

The Unmentionable Word

Growing up in the house I was planted in, there were certain things that we just didn't talk about.

Long before there were malls, my mom took me department store shopping with her. And, of course, we always, always, always wound up in "THAT" part of the store. You know what I'm talking about. You didn't even say the name of that department. To say lingerie seemed to be dirty so we called it the unmentionables department. We never talked about it.

When I was 6, my grand pop suddenly died. We never talked about it. Some 40 years later I was told that he hung himself in the basement.

One day, a number of years after my brother moved out and got married, he suddenly appeared. He moved back into the house and stayed with us for a number of months. He ate breakfast, lunch, and dinner with us, but no one said a word. We never talked about it.

In the Harry Potter series, there's the evil "He who must not be named." No matter how young or old, how brave or scared, no one wanted to say his name. You would see everyone twist and turn not to repeat his name.

There's a word that we don't like to say. We'll look for just about any other word or phrase just so long as we don't say that word. We'll turn ourselves inside out, we'll do anything not to say that word. That one word. The "D" word – Death.

They're deceased, they've expired, they've passed, they've been released, they've gone into the afterlife, they've entered their rest, their eternal rest or eternal sleep, they've reached their final rest, they've left this life, they've gone home, they've gone to heaven, they're in paradise, they've passed away or passed over. And the list goes on and on.

There's a reason that we're uncomfortable with the word death. We were never made to experience it. It's completely strange and foreign to how God made us and who we are.

When God made the world, there was no such thing as death. God predicted that death would crash into the world if Adam or Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17). And when they ate,

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death came like a freight train. And with death came a whole bunch of other problems including sickness, pain, brokenness.

One important thing to remember is that they chose to eat. They weren't scammed. They didn't accidentally click on a button that infected them with a virus. They both decided and turned away from God.

And we do the same. We're not duped. We're not the spiritual Three Stooges when it comes to following God. We chose. We decide. We're purposeful about it.

That's why we can't fix ourselves. Jesus had to come to destroy death once and for all. To remake and restore us to the place where we were before death entered the world.

But until Jesus puts all things right again, destroying death once and for all, we're to live by faith. To live each and every day like he's already done everything he's promised to do.

I'm going to tell you something that's going to sound strange. You've maybe never heard this, read it, or even thought about faith this way.

There are two kinds of faith. There's what I'm going to call the normal faith and the other kind of faith. There's the faith we all want and then there's the other faith that we'd rather not think about.

First of all, there's the normal faith, what some people call successful faith. The faith that heals today. Faith that restores today. Faith that releases prisoners and breaks chains today. The kind of faith that moves mountains today. Faith that raises the dead today.

The first part of Hebrews 11 is just chocked full of the first kind of faith. It's a pep rally for having faith that trusts God to solve our problems. This is a great kind of faith. It's the faith that we want. The faith we want to hear about. The faith we want to talk about.

This great kind of successful faith concludes starting in Hebrews 11:32

And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the

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prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again.

Hebrews 11:32-35a

Now that's what I'm talkin' about! Don't you just want to shout Amen. It's the kind of faith that I'd tell everyone about.

It's the kind of faith that makes us lift our hands and glorify God. We praise our loving Heavenly Father for looking down on us and acting for us.

And the ultimate example of this kind of faith is women receiving back their dead. It doesn't get any bigger or better than that.

- Elijah raises the Widow of Zarephath's son: 1 Kings 17
- Elisha Raises the Shunammite's Son: 2 Kings 4

This is exactly the same kind of faith Mary was talking about when she thanked God in her prayer,

For he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant

Luke 1:48 NCB

The book of Acts is just overflowing with this kind of faith too. Remember Acts 12 when Peter was released from jail by an angel in response to the prayers of God's people.

But there's a danger. If all we think about is this successful faith, this popular faith, this victorious faith, then we've missed something.

We put God in a box, he must bow down from being God and do what we demand.

When you think about many of the popular Christian speakers, writers, and churches, they only talk about this first kind of faith. A faith where we're

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only victorious in Jesus. That we can live a powerful, successful Christian life. A life only full of joy, happiness, success, and peace. A life empty of pain, disappointments, and negatives.

Now while there is truth in this first kind of faith, it misses something that God desperately wants us to know and experience. There's another side to the "victory-only" kind of faith. There's a second kind of faith. Another kind of faith.

It's what God calls the "other" faith. The second half of Hebrews 11:35 describes this other kind of faith.

There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection.

Hebrews 11:35

These other people prayed in faith, but their prayers weren't answered in the way we think about. Their faith wasn't answered in this life.

But more than just not having their prayers of faith answered, they even went through being tortured.

