

Fears Within

by Andy Brink

The sermon emphasizes the necessity of recognizing our desperation for God and relying on Him through life's trials and fears.

Duration: 1:02:26

Scripture: Isaiah 28:24-25, Matthew 6:33, 2 Corinthians 12:1-7

Topics: "Fear"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of embracing the reality of our mortality and the need to stand before God. He quotes Zechariah 4, highlighting the idea that our strength and might are not what will save us, but rather it is God's power. The preacher warns against trying to constrain the 'lion' of sin through legalism, but instead encourages surrendering it to God. He references the story of the Israelites in the wilderness and reminds listeners that suffering can be in vain if we do not trust and obey God. The sermon also mentions Paul's experience of being caught up into paradise and hearing unspeakable words, and how he was given a thorn in the flesh to keep him humble.

Transcript

How many of us, as we sit here, are truly desperate for Him? Now think about it. You know, there's a place in Proverbs chapter 2, which is a passage of Scripture that's very dear to my own heart, and it says this, it says, when you begin to seek for wisdom, when you begin to seek for wisdom as you would gold and silver, when you begin to search for understanding as you would precious treasure, when you begin to lift up your voice for understanding and cry for wisdom, it says, then you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God. So much sometimes is withheld from us because we're not desperate for it.

You know, and I have found through Scriptures and through life that a lot of times God hides Himself from the casual seeker, the one who's not desperate, the one who's not hungry, the one who's not longing. And even as a believer, how many of us in our Christian lives, there have been points and places in our life where we've been desperate, we've been longing, we've known our need for Him. But it's like when everything starts going well, when we're back on our feet, when life's coming together, we kind of lose that sense of desperation and need, that sense of passion and hunger.

You know, how many of us have cried out to God in the midst of a tragedy or a place of turmoil in our life, and it's like God helped us through that place in our life, and we grew in some areas, maybe we got some

things changed in our life, made some turns, but now that's kind of passed, and now we're just kind of running through the motions, you know. And one of the things that God allows in our life at times are certain circumstances and situations in order to expose how needy we really are. You know, one thought that came to my mind as we were singing how desperate, you know, Lord I'm desperate for you, is the passage, the story about Samson.

You know Samson, the man of great strength. How many of us, when you see a picture either in your Bible or maybe just the idea in your mind of Samson, how many of you see this gigantic man with big old biceps that conquered kingdoms and threw men aside and killed thousands with a jawbone? Is that what you see in your mind? I don't know, that's what I used to always see. And whenever I was in Sunday school and they do the little boards, you know that Samson was always depicted as this big strong guy.

You know, the guy pushing down the pillars, all the muscles bulging out and the veins popping. Really, I think it was just the opposite, because the enemy around him couldn't realize or figure out why he was so strong. It was supernatural, it was something beyond his own ability.

But because it was ever present within him, you know, Samson was sanctified and set apart for God. Just like some of you sitting in this place, you've got a mother, a parent, a grandparent that told you from the day you came into this world, they've looked you right in the eye and said you belong to God. And you've walked contrary to that all the days of your life.

Well, Samson did the same thing. He was a Nazirite, separated to God, and he had this great strength and ability about him. There were certain things about his life that were just abnormal.

But as he began to walk, he began to break every one of those Nazirite vows one by one. And as he began to break those things, he'd look at himself, and I still have my great strength, my youth, my power. And then there came a place, again without going through the whole story, where he was with this woman, and he told her where his strength lied, and they cut his hair.

And all of a sudden, this man of strength was brought to a place of absolute poverty. His strength was gone. His eyes were gouged out, and he found himself pushing this mill, mocked at, laughed by others, felt separated from family, people, lost.

And all of a sudden, what we find about Samson is he became desperate once again. God brought about circumstances in his life to bring about a recognition and a realization that it never was about his strength. It was about God and the place that God held within his life.

And in the place of humility, Samson cried out, and God gave him the ability once again to do more in this one act than he had done all of his life. What I want to look at right now as we begin to walk through the scriptures is how God, in the same way, brings circumstances in our own life. And it doesn't always have to be outward circumstances.

One brother this morning, as he's coming in, he was sharing with me just his struggle trying to resist these thoughts and these these temptations and these things coming about him, and how sometimes it just feels like I'm getting further behind than farther ahead. Why does that happen? I want to do right. Why is there this great struggle? Why does it seem like I'm falling underneath the temptation, and it's hard to stand? Because one of the things that God does, he brings about circumstances in our life to help us come to the place of realizing it was never about our strength and ability.

It throws us upon the grace of God. I need thee, God, help me. Jesus said, blessed, happy, fortunate to be envied are the poor in spirit.

That word poor is to be as a public beggar. How many of us in the room would say, yeah, I'm a public beggar. Who would glory in that? How many times have you been on the streets or on the road or seen pictures or seen the experience of somebody out on the streets, you know, having to sign out, you know, I want food, or please give me some money.

That's not the person we emulate that we want to be like. They didn't grow up their life thinking, boy, when I grow up I want to sit on this corner in Houston or Dallas or Fort Worth. I want to hold a sign and and beg people for money.

And yet for some reason Jesus uses this illustration to put a picture in our mind to show us spiritually the strongest of men are the ones who recognize the poverty of their own heart and their inability to walk out this Christian life. And their complete need day by day is for God to help them. God help me today to overcome.

