

I. INTRO

II. INTRO VIDEO

III. WELCOME

IV. ME

- A. Unprecedented.
 - 1. Sick of that word yet?
 - 2. Really are in unprecedented times... not for humanity (plague, etc.)... but for our lives. Some of the most sudden and comprehensive changes we've experienced in our lifetimes.
 - 3. Makes us wish for precededented times.
- B. But this time, and times like this, can be an opportunity.
- C. **Unprecedented times create an unprecedented opportunity to grow unprecedented faith.**

V. WE

- A. Even before this crazy year, there has been this interesting phenomenon...
 - 1. People experience pivotal, life-changing events (good or bad) and one of two things happens... their faith either grows or weakens.
 - 2. **Defining moments can either grow or weaken our faith.**
- B. When life turns good (gets too easy) people lose faith... when things get difficult people lose faith, too.
- C. Examples:
 - 1. Marriage/birth of child/ scholarship/ promotion/ job loss/ betrayal/ illness/ divorce/ death
 - 2. All have the ability to either strengthen or weaken our faith.
 - 3. Maybe you've been there?
- D. What's the difference?
 - 1. How is it that the same events grow some people's faith and destroy others'.
 - 2. Interpretation.
 - 3. **How we interpret events determines whether they grow or weaken our faith.**
- E. We can't schedule these events, we can't control how/when they will come to us
 - 1. But we can control how we interpret them... our perspective in them and of them.
- F. So how do we make the choice to grow our faith in unprecedented times?

VI. GOD (Psalm 23)

- A. One of the most famous passages in the Jewish Scriptures.
 - 1. Written about 3000 yrs ago by one of the best known murderers in history... King David
 - 2. Ever said, "If there's a God, I don't deserve his love/forgiveness"?
 - 3. Nobody understood this more than David... a nobody, Goliath, became king, and then ruined it all... never lost God's love b/c he understood... **God's love and care for us is not dependent on us or what happens to us.**
 - 4. Passage gives us the key to creating a perspective that allows events to grow our faith.
 - 5. First line is the cornerstone...

B. **V. 1- The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need.**

1. Worth memorizing.
2. This is the key... **When life happens how do you choose to view God?**
3. In the middle of life's events we have **3 options** of how to view God... **Cruel, Uninterested, or Shepherd.**
4. First two are completely understandable...
 - a. Cruel- "God if you're in charge, you're making this happen to me. You could've stopped it and you didn't"... Many people are angry with God b/c they assume he allowed difficult things to happen in their lives.
 - b. Uninterested- either you don't exist or you just don't care about me and that's why this happened
 - c. Understandable viewpoints...
5. But there's the third perspective... It's the perspective Jesus explained and exemplified... God is a shepherd.
6. Jesus never said that faith would make the situations that have plagued all humankind for our entire history magically skip over those who trust him... he said the opposite...
 - a. "...you will have many trials and sorrows."
7. But he also said... "I am the good shepherd."
8. Shepherds' lives are devoted to their sheep, feed them, care for them, guide them... sometimes to places they don't want to go but need to in order for them to grow and be healthy.
 - a. Cross rivers, leave comfortable fields for new fields, walk through dangerous places to get home
9. **The Lord is my shepherd; I have all I need.**
 - a. See the effect of this perspective?
 - b. If the Lord is your shepherd you can have contentment and reliance in every situation.
 - c. **If Jesus really is our shepherd then we can trust that we really have all we need.**

10. Is he your shepherd?

11. Those who choose to see God as a cruel entity can carry anger and resentment into their lives and relationships.
12. Those who choose to see God as uncaring or non-existent often struggle with a lack of hope or meaning when difficulties and stress come into their lives... BUT
13. When we choose to see God as our loving and caring shepherd, it changes how we view all of life's events good or bad. And we learn to trust and depend on him in every circumstance.

C. **V. 2-3 He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name.**

1. When we see God as our shepherd we see that, as Jesus' little brother said, "whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father."
2. Good events can grow our faith b/c they become examples of God's care and love for us.
3. We can look back and say, "Look what God has done for me. Look how he cares for my needs."

