

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

Trusting God in the Unknown

Ashley Stevens

Hi, I'm Ashley Stevens from Mountains Unmoved, and I look forward to talking to you today about how we can trust God in the unknown. Many parts of my story, and I'm guessing yours, the things that I had planned for, and dreamed for, and the way I thought my life would look didn't quite play out like I thought it would. And in these times of uncertainty, when God's taking you where it doesn't really make sense, and I think especially in times of suffering or darkness, it's hard not to question where He's taking us, and it's hard to trust that He can use it all for good. So, before I begin, let's open with a prayer.

In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. God, I thank You for our stories, and I thank You for how You've carried us on hard days, how You've loved us on lonely ones, how You've provided for us for when we went without. I just pray tonight for anyone that's walking through a time of uncertainty or unknown, anyone going through suffering or a hard chapter right now, really wondering how You're going to use it for good, really struggling to wait as You do. I just pray that You would be with them today, and give me the words to encourage anyone in that spot. It's in Your name we pray. Amen. Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

So, in about a week I'm going to road trip with my three little girls. Pray for me. But it's a drive I'm used to. In college, when I did the drive from Nebraska (where I live) to Tennessee (where I'm from), it was about sixteen hours, give or take the stops. But in college I would kind of look forward to it as a time to listen to music I had burned on a CD, or catch up on phone calls with friends I hadn't talked to in a while. But I think I also enjoyed just a break from the noise, a break from the classes and the paperwork, a break from the television and the social media. Just to be able to drive in silence and to look at scenery was a nice retreat in a way.

But now I'm at a much different chapter, and now driving with three kids, I think, is about as far from a silent retreat as you can get. And I've found that it doesn't matter how much you prep, how much you get the perfect desirable and clean snacks for the snack bag, how much you charge their electronic devices, or go to a Dollar Tree for a secret surprise goody bag when they get bored. It doesn't matter how much you prep, it's still hard, and they still start to cry "I'm hungry!" "I'm tired!" "I need to use the bathroom!" "I'm bored!" "I just had an accident!" "Jesus, give me strength" is what I pray a lot on those drives.

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

But I think the most reoccurring critique is “Are we there yet? How much longer do we have to drive? This is taking forever,” right. And I think just the experience of driving with children any long distance reminds me of one of my favorite stories in scripture, and it’s a story of the Israelites on another long journey, like my kids, when they walked across Egypt. And in it, God had, in different ways - He hadn’t charged their devices - but He had prepped them, I think, in His way, so that when they walked into the unknown, not knowing what the so-called “Promised Land” that they were walking toward would be like, that they would trust that He was on their side.

When they were back in Egypt, their neighbors, the Egyptians, were inflicted by plague after plague after plague. Their skin was covered in boils, their land was covered with frogs and with flies, their homes were covered with darkness, their firstborn sons were killed. But the Israelites were spared from all of that. And then after that, God had freed them from 400 years of slavery. And as they walked across the barren desert to the Promised Land, God had miraculously provided for them. When they were hungry, bread fell from heaven in manna. When they were thirsty, water spouted from a rock.

And as if that wasn’t enough, God led them in a pillar of cloud. Best GPS ever, right? He showed them which direction they should go by visibly being present and leading them. And I remember when I first read that being like “God, why can’t You be here like that? Why can’t You, when I’m hungry, shower baked Lays from heaven? Or when I’m thirsty just spout the Diet Coke from the fountain out of the floor. But I think, even more seriously, why, like, when I have a big decision don’t You just come down with a pillar of cloud and show me which direction to go?” Right? And I think, I don’t know, it feels like if I had seen that type of miraculous provision, there’s no way I could have doubted, right, when things got hard. But the Israelites did.

One of my favorite verses is Exodus 14:14, and in it, right in that verse, the Israelites saw the Egyptians approaching. And they got scared. They got scared that they would seek revenge. They got scared that they would take them back to slavery or kill them, and they got anxious that God would continue to guide them, help them outrun the Egyptians, and they doubted that this God that had just showered them with provision, and miracles, and protection would continue to. And I think this is something we can all relate to though, right? We all have been cared for, to get to where we are today. Maybe for you that’s being raised in a Godly family, maybe it’s God answering a miraculous prayer at some point, maybe it’s putting a key spiritual friend or mentor in your life at the perfect time. But God has all carried us through dark times, hard times, loved us to get us where we are today.

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

But still we doubt. Still we question. And we're not alone in that. Even the saints questioned God in their suffering. There's a story from St. Teresa of Ávila: When she was on a carriage ride, she got thrown into a big mud puddle. And from that day, covered in bruises and mud, she questioned God. She was like "Why God? Why did You call me to go on this journey? Why did You throw me into the mud?" And God looked at her that day in prayer and He said "This is how I treat all of My friends." And she - I think I would like her - said "It's no wonder You have so few."

Everyone, no matter what your mud puddle is, questions God from it. For me, my mud puddle was three weeks after I got engaged. While serving as a FOCUS missionary, I was T-boned by a Mack Truck. I was driving with myself and four other women missionaries that morning, and my fiancé and my parents got a call saying to make it to the hospital as soon as they can. And when they arrived that day I was covered with tubes, one to relieve the brain pressure, one for a breathing tube, one feeding tube, and just all kind of blood and bruises. I was unrecognizable.

And I fought to recover for six months. I was in therapy for six months, relearning, being approved, I guess, to eat non-pureed food, to use the restroom by myself. I was 22 years old. And on those days and in that mud puddle, you better believe I questioned God. I wanted to punch a wall, because so much of what I had planned for - to get married, to get my MBA, to work my way up the corporate ladder - was thrown... fell under the bus. It was so unknown if it would ever come to be.

And I think what helped me most is one of my friends brought that verse. She brought that verse in Exodus and she hung it above my hospital wall. And when I would look at it on days when I had to relearn how to tie my shoe with a stroked out hand at the age of 22, I would look at that verse and say "Remember the Israelites." I would remember how I questioned "How could they ever doubt that He would continue to provide for them after He had carried them so miraculously to get there?"

And I thought about my recovery to that point, and I thought about God had helped me miraculously make it through those first three critical days when my fever was fluctuating, and my brain pressure was spiking, and I was just on all kind of medications trying to help me survive. I thought about how God had helped me make it through that, how God had brought me to a point when I could even have the chance to relearn how to walk, and how to talk, and how to eat, and how to drive, and how to get married. Because so many patients all around me had lost those bare basic skills.

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

And I don't know what your mud puddle is today. I don't know if it's that you're dealing with an illness, or a loss in the family, or a struggling marriage. I don't know what your mud puddle is. But I would challenge you, just like I remembered in the hospital room, to remember how He has carried you. Remember how He has loved you, and provided for you, and cared for you in the hard times. Because one of the best ways to trust where He's taking us is remembering how He's provided for us in the past.

In Scripture, one of God's most common names is "I am." And I want to encourage you right now with how I encouraged myself in some of my darkest spots: God is present, even when you can't see Him. God is healing, even when wounds still feel raw. God is working your story, the good and the bad, into good. He is working all things into good, not in your timing but in His. Don't wait to celebrate the life you've been given, even if it looks different than the life you thought you had. The Lord Himself will fight for you. He has, He is, and He will. May we always remember how.

Let's close in prayer. *In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. God, thank You. Thank You for Your provision and Your love. Thank You for Your care in miraculous moments. Thank You just for being with us in all things, through all things. I just pray for anyone listening right now, anyone struggling to see You in the hard. I just pray that they would remember all that You have done, to trust where You're taking them. We ask all these things in Your name. Amen. In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*