Help me to resist temptation. Help me to become, you know, it's that need, it's that recognition. And Jesus said, blessed is the one who walks in a day-to-day recognition that I'm in need of God today.

But I don't know about you. I find myself easily drifting from that position and I begin to think, I'm okay, I can do it. And then all of a sudden as I'm in that place, God brings about circumstances because of his love for me to recognize, wait a minute God, I can't do it.

I need you. I love that song, I need thee every hour. Oh, I can't remember the whole thing.

Anyway, look with me in 2nd Corinthians chapter 1. I want to look at Paul's life a little bit. Now, would you agree with me probably that Paul was the Christian of Christians. If anybody ought to know how to walk this thing out, it ought to be Paul.

I mean, he wrote three-fourths of the New Testament. You think he's got a little bit of a handle on it. What we're going to find that even in Paul's life, there was the tendency to trust in himself, to begin to think as a Christian or as a believer that he could walk this thing out on his own.

And in 2nd Corinthians chapter 1, looking with me, let's start in verse 8. For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our troubles which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life. Now, think about that for a moment, what he's saying before we move on. He said there was something that was going on in Asia.

You know, Paul was a circuit rider of his own. You know, he went to these different places, and when he was in Asia, it says they were so pressed upon by the circumstances that they faced there, that they despaired even of life. Can you imagine Paul coming to that place? That's the same one that wrote the joy that, you know, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, rejoice in all things, and all things give thanks.

This one that wrote all these great things that we quote when times are hard, was the very one himself who felt so despairing because of his outward circumstances that he was just discouraged even about life in general. Verse 9, but we had this, but we had the sentence of death in ourselves that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead. Now listen, because of the situations they were

walking in, I want to talk about these two things.

First of all, how we overcome self, I guess the word was self-trust, self-dependency, and the answer as we look through the scripture is going to be, Paul said, I've got the sentence of death within myself, which means I know that God is leading me as a lamb led into a slaughter. He's taking me into circumstances and situations that are causing me to stop trusting myself. Count time, two, three.

Well guys, come on in, get situated, settle down, and we'll keep going through it. Again, we're talking about God's way of putting the nail to self-trust. The place that God wants to bring us to is dependence upon him, and he said, blessed are those who recognize their daily need, their place of dependence, and their need for God to be there in their lives.

And so, we were just looking at some of the things that Paul was walking through, and we're going to look at some of the characteristics of the things that he experienced at a couple of passages in the Corinthians. You know, in 2 Corinthians chapter 11, one of the things that Paul describes is the things that he has endured as an apostle, and he talks about times in which he had been beaten, times in which he had been imprisoned, times in which he had been stoned and left for dead, and he just went through. You know, sometimes I wonder when I read through different things like that, how does that fit in sometimes with the prosperity gospel sometimes we hear today? You know, do you think that Paul wasn't God's favorite, and so he didn't really watch over Paul, and Paul went through lots of persecutions, and what do you and I do? We come to the Lord, God begins moving our life, we have an experience with Him, and the first time somebody calls us an ugly name.

God, where are you? What happened to this Christian life? I thought you're supposed to be for me, not against me. All of a sudden, somebody begins to talk about you, and call you names, and begins to mock and ridicule your Christian faith. Paul, when he was talking to the church, he said, listen, follow the example that you see in me.

His was a life of constant struggle, difficulty. Matter of fact, in the book of Acts, it says, I think it's, many are the tribulations of the righteous. I think that's in Psalms.

What does it say in Acts? My mind's blank, we'll read it in a minute, but there's going to be tribulations in your life as a believer. There are going to be hard things. There are going to be difficult things that you walk through, and there's going to be moments in which you feel depressed, fearful, discouraged.

And how many of us, a lot of times when we think as Christians, I shouldn't be feeling this way. And the accuser stands next to you and says, why are you feeling depressed? Why is there fear in your life? You should be beyond that. Paul was a man who wrote portions of the scriptures, and yet he begins to talk about some of the things that he experienced when he was going through hard times.

Look with me in 2 Corinthians chapter 7. This was a particular passage that as I was studying this topic, it's like I've read certain, you know, you read certain passages over and over and over and over again, but it's not until you're looking at it through a certain light that it really stands out to you. And right here, and starting in verse 3, I speak not this to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die and to live with you. Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is the glorying of you.

I am filled with comfort, and I am seated joyful in all of our tribulation. For when we are come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Without were fightings, and within

were fears.

Now think about that for a moment. Paul said he was going into this particular place and he said without were fightings. Now listen, that could mean outward struggles and people, you know, people confronting him maybe for the gospel, but it could also mean the circumstances fighting through things.

And he said within him, and I keep harping on this, I want you to know again the Holy Spirit through Paul wrote three-fourths of the New Testament. He had a pretty good handle on things, at least the Holy Spirit in him. And yet he goes on to say there were fears within me.

And a lot of times we have a tendency to think of these believers mentioned in the scriptures, like the Hebrews 11, those men of faith. We think about the disciples, we think about the people mentioned in the New Testament, and we have this idea that they were some super saint. They were some super believer that didn't experience life in the same way you and I do.

