

The Struggling Times: Facing Illness, Loss and Grief

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Preacher: Pastor Scott Johnson

[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Good morning.

[2 : 11] Good morning.

We just have a couple of announcements. We are forming a visitation team and we have training on Monday. So if you are interested or want to find out more about the visitation ministry that we're starting here, please talk to me.

Pictures. So there is picture sign up for the new pictorial directory. It's not scary. Bob is going to be taking our pictures. 15 minutes.

I promise you, you'll be in and out. We want everybody to be in the new directory. So it's been a long time since we had that. Sign up sheets are on the table.

They are also going online. They're going live later this week. So if you haven't signed up yet, most of them are in August. They're today. Please make sure that you either sign up on the table in the back or go online to sign up for those.

[3 : 38] And that's it. So may the peace and joy of Christ be with you today and always. Good morning, everyone.

And good morning to everyone online. Some of you recognize this face. It's Tom's daughter, Ronnie. So we have a real treat having her with us this morning.

And the message for today deals with loss and grief and where is God in all of that. And one of the beautiful things about the Psalms is that they reveal the nature of a broken heart and a wounded spirit, but remind us that God is with us through it all.

And he's greater than anything we can walk through. So I invite you to stand for our two songs this morning, What a Friend We Have in Jesus, and here with me. What a Friend We Have in Jesus, What a Friend We Have in Jesus, forfeit oh what we this pain we bear oh because we do not carry everything to God in prayer every trials and temptations is there trouble anywhere we should never be discouraged take it to the Lord in prayer can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share

Jesus knows our every weakness take it to the Lord in prayer are we weak and heavy laden cumbered cumbered with the Lord of care precious Savior still our refuge take it to the Lord in prayer to the Lord to the Lord to the Lord to the Lord and to the Lord in prayer in his heart you'll take and shield thee will be thou will find us there will be thou will find us there we we the love the chocolate that said

[7 : 54] Roman Hero will bless Every single day To meet you in this place See you face to face Will you show me Reveal yourself to me Because of your mercy I fall down on my knees And I can feel your presence Here with me Certainly I'm lost within your feelings I've been a one for your time Here in this moment I'm tied somewhere and nothing to your love

For everywhere I go I am not alone You call me as your own To know you and me know You are only And I fall down on my knees And I can feel your presence here with me Certainly I'm lost within your feelings God, I've been the wonder of your touch Here in this moment I surrender to your love I surrender to your grace

I surrender to Lord You took my place I can feel your presence here with me Certainly I'm lost within your feelings Caught up in the wonder of your touch Here in this moment I surrender to your love You may be seated Thank you Amen and amen

Good morning church It is always a joy to be in God's house And it is always a joy to be connected with church family Whether you are with us online And if you are here with us as well It is a joy to experience that connection You know that for these past few weeks We've been walking together through a sermon series Called Bless to Me And today we get to one of the more challenging chapters of that series Which is called The Struggling Times We're talking about loss We're talking about illness We're talking about grief And how blessing can be a part of those experiences That is a challenging walk And a challenging subject So we are leaning into God As God takes us to that place But even thinking about some of those struggles We may have faced We know we serve a God who we worship We know we serve a God who is good Amen?

Amen? And so let us open our hearts Give our best to God As we continue in our worship time With our call to worship Praise the Lord Who has shown us the wonders of his unending love And who for the sake of his name Leads us and guides us We do Lord We do Lord We do Lord You are our God And our lives are in your hands Lord Lord we lift our lives Amen Within yous Ame completely Amen Amen so often we're tempted to always look for the return on our investment on our generosity and sometimes that's worthwhile because we need to be good stewards of God's gifts but sometimes that generosity is about what God is doing in us instead of what we're doing through our gifts so we're now entering that moment in our service where we are challenged once again to believe the promise of Jesus we hear it in Acts 20 35 and Jesus said it's more blessed to give than receive one day eyes that are blind will see you clearly and one day all who deny will finally believe one day hearts made of stone will break in pieces and one day chains once unbroken fall down at your feet so we wait for that one day come quickly we want to see your glory every knee falls down before me every tongue offers you praise with every hand raised singing glory to you and unto you only we'll sing glory to your name one day one day voices that lie will long be silenced one day all that's divided will be whole again one day one day death will retreat and with its white black one day love will defeat the strongest enemy so we'll so we'll wait for that one day come quickly

[16 : 02] we want to see your glory every knee falls down before thee every tongue offers you praise with every hand raised with every hand raised singing glory to you and unto you only we'll sing glory to your name we know not the day or the hour all the moments in between we know the end of the story when we'll see your glory every knee falls down before thee every tongue offers you praise with every hand raised singing glory to you and unto you only we'll sing glory to your name your name your name your name me cannot speaking any stronger her name the

Oh God, our creator, our redeemer, our sustainer.