And why? Not to get the answer now. Not to get the miracle now. Not to get a resurrection now.

But to get an even better resurrection later.

There were others who weren't healed, rescued, revived, made whole. They lived a faith that didn't need a resurrection now. They held on in this other faith so that they might gain an even better resurrection.

The readers of Hebrews were very familiar with the historical story in 2 Maccabees 7 of the arrest of a mother and her seven sons. They were beaten in an effort to force them to bow down to the king and eat pork (Lev 11:7-8). One by one, each son is cruelly tortured in front of the family. Their tongue was cut out, they're scalped, their hands and feet are cut off. The remaining helpless mass was then thrown on a huge red-hot pan where they were fried until they died.

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All during this incredibly cruelty, their mother encourages them to remain faithful. She tells them that God gave them their bodies and that God will faithfully give their bodies back. They echo back their faith, looking for a better miracle, a better resurrection. After the seventh son was murdered, the mother is killed.

In the New Testament, Lazarus, the Widow of Nain's son, Jairus daughter, and Tabitha were raised from the dead, but these were resuscitations because they all eventually died. We get all pumped about God's miraculous power. And well we should.

But the people described as the "others" didn't see or receive a miracle right here and now. No, they were waiting for something better.

Think about this "other" faith for a moment. Jesus prays this way in the Garden of Gethsemane.

My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.

Matthew 26:39

Will we hear what he said? He prayed with the "other" kind of faith. Not the faith of immediacy and victory, but with the other faith of humility and finality.

Jesus' "other" faith tells his Father exactly what he wants but leaves his desires at the feet of God. Jesus is willing to obey whatever God the Father wants, even the "cup" of betrayal, torture and death.

But beyond the physical pain, "the cup" is filled with his separation from God his Father. For the first time from eternity past, the Father turns away from God the son, causing Jesus to cry out in a loud voice.

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Matthew 27:46

And how does God the Father answer? Silence.

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But in God's silence, Jesus "other" faith goes forward. He dies the death we couldn't die. In our place. His one-time sacrifice for all sin; past, present, and future opens up the road to redemption, the payment for all our sin, and his absolute promise of the better resurrection.

What's the response to this "other" faith? What's the end game for "other" faith? I'll tell you what it is.

First, it's our loving obedience, trusting God that in either kind of faith, He's there with us. Here's an example for us to follow.

Born in Baltimore, Maryland, she was the youngest of four daughters.

With the example of her parents, she lived a very active life, riding horses, hiking, tennis, and swimming.

She also played field hockey, a game not for the faint of heart or body.

At the height of her life, at 17 years old, a diving accident in 1967 left Joni Eareckson a quadriplegic in a wheelchair.

Some well-meaning friends told her that if she had enough faith that God would heal and restore her. After two years of struggling through depression and rehabilitation, she found out that they were half-right.

She was restored but not healed. She remained a quadriplegic but emerged with new skills and a fresh determination to help others with disabilities.

During her rehabilitation, Joni spent long months learning how to paint with a brush and type with a stick. And it all happened between her teeth.

Now married, Joni Eareckson-Tada has sold untold numbers of paintings and drawings, written over 50 books, recorded 4 albums, she host a daily radio program "Joni and Friends" that's heard on over 1,000 stations. She founded a ministry to the disability community hosts a daily and has been honored with just about every award possible.

After being a quadriplegic for over 55 years, she still can't get herself out of bed or dress herself. She can't make coffee or even drink it herself. She

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looks at herself as someone who doesn't have the strength for each day. She asks God, who am I O Lord, that you have brought her so far.

While there's no real way of knowing, I have to ask the question. How much would Joni have accomplished without this "other" kind of faith?

And it all started with the faith of a 17-year-old.

As I look around, I see a few people that look to be a little bit more mature than 17. Myself included.

Do you mind if ask you a personal question? Do you have the faith of a 17 year-old?

The old hymn says it all so very well.

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus Christ, my righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.

First was trusting God with both kinds of faith.

Second, when the freight train of life is headed right at us, we need to keep...

fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:2

Keeping our eyes fixed on our cell phones isn't going to calm us down. Searching for answers and cures on the internet isn't going to increase our faith, letting God be God.

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The question is, "Am I going to trust him? Am I going to follow him all the days of my life or am I going to follow myself?"

We need to ask ourselves the question whether it's the "other" faith time in our life. Our time to step into that "other" kind of faith. A faith that doesn't tell God what to do and how to do it. The "other" faith like Jesus when he prayed, but not my will but yours be done. The other faith that remains loyal to God even when things are falling apart all around us. The "other" faith that looks forward to the better resurrection.