And yet Paul says here, he says there were fears within me that I was confronting, that I was facing. But then he says this next part that really stands out to me in verse five or verse six, nevertheless God. And that one couple of words there, I just circled and underlined.

Because what Paul was saying is yes, I have fears within me. I'm walking in dark places. It seems as if there are things all around me that are unfamiliar territory to me.

But nevertheless, I'm going to keep my attention on God. In this place, listen, here's one particular fear that I know affects many of you in here. All of a sudden you come up for parole, and let's say you get your F whatever, and you're going to get out.

You've been hoping and wanting and longing for that moment, that day, to get released, and now all of a sudden fear begins to come in. And what that fear begins to say is, all right, how are you going to get a job? What's going to happen with your family? Where am I going to go to? All these things begin to build. How am I going to make it out there? Who am I going to contact? What am I going to do? All of us experience fears.

You may not show it all the time on the outside, but Paul, even this great man of faith, had fears that he experienced within him. And yet in spite of those fears, here's what he says, nevertheless, God, there are struggles going on within me, but I'm going to keep my attention on you, and I'm going to trust that you have a purpose, you have a plan, that you're working things out. Verse six, nevertheless, God that comforteth those that are cast down, comforteth us by coming to Titus.

And that word, cast down, I wrote it down... let's see, verse... oh no, look with me in... back at 2 Corinthians 7, and verse 8, it says, for though I made you... nope, that wasn't what I was looking for, verse... no, wait, let me look back at verse, chapter 1, verse... yeah, back when in chapter 1, verse 8, he talks about being, we were pressed, we were pressed upon. That word pressed, it actually means this, it's like, it's like one of those old, like you see in the, maybe you watched Moses or whatever, those old movies, and they've got like the donkey pulling the cart, and they used to put all these sheaves and stuff upon the cart, and that word pressed, it means so much is put upon that cart that it begins to sink down. It begins to sink upon the load.

And Paul says at times, it seems like there's so much being pressed upon me. Anybody ever been in that position? I know I have, just sometimes, matter of fact, obviously everybody's men here, you know, the

responsibility sometimes of family, a wife, children, work, paying bills, paying the light bill, the house bill, whatever it is you face, sometimes it seems like the responsibilities of life begin to pile up, pile up, pile up, and it's like you're weighed down upon these things. You're not the only one that's experienced that.

You're not the only one that has faced those times in life. Nevertheless, God, nevertheless, He's there to be a strength to you, and what He has promised is, I will comfort you in the midst of that place, and there's a reason, which we're going to look at in Scripture right now, there's a reason why certain things happen in your life. It's to bring you and I to a place of dependence upon I. One time I was talking to an individual about responsibility, and that word can be so big, responsibility.

It puts all the weight upon you. You're responsible to this and responsible to that. You need to take upon yourself responsibility, and I was sharing with somebody one time and they said, you know what responsibility is? And I said, what? It's responding to God's ability.

If God puts you in a place, He'll give you the grace, the wisdom, and the strength in order for you to walk under those loads and in that place, and He comes to comfort your heart, and what He wants you to see is that, hey listen, I want you to take that place of responsibility and cast that upon me. Cast those cares upon me, knowing that I care for your soul. Look with me in Philippians chapter 3. Move to the rite of Corinthians.

General Electric Power Company. Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians chapter 3. Here's something that Paul states. Look between verse 1. It says, finally my brethren rejoice in the Lord to write the same things to you.

To me indeed is no grievous, but for you it is safe. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision. For we are not the circumcision, or we are the we are the circumcision which worship God in spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus and have what? No confidence.

Now think about no confidence. What does that mean? That means there's no confidence in the flesh, in his abilities. There's nothing he's boasting in or putting his confidence in.

Now listen, as he goes on, Paul says, I was a Pharisee of Pharisees. How many of you in this place as believers have put your confidence in your knowledge of the word? And everybody knows it. You know, you're quick to quote all kinds of scriptures.

You can quote them, speak them, and your confidence is in your knowledge and ability. Paul says, listen, I was a Pharisee of Pharisees. I had to memorize the first five books of the Bible.

I mean, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews. He was born into this race.

And as to the laws, he saw it for a while. He thought he was perfect. And yet he had come to a place where he says, I lay all these things aside.

You know when we talk about the concept of laying aside the past, most of the time we're usually talking about all of our vices, all the bad things in our life. You know, laying aside gambling, laying aside this or that. Paul said the things that I'm laying aside are those things that were at one time a glory to me.

All the things I used to boast in, those are the things I put aside and I'm running forward with my confidence and trust focused on him. Now listen, that didn't happen overnight. There were things that happened in his life that caused him to despair even of life, and then all of a sudden God would come through and his confidence began to be in the one who was able to deliver him.

When you're struggling with sins in your life, you know, so many times we talk about the issue of like lust. Now listen, Jesus said if you look upon another woman to lust, you've got adultery in your heart already. But in our mind, we excuse it.

We think, hey, I'm not hurting anybody. I can fantasize, run through these thoughts, but God says, I see the secret place. I know what's going on.

And then you say, well Andy, that's impossible to walk there. You're exactly right. You can't do it.

And God intended it that way because the Christian walk is a supernatural journey in which we have to throw ourself upon the grace of God and seek his help in time of need. But it's in that place where you begin to see God give you the strength to resist that thought, that temptation today, the same one you fell to yesterday. And you begin to say, wait a minute.

He can get me through this. And you may fall tomorrow, but you begin to realize there is grace there. God can help me.

There is a place where my life can make a turn and a change if I'll depend and lean upon him. Look with me in 2 Corinthians, back to this story about Paul, chapter 12. And guys, as we look at this, the main point that I want to get to is this.

So many times in our lives, there are things that come into our life, even as believers and Christians. And it's like it makes you want to throw up your hands and give up. Lord, I seem to fall when I want to stand.

I can't make it through this. I try to resist and I can't seem to become everything that your Word says. Or maybe the pressures seem to be mounting upon me.

And you know what, guys, what I want to encourage you with is that God knows. And there's a purpose for those things in your life. And the purpose is to put the death nail again and again and again to self-effort and self-trust.

This is a walk of faith and dependence upon him. But because of being attached to this flesh nature, there's the tendency at times to think, I can do it. I can make this happen.

I can just determine in my will I'm going to do this and such and such. I know in my own life specifically, let's just take the area of lust, because that was the stronghold of my life early on in my journey. The fantasies of my mind, the thoughts, the things that I looked at and watched, it just tormented me.

And so I began to cry out to God, help me. And there was a lot of falling down and getting up. But he began to help me take thoughts captive.

And then as I began to get older and stuff and things began to change, people would come to me and begin to share their hearts and their struggles. And you know what I began to find? After a while, I began to be harsh toward people. You just need to take that.

You stop this. You know, you need to do this. Why can't you just do that? You know what happened? In my pride, it was like the walls began to come down.

And all of a sudden, the flood of lust began to bombard my thoughts and mind. And God had to bring me back into another place of realizing, you didn't overcome just because you were some super Christian. You overcame because I gave you the grace to overcome.

I helped you through those places. But what happens a lot of times is in our overcoming, in areas of our life, the places where you've changed, the places where you've made turns, all of a sudden you begin to think you had something to do with that. And your confidence begins to be self-confidence.

And we're taught in this world that's what you need is self-confidence. No. What you need is God-confidence.

God will help me through this place. He's able to do in me that which I cannot do myself. And as believers, God will continue to take you into places to continually put the sword to self-confidence.

Because we're going to see in a moment no man will boast before God. Guys, there's coming a time in your life and in mine where you're going to die. You're going to shed this earth suit.

And like Samson, many of you today boast in your strength. But I'm going to tell you what, there's coming a day your body is going to begin to deteriorate more and faster. You need to embrace it and realize it, make friends with it.

And you need to consider today the reality of it. Because there's coming a time when this body is going to continually deteriorate and you're going to die. And you're going to stand before God.

And I want you to know when you stand before God, there will be nothing to boast in in regard to your own strength. There's a passage that says in Zechariah chapter 4, it's the place where it says, not by might nor by strength, but by my power says the Lord. It says, they will lift up the top stone with shouts of grace, grace to it.

And I believe what that means is there's coming a day when we shed these earth suits and step into eternity and face God before the judgment throne of God. There will be not one of us that will be able to say, God I changed my life for you. Look what I did.

Look how I turned. Look how I overcome. Every one of us, those who are believers in Christ, will have to throw up their hands and say, grace God, it was all grace.

It was something you did in me. All praise to you. Thank you God.

And that's why in this journey today, God continues to bring every one of us into places where you can't do it. You can't seem to get over that hump, cross that line. God, I'm so discouraged.

I'm so frustrated. He says, I know. Now put your trust in me.

The promise of the gospel and the hope of the gospel is God said, I will do in you that which you are incapable of doing yourself. Your part is to trust in me and to continue to seek me and cry out to me. Look with me in, oh I said 2 Corinthians chapter 12, didn't I? Look with me in a verse.

Let's go on and start in verse 1. It's the story of why something happened in Paul's life. Verse 1. It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.

I knew a man in Christ above 14 years ago, whether in the body I cannot tell or out of the body I cannot tell, such one was caught up into third heaven. So what he begins to talk about, Paul says, there was this revelation in my life. I was caught up into this third heaven.

There was this place of revelation. Now I don't know what all that means, but I know this. When you look at the prophets, there were times when God opened up visions to them.

They saw things a lot of times other people didn't see. And I think in Paul's life there was something that had happened. There was a divine revelation, a mystery that had been opened up that was beyond his natural ability.

And he says in verse 4 how that he was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words, which is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such a one will I glory, yet not myself but of mine infirmities. Verse 6. For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool.

For I will say the truth, but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth in me. Verse 7. And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelation, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan, to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. Now think about that statement for a moment.

Paul said there was a great revelation in his life. And I'll tell you what I find a lot of times is the ones that God draws the closest and that he uses the most are the ones that allow him to bring in suffering and affliction in their life. There's something about suffering and affliction that gives a greater revelation of the grace of God.

That's why Paul says I'd rather, I mean he says I'd rather boast in my sufferings that the cross of Christ would be lifted up. And he begins to talk about there was given to me this thorn in the flesh, this place of struggle. And everybody wants to talk about what it was.

It really doesn't matter what it was, you know. Was it a struggle with any particular sin? Might have been. I know in a lot of people's lives God uses them in great ways, and then inwardly there's this battle that reminds them of their own humanity, that they have to trust in God.