We thank you for the blessings that have come into our lives. We thank you for the friends and the time to be together and the music. Everything that we have and everything we are comes from you.

And at this time, we thank you and give back to you. Help us to do your work in this world. In your name we pray. Amen. You may be seated.

So we come to a time of sharing joys and concerns. Does anybody have any joys or concerns that they would like to lift up today?

[19 : 13] Angela. I know a lot of people are not aware of the situation I've had for the past six months, but I just want to give God the glory for the healing time for the evening.

I don't need brain surgery, but I do welcome any prayers to bring healing to the finish line. So pray for healing for Angela, but also celebration. Heather.

Abby is getting ready to go down to New York City. She leaves on the 13th for the 8th week. This week she's traveling down to meet the doctors and get all up in the machine. So Abby, the youth that has cancer, is going to be traveling to New York City.

And her procedures, her radiation starts on the 13th. So make sure that we keep Abby and her family in their prayers. We praise God that Dad's heart surgery went really well in this home.

And we're just very grateful God is good. So Walt did fantastic. And keep healing prayers. Okay. My brother was sick, but he has recovered well.

[20 : 25] Okay. So recovery. All right. Oh, congratulations. I'm celebrating 29 years to marry your dad.

Congratulations. Did you have one thing you wanted to say? You told me you.

I'm going home tomorrow. You're going home tomorrow. Did you have another one that you said? No, just going home. Okay. So that you're going home tomorrow. Okay. Oh, you have one?

Our mom and dad have it there in the first week and we're in the fall. And? Yes. So congratulations. Congratulations. Congratulations. Thank you.

Thank you. And Tom and Sarah also have one later this week. 38, right? So we have lots of celebrations.

[21 : 32] All right. Please join your hearts with mine in prayer. Heavenly Father, we lift up those today who still need your care, who still need your touch in their lives.

But we thank you for the celebrations of friends and family, of anniversaries and travel. We thank you that your spirit moves in our lives within us.

God, there are still people in our world suffering that need your touch. Help us to go out and be the light to those people.

Help us to show kindness. Help us to show caring and compassion. Help us to be their light. God, we thank you for the joys and the celebrations of each and every day.

In your name we pray. Amen. Our first scripture this morning is from Psalm chapter 31, verses 1 through 5.

[23 : 00] In you, Lord, I have taken refuge. Let me never be put to shame. Deliver me in your righteousness.

Turn your ear to me. Come quickly to my rescue. Be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name, lead and guide me.

Keep me free from the trap that is set for me. For you are my refuge. Into your hands I commit my spirit.

Deliver me, Lord, my faithful God. Our second reading is from 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verses 1 through 12.

Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways.

[24 : 11] We do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly, we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants, for Jesus' sake. For God who said, let light shine out of darkness, made his light shine in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard-pressed on every side, but not crushed.

Perplexed, but not in despair. Persecuted, but not abandoned. Struck down, but not destroyed.

[25 : 42] We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body.

So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. This is the word of our Lord. Thanks be to God.

Friends, would you join me for a word of prayer, please? Loving and gracious God, we are indeed thankful. Thankful for your presence here among us now, and as you move gently yet powerfully among all your people.

Touch each of us. Give us what you know we need, because our hearts are open as we have sung and praised you this morning. Plant a seed in us that you know will grow and bear fruit for the honor and the glory of your name.

[27 : 02] Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen. Life is a marathon, not a sprint.

Life is a marathon, not a sprint. Anybody ever heard that? When someone says that to you, what does it conjure up in your brain? What's the lesson, do you think, when people say that?

I'm really asking. What do you think the lesson is when people say that? Say again? Big duration. Long duration. Prepare for the long haul.

