

My Struggle is Personal

Thesis:

I have been an “adult” now for roughly ten years. Now a few of those years were spent in college and it’s up for debate whether college students are really adults or not, but that’s beside the point. In my short adult life, I have learned many things, but none of them have been as clear as this: Sometimes life just “sucks.” There are different levels of the phrase “life sucks right now.” Those levels range from I don’t have enough money for to go to taco Tuesday this week to I don’t have enough money to pay my rent, car insurance, or electric bill this month. Struggles, trials, accidents, hardships come in many shapes and forms and we feel their strain in different ways. Do you know why that is? It’s because struggles are personal. Tacos may not mean much to you, but to someone else it could mean the world. For all us, personal struggles are a reality. All of our STORIES, all of our BATTLES, all of our REALITIES are personal because they are influenced by personal experiences. All of us have a tendency to be lone wolves, to want to push through our harsh realities until we just can’t go any farther. While perseverance is good, we often forget a key aspect of our lives: God is PERSONAL and he can personally relate to your STRUGGLE.

As you’ve heard today, there are few people who understand this reality better than the prophet Jeremiah. Let’s take a look.

Scriptures:

Jeremiah 20:7-18 (ESV)

Mark 14:32-36 (ESV)

Observations:

Jeremiah was a prophet sent by God to the southern kingdom of Judah. He was there active in ministry for about 57 years. Now, the question is “what relevance does he have to the idea of a personal struggle?” Well, even though most of you didn’t ask, this is where I get to say, “I’m glad you asked.” You see Jeremiah lived in a time where we could say that Israel had a somewhat rocky relationship with God. In fact right before the passage we had just read Jeremiah spent some time in the stalks for doing exactly what God told him to do. He was confronting paganism and idol worship. When he did that, the results were a bout with depression and a whole lot of rejection from people he cared about. However in the midst of this I see three things Jeremiah did that allowed him to endure his very personal and lonely struggle.

1. Jeremiah ENGAGED God in his struggle (Vs. 7)

Right off we see that Jeremiah takes his concerns straight to God. He doesn’t try to fight through it on his own, he goes to God and essentially says look, “I tried to avoid this, but you are clearly doing

something here and I can't avoid it." Right from the start Jeremiah knows God is present and aware of his turmoil. He doesn't ignore him, he engages him.

2. Jeremiah ACKNOWLEDGED God's role in his struggle (Vs. 8)

Jeremiah knew God was present, but he also knew God had a role in what was going on. God had a message that needed to be proclaimed. God needed to warn the people that judgement was coming, that exile was coming. He used Jeremiah to do that. Jeremiah knew God's plan had a role in what he was experiencing and doing. He knew God was at work.

3. Jeremiah EMBRACED God's call in his struggle (Vs. 9)

Jeremiah knew that God was present, He knew God had role, and in spite of all of his struggles, he embraced the calling that God had on his life. Jeremiah could've turned away from everything going on, he could've fled the area and go on to live a normal life. He chose to follow through on what God had called him to do in spite of all the negativity in his life. He remained committed to his beliefs in spite of turmoil and personal struggle.

Application:

1. We must ENGAGE God in our personal struggle

Like Jeremiah you have got to engage God. Our encounters with God are not monologues, they aren't just "experiences", and they are conversations and moments from our everyday life. Jeremiah was not in a good place yet, he still managed to question God, offer commentary on his life, and confess his fears and feelings. When you are struggling the very best thing you do is let God know just that, let him know that you are struggling. The very base of our personal interaction with God is supposed to be a relationship. Effective relationships require engagement, engagement requires conversation.

2. We must ACKNOWLEDGE God's role in our personal struggle

Sometimes our struggles weigh us down, sometimes it just seems like it's too much to handle, too much negativity with no reasonable answer. Even in these moments it is essential that you remember God is at work. God has a role in your story, he is not some big spirit in the sky. Everything that is happening is happening for a reason and God is moving around you. In our culture we have a temptation to believe that God is only at work when things are going "good", when we are making lots of money, live a healthy life, have a perfect home, and family that loves us. This is more of an American reality than a Christian reality and we can't confuse our lack of happiness or success for a lack of God's love in our life.

3. We must EMBRACE God's call in our personal struggle

In spite of the deep personal struggle and turmoil in his life, Jeremiah recognized God's calling on his life. Jeremiah was called by God to share a message of repentance with the people of Israel. When they refused to listen that message changed from one of redemption to one of judgement. Exile was coming and they had better get ready. You see like Jeremiah, God has a calling on your life. The struggles you

face, the hardship you encounter does not change that reality. God's calling never ceases, your role in his kingdom work never ceases because your life gets hard. The reality is that our relationship with God and his kingdom is much bigger than our struggle. God wants to work in our lives in the midst of struggle because that my friend is how He makes us holy. When you struggle continue to pursue what God has called you to do.

You would be surprised what a five minute exercise in counting your blessings would do for your mind, you'd be surprised what a Saturday afternoon spent serving others in the same of Jesus could do for your mind, you might be surprised what visiting someone else in need of human interaction can do for you mentality, you might be surprised what praying for someone elses struggle can do for your mentality. It's not rocket science people, its making a conscious choice to reorient your view on life, even in the midst of hardship.

Folks the reality of our life is this: Struggles, Hardships, and Turmoil will come. It's not matter of if, but a matter of when. Often these things fall into two categories 1. Situations that are natural occurrences that we have no control over and 2. situations that arise directly because of sin in our lives. Whatever the case are response has to be the same. We ultimately have to begin or continue our pursuit of personal and relational God.

In the midst of our hardship he is there, he sees it, he feels it with you and he wants to guide you through it. He may not end it, he may not relive you of your burden or the consequences of your choices but he promises to walk through them with you and even at times carry you through them when you just can't do it anymore. That is how deeply personal God is and how deeply he loves and cares for you even in the midst of struggle.

I have read in Plato and Cicero sayings that are wise and very beautiful; but I have never read in either of them: Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden.

- St. Augustine

Conclusion:

In the midst of our struggle we have to recognize that God can PERSONALLY RELATE to our struggle. However in order to experience this gift, we also have to make a conscious choice to ENGAGE God in our struggle, ACKNOWLEDGE God's role in our struggle, and EMBRACE God's call in our struggle.

Story - Coming to First

Regardless of your struggle became a reality for you, your response must be the same. You must ultimately turn and pursue God and his love for you. The beauty of that passage we heard from Mark 14

this morning is that we have God who intimately understands struggle and just how personal it can be. No one is capable of doing what Jesus did and he did it for you. Jesus did it for you. I don't know where you are at this morning and I can't pretend to understand the junk you brought through the door with you this morning, but God can because he is that personal. I can however offer you a promise: God sees you, He hears you, and he loves you. He hasn't forgotten about you, he loves you, he loves you so much that he came to earth and endured human struggle just so that he could have the chance at a relationship with you. Don't walk out those doors without at least giving him a shot, hear him out, in the midst of your struggle refuse to be a lone wolf. Let God in, engage him, embrace him, and acknowledge him. What have you got to lose?

Pray