

Lean on the Cross - Avoiding the Trouble that Comes from Self-Reliance

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Hi, everybody, my name's Mary Lenaburg. In this talk, we're going to dive into the idea of being more reliant on God and less reliant on ourselves. The title of the talk is, "Lean on the Cross; avoiding the trouble that comes from self-reliance." So, before we get started, let's go ahead and ask the Holy Spirit into our time together, shall we?

Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. Oh God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit, we may be truly wise and ever enjoy his consolations through Christ, our Lord, Amen. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Relying on God

We're going to talk about this idea of what happens when we rely on ourselves and not on God. Trouble, "Trouble comes to River City," as they say in the musical. And this trouble comes because we begin to doubt the presence of God. We begin to lose our faith and our trust in God when all we see is ourselves and we rely completely on our own strength and understanding. The Book of Ecclesiastes has just verse after verse after verse all about how we are to lean on God, how we are to lean into his understanding. as St. John the Baptist says, "Less of me, more of God," right? So many times when we're struggling with life's challenges and we think our boat is sinking, remember the apostles in the storm, right? They think the boat is sinking, Jesus is sleeping, and they're losing faith. And what they are doing is for relying on what they see not on what they know in their hearts, right? We have to remember that no matter what we're going through, good, bad, horrible, wonderful, that God remains in that situation. He remains with us always.

We need a daily reminder that we are not to rely on ourselves, right? But to rely on God. I heard this quote once and I don't know who it's attributed to. I tried to find it, but it's anonymous so far as I know. It says, "Don't tell God how big your problems are, tell your problem how big God is." Now, that needs to be on a t-shirt, don't you think? Don't tell God how big your problems are, tell your problems how big your God is. People are going to let you down. The circumstances are going to disappoint you. It's part of life, right? But God always gives you what you need when you need it and not one second before. He loves a cliff hanger, He loves a great story to where you're hanging by the edge of your nails and you're like, "Lord, it is all going to explode. I'm going to fall off the cliff. It is a disaster of monumental proportions. I need you, please; please come, please come, please come." And there He is, shows up, or sends you help

right at the last minute. And when that happens to me and it happens quite often, I'm always like, really, you had to wait till that moment? It couldn't come sooner.

Well, first of all, why couldn't he come sooner? I wasn't ready. I wasn't ready to truly receive his help, number one. Number two, he was preparing a way from me. He was moving mountains that I didn't even know existed. He was preparing other people to come to my aid and my assistance. So, God is constantly working. Even if we cannot see what he's doing, he is a God of action. He is in constant movement, right? And He's always doing things that are good for us and are for his glory. No matter the situation, he's going to pull something positive out of it. There will be redemption, there will be restoration. Maybe it won't take place here. Maybe it'll take place in heaven, but it will happen.

Practical Ways to Get Closer to God

So, what are some practical ways that you can gain this dependence on God? Okay? For those of you that are unaware of my story, I've been married for more than 30 years. I have two children that I lost in miscarriage and two children that I love this side of heaven. My son is newly married and off living his own life and my daughter, Courtney, died seven years ago. She had a seizure disorder and had multiple disabilities. And so, when Courtney was alive, for the 22 years I got to love her this side of heaven, there was crisis de jour of the day. I mean, you never knew what the day was going to throw at you because we couldn't predict her health crises. We might end up in the ICU on a Thursday. We might end up in the ER at 12:30 in the afternoon. We might, you just never knew what was going to happen. And that was on top of taking care of a home. My husband was active-duty military for the first 12 years of our married life and then in government contracting. We moved 12 times. I mean, that was just in the midst of homeschooling our son. So much happened in these 30 plus years of marriage and life together, and none of it was predictable. None of it. It was just this grand adventure that it's unfolded.

And so, when I, in my early journey with the Lord, was really relying on myself, it was disastrous because all I saw was what I could do and my own limitations. Remember when our lady and St. Elizabeth are together in that beautiful moment of the visitation where our lady says, "Nothing is impossible with God." Y'all, nothing is impossible with God. Miracles exist every single day. And you're probably listening to me thinking, "Yeah, well they might exist for Sally or for Mark or for Karen, but they don't exist for me." Oh, but they do my friend, they do when we rely on the goodness and grace and mercy of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

The upside-down economy of God, as the writer, Bob Goff says. The upside-down economy of God, what does that mean? That means he's going to take my weakness and the things that I am not good at, and he is going to use them for ministry. He's going to use them for evangelization. He's going to create something beautiful and good out of them. and he has. That's the most amazing thing, he has.

Conversation with God

So, what are these practical steps to gain dependence on God? The first one is prayer. It's conversation with our Lord, Jesus Christ. When we pray, we're talking to God. When we read

scripture, the divine inspired word of God, God is talking to us. So, if you ever want to know how God thinks of you and how he feels about you, open up your Bible and read his word. Read his promises to you, that he loves you, that he has a purpose for your life, that He sent His Son to die for you. And that once we meet our Lord Jesus, our life changes. It has to, we have a choice to say yes to God, to surrender our own expectations and to embrace this unknown adventure and trust God with every aspect of our life.