Long duration. Okay? Anyone else? That's not wrong, by the way. I just want to see if there's others. There's going to be ups and downs. Okay? Anyone else?

Slow it down so you can make it. Slow it down so you can make it. Okay? Angela? Always growing and evolving. Always growing and evolving. Okay?

[28 : 02] Anyone else? You're going to get tired. You're going to get tired. See? Y'all don't even need me. So I'll just pack it. I'm gone. But all of that is real wisdom.

All of that is real wisdom. And like we said, we've heard that phrase a lot, right? That life is a marathon and not a sprint. And people usually say that for the very reasons that we're talking about.

But I wanted to bring that up today because, as you heard me say, we're talking about a really challenging thing today. We're talking about struggling times.

Times when life is really, really hard. And when we talk about seasons in our lives that are hard, this laying down the idea of a marathon next to it might be helpful for us.

Because when we talk about marathons, we kind of get these things. That it's going to take a while. That you're going to get tired. That there's going to be ups and downs.

[29 : 06] We can see that. But, we know it. Like we can process it intellectually. We get it. But when a season of difficulty hits our lives, that wisdom kind of fades.

And there's a reason for that. And we'll talk about that some more. But as we keep taking this challenging subject. This idea of seasons of loss.

Seasons of illness. Seasons of grief. And use that to say, well, how do we find blessing in these?

Because this idea of blessing. Especially during a difficult season. Is one that everybody struggles with. Now some of us may have walked with God a little longer.

Some of us may have different experiences. And we may understand it a certain way. But, everybody. I'm willing to bet without exception. Struggles with this idea of finding blessing in a season of grief.

[30 : 12] Now. So, let's go back to this marathon thing for a second. I'm just curious. Anybody ever run a marathon? Anybody ever do it?

Alright. So, we got one person who's run a marathon. Now. Marathons are hard. Right? By definition. Marathons are hard. Right, Jim? Marathons are hard.

Marathons are hard. And now. For those of you who don't have the context. The idea of a marathon comes from the city of Marathon. Which was a city in Greece. And a messenger.

Ran from the city of Marathon to Athens. When the Persians attacked the city of Marathon. The distance from Marathon to Athens was 26.2 miles. Hence. The idea of a marathon.

That's where it is born. Okay. What people often leave out of telling that story. Is when the messenger. Whose name was Pheidippides. When he got to Athens. He died.

[31 : 12] They often leave that piece out of the story. Right? Now. See. There's a reason why a lot of us don't run marathons. Now. That being said. Though. The thing about it.

Is marathons are physically challenging. That's why most people choose to run them. Because they are so physically challenging. And the idea of being able to complete one.

Talks about your physical fitness. And your mental fitness. Etc. And that's why so many people like the idea. Of running a marathon. People train intensely. To be able to run them.

As we've learned more about the science of it. We've gotten even worse. We have these things called ultra marathons. Now people run marathons day after day after day. Things of this sort of thing.

I was watching this one thing on YouTube. About training for marathons. As I was studying for the message here. There was a guy on there. Who'd actually run. And it's still hard for me to get my head around this.

[32 : 07] 170 marathons. I'm like. Wow. That's impressive. Right? You know. See. I have this running joke with my wife.

I say. I don't even like driving 26 miles. So the idea of running 26 miles. It seems like beyond comprehension. But here's the thing.

As I said. We have learned more and more. About what this takes. To do well. And it is really demanding. On the human body. Now part of the miracle.

Of the way God put us together. Is that we can do it. Right? Because our bodies are built a certain way. You know. Because we stand upright. Because we have this built in natural shock absorber.

And the way our legs work. Between our knees and our feet. All different kinds of things. That we've discovered. That make it possible. For us to do this. Right? And so it's possible. But it's hard.

[33 : 07] Now why do I spend so much time on that? Because if you know something. Is hard. And you know something.

Is going to be a struggle. And you know something. Is going to demand. An awful lot of you. And you know there's going to be ups and downs. And you know that you're going to be tired. And you know that you're going to evolve.

And you're going to grow. If you know those things. You go into it. With a certain understanding. Expectation. And you prepare. You're going to be a struggle. You're going to be a struggle. You're going to be a struggle.

