

Spiritual Fortitude

Zoe Christian Fellowship of Whittier

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Objective: An opportunity to reflect on the lives of those who exhibited spiritual fortitude and boldness in their walk with God. They were stretched, ridiculed, threatened, mocked, and abused, yet developed the endurance to bend and not break!

Key Scripture:

Psalm 92:12 NIV - The righteous man will flourish like the palm tree; He will grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

Week 1:

- *Are you built to bend or break?*
- *Have you placed yourself in the right environment?*
- *What causes some to have fortitude and others not?*



Flourish

- Grow or develop in a healthy or vigorous way, especially as the result of a particularly favorable environment.

Fortitude

- Courage in pain and adversity

Group Discussion/Reflection: Can you recall a time when any of the pressures listed below have impacted you? In childhood or adulthood?

- Peer pressure
- Fear
- People-pleasing
- Insecurity
- Self-doubt
- Adverse perspective
- Negative thinking
- Temptation

We've all heard the saying, *"Apply pressure to stop the bleeding"*. Pressure is designed to stop the flow of things.

The pressures of life can stop the momentum of:

1. Connecting with the King
2. Taking calculated risks
3. Believing
4. Loving inwardly and outwardly
5. Walking in purpose
6. Engaging with others
7. Living in peace
8. Voicing sincere opinions
9. Speaking from the heart
10. Keeping your word
11. The list goes on and on...

*****Let's take a moment to reflect on those who'd reached a "breaking point" in their journey.***

Peter denied Jesus

Matthew 26:69-75 NIV

69 Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said.

70 But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said.

71 Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth."

72 He denied it again, with an oath: "I don't know the man!"

73 After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away."

74 Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, “I don’t know the man!”

Immediately a rooster crowed. 75 Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: “Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly.

NOTE: Peter loved Jesus, without a doubt. In fact, he had a reputation of being amongst the first to come to Jesus’ defense, in full force and without apology. However, the pressure Peter received from the crowd put Peter’s loyalty to the test. Pressure is uncomfortable and if not handled properly, it can inevitably break you!

Judas betrayed Jesus

Luke 22:1-6 NIV

22 Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, 2 and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people. 3 Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. 4 And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. 5 They were delighted and agreed to give him money. 6 He consented and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.

NOTE: Judas stepped into the Pharisees’ environment which would inevitably cause him to bend or wilt (like a dying flower) and eventually break. Satan targeted Judas’ weakness in an area where he was already fractured and fragile – the temptation of money and greed. If you recall, in Matthew 26:6-9, Judas and other disciples complained about the woman with the alabaster box, who poured expensive perfume on Jesus’ head. Judas viewed the woman’s expression of worship as a waste that could have been “better” used to earn money.

Judas’ actions caused brokenness, which eventually led to a tragic end...suicide.

Satan took advantage of the opportunity to sift Judas as wheat!

Luke 22:31-32

31 “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”

Ephesians 4:27 states, “and do not give the devil a foothold”. This verse is referencing anger; however, this command should also be exemplified in every area of our lives.

Closing Group Prayer: Begin to declare over yourself and your family, a life of spiritual fortitude to withstand and overcome the pressures of life. You will flourish like the palm tree!

Week 2:

*****The remainder of this lesson will be an exploration of those who exhibited fortitude.***

Caleb

Numbers 13:17-31

17 When Moses sent them to explore Canaan, he said, “Go up through the Negev and on into the hill country. 18 See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many. 19 What kind of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What kind of towns do they live in? Are they unwallled or fortified? 20 How is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees in it or not? Do your best to bring back some of the fruit of the land.” (It was the season for the first ripe grapes.)

21 So they went up and explored the land from the Desert of Zin as far as Rehob, toward Lebo Hamath. 22 They went up through the Negev and came to Hebron, where Ahiman, Sheshai and Talmai, the descendants of Anak, lived. (Hebron had been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) 23 When they reached the Valley of Eshkol, they cut off a branch bearing a single cluster of grapes. Two of them carried it on a pole between them, along with some pomegranates and figs. 24 That place was called the Valley of Eshkol because of the cluster of grapes the Israelites cut off there. 25 At the end of forty days they returned from exploring the land.

26 They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land. 27 They gave Moses this account: “We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. 28 But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. 29 The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan.”

