



# GROW. PRAY. STUDY

Maple Grove United Methodist Church – Weekly Devotional Guide

February 3, 2019 – *Unafraid – Living with Courage and Hope*  
“Fear of Failure”

## Scriptures:

[The LORD said to Moses,] “Come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” ... But [Moses] said, “O my Lord, please send someone else.” *Exodus 3:10, 4:13*

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, saying, “... As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you... Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” *Joshua 1:1, 5b, 9b*

God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. *2 Timothy 1:7*

## MONDAY 2.04.19 – Moses: lots of frightened excuses, world-changing success

Read: [Exodus 3:2-4, 9-11, 13, 4:1, 10, 13](#); [Deuteronomy 34:10-12](#)

Moses had a safe, steady (if fairly boring) job tending sheep for his father-in-law. He’d long ago left his upbringing in Egypt’s royal palace behind. But God had other plans. God came to Moses as he did his steady, boring job (with little need to trust in himself or God), and kept calling as Moses offered excuse after excuse. In the end, Moses left his safe life to answer God’s call, and marched into history trusting God to guide him in leading Israel out of slavery.

- As you read all of Moses’ reasons for not doing what God was calling him to do, consider which of them most resonate with any fears you face. Ask God to day-by-day help you grow, as Moses did, into a person God can use to serve where you are—your home, workplace or neighborhood—or in a special mission you sense God calling you to.
- Moses seemed to think only a strong, important person could carry out God’s call. Was he really supposed to go as one man, with no army, and demand that Pharaoh let most of his slave labor force go just because God told him to? Do you ever fear that you are not strong or important enough to live as God calls you to live? God can help you shift your focus from your limitations to your strengths, the greatest strength being the fact that God will be with you.

**Prayer:** O God, you don’t call all of us to huge, historic missions like the one you gave Moses. But at times your call looks big enough that I get scared. Give me your strength to live for you beyond any of my fears. Amen.

## TUESDAY 2.05.19 – God-given success when facing a scary giant

**Read:** [1 Samuel 17:4-11, 32-37, 41-45](#)

This is the first story about Israel's King David most children learn in Sunday School. Even in sports or business, we often talk about a "David and Goliath" story when a "little guy" takes on an established power. The Philistine giant, whatever his exact size (ancient manuscripts differ), was big enough to terrify King Saul and the whole Israelite army. But he didn't scare David. For him, the size of the God he served mattered much more than the size of his enemy. (And, of course, the story goes on in verse 46 ff. to say the giant lost—badly.)

- When have you had to face a "giant" problem or person? Were your inner feelings (whether you showed them externally or not) more like those of Saul and the army, or like David's? What role, if any, did your trust in God play in the way you faced the intimidating situation? Did you learn anything that helps you with giant problems or persons you face today, or may face in the future?
- Goliath was no doubt a veteran fighter, but he seemed to count as much or more on insults and intimidation as on his physical skill. As the Philistine poured out scornful insults toward David, the Hebrew young man wasn't cowed or distracted. To what extent are you able to be "inner directed," rather than overly sensitive to what others (especially any giants you face) may think of you? What makes that ability important when you're tempted to feel afraid of failing?

**Prayer:** Lord God, giants don't always have to be nine feet tall to feel that way to me. Teach me that you are bigger than any human "giant," and help me "cut them down to size" by trusting in you. Amen.

## WEDNESDAY 2.06.19 – A failure of nerve rooted in a failure of faith

**Read:** [Numbers 13:27-33; 14:1-3](#)

As Israel neared the Promised Land, Moses sent 12 men to scout the land (Numbers 13:1-3). When the scouts returned to give their report, ten of them focused on obstacles and problems, and were terrified. Long before David faced Goliath, they were frightened of the "huge men" they saw in the Promised Land. Only Caleb (along with Joshua—Numbers 14:6) focused on God's promise and power, and pleaded with people to keep moving forward.

- This story shows two things about fear. First, it's contagious—the 10 scouts' fear spread to most of the people. Second, it clouds the ability to think clearly—once afraid, the people thought irrationally, "Wouldn't it be better for us to return to Egypt?" Can you think of times when fear has magnified a challenge you faced, or led you to a damaging response? How can you avoid being a source of contagious fear for others?
- Camped right on the borders of the Promised Land, Israel turned away because fear got the better of them. Are there any "frontiers," spiritual or emotional as well as physical, you sense God might be calling you to cross? What fears arise in your heart as you think about where God may be calling you? How can you develop the kind of faith Caleb and Joshua showed?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, had you been governed by fear, you'd no doubt have stayed safely away from this broken, sometimes hostile planet. Please keep infusing your holy fearlessness into my heart and life. Amen.

