



## **Theme: Restoration and Renewal – Life and Pandemic**

### **“The Looking Back Trap”**

#### **Weekly Memory Verse:**

*Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. <sup>2</sup> And all the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron; the whole congregation said to them, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! <sup>3</sup> Why is the LORD bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become booty; would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?” <sup>4</sup> So they said to one another, “Let us choose a captain, and go back to Egypt.”*  
*Number 14:1-4 NRSV*

#### **Monday, August 23, 2021**

##### **Sources of Uncertainty: Opportunity**

##### **Genesis 41:1-16**

Joseph experienced violence and tragedy at the hands of his own family. As if that weren't enough, he ended up as a prisoner in jail despite having done nothing wrong. How easy it would have been for him to hate God or live in a state of “woe is me” self-pity.

Miraculously he did neither. Somehow, he maintained a sense of God's goodness and power. When a life-changing opportunity presented itself, what was his first response?

“I cannot do it,” Joseph replied to Pharaoh, “but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.” v.16

Despite all that had happened to him, Joseph knew where the power was. He knew who had the answer. By turning to God for help and guidance, he put himself on the path to freedom, physically and spiritually.

Who do you turn to when opportunities present themselves?

#### **Tuesday, August 24, 2021**

##### **Sources of Uncertainty: Calling**

##### **Exodus 3**

Moses. What a leader, right? A man of faith, vision, courage, discernment, and all of those other GREAT spiritual things we should aspire to be. You probably think of him as an unattainable model of spiritual leadership. But that is not how his relationship with God began.

In our reading today, God calls Moses from a burning bush. (I guess Moses wasn't very discerning early on because it took a magic trick to get his attention.) And when he did begin to hear God's voice, his first answer was "no." In fact, if you read Exodus 3 & 4, you will notice that Moses tries every possible excuse to wriggle out of God's plan, God's calling on his life. I guess he was pretty uncertain about this whole calling and faithful obedience thing.

What IS certain is this: only God knows the best path for your life. Certainty can only be found in seeking and following the path God has for you. True uncertainty is choosing to go your own way—living with a constant sense of not being where you are supposed to be....deliberately living outside God's will for your life.

Moses ultimately said "yes," and he discovered that God doesn't call the equipped, he equips the called.

In other words, when we beg off from God's calling or nudging by saying "God I can't do \_\_\_\_\_," we are really saying "God you can't do \_\_\_\_\_." I don't recommend making a practice of telling God what He can't do. A better practice is to say "Yes, Lord, but I will need you to do it through me."

**Wednesday, August 25, 2021**

**Sources of Uncertainty: Tragedy**

**John 11:1-44**

In today's reading, Jesus' close friend Lazarus gets sick. Rather than rushing to his aid, Jesus seems to delay and Lazarus dies. As the story plays out, we discover that Jesus might have had more than one agenda in mind as he determined how to respond to a tragedy among His inner circle.

With certainty of the final outcome, Jesus responds according to His own timetable. He sees a bigger picture and plan, and His response is designed to accomplish many goals. Those who called Him were not happy with his seemingly slow response, and while it clearly hurt him to see their pain, He was resolute in responding in a way that would bless all people--Lazarus, those who sent for Him, and all of humanity.

Tragedy always brings uncertainty. What will life be like now? Will it ever go back to normal? How can I go on? Etc. These questions, while normal to ask, never bring clarity or even answers. We would do well to respond to tragedy in the same way Martha and Mary did, call out to Jesus. Ask Him to help and trust that He will...in His own perfect way and in His own perfect timing.

**Thursday, August 26, 2021**

**Sources of Uncertainty: Fear**

**1 Kings 18:16-19:1-18**

In today's reading, uncertainty grew out of fear. Elijah, a prophet of God who had seen the awesome power of God manifest in remarkable ways, was threatened by Jezebel. In fact, she sent a messenger to Elijah with the promise that he would be dead in 24 hours. Now, when I read this story, I wonder why Elijah didn't laugh in the messenger's face. I wonder why he didn't go see Jezebel immediately and ask her if she would like a "personal encounter" with some of that Mt. Carmel shock and awe? Truly! How

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could Elijah be scared given what He had seen God do up there? Nonetheless, despite all he had seen God do, Elijah crumbles in the face of this threat and flees.

Maybe Elijah was exhausted. Maybe he was totally wiped out. I recall the words of General George S. Patton, Jr. who said, "Fatigue makes cowards of us all." I believe Elijah was spiritually and mentally tired. In his weakened state, he forgot all that God had done for him and through him. He faltered and was filled with fear rather than relying on his faith. In summary, he was human.

When faced with fear, do you ever forget all that God has done for you? If you are exhausted or stressed, you are even more likely to ignore or discount God's amazing track record in your life....all the prayers answered...the faithful presence He always provides...the listening ear that you can count on whenever and wherever you need it.

When faced with fear, the very best thing you can do is stop and recount all of the ways God has "shown up" for you in your life. If circumstances permit, take out a pen and paper and try to write down as many of the answered prayers as you can remember. As you reflect on God's remarkable faithfulness, you will feel your courage and faith rising. You might even find yourself saying, "Why should I fear anything? God's got this!"

**Friday, August 27, 2021**

**Sources of Uncertainty: Obstacles**

**Acts 16:16-34**

I haven't been to prison, and I bet most of you reading this haven't either. Talk about an obstacle, an interruption to your plans. Other than death or a major illness, I can't imagine a bigger obstacle in life. Few of us can read this story and say, "well Paul just wouldn't understand how difficult my obstacles are." Not only was he in prison, he was imprisoned for casting a demon out of a little girl.

Rather than being angry or resentful toward God, rather than wondering aloud how God could let this happen or whether there really is a God, Paul responded by expressing his faith. There he is in prison, in agony from being flogged, and he is praying and singing hymns. Welcomed into that prison by Paul's unflinching faith, God shows up and literally breaks them out of jail.

Here is a simple lesson from this text. When you are faced with a seemingly insurmountable obstacle (or even a small one), don't immediately try to think your way out of it. Just worship. Worship isn't something God needs from us. God isn't short on self-esteem, desperately needing to hear how wonderful He is. Worship is what we need. We need to be reminded how faithful, powerful and attentive God is. Just start worshipping and be amazed at how that obstacle shrinks when you turn your mind toward God.

**Saturday, August 28, 2021**

**Sources of Uncertainty: Needing Discernment**

**1 Samuel 3:1-21**

Samuel was precocious in his responsiveness to Eli and God. He responded quickly and was attentive when he thought his master might be calling. Moreover, he was obedient and a quick study. He listened to what Eli said and followed his instructions precisely. What was the result? He clearly heard God's voice and understood the message.

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Do you have young Samuel's desire to hear and respond to the Lord's voice? Do you jump up and run to your master when He calls? Honing your spiritual discernment first requires a heart that is truly eager to hear The Voice. Evidence of that desire is easy to see in yourself...if it is there. Do you set aside dedicated time to listen to God? Do you ask for God to speak? Do you respond with alacrity when you get the sense God is speaking or nudging you?

The best solution to uncertainty is to act on the promptings of God. Then, in God's own way, God will clearly confirm your discernment or redirect you. In either case, the uncertainty will diminish as God's will becomes clearer to you. And along the way, in the midst of these daily and intentional interactions, a relationship will begin to develop.

Who knows? Maybe that was God's goal in the first place.