

Gateway Fellowship Church

Marathon Faith

Part Six- Be Brave

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I recently heard of a story that just really rocked me, if I could be honest with you. Andrew Stockline, Pastor of a church family about the same size as ours, he had been struggling. Struggling with depression because his dad had passed away. He had personal health issues and really just a lot of ministry stress. Last month, on a Thursday afternoon, Pastor Andrew took his own life at the church. His wife Kayla said at the funeral, "The enemy wants you to feel isolated, unloved, and worthless. I'm here to tell you that you are loved and valued more than you will ever know." While I was praying for this family, those three little boys, and that church family, my wife and I—this story just gripped our hearts, with greater compassion and love, we have been praying for you. I wouldn't want this to happen to anyone in our church. Anyone on our staff. Anyone of you. The reality is there is a real enemy who comes to steal, kill, and destroy. You can't allow the lies of the enemy to penetrate your hearts and your minds. Depression is real. Anxiety is real. As a church we haven't always addressed it in the right way. If we have ever missed your expectations or hurt you, I want you to know how sorry we are. I'm not naïve today to say that one sermon is going to fix all of your problems. But I do believe in the Lord and I do believe as a catalyst for hope there must be faith. There must be faith. Depression is a real issue. Mental health issues are real. Mental health issues or disorders does not equal crazy. They are real. People struggle with it. The diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders defines a major depressive attitude as at least two weeks of depressed mood or loss of interest or pleasure in almost all activities including some of these symptoms:

Sleep issues on almost a daily basis

Changes in appetite and weight

Decreased energy or fatigue almost every day

Difficulty concentrating or making decisions and thinking clearly

Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide

These symptoms will keep you from functioning. They will keep you from growing in your personal relationship with the Lord. They will keep you from having healthy relationships with other people. While anxiety disorder is the number one mental disorder, depression is not that far behind. Today there are over 300 million people in our world that are struggling and have depression according to the

World Health Organization. 16.2 million adults in the United States equaling 6.7% of our population, have had a major depressive episode in this last year. For those of you who were here at the church yesterday and witnessed the incredible baptisms in water, did you hear how many testimonies involved anxiety, depression, worry? It's a real issue. 1 in 5 children struggle with mental illness. The average age for the onset of depression used to be age 30, now it is age 14. Depression and anxiety, it is real.

The good news is, the hope is, that it is treatable. God doesn't want you to stay stuck in depression or allow fear to have a hold on your life. The challenge is that only half of those who are depressed ever seek help or treatment. That's a real problem. Let's go to the source of all truth and life; please turn with me in your Bibles to the Old Testament, Exodus 2. We are in the middle of a series called Marathon Faith. Finding motivation from the endurance runners of the Bible. There are 20 that are listed in Hebrews chapter 11. Each of them has something in common. Prior to them being mentioned in this chapter there are two words; By Faith. Each of them had faced great tragedy, trials and hardship in their life, but By Faith, they overcame. There was something inside each of them that will help us in our journey, our race, as well.

The background of Exodus chapter 2—we are going to be focusing on the mother of Moses. This is the setting where God had fulfilled his promise. The descendants of Israel have multiplied, has grown and they began to become a threat to the countries around them. The King of Egypt, known as the Pharaoh, begins to enslave the children of Israel to construction projects, and then he creates a law that says All male babies must die. They must be killed, murdered. That is the background to the passage of scripture. Exodus 2:1—And a man of the house of Levi went and took as wife a daughter of Levi. So, the woman conceived and bore a son. And when she saw that he was a beautiful child, she hid him three months. (Ex 2:2) But when she could no longer hide him, she took an ark of bulrushes for him, daubed it with asphalt and pitch, and put the child in it and laid it in the reeds by the river's bank. (Ex 2:3) And his sister stood afar off to know what would be done to him. (Ex 2:4) Then the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river. And her maidens walked along the riverside, and when she saw the ark among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it. (Ex 2:5) And when she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby wept. So, she had compassion on him, and said, "This is one of the Hebrew's children." (Ex 2:6) Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you?" (Ex 2:7) And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So, the maiden went and called the child's mother. (Ex 2:8) Then Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." So, the woman took the child and nursed him. (Ex 2:9) And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. So, she called his name Moses, saying, "Because I drew him out of the water." (Ex 2:10)

