

unCommon Sense Week 3
Don't be Lazy... Be Brave!

One of the great American summer traditions is the road trip. How many of us have taken road trips with our families or friends? Before blockbusters became the summer movie staple, it was movies like *Vacation* or *Road Trip*. It always starts in a house or dorm room, with one person who gets a vision for a grand adventure. They usually have to talk the rest of the family into it - at least one person is dragged against their will.

In the movies, the Road Trip *never* goes like it's supposed to. Something inevitable goes wrong - the family faces some sort of seemingly insurmountable obstacle and almost decide to give up and go home. But of course they soldier on and end up making memories that last a lifetime.

We love those movies - they're the modern-day quest motif. I wonder if we love them because they point to who we want to be? If they resonate in us because deep down a lot of us aspire to be heroes. To go on some sort of trip, some journey.

Not necessarily a road trip. Not even a literal journey, more often than not.

Think about it: haven't you ever known a way you were supposed to go? A decision you were supposed to make? Haven't you ever stood at a crossroads and looked two directions (or three or four), like you were looking into possible futures?

And haven't there ever been moments, at that crossroads, when you *just knew* THAT was the right path? That down THAT road was a better future, a place you *should* be?

When you just knew that the other road, the easier road, didn't lead anywhere good?

We've all stood there. We've all faced that choice.

And a lot of us have said No to the adventure. To the hard road, the good road. The way we were supposed to go.

Frankly, a lot of us just have the courage to step out on that good road.

Why is that?

Well, according to Proverbs, it's because we're lazy.

The lazy person says, "There is a lion in the road! There is a lion in the streets!" -- Proverbs 26:13 (NRS)

I know what you're thinking - lazy? I'm not lazy!

No one wants to be lazy. It's a word that has some pretty negative connotations. When you hear it what do you think of?

Worthless? Good-for-nothing? A shiftless-layabout?

Did someone specific pop into your brain?

We think of lazy people as selfish. A drain on the rest of us hard-working contributors to society.

So when Proverbs suggests that we might be lazy, we take offense. BUT

That's because we focus on the first part. Let's let Proverbs define laziness for us. And then take a good hard look at whether we fit the bill.

Lazy and Lions

According to Proverbs, you're lazy if you say, "There's a lion in the road!" I'm sure that a lot of us are great at coming up with excuses, but this one takes the cake.

"I can't go outside - there might be a lion out there!"

This is technically a real possibility. Not very plausible. But possible.

If you stay inside, you definitely won't get eaten by the possible lion.

And we laugh, but look closer:

The word 'road' here in Hebrew is an interesting one. It has a pretty broad range of meaning. It can also mean 'way' as in 'which way are you going?'

Not too different from road, right?

But also means way in the sense of manner - we could talk about the 'way' birds fly or the 'way' fish swim. This connotation of way has much more to do with the 'way' things were created to live. The path they were designed to follow.

Which, you remember, is what Proverbs is all about. We were created to live a certain 'way'. To follow a path in our lives.

And, according to Proverbs, we don't always do that. Sometimes, we stand at a crossroads, and we know the way we should go, and we don't.

And we make up all kinds of excuses. Just because they're not as silly as a lion doesn't mean they're not excuses.

So what's the lion in your way?

What's keeping you from stepping out into the way you know you should go?

Because if that's you, Proverbs says you're lazy.

And that, I think, is an interesting insight.

I am convinced that laziness is seldom really about selfishness. I am convinced that nobody is truly worthless. That nobody is good for nothing.

[I'm not sure how to represent this visually, but a lot of what's happening here is the 'real picture' past what we see. So in the verse, we 'see' a lazy man inside/at home and a lion outside/in public/in the way.

But *beneath* the lazy man is fear/lack of confidence/ambition/self-esteem. And *beyond* the lion is who we are called to be.

Then on another level, by the end of the message, inside/home will become a prison and outside/public/the way will become freedom.

Have fun with all that.]

That's what we see when we look at a lazy person. But *under* that, where we can't see, there's fear. A lack of confidence. A void of self-esteem.

Lazy people don't have ambition, that drive to do more, to move forward in life, to get up and go. But I suspect it's not because they're somehow inferior persons.

According to Proverbs, *fear* is actually what paralyzes us. We aren't confident in ourselves, not confident that the path is clear.

We see obstacles everywhere and excuses pile up. The way looks dangerous, frightening. We make mountains out of the smallest mounds and call them unscalable. We turn the littlest problems into fierce lions that stand in our way.

And the core of the problem isn't even the problem, the lion. I put this proverb up on Facebook on Monday and a friend of mine said this in response:

The non-lazy person goes out and gets eaten. Lazy person FTW!

This is what we think, right? This is what keeps us from doing what we know we should do, from living the way we were designed to live. Because we're sure that that lion is going to eat us.

I want to share three stories from the Scriptures with you - three stories of guys who encountered lions.

