

# 40 Weeks of Purpose

Week 25

## Transformed by Trouble

*Review from Last Week:*

### **POINT TO MEDITATE ABOUT FROM LAST WEEK:**

*The Truth transforms me*

The Word of God is the single most influential tool that God uses to change us.

In order for us to help the process, we should:

- 1) Receive the Word
- 2) Read the Word
- 3) Research the Word
- 4) Remember the Word
- 5) Reflect on the Word

### **VERSE TO MEMORIZE FROM LAST WEEK:**

- John 8:32 (KJV)

32) *The truth shall make you free.*

But, it might just make you miserable first!

### **QUESTION TO CONSIDER FROM LAST WEEK:**

*What one thing has God told me in His word that I haven't started doing yet?*

#### • ***Why me?***

- If you haven't asked this question yet in your life, you probably will
- It's much easier for me to answer it for you now, then it is for you to hear it then...
- God has a purpose behind every problem

- Harry Whittaker, Through Patience and Comfort of the Scriptures  
*“The Bible requires you and me to believe that God is at work - bringing sickness and pain – for a specific purpose. Obviously, our Heavenly Father would like us to cooperate, instead of just sitting back in mystified resignation and letting Him get on with it as though He were a heavenly dentist.”*
- God uses problems to develop your character
- God depends on problems to transform us into Christ-like people
- But, take heart! It’s not hopeless:
- John 16:33 (NIV)
  - 33) “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”
- Troubles serve a distinct purpose in our life
  - When viewed from immortality, they will seem trivial and silly...
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 4:17 (NIV)
  - 17) For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.
- But, when you are sitting in the hospital waiting room at 2:00 a.m., waiting for the Dr. to come out and give you some information...
  - They don’t seem trivial at all!
- We all face trouble
  - No one is immune to pain
  - No one is insulated from suffering
  - No one gets through life trouble-free
- **Life is a series of problems**
  - Often overlapping, pushing for immediate attention
  - Some never fully resolving
  - Some eventually going away
  - Some are small
  - Some are big...
- But, they are all important!
  - Problems are part of God’s plan to grow you, stretch you, push you, pull you and **TRANSFORM** you into a different person

- This is a normal part of life
  - Don't think that you are the only one going through things like this
- Look at what Peter says,
- 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:12-13 (MESSAGE)
  - 12) Friends, when life gets really difficult, don't jump to the conclusion that God isn't on the job.
  - 13) Instead, be glad that you are in the very thick of what Christ experienced. This is a spiritual refining process, with glory just around the corner.
- Why does God bring us trouble?
  - What is the reason behind this?
- God uses problems to draw you **CLOSER** to Him
  - We are closest to God when we are broken and brought low
- Psalms 34:18 (NLT)
  - 18) The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those who are crushed in spirit.
- Your closest times with God will probably be your **DARKEST DAYS**
  - When your heart is broken
  - When you are feeling abandoned
  - When you are out of options
  - When the pain is great
  - When you are all alone and finally turn to God
- It is during suffering that we learn to pray our most authentic, heartfelt, honest prayers
  - When you are brought low, you simply don't have the energy for fake prayers
- We learn things about God while suffering that we simply can't learn any other way
- God knows this...
- God can stop troubles from happening if He wants
- God can deliver you from trouble if He wants
  - But, God is more concerned about **TRANSFORMING** you than **TRANSPORTING** you

