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Good morning. I've got a new spot. Let's open with a word of prayer. Heavenly Father, thank You on this beautiful, sunshiny day to get together, to share love with our brothers and sisters in Christ, and to glorify You, to be Your children, to be Your family in this place. As we seek now to learn from Your Holy Scriptures, God, we ask that You will please open up our hearts and minds to understand what it is You're saying to us. Help us to learn and change and grow, reflect more and more the glory of Your Son Jesus in our lives, in whose name we pray. Amen. So as sometimes happens, I have found myself inexplicably doing a series. And I never planned to do it. It just sort of works out that what I was talking about last week there's more to talk about. Well, two weeks ago we spoke on Step Up and Be Excellent. We talked about how to be excellent, you must look at the different areas of your life, your mind and your body and your finances and your job and stuff, and be excellent with those things out of service to God because you realize that God gave you those things. And the power to be excellent in all those areas of your lives is your love for God. And then last week we talked about how once this love grows and grows, you will reach a point of abandonment to God. You will reach the place where you are so interested in His will and His glory that you will begin to set aside your own interests and your own goals for your life and pursue God's goals. Not necessarily God's goals for your life, but God's goals. That is the ultimate of when we love God. This week we're going to be talking about how to live that out. And in the Bible, that living out is referred to as the walk of faith. So where does this phrase "walk of faith" come from? It's in 2 Corinthians 5, 7, which says, "We walk by faith, not by sight." And also, Galatians 2, 20 says, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." So the Bible tells us we need to live by faith, walk by faith. And why is that important? Why is walking by faith important? Because as Hebrews 11, 6 says, "Without faith, it is impossible to please God. For He who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." So we must walk by faith because it is impossible to please God without faith. So what is this walk of faith? What does it look like? The walk of faith is when we choose to live completely by the Word of God, completely by the truth that He has revealed, regardless of the circumstances or the outcome for ourselves. The walk of faith is when we live completely by the Word of God, regardless of the circumstances that we are in or the outcomes that we might experience. The very first sin, and every sin ever since, can be summed up like this. Mankind deciding for himself what is and isn't right, what is and isn't good. It was in that first moment when Adam and Eve disobeyed that they took the place of God. They said, "I am going to determine for myself that this is okay." They made that judgment. They took God's place. And ever since has been us saying, "I am going to choose for myself that this is right." The walk of faith is to simply step back from God's place and allow Him to be God, allow Him to set the standard for truth and for goodness. You'll find yourself having to say, "I don't always understand, but I'm going to trust and obey what God has taught me from His Word." And that's important. This is to our next verse, Romans 10, 17. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. If you want to walk by faith, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. This is why you'll hear me so often emphasizing the need to read your Bibles. Adam puts the Holy Spirit into our hearts and the Holy Spirit opens up the Scriptures to us, but we need to be reading those Scriptures so that He can open them up to us. Spending time in the Word every day is vitally important because as you read the Word, you will learn the truth of God, you will understand His ways, and then that will build your faith and you will be able to walk in that. You must know the truth before you can live by it. You will know it when you learn it from Scripture. A major problem that I see in churches today in religion and all throughout the country, even outside of religion, is rationalism. And on the surface you think rationalism. Being rational makes sense. It's the opposite of irrational. Good. Rationalism must be good. But the problem is rationalism is when you decide randomly, willy-nilly for yourself, what is true and what isn't true. And you end up with theology that says, "I know the Bible says," blank, "but I believe something else." I know what the Bible says about divorce, premarital sex, drunkenness, all of these things. But this is the 21st century. We have wisdom. We've learned things through science, blah, blah, blah. Whatever excuse you come up with, when you say, "I know the Bible says this, but I choose to believe this," that's rationalism. And that is the opposite of the walk of faith. That's when you're deciding, when you're taking the place of God and saying, "This is okay and this isn't okay." We must choose faith. We must choose to step back and say, "Bible says so, so I will trust. I will obey. Everyone else is doing it that way, but God says not to go that way. So I will not go that way." That's the walk of faith. What does it look like when you walk the walk of faith? Well, it's not always