



MOVING FORWARD

A DEVOTIONAL FOR TCS GRADS OF 2022
BY: TIM MCALPINE

This short devotional is a gift from me (Tim) to
Trinity Christian School's graduating class of 2022.
My life is better because you entered it.
I love you every day.
- Pastor Tim

(I must acknowledge the work of Paul Tripp, Ed
Welch and David Powlison, who have profoundly
influenced me and my writing.)

Take Heart

Psalm 27:14

Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

Well, you made it!
Your time at TCS has come to a close.
The end may stir up many different emotions.

For some of you, this couldn't come soon enough.
For others, this has caused a great deal of fear and anxiety. And for a number of you, this was something you knew was coming, and you have accepted the time of transition.

Whatever the case for you, I want to open this short book with this reminder; "Be strong and let your heart take courage."

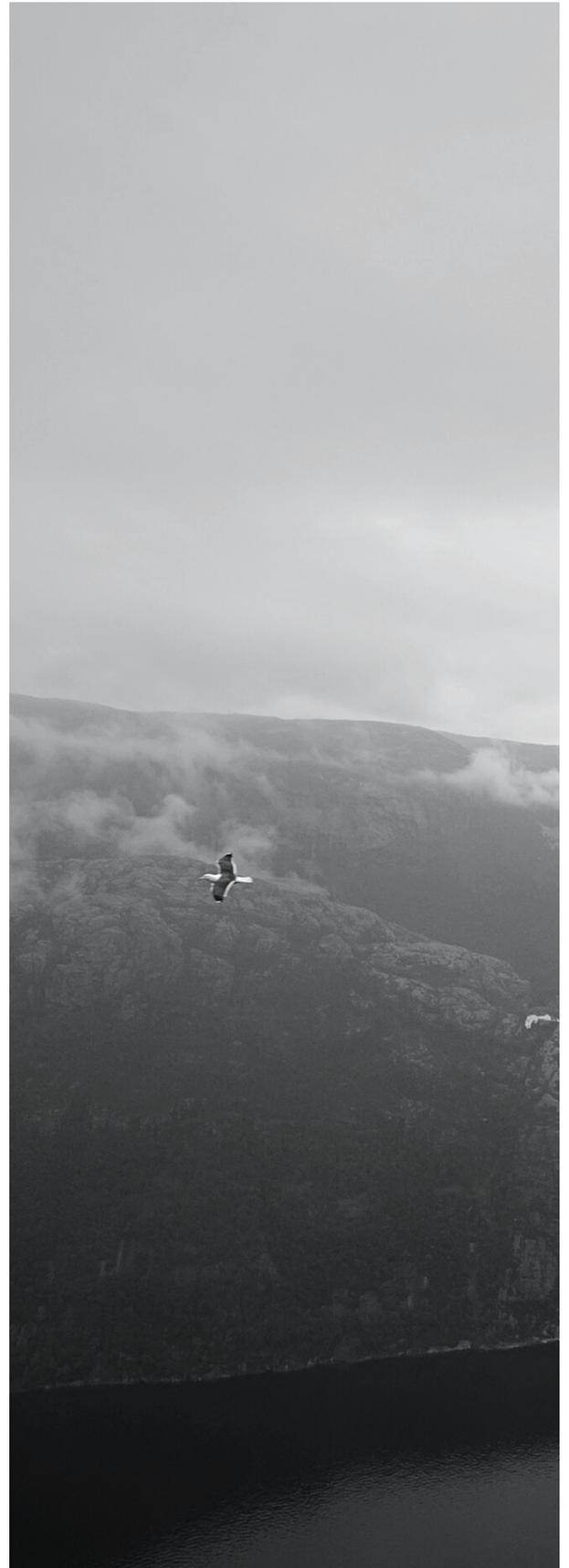
Where are our strengths and courage found? Better yet, in **whom** are our strengths and courage found?

We can take heart or find comfort and encouragement in the reality that we do not go anywhere alone. Jesus has promised to go ahead and be with us every step of the way.

When we remember the presence of Jesus in our lives, we are more likely to be strong in conviction and love and courageous in the face of fear and uncertainty. We are more likely to live like those we surround ourselves with, so stay close to Jesus and find yourself living like Him. Be strong and courageous; Jesus is with you.

Questions to reflect on:

- 1) What are you afraid of as you enter high school?
- 2) Have you brought your fears to Jesus and invited His strength and courage into your heart and mind?
- 3) How have you experienced the strength and courage of Jesus? Write down three examples and thank God for His grace and provision



For further study: Read Joshua 1:1-9

Be Consistent

Hebrews 13:8

With things constantly changing, many I talk to have experienced some stress. Not knowing what might come next weighs heavy on our hearts and minds. Studies have shown the power of our brains to conjure up consistently the worst-case scenarios imaginable under the right amount of stress and uncertainty. I'd suggest this is more common than we would like to admit, but it can also cause us to forget a life-altering truth about Jesus. **Jesus hasn't changed.**

Jesus, who came on a mission to redeem and reconcile all things to Himself, is still doing just that, and He is still doing the same things He has always done. Nothing that is going on in our lives personally or our world collectively has changed who Jesus is or what He will do.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." If you are looking to find peace, stay close to Him. If you are looking for comfort, read about Him. If you are desperate for hope, look at His nail-pierced hands, look to the empty tomb, and see Him seated at the right hand of God mediating on our behalf. Jesus has shown us why we can trust and obey (I like that song). He calls to find rest by "casting all your anxieties on him because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7)

Let us not allow the cloud of uncertainty to cause us to forget who Jesus is, what He is like and how He loves us. Jesus has not changed. Jesus is enough. Strive for consistency in your pursuit of Him, and I promise He will always meet you.

May the consistency of Jesus in an unpredictable world bring you unexplainable joy and peace today.

Questions to reflect on:

- 1) How has Jesus been consistent in your life?
- 2) When have you felt He changed (specifically, what was going on in your life)?
- 3) How would knowing without a doubt Jesus is always the exact change how you live?

For further study: Read 1 John 2:27-28



Distruptions

Matthew 4:19

I will never forget when I was at youth group and my wife called, "Tim, I am pregnant!" We were going to have a baby, and this was going to disrupt our lives radically.

I don't say that as a negative, but it was the reality.

Gone were the days of sleeping in, doing whatever we wanted, when we wanted, and we were now responsible for this life.

Yet, we wouldn't trade what we have been blessed with for the world. We love being parents and love our kids dearly. Being a dad has brought me more joy than any sleeping-in, sports team, and other friendship. In my mind, there is nothing cooler than being a dad.

Disruptions can be annoying or blessings, but the reality is that God will often disrupt our lives, and we can be confident it is for our good.