So let's get back to what we were saying before. I'm willing to bet. That there's no one sitting here today. For whom the idea.

That a season of difficulty in life. Is new information. That I'm willing to bet. That most of us. If we have gone through life. Probably got the message pretty early on.

[34 : 08] That there are going to be seasons. Of hard. Right? I'm pretty sure most of us got that. And we got that pretty soon. On the journey.

And yet. When those seasons come. They seem to still. Kind of turn us into this place. Where we act like.

Well wait a minute. Like there's this surprise element to them. Not that necessarily the circumstance might be a surprise. Like you might not have expected a certain diagnosis.

You might not have expected the loss of a loved one. I get that. But the idea that seasons of difficulty come in life. Being a surprise.

Is something different than that. You follow? And that's why. When we as people who claim and follow Jesus.

[35 : 04] Hit these moments. This is where. We really have to do some unpacking. About what it is we claim. What it is we believe.

And that friends. Is one of the reasons. Why we visit this question of blessing. During such a season. Now let's remember a couple of things.

We've talked about. Now one of the things we've talked about. Over the course of this series. Is what blessings are. The pop culture would tell you.

That a blessing is sort of like a present for doing well. Right? It's kind of like a prize. You behave yourself. God throws you a solid. That is not what a blessing is.

Now does God reward people? Yes. Okay. But we understand blessing to be much more. Than just simply a prize. That it's a manifestation of God's love in your life.

[36 : 05] It's something God does. To show you that God is with you. That God loves you. And that's much bigger than a little carnival prize.

Secondly. That blessings are not just material. We tend to lock in on material things as blessings.

And that's part of what happens in pop culture. And in bad church culture. Because we tend to think that it's all about how many toys you get. But we've said that's not how this works.

That's not how this works. The other thing we want to talk about. Is remembering what blessings are. And how blessings work. Gets us to where we need to spend a little more time.

Because when we open the series. We talked about the idea. Of just because something bad happens. Doesn't mean there's no blessings happening. And that's where we're really going to focus today.

[37 : 08] Because we get kind of confused around this idea. And there's a reason for that. Because when something bad is happening. We tend to go.

Well wait a minute. What happened God? And that's because we bought into some wrong thinking. Because we have started to get to this.

We kind of fall into this trap of saying. Well if God loves me. And I'm doing all right. Then I shouldn't have any problems. Somehow that message.

Still seems to follow us. Even though. We know that's really not how it works. But that message still seems to stay with us. So the minute we get a problem.

We're like. Well wait a minute God. You done messed up. Notice we put it on him. Right? No. Because I'm fine. You must be falling asleep at the wheel.

[38 : 04] And we know that's not how it works. Yet that's still what we do. So then. How do we fix that?

That's where we need to sit. So how do we fix that? I want to go back to this marathon idea. Because. If you've ever run anywhere.

You know how hard it can be. Okay. I used to run regularly for exercise. Can't do that anymore. Age and a bad knee have kind of taken that piece away from me. But the thing about running.

Especially running for a marathon. Is you notice if you've seen people run a marathon. And if you've seen them run any sort of distance race of any kind. One of the things that happens. Is you'll see runners doing their thing. But along the way.

There will be people. Who will be handing them cups of water. Right? Everybody know what I'm getting at? You'll see them run by. And sometimes they'll snatch it. They'll drink it. Sometimes they'll just pour it on their head.

[39 : 04] Because they're overheating. And those sorts of things. And. What we need to know about that. Is hydration. And fuel is extremely important during a marathon. The science of marathons tells us.

That you should really hydrate. Roughly 15 to 20. Every 15 to 20 minutes. Because of the way our bodies work. Because if you don't do that regularly.

I'm willing to bet some of us also. Have probably seen those images of runners that have pushed too hard. Where they start to struggle. They start to cramp up. That they're trying to keep going.

But their bodies physically just can't. They physically can't. And that's the science of it. Okay? That their bodies physically can't. Sometimes they hallucinate. All kinds of things can be happening.

The reason why I want us to get that. Is. If life is a marathon. And not a sprint. The thing you might want to check on.

[40 : 04] Is how well are you. Taking care of yourself. As you keep putting one foot in front of the other. Because if you're not taking care of yourself.

