

CHIEF

MINISTRIES

June 2022

In one of my devotionals, there is a series on “Fearless Living”. It is interesting and very timely, so I felt it important to share some of the highlights with you. I know this year there has been a focus on our identity, in Him but also in us. This series speaks to the “us” part of our identity and how easy it is to lose who we really are.

Pretending to be someone you’re not is exhausting, isn’t it?

Too many people have spent so much of their lives pretending that they don’t remember who they really are anymore. They’ve spent all their energy and effort trying to fake their way through life, thinking it will give them the life they want. I’m sure you have heard the saying (and may have even lived by it yourself) “I’ll fake it till I make it”. Well, if that’s you, then you’re in a prison of pretending. And you’ve locked yourself in this prison for two main reasons.

First, you’re trying to please people. The Bible tells you how foolish this is: *“It is dangerous to be concerned with what others think of you, but if you trust the LORD, you are safe”* (Proverbs 29:25 GNT).

Second, you feel like you need to be perfect to be loved. Since no one is perfect, you’ll never feel truly loved if perfectionism is snaring you. You make up for this by living in a pretend world, where you never make mistakes. Even worse, as you’re hard on yourself, you’re also harsh on others. When that happens, everyone ends up in your prison.

Jesus once said of people who pretend to be something they’re not, *“You are the ones who make yourselves look right in other people’s sight, but God knows your hearts. For the things that are considered of great value by people are worth nothing in God’s sight”* (Luke 16:15 GNT). This type of thinking and actions results in a life of fantasy, yours! By switching your focus to being concerned about what God thinks and who He made you to be you can be free. God is the only one who knows you completely and loves you unconditionally. If you’re doing what God wants, then you’re doing what’s right. And therefore, you are OK!

The psalmist says of this kind of focus, *“I will live in perfect freedom, because I try to obey your teachings”* (Psalm 119:45 GNT).

You don’t need to belong to a certain group of people to find out who you really are. Social media can’t tell you who you are or how much you’re really loved. Only God can tell you the truth about who you are—and that will set you free. Sometimes fear, keeps us in that place of pretending, and we have addressed that before but let’s tie it in because it is one of the areas that will keep us from breaking out of the prison of pretend.

Fear never gives you a life of freedom. It always limits you! You may call it worry or anxiety, but the results are the same. It’s a prison of fear. If God is perfect and God is love, the word says that *“There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out all fear. So then, love has not been made perfect in anyone who is afraid, because fear has to do with punishment. (1 John 4:18)*. Verse 19 goes on to say; *“We love because God first loved us”*. The enemy is the producer of fear, so our job is to not give the enemy an opening to bring in fear and we do that by doing what is right in the eyes of the Lord.

Even when Jesus rose from the dead on the very first Resurrection Sunday, fear locked the disciples away from how God wanted to use them.

John 20:19 says, *“That Sunday evening, the disciples were together behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jews”* (GW). After Jesus died, the disciples locked themselves in a house because they believed the religious leaders might come after them next. But those doors didn’t just keep the Jewish authorities out of their lives. It kept everyone else out, too.

Fear always locks people out of your life. You fear getting hurt again, so you don’t let anyone close to you. But you can’t have love without risking hurt. That place of aloneness causes you to pretend even more of who you are (not).

So how do you escape your prison of fear so you can get close to people again? You don’t do it through a self-help book, or by continuing to pretend you are somebody you are not. Only God can break you out.

God does this when you:

Remember how much God loves you.

You need to do this every time you start to panic and get afraid. Remember that *“God is love. Those who live in God’s love live in God, and God lives in them . . . No fear exists where his love is. Rather, perfect love gets rid of fear, because fear involves punishment. The person who lives in fear doesn’t have perfect love”* (1 John 4:16, 18 GW).

When you invite God’s love into your life, fear cannot take up residence anymore. Love and fear can’t stay together! The more you accept God’s love the less afraid— and the more confident and courageous and stronger—you’ll be.

Remember God has a plan for you.

God’s plan is always good. Bad things might happen in your life, but that’s not God’s plan. The Bible tells us, *“We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God—those whom he has called according to his plan”* (Romans 8:28 GW). And yes, we have talked about the choices we make and the consequences that follow, BUT GOD can take those bad choices and turn it around for your good....if you let Him.