In Matthew 4:19, Jesus calls His first disciples, and it is not in a way that was overly convenient for these men. These dudes are in the middle of their work day, and Jesus comes along and says, "Follow me."

What? Like now? But I am working! I can imagine what that must have been like for them. Yet the passage tells us "immediately they left their nets and followed him." If you are curious how this played out for these guys, I'd suggest reading through the rest of the gospel. A ton would happen, and it is an incredible story.

But here is the takeaway – When Jesus disrupts, He may be protecting or providing. His disruption may come to deliver you from a bad situation you can't see. In other words, sometimes Jesus disrupts our lives for our protection. It doesn't always feel good, but it's for our good.

He also may be providing us with an opportunity to serve others, honour God and find great joy. Many times in life, God will blow up our plans and, in doing so, provide us with an opportunity to experience joy, new life and hope like never before.

So embrace disruptions. Discern if it's for protection or provision; even if you can't know which it might be, we can trust – God's troubles are for our good.



A Prayer For Belief



Jesus,
You don't always chose the
biggest, smartest and most
popular.
You call the faithful
You knew I'd fail time and time
again.
So you obeyed on my behalf.
When doubt fills my head.
You demonstrate your power
When fear creeps in,
You bring peace

Where there is hatred
You bring love.
Where there is division
You bring unity
What sin tried to destroy
You have restored.
I believe you will do this, over
and over again.
Jesus, I believe.
Help my unbelief.



Easy

Matthew 11:28-30



"Tim, can you meet me at the church office Friday at 6:30pm?"

There was a knot in my stomach as I knew I would face some complex consequences for my actions. My mind raced as I tried to think of ways I could justify or rationalize my mistakes. I was drawing a blank, and the stark reality was setting in, I was going to lose my job.

Since that day, I have realized that Jesus gave me many ways to deal with my situation before being fired. You see, I had sensed the leading of Jesus by the Holy Spirit to confess my drunkenness years before, and I had ignored that prompting. I also understood that as a Pastor, I was accepting a responsibility to live a biblical lifestyle, yet I chose to ignore that.

You see, God is kind and guides, convicts, and leads us as we go, yet we can choose to ignore His leading. We can decide to turn an emotional blind eye to His convicting work and decide to do what WE want to do.

The problem isn't God. The problem is me.

The problem is that I view the leading of Jesus as a burden and not a blessing.

Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus tells us to come to him, and he will give us rest for our souls. In the dark of night, the rest we long for, Jesus promises to us if we come to him.

He also says something we need to note: "My yoke is easy, my burden is light" the guiding work of Jesus in our lives is not burdensome if we are willing to surrender our wills to His calling.

The "yoke" or guiding call of Jesus on our lives is only a burden when we want to ignore what He has for us. When we want to be God of our lives and the true and living God tells us to move in a different direction, it feels like a burden.

I chose to view the leading of Jesus as a burden, and I paid dearly. Fortunately, Jesus paid the ultimate price and could redeem the most broken people.

Remember, friends. We can take it easy, trust Jesus and know His plan and purpose are for our good. Find rest in His presence and leading.

- 1) What is one thing Jesus is calling you to and ignoring you?
- 2) How has the leading presence of Jesus brought rest to your soul?

For further encouragement:
Ephesians 2:1-10

I know, I

know

John 9

An incredible story is found in John 9, where Jesus uses a reasonably unconventional method to heal a blind man. This individual was born blind, and the assumption from Jesus' disciples was that this resulted from sin.

Side note – How often do we do the same thing? We see someone suffering or facing a challenging circumstance, and our default posture is to assume they "deserve it." Let us be a people that are slow to judge and quick to show compassion.

Jesus graciously explains to His disciples that this is not a result of sin, but there is a purpose: the "works of God might be displayed in him." At this point, Jesus bends down, spits in the dirt and makes some mud. He rubs the mud on the blind man's eyes and instructs him to wash his eyes in the pool of Siloam. The man does so, and he is healed of his blindness.

Then we have the Pharisees. They are upset because Jesus healed on the sabbath. They make a bold claim and call Jesus a "sinner." I love how the blind man responds, "Whethere he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

Life is full of people, places and circumstances that are out of our control. Our logic does not bind God to heal and restore difficult people, places, and events. As you go about your day, don't remind yourself of what you do not know but what you do know. When we are asked, "How can you have such peace? or "Why are you the way you are?" We can say with confidence that Jesus has opened our eyes, and we now see.

We see our sin for what it is and our Saviour who paid for that sin on the cross. We have a God who is ruling and reigning over everything that is happening in our world. He deeply loves us and will provide all we need, even if it is not how we draw it up.

Friends, we might not know many things, but we do know this. We were blind, and now we see.

Our spiritual blindness being removed is our reason for hope, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control. Our reason is not a circumstance; our reason is a person. His name is Jesus.

What are some things that cause distractions from what you 'know' to be true?
How does truth set you free?

What truth do you need to believe today?

For further
encouragement:
John 9



RESPOND vs. REACTION

1 Corinthians 4:12-13

"That doesn't seem fair."

"They had it coming."

"If you follow through on that I will make sure to get my revenge."

"Why me?"

We all have a sense of justice and right and wrong.

We all want justice; unless it's for us, we want mercy.

How does the bible speak to response as opposed to reaction? Specifically, when trying to do what is right, it still feels like we are in trouble or dealing with consequences.

Paul writes, "and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless, when persecuted we endure; when slandered, we entreat." (1 Corinthians 4:12-13a)

Utterly contrary to our world.

