

# The Lies We Believe About Our Circumstances

1. Prayer
2. Opening Story
  - a. In the children's book by Judith Viorst called Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day the young boy at the center of the story is having a bad day.
    - i. "I went to sleep with gum in my mouth and now there's gum in my hair and when I got out of bed this morning I tripped on the skateboard and by mistake I dropped my sweater in the sink while the water was running and I could tell it was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day."
    - ii. He goes on to tell about his day: "There were lima beans for dinner and I hate limas. There was kissing on tv and I hate kissing. My bath was too hot, I got soap in my eyes, my marble went down the drain, and I had to wear my railroad-train pajamas, and I hate my railroad train pajamas. When I went to bed Nick took back the pillow he said I could keep and the Mickey Mouse night light burned out and I bit my tongue. The cat wants to sleep with Anthony and not with me. It has been a horrible, terrible, no good, very bad day."
  - b. Gee, that sounds like a typical morning to me!
    - i. I imagine that every one of us has a day every once in a while where we would echo the words of the Psalmist who said, *"I said, 'Oh that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest...I would hurry to my place of shelter, far from the tempest and storm.'" (Psalm 55:6-8)*
    - ii. If those words describe your experience today, then God has you here for a reason.
    - iii. Our church is named "Here's Hope" because we desire to be a safe harbor of God's love where you can escape the storms of life and find shelter.
3. Lie #1: **If my circumstances were different, I would be different.**
  - a. Have you ever said, *"I wouldn't have lost my temper if so and so didn't do such and such?"*
  - b. Or *"I would be a happy adult if my parents hadn't done such and such to me?"*
  - c. If this lie were true, then we would all be VICTIMS of our circumstances.
    - i. If we are victims, then we are not responsible, someone else is.
    - ii. If we are victims, then we can't help being the way we are.
    - iii. If we are victims, then we cannot be held accountable for our actions.
  - d. This is a lie that Satan uses to convince you to take the blame game.
    - i. If only we didn't have to move
      1. I know that moving from Texas to Massachusetts in 1998 was hard on my oldest daughter.
      2. I know that moving from Massachusetts to Ohio in 2001 was hard on my wife and family.
      3. We all have regrets, we all say, "if only."
    - ii. If only we had more money
      1. I think this one probably comes up every time you pay the bills.
      2. Did you ever notice that the more your income increases, so do the bills?
    - iii. If only we lived closer (or further) to my parents
    - iv. If only...
    - v. Satan wants to deceive you into thinking that your happiness is dependent upon your circumstances.
      1. But the truth is that **if we are not content with our CURRENT circumstances, we would not be happy in any other circumstance.**

2. Martha Washington, wife of our first president wrote, "I am still determined to be cheerful and happy in whatever situation I may be; for I have also learned from experience that the greater part of our happiness or misery depends on our dispositions and not on our circumstances. We carry the seeds of the one or the other about with us in our minds, wherever we go."
- vi. The apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 4:11-12, *"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."*
- vii. Just like we learned last week that we may not be able to control our emotions, but we can prevent them from controlling us, so it is with our circumstances. We may not be able to control them, but we keep our circumstances from controlling us!
  1. This passage in Philippians tells us that for Paul, he LEARNED TO BE CONTENT. It didn't just happen overnight.
  2. It was the result of a struggle.
  3. It was the result of passing through the tough circumstances and learning one of the hardest lessons of life in order to learn who was the Source of true contentment.
    - a. Where did he learn it? He did so in God's classroom, in such classes as "Discipline101", "Tribulation102",
    - b. Consider: *"I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren..."* (2Cor 11:26)
  4. The Apostle Paul calls it a "SECRET" or "MYSTERY" (Greek word musthion)
  5. The secret or mystery is that of contentment which means "to be satisfied to the point where I am not disturbed or disquieted"
    - a. If you aren't worried about what you are going to lose, or gain, what you want or need, but are satisfied sufficiently that it does not disturb you to have to miss a meal, not have a change of clothes, or whatever the need is...then you will understand contentment.
    - b. Most of us here can make a list of things we wish we could have...
      - i. A better car, a better job, a nicer home, more food in the fridge...
      - ii. It isn't bad to say, "it would be nice to have these things"
      - iii. But when we are disturbed because we don't have something, when it steals our peace and causes us to be upset, then we don't understand contentment.
  6. I believe that God wants to wean us from any dependency on the decaying things of this world to provide us with satisfaction.
    - a. Dwight Pentecost wrote... "Air and water are two entirely different elements or spheres, and it is impossible to have a vessel filled with air and water at the same time. One that is filled with air must have the air displaced in order to be filled with water. Similarly, if a man's life is given over to the pursuit of material things, that life cannot then be filled with Jesus Christ. Until that love for material things is displaced, that life cannot and will not be filled with Jesus Christ. When a man gives himself to the pursuit of all that is involved in this world and makes its position and its material things his goal and his standard and the center of his life, he will not find the satisfaction that comes from making Jesus Christ the center of his life. To be content is the opposite of to be covetous, to be greedy, to be worldly, to be materialistic... The reason material things can

never make a man content is that a man is never able to get enough of them to satisfy him... Someone once asked John D. Rockefeller how much money is enough. He thought a moment and said, "Just a little more than one has."

- b. One of the problems with a lot of Christians is they're not content with having their needs met.
  - c. They're trying to get their wants met.
  - d. You can never, ever satisfy your wants. You will always have more.
7. What is driving your life?
- e. The hard truth is that **circumstances don't make us what we are, they REVEAL what we are.**
    - i. A young mother loses her patience with her children...are the children to blame for her anger?
      1. They are if she believes this lie.
      2. But if she understands the truth, all that her children did was reveal what was already inside of her, hidden from herself and the rest of the world until something came to shake it out.
    - ii. You slam your thumb with a hammer and a cussword comes out of your mouth.
      1. Did the hammer cause you to pronounce the expletive?
      2. No, it only revealed that you still had that in your heart.
    - iii. You see, circumstances are like a bouncing road to an upset stomach. Eventually, what is inside that stomach will be revealed, "come out" if you will, because of the bouncing.
    - iv. If you think you are a patient person, have some children. You will discover that patience is developed and not inborn!
      1. Jesus said that "*The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart*". (Luke 6:45)
      2. It is in the revelation of what our hearts are really like, of the stuff that is in them, that we realize how much we need Jesus to make us holy, and that we are far from attaining the righteousness of God. As God exposes every hidden corner of our lives, we learn to lean upon His righteousness and to reject any belief in our own.
  - f. We just love to look and sound good to other people.
    - i. Doesn't it just kill you to have a sin slip out, something within you to slip out and ruin your façade of goodness? It is bad enough when we are aware of it...if we are the only ones who know, we can rationalize it or explain it away.
    - ii. But when others see what is inside of us, they will see us as we are...people in need of God's grace.
    - iii. When you fail, have the humility to acknowledge your struggles, people will be drawn to Christ through you!
      1. Jonathan Edwards stated, "Nothing sets a person so much out of the Devil's reach as humility"
      2. Charles H. Spurgeon said "Humility is to make a right estimate of one's self."
      3. Dr. Samuel Brengle (Salvation Army) said "The axe cannot boast of the trees it has cut down. IT could do nothing but for the woodsman. He made it, he sharpened it, he used it. The moment he throws it aside, it becomes only old iron."
      4. It is through circumstances that reveal our character that we realize who we are and all that we depend upon God for.
4. **Lie #2: Suffering isn't God's will.**
- a. We live in a culture in the west that does everything it can to alleviate any form of pain and suffering.

- i. We hate suffering so much that we almost view it as the worst evil that exists!
- ii. When preachers preach this attitude, I have to believe that they are telling people what their itchy ears want to hear.
- iii. This concept is not in the bible. In fact, the bible says something completely different.
  - 1. Hebrews 5:8 *“although He was a Son, he learned obedience from what he suffered”*
    - a. Did you hear that? Jesus learned obedience from what he suffered?
    - b. Learning is a process. Jesus learned from what he suffered.
    - c. If Jesus suffered, not only on the cross, but in this life; if he was not exempt from the pains of the body in daily life, then why should we?
    - d. To this the preachers say, Jesus died on the cross so you wouldn't have to suffer. To them I read 1 Peter 2:21 -
  - 2. 1 Peter 2:21 *“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”*
    - a. We are called to suffer for others, to give ourselves to others, because that is what Jesus did for us. We follow the same road, not a different one!
- b. I will agree that God didn't intend for Adam and Eve to suffer the way in which they did (as a consequence of sin.). But I don't think God excluded them from suffering or pain in the garden.
  - i. Consider Genesis 3:16 *“To the woman He said, “I will greatly multiply (increase) Your pain in childbirth”*
  - ii. To increase something means it existed to some degree before it was increased. Eve was going to suffer childbirth pains before the sin and the fall that expelled them from the garden. How bad? I don't know. But it got a lot worse after the curse of the fall.
  - iii. I also think Adam felt pain from time to time. He had to have stubbed his toe or get stung by a bee while in the garden. He had a human body for heavens sake.
    - 1. It feels PAIN!
    - 2. Pain is an informant to us that we need to stop hitting our toes on rocks!
    - 3. Pain is how we learn to take our hand away from the fire.
    - 4. Pain is a tool to learn from.
  - iv. Folks, the only place that is EXEMPT from suffering is Heaven, when you shed this body and get your new, spiritual body promised at the resurrection of the dead.
  - v. Are you are looking forward to that!
- c. 1 Peter 5:10 *“The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered for a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.”*
  - i. It is in this passage that I am convinced that God PERMITS us to suffer, so that we will learn dependence upon Him and not ourselves.
  - ii. **True joy is not the absence of pain but the presence of God in the midst of the pain.**
- d. 2Co 12:9 *And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*
  - i. And his grace is sufficient for me.
  - ii. Is His grace sufficient for you?

