

1. Last week's message was about freedom from Grief.
2. I had no idea that so many people would respond to the message the way they did.
3. I don't know how many conversations I have had this week with people who are grieving over something that has happened in their life.
4. The reality is sometimes we don't grieve and mourn very effectively.
5. We have the tendency to act like the losses of life are no big deal.
6. We have the tendency to not want to talk about the losses of life.
7. We have the tendency to run away from losses and just try and ignore them.
8. But obviously those methods rarely work. It is as we are honest with God and with others about our struggles and our losses that healing, and freedom are able to occur.
9. I got to witness this truth this past Wednesday through our connect groups.
10. As people were coming in for their groups, I noticed two different people who it was obvious were struggling.
11. However, our groups are designed to allow us a place to struggle and be real with one another about the losses in our lives.
12. After connect groups were over, I saw those two folks again, and both of their faces were literally lit up. They were completely different.
13. I don't know what happened in their group that night, but whatever it was, was life giving.
14. To me it is just a reminder that we need one another desperately.
15. God has not created us to be stuck in the past. He has designed us for a future.
16. Let's talk about that future this morning.

TEXT: Isaiah 43:15-19 I am the LORD, your Holy One, Israel's Creator, your King." **16** This is what the LORD says-- he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, **17** who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick: **18** "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. **19** See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.

TITLE: Forward Facing Faith.**INTRO:**

1. The other day I came across some interesting world records.
2. Brian "Cub" Keene and James "Wilbur" Wright (both from the USA) drove their Chevrolet Blazer (9,031 miles) in reverse in the 37 days between August 1 and September 6 1984. They passed through 15 US states and parts of Canada.
3. On October 7-8, 2013, Andrew Hellinga from Australia rode a bicycle backwards for 209.77 miles.
4. Steve Gordon (from the USA) rode backwards on a unicycle for a distance of (68 miles) at Southwestern Missouri State University, Springfield, Missouri, on June 24th, 1999.
5. Now. It's no secret to you that I don't hold any world records. But if I did, I can assure you it would not be a record for driving backwards, or riding a bike backwards, and especially not riding a unicycle backwards.
6. I don't guess I do terrible going backwards. I don't remember the last time I ran into something. But I've noticed the older I get the less comfortable it is to back into some place, or back out of a parking spot.
7. My eyes don't work as good. I don't turn my neck around as easily as I once did. And at times my depth perception isn't all that great.
8. And I am grateful for any vehicle that has a backup camera, but even using one of them can be tricky.
9. I'll just stick with driving and moving forward as much as I can.
10. And I wish I could say that about every part of my life, but the reality is **I find myself at times regressing rather than progressing.**
11. We were watching a show the other night and there was an actor I have seen for years that came on.
12. I commented to my wife. Wow. He has really gotten old. To which she responded. He's the same age as you. Ouch.
13. Regressing. Going backwards. Rather than progressing. Going forward.
14. The reality is all of us are prone to that at times.

15. It's been said some people get bitter. Not better.
16. Some people get more cranky and less caring.
17. Some people develop more hate and less hope.
18. One of the reasons why each of us can regress rather than progress, is because progress is not natural.
19. Meaning, **progress doesn't naturally happen on its own.** What naturally happens is regression.
20. The same can be said of our faith, or our relationship with the Lord.
21. I wish I could say that getting stronger in the Lord and closer to the Lord just happens.
22. But in my life, it is the opposite. Without attention I get weaker and further away.
23. Without intention my faith doesn't grow my faith tends to fade.
24. Am I the only person who experiences that?
25. So, in order to kick start our faith into forward motion rather than backward motion, some specific things have to happen.
26. One of those things is found in the passage I read you today.
27. **Isaiah 43:15-17 I am the LORD, your Holy One, Israel's Creator, your King."**
16 This is what the LORD says-- he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, 17 who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick:
28. What we have here is a declaration of the present, and a reminder of the past.
29. Verse 15 says I am the Lord, your Holy one, Israel's creator. Your king. I am is present tense.
30. Then what we have in verse 16-17 is a look at the past.
31. This past experience is found in Exodus 14.
32. He who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters.
33. We know that is a reference to when the Israelites were fleeing Egypt and they came face to face with the Red Sea. The Lord parted the waters, and they walked across on dry ground.
34. And then in verse 17 the Lord makes reference to the chariots and horses being drawn into the deepest part of the sea, and their wheels

breaking and coming apart, and the water closing in over them and wiping them out completely.