Now, can you imagine being a parent of this baby? As a parent, the greatest gift you ever receive, besides Jesus—if you're a follower of him, is your own child. There is a bond between parent and child and there is no other bond that can compare to that. God gives life, and now there is a threat to this life. As a parent, you can mess with yourself, but you better not mess with my children. There is a direct death threat on this child. What if it was you? Imagine that you aren't just hearing rumors, but these are

real stories of friends and family members whose babies are being yanked from the arms and being stabbed and beheaded. Wouldn't you be afraid for the life of your child and your family? Not only the threat, but taking the baby? Your only hope is to put it in a basket and put it down the river. Wouldn't you worry that your baby is going to drown? Or get eaten by crocodiles? Who knows what! The fear that could grip your life is real. She could go down that path of being worried and afraid, or she could trust the Lord. It was a pivotal moment in her journey. Hebrews 11:23, hundreds of years later the Holy Spirit inspires the write of Hebrews to encourage the children of Israel at the time to say don't give up. I know you want to quit, but don't give up. Then the Holy Spirit brings back to the memory of this writer, of all the hundreds of stories, beyond Esther and Ruth, there was the mother of Moses—Jochabed. A name you probably have never even heard of before. Scripture says, By Faith, when he was born, he was hidden for three months by his parents because they saw he was a beautiful child and they were not afraid of the king's command. (Heb 11:23) God blessed her because she was not afraid. She didn't just give up. She didn't quit. She had faith. She didn't just set her eye on what was around her or what was visible. She had to trust in an all-powerful God that He could do an impossible work. That's what happened.

You may be here today, at a pivotal moment; a cross roads. You're enduring suffering, a trial. Something has happened in your life and you're afraid. You're afraid of the unknown which can be a breeding ground for anxiety, right? Afraid of not passing your class. Afraid of not fulfilling what God is calling you to do. Afraid of not being cured of a problem with your health, mentally or physically. Maybe there is conflict and there is a broken relationship and it has just caused grief, anxiety and there is hurt and there is pain and it feels overwhelming. You're in the storm and there's a dark cloud and you can't see straight, and you just feel lost. What are you going to do? Are you going to give up, or are you going to put your faith in the Lord? This is the one thing that you must know. When fear is holding you back, have faith that God has your back. I want you to get this truth deep down inside of you. Look over at your neighbor and say When fear is holding you back, have faith that God has your back. Why do you need to know this? Because if you don't have faith in God, you're not just going to stay in that dark place where you can't see the light at the end of the tunnel, you're going to start taking steps backwards. It's going to get worse and worse and you are going to spiral to a place where the enemy wants to lead you to destruction. It's time to get off that wide road of destruction and on the narrow way where Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth and the life" and if you want to have true life, you can only find true life in Jesus. Not only life, but life more abundantly. That's the God we serve. That's why we have to have hope. That's why we have to have faith. We look at scriptures and there are so many examples. A lot of times when we are depressed or discouraged, we feel like we are all alone, right? We think to ourselves that no one can really relate. Again, I don't know what you're going through exactly. I'm not going to pretend to know. We all have different experiences and different pain points. I want you to understand that there are real people in the Bible. Even some great men and women like Elijah, the great prophet in the Old Testament in I Kings 19:4—he was under attack—But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" You may be thinking wait a minute—are you sure this is a scripture? We surely don't read scripture like this in church, right? But it's real! Elijah, a great man of God, a great prophet—he was so discouraged that he took a day's hike, went in the woods by himself, sat under a tree and said I'm giving up. He had anxiety,

and depression and perhaps even thoughts of suicide. And he's not alone. Even Jesus' own disciples struggled. Judas, one of the twelve. He betrayed Jesus and out of his shame and his guilt lead him to a path of depression. He gave up and committed suicide. Peter was another one that betrayed Jesus. Scripture says that after he betrayed Jesus he wept bitterly. He went back to his former occupation. Thank God he didn't give up. Thank God he didn't stay in that place of depression, but he received God's forgiveness, redemption, reconciliation. There was hope for Peter. There is hope for you. Don't give up. You must have faith. When fear is holding you back, have faith that God will have your back.