easy, as you probably have thought of, especially when I say something like, "Everyone else is going that way and I'm going this way." It can be lonely. It can be difficult. There's a lot of peer pressure not to do the walk of faith. James 1, 2 through 4 says, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience, but let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." One thing that a lot of people misread when they see that verse is they say, they kind of skim it and they say, "Joy, trials, faith, patience, I got it." And they think that trials produce faith, but that is not what it's saying. Trials test your faith and that testing produces patience. You need to build up your faith before the trials happen. Don't think, "I'll just wait for trials to come along and then I'll be a person of greater faith." It's not going to work like that. You need to, in the peaceful, calm seasons of your life, be studying the Scriptures, getting that truth into your mind. So when the trials come, you have that truth to stand on. You have something to fall back on. And then you will be able to be patient and you will be able to get through those trials. Another example, Daniel 3, 14 through 18. Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up? Now, if you are ready, at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and sultry in symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made good. But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is the God that will deliver you from my hands?" Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace. And He will deliver us from your hand, O King. But if not, let it be known to you, O King, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up." They're saying, "I'm going to do the right thing. God might save me, He might not, but whether or not He does, I'm going to do the right thing." That's the walk of faith. Job sums up that whole story nicely when he says, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." It's difficult for us to hear sometimes. We live in a culture where gratification is so immediate for us that it's hard for us to see the goodness in a God who allows us to go through difficult times. But when we look back over all the course of history, when we look at the great price that God paid to show His love to us, to purchase us back into His family, if we remember that love, then it becomes easier to look past our temporary circumstances and to put our hope on the glory and the love and the goodness that we know is further down the road. What doesn't the walk of faith look like? I didn't think I was going to have an example for this, but Clover Lee pointed one out, and it's a great one. And it's kind of long. It's Jeremiah, all of chapter 42 and seven verses out of 43. And so since it's that long, I'm going to read it out of the message because it's a little easier on the ears. So here we go, Jeremiah. All the army officers led by Johanan, son of Korea, and I'm going to mess up these names really bad, I'll tell you right now. Jezaniah, son of Hoshiah, accompanied by all of the people, small and great, came to Jeremiah the prophet and said, "We have a request. Please listen. Pray to your God for us. That's what's left of us. You can see for yourself how few we are. Pray that your God will tell us the way we should go and what we should do." Jeremiah the prophet said, "I hear your request, and I will pray to your God as you have asked. Whatever God says, I'll pass on to you. I'll tell you everything holding nothing back." They said to Jeremiah, "Let God be our witness, a true and faithful witness against us, if we don't do everything that your God directs you to tell us. Whether we like it or not, we'll do it. We'll obey whatever our God tells us. Yes, count on us. We'll do it." I'm sure you know where this is going. Ten days later, God's message came to Jeremiah. He called together Johanun, son of Kariya, and all the army officers with him, including all the people, regardless of how much clout they had. He then spoke. This is the message from God, the God of Israel, to whom you sent me to present your prayer. He says, "If you are ready to stick it out in this land, I will build you up and not drag you down. I will plant you and not pull you up like a weed. I feel deep compassion on account of the doom I have visited on you. You don't have to fear the king of Babylon. Your fears are for nothing. I'm on your side, ready to save and deliver you from anything he might do. I'll pour mercy on you. What's more, he will show you mercy. He'll let you come back to your very own land. But do not say," this is Jeremiah talking again, "but do not say, 'We're not staying around this place, refusing to obey the command of your God and saying instead, 'No, we're off to Egypt, where things are peaceful. No wars, no attacking armies, plenty of food. We're going to live there.' If what's left of Judah is headed down that road, then listen to God's message. This is what God of the angel army says. If you have determined to go to Egypt and make that your home, then the very wars you fear will catch up with you in Egypt and the starvation you dread will track you down in Egypt. You will die there. Every last one of you who is determined to go to Egypt and make it your home will either be killed, starve, or get sick and die. No survivors, not one. No one will escape the doom that I bring upon you." Jeremiah says, "This is the message