As you continue to run the race. We see what happens. Right? And. When a season of difficulty hits.

It becomes even more important. So. If. As I said. You ever run anywhere. And you started to feel what that feels like. Your legs start to burn.

You're having a hard time breathing. You might be starting to feel a little headache. And you're still trying to push on through. This is hard. But thank goodness.

Someone was there. With that cup of water. That makes it possible for you to keep going. Friends.

[41 : 07] That's. Where we need to take our heads. Around this idea of how we find blessing. In seasons of difficulty. Because. If you've.

If you've. If you've. Experienced grief. If you've experienced. Physical illness. If you've experienced. Loss.

There were probably times. During those seasons. Where someone. In some kind of way. Reached out to you.

To offer you. Some metaphorical. Cup of water. During the season. While you were still. Trying to put one foot.

In front of the other. So. If it was a season of grief. And that thing we tend to do. Which is to prepare meals. And take them over people's houses.

[42 : 03] Because people. Don't even think to eat. Much less cook. Right. That thing of calling. And checking on people. Just giving them safe space.

That says. You know. How you doing today? Without judging. Just opening a door. That says. How is it with you today?

The thing. That we do. If someone's in the hospital. Whether they're aware. That you're there or not. To simply just be present. So that they're not alone. Those prayers.

That go up. That you're aware of. And the ones. That you're not. We don't often. Count that.

Sometimes we. Miss that. And there's reasons for it. Now. I want you to follow with me. I wanted to bet.

[43 : 01] I'm not the only person. In the world. Who. Has probably. Banged their foot. On a table. Unexpected. Right. It happens more often. Than I would like.

But I want you to stay with me here. So you get up. You're doing your thing. Whatever that thing may be. You're just making your way through the house. Or what have you. And then. And you know that it's a lot louder.

And probably a lot less church friendly. Right. But when you do it. When you're in that moment. However long it lasts.

You know how your whole brain just shuts off everything. But the explosion of pain that you're experiencing. Right. So if the phone is ringing. If you got something on the stove.

If the dog is barking. If you got something in your arms. You don't care about any of that anymore. Right. All you can see is that flash of light. And then whatever comes flying out of your mouth.

[43 : 57] And your whole brain just blows off your head. Right. Because whatever you're dealing with. Is just right here. You can't do anything else. Now.

Believe me friends. I am not comparing. The idea of banging your foot on a table. To losing a loved one. Or being in the hospital. Or anything like that. But in many ways.

The phenomenon is kind of similar. Because when that thing hits. All that's happening. Is your brain just has this in front of it. Right here. And you can't process anything else.

And even if friends are trying to be nice to you. And they're offering those words of kindness. People are doing those things. You're just so in this moment. And the pain is just so big.

However long it takes for you to make your way out of that morass. But it's right there. And the thing is. Is that. You may not even be aware.

[45 : 00] Of the ways in which. People are still holding out those cups for you. You may not even be aware of the fact. Until you get through it.

That you may have had. Three. Four. Ten. Twenty of those cups. Before you're even conscious. That you had them. You just know.

That you're a lot further down the road than you were. And that's. Where we need to remember. That blessing is still possible.

Blessing is still with us. Even during hard seasons. Because we get so caught up in the idea that the season is hard.

That we miss the fact that God is with us in the season. We get caught up in the question of. Well God why is this happening to me?

[45 : 57] And it's perfectly natural to ask that question. And it's okay to ask that question. God can handle that. Okay. So if you want to cry out.

And if you want to wrestle. And if you need to just let that off your chest. Have that conversation with God. Trust me. God can take it. Now you might not like what God has to say.

God might not answer you. But it's okay for you to ask. And it's okay to work on it. But the challenge for us.

Is that if we're so worried about that. We kind of missed. All the cups. And we're mad at God.

Because we got the problem in the first place. And God was saying. See what we've missed is God's promise is not. There will not be storms. God's promise is. I will be with you.

[46 : 59] Check that. We keep bringing the idea. That says there shouldn't be any storms. And God's promise is.

I will be with you in the storm. Not that there will not be storms. And if you start from the wrong place.

You see why you have the struggle. Does that make sense? Right? And if that's where your energy is going. Being mad at God because the storm exists.

