

A Living Faith: Pivot Points

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Oct 6, 2019

Joshua 1:6-11

Eddie and Linda were a happy couple from Kentucky whose second baby Noah started throwing up at three months old. Their first child had an allergy to lactose, so they eliminated lactose for Noah, but nothing changed.

After many trips to the doctor's office, a week-long trip to the children's hospital, and many tests, all they had was a diagnosis of "failure to thrive," which essentially is a diagnosis given when doctors can't diagnose a problem.

For four years they continued to put little Noah through test after test, and changed his diet many times but nothing was working. This was exhausting for Eddie and Linda and their concern for Noah was increasing since at four-years-old he was only 20 pounds. They gave up on doctors and the hospital because they didn't seem able to help.

At five-years-old, Noah was just well enough to be enrolled in a local Methodist preschool. While at the school one day, Linda heard another mother talk about her

child's health problems and what she was describing sounded just like Noah's experience. But this other child had a real diagnosis — a rare disorder called eosinophilic esophagitis (EE).

Very soon after this conversation, the woman and her family (who only lived in town for two months) moved away, because the father got a new job.

Eddie and Linda are convinced that they never would have discovered what was going on with Noah had it not been for this woman sharing at the preschool. This was God breaking into their world.

They went back to the children's hospital with the new information and soon they diagnosed Noah with EE. However, his symptoms continued to get worse and they needed to install a feeding tube to bypass his esophagus so that Noah could get the nutrition he needed.

They knew it was necessary to keep him alive, but it was so hard to see their normally energetic little people-person Noah, lying on a bed with a feeding tube in his stomach.

Another challenge was that the special nutritional formula he needed cost \$1,500/month and

insurance wouldn't pay a dime. To make matters worse, Linda had lost her job and money was tight.

Perhaps you can relate to financial hardships. This was a pivot point in their life.

Linda heard about a law passed in Illinois mandating insurance companies pay for formula needed for EE patients. So, they took the case before legislators in Kentucky and prayed. Representatives in the Senate and House crossed party lines to support the bill and finally in March of 2016, Governor Matt Bevin signed what became known as "Noah's Bill" into law. This meant huge financial relief not only for Eddie and Linda's family but an estimated 200 other families in Kentucky whose children also had an EE diagnosis.

There's an ancient story of a time when the Hebrew people, who had lived for about 500 years apart from their homeland. They faced a pivot point in their history.

This particular group of Hebrews had lived as nomads in tents in the wilderness for nearly 40 years after coming out of slavery in Egypt, but now they were looking across the Jordan River at their ancestor's homeland.

Moses had just died and this had them worried, because Moses had always been their connection to God. Now they had Joshua.

They weren't sure that God would continue to be faithful to them without Moses. They weren't sure that their new leader Joshua had what it took to lead them. After all, they had known him since he was a little boy.

They also looked over the Jordan River and saw other people living there — people who had been living on the land and calling it home for generations. They questioned whether those people would defend that land and wipe them out.

For many reasons the people were skeptical about whether the next chapter in the life of their families would be a reason to celebrate or if their history might end right there such that none of their stories would ever be told again.

They were at one of those pivot points. They were afraid, they were nervous, and they doubted, not unlike Eddie and Linda regarding their son Noah. And can you blame them? I imagine you and I probably would feel the same way if we were in their shoes.

At that point, God spoke to the people through Joshua.

READ JOSHUA 1:6-11

This is one of those pivot points that we read about in the great stories of literature. Everything hinges on what the people choose next.

Will Frodo overcome his fears and join the fellowship to take the One Ring to be destroyed in Mordor?

Will Ebenezer Scrooge wake up to his selfishness after being shown his possible future?

Will Rocky get back in the ring after being beaten badly?

Will Dorothy continue pressing on to find the great wizard after being scared stiff by some flying monkeys?

Will Rey turn her back on the mission after seeing a terrifying glimpse of the past and future when she touches Luke's lightsaber?

These are not only pivot points in the story line from movies. They are pivot points in our lives where we have reason to pause and choose which way we might go. We know that our choice very likely will be very consequential.

For Joshua and the Hebrew people, it was a choice to face the fear of the unknown. Would they trust God to go with them?

This is a pivot point in the big picture of Israel's history. Will they receive the land promised to Abraham many generations before, or will they shrink in fear?

Our lives can feel like this too, especially when we face significant medical challenges, food allergies, diagnosis that don't have a promising prognosis. None of us can read ahead to know how the story unfolds in the next chapter, or if there will be another chapter.

When facing these points, all of us will have waves of emotion run through us — this is normal. We will be fearful, we will doubt, we will question if we will have enough courage.

All of this and more is the normal human experience. But after this wave rolls through us, we will have an opportunity to choose how we face the future.

With what resolve will we move forward? How will we face these moments?

Remaining in fear, contracting, shrinking back, and becoming small is one option that many take.

Trusting in God is another.

God's message to the Hebrew people through Joshua was encouragement to choose trust. In the passage I read, three times God encouraged the people to be "strong and courageous."

The first time is not so much about victory in battle, but an trusting God for what has already been promised, which in the big picture was to provide for their needs with a home they could call their own.

We also need courage and strength to trust that God will follow through and deliver. The reality is that this is not always easy, because everything we see around us is telling us that the future is bleak, uncertain and at best foggy.

As we know, the promise when we face medical-related challenges is not that the cancer will go away, that the one we love will heal perfectly from the injury, or that the journey will be easy.

The promise is that we will not be alone through the challenges, and that our future in God's family is secure. We are loved, and our lives matter to God — in every case! That is the promise!

When facing medical challenges or any other adversity in life, we have

a God who we can trust will go through it with us. This takes strength and courage.

The second time "be strong and courageous" is used implies something different altogether.

It says to "be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you..."

In this case, the strength and courage are related to our follow through with action in alignment with the way God made the world.

God had provided a guide for the people. It was the law they received through Moses while they lived in the wilderness.

But it was never meant to be about the law itself. It was about a way of life that was filled with grace, respect, generosity, forgiveness, and most importantly love.

It takes courage and strength to live this way in light of the medical challenges we face — and God encourages us that this is the best possible way through the challenge.

And "don't be afraid," Joshua told them. Fear will not serve us. It will have us sidetracked. Fear will never lead us to a better future, but

will only have us shrink and become small.

Instead, like the Hebrews in Joshua's day and Eddie and Linda did when facing the health issues with Noah, we are called to be a people who trust in God.

We trust, as Joshua said "because the Lord God is with you, wherever you go!"

We need to be reminded of this, especially in our moment of need.