from God of the angel armies, the God of Israel. In the same way that I swept the citizens of Jerusalem away with my anger and wrath, I'll do the same thing all over again in Egypt. You'll end up being cursed, reviled, ridiculed, and mocked, and you'll never see your homeland again." God has plainly told you, you leftovers from Judah don't go to Egypt. Could anything be plainer? I warn you this day that you are living out of fantasy. You're making a fatal mistake. Didn't you just now send me to your God saying, "Pray for us to our God. Tell us everything that God says and we'll do it all." Well, now I've told you, told you everything he said, and you haven't obeyed a word of it. Not a single word of what your God sent me to tell you. So now let me tell you what will happen next. You'll be killed. You'll starve to death. You'll get sick and die in a wonderful country where you've determined to go and live. When Jeremiah finished telling all the people the whole message of their God, that their God had sent him to give them all these words, "As Uriah, son of Hoshiah and Jehannan son of Kariya, backed by all the self-important men, said to Jeremiah, 'Liar, our God never sent you with this message telling us not to go to Egypt and live there. Baruch, son of Narayah, is behind this. He has turned you against us. He's playing into the hands of the Babylonians, so we'll either end up being killed or taken off to exile in Babylon.' Jehannan son of Kariya and the army officers and the people along with them wouldn't listen to God's message that they stay in the land of Judah and live there. So Jehannan son of Kariya and the army officers gathered up everyone who was left from Judah, who had come back after being scattered all over the place, men, women, and children, kings, daughters, all the people that Nebuzaradon, captain of the bodyguard, had left in care, names, names, names, they entered the land of Egypt in total disobedience of God's message and arrived at the city of Topanez. Not only did these people have the Word of God, they had direct word from a prophet. And yet they still said, 'No, we think our way is better. Our way is logical.' And they disobeyed and they got themselves into a lot of trouble. The walk of faith isn't always easy, isn't always logical. A lot of people are going to make fun of you for using the walk of faith. It is not always doing what feels comfortable, logical, safe, and natural. The walk of faith is not allowing our fluctuating circumstances to base our opinion of God's happiness with us. You will have good times and bad times, but God's love for you is constant. And when you begin to doubt that love and question it based on what you're going through, then that's not the walk of faith, because look at what He did on the cross. That is His love for you. The walk of faith is not measuring out our love and our obedience to God based on our blessings or our circumstances. You don't say, "I'm having a difficult day, God, so I'm skipping Bible time. I'm skipping prayer time because you didn't make my day easier." That's not the walk of faith. Or, "I'm not going to show love to that person because my day has been bad." The walk of faith is giving up the idea that we can comprehend and understand God's ways. The walk of faith is forgetting that it stops saying, "If it doesn't make sense to me, then I'm just not going to believe it or I'm not going to obey it." The walk of faith is aligning your thoughts and thereby your actions perfectly with God's Word. You conform your attitude and your actions in line with who God is and who He says you are, regardless of the circumstances or the outcome. When you let God be God, when you make His truth your truth, you will be walking by faith, and it is then you will be pleasing to God. We're going to have our time of open worship now. I encourage you during this time to just examine your life, examine the good parts and the bad parts. Ask yourself, "Have I been neglecting God because I'm resentful?" "Can I trust that God is the loving God of the Bible, even through the difficult times?" Let me start with some prayer. Heavenly Father, thank You that You are the God of love 24 hours a day, seven days a week, from beginning of time to the end of time. Help us to understand this. Help us to walk in faith and obedience. Open up the truth in Your Word to us. Speak to our hearts now, we pray in Jesus' name. My friends, don't be like the children of Israel who lost their blessing out of fear and logic. Be like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Who even with no promise of being saved from that furnace refused to bow. They stayed steadfast the course and because of it saw God's glory. Heavenly Father, please help us to have this same attitude in our hearts as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Help us to trust You and rely on Your goodness and Your love, even in the face of great opposition. Even when everyone tells us we're wrong and we're foolish. Even when it comes at personal risk, help us to trust and obey You. And bring to our minds the truth in Your Scripture, that we can stand on that solid ground through the difficult times. And we praise You and thank You right now for the glory that we will see on the other side. Whether it is miraculous salvation or whether we have to go through the fire, we praise You and thank You that on the other end is Your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.