30 Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.”

31 But the men who had gone up with him said, “We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are.” 32 And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. 33 We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”

NOTE: *Caleb and several other men went into the land of Canaan to capture a first-hand view of the city. They were instructed to report back to the group. He observed everything the other men observed, yet his report was filled with fortitude and boldness!*

The other men compared themselves to “grasshoppers in their own eyes”. They had a broken perspective of themselves. They spoke of their negative self-reflection.

Discussion Question: *How do you think the men viewed themselves prior to their entry into the land of Canaan?*

Discussion Question: *Why do you think Caleb was so driven and unable to be swayed by his peers?*

Caleb didn't see himself as small. He viewed himself as undefeated and refused to break and yield to the opinions of the majority. In fact, he seemingly reached a point of irritation, as the scripture says he "silenced the people before Moses", as they continued to complain and proclaim defeat. He had a flourishing perspective of himself, and in so doing, reminded the Israelites of their capabilities.

Caleb's mentality brings-to-mind another great man...David!!!

David

I Samuel 17:17-26

17 Now Jesse said to his son David, "Take this ephah of roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread for your brothers and hurry to their camp. 18 Take along these ten cheeses to the commander of their unit. See how your brothers are and bring back some assurance from them. 19 They are with Saul and all the men of Israel in the Valley of Elah, fighting against the Philistines."

20 Early in the morning David left the flock in the care of a shepherd, loaded up and set out, as Jesse had directed. He reached the camp as the army was going out to its battle positions, shouting the war cry. 21 Israel and the Philistines were drawing up their lines facing each other. 22 David left his things with the keeper of supplies, ran to the battle lines, and asked his brothers how they were. 23 As he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, stepped out from his lines and shouted his usual defiance, and David heard it. 24 Whenever the Israelites saw the man, they all fled from him in great fear.

25 Now the Israelites had been saying, "Do you see how this man keeps coming out? He comes out to defy Israel. The king will give great wealth to the man who kills him. He will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his family from taxes in Israel."

26 David asked the men standing near him, "What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

NOTE: *Most of us are quite familiar with the story of David. He was an unexpected, mighty man of valor. As we walk closely with God, He causes us to "see" things that others may not. David knew he had a covenant with God; and he immediately noticed something very significant. He referenced Goliath as the "uncircumcised Philistine", which reinforced within himself that he had the upper hand in the upcoming fight. You see, circumcision was an indicator and representation of covenant with God and Goliath didn't have it!*

David had the confidence in knowing that God was going into the battle with him, so there was no way he could lose. As a result of this covenant, God had given David the gift of precision and victory over

those bigger and seemingly stronger than himself (lion, bear and now Goliath). He moved with fortitude, and we all know how the story ends!

Group Discussion: *David thought he was simply delivering lunch to his older brothers, but God had a greater task at hand. He became an answer to a lingering problem.*

Have you ever stepped out with your own agenda in mind, only to find that God had a bigger plan? What was your response when the plans changed?

Week 3:

The Shunamite Woman

Take a moment to review II Kings 4:8-17

II Kings 4:18-37

18 When the child had grown, he went out one day to his father among the reapers. 19 And he said to his father, "Oh, my head, my head!" The father said to his servant, "Carry him to his mother." 20 And when he had lifted him and brought him to his mother, the child sat on her lap till noon, and then he died. 21 And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God and shut the door behind him and went out. 22 Then she called to her husband and said, "Send me one of the servants and one of the donkeys, that I may quickly go to the man of God and come back again." 23 And he said, "Why will you go to him today? It is neither new moon nor Sabbath."

She said, "All is well." 24 Then she saddled the donkey, and she said to her servant, "Urge the animal on; do not slacken the pace for me unless I tell you." 25 So she set out and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel.

When the man of God saw her coming, he said to Gehazi his servant, "Look, there is the Shunammite. 26 Run at once to meet her and say to her, 'Is all well with you? Is all well with your husband? Is all well with the child?'" And she answered, "All is well." 27 And when she came to the mountain to the man of God, she caught hold of his feet. And Gehazi came to push her away. But the man of God said, "Leave her alone, for she is in bitter distress, and the Lord has hidden it from me and has not told me." 28 Then she said,

"Did I ask my lord for a son? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me?'" 29 He said to Gehazi, "Tie up your garment and take my staff in your hand and go. If you meet anyone, do not greet him, and if anyone greets you, do not reply. And lay my staff on the face of the child." 30 Then the mother of the child said, "As the Lord lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So, he arose and followed her. 31 Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the face of the child, but there was no sound or sign of life. Therefore, he returned to meet him and told him, "The child has not awakened."