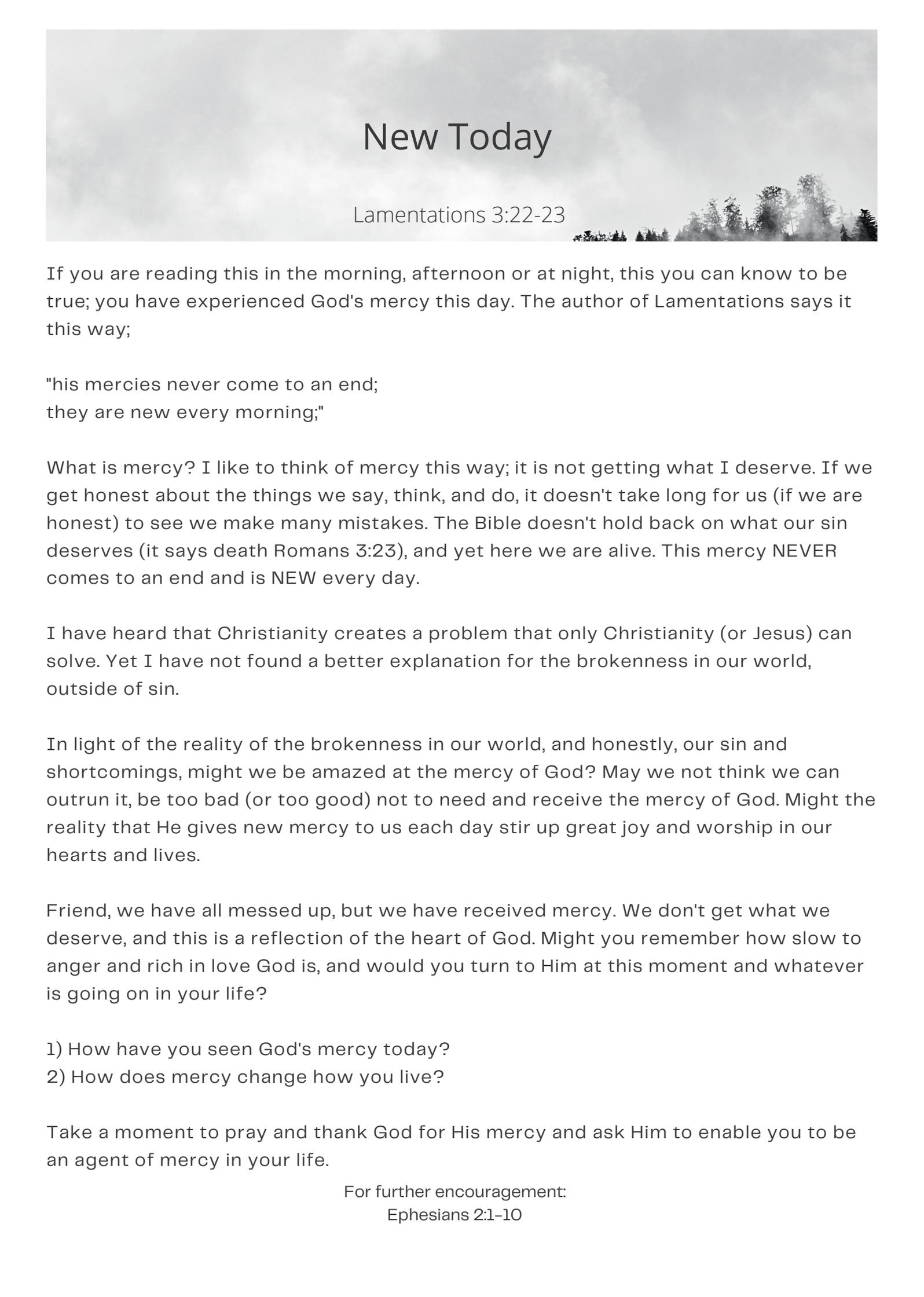
In today's world, if someone offends you in any way, you take it to the internet mob and allow them to deal with it.

Let us be a people who seek to reflect Jesus, who "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly." (1 Peter 2:23)

Just asking:

- 1) What causes you to react in anger?
- 2) What stirs up self-pity?
- 3) How do you handle criticism?
- 4) Have you asked God to help you be more like Jesus in how you respond to others?

For further encouragement:
Romans 8



New Today

Lamentations 3:22-23

If you are reading this in the morning, afternoon or at night, this you can know to be true; you have experienced God's mercy this day. The author of Lamentations says it this way;

"his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;"

What is mercy? I like to think of mercy this way; it is not getting what I deserve. If we get honest about the things we say, think, and do, it doesn't take long for us (if we are honest) to see we make many mistakes. The Bible doesn't hold back on what our sin deserves (it says death Romans 3:23), and yet here we are alive. This mercy NEVER comes to an end and is NEW every day.

I have heard that Christianity creates a problem that only Christianity (or Jesus) can solve. Yet I have not found a better explanation for the brokenness in our world, outside of sin.

In light of the reality of the brokenness in our world, and honestly, our sin and shortcomings, might we be amazed at the mercy of God? May we not think we can outrun it, be too bad (or too good) not to need and receive the mercy of God. Might the reality that He gives new mercy to us each day stir up great joy and worship in our hearts and lives.

Friend, we have all messed up, but we have received mercy. We don't get what we deserve, and this is a reflection of the heart of God. Might you remember how slow to anger and rich in love God is, and would you turn to Him at this moment and whatever is going on in your life?

- 1) How have you seen God's mercy today?
- 2) How does mercy change how you live?

Take a moment to pray and thank God for His mercy and ask Him to enable you to be an agent of mercy in your life.

For further encouragement:
Ephesians 2:1-10

PROOF

God has given us every reason to trust Him.

Have you ever heard the expression, "trust is earned"? The idea behind this statement is that we don't owe anyone our trust, but IF they earn it, we can choose to give it to them. I understand the sentiment behind such a philosophy. We want to protect ourselves from being hurt, which makes so much sense. Skepticism can be beneficial, but it can become a problem if we refuse to trust someone who loves us and demand they prove to us not only why we should trust them but what we trust them with.

Imagine a dear friend or mentor comes to you and says, "I want to give you a private island. This island location is in a tropical region and has every amenity you need to survive. You won't have to worry about a thing, and your family and friends can join you. The one condition is, the journey to get there is dangerous; it will be painful, and there is a chance you won't make it. Now, if you do as I say and follow my lead, I promise you will be safe. Many times you will be tempted to ignore me and look for an easier, softer way but trust me: the hard way is the only way to the island."

Keep in mind that you know this person, and they know you. What would your first question to them be? Maybe it would not be a question but a statement; "Yeah! kick rocks, bud!" Perhaps you would focus on the last bit of information and want to know more about the dangers involved. Maybe you don't have any questions and are infatuated with the idea of owning an island.

Regardless, we might want more information about our highly fictional situation before deciding to go on this make-believe journey. That seems fair, and I don't believe many would question your judgment for seeking the information. But I am convinced we miss out on gifts that God has for us because we want to know, "why do I have to do this?" and "what is it going to cost me?" Whether it is an entitlement issue, fear, or just rational thinking that keeps us from trusting God, we sometimes need to stay focused on the Guide and His promise to maintain faithfulness in our journey.

Reflection

There is no better example of trusting God the Father than Jesus. Jesus was in the garden and about to be crucified; this was His response to facing fear and uncertainty; "And going a little farther, he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me;" Jesus was not shying away from acknowledging fear: "nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." but He knew He could trust the Father. Because Jesus did not demand the Father to "prove it," but trusted Him, you and I have salvation. Trusting Jesus frees us from the bondage of "prove it" and releases us to the life of "your will be done." We can trust and know; that His will is the abundant life God has for us.