- God could have kept Joseph out of jail
  - God could have kept Daniel out of the lion's den
  - God could have kept Shadrach, Meschech and Abednego out of the furnace
  - God could have kept Job from bankruptcy and disaster
  - God could have kept Paul from being shipwrecked
- But, God let every one of these problems happen...
    - And each one of the individuals involved was drawn closer to God as a result
- Problems **FORCE** us to look to God for help instead of trusting in ourselves
    - Problems force us to depend on God instead of depending on ourselves
- Paul talked about this after one of his low points:
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 1:9 (MESSAGE)
    - 9) We felt like we'd been sent to death row, that it was all over for us. As it turned out, it was the best thing that could have happened. Instead of trusting in our own strength or wits to get out of it, we were forced to trust God totally—not a bad idea since he's the God who raises the dead!
- **You'll never know that God is all you NEED until God is all you've GOT**
- Regardless of the cause, none of your problems could happen without God allowing it
    - Everything that happens to you God allows, and He intends to use it for good
- Let's talk about Romans 8:28-29 a bit...
- Romans 8:28-29 (NLT)
    - 28) **And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.**
    - 29) For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn, with many brothers and sisters.
- ***"All things work together for good to them that love God"***, has to be one of the most misunderstood verses in the Bible
    - Many see it as saying, *"God causes everything to work out to a happy ending"*
    - Some see it as saying, *"God causes everything to work out the way I want it to"*
    - And some negative people even see it saying, *"God causes MOST things to work out okay, but many things just simply don't work out at all."*

- Let's look at what it really says, word by word...
- ***"We know"...***
- Paul sees this a very clear, confident, almost commonplace knowledge
  - Our hope in difficult times isn't based on wishful thinking, a positive frame of mind, or optimism
  - Our hope is based on the certainty of the truth that God is in control and that He loves us
- ***"that God causes"***
- God CAUSES
  - God is in control
  - Your life is not a result of random chance or luck
- God has a plan for you
  - And He never makes mistakes
  - God is perfect
- ***"everything"***
- God's plan for your life involves EVERYTHING that happens to you
  - Not just your Baptism
  - Not just the Spouse that He brought you
  - Not just the career that he has guided you into
- God's plan involves your mistakes, your sins, and your long hidden hurts
- God's plan for you includes illness, debt, disasters, divorce and death of loved ones
- Unlike anyone else...
  - God can bring good out of evil
- ***"to work together"***
- With God things work together, not separately or independently

- The events in your life work TOGETHER with God's Plan for you
- Life is not a series of isolated acts
  - But interdependent parts of a process designed to transform you into the Character of Christ
- Each individual act might seem out of place, distasteful or upsetting
  - But, God blends them all together for good
- ***“for the good”***
- God does not guarantee that everything in your life will be “good”
  - Much of what happens in this life is evil and bad
- But, God specializes in bringing Good out of Bad
- Did you ever notice that in the Family Tree of Jesus, there are only four women listed?
  - Tamar - Seduced her Father-In-Law to get pregnant
  - Rahab - Was a Prostitute
  - Ruth - Was a Gentile (A Heathen!) She broke the law by marrying a Jew
  - Bathsheba - Committed adultery with David who then murdered her husband
- Why would God choose these women to be in the lineage of the Messiah?
  - Because he specializes in bringing Good out of Bad
- God's purpose for your life is greater than your problems, your pain and even your sin
- ***“of those who love God”***
- This promise is only for God's children
  - It is not for everyone
- All things work for BAD for those living in opposition to God
- ***“and are called according to His purpose”***
- What purpose?
  - ***“God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son”***
- Everything that God allows to happen in your life is permitted for that purpose!
- Everything!

- It is not **Time** and **Chance** at work in your life, it is the hand of God!
- Let's talk for a few minutes about **Time** and **Chance**
- Everyday, good, honest, God-fearing Brothers and Sisters are beset with troubles that can shake the soul...
  - Questions pile up unanswered
  - And the mind wanders in a maze with no way out
- Children get sick
- Car accidents happen
- Women lose their babies
- People get laid off
- Loved ones die...
- And these tragedies are miniscule compared with an earthquake in Central America, or a tsunami in Asia
  - Somehow we are able to take disaster in stride, until it comes calling at our door
- Then the sledgehammer of fate smashes the happiness out of our lives
- And the agonizing questions keep coming back?