I used to be on the lookout for the magical formula that would guarantee me getting what I wanted from God. Just saying the words "not my will but yours be done" doesn't twist God's arm.

We have to be willing to hold our prayer, our will, out to God and to leave it with him. We actually have to want God's will to be done. We've got to be willing for God to do whatever he wants. Whatever will make his name known. Whatever will give him the greatest glory.

First was trusting God with both kinds of faith.
Second was fixing our eyes on Jesus.
Third, we need to let Jesus take us in his arms.

In Mark 10, people want Jesus to touch some little children. His disciples made a big deal about it and pushed them away. After correcting the disciples, Jesus does a remarkable thing.

The people only wanted Jesus to touch the children, but he does more. He doesn't just touch them; he takes them into his arms. He bends his arms around the children, holding them tight and close. And then the cherry on top is that he puts his hands on top of them and blesses them.

Even in the middle of the dark storms of life, Jesus is ready, willing, and able to hold us. To anchor us with his strong arms. To comfort us.

Ned and Betty were the picture of success. They lived in a really large house on a private golf course. Ned was head of worldwide safety at a 15 billion dollar company. His idea of a business trip would literally take him around the world, walking on six continents. They lived very active lives, both physically and spiritually.

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But Ned contracted cancer. He had all the resources in the world. He went to the very best doctors, was treated with the most advanced treatments available, but nothing stopped it. Or even slowed it down.

One Sunday I saw them standing together as we began to sing a hymn. While the words might sound old and antiquated, their meaning has a power that's very rare today. The hymn began.

Whate'er my God ordains is right
His holy will abideth
I will be still whate'er He does
And follow where He guideth
He is my God, though dark my road
He holds me that I shall not fall
And so to Him I leave it all

I thought, what's going on here? What's wrong with them? Their lives had been blown up, thrown upside down by this plague. Ned's been transformed from this strong, healthy guy into a weak, frail, shadow of a man.

But they continued to sing.

Whate'er my God ordains is right
He never will deceive me
He leads me by the proper path
I know He will not leave me
I take, content, what He has sent
His hand can turn my griefs away
And patiently I wait His day

Ned was so weak that he needed both hands to hold himself up. But that wasn't enough, Betty had to help steady him. As I looked at Ned, he had radiation burns on his neck and face from the treatments that failed.

By this time, I had to sit down. I could hardly breath. I couldn't take it. My eyes were wet and I was having trouble reading the words on the page. I struggled to sing the last verse with Ned and Betty.

Whate'er my God ordains is right

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Here shall my stand be taken
Though sorrow, need, or death be mine
Yet I am not forsaken
My Father's care is round me there
He holds me that I shall not fall
And so to Him I leave it all

Now tears were freely rolling off my cheek. I shook my head in total disbelief and wondered, how could they do it? How could they sing a hymn of praise to God with all hell falling down on them?

I'll tell you how. They had that "other" faith. They didn't need success or victory in this life. They were looking forward to a better resurrection.

They didn't fear the word death. But more importantly, they didn't fear death itself. They were living examples of the 23rd Psalm. They were "walking through the valley of the shadow of death" and they weren't afraid any longer.

When was the last time you had that "other" kind of faith? Or maybe the question should be have you ever had that "other" kind of faith?

A faith that let's God be God. A faith that trusts God to do his loving best for you and your loved ones.

Even in the middle of the storm, on the edge of a financial free-for-all, or even death itself, the promise of God is for a better resurrection.

God is offering mercy. He's paid the price in Jesus. He's standing at the door knocking. But this is one of those things that God won't do. He he'll never kick the door down. He'll never force you to receive him. His mercy. His forgiveness.

He offers and we have to receive. He knocks but we have to open the door. And the amazing miracle is that for everyone who receives him, who grabs hold of him and believes in his name, he gives the guaranteed right to become a child of God.

Jesus says I've got you if you come to me. He doesn't say, "I've got this" but he says, "I've got you."

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With Jesus, there is no such thing as the unmentionable word. Why? Hebrews 1:15 gives us the answer, the words we need to hear, the reassurance that we can trust him.

Jesus came to free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

Are you being held hostage by your fear of death? Are you enslaved by your fear of death.

If you want to be free, then receive Jesus and his eternal freedom. Make the big exchange – we give up all our sin, and all our good works. We give everything we are to him and he gives us himself.

With God, there is no unmentionable word. Jesus himself experienced death for us. For our sin. And one day, he's going to destroy death once and for all.

Today is the day to come to him with "other" faith.

- A faith that lives a better life today.
- A faith that looks forward to a better resurrection.
- A faith that frees us.
- A faith that is no longer afraid of death.
- A faith that lasts forever.

Would you please pray with me.