Don't rob yourself of the joy found in trusting Jesus by demanding that God prove Himself. Remember, He already has.

Further Study – Matthew 26





Help?

Psalms 121:1-4

"I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep."

I recently experienced the joy of covid (read with a dose of sarcasm). In the days it took to rest and recover, I was reminded how much I don't particularly appreciate asking for help. I like being self-sufficient, and our world loves the idea of being "self-made." In the days spent in my basement, I was struck by the reality that all the strength I may have one day can be gone the next, and if my power fails, who will help? Maybe you can relate? Perhaps when you feel good and life goes your way, you don't recognize the help you need.

"Help" can be defined as; "make it easier for (someone) to do something by offering one's services or resources." I don't think it is a reach to say that we can all relate to that definition at some point in our lives. When life presents obstacles, challenges, pain, struggle, uncertainty or fear, we must be aware of where we are seeking. The verses found in Psalm 121:1-4 provide several reasons to look to God for help in times of need.

- 1) Help comes from God - "My help comes from the Lord." The Psalmist is reminding us that WHO provides help. We can remind ourselves that when we needed the most "help" (when we were dead in our sin), God provided all we needed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. If He were willing to do that, He wouldn't fail us now in providing the help we need.
- 2) God is Creator - "who made heaven and earth"; in other words, God knows what is going on, how it works, why it works the way it does or doesn't and has complete control over all things found in this creation of His. This provides comfort to those who have asked for help and not received what we had hoped for because we know the one who created everything we see is in complete control.
- 3) God is Our Protector - "He will not let your foot be moved," there is absolutely nothing happening or moving in your life that God does not impact. He has shown that He knows what He is doing, and everything He does is found within His perfect will.
- 4) God Does Not Get Tired - "he who keeps you will not slumber," sometimes, hard things in life cause us to wear down, get tired and want to quit. Even at your weakest, remember that God is not off sleeping. He is, as my dad says, "Always doing something and never do nothing." He loves to help, provide, care for and give us all we need to flourish as His disciples. Do not put the limits you experience on a limitless God.

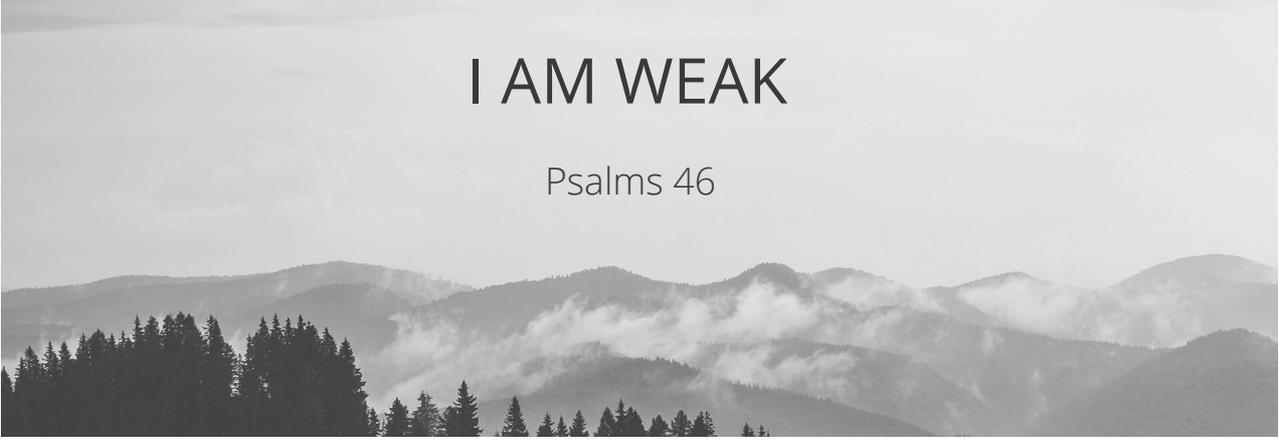
As life and storms roll in, ask yourself, "Where am I turning for help?" Might we, like the Psalmist, look to God, who made all, provides all and is all.

Think about it:

- 1) Where do you look in times of trouble?
- 2) How have you seen God help you in your life?
- 3) What reservations do you have for trusting God to help?
- 4) How does God being in control, all-powerful and never tiring help you find peace?

I AM WEAK

Psalms 46



One of the most intriguing things about our culture is the idea that showing any weakness makes you an utter failure. Not ALL the time, but it seems that if we are to show any weakness, it makes us vulnerable and weak. Yet the bible tells us it's in our weakness that Jesus can be strong (2 Corinthians 12). The hard part is applying that to our hearts.

We need to understand that it is not until we appropriate our faith in Jesus as our refuge that we can experience his strength. God's refuge and strength can not be an abstract concept to us, but it must be the truth we cling to. It is not a nice saying we have over the doors of our houses, but what we have ingrained in our hearts. God is my refuge and strength!

One of the most beautiful implications of the gospel is that we are free to be weak because Jesus has been strong for us. We don't have to stand in front of God and flex our spiritual muscles trying to impress him. What Christ has done on our behalf is enough. Remember, it is because we were weak and dead in our sin that Jesus came.

Because of Jesus and what he did for us in his life, death and resurrection, we are found in him and have access to God's sustaining strength. God's power that He gives to us will enable us to persevere through the most horrific times. I bet if we opened it up to hear from folks in this congregation about the faithfulness of God in providing strength in hard times, we would be here till next week. Yet, amid hardship, how quickly I forget.

Listen, our peace will come, not just by talking about who God is, but by trusting this to be personally true for us. Do you believe today that God is your refuge from evil? When we rest here, we find a peace that blows up all practical understanding. The psalmist says, "Our refuge," He is my refuge, He is your refuge, He is Trinity Christian Schools only refuge!

- 1) Where do you find your strength?
- 2) Are you aware of your weakness?
- 3) How have you seen God strong in your life?

THAT REALLY HURT

Have you ever had someone you trust say or do something that wounded you? If you said "No." Just wait. It's coming. All people, even those that love us the most, can say and do things that hurt us. The question is not If that happens, but "when that happens, how should we respond?"

I'll never forget when I was nine years old, a kid at school told me I had chicken legs. I am still talking about it speaks to the reality that it cut deep. This off-handed comment would shape my wardrobe for the foreseeable future, as I would rarely wear shorts growing up.

Proverbs 18:21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits."

I want to suggest that one of the most significant or destructive realities in our world is that very few take the reality we find in the verse listed above seriously.



Something I have been trying to do more of is speaking the way Jesus does in scripture.

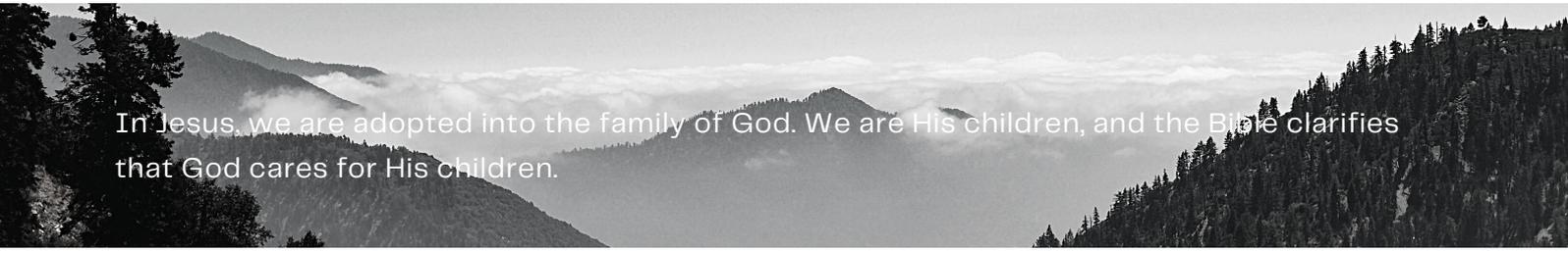
I am cool to get mad at what He gets angry at (which are very, very few instances). Namely, I focus on how he interacted with people who would abandon Him when He needed them most.

You see, Jesus knew what He had come to do, which was to go to the cross for our sins. He had chosen 12 men to be his disciples, and they would spend every waking moment of three years with Him.

Imagine how much it would have stung to have your best friends run and hide when you were in your greatest need. A young child confronts one of them, and he denies even knowing him (three times!) The pain of a loved one turning their backs on us is a reality we can all empathize with. Yet here is the best part, Jesus did not hold this against them and would be willing to die in their place for their sin. He would forgive and show grace to those who hurt him the most. He also did this for you and me, as we have turned our backs on Him.

Whom do we need to forgive in our lives, so we can be free of resentment and reflect the love of Jesus to people in our lives?

GOD CARES



In Jesus, we are adopted into the family of God. We are His children, and the Bible clarifies that God cares for His children.

Have you ever worried that God doesn't care for you? Maybe you have thought, "I don't want to bother God with the small things." or "This is too big even for God. I am not sure He cares." The good news is that although these doubts and fears are an everyday experience for us, they are not true. The Bible is a megaphone that God calls, "I care for and about you."

Here are some verses to remind you of this truth;

Psalm 34:15 - "The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry."

1 Peter 5:7 - "casting all your anxieties on him because he cares for you."

Psalm 136:1-3 - "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of the gods for his steadfast love endures forever. Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures forever."

Sometimes emotions, experiences, circumstances and maybe others say to us, "God doesn't care." I am going to suggest something that might sting a little. Worrying about if God cares is a waste of energy. He does care, and, as His child, you are NEVER not under His care.

An author named Paul Tripp said this; "If the big question isn't whether God cares, then maybe the real question, one that is more practical to us all, is, will I recognize God's care when it comes?" It has taken me many years to realize that God's care is not one-size-fits-all. Sometimes God's care is in dealing with consequences. Other times it is in relief of pain or finding a solution to a problem.

Reflection

When I question God's care, I have found that reflecting on the gospel is the most effective way to combat this doubt. Jesus cared, so He lived perfectly on our behalf. He cared about our sin, so He died for it. He cared that we receive salvation, so He rose again. He cares that we are still experiencing pain, suffering, confusion and affliction, so He promises to come again.

Life can throw some crazy stuff at us. People will hurt us, or life will be very hard and out of control. So in the moments of life when we feel lost or even at peace, stop and remind ourselves: "This is God caring for me."

For further study - Romans 8:31-39

Courage

"Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die. "He that will lose his life, the same shall save it," is not a piece of mysticism for saints and heroes... A soldier surrounded by enemies, if he is to cut his way out, needs to combine a strong desire for living with a strange carelessness about dying. He must not merely cling to life, for then he will be a coward, and will not escape. He must not merely wait for death, for then he will be a suicide, and will not escape. He must seek his life in a spirit of furious indifference to it; he must desire life like water, and yet drink death like wine." - G.K. Chesterton

What does it take to be faithful to Jesus?

It starts with grace. It begins with Jesus giving us what we don't deserve and providing us with all we need to follow Him. He has equipped us to live in His way and as His word commands. At times it can feel like we need to muster up the strength and do more on our own to accomplish what God has called us to. We feel this need to be fearless and bold, which are good and probably a necessary mental state to be in from time to time. But how can we be truly courageous? How can we live in a way that desires to live but is not afraid to die, as G.K. Chester suggests?

Deuteronomy 31:6

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

Some Ideas:

- 1) **Remember You Are Not Alone** - the verse above reminds us that God has promised never to leave or forsake us. That He goes with us, and because of His eternal presence, we can live with a love for life and no fear of death. God coming with us means nothing will happen that isn't a part of His plan.
- 2) **Remember Your God is Mighty** - The command to be strong is not God saying to us, flex your muscles. This reminds us that because He is with us (as a Christian, the Spirit of God dwells within us), He will be strong for us.
- 3) **You'll fail, and He Will Forgive** - We will have more failures than successes when it comes to being courageous in High School. When you fail, run to Jesus, don't run from Him. When we move away from God, we experience greater fear and cowardice. Let's draw near to Him, receive His forgiveness and grace and allow Him to love to reinvigorate our strength and courage.

WHY DID YOU DO THAT?

Do you ever do something and, after the fact, think to yourself, "Why did I do that?" I do this daily. I say or do something short-sighted, selfish, hurtful, rude, or dumb.

The wonderful thing about the Bible is that it can answer all of life's questions; we need to be willing to listen and apply.

Something to ask yourself is, Why do I do what I do?
Or a better question would be What is it I want?

Self-diagnosis questions help us understand why we do what we do.

The Bible takes about heart a fair amount.

Proverbs 4:23 says: "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life."

Luke 6:45 says: "...for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."

To "keep" is to watch over, guard or protect our "heart" or desires. The reason is that our hearts or desires will shape how we live. What we long for will be communicated in how we speak and live.

If we take the time to get honest about what we want, we can become more aware of the motivation that leads us to do things we might regret later.

As you go through your day today, pause and pray when you feel agitated, confused, frustrated, or afraid and ask God to guard your heart and guide your mind. Allow His Spirit and Word to guide your next step. Slowing down helps us slow down; when we aren't rushing through life, we are less likely to do or say things we regret.