32 When Elisha came into the house, he saw the child lying dead on his bed. 33 So he went in and shut the door behind the two of them and prayed to the Lord. 34 Then he went up and lay on the child, putting his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands. And as he stretched himself upon him, the flesh of the child became warm. 35 Then he got up again and walked once back and forth in the house; and went up and stretched himself upon him. The child sneezed seven times,

and the child opened his eyes. 36 Then he summoned Gehazi and said, “Call this Shunammite.” So, he called her. And when she came to him, he said, “Pick up your son.” 37 She came and fell at his feet, bowing to the ground. Then she picked up her son and went out.

NOTE: *There’s something special about a mother who believes! The Shunammite woman also honored and respected the man of God. She supernaturally maintained her composure and spoke life despite the fact her son died in her arms. She was intentional about saying, “All is well”. She didn’t leave room for any opposing conversation or belief. She was strategic, about laying her son on Elisha (the prophet’s) bed. She probably understood that his bedroom was an anointed place and it served as the right environment. She was not concerned about her discomfort, as they traveled along the bumpy road. She knew she had to get there. She was adamant about not leaving the Elisha’s side until he personally agreed to see her son, because she believed the supernatural outcome would be in both she and her son’s favor. The Shunammite woman was, indeed, a woman of fortitude!*

Syrophenician Woman

Mark 7:24-28 NIV

24 Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. 25 In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. 26 The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

27 “First let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

28 “Lord,” she replied, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

29 Then he told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.”

30 She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone

Note: *The Syrophenician woman did not back down. She wanted her daughter delivered and knew Jesus was the person to do it. She “heard” about Him. According to Romans 10:17, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. She came to get her blessing and was willing to take any-and-all left-overs, i.e., the “crumbs”. Her fortitude of faith literally moved the heart of God and ultimately led to her daughter’s deliverance.*

Group Discussion: *Will you turn back after the first ‘NO’? Have you chosen offense over persistent pursuit?*

Note: *Don’t give up too quickly!*

Week 4:

Jehosaphat

II Chronicles 20

1 After this, the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites came to wage war against Jehoshaphat

3 Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. 4 The people of Judah came together to seek help from the Lord; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him.

5 Then Jehoshaphat stood up in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem at the temple of the Lord in the front of the new courtyard 6 and said:

“Lord, the God of our ancestors, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you. 7 Our God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend? 8 They have lived in it and have built in it a sanctuary for your Name, saying, 9 ‘If calamity comes upon us, whether the sword of judgment, or plague or famine, we will stand in your presence before this temple that bears your Name and will cry out to you in our distress, and you will hear us and save us.’

13 All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the Lord.

14 Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jahaziel son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite and descendant of Asaph, as he stood in the assembly.

15 He said: “Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the Lord says to you: ‘Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s. 16 Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel. 17 You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.”

18 Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the Lord.

22 As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. 23 The Ammonites and Moabites rose up against the men from Mount Seir to destroy and annihilate them. After they finished slaughtering the men from Seir, they helped to destroy one another.

***Note:** Jehosaphat stood with fortitude as a leader. His fortitude was found in his worship. He brought God into remembrance of who He is. He practiced humility and went directly to the Father with the understanding that he would only be victorious with God on his side. He had great influence over the people who joined in His worship and began to refocus their eyes on the deliverer. Jehosaphat had*

gotten God's attention and moved Him into action. Our Father inhabits the praises of His people, according to Psalm 22:3. Inhabits means to live in or occupy the space. God literally occupies the very space where worship resides. As Jehosaphat and his people began to fill the atmosphere with worship, it drew God in and moved Him into action.

As we conclude this lesson:

Pause and take time to worship our Heavenly Father. Reflect on His goodness. Give Him praise. Allow Him to occupy your space. Ask Him to fill you with supernatural fortitude.

It's yours for the taking!