35. But then we come to verse 18. In verse 18 the Lord says something to them we rarely see in the bible.
36. He says forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.
37. So, the Lord mentions this great, amazing series of miracles that, were they to happen to us, would be etched in our minds indefinitely.
38. And then he says forget those things.
39. Now, we know that the Lord was not asking them to erase those memories from their minds kind of like you would erase all your text messages or emails.
40. No. they would never forget them. More specifically, what he means is do not dwell on them.
41. **Isaiah 43:18 "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.**
42. In this context, the word dwell means to fix your eyes or attention on something and linger or stay there.
43. So, what the Lord is saying to them is do not fix your focus or attention on these former things. Even though they were amazing and miraculous.
44. Instead, recognize that I am doing a new thing.
45. This new thing would be not only in the present, but also in the future.
46. So, if I were to wrap all this together in my own words. The Lord was telling them not to allow their focus and attention to be pointed in reverse. Instead, focus your attention forward.
47. Now. there are many reasons why the Lord told them that. And we will look at some of those in a minute.
48. But the main reason that stands out above the rest was the ongoing tendency the Israelites had of trying to live their life looking backwards.
49. Especially when they faced uncertainty or difficulty.
50. Let's go back to the book of Exodus for just a moment.
51. In Exodus chapter 12, God sends the 10th and final plague, and as a result, the next morning the Egyptians begged them to leave and they did.

52. In exodus chapter 14, just a couple of days after they left Egypt, they crossed the red sea.
53. Then, about a month later in Exodus chapter 16. The best I can tell, about one month after the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea.
54. This is what the people of Israel did when they were faced with a shortage of food.
55. Exodus 16:2-3 In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. 3 The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."
56. About one month after the Lord has delivered them from hundreds of years of bondage, they are looking backwards, wishing they could go back to that bondage.
57. And for the next 40 years, it is a tendency we see displayed over and over again.
58. And everything in me wishes I could say that I am extremely different than those folks way back then, but I know the truth.
59. And the truth is, sometimes I want to go backwards, and sometimes I do go backwards rather than moving forward.
60. So, there I am. The Lord is saying, hey, I am doing a new thing. I want you to forget these former things and I want you to look and live forward.
61. And all the while the Lord is speaking, my attention is focused in a completely different direction.
62. And so, in order to break our focus from the former things, and get our focus and attention looking forward, we have to ACT.
63. I want to use each letter of the word **A.C.T.** as my points this morning.
64. First of all, we must reject the tendency toward...

Avoidance.

1. Avoidance of what? Avoidance of the desert, difficult, and dry places.
2. I know we have touched on this briefly before, but let's consider it one more time.
3. Notice with me the nature of the new thing God is doing.

4. Isaiah 43:19 See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.
5. The Lord makes it very clear that in this new thing there will be times of wilderness, and there will be times where we feel like we are in a wasteland.
6. The Lord does not say hey. Pay attention to this new thing I am doing.
7. In this new thing I am going to deliver you from wilderness and wasteland. What he promises is that he will deliver us in the wilderness and wasteland.
8. So, if we mistakenly believe that in this new thing there will be no deserts, and difficult, and dry places, then we will be highly disappointed.
9. And what's more, if we somehow make it a priority to avoid any desert, difficult, and dry places, we are going to be highly disillusioned.
10. Go back with me for just a moment to Exodus 16:3 "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."
11. If we had just stayed in Egypt we could have avoided being out in this desert starving to death.
12. Their statements indicated that they truly believed that one of the major aspects of their journey with the Lord was to avoid the desert, difficult, and dry places.
13. Almost nothing will keep us in bondage to the past, going backwards at light speed, like believing that the Lord's goal for us is to avoid tough places.
14. Because if we do mistakenly believe that lie, every time desert, difficult, and dry places come, we will be susceptible to the lie of the enemy that there is something wrong with us.
15. That there is something wrong with the promises of God.
16. And as a result, we will miss the very provision and direction the Lord is bringing in those places.
17. You and I cannot avoid desert places, difficult places, and dry places.
18. God's promise is not that he will deliver me from those places; his promise is that he will deliver me in those places.