Over and over again there are those things in our lives that have to bring us that place of trusting in him. And Paul says there was this messenger of Satan that was given to him for this purpose. In verse 8, or the end of verse 7, lest I should be exalted above measure, for this thing I besought the Lord three times that I might be, that it might depart from me.

And he said to me, my grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in your weakness. Whatever it was in Paul's life that God put there, it exposed his weakness. It exposed his place of struggle.

And God said to him, listen, in that place of weakness, it wasn't that I'm giving you to this place of weakness just to let you fall. It's I've allowed this place of weakness to cause you to trust in me, to cause you to lean upon my strength. It was something greater than Paul, and it continually reminded him not to boast in himself or put confidence in himself, but to trust in the grace of God.

Are there things in your life today that continue to bring you to that point of weakness? Maybe it's a certain sin, and you know that there's a certain familiarity with that sin, a certain difficulty to that sin. And God has allowed that thing in your life to continue to drive you to the cross, to continue to drive you to that place of seeking him for help and strength and deliverance. Look with me in Galatians chapter 3. Paul's talking to the church, and he says in verse 3, it says, are you so foolish, having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect through the flesh? Now think about that for a moment, especially in a lot of young believers' lives.

It's like something begins in your life with a zeal. You start walking, you start walking this thing out, and all of a sudden you knew that you needed God to bring you up out of a pit. But now it's like you've got your feet upon a rock, and now you're just, I'm going to do this myself.

And that's what Paul was speaking to this church. He said, you began in faith, but now it's like you're going to perfect it through the flesh. And how do we perfect it through the flesh? We put all of our emphasis on outward works of righteousness, showing up at church, doing this, and you begin to gravitate toward a lot of times this idea of legalism.

And God said, listen, you know, when I was in Africa with Joyce, we began to talk about how legalism comes into our life. And a lot of times legalism comes into our life because we can't restrain the sin within us. We're trying to restrain the sin.

For instance, a lot of times, you know, women have to wear, you know, things down to here. Men have to do this and that, and they need to sit over here, and they need to sit over there. And we do all these things to make sure to protect and to constrain this monster within.

You know what? God's interest is not in restraining the monster within you. And I'm gonna tell you, in my life there was -- listen, everybody's different, and that's why I can empathize and come alongside, especially those of you who are here with sexual crimes and all kinds of different things, because I knew in my heart there was a monster. And I was growing up in church, and I felt like there was no way out.

And I remember one time sitting in a church service, and this thought came to my head. And I didn't know anything about the powers of darkness. I didn't know there was a war all around me.

I didn't know that the Father of Lies was constantly looking for ground. He was saying things up here. I just thought it was my thoughts, and this thought came into mind, Andy, you are destined for destruction.

Because I was sitting in the church, and this monster kept growing within me. And I could remember at that place being completely hopeless, because I knew that one day it was going to come out, and it was going to harm not only my life, but the life of others. And I began to believe I'm destined for that.

And all of a sudden, I heard of someone give a testimony, and hope was birthed in my heart that there could be change, that God could change my life. And all of a sudden, he lifted me by his own hand and power out of that pit of destruction. And his word to me was not, Andy, I want to restrain that monster.

Andy, I want to kill that monster in you. I came for this purpose, and that is to destroy the works of the enemy. And my hope from that point on was never in my ability to kill it.

It was in his ability to cause me to overcome, and to put my foot upon the head of that enemy, and sever its neck in my own personal life. And I want you to know in your life, whatever that thing is that controls

you, God's interest is not in bringing you into a place of restraining the enemy. Listen, a lion is a lion, and you can keep it in a cage, and you can feed it a little here and there, but I'm going to tell you, if that lion is not in the cage, it's going to devour you.

And many of you sitting in this place have gravitated toward legalism in order to constrain the lion, but you know that it comes out of your life. The hope of the gospel says, I've come not to constrain it, but to kill it. And when I went to the cross, I said, it's finished, I already overcame and won.

And your overcoming will be in faith and trust in me, and obedience to me. But just like the Galatians, they started in the Spirit, then they thought, hey, I can do this on my own. Verse 4, have you suffered so many things in vain? What was the purpose? You know you can suffer things in vain.

The children of Israel walked 40 years in the wilderness. Why did God do that? Remember, they were in bondage in Egypt. They were under slave masters.

It says these slave masters made their life bitter and hard, and it says they cried out to the Lord in the midst of their affliction, and God heard their cry and sent a deliverer, and he brought them out through many signs and wonders out of Egypt, out from under the hand of Pharaoh, and he brought them out into this wilderness journey, and his promise was, I'm going to take you to a land flowing with milk and honey. Guys, I want you to know, in your life, God's interest is to take you to a land flowing with milk and honey, a place of God's blessing, a place of peace, a place where you can walk in joy in spite of the circumstances around you. There is a place that God intends to take you if you'll only let him.

But they walked into the wilderness, and what did they experience in the wilderness? Over and over and over again, it was trial after trial after trial, and in those trials they were forced to look up to God. You know, remember when they got to the Red Sea? There's a sea in front of them, nowhere to get through, and there's this army coming from behind them, Pharaoh's army, to kill them. And you know what they said? Why? God, were there not enough graves in Egypt that you brought us out here to kill us? And all of a sudden, he caused the waters to open up, and he brought them through on dry ground.

