

Safe to Hope

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Abstract:

When circumstances rock our world and cause significant disappointment, threaten mental or physical health, or produce devastating suffering, our tendency is to respond passively. These situations feel outside of our control, so we simply ride a wave of emotions until the circumstances dim. It feels a bit like careening around in an inflatable bounce house. We wobble around out of balance, recoil in fear, withdraw from people and/or places (like church), dodge discomfort, or retreat in defeat. Life becomes overwhelming.

But what if we considered these circumstances a *calling* instead?

What if every single circumstance, no matter how sinful, distorted, or ugly, was an invitation from God to overcome fallen-world-evil with good?

What if he is calling you (your position, your giftedness, your experiences) *specifically*?

Paul tells us he knows what it's like to be overwhelmed with life defeating circumstances.

In 2 Corinthians 1:8 he said it tempted him to desire death!

Many of us know that feeling.

But God...

Paul reminds us "He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again" (2 Corinthians 1:10).

Paul tells us we are

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1. Circumstances

Ecclesiastes 3:1 tells us there is an occasion for everything, and a time for every activity under heaven. The “teacher” of Ecclesiastes contrasts two completely opposite circumstances to illustrate the comprehensiveness of the situations of life. Our story illustrates this well—there can be two very different things happening, but both are happening perfectly within God’s timing.

- a. 2 a time to *give birth* and a time to *die*;
a time to *plant* and a time to *uproot*;
- 3 a time to *kill* and a time to *heal*;
a time to *tear down* and a time to *build*;
- 4 a time to *weep* and a time to *laugh*;
a time to *mourn* and a time to *dance*;
- 5 a time to *throw stones* and a time to *gather stones*;
a time to *embrace* and a time to *avoid embracing*;
- 6 a time to *search* and a time to *count as lost*;
a time to *keep* and a time to *throw away*;
- 7 a time to *tear* and a time to *sew*;
a time to be *silent* and a time to *speak*;
- 8 a time to *love* and a time to *hate*;
a time for *war* and a time for *peace*. -- Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (CSB)

Captures all of life

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- b. Embedded in “events” (the CSB translation of the word) is suffering
 - i. “Suffering...
 - ii. May conveniently be defined as getting what you do not want while wanting what you do not get.
 - iii. This definition covers all forms of loss, hurt, pain, grief, and weakness--all experiences of rejection, injustice, disappointment, discouragement, frustration, and being the butt of others hatred, ridicule, cruelty, callousness, anger, and ill treatment—
 - iv. plus all exposure to foul, sickening, and nightmarish things that make you want to scream, run, or even die... ease for heaven not earth.
 - v. Life on earth is fundamentally out of shape and out of order by reason of sin... so strains, pains, disappointments, traumas, and frustrations of all sorts await us in the future,
 - vi. just as they have already overtaken us in the past.”

JI Packer *Rediscovering Holiness*, 249, 254
 - vii. see Ecc. 3 charts
 - viii. The rub in Ecclesiastes 3:11 He has put eternity in our hearts,
 1. Develop a Big Bow Theology
 - a. Fix it,
 - b. Organize it,
 - c. Reconcile,

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- d. Wrap it up
2. Reality is that our circumstances are out of our control
 - a. When circumstances rock our world and cause significant disappointment, threaten mental or physical health, or produce devastating suffering, our tendency is to **respond passively** by simply **riding a wave of emotions (emotion motion)** until the circumstances dim.
 - b. It feels a bit like careening around in an inflatable bounce house. Someone is bouncing and we are passively
 - i. Wobbling around out of balance,
 - ii. Recoiling in fear,
 - iii. Withdrawing from people and/or places (like church),
 - iv. Dodging discomfort, or
 - v. Retreating in defeat.

Life is overwhelming.

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2. How does God view our circumstances?

Redemptive Historical Theology

a. *In reference to Him*

i. Luke 24:25-27 (CSB)

He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Wasn’t it necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted for them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures

ii. The entire Bible is a story about him and what he’s doing.

iii. “God’s story reminds us that we live in God’s world, where Jesus rules and reigns. God’s story informs and forms who we are and shows us how we are to live and love.” Robert Cheong *Restoration Story* 25

b. *In reference to Us*

i. Our story is in his (“in him”) in two ways

1. Our circumstances

2. Our person

ii. First, the specific **circumstances** in Acts 17:16-28

¹⁶ Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the

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Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.

verse 22

22 So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴

- **The God who made the world and everything in it**, being Lord of heaven and earth, **does not live in temples made by man**, ²⁵ nor is he **served by human hands, as though he needed anything**, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and **everything**.
- ²⁶ And he **made from one man every nation of mankind** to live on all the face of the earth,
- having **determined allotted periods [of their dwelling]** and the **boundaries of their dwelling place**,
- ²⁷ that they should **seek God**, and
- perhaps **feel their way toward him** and
- **find him**. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for “In him we live and move and have our being”

iii. Everything. Every circumstance has one goal.

That we should seek God.