Remember when Jesus was afraid (because He was), He took time to pray to His Father in Heaven. He confessed He would take another road if His Father willed it, but He would be faithful to the mission He (Jesus) was on.

We all make mistakes, but we don't always HAVE to make mistakes.

Let's guard our hearts and minds.

Let's pause and pray.

Let's trust God with what unfolds in our lives.

For more study, check out Matthew 26:36-56

TAKING INITIATIVE

"God takes the initiative and moves toward us; we take the initiative towards others. This is simple teaching with endless applications." – Ed Welch.

No one cares.

These words have crossed my mind on more than one occasion.

Have you thought that? Have you ever felt that no one cares about you in your world? You have felt this way and equally good a chance that someone in your life feels that way. We have opportunities every day to care for one another.

Here are a few ways we can care:



1) **Go After One Another** – Waiting for others to approach us is tempting. Every day, we have the opportunity to go after or pursue one another just like Jesus has pursued us.

2) **Listen. A lot** – Maybe we don't know what to say to someone in pain. That is just fine. More often than not, being quiet is more helpful to those hurting. We can be patient and listen to others because Jesus is patient and listens to us. You do not HAVE to have all the answers, but we can provide a listening ear.

3) **We Can Pray** – Perhaps someone has come to mind at this moment. Why not pause and pray for them? We do not need to understand every theological concept to pray for people we care about. Why not even go a step further, and let this person know you are praying for them. You never know how God may use that in their lives.

For further study, read Ephesians 4:1-3

THINK ABOUT IT.

"We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and **take every thought captive to obey Christ**" - 2 Corinthians 5:10

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." - Romans 12:2

Have you ever considered how powerful our thoughts can be? I was taught that my thoughts lead to feelings, and my feelings turn into actions. I have learned there is truth in this idea of "thoughts - feelings - actions." My actions have often started with a thought. The reality is that our minds are on the go more often than we are aware. Research shows we think more than 6000 thoughts a day. So what can we do? Here are a few suggestions that we can take from scripture.



1) **Own Thoughts You Are Aware Of** - When a thought pops in your mind, and you are aware of it, God has given you the grace to take it captive or not allow an idea to lead us to action. Remember, it is just a thought and doesn't need to lead to action.

2) **Head In The Word, Ear to The Spirit** - When our thoughts contradict what the Bible teaches, that doesn't make us evil. This reminds us that we live in a fallen world. The Bible helps us see what is true, right, good and pure. If our thoughts are not lining up with the Bible, it is a safe bet that this is not the leading of the Holy Spirit. If your head is in and your heart is submitted to the Bible, you can trust you will hear from the Spirit.

3) **Be Transformed** - The excellent question is, "Is this thought transforming me to be like Jesus, or conforming to the world?" God calls us to be transformed or be more and more like Jesus, and He promises to give us all we need to accomplish transformation rather than conforming. Trust God to do what He promises. The challenging thoughts don't have to lead us to conform, and they can be used to transform.

For further study, read Romans 12

GUILTY GRACE?

"The moments we feel guilty over our sin are moments we are being reminded of God's grace.

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even twhen we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—" - Eph. 2:4-5

I often find myself baffled, angered, saddened, and guilty over my sin.

The number of times it is the same sin. Again.

I Look at my life and think, "Will I never learn?"

The weight of my sin is heavy.

The reality of consequence sets in.



But God.

Every. Single. Time.

"But God is rich in mercy..." I do not receive what I deserve.



I have realized that God's grace is confirmed in the guilt.

I KNOW I AM MISSING GOD'S GRACE when I have no sense of responsibility for my sin.

Guilt is ours to feel but not ours to carry.

Jesus came to take the burden of our guilt and shame and give us His robe of righteousness.

See, guilt helps us remember a couple of things;

- 1) We all fall short. Everyday.
- 2) Jesus did not fall short. Ever.
- 3) We are hidden in Jesus' perfect life, covered by His blood and liberated by His resurrection.

So when we feel guilty, let's learn to pause and pray these words.

"Jesus, thank you for your grace that reminds me of my guilt. Thank you for your mercy that I do not receive what I deserve. Thank you for carrying my guilt and shame and freeing me to live for you. Forgive my sin of _____ and may I walk in the newness of life you bring. In Jesus name, Amen."

For further study - Ephesians 2:1-10

STRESSING

Stop and Read Psalm 131

"O Lord, my heart is not lifted up (proud); my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvellous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore.",

Does this Psalm reflect what is going on in your head and heart?

If not, can you identify where the 'noise' is coming from?

Do you have too much going on?

Are you full of pride (either fear or arrogance)?

Are you hurting, alone and confused? Are these emotions causing you to feel the weight of circumstance rather than live in the love of our Savior?

Feeling stressed is normal, and we all experience it. The problem comes into play when it consumes us, and we are paralyzed or controlled by stress rather than the Spirit of God.



How can we deal with stress when it becomes unhealthy or even sinful in our lives?

1) **Faith** – David makes it clear, I am not more brilliant or trusting in anything or anyone other than you, and because of this faith, he has peace.

2) **Bulldoze** – We have thoughts and feelings that need to be silenced in our hearts and minds. This does not come easy but takes consistent discipline. When our thoughts tell us lies, our emotions stir up pride, or our circumstances cultivate self-pity, we must speak the truth to our souls. David Powlison said, "It is self-mastery by grace, not sleepy ease." Do not allow the shouts of the world to drown out the whispers of Jesus. Those whispers remind us of His love, mercy, grace, power, strength and victory.

3) **Remember the Reason** – We look to Jesus first and find peace. Once we remind ourselves of all that Jesus has done, we can continue the process of living in that peace He freely offers. Hope in Him brings peace in the present.

Further Study:

Galatians 6:16

Romans 2:29

2 Corinthians 4:17

2 Peter 1:4

GOD UNDERSTANDS

One definition of empathy is "the ability to understand and share the feelings of another."

When dealing with hurt, confused or angry feelings, do you ever feel that no one can relate? So often, we deal with emotions and assume no one can understand us.

The author of Hebrews tells us there are no feelings we can have that Jesus cannot relate to. As the one who came as fully God and fully man, He can relate to and knows all we feel in this life.

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." - Hebrews 4:15



Not only can Jesus empathize with us in our pain, confusion and suffering, but He also plays the role of Great High Priest. This means He knows how we feel and petitions the Father to grant us grace and mercy.

When you find yourself feeling alone, afraid and unsure of how to process what you are feeling, come to the feet of Jesus. He understood and went through the same emotions yet lived without sin. He can give you the grace you need to withstand no matter what you are going through. He won't reject you, belittle or mock you, nor will He be annoyed by you. Allow His empathy towards you to empower you to show the same kindness to others.