Instead of realizing that God is standing there with an umbrella. Then you fundamentally misunderstood. And that's where this idea of the blessing.

In the midst of our seasons of difficulty gets twisted. So I want to visit this with a little bit of what Paul had to say.

[48 : 01] You heard Sandy read two passages today. And the one comes from 2 Corinthians. 2 Corinthians is an interesting letter. Now it's interesting in the sense of its context.

Because people don't really doubt that the Apostle Paul wrote it. Paul had an interesting relationship with the church in Corinth. That there was a whole lot of drama going on there. Okay?

And he wrote multiple letters to them. Two of which have made it into the Bible. Now this one is offered to them. Because of a situation that's happening.

Now after Paul is not there. What happens is some other people show up. And they start to question Paul's authority. They start to question Paul as an apostle.

And they start to question some of what Paul has taught. And the people in the church in Corinth. Some of them are like. Well what are we supposed to do about this? And some of them have also said. You know we like these guys better.

[49 : 04] And Paul writes this letter to the church that says. We got to deal with this. Okay? So that's the broader context. Now.

We're in the middle of a section of it. Where Paul is saying. Essentially laying down his credibility. Right? Saying look. This is who I am. And this is what I've been trying to do.

Now. I want to read a couple pieces of this. And highlight them. In relationship to what we've been talking about. We're going to start at verse 3. We're going to read through verse 6.

Start at verse 3. Read through verse 6. So this is 2 Corinthians chapter 4. Verses 3 through 6. And even if our gospel is veiled. It is veiled to those who are on the road to destruction.

The God of this age has blinded the minds of those who don't have faith. So they couldn't see the light of the gospel. That reveals Christ's glory. Christ is the image of God.

[50 : 04] We don't preach about ourselves. Instead we preach about Jesus Christ as Lord. And we describe ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake.

God said that light should shine out of the darkness. He is the same one who shone in our hearts. To give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory.

In the face of Jesus Christ. So where Paul is. Is he's trying to get the church to understand. Look when we came to you.

And we were sharing the message with you. It was all about the idea. Of just showing you who Jesus is. And how Jesus works in our lives. What God wants. And how God is at work in you already.

And what happens is some people just don't get that. Because of circumstances. Because of the enemy. Because of any number of reasons. They just don't see that.

[51 : 02] But we were never here. To simply puff ourselves up. We were here to make sure we pointed the way to Jesus. Now. Why read that today?

We read that today. Because if we want to understand blessing. In seasons of difficulty. One of our challenges. Is that the season of difficulty. Can keep us from seeing God at work.

In the ways in which people are taking care of us. So when those gestures of kindness come. When you have a strength that you can't name.

That makes you keep getting up. And going back for the next test. When your hope won't fade away. Even though you are tired. You are angry. You've gotten cynical.

And you have all kinds of bad things to say. Still there's a part of you that knows. I'm going to still keep going. And when we talk about the gospel being veiled.

[52 : 00] You see where we're getting at. Because sometimes when the pain is too big. When the struggle is too big. All of that makes it hard for us to see God in the moment. That doesn't mean God's not in the moment.

It means it's hard for us to see God in the moment. Yet our brains are telling us that God isn't there.

And see that's the difference. We get so locked in where we're at. We think that God has stopped taking our calls. Or God is not on the job.

Or what have you. And those things are simply not true. It's just where we are. It's keeping us from understanding. How God is at work.

God understands that. God gets that. But we need to get that. Because it's real easy for us to talk ourselves out of how our relationship with God works.

[53 : 08] And remember that's an us problem. Not a God problem. And if we choose to separate. And when we choose distance.

When we choose to try and keep running this race without grabbing those cups as we pass them. Why would we be surprised that we hit that place where our bodies stop working and we can't run anymore.

We start breaking down. That's how we get caught. That's the risk.

So we need to be aware of how blessing works in these moments. We need to be aware of how God works in these moments.

Because it's easy for us to get distracted. It's easy for us to get lost. And when we do. And we choose distance. We choose separation.

[54 : 06] Instead of reaching out and leaning in. And taking what God is offering. Which allows us to keep running the race in the best way.

That's our struggle. We have to get back to that. And I want to read you this second piece. So we're going to read verses 7 and 8.