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iv. Second our **persons**. In Isa. 49:16 the prophet tells us - Look, I have inscribed *you* on the palms of my hands; (CSB) Engraved,

1. Your person
2. Your image
3. Your “case”
4. Your circumstances (Eccl. 3:1-8)
5. Your sins
6. Your temptations
7. Your weaknesses
8. Your wants
9. Your works
10. Everything about you
11. All that concerns you

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3. How to get on the same page “Safe to Hope”

- a. Redemption’s a com’n. How will you live today in light of that reality?
 - i. Then the one seated on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new.” Revelation 21:5 (CSB)
 - ii. “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.” (1 Peter 5:10)
- b. How will you live today knowing there is a day coming when all injustice will be made just, everything broken will be renewed, you will be perfect (like Christ)? You will be restored, confirmed, strengthened, and established?
- c. Most importantly, how will that inform how you view your circumstances today?
- d. RESTORY - What if we thought of ourselves as Change Agents?
 - i. What if every single circumstance, no matter how sinful, distorted, or ugly, was an invitation from God to overcome fallen-world-evil with good? What if he is calling you (in your position—dwelling place, your giftedness—how you respond, your experiences—good and bad) *specifically*?
 - ii. Hinds feet MuchAfraid... “*You purposely allow us to be brought into contact with the bad and evil things that you want changed.*” *Perhaps that is the very reason that we are here in this world, where sin and sorrow and suffering and evil abound, so that we may let you teach us so to react to them,*

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that out of them we can create lovely qualities to live forever. That is the only satisfactory way of dealing with evil, not simply binding it so that it cannot work harm, but whenever possible overcoming it with good.”

iii. Spurgeon writes *“Trials make more room for consolation. Great hearts can only be made by great troubles. The spade of trouble digs the reservoir of comfort deeper, and makes more room for consolation.” Feb 12 am*

iv. "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds by Christ." — 2 Corinthians 1:5

v. A couple verses later Paul tells us he knows what it's like to be overwhelmed with life defeating circumstances. In 2 Corinthians 1:8 he said it tempted him to desire death!

vi. Many of us know that feeling. But God...

e. What if we examined our circumstances to see what change project God is up to?

f. What if our circumstances perfectly fitted us to be change agents for evil?

i. Joy still somehow co-exists in tension with devastation.

ii. Peace coincides with mourning.

iii. Hope is renewed from an eternal vantage point.

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- iv. Luther called this “delicious despair;”¹ the pain of suffering results in transformation.

British hostage Terry Waite, as recorded in *God's healing for life's losses* by Bob Kellemen writes, “I have been determined in captivity, and I'm still determined, to convert this experience into something that will be useful and good for other people. I think that's the way to approach suffering. It seems to me that Christianity doesn't in any way lessen suffering. What it does is enable you to take it, to face it, to work through it and eventually convert it.” page 4

But How?

1. Posture (more on this in the next session)

See, I am the Lord's servant, said Mary. “May it happen to me as you have said.” Luke 1:38-1 (CSB)

2. Pray (call to arms!)

To receive power, strength, and endurance to continually bring good out of evil

3. Process

Paul reminds us “He **delivered** us from such a deadly peril, and he will **deliver** us. On him we have set our hope that he will **deliver** us again” (2 Corinthians 1:10).

¹ As quoted in Kellemen, *God's Healing for Life's Losses*, 13.

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- a. THIS is safety (not safe people, not safe places, not safe circumstances)
 - b. THIS is what we hope for (deliverance) and IT IS A PROMISE
4. Identify your losses/all suffering is loss (next session)
5. Know truth
 - a. Recognize evil (doctrine of evil)
4. Know your typical responses
 - a. Wobble around out of balance,
 - b. Recoil in fear,
 - c. Withdraw from people and/or places (like church), dodge discomfort, or
 - d. Retreat in defeat.
5. 2 Cor. 1:3-4 “Comfort with the comfort you’ve been given”
 - a. Our comfort is something God gifted to us so that we can give it away
 - b. Nothing goes to waste in God’s redemptive plans
 - c. Again, in the classic (*Hinds Feet on High Places*) the main character Much Afraid’s response to the lessons learned on her journey to the “High Places” and her new understanding of who God is and how he sees her (“gently”) said... “*My Lord, I cannot tell you how greatly I want to regard others the same way*” *Much Afraid*
 - d. “God is at work in your story to bring about good from evil to accomplish his purposes.” Robert Cheong *Restoration Story* 32

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10 Simple Decorating Rules for Arranging Furniture	Don't Settle for Moving the Furniture Around in Your Own Little Kingdom
Choose focal point	Eternity (fill in the blank) "If you knew one day _____ how would that inform your life TOday?"
Don't push furniture against the walls	Purposely walk into the loss (Resist pushing feelings of loss down and coddling your inner victim)
Create conversation areas	Find friends to talk to
Find balance	Purposely care for your emotional, spiritual, physical health (inner and outer man)
Consider traffic flow	Pace yourself—don't try to heal everything all at once Be ok with forward <i>and</i> backward motion
Use the right rugs	Rugs frame the room. Use scripture for the framework
Get a big coffee table	Lay everything out. Deal with each loss comprehensively
Put tables at arm's length—avoid layouts that force people to move	Support one another rather than provide advice (did she ask your opinion?)



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Let there be light	Don't ignore where God shines a light (typically this happens in our circumstances—often in relationships) Record the event, what were you thinking, feeling, how did you act, what did you want.
Use right size artwork (strategic, proportionate)	Respond to circumstances proportionately