I wrote in my notes that number two was the small stuff matters. I pray to God about everything. I ask for a parking spot at the grocery store. I ask that it doesn't rain for the three minutes that it takes for me to get to my car to adoration because I didn't bring an umbrella. I ask all the time. I'm like, "Please let this dress zip up. Please don't let me burn dinner. Lord Jesus, help me be patient with a brand-new puppy that we have. Lord Jesus, help me be patient with my husband. Lord Jesus, help me to be joy-filled. Help me to go into this funeral home and greet this family who has lost a loved one with mercy and grace and compassion. Help me not stick my foot in my mouth." I am constantly talking to God about the big stuff but especially about the small stuff. Isn't that what you do with your friends. You ask them for prayers. You're like, "My husband lost his job, please pray. I'm really struggling with this sin, please pray. I'm really going to lose it with my kids, please pray." I mean, so many different variations of prayer, right? Intercessory, individual, communal. It says don't sweat the small stuff. No, give it to God and allow him to sweat it out.

Be Obedient with God

The third thing is to be obedient. What does that mean, to be obedient? Believe, trust. If God is asking you to endure a suffering or a difficulty, then there is a purpose and a reason that you may never understand. I felt this way for 22 years, "I don't get it, Lord. Why does Courtney have to suffer so? Why do we have to suffer so? Why does Jonathan have to suffer so? Why, why, why? And finally, I came to understand that when God allows suffering, that's where growth happens, that's where a deepening of our relationship with the Lord, that trust happens. That's where prayerful conversation happens. If everything's good all the time, do I really need God? Hmm. If you're anything like me, the answer to that is, "No, probably not, I'm good; I'm good, thanks so much." No, we need him. We need him for everything. For the very breath in our bodies. We need him.

So, if he's asking you to do something, be obedient to that and trust that he's got things well in hand and he is not surprised by any of the circumstances or the details. He's got you. He showed us that time and time again with our Courtney, He's got her, and she will go to Him in his time and not one breath before.

Less of You more of God

Less of me, more of Him, we talked about that a little bit. Less of me, Lord, more of you. How do you achieve that? You surrender. You surrender your expectations; you surrender your dreams. You say, Lord, this is what my dream is, this is what the challenge is, and I'm going to give it to you, and I'm ask going to ask you to bless it or to remove it. Right? It's kind of like we become toddlers and we say, "I want what I want when I want it." And that can't be. We can't

want what we want when we want it, right? That's relying on ourselves. That's not relying on our Lord, Jesus. We have to say, "Lord, I want to want what you want. Help me want what you want from me." That is a daily prayer for mine. Lord, I want to want what you want. St. Gianna Molla said that, "God, whatever you want." And here she is, she got to hold her little glory for four months before she went home to him because she chose her daughter's life over her own. Whatever you want, God. And that's the story He wrote. And look, look at what we've learned from her. Look at the beauty of her daughter's life, the beauty of her story, the strength and witness to love.

Fasting and Discipline

Fasting and discipline. I really struggle with this which is why I put it on my list. Fasting isn't necessarily of food, but it creates discipline in your life, right? So it could be of television, it could be of shopping, it could be of food of some kind, it could be going out to dinner. It could be fasting. It just means removing something pleasurable from your life for a time as an offering to the Lord for a prayer request. And so, we do it during Lent, of course, during our season of Lent. We can do it during Advent, which is a mini-Lent. There are seasons in the liturgical year that call for fasting. But what it does for us is it creates a discipline within us that we are able to withstand hardship and challenge and difficulty because we can fast, and we can give it up. And even if we only fast for two weeks and we said we would fast for six and we fall, we get up and we start again, right? That's what Jesus did on his way to the cross. He fell three times, he got up every time. He shows us what to do. Get up, don't quit. Get up and try again.

Confidence in God

And finally, confidence. This is what is needed if we are to rely on God and not ourselves. We need to have confidence in God that God is who he says he is Right? Lord, less of me, more of you. I know you are God I am not. I know you see every lane of traffic; I only see my own. I know there is a purpose and a plan to my life and to my son's life and my husband's life and my daughter's life and I know you have things well in hand. Please give me the confidence in you. Remove my doubt, remove my questioning because that's where Satan speaks, in your doubt and in your questioning. And give me a supernatural confidence to rely completely on you. I think it was St. Padre Pio, don't quote me on that, but I think, where he said, "Work... Pray as if everything relies on God and work as if everything relies on you because the two go together."

Prayer is an active thing. We pray with our lives. It's not just the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Rosary, the Memorare, that's a load of prayer, but we pray with our very lives. We pray with the action in our lives. That's where the fasting and the discipline come from. That's where we are obedient to the Lord and what he is asking us to do. For those of us that have a vocation, I'm a married woman. I am number one, a wife, and so when I start to get off the beaten path, I go back to what my vocation is. What is it God asked me to do? He asked me to know, love and serve the Lord and to know, love and serve my husband, and so that's what I go back to. And he speaks in that. He shares with me what he needs next, right?

So, to rely on ourselves, to rely solely on me is to say to God, I don't need you, and that's when the trouble comes. That's when the arrogance and the pride come. Instead, He is asking us to

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humble ourselves and say to Him, Lord, I need you. Every day I need you. With every breath I take, I need you Give me the confidence that Mary had in you. Give me the confidence that the apostles had in you. Give me the confidence that the Saints had in you so that there is less of me and more of you, Lord. I hope that's helpful to you, this idea that we need God for all things and that our lives are a prayer of obedience and service.