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SERMON TITLE: Center Yourself in Purpose, Not Fear
Walking as Disciples of Jesus Series

SCRIPTURE: Luke 12:1-9

DATE: January 26, 2020

Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Read also Jeremiah 37:13-21. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org

How many of you have challenges in front of you? How many have circumstances before you that seem insurmountable? It may not be as hard as Jeremiah's, but for you it is difficult. Today we talk about what to do when life throws us a curve ball.

In Jeremiah, Judah was being besieged by Babylon. Food was scarce. Doom seemed right around the corner. And yet Jeremiah had been told by the Lord to buy a field. The Lord had told him, "Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land" (32:15).

It was a sign of hope. (In other words, don't fear, even though the enemy is at your door.)

So Jeremiah bought the land. He was going out to check on his land.

But a guard saw him leave and accused him of defecting to Babylon, and threw him into prison. Now, anyone listening to him, he would have known Jeremiah would certainly not defect to Babylon. But that guard, had not been listening. Now Jeremiah's life was at stake. Would God take care of him? Do you ever wonder how God is going to come through in your hard circumstance?

Do you struggle to see God's hand when times are hard?

Just about the time that it looked like Jeremiah would not survive, the King called for him. He didn't call for him in public, but in secret. He was worried about public opinion, for his police force might turn on him as it turned on Jeremiah.

Isn't it amazing how God's timing works? Jeremiah is starving to death, and God finds a way to get him out, even in the face of tremendous opposition.

Zedekiah asked for prayer, and a word from the Lord. And Jeremiah told him the truth. To tell the truth was an incredible risk. The King could have destroyed him immediately because of his message. But Jeremiah said it anyway. Would you?

Would you have done the necessary job? Or would you think, I'm not going to mess with the king's problem! Let him figure it out for himself. Would you have been concerned about helping

your nation and spoken up? Or would you be concerned about your own protection? We need to ponder these questions.

Jeremiah told the truth because the king needed to hear it, even if it cost him his life. Jeremiah centered himself in God's purpose, rather than live to protect his own hide, or make his life safer, or cave in to fear.

God was on the move. God did a miracle. The very king that could have sent him back to that dungeon actually moved him to the palace where he was provided daily bread, even though it was still a prison.

That's a stunning outcome that came unexpectedly.

Do you give up before giving God a chance because you don't see a way out?

On December 7, 1941, sailor Dorie Miller, of Waco, was in Pearl Harbor when his ship, the USS West Virginia, came under attack. The ship was hit. Dorie's job was mess attendant, because African American ratings were very limited at that time. But, instead of taking protective cover; instead of saying "that's not my job," he immediately stepped into a role that could have cost him his life.

Under fire from Japanese planes, he carried wounded sailors across the quarterdeck to safety, including Captain Bennion, who was mortally wounded. After moving the captain and saving many others, he manned a machine gun he was not trained to shoot. According to him, he shot down at least one of the attacking Japanese planes. Others say he shot down seven. When they had exhausted the ammunition, he continued to carry the wounded to safety. Miller was recognized as one of the "first US heroes of World War II."¹

Dorie Miller was not hampered by restrictions. He centered his life in purpose, not fear or selfishness. He focused on what he could do, even risking his own life to save others.

This is a man whom God honored with success. He was the first black sailor honored with the Navy Cross medal, the Navy's second highest award. Now, a new aircraft carrier has been named for him, the fourth of the Gerald R. Ford carriers, alongside the John F. Kennedy and the Enterprise. He sits with presidents. His heroism: his commitment, courage, and leadership painted a vision for other black sailors—and all of us—to center ourselves in purpose.

¹ Peter C. Anderson, "The Hero of Pearl Harbor: the Dorie Story," at <https://thefoundingproject.com/hero-pearl-harbor/>, accessed January 23, 2020.

Christians have always been called to live beyond cultural restrictions like Dorie Miller. That is exactly what Jesus said to his disciples. Let's read it. LUKE 12:1-9

Thousands were now following Jesus and in that crowd were Pharisees. Jesus saw them as flawed. That makes you wonder. Weren't they the elders of the church? Weren't they the ones who fasted and prayed and kept God's law more than anyone? Perhaps my word "flawed" isn't the best choice. Perhaps it would be better to say—their "yeast" was a handicap. Yeast in the Bible is a symbol for corruption. They were, then, corrupt. But maybe it was something that crept in from all that rule-keeping.

Perhaps they were doing all these things but had lost their heart for God. Perhaps they cared about what others think more than caring about the right thing.

One reason thousands sought Jesus is his heart, his healing, his grace, his forgiveness, and his authoritative teaching. Why is Jesus so desirable? He is centered in purpose, not fear.

The Pharisees were keeping their faith for all the wrong reasons. They were actually very fearful: fearful of God's scrutiny; fearful of not being first; fearful of what others thought of them; fearful of judgment. Fearful of not keeping the rules. Their priorities were in all the wrong places.

They were one way in private and another way in public.

Jesus said in *The Judgment* all of that will come to light. Jesus also said, *so don't fall into that corrupt way of thinking. Live not in fear when others come against you. God is for you. You are valuable to him. So take a risk. Acknowledge me publicly. That is a must.*

That's not just a verbal acknowledgment and then you go about living as you want. It's not just a Jesus bumper sticker on your car. It is doing acts to express Jesus' purpose in your life, regardless of what people think, even if it comes to your harm. Martin Luther King, Jr. did just that, and it did eventually come to his harm, but not before he changed the whole trajectory of a societal ill. His actions have affected the whole world, and cast a vision that living as Jesus' disciple matters.

Do good acts when you see injustice, even small ones, and you will be amazed at what God does with them.

Marion Washington of Dallas is 92. She lives in her own home in a neighborhood called Hamilton Park in north Dallas. But before she lived there, she lived with discrimination. It was 1953. She and her husband wanted to buy a home in a quality neighborhood in Dallas. They put a deposit on a house near White Rock Lake. Then, they received news that they were not welcome there. Their deposit was returned, minus \$35. It was a huge disappointment.

They eventually found Hamilton Park, but Mrs. Washington always remembered the \$35. In December, the Dallas Morning News carried her story. Sharon Grigsby wrote it.

A lawyer from Coppell read it. I drive by their house all the time. Brian Jobe wanted Mrs. Washington to know that someone cared enough to take action. He couldn't shake the thought that they made a down payment on their dream home and then were told they were not welcome. Ms. Grigsby writes, "It didn't matter what he thought about the wrongdoing but what he could do about it."² So, calculating inflation, he wrote a check for \$332.21 and mailed it to Sharon Grigsby with the message to get it to Mrs. Washington. And she did.

Mrs. Washington was speechless. She marveled, "He didn't have to do this. What a blessing he is!" She could not believe someone she had never met, whose life was so different, could understand what that \$35 meant to her.

What if we all looked for opportunities to live by purpose. What if we laid aside fear of what others might think; fear of criticism; or whatever fear we might have and followed our hearts. Being a disciple of Jesus is exactly that.

Walking as a disciple—whether it is saving someone's life, speaking a word of truth, or righting a longtime wrong, it can make heroes of us and bring hope to our nation. Can we Christians take this into our own hands, rather than watch from a distance and expect someone else to do it?

Center yourself in purpose when you have a problem. Look for God to move.

AMEN

²Sharon Grigsby, "Righting a \$35 Wrong," Dallas Morning News, sec. B, p. 1, January 11, 2020.