5. **How we respond to a problem has to do with where our focus is.**

- a. 2 Cor 4:16-18 *“Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*
  - i. As long as we look at the visible stuff we will be frustrated, angry, prone to bitterness, likely to say, “No way” to God's intervention.

- ii. It is this way for people who get bitter in life instead of better.
- iii. This is because they choose to focus upon the problem and their own wants and desires instead of looking outside of themselves.
- iv. But when we look at life's troubles with spiritual eyes, we see God's promises and God's nature.
- v. We are reminded in this of our first purpose...that we were created for God's pleasure, not our own.
- vi. We must stop living as the CENTERS OF THE UNIVERSE and worship the One Who Is.

6. **Trouble can work for you or against you.**

- a. An old story is told of a king in Africa who had a close friend with whom he grew up. The friend had a habit of looking at every situation that ever occurred in his life (positive or negative) and remarking, "This is good!" One day the king and his friend were out on a hunting expedition. The friend would load and prepare the guns for the king. The friend had apparently done something wrong in preparing one of the guns, for after taking the gun from his friend, the king fired it and his thumb was blown off. Examining the situation the friend remarked as usual, "This is good!" To which the king replied, "No, this is NOT good!" and proceeded to send his friend to jail. About a year later, the king was hunting in an area that he should have known to stay clear of. Cannibals captured him and took him to their village. They tied his hands, stacked some wood, set up a stake and bound him to the stake. As they came near to set fire to the wood, they noticed that the king was missing a thumb. Being superstitious, they never ate anyone that was less than whole. So untying the king, they sent him on his way. As he returned home, he was reminded of the event that had taken his thumb and felt remorse for his treatment of his friend. He went immediately to the jail to speak with his friend. "You were right," he said, "it was good that my thumb was blown off." And he proceeded to tell the friend all that had just happened. "And so I am very sorry for sending you to jail for so long. It was bad for me to do this." "No," his friend replied, "This is good!" "What do you mean, 'This is good'? How could it be good that I sent my friend to jail for a year?" "If I had NOT been in jail, I would have been with you."
- b. *Romans 8:28-29* "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. <sup>22</sup> For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren
  - i. It doesn't say,
    - 1. "God causes everything to work out the way I want it to."
    - 2. "God causes everything to have a happy ending on earth."
    - 3. We live in a fallen world.
  - ii. "We know that God causes..." means that your life is not a random series of events.
    - 1. There is a master plan.
    - 2. We make mistakes but God never does.
  - iii. "Everything..." means that God's plan for your life includes ALL that happens to you and I.
    - 1. Including your mistakes, your sins, your hurts.
    - 2. Illness, debt, disaster, divorce, and even death.
  - iv. "To work together...For the good"
    - 1. The events of our lives are not isolated acts, they work together when God uses them.
    - 2. Just like taking flour, oil, sugar, baking powder, salt and raw eggs. Imagine, any of those by themselves would be pretty distasteful. But together, in the hands of a baker, they can make a yummy cake
    - 3. If you will give God all your distasteful, unpleasant, painful and hard experiences, He will blend them together for good

4. This doesn't say life will be good or pleasant. Much of our lives are surrounded by evil and pain.
5. God's good means His plan and His purpose.
- v. "of those who love God and are called according to His purposes."
  1. This promise is only for God's children.
    - a. It is not for everyone.
  2. **If you are living in opposition to God**, and insist on being god of your own life, then the events of your life are in your hands.
    - a. And they will be random and painful and totally without meaning, just like your life will be.
    - b. You can become a child of God today!
- vi. "according to His purpose" means to "become like His Son."
  1. God has one purpose for your life. And it isn't to make your life easy, smooth, comfortable, or happy.
  2. His singular purpose is to reproduce the character of Christ in you, to glorify Himself through your life.
  3. Every problem is a character building opportunity for God's hands in your life.
- c. **God does this through something called Providence:**
  - i. Providence is a term to indicate that God provides and that He orchestrates everything to accomplish His purpose.
  - ii. There are two ways that God can act in the world. One is by miracle, two is by providence.
    1. One is miracle. What is a miracle? It is where God stops the normal flow of nature and injects a miracle. It has no natural explanation. It has nothing to do with what is normal. He raises someone from the dead. He heals someone. God can intervene in history, stop the flow of normal history, do a miracle. And then set the flow back in motion, just like stopping the Red Sea until His people could walk across. He stops the natural course of things, injects what is supernatural, and then let's the flow go again. That's a miracle, an invasion of the natural that causes the natural to cease and be invaded by the supernatural.
    2. Secondly, the way God acts is to take all of the diverse elements of the normal and orchestrate them to accomplish His own purpose. He takes 50 billion circumstances that He's got to orchestrate to accomplish this one thing. That's providence. That is more incredible than we can ever imagine!
    3. But when you come to understand that a sovereign God is not only sovereign by **supernatural intervention**, but He is sovereign by **natural orchestration**, you have confidence and you have contentment.
    4. The contented person is the person who knows that God is ordering everything for His own holy purpose. You're content.
- d. Romans 5:3-5 "*And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*"
  - i. Exult: (greek=boast)
  - ii. Tribulation means to "press together"
    1. I read last week about how Japanese sword makers make their famous Samurais Swords. (too brittle too soft, so they press together 3000 layers of steel alternating soft and hard, hammering and pressing together.)
    2. When was the last time you boasted about your tribulations and struggles?
  - iii. It is something we rarely want to do when we are going through them...in fact, Paul's writings are mostly *reflections* upon his troubles.

- iv. Our gratitude comes as we look back and see God's hand on our lives.
  - 1. A silversmith was once asked, "how do you know when the silver you are smelting is pure enough to work with?" He replied, "when I can see my reflection in it."
  - 2. Can God see His reflection in you yet?
  - 3. Can people see it in you?
  - 4. When you have been refined by trials and trouble, what is inside of you is purified.

7. How to have victory in any circumstance:

a. **Stay focused on God's plan and not your pain or problem.**

- i. *"let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."* (Hebrews 12:1-2)

- ii. I have been saying this for weeks now. What do you look at? Your needs, yourself, or Christ?

- 1. Corrie Ten Boom, who suffered the loss of her family and was imprisoned in a Nazi Concentration Camp said, *"If you look at the world, you will be distressed. If you look within you will be depressed. But if you look at Christ, you will be at rest."*

b. **Your focus will determine your feelings.** What you look at will determine how you respond.

The secret to endurance is to remember that pain is temporary and our reward is eternal.

- i. Rick Warren: "Because God is in control, accidents are just incidents in God's plan for you."
- ii. Don't give in to short term thinking. Remember Romans 8:17-18, *"If we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. What we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will give us later."*

c. **Rejoice and give thanks.**

- i. Not thanks for the trouble, but thanks IN the trouble.
- ii. *"Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."* (1 Th. 5:18)
- iii. God doesn't expect you to be thankful for evil or for sin or for suffering. But He does want you to be thankful that He will use all the junk of life to fulfill His purposes and draw you to Himself.
- iv. We don't rejoice over pain. We rejoice IN the Lord!

d. **Refuse to give up.**

- i. Endurance is the mark of a Christian.
- ii. I have said this before, lets see if you remember...what is the one common thread between the 7 churches that are mentioned in the book of Revelation?
- iii. It is that of endurance. *"He who perseveres to the end will receive a crown of life."*
- iv. You will know you are growing in endurance when your prayers during times of trouble become less "comfort me" kinds of prayers and more "conform me" kinds of prayers.
- v. Ask God, "What can I learn from this difficult situation?" instead of "why me!"

- e. 2 Cor 4:16-18 *Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

- f. DON'T LOSE HEART! Shake It Off!
  - g. One day a farmer's donkey fell down into a well. The animal cried piteously for hours as the farmer tried to figure out what to do. Finally he decided the animal was old and the well needed to be covered up anyway, it just wasn't worth it to retrieve the donkey. He invited all his neighbors to come over and help him. They all grabbed a shovel and began to shovel dirt into the well. At first, the donkey realized what was happening and cried horribly. Then, to everyone's amazement, he quieted down. A few shovel loads later, the farmer finally looked down the well and was astonished at what he saw. With every shovel of dirt that hit his back, the donkey was doing something amazing. He would shake it off and take a step up. As the farmer's neighbors continued to shovel dirt on top of the animal, he would shake it off and take a step up. Pretty soon, everyone was amazed as the donkey stepped up over the edge of the well and trotted off!
  - h. Life is going to shovel dirt on you, all kinds of dirt.
  - i. The trick to getting out of the well is to shake it off and take a step up.
  - j. Each of our troubles is a stepping stone.
  - k. We can get out of the deepest wells just by not stopping, never giving up!
  - l. Shake it off and take a step up!
8. How have you been handling the troubles of life? Have you been shaking your fist at God? Has life been tossing you some tough pitches? Then you are LEARNING the secret of contentment.
- a. I invite you to come for prayer for the strength to endure the troubles of life, to commit your struggles to Him and to leave them here at the altar.
  - b. You were not designed to carry them.
  - c. You have carried those troubles far too long.
  - d. Won't you bring them to the altar and leave them there?