A guy named Samson was traveling between towns one day when a lion attacked him. Scary, right? Here's what happened:

That moment the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon him, and he ripped the lion's jaws apart with his bare hands. -- Judges 14:6 (NLT)

Another kid in the scriptures was David, who would one day become the king of Israel. But he started out as a shepherd for his dad. At an army recruitment interview he had with the reigning king, David described his daily life as a shepherd:

"I have been taking care of my father's sheep and goats," he said. "When a lion or a bear comes to steal a lamb from the flock, I go after it with a club and rescue the lamb from its mouth. If the

animal turns on me, I catch it by the jaw and club it to death... The LORD who rescued me from the claws of the lion and the bear will rescue me from this Philistine!" -- 1 Samuel 17:34-37 (NLT)

David was apparently a pretty scrawny kid. But he had a job - shepherd - and knew what he had to do. So he just did it, and credited God with protecting him.

The last guy is in a different place from both Samson and David. Daniel was living in a foreign country, serving as an advisor to the Persian emperor. Because Daniel is faithful to Yahweh, he won't worship the Persian gods. This makes him quite a few enemies in the royal court. Through a bunch of political intrigue way more interesting than the Weiner Scandal, Daniel's enemies trick the emperor and get him to condemn Daniel to death for worshipping Yahweh instead of their gods. And since the Persians were apparently crazy, their preferred method of execution was to starve a pride of lions for a few days, then toss criminals into the pit and let the lions tear them apart.

So the emperor has Daniel tossed in the pit of lions and closes it up for the night. The next morning, everyone rushes to the pit, pries off the stone and checks to see the damage.

Daniel - alive and well - calls up:

My God sent his angel to shut the lions' mouths so that they would not hurt me, for I have been found innocent in his sight. And I have not wronged you, Your Majesty. -- Daniel 6:22 (NLT)

I was just walking down the road and got attacked.

I was just doing my job.

I refused to cave to pressure to compromise what I know is right.

I was just following the way I was supposed to go.

And a lion attacked.

But God took care of the lions. Ever time.

It didn't really ever look the same. Samson was given strength. David had a club and sling. Daniel's lions had their mouths held shut.

But every time, God came through.

Because when God calls you to something, God takes full responsibility for that call.

Yeah but...

...my lions aren't really lions.

My lion is my job.

I know I should spend more time with my wife (or my kids). But I *have to* work 80 hours a week. I can't quit and do something else. I don't even know what else I would do. Even thinking about it scares me.

Or, I know I'm not doing what I should be doing. I have a clear idea what I *should be* doing. But I can't afford to step out and try it. I don't know if I will succeed. It's scary.

Maybe your lion is a relationship.

I know I need to confront that person. But I hate conflict, and I know how they'd respond anyway. Just thinking about having that conversation freaks me out. Maybe I'll just send them an email. Or text them.

I know this relationship is unhealthy. But I don't think I deserve any better. If I get out, I'm afraid no one else would ever love me.

What's the lion in your way?

What are you so afraid of? What are you worried about?

Do you trust that God will take care of it?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes us this promise:

Don't worry... Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. --Matthew 6:31-34 (NLT)

We can choose not to be lazy. Not to be afraid. We can choose to stand at that crossroads, to face the lions in our lives not because we are confident in ourselves but because we trust God. Because we are confident in who we are becoming in Jesus.

Of course that's not necessarily easy. Laziness takes many forms. Our Children's Pastor Sheila has been talking about an epiphany she had recently. She told me this week, "I run because I'm lazy."

Now if you know Sheila, that's a surprising statement. She's run marathons and still trains all the time. Her daily runs are in the double digits more often than not.

I run because I'm lazy.

She told me that and I said, You're not lazy. You're crazy!

She explained: I really need to be doing a lot more than just running. If I want to be healthy, I need to change my diet and lift some weights. But that's all way harder than just running a couple extra miles. It's easy for me to run. The other stuff's hard. So I don't do it.

I run because I'm lazy.

Makes a lot of sense when you think about it that way.

Because, according to Proverbs, a lazy person isn't a selfish, worthless good-for-nothing. A lazy person is the one who takes the easy way out, who settles for getting by instead of soaring.

A lazy person is someone who refuses to go outside, to take the road they need to take, because of the lion.

The lazy person says, "There is a lion in the road! There is a lion in the streets!" -- Proverbs 26:13 (NRS)

The lazy person is in their home. The lion is outside. And so the lazy person is trapped by his own fear inside. We have a word for that sort of place - prison.

This fear, this inaction, this choice to take the easy way out, this is a prison. Proverbs warns us that laziness traps us in ways of living that kill us.

Maybe we should really call them ways of dying.

We think the lion is what we should be afraid of the lion, that the lion is what will destroy us, when it's really our own inaction, our own refusal to go out, to make the hard choice.

Our own refusal to trust that it's our job to get up and go.

We think death is *out there* but death is really *in here*. In our refusal to step out, to follow faithfully, to risk. To trust.

Don't worry about the lions. God will handle them. Worry about your own inability to move forward. Your own fear. *That's* what you need to face down.

Don't worry about the lions. God will handle them.

So what's the lion in your way?

What excuses are you making for not doing what you know you're called to do, what you know you were made to do?

What's keeping you from living the life God has for you?

Don't let your fear of the unknown trap you. Don't let your lack of faith in yourself paralyze you.

There's a big, exciting world waiting down the road. And you are called to be the hero on this journey. God takes full responsibility for the obstacles you'll face. You just have to follow.

So get up and go. Let God handle the lions.