And what Paul tells the people is this. But we have this treasure in clay pots. So that the awesome power belongs to God and doesn't come from us.

We are experiencing all kinds of trouble. But we aren't crushed. We are confused. But we aren't depressed. We are harassed.

But we aren't abandoned. We are knocked down. But we aren't knocked out. What Paul is trying to get people to understand.

[55 : 05] Is that everything he was going through. The beatings. The arrests. The attacks. The repeated attacks on who he was. And everything about his ministry. What Paul is telling everybody is look.

This is God at work in me. Okay. Y'all can do what you want to me. But God is not going to be stopped. And when he talks about this idea of jars of clay.

What he's saying is we have this precious treasure. Which is the Holy Spirit. God at work in us. But it's in jars of clay. The reason why he says that is because the pottery of the time was cheap.

That when they put their stuff in jars and bottles. They would make it out of mud and put other stuff in it. But it was so fragile. It was easy to break. And that was the point. That it would often be cracked.

And people would be able to see in it. And that sort of thing. So if you put the precious treasure in the jar of clay. And if it's the light of Christ.

[56 : 07] People will still see it. And that's how we need to start thinking. That's where we might need to change how we move through crisis.

That's how we need to start seeing God at work. And perhaps blessing in a season of difficulty. Because however the spirit of God manifests itself around you.

During those times. However God is reaching you. During those times. God is still at work. We may be blinded by the pain.

We may be frustrated. We may be afraid. We may be having all of those feelings. But God gets that. But that doesn't mean God isn't with you. What we have to do.

Is do the very best we can to keep our eyes open. We have to do the very best we can to make sure that we keep our ears open. We have to do the very best we can to make sure we keep our hearts open.

[57 : 14] So that as God is doing these things. That we don't miss out on them. Because we can't run this race.

Without those cups. One final point. Actually two. Sorry about that. One final point. I said two now. I said two.

Alright. First one. Is that. When we do this. When we know this is happening. I wanted to bet that most of us. As we said before.

It is not news to us. That seasons of difficulty happen. Think about that season of difficulty. Is that no matter how hard it was.

Or even if you're still in it. I'm willing to bet. I'm willing to bet. That it wasn't the finish line. I'm looking around the room.

[58 : 16] And since you're here. And I'm looking into that camera. And I'm looking into that camera. And I'm going to trust that y'all still with me. That no matter what that season of difficulty was.

You're through it. You're through it. And just like that runner. And you hear about that mythological wall. That runners hit when they run long distance.

And how they have to press through it. In order to keep going. Seasons of difficulty happen. But they are not your end.

And if you trust that to be true. And you trust God to be with you. Then don't let the season overcome you. That you are in. Because it's easy to do that.

We'll talk ourselves into believing that this is just it. That God is over. This is done. When in fact. You've been through bad seasons. And you came out of them.

[59 : 23] Or. Let's just keep it clear. That season may have changed some things about you. And you may have to deal with it. Like say it's a medical condition. Something like that. That's true.

That's real. But. You're still in the race. And you haven't crossed the finish line yet.

And God is still with you. Last piece. If. You know what that's like. If you have received those cups along your journey.

And you're still able to put one foot in front of the other. One of the things that Jesus has taught us. One of the things that is perfectly clear in our lives as disciples. Is that we are not just meant to receive.

And so if you know the benefit. Of having God. Work in God's life. Work in your life. That underneath all those gestures of kindness you received during your season of difficulty.

[60 : 24] You could see and feel God's hand at work. Then. Knowing what it did for you. Make sure you listen for the spirit. And you do it for those who are still running.

In all the ways that you are capable. In all the ways that you are called. You. Don't just receive that nourishment.

Be sure to provide it to someone else who you know needs it. Because there are times. When you have to be the one who receives.

But there are also times when you have to be the one who gives. That is how our God works. And if you've known the difference it made. To have someone show up for you.

Be sure. When the time comes around. That you show up for someone else. That's what it means to be a part of the body. That's what it means to be a disciple.

[61 : 26] Love has to be real. And when we love like that. When we know what that feels like. We can find blessings in our seasons.

And we're able to just keep going. One foot in front of the other. Day after day. Until we reach the finish.

Life's a marathon. Not a sprint. Amen. And amen. Loving and gracious God. We are so grateful.

