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Friends are important. When I was getting treated for breast cancer, I relied on my friends a lot. Over the course of four months I received 179 cards. It's been seventeen years. Some of you are going to say, "You need to do some serious housekeeping!"

But when I look at them I see the love that got me through. "I'm praying." "Actually, you don't look too bad bald!" "Just one more treatment to go!" It helped me have the strength to endure.

When you have cancer you don't know if you will survive.

But their words were important because I also remember doing Bible studies with them; pressing on to learn; going on retreats for deeper discipleship. Those were also special bonds.

They were the "love of neighbor" expressed for me. The cards express a lot of faith and history we had together.

Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had been exiled together. They were friends. Daniel helped them trust God when he stepped up and ordered special food for all of them. Daniel and his friends prayed together for God to reveal King Nebuchadnezzar's dreams. When Nebuchadnezzar promoted Daniel, Daniel asked that his friends be promoted to special positions, too. They loved God together. They loved each other as fellow believers.

They practiced spiritual disciplines together. They took steps of faith together. So, Daniel wanted them to be successful—so he asked that they be considered leaders in Babylon. And Nebuchadnezzar granted the request. Jews would be placed over Chaldeans; that is Babylonians.

It was some time after all that happened when the king decided to make this statue of gold—ten stories high. Remember his dream? God said his kingdom was represented in a statue with a gold head. The image must have gone to his head. His statue was all gold.

Perhaps the king felt the need for this action because he sensed the rumblings of disloyalty amongst his leaders and his point was to get unchallenged support from his staff. If Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had remained ordinary citizens, they would not have been subject to this decree, but since they held important governmental positions, they were required to pay allegiance. You know how prejudices are—Jews and Babylonians. So the Babylonian leaders reported them to the king:

"There are some Jews-- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego-- whom you have put in charge of the province of Babylon. They pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They refuse to serve your gods and do not worship the gold statue you have set up." (Dan. 3:12)

The king flew into a rage.

Daniel must have felt terrible. Here he was, trying to make the best of the exile for his friends. He stood up for them and got them food they were used to. When they prayed, they got answers!

But now, everything was turned upside down. They were threatened with sure death. Why, God? He probably felt like David, who wrote:

“Why, O LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?”
(Psalm 10:1)

Why didn't Daniel just leave well-enough alone? Why had he asked the king to give them positions in his government?

The truth is Satan rears his ugly head against people of faith. Satan challenges the ways of God and sends trials to God's people. Paul writes in Ephesians:

Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. (6:11-13)

Notice he says “when the day of evil comes.” Satan roams the earth, but we can be prepared. Spiritual disciplines will help you. Paul calls those disciplines “full armor.”

Armor in Paul's day protected an individual in combat. Today, we might consider a bullet-proof vest, or a riot shield as armor. But in Paul's day, a Roman soldier would have protective equipment that was both defensive—a breastplate and leg coverings—and also offensive, their shield was used offensively. They would hold up the shield with a straight arm and run full force against a foe and knock them down with the shield. Then, they were able to use it to protect their body while fighting with the sword.

Paul says when you are attacked by the powers of this dark world and spiritual forces of evil, you want to be able to stand your ground.

The belt of truth: the truth they stood on was, *You shall have no other god but God alone.*
(Exodus 20:3)

King Nebuchadnezzar said bow before my statue and worship. It was no problem for them to “wear the belt of truth.” “Sorry, dude, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter.” (Ginger's translation of Dan. 3:14 ☺)

But then they added:

“If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.” (v. 17-18)

Somehow they knew it would be okay if they stood on that truth. It was a spiritual discipline to do so. Do you aspire to be so unafraid that you, too, in the face of threat do not crumble and fall, but can stand strong? How did they do it? They practiced. They practiced over the long haul.

Sarah Young writes, “Every step on your life-journey can be a step of faith.”¹

Baby steps of trust build faith. At first, the men simply ate what they were used to, what was their tradition. They did it together.

We are meant to be in this together. Faith is not private, or subject to your own interpretation. When we act in community, there is unity. Faith is standing on Scripture, a sacred text, along with connection with an active, Divine God who acts in history.

Faith is as valuable as life. They couldn't serve something that was false. How much confidence do you put in false things?

Let's rephrase it. “Without faith in something TRUE, you have no life.”

How does that statement help you? You might say, *Who wants to have no life? Or, no purpose. Or no happiness. Or powerless faith.*

Perhaps when we encounter those situations which require giant leaps of faith—and this situation required a giant leap of faith,
it was like going through “the valley of the shadow of death;”
it was like jumping a huge chasm in the dark or scaling a cliff you cannot see over;
or being drawn into deep waters.

We can remember faith involves small steps and giant steps. We can remember they took the giant step because they believed *without faith in the true God, you have no life*. That can help us in the moment giant faith is needed.

Into the fire they go, not knowing if God will save them. Into the bound. But notice:
Jesus set them free.
Jesus did not send them someplace He was not willing to go himself.

Do you struggle with faith? Take baby steps. Grasp that one thing:
“Without faith in Someone TRUE, you have no life.”

Stand on it in the little things. Reinforce it with a group of friends. Then, when your “valley” or chasm or deep water comes, you will find that you can take bigger steps of faith than you know, and your faith has gotten real.

AMEN

¹Sarah Young, *Jesus Calling*, September 25.