Jesus knows, Jesus freely gives, and Jesus restores hope. We are called to share this grace with anyone who asks.

Further Study - 1 Peter 3:8, Romans 12:15, John 11:35, Hebrews 4:15

DESCRIPTION OF GOD'S LOVE

The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. – Psalm 145:8

You can tell a lot about a person by what they love.

In our world today, the word love is thrown around like a Frisbee. Whoever is in the field of life will hear "I love you." Often from people who hardly know them.

But what is God's love like?

And how does He show us, love?

The Bible does this annoying thing where it actually speaks to every question we may have. The Bible also consistently gives the best definitions for emotions/choices, like when we deal with love.

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. (1 Corinthians 13)

We live in a world where love is often diluted to nothing more than a fleeting emotion or just sex. So please hear me on this: if you are ever in a relationship and your boyfriend or girlfriend says, "If you love me, you'd..." run, fast and far! That is not loving; that is, begin manipulative and destructive.

Reflection

From Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, we have defined what love looks like: patient, kind, not jealous, not arrogant or rude. It doesn't have to have its way, it's not irritable or resentful, and it treasures truth. Love bears all things.

Who doesn't crave to know and be known in this kind of love? Well, the good news is, we can. This perfect love is precisely how God loves us. God's love is perfect, unchanging and life-transforming.

In moments you feel unloveable, speak truth into your heart. Know that God's love for you is real, His compassion is great, and He is holding you in His eternal grip.

Further Study – Psalm 36:7; Romans 5:8; John 15:13



DEPRESSION



Depression is real. It hurts or takes away all feelings. Thankfully we have one who knows what it is like to be in every valley of depression imaginable, and He offers us grace in our most significant time of need.

(Please note, we are speaking in terms of feeling depressed and not being clinically depressed.)

Would they even notice if I was gone?

I seem to hurt everyone I love.

It's impossible to get out of bed today; I can't do anything when I don't feel anything.

These are questions and statements I have told myself during highly challenging times. So how do we deal with feeling depressed? I think we have some excellent advice found in the pages of scripture.

Hebrews 11:1– Faith. Faith is when we are sure of something we cannot see. When we can't find the motivation, energy or will to do anything, let us take a moment to look back to our Savior. With faith that He will provide us with what we need to get through this day, we can put one foot in front of the other and leave the outcome to Jesus.

1 Peter 1:22 – One of the most effective ways to combat feelings of depression is to serve and love someone else. Are you feeling numb? Why not call a friend and see how they are doing. You could help around the house, encourage a sibling, don't overthink this but find a simple way to serve someone else to fight back the numbness we can feel.

Philippians 1:6 – SAY IT OUT LOUD! God won't leave you unfinished. Don't give up; you are still breathing, and Jesus has a plan. Changes are guaranteed, and we know that from the verse listed above. Write it down, memorize, speak, sing, shout it out. GOD WILL MAKE A WAY!

For more information, check out

www.prpbooks.com/series/resources-for-changing-lives.

SUFFERING

"Hardship and suffering are everywhere, and Scripture counters by speaking to our troubles on nearly every page." – Ed. Welch

Experience has taught me a couple of things about suffering. Firstly, not all suffering is the same. It is fair to say that no suffering is identical. That said, suffering provides us with common ground to hang out on together. One consistency I have noticed/experienced is often time suffering feels like a wilderness experience. Maybe that is because I don't expect suffering to be a part of closeness to God.

That said, wandering the wilderness is often very challenging, and suffering is never fun, but it does not have to be wasted, and more often than not, God is doing something in the midst of suffering rather than its absence (Deut. 8:1-3; James 1:2-5).



In no way do we need to minimize our suffering and pain.

Run to God with them and lament before Him.

He hears. He cares. He loves. He provides. He supports. He gives grace. He relieves. He sustains.

Some helpful questions/thoughts I have learned to ask myself while suffering:

- 1) Will I believe Jesus and trust Him with my circumstance?
- 2) Remember how God has provided what I needed in the past.
- 3) Do I trust that Jesus knows what I am going through, and how does that help me?

Ask God to give you faith where you have none. Write down and remember God's faithfulness and trust His purpose. Your pain is real. Your God will be faithful.

"Hardships will come.

Jesus has gone before us in hardships and knows us.

The love of the Father pursues us in our hardships.

The Father's justice, which will silence all perpetrators and restore His people, is assured."

– Ed Welch.

DEMANDING LOVE?

"Were the whole realm of nature mine, That were a present far too small; Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all."

A friend once said gratefulness is a feeling, and gratitude is an action word. His point was that I can feel grateful yet not demonstrate these feelings in my life.

Have you ever had someone do something for you that blessed your socks off?

How did you respond?

Why did you respond the way you did?

It is natural for us to respond to a loving act with gratitude. Our natural response to someone caring for us is not to swear at them and tell them to kick rocks. On the contrary, when we receive a good gift, we try to show our gratitude with words and actions.



Take a moment to reflect on the love God has shown you.

What is the most excellent picture of love? **"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."** - John 15:13

God's love for us is so great that he would send His one and only Son to pay the penalty for our sin. The truth is, I don't think about this enough, and I am not convinced we can think about the cross too much. When we get honest about where we have been and what we have done, we come to grips with our fallenness and sin. Something stirs up within us that screams, "someone save me," and this is what Jesus has done for us.

This type of love demands the best response. We get to give ourselves to serve Jesus and others. We get to trust Him, obey Him, and love Him for today and all eternity.

This call to Christians may seem too demanding, and some will reject the work of Jesus based on the idea that God should not demand this much from us. In reality, when God says, "lose your life, and you will find life in me," He is presenting to us the best and most fulfilling life possible. When God demands all of us in response to His love, it is for our good and His glory.

For Future Study - John 15: 1-17

JUST ADMIT IT

"The admission of sin doesn't lead you somewhere dark and depressing because you know you've been given grace that is greater than your sin, and your celebration of grace is real and heartfelt because it's done in the context of your confession for the very sin that grace addresses." - Paul Tripp.

No one wants to admit failure.

We are lied to often by the world that would convince us to deny, defend and deflect as often as possible. Admission is a sign of weakness. It usually takes extreme brokenness for someone to come to an end of themselves and admit they have failed, are tired and need help.

The Bible gives us hope even though we are so weak.

"But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

2 Corinthians 12: 9-10

Paul is making it clear that when we are weak is when Jesus looks incredible.

This includes when we mess up and sin when we blow it. Jesus gives us the freedom to admit, confess and run to the open arms of Jesus and find that we can be forgiven, freed, redeemed, restored, loved and given amazing grace.