- **Why?**

- The answers often do not come easy
- But, one answer must always be rejected if it rears it's ugly head:
- ***"Time and Chance happeneth to them all"***
- Brother Harry Whittaker did an excellent job 25 years ago of putting that nonsense to rest
- Brother Harry provided four excellent reasons why we must not look at Ecclesiastes 9:11 in this context:
  - 1) There is no other verse like it
    - In all of Scripture, there is no other Bible passage that carries this teaching
    - Never base a theory of life and death on an isolated passage
  - 2) This is a Pagan Philosophy
    - The world tries to come to terms with a bad situation by saying,
      - ***"When your number is up, you've had it"***

- The only two places in the Bible where this kind of thinking is found are Pagan in their origin
  - The Philistines sending the Ark back to Israel did so in an attempt to try to figure out if was **chance** that had happened to them
  - And Isaiah (65:11) chastises apostate Israel for their superstition and following the foreign gods by saying, “Ye are they that forsake the Lord, that prepare an altar to “Luck” and provide a Drink Offering to “Chance”

3) “Chance” doesn’t actually imply Haphazard

- The Hebrew word PEGA does not rule out the idea of Divine control, in actuality it insists on it!
- Other examples where the same word is used show us:
  - Jacob was **MET** by angels in Genesis 32:1
  - God **LAI**D on him the iniquity of us all in Isaiah 53:6
  - If they didn’t sacrifice in Exodus 5:3 then God would **FALL** on them
  - Samuel was to **MEET** a company of prophets in 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 10:5

4) Jesus taught that everything is in God’s hand

- Even the smallest of things are in God’s hand
- A sparrow is so cheap that you get two for a penny...
  - And when one falls to the ground, God knows about it
  - Notice it doesn’t say that God protects it from falling?
    - But, when it does it is my God’s control and direction
- The very hairs of your head are numbered!
- So, how what conclusions should we come to?
  - **God knows best**
    - God knows, and He knows what is best for you...
- The race *is* not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill...

## **But God determines WHEN and WHAT is going to happen to them all!**

- Brother Harry concludes...
- As a dog is to a man, so is a man to God
  - A dog understands his master's speech and behavior is a few small things
    - You open the cabinet that has the biscuits in it, and he comes running
    - You pick up the leash and he goes to the door
  - But, you bring him to the Vet, and hold him down while the Vet puts that big needle into his backside, and the dog will NEVER understand that!
  - Why should the kind, affectionate master allow his beloved pet to suffer such painful treatment?
    - Because the Master knows best
- God wants to **TRANSFORM** us
  - He wants to change us
- He will use every means in His great abilities to do so...
- We are like raw stones, and God wants to shape us into the most precious jewels possible
- God shapes us with the hammer and chisel of adversity
  - If the cute little jeweler's hammer isn't strong enough to chip off our rough edges
  - Then He will use a sledgehammer
  - And if we are really stubborn, He will resort to a jackhammer
- God will use whatever it takes to get us to change
- Every problem that He presents us with is a character-building opportunity
  - The more difficult it is, the greater the potential for building up our spiritual muscle and moral fiber
- What happens outwardly in your life is not as important as what happens inside you
- Your Circumstances are **TEMPORARY**

- Your Character will last **FOREVER**
- God is looking to develop your Faith...
- 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:7 (MESSAGE)
  - 7) Pure gold put in the fire comes out of it *proved* pure; genuine faith put through this suffering comes out *proved* genuine. When Jesus wraps this all up, it's your faith, not your gold, that God will have on display as evidence of His victory.
- The refining fire burns away all impurity
  - It's often not a pleasant process
  - But, look at the beauty of the result!
- Since God intends to make you like Jesus, He will take you through the same experiences that Jesus went through:
  - Temptation
  - Loneliness
  - Stress
  - Criticism
  - Rejection
- Hebrews explains the result of all this on Jesus
- Hebrews 5:8-9 (CEV)
  - 8) Jesus is God's own Son, but still he had to suffer before he could learn what it really means to obey God.
  - 9) Suffering made Jesus perfect, and now he can save forever all who obey him.
- God wants us to go through the same things and come out with the same result!
- Romans 8:17 (Message)
  - 17) We go through exactly what Christ goes through. If we go through the hard times with him, then we're certainly going to go through the good times with him!
- The problem is...
  - Problems don't always produce what God intends
- Many people become **BITTER** rather than **BETTER**

- In order for you to be changed like Jesus was, you have respond like Jesus did
- Here are Three things to keep in mind when facing your problems:

### 1) **Remember that God's Plan is Good**

- God knows what is best for you, and had your best interests at heart
- No matter what happens, no matter how bad things look...