The waters came over their enemies, and man, they got to singing and dancing. They saw the miracle of God in their life, and then three days later they were without water in the desert, and they come across this pool of water, but it's all bitter, and they begin to complain against God. Did you bring us out here to kill us? Because see, if God didn't show up, they were sunk.

You're talking about millions of people without a million people without water for three days. Children, women, men, and all of a sudden they come to that place, and they're brought once again to a place of need, and they begin to cry out, and God turns those bitter waters into sweet. Well then they keep going, and it's again trial after trial after trial.

You know what their heart continues to say? God, you hate us! And finally he brings them to the Jordan River with the opportunity to go into the land that God had promised them from the very beginning. You know what they said? It says, still they would not trust him. And that whole generation was laid low in the wilderness.

You know what? Now let's think about this for a moment. Right here in Galatians, what we hear is, have you suffered so many things in vain? And think about the children of Israel. For 40 years they went through trials, difficulties, and hardship, and never learned this one lesson to trust in God, to trust Him.

Are you learning through the circumstances of your life the faithfulness of God? Or are you continuing to put your trust in yourself or the people you know, what you can do, what you can make happen in a certain group of people? And over and over and over again, God allows you to come into situations. He puts you in situations. He puts you in places to cause you to trust in Him, so that He can demonstrate to you His faithfulness, that He cares about you, that He's going to lead you through this, that He can do something that no one else can do.

But some of us have certain people in our lives, sometimes it's a mom who continues to get us out of trouble. Every time you're right there at the line where nobody can help you except God, and God's sitting there waiting, He says, I'm right here for you, and all of a sudden somebody else steps in again and solves your problem, and you don't need Him. And many of you sitting in this place have gotten right to the edge of a desperate need that nobody could meet but Him, and you were delivered once again by somebody else from that place of struggle.

And there's some of you sitting in this place that need to stop begging your family for money. God's saying, I know you don't have anything on your books. I want you to begin to seek Me.

I want you to begin to call out to Me, and let Me meet your need in the way that I see fit, and learn contentment in the place that you're walking. Some of your families can't stand to get a letter from you because they know you're going to be begging them for something, and you're trying to tell them how much you love Jesus. Maybe it'd be nice to get a letter every now and then just saying, I wanted to catch up with you and see how you were doing.

I don't need anything. I'm not asking for anything. Maybe just thanking them for what they've already done.

Guys, the point that I'm making is that God's just begging to be there for you. He really wants to prove to you His love for you, that He hadn't forgotten you. But sometimes you've got to let Him do that, and put your eyes off of other people, and let Him demonstrate to you that He's big enough to carry you through the hardest of times.

And if you don't let Him prove His faithfulness to you in here, when you get out there you're going to be filled with fear, because you've never learned to trust Him in this place. Are the sufferings that you're walking through in vain, like the Galatians? Are they not producing anything in you of confidence in God? Look with me. And you know, I'll tell you, I can look out there in some of your faces when I said that, and I don't think I've ever really addressed that before, or said anything like that before, but I can look at some of you and look in your face and you say, yeah, you've never been in prison.

I can see that happening. But I can tell you guys, I don't have a nine-to-five job. I don't have a paycheck comes to me every day, every week, or every month.

And I made a decision ten years ago that I'd never let anybody know my needs. I'd never write a newsletter begging for money or asking people for money. I'd go through whatever door He opens up with no expectation or hook in it.

In San Antonio, I was sharing with six people. Last Friday, Tuesday, I was sharing with 25 people at some place. And not once have I ever asked for an offering.

And there's been times where there's been nothing in my cupboards and nothing in the refrigerator. And I've thought to myself, God, where are you? And those thoughts come to my mind. I can always call.

You know, it's not that you can call. I can always talk to my family or Rebecca's family, and I can just say something like, man, I hadn't been able to buy groceries. And my family and her family will do whatever it takes to meet our needs, and I know that.

That's why it's easy to manipulate the people closest to you, because you know they'll do whatever it takes. And there's been times I've been right on the edge of that, and I thought, you know what, God? If you've got me in this place and you're using me, then I can trust that you'll take care of me. And sometimes what we do is we complain at God's way to take care of us.

I can tell you right now, God has been better to me than I deserve. I live in a nicer place than I deserve. I'm able to, I've got three good meals a day.

I've got more than I deserve. But there's been times people have showed up on my doorstep with a bag of groceries, because they knew I didn't have anything in the cupboard. And that was God's provision.

And you know what, in that bag, it wasn't steak. It was rice, staples, beans. But you know what? He provided.

And you know what? Because of that bag of groceries, I grew in confidence toward God. And I began to know the next trial I walked through, wait a minute, he's done it before. I know he'll do it again.

Now listen, I'm not saying that in those trials there weren't fears within. God, what if, what if, what if, what if there's not provision in those inward struggles? And I had no idea that God was preparing me at some point in my life to become the director of Be Fruitful Multiply. See guys, I know I've learned through the journey of my life how to depend upon God for my personal needs.

And then I got married, and I began to think, God I got a wife and children now. And I had to learn to depend upon God to take care of the needs of a family. And there were fears inwardly, fightings without, inward struggles with circumstances through that journey.

Well now I've got a ministry. I say, he's got a ministry that's allowed me to be a part of, in which there's a lot other things, a lot other responsibilities. And there are times when those responsibilities seem to weigh upon me, and like that cart, I feel pressed into the ground.

And it's in that place that I have to stand up and say, nevertheless God, and cast those things upon the Lord. Lord you delivered me and brought me through as a single man. You've delivered me and brought me through as a family man.

You've delivered me and brought me through my own personal ministry. And you will deliver me and bring me through as the, as the responsibilities extend outside of me and my family. But I'll tell you what guys, you have to learn to trust Him in here.

Because you're always going to have fears. Even in Paul's life, a man who wrote three-fourths of the New Testament, there were fears within. You know why? Because God always takes you to a deeper place of struggle.

Once you've learned that that confidence in this place, that God will be there, now all of a sudden, how many of y'all, I don't know, either here or even before you got here, was ever, were ever into working out with weights and stuff? Some of you? Some of y'all don't like to raise your hand. That's all right. Listen, I'm

no buff guy, but I do play around with weights and stuff.

And I, and, and you know, God has all these other people around me. But you know, you have to tear down those muscles. So you put weight on there where you can only do about three of them.

But then you build up, and all of a sudden you do some more, but then you make the weight, because you have to tear down those muscles so they grow up stronger, so they develop bigger. And the same way in the relationship to faith, think about, now listen, I don't have one, but think about this little muscle right here. This muscle, we'll call it faith.

And all of a sudden, He puts you in a difficult situation. He puts some weight on there. Oh, I can only get about three of them.

And you break that muscle down, and all of a sudden, it begins to get stronger. And now that, that, that one weight you could do, now you put a little bit more on there. In the same way, in relationship to the circumstances you're walking through, God, for the rest of your journey, is going to be taking you into places to cause faith in you to grow, and to realize a confidence in Him, and not in yourself.

Let's look at Proverbs 28. We're almost finished here. Proverbs 28, and verse 26.

He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool, but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered. The Scripture says in Jeremiah, the heart's deceitfully wicked. Listen, the point I'm making is, what is it that we trust in? Are we confident in our, you know, some of you are confident in your own heart to make decisions, and you have no regard for the counsel of others? The Scripture says, listen, there's safety in a multitude of counselors.

Doesn't mean that always counselors are right, but are you open to hearing instruction from the people around you? Or do you have a self-trust? I can hear God for myself, and you're unwilling to hear from other people. Now listen, guys, I believe sometimes God will speak something to you that He won't speak to anybody else. It's to teach you to trust in Him.

There have been times I've walked opposite of the counsel given me because I knew, I felt like I knew that I knew that I knew that God spoke something to my life. But I've never been unwilling to hear the counsel of others, even if it's different from what I feel in my own heart. I can tell you one instance I remember when I bought our first house, and Joyce was one of, obviously one of the mentors and most respected people in my life.

And she said, Andy, she just went right out and said, I do not believe this is the will of God for you. That house is too far outside of town, you're gonna be driving back and forth, it's not gonna work. And I said, Joyce, I really believe I came up in that driveway, I can't explain it.

I knew that I just know that place is God's will for me. And she said, Andy, if it's gonna end up being God's teaching will, that's what she said, which means you're gonna get into it and realize you should have listened. And most of the time I listened to the counsel given me, but there are some times I can't explain it.

I know that I know that I know. And I went on and bought that house, and it was one of the best decisions I ever made, because I knew it was the Lord. And I wasn't angry at Joyce for the counsel she gave me, I believed God intended for that, for me to keep my eyes on Him.

Guys, listen, do you have counselors in your life, or are you a fool? Are you a fool who trusts in your own heart, trusts in your own wisdom? You'll find yourself making mistake after mistake if you can't hear the counsel of friends. A fool trusts in his own heart, but a wise man listens to instruction. All right, look with me, and I need to finish this up.

Let's look at here, here's something. Look with me in 2nd Corinthians chapter, I'll tell you what, we'll finish up with Isaiah 28. Let's look at Isaiah 28.

And as you're there, I'm going to throw out a couple of things. First of all, do you remember the story of Gideon? He's mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11 briefly, but in the Old Testament, basically, the children of Israel were subject to the enemy. And the enemy, the Philistines, were coming in and taking their grain, and they were having to hide to beat out their grain and do things.

And all of a sudden, God shows up to Gideon and says, I'm going to use you to deliver Israel from the Philistines. And Gideon looks around and says, you've got to be kidding me. No, you're the man I've chosen.

That's why, guys, God doesn't always choose the man who articulates the best, who has the most charismatic ability to stand in front of people. A lot of times, he chooses the very one who is totally incapable of speaking to people. That way, he gets all the glory.

And some of you sitting in this place wonder, how can I ever be of any benefit to God? You let him worry about that. And I want you to know, God, and I think in the prisons, I really do, in my heart, I believe for those who will let it, the prisons is God's seminary. And in this place, he has separated you from certain responsibilities on the outside in order to pour in the Word and prepare you through the circumstances you walk through in order to help people and to be a light.