Grateful for the ways in which you continue to show us kindness. The ways you continue to show us blessing. Even in our hard moments. Even in our hard seasons. Help us to receive that.

Let your voice be clear. Let your voice ring true. Always break through those things that we have in front of us. That keep us from seeing and hearing you clearly.

[62 : 27] Lord we know that you are there. We know that your promise is that you would never leave or forsake us. We know that your heart doesn't change. That you make love real in the ways in which you show up.

So Lord even when we are blinded to it. Even when our feelings cause us to close our hearts to it. We thank you for the grace that is you never giving up on us.

Help us to always see you. To see you in those seasons. So that we can make it to the finish. And see you there.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Creator of heaven and earth, you formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life.

[63 : 50] When we turned away and our love failed, your love remained steadfast. You delivered us from captivity, made covenant to be our sovereign God, and spoke to us through the prophets.

And so with your people on earth and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn. Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. Holy are you and blessed is your son, Jesus Christ.

Your spirit anointed him to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind. To set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to announce that the time had come when you would save your people.

He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and ate with sinners. By the baptism of his suffering death and resurrection, you gave birth to your church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death, and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.

[65 : 02] When the Lord Jesus ascended, he promised to be with us always in the power of your word and Holy Spirit. On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said, take and eat.

This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And when the supper was over, he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples and said, drink from this, all of you.

This is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. And so in remembrance of these, your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. Pour out your Holy Spirit on those gathered here and on these gifts of the bread and cup.

Make them be for us the blood and body of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood. By your Spirit, make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

[66 : 35] Through your Son, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in your holy church, all honor and glory is yours, almighty Father, now and forever. Amen.

And now, with the confidence of the children of God, let us pray. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, and forgive us our children. We forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us evil. Thy is kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[67 : 33] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

For those who are helping serve, please come forward. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.

[69 : 11] Thank you.

Thank you.

You always fill my heart with songs of deliverance.

Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in you. I will trust in you.

Let the weak say I am strong in the strength of the Lord.

[70 : 53] I will trust in you.

I am strong in the strength of the Lord. I will trust in you.

You are my hiding place.

You always fill my heart with songs of deliverance.

Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in you. I will trust in you.

[72 : 39] Let the weak say I am strong in the strength of the Lord.

Let the weak say I am strong in the strength of the Lord.

Let the weak say I am strong in the strength of the Lord.

I will trust in you. I will trust in you. Let the weak say I am strong in the strength of the Lord. Let the weak say I am strong in the strength of the Lord. Let the weak say I am strong in the strength of the Lord.

Our final song is called Made Me Glad. I just want to share the chorus with you. It says, you are my shield, my strength, my portion. Deliverer, my shelter, strong tower, my very present help in time of need.

[74 : 34] I invite you to stand for the closing song. Let the leaders in the strength of the Lord. We buddy, our Savior. My mother speaks to you. They are all the plans made closer to you. Let the choices of body are sound and wonder for you.

WE BAHOVE YourNEY Once We've compromised, we carry out 2 to 7 or ver. Let the forcé and restore and the strong warfare Matte Silence ngon WSet I will bless the Lord forever I will trust Him at all times He has delivered me from all fear He has set my feet upon a rock

And I will not be moved And I'll say of the Lord You are my shield My strength, my portion, deliverer My shelter, strong power My very present hope In time of need Whom have I in heaven but You?

I will trust You And You have made me glad And I'll say of the Lord You are my shield My strength, my portion, deliverer My shelter, strong power My very present hope You are my shield My strength, my portion, deliverer My shelter, strong power

My very present hope In time of need My very present hope In time of need My very present hope In time of need When your legs are sore Your lungs are burning Feels like you can't take one more step And all of a sudden You come around a corner And there's someone with a cup That's who our God is So even in your difficult seasons

[78 : 45] Remember you can find blessing You can find blessing Trust God to be God All the time And never lose sight of you Now in the name of God Our creator and king In the name of Jesus Christ Our Lord and our savior In the name of the Holy Spirit Our comforter And our sustainer May God bless us now As we leave to love and serve God And all God's children Amen Our ~~■■~~eres Amor In the name of Jesus Christ Our Lord and our moist

Amen Amen Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.