God specializes in bringing good out of bad. He turns crucifixions into resurrections! The disciples responded in fear and despair to Jesus’ death on the cross, but God brought good—the salvation of humanity—out of it.

God’s plan for you is good. No matter what happens, he will turn it into something good. Remember Jeremiah 29:11 and Romans 8:28.

Seeing Jesus and understanding his love for them brought the disciples out from behind locked doors. Whenever you start to feel afraid, remember God’s promises to you. Then, you’ll be free to rest in His love and open your life to loving others. One can’t love others till they learn to love themselves. So, if you pretend to be who you are not, the love you have for yourself, and others is a false love. God’s love for you is the real deal. But you have to accept and believe it. As we acknowledge who we are and that we are not perfect, it allows us to accept those around us as not perfect as well. Now as with ourselves, we are still supposed to do what is right in the sight of the Lord and obey His teachings.

Another thing that can hold you back from receiving all that God has for you is unforgiveness, holding grudges. Now I know, no one holds grudges in prison. Right! “I have been here longer than he has, why should he get to do that instead of me”, or “that was my job, I was just gone for a short trip to medical” or “it is someone else’s fault I was out of place and got a case and lost my position as”. Do you know what starts you down a path to unforgiveness? Offense! I’m sure when you read the first part of this paragraph, you thought, well that isn’t unforgiveness. You are right, but offense (like those above) lead to ill feelings towards someone → anger → disrespect → words → maybe even a fight → grudge → bitterness → unforgiveness → death.

You may have big plans for yourself, your family, your career, and your community. But none of those plans even come close to the plans God has for you.

The Bible tells us, *“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined the things that God has prepared for those who love him”* (1 Corinthians 2:9 GW).

You can't walk into the plans God has for you unless you learn to walk out of the prison of unforgiveness. You can't walk into those opportunities carrying a grudge.

Why should you forgive people that have hurt you?

Because God has forgiven you.

You will never need to forgive anyone more than God has already forgiven you. When you come to faith in Christ, you don't just get your sins forgiven. God completely wipes them out! There's no record of them anywhere. Romans 8:1-2 says, "*There is now no condemnation awaiting those who belong to Christ Jesus. For the power of the life-giving Spirit—and this power is mine through Christ Jesus—has freed me from the vicious circle of sin and death*" (TLB). When you don't forgive people in your life, you start a vicious circle. That cycle won't end until you forgive the people who have hurt you.

Forgive, because resentment will make you miserable.

Refusing to forgive someone doesn't hurt the other person. It hurts you. Resentment makes you miserable. Holding on to a hurt is like drinking poison and hoping it kills the person you hate. You may be hanging on to pain caused by people who can no longer hurt you. They can't hurt you unless you let them! And honestly, if they even knew they hurt you, they have probably already forgotten about it and moved on. Yet you are still harboring (holding) on to that hurt.

The Bible says, "*One person dies in full vigor, completely secure and at ease, well-nourished in body, bones rich with marrow. Another dies in bitterness of soul, never having enjoyed anything good*" (Job 21:23-25 NIV). You can either forgive and be happy or hold on to hurt and grow bitter. The choice is yours. We talked last month about choices.

Forgive, because you'll need forgiveness in the future.

You will never stop making mistakes because you are human. You'll need to be forgiven in the future, so you need to forgive others. Jesus taught, "*If you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your failures*" (Matthew 6:15 GW).

You cannot receive what you are unwilling to give.

Today is the day to start forgiving so you can heal and move forward into God's plan for your life. Too often we allow the enemy to steal from us and without realizing the fear, offense, root of bitterness that has started to take hold, we lose our focus on the plans that the Lord has for us. The promises He has given us.

God's Freedom Is Available to You Today

God promised that for those who believe in Jesus, there is no condemnation. He sent Jesus to save you from your sin. His death on the cross paid for the price to restore us back into the family. And by sacrificing Himself for your sins and giving you His righteousness, Jesus made it possible for you to have a relationship with God, the Father. And the good news doesn't stop there. God also raised Jesus from the dead, proving His power over sin and death. And that makes it possible for you to spend eternity with Him. Stay right with Him and right in His sight.

Let's keep our eyes focused on the Lord and the things of the Lord. As we do that, we will be who God created us to be and in the fullness of His glory to fulfill the great plans He has for us. Be who he made you to be, stay focused.

Praying for you all,

Ms. Chief (aka Ms.G)

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Christ's Heart In Every Felon