

Changing Through Struggles

Message 04 of the series "Changing for the Better"

I. We will all face trials and struggles this year.

"Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."

John 16:33 (NLT)

a. God understands our struggles.

"This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most." Hebrews 4:15-16 (NLT)

Life Application: "Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you." 1 Peter 5:7 (NLT)

b. God will be with us through our struggles.

"When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior." Isaiah 43:1-3 (NLT)

"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you... the Holy Spirit...will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." John 14:16-17, 26 (NIV)

Life Application: We must allow Jesus to guide us through our struggles.

Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light." Matthew 11:28-30 (NLT)

c. God will use our struggles for good.

"We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love." Romans 5:3-5 (NLT)

"God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them." Romans 8:28 (NLT)

Life Application: We must trust God's goodness and wisdom.

Joseph replied, "...You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people." Genesis 50:20 (NLT)

d. God promises to end our struggles forever in heaven.

"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.'" Revelation 21:4-5 (NIV)

Life Application: We must choose to view life from an eternal perspective.

"That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!" 2 Corinthians 4:16-17 (NLT)

II. Struggles will reveal what's in our hearts.

a. Our struggles will reveal if we trust God more than our circumstances.

Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's cross to the other side of the lake." So they took Jesus in the boat and started out... But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water. Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, "Teacher, don't you care that we're going to drown?" When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the water, "Silence! Be still!" Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm. Then he asked them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" The disciples were absolutely terrified. "Who is this man?" they asked each other. "Even the wind and waves obey him!" Mark 4:35-41 (NLT)

Note: The real me is revealed by:

- What I say
- What I do

“A good tree can’t produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can’t produce good fruit. A tree is identified by its fruit. Figs never grow on thorn bushes, nor grapes on bramble bushes. A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart.” Luke 6:43-45 (NLT)

b. Our struggles will reveal if we desire God more than anything else.

“What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don’t they come from the evil desires at war within you? You want what you don’t have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can’t get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don’t have what you want because you don’t ask God for it. And even when you ask, you don’t get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure. You adulterers! Don’t you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God... But he gives us even more grace to stand against such evil desires.” James 4:1-6 (NLT)

Life Application: “Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.” Psalm 37:4 (NIV)

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Connect Group Discussion Questions:

1. What is your typical response when struggles hit your life? Is it a positive or negative reaction?
2. Have you ever questioned God’s goodness during difficult times and if He is actually there with you?
3. Read Psalm 139:1-10. What do you see in this passage about God’s knowledge of your life? Based on this understanding, can God really be trusted in difficult times?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 6:3-10. How was Paul able to endure struggles (vs 6+7)?
5. Read Genesis 50:14-21. Joseph’s brothers had sold him into slavery, yet Joseph did not seek revenge. What allowed Joseph to have this perspective? How do you see the struggles you have gone through or are going through?
6. Read Romans 5:1-5. What is the positive side of difficult times in our lives? How does this knowledge help your perspective on difficulties in life?
7. Why should you trust God more in your life? How can your connect group pray for you right now about a struggle you are currently facing?

Quotations to consider:

“There is a twofold problem in the heart: what we think or trust and what we desire or worship. Sin happens when we don’t trust God above everything... and when we don’t desire God above everything... when we believe lies about God’s Word and when we worship idols instead of worshipping God.” Tim Chester

“Sometimes I thank God, for unanswered prayers. Remember when you’re talking to the man upstairs just because he doesn’t answer doesn’t mean he doesn’t care. Some of God’s greatest gifts are unanswered prayers.” Garth Brooks

“When you live in the light of eternity, your values change.” Rick Warren

“Only the man who follows the command of Jesus single-mindedly, and unresistingly lets his yoke rest upon him, finds his burden easy, and under its gentle pressure receives the power to persevere in the right way. The command of Jesus is hard, unutterably hard, for those who try to resist it. But for those who willingly submit, the yoke is easy, and the burden is light.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer