

Surviving The Difficulties of Life

Sunday, April 8, 2018
10:30 AM

The book of John gives us one of the longest discourses concerning Jesus words to the Disciples in the upper room on the night of his betrayal. In chapter 16, after sharing many things with them, and before he prays his high priestly prayer in chapter 17; Jesus tells them why he has taken time to share these things with them.

John 16:1 (NIV)

16 “All this I have told you so that you will not fall away.

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.”

Jesus was concerned that what had begun in the hearts of his disciples would continue. So, too, He is concerned that what has begun in our hearts by faith, continue. To do so, He honestly tells them that they will face difficulties in this world

Trouble - thlē'-psēs (Key)

The word trouble here literally means a pressing, pressing together or pressure. Metaphorically it means oppression, affliction, tribulation, distress, straits

It is the same word used in Matthew 13 where Jesus speaks of the parable of the seed and the sower.

Matthew 13:20-21 (NIV)

20 The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. **21** But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

The stark reality is that we all face difficulties of many kinds in this world. That's why James says...

James 1:2-4 (NIV)

2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, **3** because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. **4** Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Now let's be honest for a minute... How many of us face the difficulties of life and jump straight to "pure joy." I mean how many of us have got to the point that when difficulties come we are like "YES... Bring it on... This is going to be so good for my faith"

More likely were thinking "Oh no, not now, Are you serious?, Really?, How am I going to get through this?, Why?, Is God real?, Is my faith real?, Who can I kill?" More than likely we are just thinking about how we can survive. How do we survive the difficulties of life?

I've been thinking a lot about the disciples in light of the days immediately following the resurrection. We focus so much on the joy of the resurrection that we sometimes forget the realities of the difficulties they must have faced following the resurrection. It wasn't all joy... There was fear, doubt, confusion, lack of faith, depression, a desire to go back to what they knew (fishing) rather than press forward into the commission that Christ had given them. All the things that we face when the difficulties of life come our way.

Now difficulties is a broad word and covers a big range of things that we may face...

Difficulties can be tragic... The loss of a loved one, a terminal illness, a life-threatening health crises, financial ruin, a deadly accident, a disastrous storm or other catastrophic natural disaster, terrorism, violent attack.

Difficulties can be ongoing... Financial hardship, plaguing health problems, family problems, relationship battles, unanswered prayer.

Difficulties can be heartbreaking, frustrating and annoying... A bad job situation, hectic schedules, traffic, accidents, relationship breakups, your kids school, bills that need paid, rude people, life in general.

In fact, how many of you would say that this week, the week immediately following Easter, you faced some difficulties?

What Difficulties are you facing right now?

The question then is how do we survive the difficulties of life with our faith intact? A question that I would like to try and find answers to as we take about 4 weeks to study the book of Ruth

Naomi Loses Her Husband and Sons

1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. **2** The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

3 Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. **4** They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, **5** both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

Naomi and Ruth Return to Bethlehem

6 When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. **7** With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

8 Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. **9** May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband."

Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud **10** and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people."

11 But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? **12** Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— **13** would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has turned against me!"

14 At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

15 "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her."

16 But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my

God. **17** Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” **18** When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

19 So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, “Can this be Naomi?”

20 “Don’t call me Naomi,” she told them. “Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. **21** I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.”

22 So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

Talk about difficulties...

Here in this one chapter there are difficulties that are tragic...

- Severe famine

- Loss of her husbands and then both sons

There are difficulties that are ongoing...

- Life in a foreign land

- Provision of food

- Life as a widow

There are difficulties that are heartbreaking, frustrating and annoying...

- Separation from those you love

- Leaving behind what you have known to travel into the unknown

- Little hope from a natural perspective

- Traveling alone as women

Of the things that Naomi and Ruth faced, which one would be most difficult for you to face?

Which ones are most like the difficulties you have or are facing?

1. It wasn't a sin to leave Bethlehem because of the famine

But sometimes our search for answers from the difficulties of life separate us from our faith and connection with God

2. Surviving the difficulties of life begins as we realize that despite our troubles, God is a good God and has help for us

For most of us our first responses to difficulties are not God centered

There may be fear, frustration, anger, ambivalence, confusion, doubt, questions, strategies....

3. There is often a journey back to, or for some the first time, that place of faith and relationship with God.

What journey do you need to make?

4. We will have to make a choice as to where we will look for strength and provision
5. If we are to make it through we must cling to God

1 Samuel 30:1-6 (NIV)

30 David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day. Now the Amalekites had raided the Negev and Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag and burned it, **2** and had taken captive the women and everyone else in it, both young and old. They killed none of them, but carried them off as they went on their way.

3 When David and his men reached Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. **4** So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep. **5** David's two wives had been captured—Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel. **6** David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the Lord his God.

What does clinging to God look like for you?

6. Difficulties may change us, but they don't have to define us

God is patient with us as we wrestle with the effects of the difficulties of life. But He never leaves us or forsakes us and is waiting with the hope of His love, His grace, His guidance and provision, His future plans for our lives.

Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

11 For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.