Some questions/suggestions to ponder:

- 1) Do I have a secret sin I plan to take to the grave? What stops me from confessing and being forgiven?
- 2) What comes to mind when I think of Jesus knowing my weakness and sin?
- 3) Write a letter to Jesus, admit your weaknesses, sin and shortcomings and ask Him to give you what you need. Don't quit until the miracle happens.

"Confession of sin without the celebration of grace leads to guilt, self-loathing, timidity, and spiritual paralysis. Embracing grace without the admission of sin leads to confident theological "always rightism," but does not result in change in your heart and life."

- Paul Tripp



WE, NOT YOU.

"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." - Ephesians 6:12

Maybe it's just me, but sometimes when I hear about other people struggling, I think things like, "Glad it's not me." Yet God has made it clear that our battle is a serious one, and chances are there is strength in numbers.

What would your world look like today if you stood with those struggling?

What if when we hear about others' sins and failures, we ask, "What are WE going to do." In other words, this might suck for you right now, but you will not fight this fight alone.

The easy road is to turn a blind eye, laugh at, minimize, judge and walk away from people in their battle with life or sin.

The calling is to stand with them. Hold them up when they are too weak to stand. Speak when they have no voice. Love them when they can't love themselves. Pray without ceasing, care without compromise, love with sacrifice.

What does our world look like if each of us said "We, not You" to those around us?

Can we take seriously the call to consider others better than ourselves? Will we be willing to stand in the gap and fight FOR one another, not against?

Are we willing to ask, "What are WE going to do about this?"

For Further Study: Philippians 2



Time

A poem by Pastor Tim

The hardest part about time is it doesn't care.
We can plead, slow down, and even desperately try to earn back lost moments.
Time will laugh.
Time will continue.
Time won't look back or make sure you are good to keep up.
Time will take away moments of joy and replace them with moments of pain.
Time has rightly been called an enemy.

BUT

Time is not God.
God is the one who holds time in His hands.
God told time when to begin.
God will tell time when to end.
God is not bound by time, and yet He works within time.
God reminds us that even though we may waste time, He can restore lost years.
God does not begin like time.
Nor does God end like time.

Your time at TCS may have come to an end.
But time continues to move.
As you leave, consider making the most of your time.
But don't fear time.
Stay present, but don't get stuck.
Be excited, but keep trusting.
Don't live in regret, but don't allow time to cause you to forget.

Above all, allow your time on this side of heaven to be invested wisely.

Give of your time generously.
Be thankful for your time daily.
Love like you'll live for eternity.



YOU'RE GONNA MAKE IT

"Do you ever wake up and wonder, "How am I going to get through today?"

It feels as though you will never make it with so much going on.

The good news is that God has given us exactly what we need for today.

Lamentations 3:22-23 says;

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;

his mercies never come to an end;

they are new every morning;

I want to remind you of two truths:

1) God's love NEVER ceases. Stop. Think about what you just read. Remind your heart at this moment, "I. AM. LOVED."

2) God's mercies never come to an end. This promise and reality of the gospel are that Jesus' mercy NEVER comes to an end. You cannot outrun or run out of the mercy Jesus has for you.

3)"His mercies are new every morning." Every day, you wake up, and God has gone before you. He already knows what you need for this day.

Stop.

Read that again.

He has given you all you need for today. So don't stress about tomorrow yet, don't allow fear to creep in and rob you of the joy of today.

Watch, listen and give thanks for the mercy God will pour out in your life today. Live in reality that in His grace, He died in your place. In His power, He rose again, and for His glory, He will return.

Spend a moment and write down a few ways you have seen God's faithfulness in your life.

Then, express your gratitude for His mercy and ask Him to show you how you can share this love and grace with others.

Further Study - 2 Peter 1:3, Philippians 1:6



PRAY AND PRAY SOME MORE

"Prayer is one of the greatest gifts of being a child of God. Jesus has made way for us to draw near God and be heard and loved.

How often do we forget to eat breakfast? What about breakfast and lunch on the same day? Have you ever gone 24 hours without eating because you forgot to eat? Chances are you have not. This is because our bodies tell us when we need food through pain and exhaustion.

Similarly, our minds, bodies and souls seem to signal that we need to pray. Experiencing fear and anxiety, sadness, or even joy are signals to pray. The thing is, prayer is not so much about discipline but about receiving a gift. Jesus laid down his life so that the veil may be torn, and we are now free to enter into the throne room of grace (Hebrews 4:16) and present our requests to God with thanksgiving and peace (Philippians 4).

What if we approached prayer as we do food? What if we prayed not only because we saw our desperate need for it but understood it is a beautiful gift that allows us to grow in our love and understanding of who He is and what He is like!

Jesus emptied Himself so that we could be filled with the Spirit of God, which leads us into communion with God the Father. Why would we not embrace this gift and enjoy time with Jesus? Our gift of access to the throne was purchased with a price. So let us, with confidence, draw near and know we are heard, loved and will be faithfully directed when we seek Him.



Reflection

"Prayerlessness is an expression of our meagre confidence in God's ability to provide and of our strong confidence in our ability to take care of ourselves without God's help." Not only does a lack of prayer communicate self-reliance, as opposed to God-reliance, it also robs us of the joy of watching God faithfully answer prayer.

Prayer is not a duty but a delight. God wants to hear from us, will fight for us, and won't fail us. He may not answer our prayers exactly as we would like, but nothing can undo what has been done to bring us into the throne room of grace, no matter the circumstance.

Further Study – Philippians 4:4–9, Hebrews 4

SO LONG

"Don't cry because it's over. Smile because it happened." – Dr. Suess

I am not often one who lacks the words to say, but this feels like one of those moments.

Trinity Christian School graduating class of 2022 – I have always said you were special.

So as you read this last little letter, be reminded of that.

Maybe you have picked up this book, and it has been ten years since you graduate.

Maybe it's the day after graduation.

Maybe you are happy.

Maybe you are heartbroken.

No matter what, I need you to know this.

YOU ARE LOVED.

YOU MATTER.

YOU HAVE VALUE.

YOU HAVE WORTH.

If no one has told you today, allow me to be the first, I love you.

You as a class will not soon be forgotten and will be fondly remembered, and have been used to improve the lives of all of us who worked with you.

May Jesus be so kind as to, in this very moment, remind you of how rad you are.

Dear Jesus,

You know exactly what is happening in my friend's heart and mind.

Comfort, convict, free, give grace, empower, give courage, remind and bless them as they read this.

In your name, I pray,

Amen.

I love you every day.

Pastor Tim