## THURSDAY 2.07.19 – A puzzle: the apparent success of the wicked

### Read: [Psalm 73:1-13](#), [Daniel 8:12-25](#)

Psalm 73 reflected a spiritual puzzle. People who completely ignored God seemed to be having success—no troubles at all (verses 3-5). If that was the case, maybe serving God was futile (verses 11, 13). Daniel 8's apocalyptic vision pictured an evil power (probably, originally, the oppressive Greek king Antiochus IV Epiphanes). Three times it said he would "succeed," but only in the short term. In the end, "he will be broken—and not by a human hand."

- For this psalmist, it was "the prosperity of the wicked" that nearly caused him to give up faith in God. At what times in your life, if any, has the "success" of the wicked led you to ask, "Does the Most High know anything?" (v. 11) Whose position, possessions or prospects do you envy? How much does it matter to you how "success" is reached?
- If the evil power in Daniel 8:12-25 was Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the "daily sacrifice" likely referred to that king sacrificing a pig on the Temple altar in Jerusalem, deliberately trying to discredit Israel's God. He was arrogant about his power— "in his own mind, he will be great." But his army and title did not dethrone God. Can you think of other evil forces (e.g. Hitler's "thousand-year Reich") that crumbled after seeming success? Can you trust, as James Russell Lowell wrote in "The Present Crisis," that "behind the dim unknown, standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own"? \*

**Prayer:** O Lord, give me more and more of your eternal perspective on success. Keep my steps from slipping at the times when I see the apparent success of the wicked. Amen.

\* If you'd like to read Lowell's entire classic poem (it's long), visit <http://www.bartleby.com/42/805.html>

## FRIDAY 2.08.19 – Young minister, tough situation, and a recipe for success

### Read: [1 Timothy 1:3-5](#), [4:8-16](#)

On his second missionary journey, the apostle Paul met a younger man named Timothy (cf. Acts 16:1-4). Timothy became one of his most trusted associates, one Paul trusted to lead some of the churches he planted, and to continue leading them after Paul was gone. Such a large responsibility must have frightened Timothy at times, especially in the light of his youth (1 Timothy 4:12). But Paul urged him to lead with confidence and trust in God.

- In God's sweeping story in the Bible, we see that God used people who might have been thought too old (e.g. Abraham, Moses) and others who might have been thought too young (e.g. Jeremiah, Timothy). If you are on the younger end of the age spectrum, do older people ever intimidate you, making you afraid to offer your gifts and insights? If you are on the older end of the spectrum, what helps you resist the urge to look down on younger Christians whose thinking or music may be different than you've been used to?
- What examples of either spiritual courage or timidity are parts of your family's spiritual legacy? In what ways have parents, grandparents and other important people given you confidence to fearlessly value and use your God-given strengths? What effect have they had on you? How can you mentor and encourage someone who is younger than you are?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, as I live in this age-conscious culture, remind me that from your eternal view, age is one of the least of your concerns. Empower me to live without fear, now and in all the years of earthly life that are left for me. Amen.

## SATURDAY 2.09.19 – The divine definition of true success

### Read: [Isaiah 52:13 – 53:11](#)

Rabbis debated who Isaiah's fourth "servant song" was about. The first Christians had no doubt—they quoted this song more than any other verses to describe Jesus' redemptive suffering. In Jesus, the early Christians saw, God's servant succeeded by taking the world's evil and hatred onto himself and through what looked like failure to human eyes changed it into a redemptive force. No passage in the Hebrew Scriptures spoke more eloquently to those early Christians—and to every generation of Christians since—about the meaning of Jesus' death. As the New Dictionary of Biblical Theology said, "God's power is at its greatest not in his destruction of the wicked but in his taking all the wickedness of the earth into himself and giving back love." \*

- Jesus set the stage for the way New Testament writers applied Isaiah 53 by quoting part of the passage and applying it to himself (cf. Luke 22:37). It all came true in Jesus' saving death and resurrection, they said. What does Jesus' way of succeeding in defeating evil as the Suffering Servant tell you about how God defines success? What kinds of evil have you faced? How can Jesus' example guide you toward the path of genuine success at those times?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you succeeded through self-giving love, through suffering for others and giving your life to offer me life. Reshape any flawed notions of success I may have, and help me to truly succeed by the same divine standards that you did. Amen.

\* T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, ed. The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000, p. 222.

**Family Activity:** Collect a backpack, some large, heavy rocks and a few thick markers. As a family, invite each person to try on the empty backpack, and feel its lightness. Next, ask everyone to take two stones and a marker. Have each person think of something they are not very good at or something they have done wrong and write it on one rock. Pass the backpack around asking each person to share what they wrote and place it in the backpack. Talk about how the backpack is feeling heavier. Now, invite each person to take their second rock and write on it something they do well but can sometimes be difficult to do. Pass around the backpack again with each person sharing what they wrote on the second rock, and placing their rock in the backpack. Have each person try on the backpack again. Discuss how at times both our failures and our successes can feel heavy or burdensome. Read [1 Peter 5:7 and Matthew 11:28-30](#). Thank God for helping us carry our burdens.