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Finding Hope In Hard Times
“Hope For Your Circumstances”
(Part 3)

Intro: How do we find the hope to keep going even in the midst of painful circumstances? Doesn't it just seem to be getting worse? With all that is going on in our economy and around the world, now we have to worry about a possible pandemic! Our circumstances have not improved? What do we do? How do we cling to some hope despite the circumstances? Today I want to give you 4 Biblical truths that produce hope even in the midst of our painful situations...even when life seems out of control.

I. Negative Circumstances Are Normal

1 Peter 4:12 “Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you.” (NLT)

John 16:33 “I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.” (NLT)

A. Negative circumstances are part of a fallen world

1. If we embrace negative circumstances as something strange and abnormal, we will always struggle with hope. If we have a belief that nothing bad / painful / or uncomfortable should happen, we're going to be hopeless most of the time.
2. Peter tells us “don't be surprised”. Jesus promised trials and sorrows. We live in a fallen sinful world with fallen sinful people. Therefore, bad circumstances are going to happen to us.
3. This doesn't mean we live in fear and dread of the next negative event. It just means we embrace reality. In this world, people lose their jobs / have financial struggles / get sick / car accidents / natural disasters / suicide bombers / people get divorced / abused / children are born with birth defects.
4. Everyone in this life experiences negative circumstances just from being in this world. No matter who you are! It is amazing to me how many people have this perspective of me that nothing negative ever happens.
 - I have had 2 root canals in one month / optic nerve in right eye is 50% gone – eye drops / 3 years ago my family was in a car accident / I still get moles in my yard!

5. I don't tell you these things to complain or to make you feel sorry for me. I tell you these things so that you understand I am in the same world you are! The one that's painful! We're in this thing together! We all live in this fallen world.

B. Negative circumstances do not indicate God's punishment

1. It is so important to not draw this conclusion. Haven't you done this? "God, what are you doing?" "Did I do something wrong?" God is the One you need when things go south. If you think He's punishing you, you will avoid Him rather than draw near to Him.
2. Never doubt God's unconditional love for you. Once you doubt this, you lose all hope! This is what some of you are doing right now in the midst of your circumstances. You are doubting God's love / His goodness / His grace and mercy towards you. AND, you are losing all hope because of this! (character of God)
3. Negative circumstances are the result of living in this fallen world. At other times, they can be the result of our own poor choices in this life. I know I can be my own worst enemy. Some of my pain is self-inflicted.
4. Instead of drawing a conclusion that will cause me to avoid God, we need to draw a conclusion that will cause me to run to Him. Therefore, when we experience negative / painful situations, we should put our trust in the God who loves us and give Him our undivided attention. WHY?
5. Since God knows painful circumstances are part of life, He doesn't waste them. Therefore, if we truly want to experience hope, we need to give God our attention during these times. These are times for divine instruction.
 - You may be in the midst of some very stressful / painful circumstances – and you're wondering if God wants your attention. The answer is YES!

II. God Uses Negative Circumstances To Develop Our Maturity

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

James 1:2-4 "Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing." (NLT)

- There is hope because we see that the circumstances are not pointless. God will use them in our lives! If God is going to do good things in us through our circumstances, we have to respond in a manner that produces hope. (Staying immature is hopeless!)

A. We must choose between fighting or following

1. We can either fight against the circumstances or choose to follow Christ in the

midst of them. We can shake our fist at God or bow our knees. We can declare the injustice of our situation and remain the same; OR we can humble ourselves before God and be transformed. Which are you doing?

2. This doesn't mean we live in denial of our emotions. We hurt / grieve / cry / discouraged / depressed / we rage / we weep / - God made us emotional beings and we must be honest with these emotions. Denying our feelings is unhealthy and emotionally dishonest. God can handle our emotions.
 3. Part of learning to stop fighting is learning to process our feelings vertically. It's OK to tell God you don't like what's going on in your life. It's good to tell Him how deeply you hurt or how angry you are. There is release and healing in this! This is what King David did. This is why I love the Psalms. (explain)
 4. God wants to use the trials of this life to mature us into the people He wants us to be. If we continue to fight against them, we miss these lessons...we miss the character development that He wants. Frankly, I'd rather learn it the first time!
 5. If you are in the midst of some tough circumstances, will you be willing to tell God, "OK, I will quit fighting. I choose to follow You God!" It doesn't matter if you don't know what that means. He'll show you! But choosing to humble yourself before God is how you stop fighting.
- Share – before Foothills – washing windows – telling God I'll wash windows for the rest of my life if this is what He wanted. This response changed my life!

B. We must stop asking why and start asking what

1. I think the most natural question to ask when our circumstances are painful is "WHY?" Why Lord did you let this happen? It has been my experience that this is a question God rarely answers immediately. You see, He doesn't owe us an explanation. I know this is tough for some of you. He wants us to trust Him!
2. Eventually, we need to move our question off of why and on to what. Lord, what would you have me do? How do you want me to respond? What is the right / correct course of action in this circumstance?
3. This is where we learn to do the right thing regardless how we feel. This is where we learn how to be obedient despite our emotions. This is where our character begins to be transformed because I choose a biblical response despite the circumstances.
4. This is where our lives really begin to change. Our lives are transformed in the crucible of circumstances. The heat of pain boils our imperfections to the surface where we can see them and God can change them.
5. The greatest life lessons I have learned have been in the crucible of circumstances...in the fires of life. Where I was faced with the choice of following God through the circumstances or turning away.
6. God is using these circumstances to prepare you for something great! He is a God of purpose. The painful situations are not pointless. If you give these

circumstances to Him, they become reference points to where God is taking you.