What is faith? Faith is described in Hebrews 11:1—faith is the substance of things hoped for the evidence of things not seen. This Marathon Faith. It's not just setting your eyes on what you can see or understand. It's trusting God to do the impossible. It's having faith in God, that He knows what He is doing, and I can trust Him. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight." A lot of times when we are in a bad place, we want to trust our feelings. We want to trust what we see with our eyes. We replay these things and we get stuck. We replay all of these negative voices. All of these negative thoughts and it just gets worse and worse. We have to have faith in God to do the impossible. Have faith that He will deliver us. Have faith that He can have redemption no matter what we face in life. No matter what the suffering, He can receive glory. Even when our own prayers aren't answered. Even when things don't go our way. Even when you pray, and God says No. Can you still trust God? Can you still have faith in Him? Think about the story of the Apostle Paul. Do you remember when he got saved? He had an encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus—what happened to him? He was blinded for three days. How's that when you turn your life over to Jesus and you're blinded for three days! But God was humbling him and bringing him to a place of brokenness where he could be dependent on the Lord. But that was just the first of many trials that Paul would face and endure. He was beaten. He was shipwrecked. But he was also mightily used by the Lord because he was dependent on God for power and grace. Great miracles happened as a result of his ministry. There was one miracle that didn't happen. That was in his own life. You can read about it in his letter to the church at Corinth. He said three different times I have this thorn in my flesh, historians believe it was his eyesight, poor eyesight and he couldn't see clearly. Three times he asked God to deliver him and heal him and each time God said no! But Paul didn't lose heart. He didn't quit. He kept putting his faith in God. He came to the conclusion, God you're enough. Your grace is sufficient for me. In my weakness you are made stronger. It's trusting in God, even when things don't go your way. That's faith.

You have to have Marathon Faith. It's saying I am going to keep putting one foot in front of the other. Step by step. Inch by inch. Day by day. I'm going to fight. I'm going to claw. I'm going to keep going. I'm not going to stay stuck. I'm not going to allow fear to hold me back. Not going to allow the enemy to hold me back. I'm going to fulfill what God has on my life. That's Marathon Faith. Don't allow the tragedy in your past to be your excuse. What happened in your past does not have to define your future. Faith in God is believing He will turn things around in His time. You have to trust in God. You have to have faith. Faith in God's promises.

Every promise in scripture is a yes and amen. There is not one promise of God in scripture that hasn't come true or will come true. Have faith in God's promises. While I was praying this past week, I felt like the Holy Spirit was prompting me to share these 5 promises with you.

- 1) **Have faith that God is in control.** He's got this. God is in control. Have you ever been outside, and the sun is so bright and you didn't have your sunglasses on, so you used your hand to shield your eyes? Have you ever just kept your hand in front of the sun for so long? After a while, you look up and all you see is your hand. From a certain perspective you could almost be tempted to believe that your hand is bigger than the sun. Now, if you heard someone say that their hand was bigger than the sun, you would say they're a fool, right? That's not truth. But from their perspective, it may seem like it's true. The reality is the sun is 849,000 miles in diameter. You could take 109 earths and still the sun is bigger. It's pretty big. Your hand is not bigger than the sun. A lot of times we get into a trial and fear grips us and all we can see is that problem. All we can do is worry and panic and get upset. That's because we are keeping our eyes on the hand and not what's beyond. The truth is, there is a God who is in control. He who created the sun, the moon and the stars; He who breathed life into you—He has got this. He wants to sustain you and hold you up and carry you. He's in control.
- 2) **You're not alone.** I know when you're going through a difficult time, it feels like you're alone. You feel like no one understands what you're going through, and you tend to isolate yourself. I was reading this past week in the gospel of Mark the story of Jesus' disciples. They were out to sea at about 3:00 in the morning and a storm rolled in. The winds were howling, and the waves were high. They thought they were going to die. Scripture says at 3:00 in the morning that Jesus came walking on water. Do you know what their response was when they saw Jesus? Most of us would assume, oh good, our deliverer. But they were afraid when they saw Jesus. They thought He was a ghost. It's Jesus! God in the flesh! What happened was their eyes were so centered on the problem that they lost focus on who Jesus was. When Jesus got in the boat, you know what He said to them? He said, "Don't be afraid! Have courage for I am with you." Some of you need to hear that today. Don't be afraid. Have courage. The Lord of the universe is with you. He cares about you. He loves you.
- 3) **He is faithful.** Even when you're not faithful, God is. He is good. You can trust Him.
- 4) **He cares about what you're going through.** Isn't that a great promise? That we don't just serve a God who is distant. Like, He didn't just set the earth spinning and then become oblivious to what we're going through. Scripture says that Jesus was tempted, tested, and tried in every way. You don't think He understands? His best friend and cousin was beheaded. His closest friends would betray Him and leave Him. Church folks would lie about him, gossip and throw out accusations. He would experience physical pain on the way to the cross. Yet He did not give up. He endured for your salvation and mine because He loves us that much. That is a God that can understand. That is a God who can say Me too! He cares for you. He loves you.
- 5) **God will restore your joy.** He is seeing your tears. He is seeing the late nights. He is seeing those discouraging thoughts. That mourning and that grieving in the evening; God's going to return that smile to your face. He is going to return that laughter and that joy so that nothing in this earth can take it away. Because your joy is based on Jesus Christ and your relationship and your faith. Not on your circumstances around you. That's what faith is. Believe the promises. Have faith and trust in God and what He says is true. Have faith in God's presence. Some of you are in a bad place and you're listening and watching stuff that's not helping. You need to turn off