19. Reject avoidance.
20. Secondly, when those desert, difficult, and dry places come.

Continue moving forward.

1. How do we continue moving forward when faced with the desert places?
2. By being obedient to what the Lord is telling us to do. Obedience is forward facing, not backward facing.
3. If we go back to Exodus chapter 14 for just a moment, we find the people of Israel and Moses standing at the edge of the Red Sea.
4. If my study of the geography of that area is correct, there was the Red Sea in front of them.
5. There were mountains on either side of them. And the raging armies of Egypt were bearing down behind them.
6. Again, let's look at what the Israelites did. **Exodus 14:12** Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"
7. There we have it again. In the face of difficulty, they stop. Turn around and focus their attention on the past, and start back peddling as fast as they can.
8. But again, we see that was not what the Lord wanted them to do at all. What God wanted them to do was continue moving forward by being obedient.
9. **Exodus 14:15-16** Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. **16** Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.
10. Moses. I don't need you having a pity party right now. I need you to raise your staff and get ready for me to do something.
11. Children of Israel. I don't need you to stand there crying to go back to where you came from. I need you to physically move forward toward the deliverance that I will provide.
12. One of the things that will break in us the tendency to go backwards is when faced with the desert or difficult or dry places, to cry out to the Lord.
13. Lord, what is it you want me to do? How can I honor you in this

difficult place by being obedient?

14. Lord, my flesh wants to throw this thing in reverse and retreat, but I choose to obey you in what you are doing.
15. Say it with me. Lord. I don't know what you are doing. But whatever it is I commit to obey what you tell me to do.
16. And finally, when faced with the desert, difficult, and dry places...

Trust in the Lord, not the idol.

1. We can't avoid these difficult places. They are going to come.
2. And we know the only thing that is pleasing to the Lord is for us to obey his commands.
3. But inevitably, when the desert times come, the enemy rears his ugly head and he points us right back to the very lifeless, blind, and deaf idol we trusted in before, because we can't trust the idol and the Lord at the same time.
4. I'm not sure exactly how many times the people of Israel stopped and complained and begged to go back to Egypt. But I am sure of this.
5. Not one time when talking about going back to Egypt did they ever express a trust in the Lord.
6. The focus on going back to Egypt always centered around pots of meat, and having lots of water to drink.
7. Not having as many problems there as they were having now.
8. Their security back then didn't come from the Lord, their security came from what they had. Those things had more than likely become an idol to them.
9. Going backward when facing the desert, difficult, and dry places requires absolutely zero faith or trust in the Lord.
10. We don't have to trust Him for what has already happened.
11. But **moving forward always requires trusting in the Lord.** Because what we need, we don't have yet.
12. What we want is not yet within our grasp.
13. The deliverance we so desperately desire is yet to be fulfilled. And all of those things require **Forward Facing Faith.**

Conclusion:

1. So, when all is said and done. This new thing the Lord is doing is really a new way of living for us.
2. The new thing is really a new us. It's a transformation of how we live and relate not only to the Lord, but to the world around us.
3. And only the Lord, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and with our cooperation, is able to cause that kind of transformation in our lives.
4. When we've been used to living a certain way.
5. Believing a certain way.
6. Trusting a certain way. It's hard to break those cycles.
7. But I choose to believe in the greatness of God.
8. And I choose to believe that whatever he wants to do in my life is ultimately for my good.
9. So, this morning I am going to ask you to join me in offering ourselves to the Lord.
10. Lord, do a new thing in me.
11. Change me. Transform me. Make me more like you.
12. Change the way I think, the way I act, how I trust and who and what I put my hope in.
13. Lord help me to not live a life of avoidance. Always trying to escape the inescapable.
14. Help me to be obedient in times of testing.
15. Help me to trust you rather than trusting the idols of my past.
16. Do a new thing in us as a church and as a community.
17. Closing prayer.