

WHAT IF... EVEN THOUGH

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I'm not a great auditory learner. Give me a pencil and some paper, notes to take, equations to solve or some journal-type writing to clarify my thoughts... THEN information may well stick in my mind and memory.

I know the truth . . .that we are all uniquely and wonderfully made. Even so, I do feel badly in the middle of a great sermon and I find myself wandering off to the grocery list, a friend in need or the next sleepover with the grandkids. Saturday night was no exception (we love Saturday night services, but are tempted to create a Tshirt for our Sunday morning hikes that reads "I went to church last night!").

The pastor read through Psalm 23 reminding us of God's great affection as our Shepherd. I know that Psalm, can quote it and have studied it multiple times over the years. Not a good set up for me, the "drifter". Familiarity leads me to "tune out" even more quickly than normal.

Amazingly, in the midst, I suddenly heard these words: "What if you turned all your "What Ifs" into "Even Thoughts"?" Just as the Psalmist does in not placing focus on "What if you walk through the valley of the shadow of death", but rather "Even though you. . .". My whole body felt alert and I knew that Holy Spirit nudge was saying, "This one is for you!".

I've spent much of my life battling fear. Gratefully, it's hold has lessened over the years and the wrestling is now more of acknowledgement when it crops up and then letting it go. Still, it's ready to grab hold at the least expected moments. Fear is "an unpleasant emotion caused by the belief that someone or something is dangerous, likely to cause pain, or a threat" or "anxious concern". My own list tends to center around health, family and future.

For each one, instead of saying to myself, "I'm afraid of _____", I'm really thinking, "What if _____?".

What if my aching back never feels better? What if something happens to Chuck? What if our kids get in an accident? What if my memory really starts fading (more than it already is!)?

Just the words, "What If" make my heart stir, knowing any way I finish that sentence will be scary! No matter the focus of the "What If", it leads me to feeling alone in my fear, pensive, unsure and anticipating bad things. "What If" leaves

me dangling...full well knowing that something may happen or not, so I'm stuck feeling very insecure and unsettled.

In His grace, God offers a better way. Psalm 23:4 gives us a roadmap. "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." NIV

Not "what if" I take such a difficult journey, as we all will at some point... or many times in our life. But rather "even though" I take such a journey. Just attaching those two words to one of my fears... "Even though my back may never feel better...", somehow physically feels like a weight rolling off my shoulders, a fresh breath of air and a letting go.

The Psalmist gives clear reason for being able to speak "even though" in confidence. "You are with me" "Your rod and your staff, they comfort me". There is the Shepherd. Present. Protecting. Tending, Caring. Encouraging. Directing. Leading.

I'm choosing to daily embrace a better way of thinking, a new way to battle fear. When a fear pops up, no matter how silly or overwhelming, my heart now says "Even though....". I can feel myself falling back into the Shepherd's embrace and letting Him carry the weight, knowing He knows and that His presence is enough. May you purpose to grab hold of every What If when it hits and acknowledge the good Shepherd's presence with a simple whisper back to Him, "Even though...".

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