

Hardship

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[0 : 00] It's been an interesting series as we travel through this, looking at the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

And this, so often we can skate over the issue of hardship. That hardships come, and I think it's quite right that at this point in the series, it's good to talk about this because none of us are immune from the hardships that come from being a Christian. As John said, you know, it's tough for many now to live out their Christian faith, probably not within our communities in the world, but often it is. And Paul is saying, don't put a stumbling block in anyone's path.

And I was challenged with this when I was reading this because I have to ask myself, where am I the stumbling block? Where is it within my character? Where is it, if I'm not living within this, that people would look at lifestyle, look at me, and think, what is there that prevents others from coming into relationship with the Lord? I was taken through this. Two things I really would want to say is that Scripture, as we sung in that hymn, which was really helpful, truths unchanged from the dawn of time that will echo through eternity. And I do believe going back again and again back to the Bible is a huge answer for us to stick close to Scripture, especially when hardships come, and it's so hard. As I was thinking about this whole series, I stumbled upon thinking about those who came from West Africa as slaves. And probably one of the things that I hold on to, which really touches me greatly when it comes to hardships, is the black church in America.

The black church in America that has grown through because out of hardship, but their deep, deep faith and reliance on Jesus. And I think, again, there's something to think about today of when we don't know our need of God, then we don't know our need of God. You need to know your need of God. Because when we need to know our need of God, then we actually know that God is there for us, even in the tough times.

I'm going to show you a little clip, which really I hope you find inspiring as I did, because there's something about those spirituals that really seem to touch my soul. And it speaks to me a lot about where that has come from, from the hardships of a whole race of people. Thanks.

[2 : 48] Did you know all, just about all Negro spirituals are written on the black notes of the piano? This is absolutely true. You can go home tonight and play almost any Negro spiritual, just play the black notes on the piano. You look skeptical. Now, you can't see it out there, but I want you to watch. Watch. There are five black notes on the piano. And those same five black notes just keep recurring. And you can go home tonight and play almost any Negro spiritual, just play the black notes. Watch.

You know that? Every time I feel the spirit, just black notes. Watch this.

That's because the slaves didn't come to America with do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, de, do. That's somebody else's scale, okay?

All they had in their musical scale were those five black notes. We know it in music as the pentatonic scale. And they built the power and pathos of the Negro spiritual on five notes. When you study music, you also come across what are known as white spirituals. Did you know that? And they are white composers who worked with those, that scale. In early America, they used to call this the slave scale.

[4 : 26] And I'm going to play for you what some musicologists think is the most famous white spiritual built on the slave scale, or just the black notes. I'm going to play for you.

Anybody tonight know who wrote that song?

I heard it. I heard it. A man by the name of John Newton. But do you know what John Newton did before he became a Christian? He was the captain of a slave ship.

And many believe heard this melody that sounds very much like a West African sorrow chant. And wrote the words amazing grace and said his words to a slave melody.

I looked up that song. I believe God wanted that song written just the way it was written, just so that we would be reminded that as Christians, whether black or white, free or bond, in his eyes, we're all connected.

[6 : 11] We are connected. We are connected. And we are connected. And we are connected. And we are connected by God's amazing grace. Hallelujah! We are connected by God's amazing grace.

Woo! I looked up that song in the Library of Congress. I went to the Library of Congress. I looked up that song.

And wherever you see it authentically printed, you know what it says? Words, John Newton.
Melody, unknown.

I tell the Lord, when I get to heaven, I want to meet Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. But boy, I want to meet that slave called unknown. There's something about where we are rooted and knowing our need of God.

And hardships in our spiritual life draw us to the point of our heartbeat of our faith and our journey and our relationship with Jesus.

[7 : 15] And often we find that when we're facing hardships, that is one of the things where when life comes at us fast, when events can take us by surprise, when hardships often force us to ask God some tough questions, for some they are tempted to turn away.

And turn their back. Because we know where our help comes from. And our help comes in the name of the Lord and in that relationship.

Pause and look at this reading. And perhaps 2 Corinthians tells us more about the man, the character of Paul, than any other books in the Bible. It's quite dynamic. And here he is extolling to the Corinthian church about stickability.

And Paul talks openly about his life and what it looks like. And for many people looking outside and many people looking at us, they may see it looks like a life defeated.

And totally contrary. It is a life that Paul sees as a life that is victorious. And the life that he is living and in the struggles that he has untaken. And there is a word which in the original text, and somebody will correct me, but it sounds like hupermone.

[8 : 26] But it actually is translated as endurance. And the fact there is this enduring spirit that comes from the Lord to help us through, to be with us, to be alongside us, is exactly that from all those fruits of the Spirit to help us through times of hardship.

It's a very weak translation because the original wording is more than endurance. It encompasses things like courage, bravery, power, strength, the frame of mind which characterises Paul's ability to endure.

While pondering on the greatness of God's power in the midst of his torrents and troubles. And many of us will have known that. And many of us will know that now.

As to what that is like. Why is Paul telling the Corinthians church this? Look at me. Look how good I am. Look how well I deal with this. No, he's not.

The context that he is saying is because the early church had the propensity to get easily diverted. And I don't know whether that resonates for you in your own personal life.

[9 : 40] It certainly does for me as well. And also I believe in the life of the church that we can so easily get diverted by small things which take us away from this strength that God has for us.

And knowing our need and rooting in God. And I guess many of us wouldn't dare to compare any of our issues with Paul's life. Being flogged, in prison, close to death.

Speaking out, preaching under the threat of death. And many of us will know when life presses in and hardships come and they are various.

They are cumulative. It's a bit like buses. You know, they don't come for a long time. And then they all come at the same time. People are nodding at me. You know what that looks like. In our own lives.

And Paul speaks of the power that is in his life. And the power of the spirit that helps him endure. But talks about the ministry. Not about his own personal ministry.

[10 : 38] But the ministry of that of the church. About how together we stand and support one another in those times. Paul isn't saying woe is me.

He connects his own personal life with the gospel. To keep the ministry. To make sure that nothing gets in the way of that.

Paul is saying woe is God's hope. And God's hope and God's grace. Paul had an obsession.

That God loved all people. That God loved all people. And that he had been called to represent the message of reconciliation to all people.

Do we feel that? Or is it about me and I? Or about us? And how we can share that with a waiting world that we are waiting to make contact with.

[11 : 36] And to be honest as we said in fact earlier. That people are hungry. People follow Jesus. And then found out they were hungry for more of what he wanted. That message is not how we do church.

Or the personal rules we keep. Or our own personal preferences. Our message is Jesus Christ. Our message always will be Jesus Christ. That will be it.

That is the thing that we will hold on to. I pray that's the thing that I hold on to. When we sing that hymn. You know. And when my strength is failing. I pray that is what I will hold on to.

Is Jesus Christ. And that will depend on how deep our rooting has gone. And where our rooting is now in Jesus. And Paul wasn't about introducing people into a like me, like my church culture.

I think that's pretty clear from this morning's culture. I mean who would want to buy into what Paul is doing? But there is this sense of Paul is saying. Look not away from me. But look to your rooting.

[12 : 37] Because when the storm comes. When it comes. It will depend on how far we sway. And whether we fall over as to how deep our rooting is. The saving power of Jesus.

Which is essential. Most powerful. Most awesome message. That so often gets lost in the mush of the everyday life. And certainly with our struggles. I recall a few years ago.

On a Sunday morning. Listening to Radio 4. You may listen to it in the morning as well. Well. It's a bit. Yeah. It's good. It gives an overview of the church. It's a bit like reading the church times.

But it's a bit more encouraging. And this. I heard as I laid there in the morning. How the flower arrangers in a certain cathedral.

Had decided to boycott the church. And I laid there. And I think. Sorry. How can you boycott the church?

[13 : 34] Over whatever issue that might have been. How can you walk away? And yet. Time and time again. I meet people. Who walk away.

I didn't like the hymns. I didn't like the way this was done. I didn't like the way coffee was done. You know. People walk away. And yet. The essential is Jesus Christ. That is what we're here for.

That is where it is. And that's where our rooting is. And if our rooting is. Then no wonder we're going to keel over. If all of our own personal preferences. Is just wrapped up in who we are.

And not in the strength of who we are called to be. And where we are. And no wonder that Paul won people for Christ. By his endurance for the gospel. He pointed people to the giver of help.

He pointed people to where that rooting can come from. He pointed people to that point. Not by saying look at me. But saying this is where our rooting goes deeper. And so in all of this.

[14 : 31] This isn't just a fluffiness. This fruit of the spirit. Isn't just like a fluffy candy floss thing. It is actually the rooting of who we are. In Jesus.

And all that he did for us. I think it was this time next year. Yeah. It was this time last year. That's probably for many of you here.

You will know what this is like. But I had come to that point. Where you know. There's things that crushes cars. That's what it felt like with my life. I'd gone.

We'd undergone a whole thing. You know. Talk about everything coming at you at once. And that's exactly how it felt like. And it was one night.

I was reading a night prayer. I don't know whether you do night prayer. Compline. It's a great thing to do. Just look it up. Read Compline at night. It's a great way to go off to sleep.

[15 : 27] And be at peace with your soul. Clear up everything. And start the day well. The next day. And I was fragile. I was close to breaking. And I read this scripture.

This happened to be the scripture that came in. And there was a mystic. The footnote. John Christostrum. Or however you pronounce it. The dark night of the soul bloke. And there was a footnote that said.

Paul didn't allow any stumbling block to hinder his ministry. It is the courageous and triumphant ability to pass the breaking point and not to break.

To pass the breaking point but not to break. And always greet the unseen with a cheer. It is the alchemy which transmutes tribulation into strength and glory.

And sometimes we have to go to that point beyond breaking. To really experience what the power and presence of the Holy Spirit is in our life. I guess some of us know that.

[16 : 30] I guess some of us might be there now. But to know that God doesn't leave us or desert us. Or ever forsake us at that point.

Jesus will never. I had this picture of you. You've got the Holman Hunt picture. Behold I stand at the door and knock. What a great picture that is.

We've been doing a thing on Monday night with about questions. It's been resonating with quite a few people. And Jesus has stood at this door. It's all ivy all over the place. It's got the light of the world. And you notice there's no handball on the outside of the door.

The choice is for us. To open it. And let Jesus in. And that may open a little bit or whatever. I had this picture. Maybe of the door opening.

And Jesus just about to step in. And the door slams. Again and again and again. And as I had this picture.

[17 : 32] I thought there was two things. One is Jesus will never give up waiting. He will never give up waiting to come in. And secondly.

In amongst of all the pain and hardships. He is longing to come in. And join us at the heart of our struggle. Whatever that might look like. That is what a lot of people need to know.

Hardships will bring change through endurance. Nothing diverted our black brethren. From the struggle in which they had.

They knew their need of God. And I pray this morning. That in this series. Whatever place we are with. In our journey with him.

That we will not only embrace our hardships. But also we will turn to the giver of help. That we will know our routine.

[18 : 30] That we will know our need of God. And that will make us stronger. One of the main privileges. And one of the great privileges. With this role.

And with this collar. Is that you spend a lot of time with people. In their final moments. In their final days. And I didn't bring it with me. But there is a little holding cross.

That I have. Which I think has been in the hands. Of numerous people. As they have gone home. To be with the Lord. And there is something. About a strength.

In Christianity. When we know our hope in Jesus. When we stand in that hope. When we know that hope. But also for us.

To be alongside those who don't. We know that we will be. Bringers of hope. I pray that we will be. Bringers of love. That we will be.

[19 : 23] Bringers of joy. Of joy. Peace. Patience. Kindness. Goodness. Faithfulness. Gentleness. And self-control. And that we too. In the weeks.

The days. And the years to come. Would grow our deeper roots. Into Jesus. So that we can be that voice. We can be that melody. To a waiting world.

Who need to know the grace. And love of God. Amen. Amen.