the news, and the Netflix and Social Media and you need to start opening up the Word of God and allow it to be such a source of life. This is what is going to feed the spiritual man and woman inside of you to make you stronger. To make you and overcomer. You need to start reading the Hall of Heroes in Hebrews 11 and turn off the Hallmark Channel. Somebody needed to say that. That was not spontaneous. That wasn't coming from the anointing. I couldn't wait all week to say that word. Don't put your thumb down at me babe. For those of you who are booing me, don't get mad at me if the Holy Spirit convicts your heart. Same can be true to ESPN, right? When we are in a place, we don't need to be feeding our minds on things that are only going to reinforce bad thoughts. Trust in the Lord. Trust in His presence. Spend time with Him. Abide in Him. Worship Him. Even when everything around you screams not to. You need to worship Him and lift up God's name and be grateful and recount all the blessings on your life. How He saved you. How He delivered you over things in the past, because if He did it once, He's the same yesterday, today and forever and He is going to do it again. When you see someone, who is going through what you went through, you are going to be able to say, hey, I've been there—listen to my story. I put my faith and trust in the Lord even when I didn't understand and guess what happened later? No, it wasn't when I expected it. But a little bit later the Lord redeemed it and He received the glory. I didn't lose heart. I didn't give up. I didn't quit.

You have to spend time with Him in your devotional life. In prayer and fasting and memorizing scripture. Have faith also in God's plans. There is a scripture that says, "All things work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose." (Rom 8:28) Do you know what all things means? Like the Greek word for all? It means the sum of all the highs and all the lows. If you are His follower, you have to trust His word. We aren't going to be exempt from problems and trials. There is going to be bad stuff. We are going to face crisis. But we are going to trust the Lord that ALL things will work together for the good for those who love Him. You need to hold onto Jeremiah 29:11 promise. "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans of good and not evil, to give you a hope and a future." A lot of times when we get in a bad place, we begin to resent God and get angry at God. God is a big enough God, He can take it. He is not the source of your depression. He is not the source of your worry. He is not a mean God. Yes, He will allow trials, and things to happen if it shapes our character and allows to be more broken and more humble and more dependent on Him. Our Lord is for you. Take heart. Be encouraged. No matter how dark it may seem or how lost you may feel. God is for you! Trust in His plans. Not all of His plans are going to look the same. They are not cookie cutter for every single one of us. We all face different things. We all have unique experiences and stories.

I want to share with you some very practical, real things that can help you. If you and I were just hanging out at Taco Cabana and I'm listening to your story. Sharing why your heart is so heavy. I would tell you:

- 1) **Get help** Don't try to keep it all to yourself or suppress it or try to figure things out on your own. Guys, we are the worst, right? We are the worst to ask for help because our pride gets in the way. Ask for help! If I knew you were in a bad place I would tell you to
- 2) **Get professional Christian Counseling** I would tell you to go see a doctor. You may say well I can't afford it. You can't afford NOT to. Trust me. Get help! This is why we are so passionate about small groups. It's not a matter of IF, but rather WHEN—we will face the

challenges of life and we need Christian brothers and sisters to have our back. That is how God sometimes has our back is not through the head, but through the body. They can lift us up and pray for us. Celebrate our successes but also help carry the burdens when we are weak. You have to have somebody. Not tell everybody. But you need a few close friends you can confide in. Trust someone. On Tuesday nights, we turn our church into a hospital and we offer classes called Freedom & Recovery that helps those dealing with grief recovery, PTSD, addictions, strongholds. If you've got a hurt or are discouraged today, I invite you to come on Tuesday. Men and women who have battle scars, who still smell like smoke, but they want to help you and love you.