And there will be days when you stand in front of people outside of this prison in order to speak the Word, and they won't be able to hear you. You know why? Because you're a convict. And you know what, guys? God intended it that way, because he always hides his Word from the proud of heart.

And he puts it in vessels that make it hard for the proud to hear. That's why, guys, when you leave this place, you don't have to be ashamed that you've been to prison. Some of you, it's so hard for you because you get out and you're trying to hide it everywhere you go.

And again, I haven't been there, so I don't know that certain struggle. But when you begin to realize, wait a minute, God, it was my actions, but you allowed me to come to this place, and I've taken full opportunity here, and I've let you work in my life, and what I am, I am by the grace of God. In that same place in Corinthians, Paul said, I was a persecutor of the church, and he did not hide from it.

He didn't walk away from it. He threw it out there in the open. Listen, I was a persecutor of the church.

I'm ashamed of what I did, but what I am today is by the grace of God. And he knew where his confidence lied. So Gideon, God chose him, and then he had this multitude of people that showed up to fight this battle, and you know what God did? God could have said, fantastic, what a great group of guys.

He said, nope, this is too big. What? He started separating them out, separating them out, until he got to a small group of men. And he said, through you, I'm going to bring about deliverance.

You know why? Because had it been with the multitude, they could have boasted in their numbers and their ability. But God purposely brought them to a place of great inward fear. God, you've got to be kidding me.

You're going to bring us into this situation. We're going to get slaughtered. Trust me.

And when the battle was done, there was nothing to do but boast in God. The last scripture I want to read is Isaiah chapter 28, and let's start in verse 24. Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? Doth he open and break up the clods of his ground, when he hath made plain the face thereof? Doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cumin, and cast in the principal wheat, and the appointed barley, and rye in the place? For his God instructs him in this direction, and doth teach him.

For the fitches are not threshed with a threshing instrument, neither is the cartwheel turned about upon cumin. But the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cumin with a rod. Bread corn is bruised, but he will not ever be threshing it, nor break it with the wheel of his cart, nor bruise it with his horsemen.

This also cometh from the Lord of Hosts, which is a wonderful and counsel and excellent working." What? Huh? You've got to be a farmer to get all that. What's he talking to? But listen, he's using a physical illustration. Now listen, I'm always fishing.

Look up here. Here's what begins to happen. He's saying through this, he's saying, listen, there are certain things you do with certain crops, and certain crops, you know, you separate the chaff like this.

Other crops, you have to beat it. Other things you have to do. But it says, listen, God is not going to be plowing in your life 365 days a year.

There's a purpose and a time for when God puts in the plow in your life and breaks up the hard ground. Is that an easy time in life? That's a painful time. It's a hard time.

It's a discouraging time. That's a time when it seems like everything is just being broken and turned over. But he said, I don't do that all the way through like when you're doing crops.

He said, there's a season for it. And if you're going through a time when everything's breaking up, he said, listen, don't get depressed. Don't get discouraged.

It's not going to last forever. But it's necessary in order for the ground of your heart to receive the Word. And then there's going to be a time of harvest.

And in that time of harvest, there's a cutting. There's a shifting. There's all kinds of things that take place.

But don't get discouraged and think that it will never end. It will. The end result is the fruit.

That's what God's getting at. So as we close, I know I've been a little disjointed, but here's what I feel like God's brought in here to say this morning. Some of you are walking through times in which you feel fearful inside about decisions that need to be made.

Maybe you're going through a season of depression. It's like you're going through a circumstance. It's like the clouds have just covered you over.

You are not the only one that's been there. And just because you're there, it doesn't mean you're not a good strong believer, just like Paul was. But here was Paul's answer to the clouds of depression.

Here was his answer to the fretting and the fears within. Nevertheless, God, that's where I'm going to put my attention. And one of the ways in which you put your attention back on God is to give thanks.

One of the keys to unlocking the gloom and depression of life is thanksgiving. It's easy to thank Him when everything's going right, but it's learning to give thanks when everything's going wrong. And in the midst as we look at that, the last thing I want to say about God's intended purpose for the circumstances you're walking through, it's to put the nail and to drive it in to the heart of self-confidence.

That may be a trait in this world that is exalted and lifted up, but in the kingdom of God, it's a trait that is detestable in the eyes of God. He says, your confidence is to be in me. And I am able to bring you through every circumstance you walk through.

And there are things that God will allow, like Paul, in your life in order to remind you that it's in your weakness that God displays the greatness of His strength. Let's pray. Lord, I want to thank you for the brothers in this place, the men in this place.

I want to thank you for the attentiveness and the heart. I believe you planted your Word today. I pray that as we leave this place that men would meditate and give consideration and thought to those things that are spoken, that they heard.

Lord, I ask you to change us, to make us different than we are. Lord, for some, I pray that you would send out your mighty hand and lift them up out of a pit of destruction. For others, I pray that you'd give them strength in the midst of their trial, that you'd help them to look up and put their attention back on you.

And Lord, that you'd bring peace to the frettings and fears and anxieties of their heart. Lord, I pray that you would encourage them to know that men of faith walked through those same places and dealt with those same places of turmoil, and yet you brought them through. Lord, we glory in you, we magnify you, and we pray for the families represented in this room that you would give help and strength to them, and we thank you for this time together, in Jesus' name, amen.

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