Liminality: Fear or Faith?
May 23, 2021
Our reflections for this week are written by Sally Green.

Day 1

From Numbers 13 we see the contrast of fear and faith. The LORD told Moses to send one leader from each tribe to explore the land of Canaan for forty days. When the "spies" returned, ten reported the land does flow with milk and honey, BUT the people are large & powerful, the cities fortified. Then Caleb silenced the people and told Moses, "We should go up and take possession of the land for we can certainly do it."

The LORD had already performed the miracles delivering them from powerful Egypt, divided the Red Sea to ensure their escape, provided water, manna, and quail to feed them, guided them with the pillar of fire/cloud, and provided them the commandments to live by. Yet most of them quickly forgot, and feared the people living in Canaan over trusting in the LORD. They wanted to choose a leader to go back to Egypt.

Moses and Aaron fell face down before the LORD. Joshua and Caleb, the spies who believed the land could be taken, pleaded with the Israelites to not rebel. They encouraged the people that the LORD is with us and not to be afraid of them. Instead, the assembly wanted to stone Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb. At this, the LORD wanted to strike down the Israelites and make Moses into a nation, but he pleaded for the Israelites and the LORD spared them. As punishment, no one who saw all of God's miracles but was unbelieving would enter the promised land; the Israelites would wander the wilderness for forty years, one for each of the days the spies were in the land.

What was the difference between the ten spies who held unbelief in their heart and the two spies who believed the land could be conquered? One difference was what the focused on. The ten spies focused on the circumstance: the large people and fortified cites. The two focused on the LORD and his track record, which was flawless. Where do you put your focus when you are in a tough season?

Day 2

Abraham showed faith throughout his walk with God, but his greatest test of faith came when God told him to take Isaac, the son of the promise, and sacrifice him there as a burnt offering in Genesis 22. We are told early the next morning Abraham got up, prepared the wood and left with two servants and Isaac. That's it—we are not told any more. This is the same Abraham who pleaded with God for Sodom and Gomorrah, asking if he would sweep away the righteous with the wicked. We see a boldness on Abraham's part as he goes back and forth six times, until God agrees to not destroy these cities if ten righteous people remain. Yet, when God tells him to sacrifice Isaac, no pleading.

Hebrews 11:17-19 lets us in on more of what Abraham was thinking: "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God has said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death."

So, we see Abraham, resolutely, heading to sacrifice his only son believing that God could raise him from the dead. What great faith! When Isaac asks, "the fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb?" Abraham answers, "God himself will provide the lamb." We are told upon arrival he arranged the wood, bound

his son, and laid Isaac on the wood. When he reached out and took the knife to slay his son, the angel of the LORD called out to him, "Do not lay a hand on the boy. Now I know that you fear God because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." God provided a ram caught in a thicket for Abraham to use for the sacrifice. Abraham could have been fearful of the task God asked him to do, but instead, he continued to trust God, even in the face of an impossible task. What kind of lasting impact do you think this had on Isaac?

Day 3

We see the contrast of the fear of the Israelite army and the great faith of the young boy David in I Samuel 17. Goliath, the champion of the Philistines, stood over nine feet tall and would come out day and night defiantly challenging any Israelite to fight him. The losers would become slaves to the winners. But when David came on an errand to his three older brothers, he heard Goliath shout his usual defiance. The Israelites ran from him in great fear, but David asked, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

News gets back to King Saul who sends for David, and upon seeing him, comments that he is only a boy. David responds, "Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God." So, Saul resigns to send David. After choosing five stones from the stream and with sling in hand he approached Goliath. When Goliath saw that David was only a boy, he despised him and cursed him by his gods. David's response was, "You come against me with

sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off you head…all those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands."

At the sight of Goliath, the Israelite army responded in fear. David, in contrast, put his faith in an unseen God over the giant Goliath standing before him. And we know the rest of the story. God honored David and he led the Israelites to a victory, as a "boy."

What "giants" are you are facing in this season of your life? Ask God to help you trust him with whatever you are facing.

Day 4

I am encouraged that God also uses people who, at first appear to be fearful, then step out in faith. We see this in the book of Esther. A plot to destroy the Jews is afoot. Mordecai, Esther's uncle, implores her as queen to go to the king and beg to him to save her people, the Jews. She is hesitant because if you come before the king without being summoned, you will be killed unless he extends his scepter. After three days of fasting among the Jews, she says, "I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." She went before the king, who does extend his scepter and asks, "what is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you." After a series of banquets, the king has the person behind the plot killed and the Jews are allowed to defend themselves on the day set for their destruction. Esther stepped out in faith and God honored her, and the Jews were spared.

We see another example in Judges 6. Gideon is threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites—hiding, really. The Midianites would come and ravage all the Israelites had, crops and livestock. While there, an angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon and

said, "The LORD is with you mighty warrior." He is told to go and save Israel. Gideon points out his clan is the weakest, and he is least of his family. The LORD tells Gideon to tear down his father's altar to Baal and Asherah pole (both false gods). He does it at night because he is afraid of his family and the men of the town. After getting confirmation twice and overhearing an interpretation of a dream at the outskirts of the Midian camp, Gideon's faith is bolstered, and he is able to defeat the Midianites with only 300 men because God caused the Midianites to turn on each other.

When I see God's great deliverance in both of these stories and how he used people filled with fears and uncertainties, I am encouraged. Just as their faith was stretched, so can yours and mine!

Day 5

Fear seems to be a natural part of our lives. We even fear things as children. The list of things we fear is ever increasing—fear of loss: death, health, income, home to natural disasters; fear of failure, fear of not being loved, of loneliness, fear of crowds, fear of being vulnerable—the list is never ending. Fear of persecution for our faith is something we haven't had to face, but many of our brothers and sisters in Christ across the world face many forms of persecution: prison, death, loss of home, loss of jobs, to name a few.

If I were to get real with you, I would admit I sometimes fear "what if" something happens to Ed? or do we have enough saved for retirement? or will we be able to afford health insurance later in life? to name just a few. Yet when I look at this list, many of these things I can't control. But when I choose to acknowledge my fear, then I can acknowledge that I serve a God who has been faithful from the beginning and will be faithful to the end, he is worthy of my trust.

When I am tempted to take my focus off God and put it back on the "what ifs," I can lift my hands and open them upward as a sign that I am giving my fears back to God. I may have to do this over and over somedays. A friend of mine recently was facing cancer. When asked how he and his wife got through this hard time, their response was to choose worship over worry (they even had shirts made with this phrase). Listening to worship music and focusing on God and all his attributes helped them get through this difficult season.

Take some time to recognize the things you fear. Then take some time and acknowledge how faithful God has been, not only in history, but your life. Finally, spend some time listening to some worship music to focus on the great God we serve.

Extra Credit: Go to opendoorsusa.org or persecution.com (Voice of the Martyrs) to know how you can pray for the persecuted church, who live by great faith in the face of real danger.