- Hope is the result of responding in a way that God desires so that our character is transformed. When we stop fighting and start following... Where we move past asking why to asking God what. This response not only changes us, but it also unleashes God's resources into our lives for His purposes.

III. God Uses Negative Circumstances To Demonstrate His Resources

II Cor. 4:8-10 "We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies." (NLT)

A. God wants us to experience His resources in the circumstances

1. There are resources that God has that can only be experienced when the circumstances are against us. Notice all the circumstances Paul experienced: Troubles / perplexed / hunted down / knocked down / suffering.
2. Do you also see what Paul experienced in His relationship with God in the midst of these circumstances. *"Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies"* He experienced the "Life of Jesus" in the midst of all the negatives.
3. Jesus has supernatural resources for the negative circumstances of this life. Life is NOT stronger than Jesus in your life. How else are we going to experience His Power / life unless we experience our weakness in the circumstances?
4. Sometimes God allows the circumstances to show us that we do NOT have what it takes to get through this. As long as we think we can handle things, we tend to trust ourselves. Circumstances have a way of showing us we can't handle it!
5. Overwhelming circumstances are opportunities for God's overwhelming power! Hope is the result of experiencing God's resources poured out into our lives. Paul talked about "the life of Jesus" being seen. This life is observable!
6. Circumstances can cause us to feel drained and dead. BUT, Jesus will actually pour His life into us so the circumstances do not overwhelm us! That's hope! How do I experience this?
7. As you choose to follow Him through your circumstances He will empower you. Remember, God doesn't empower you to live independently of Him. He empowers you to follow Him. He empowers you to accomplish His will.
8. Therefore, the more you submit your life to Him in your circumstances, the more of His resources He will pour into your life, and the more hope you will experience!

B. God wants us to look forward to His resources in eternity

II Cor. 4:16-18 "That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last

forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever." (NLT)

1. Experiencing hope in our circumstances comes from anticipating blessing and rewards in eternity for our obedience in this life. It is choosing to have an eternal perspective of trials and hardships.
2. God believes in an incentive program therefore He tells us that how we live this life matters in eternity. Eternity is something we must fix our gaze on in order to maintain hope. It is something to look forward to / anticipate / and realize that the glory of eternity will make the sufferings of this life seem like nothing!
- It's kind of what looking forward to vacation does for me every year. There is just something about looking forward to a positive experience in the future that makes the struggles of today a little more bearable. (share) I believe this is why God tells us about heaven. This world is painful...BUT I have something for you to look forward to!
 3. I'm not going to discuss this much here because I am going to take an entire service just to talk about our future hope in a few weeks.
 4. We can lose hope pretty fast if we do not maintain an eternal perspective of the hardships of this life. Having an eternal perspective is looking forward to the right things. If all our hope is fixed on this life and everything working out well, we are set up for hopelessness.
 5. God wants us to put our hope in experiencing His eternal resources someday. We get a taste of these resources in this life and the full experience is yet to come!

IV. God Uses Negative Circumstances To Accomplish His Will

A. Negative circumstances cannot hinder God's plans

1. The story of Joseph: Briefly explain

Gen 50:19-20 "But Joseph replied, "Don't be afraid of me...You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people." (NLT) Never forget God is in control.

- God can even use the evil actions of others to accomplish His purposes.

2. The Apostle Paul was put in prison. Oh no! What a disaster!

Phil. 1:12 "Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel." (NASB) God knows what He's doing!

3. Our hope comes from knowing that even negative circumstances cannot hinder the plans of God for your life. He is still in control. If I had never been voted out of my last church Foothills would have never existed. God used the wrong behavior of other people to birth this church. What hope!!!

4. Just because you don't see how God could possibly use the ugly situation you find yourself in, God is still in control! There is still hope!

B. Negative circumstances can be God's will

I Peter 4:19 “So if you are suffering in a manner that pleases God, keep on doing what is right, and trust your lives to the God who created you, for he will never fail you.” (NLT)

1. We must stop automatically assuming that everything negative is against God’s will. We can actually suffer according to the will of God. WHY? Doesn’t God love me? Of course He loves you! But your view of what He is doing is limited.
2. Your life is God’s masterpiece. But we all must remember, this masterpiece is a work in progress. You may not like the color God is using right now on the canvas of your life, but you don’t see the whole picture.
3. **Illustrate:** Show my Thomas Kinkade Painting – Explain – Even though he is called the painter of light, he still uses dark colors. God does the same with us. Someday in eternity, God will unveil to you the whole painting, but not until then.
4. Until then, we must do what Peter says. We must keep doing what is right; keep trusting God; and we will experience how He will NEVER fail us! This is hope!

I want to close today with a video about someone who has trusted God in the midst of their adverse circumstances and found a life of hope.

- **Nick Vujicic video**

Can you embrace the truth that negative circumstances are normal? Will you allow God to use your circumstances to develop your character? Will you allow God to pour His resources into your life in the midst of your circumstances? Will you believe that despite the circumstances you are experiencing, God can still accomplish His will for you? It’s not hopeless as long as God is in the equation! Is He?