- 3) **Some of you need to listen to your mom** Some of you think well, I don't want to tell anybody what I am dealing with, because they are just going to give me scripture. But some of you have lost your way and you don't have any more self-awareness. You need to be teachable and listen to someone who will be honest with you and love you no matter what—even if the wounds of a friend sting a little bit. Trust them. Tell them, hey, I am in a funk right now in a dark place and I feel lost and I am getting worse. Will you help me? Not just a friend who will listen to you vent, but a friend who can give you tools to help you take the next steps.
- 4) **Thinking and choosing good thoughts** because what leads to worry, discouragement, anxiety, depression is that we replay the bad thoughts over and over until they become seared in our minds. These patterns just get so bad and they spiral out of control. Bad thoughts will lead to bad actions. Bad actions will lead to bad habits. Bad habits will lead to bad company. Before you know it, things are getting worse and worse and you're trying to numb the pain with Captain Morgan and Jim Beam and medication and drugs and it compounds it and amplifies it. You need to choose good thoughts. Go back to the Word of God. Find the truth in the scriptures. This is a passage I want us to read together, but I want to challenge you to memorize it. If not for yourself then you will have it ready for someone else who needs it. Philippians 4: 6-8, Paul is writing from prison by the way—Be anxious for nothing, but in everything with prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—think on these things.

The next time you're in a dark place filled with worry and this close to a panic attack, hit the pause button and say I am not going to allow this worry and this fear to hold me back. God has provided a way out. I have meditated on His word and I have memorized it so the moment you are tempted you can say that the enemy did not give me a spirit of fear, but God has given me a spirit of love and sound mind and power and I overcome these negative thoughts. I can overcome what I think is the worst-case scenario because God will deliver me. You can take authority found in scripture. He wants to help you. Next part of the plan, I know it may not sound spiritual, but it may be the most important thing you can do—get outside. Just get outside. Take a walk. Breathe some fresh air. Allow the sun to hit your skin. When we

get into a funk, don't we want to just be by ourselves? When you begin to get the heart rate up, start exercising, the physical health can be a factor to helping you have a good mental health. Very practical.

Help someone else in need. Seems counterintuitive because when you're in a dark place, you tend to have that woe is me mentality. Something happens in the supernatural and I can't explain it but when you start ministering to someone who needs to be encouraged or someone who is in need. I believe that love finds a need and meets it. I'm going to give my time, my energy, my prayers not on myself but someone else. When you begin to help encourage someone else, God changes your perspective.

Stephanie and I several years ago started an inner-city ministry for a new church in Little Rock, Arkansas. Tough place at the time. We did this for three years, every single week. We had someone from our church home, she was a leader in a bad place. Depressed and lost her way. She came in for counseling. I told her before we ever have a conversation, I want to invite you to come with our team to this inner-city ministry. Just plan to come hang out and trust the Lord to use you in any way. So, we went, Thursday night. Her eyes got so big. She didn't just observe. She got involved. You could see something change in her attitude. On the way back I told her that I knew we hadn't had any counseling appointments, but what is God doing in your heart? She said I just THOUGHT my problems were so big. But when I got down here and saw the poverty and how many kids don't have a mom and to see how hungry they were for a hug and any kind of attention. When I began to pray for them, God began to change me. That's what happens. He tells us to love Him with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. To love our neighbors as ourselves. When we demonstrate our love for God through serving others, God uses that to strengthen our faith. He uses that to change our perspective.

I want to share with you an event that we have been doing for 10 years called Love in Action. Now, we minister throughout the year through small groups, but this is the one event that we do as a church body. We mobilize our bodies and get out of this building and into the streets. We have over 20 opportunities. Our staff has been praying and talking to these organizations in our city—they are in the trenches. I want to invite you in your worship guide to click the link to sign up to join us; our whole church needs to be involved, but especially and specifically if you are in a bad place—By Faith, will you sign up? Give 4-6 hours of your day. Just help out and serve and watch how God uses that to help you.

Have faith in God's promises. Have faith in God's presence. Have faith in God's plans. Finally, have faith in God's power. You must believe in the power of God. That His power is bigger than your fear. Bigger than your trial. Bigger than your problem. That you trust Him with it. That He can deliver you. That He can change things around.

Prayer

KDD

10/1/18