4. Is he your shepherd?

5. This perspective allows us to grow in hard times too...

D. **V. 4 Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.**

1. How Jesus put it...
2. **John 16:33** *I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.*
3. And... *I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*
4. Even in the worst of times you can have peace and confidence.
5. Does a loving, all-powerful, all-knowing God allow bad things to happen to his sheep?
6. Yes. But when he allows them it isn't b/c he's mad or abandoned us...
7. Something interesting about sheep- they are pretty helpless and need the guidance and protection of a shepherd.
8. I don't know why all bad things happen but I know he uses them to show us that he is always with us, that he can be trusted to lead us through them, that he can use them for unimaginable good.
9. **God uses difficult situations to show us we can trust him.**
10. **Is he your shepherd?**

11. Perspective allows us to focus on what he has given us even in the middle of unprecedented times.

E. **V. 5-6** *You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings. Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord Forever.*

1. **Surely**- certainly, truly
2. A choice to trust.
3. "B/c of everything you have led me through... the good and the bad... I choose to trust... I KNOW..."
4. Your goodness, UNFAILING LOVE (we can't do anything to make God stop loving us)...
5. Will PURSUE... Chase, Run after, me all the days of my life."
6. When we choose to see God as our shepherd, we are able to look back and see how he never stops running after us, never stops chasing us with his never giving up, never ending, always taking the first step- love.
7. **Every unprecedented time is an opportunity to see God's unprecedented love pursuing us.**
8. **Is he your shepherd?**

VII. YOU

- A. God doesn't keep us from difficult and painful situations, so we have to choose how we interpret them.
 1. Are they the result of a cruel, uninterested, or non-existent deity or are they opportunities for us to see the love and care of a real God in the middle of real life?
- B. **How do we allow these circumstances to grow our faith?**
 1. #1 Question God. What?!
 2. **The questions we ask determine the perspectives we have.**
 3. We need to learn to ask the right questions.
 4. We can ask, "Why me?" "Why does everything always happen to me?" "What did I do to deserve this?" "Why don't you care?"
 5. Or we can ask, "Please show me you are in this with me." "What are you showing me, preparing me for, saving me from?"
- C. Then (as we talked about last episode) **#2 Walk with others.** Surround yourself with people who can help you properly interpret what's happening... people who are with you in it, point you to the truth of God's unfailing pursuing love...
 1. **The people we walk with tend to shape our perspective.**
 2. Movie experiences- watch same movie with two different people?

3. Traveling/work... someone complaining the whole time or someone pointing out beauty and having a good sense of humor?
 4. Same with life's defining moments.
- D. Look back at the big moments in your life (good and bad)...
1. What if you were able to see them as something God led you to and through?
 - a. Perhaps you would have started thanking him for his wisdom, care, and protection in the middle of it
 - b. Perhaps it would have given you confidence in the moment and hope for the future.
 2. How would your perspective have changed if you asked different questions?
 - a. Rather than asking "Why?" you would have asked "What? What should I do God?" Or "How?" "How should I respond to this, deal with it, grow from it?"
 3. How would your perspective have changed if you had others to help you interpret those events from a faith-filled perspective?

E. Circumstances can either weaken our faith or become opportunities to grow it... the difference is in our perspective.

F. Big Question: Is he your shepherd?

1. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for his sheep... I know my sheep and they know me."
2. God is not distant... he is right with you, pursuing you... he came and died for you... and rose again to give you a new life of love, freedom, and confidence.
3. Faith is a choice. A choice to trust that Jesus is the good shepherd who died for his sheep and lives for them now..
4. Encourage you to explore what it means for you to make that choice. Jesus said, "my sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life." That means REAL life now and forever.

VIII. WE

- A. Imagine a life where whatever comes, good or bad, we could see those events as opportunities to grow our faith?
- B. Where there was no need for fear, anxiety, fighting for a future we can't control, b/c we chose to trust our heavenly father?

C. A real faith chooses to see the real shepherd at work in the middle of real life.

IX. OUTRO

Questions:

1. Besides the metaphor of sheep and shepherd, what is an analogy that represents how you see your/our relationship with God?
2. Read John 10. What stands out to you in Jesus' descriptions of himself as it pertains to the idea of us choosing to trust him?
3. What is keeping you or tends to keep you from trusting Jesus as your shepherd? How can your group pray for you in this?