- Always remember that God's Plan is Good

- Look how clearly Joseph understood this truth

#### • Genesis 50:20 (NIV)

- 20) You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

- This is hard to remember when new problems come your way, and you are still dealing with the original set
- This is hard to remember when God seems to be saying NO to your prayer for relief
- But, you have to believe that it is for your good...

#### • Hebrews 12:10 (MESSAGE)

- 10) While we were children, our parents did what *seemed* best to them. But God is doing what *is* best for us, training us to live God's holy best.

- Stay focused on God's Plan, not your pain or problem
- This is clearly how Jesus was able to endure the pain of the cross:

#### • Hebrews 12:2 (LB)

- 2) Keep your eyes on Jesus, our leader and instructor. He was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy he knew would be his afterwards.

- Your **FOCUS** will determine your **FEELINGS**

- If you look to the **WORLD**, you will become **DISTRESSED**
- If you look to **YOUSELF**, you will become **DEPRESSED**
- If you look to **JESUS**, you will find **REST**

- The secret to endurance is to remember that your **PAIN IS TEMPORARY**
  - But, your **REWARD IS ETERNAL**

- Paul endured many hardships the same way,

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 4:17 (NLT)

17) For our present troubles are quite small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever!

## 2) Rejoice and Give Thanks

- This one is hard...

- What do you think when you read verses like this?

- 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:18 (NIV)

18) Give thanks in **all** circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

- How is this possible?

- How are you to give thanks in all circumstances?

- The key for me was understanding that God is not saying,

“Give thanks **FOR** all circumstances”

- But, rather...

“Give thanks **IN** all circumstances”

- God doesn't expect you to be thankful for suffering, for evil or for sin

- Or for their painful consequences in this life

- Instead God wants you to be thankful that He is using your problems to **TRANSFORM** you

- The Bible says, “Rejoice in the Lord always!”

- It doesn't say, “Rejoice over your pain”

- No matter what is happening in your life, you can rejoice in God's love, care, wisdom, power and faithfulness

## 3) Refuse to give up

- One of my favorite speeches was given by Winston Churchill on October 29, 1941 to the Harrow School

- He rose to the podium, and stood staring at the young boys for over 3 minutes...
- **“Never give up”**, he said, **“Never, ever, ever, ever, ever give up.”**
- Of course, there was more to the speech than that, but it’s my favorite part...
  - It reminds me of our calling in Christ
- We are called to be patient and to be persistent...
- Character Building is a slow process
- James 1:3-4 (CEV)
  - 3) You know that you learn to endure by having your faith tested.
  - 4) But you must learn to endure everything, so that you will be completely mature and not lacking in anything.
- Whenever we try to avoid or escape the difficulties in life, we short-circuit the process, delay our own spiritual growth, and actually end up with a worse kind of pain...
  - The worthless type of pain that accompanies denial and avoidance
- Character Development is all about praying for God to **CONFORM** you, and not just **COMFORT** you
  - Ask God to use your problems to make you more like Christ, and not just make you feel good

**POINT TO MEDITATE ABOUT THIS WEEK:**

*God has a Purpose behind every Problem*

**VERSE TO MEMORIZE THIS WEEK:**

- Romans 8:28 (NIV)

28) *In all things God works for the good of those who love him*

**QUESTION TO CONSIDER THIS WEEK:**

*What problem in my life has caused the greatest growth in me?*