

## 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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In 2008, 30-year-old Esther Elizabeth Reed was the United States Secret Service most wanted woman fugitive. Her 10-yearlong spree of identity theft included victims that varied in age, residency, intelligence, and socioeconomic status.

Esther's distinction as most wanted was the result of her application for a passport posing as missing South Carolina woman Brooke Henson. For four years Esther impersonated Brooke as she attended college, applied for student loans and rented an apartment. She even registered as Brooke on Match.com, dated a NYC firefighter and a Westpoint Cadet. Esther literally became Brooke.

However following an interview for a job in NYC, a curious potential employer initiated the end of Esther's identity theft spree. He googled her name, found that Brooke Henson was a missing person, and contacted the NYC police department. The NYPD in turn notified South Carolina authorities to tell them Brooke had been found alive.

Local detectives examining the facts became suspicious. Esther, living as Brooke, attended the prestigious Columbia University. Brooke Henson was a high school dropout. Skeptical, they asked the NYPD to request a DNA sample.

Amazingly Esther agreed, however before police arrived at her apartment, Esther had packed every chair, towel, dish, toothbrush and hair sample into a U-Haul and fled.

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Unfortunately, and to Esther's eventual downfall, her course led her to the Chicago suburb, Tinley Park, Illinois.

Situated between Frankfort and Oak Forest, Tinley Park is what is known as a bedroom community. A bedroom community is a town where the inhabitants sleep and live and eat, however they work and shop and dine somewhere else. It's basically a community of houses. This town, or 'Village' as it's called, is far from the hustle and bustle of the big city and, like most of the towns that surround Chicago, had its beginning as farmland.

Running right through the middle of Tinley Park is Interstate 80; the second longest interstate in the country. It stretches from Teaneck, New Jersey on the east coast, to San Francisco, California on the west. I-80's claim to fame is that it parallels the historic Route 30 Lincoln Highway, which was the first road built across America. Every car, freight truck, tractor-trailer, motorcycle, mini van, cab, bus, bike and pedestrian seeking travel from east to west must traverse Interstate 80.

In 2005 The Ryan Companies, a commercial real estate and construction firm, significantly enhanced the demographic of Tinley Park by developing one of their massive cornfields. Brookside Marketplace, built directly across from

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Interstate-80, infused LIVING, not just sleeping, in the area. Residents welcomed the addition.

Among the first anchor tenants were Target, Kohls, Best Buy and PetSmart.

Located in the smaller outparcels was Ulta, GNC, Arby's and Taco Bell. And situated closest to the southeast ramp of I-80, a string of smaller, nationally known specialty stores were located; Sally Beauty Supply, Hallmark, and Lane Bryant.

Lane Bryant, a woman's clothing store focused on plus-size women's clothing, experienced exceptional earnings. Employees noted that ladies living in the area found that shopping on their way to work, or wherever else the highway would take them, was a fabulous convenience. However, on a snowy Saturday morning, February 2, 2008, it was a stocky African American *man* who entered the store. With beaded braids hanging from his cornrowed hair he was a stark contrast to the four female customers. Manager Rhoda McFarland and her part time employee took careful notice, then continued opening procedures. It was 10 am.

A short time later, at 10:45 am, the Tinley Park 911 received a frantic emergency call from inside the store. A police officer on a call outside Target was at the scene within one minute, but as he entered the back room he discovered a horrific scene. The female customers and two employees had been beaten and

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then shot execution style. Of the six ladies present that day only the part-time employee survived. Her identity is still unknown.

Tinley Park Police, Illinois State Troopers and a host of neighboring Police departments immediately locked down the shopping center, closed the highway and scoured the area. Helicopters buzzed overhead, customers at neighboring stores were herded outside and every aisle of every location was searched. Despite widespread collaboration of law enforcement and local media, no suspect was ever found. It is assumed he was able to escape along the vast expanse of the second longest highway in America. And in spite of the ongoing open case, no killer has never been found.

What investigators did find, however, was Esther Elizabeth Reed. As law enforcement officials swarmed over Tinley Park looking for a mass murderer, they traced each out-of-state vehicle in the local parking lots. In the guest lot of the nearby Holiday Inn was a car registered to none other than the United States Secret Service' Most Wanted female fugitive.

On February 2, 2008, the morning of the most horrific murders in Tinley Park history, authorities took Esther Reed into custody and charged her with four counts of felony.



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Brooke Hensen's family soon found out that the woman posing to be their daughter, their sister, their niece was in fact, a fraud.

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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

<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup>

- **The God who made the world and everything in it**, being Lord of heaven and earth, **does not live in temples made by man**, <sup>25</sup> nor is he **served by human hands, as though he needed anything**, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and **everything**.
- <sup>26</sup> 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**,
- <sup>27</sup> 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, <sup>28</sup> 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;”<sup>1</sup> 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).

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<sup>1</sup> 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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## Session 2 Change is Good

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<b>10 Simple Decorating Rules for Arranging Furniture</b>	<b>Don't Settle for Moving the Furniture Around in Your Own Little Kingdom</b>
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