

Gateway Fellowship Church

Marathon Faith

Part Five- Trials

September 23, 2018

Teacher: John Van Pay, Lead Pastor

There we were on the Hiawatha Trail in the scenic mountains of Montana. I talked Stephanie into riding her mountain bike with me on a 15-mile trail. It was a lot of fun at first. I was so proud of her. She was just riding so strong. Romance was in the air. We would take several breaks and take in the mountains, the scenery, the fresh air. Maybe sneak a kiss or two. We were having such a good time. Then after about three hours something changed. Sweet little Stephanie that you see on Sunday mornings wasn't so sweet anymore. She was tired. Three hours had passed. This mountain bike trail went over bridges and different obstacles and went through ten different train tunnels. The very last train tunnel is known as the St Paul train tunnel. It is 1.7 miles long. It looks like it leads straight to Hell. I mean, there is nothing saintly about it. It's dark. It was 70 degrees on the outside and 40 degrees on the inside. It's wet. There was water dripping down from on top. While we were biking through this tunnel, about half way through Stephanie was like "John why did you bring me here?" There was NO love in the tone of her voice. It was in that moment that Stephanie needed to know one thing. That thing is "When you're in a dark place, look for the light." When she saw the light, it was like something else had changed. She started riding a whole lot faster like she drank a bunch of Red Bull. It was like the Holy Ghost just got ahold of her. She passed me to get to the exit. There is nothing like the light at the end of the tunnel. What is true in our experience is true in any endurance race. If you have ever ran or cycled for miles or hours, then you know about three or four miles from the finish line you hit what is known as the wall. It's when everything inside of you screams Quit! The pain is bad, and you start having these conversations with yourself where you talk to God and say things like, "God if you just get me to the finish line, I will never do this again." Anybody ever had that thought? Promise I won't ever put myself in this situation again and you don't want to keep going. When you're in a dark place, look for the light. Reality is you may be here right now and you're facing life's greatest trial, like you're going through a crisis. We all go through them. It's not a matter of IF, it's a matter of WHEN. You may have gone through one in the past. You may be going through one right now. We are going to discover what God's word says to us that can help us overcome those trials that we face.

Everything may be going good for you right now, but you need to know ahead of time how to overcome trials so that when you're there, you don't check out. You don't hit the panic button. You don't quit. The Bible says that when you faint on the day of your adversity, your strength is small. So, when you're in a

dark place, look for the light. This is why you need to know that because when you are in that trial, in that dark place, you're going to be tempted to quit. If you do, your faith is small. Your faith is weak. But if you endure, if you keep putting your trust in the Lord and you lean on Him, then your faith is made stronger. Not only that, it's important that you endure and don't quit because other people are watching. Your children are watching. Your friends who don't know the Lord—they are watching. Your witness may never be greater than when you're in that storm of life. When that blip on the radar screen happens. When all hell is just pouring down on you. How are you going to respond? What is your attitude going to be like? Are you going to quit? Are you going to panic? Are you going to turn to other substances to numb the pain or to medicate? The only brings temporary relief. Or are you going to put your trust in the Lord?

Turn with me to Genesis Chapter 37. Glad that you are here. We are in the middle of a series we are calling Marathon Faith. The Bible says in Hebrews that "Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses let us run our race, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus." In Hebrews 12 it says "this great cloud of witnesses" so who are they? Turn to Hebrews 11 and there are twenty of them mentioned by name. They are all from the Old Testament. There was something inside each one of them that helped them endure, that helped them to finish strong. There is an attribute that we can learn and be inspired by from their lives that can help us. Overcome anything that you face, any obstacles. So that one day you can look at the Lord and say, "God I finished my race well. Wasn't always easy, but I finished the race."

Our next endurance runner is Joseph. At the age of seventeen God gave him a dream. A dream of the future and how He was going to use Joseph. Joseph was young, and he prematurely shared his dream with his brothers who were already jealous because Joseph was his Father's favorite son. Are any of you favorites of your parents? (raise your hand) Hopefully your siblings aren't with you. Hopefully your parents did a good job and each of you feel like you're the favorite. But Joseph's brothers knew clearly. His dad made him a coat of many colors. Joseph shares this dream with his brothers and notice how the brothers responded. Genesis 37:23-24, "So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty, there was no water in it. They threw him into what? A pit. A dark place. Imagine you're Joseph, just a kid. Betrayed by your brothers and you're in this dark place and you don't know if you're ever going to get out. You don't know if you're going to get killed. The intention that he was going to be sold into slavery but that would start a sequence of events. That means he is separated from his father, his friends. He would be taken into a different country. Sold as a slave to Potiphar. Potiphar was the captain of the palace guard. Joseph didn't do anything wrong, he wasn't at fault. But he was in a dark place. He didn't panic. He didn't quit. He didn't become bitter. He became better. The Lord honored his character and he worked his way to leadership. Minding his own business at Potiphar's house. We discover in the next chapter that Potiphar's wife was attracted to Joseph and she tried to seduce him. It's the first place in scripture where we have any kind of a "cougar sighting" (laughs). She was attracted to Joseph and she tried to seduce him. Joseph didn't yield to temptation. He ran away. She grabbed part of his clothing garment as proof or evidence, and then she made an accusation against him. She accused him of raping her. Potiphar is upset, and how he responds in Genesis chapter 39:20 "And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison---another dark place. Joseph spends 13 years in prison. He did the right

thing and he still was in a trial. How many of you have ever felt like that? God I am doing everything I know to do. I'm trying to serve. I'm trying to be a good person. I'm trying to trust you. I'm doing all these things and then it feels like things just start falling apart. Have you ever felt like that? That is what Joseph is feeling. He doesn't get bitter. He becomes better. He looks for the light even though he is in a dark place. Year after year he is looking for an opportunity and he hears of somebody in the jail who has a dream and God gives him the wisdom to interpret the dream. Joseph says Remember me when you get out. Years passed and then Pharaoh had a dream and the servant of the household says I know a guy named Joseph who can interpret your dream correctly. So, Joseph stands before Pharaoh and correctly interprets the dream. There was going to be a famine and God gave him wisdom. As a result, Joseph was elevated to the number 2 guy in command of all of Egypt. He helped deliver not only Egyptians, but God's people, and his own family. There was a reconciliation, a reunion that happened. Joseph was not bitter. He forgave and as a result he was able to overcome these trials that he faced. These trials built character and they had great purpose. What's true for Joseph is true for you. What kind of trial are you facing? What kind of dark place are you in? What is the tough challenge in front of you? When you feel hopeless and desperate and helpless. Maybe you're a mom and your kid is going through some things. You're stressed out and you don't have much margin. Or maybe there is a hardship, or a physical issue with one of your kids and you're feeling like I don't know if I can continue on. Maybe you have sat in the doctor's office and the doctor doesn't have answers to the chronic illness you have been facing. It doesn't seem like there is light at the end of the tunnel. Maybe there is a broken, fractured relationship and there is no peace with someone that you love. That has caused your heart to be filled with grief. You're restless. When you're in a dark place, look for the light. The Bible says the Word of God is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path.

Now let's turn to Psalm 40 and we are going to discover someone else who was in a dark place and the Word of God is going to be illuminated to you right now. You're going to be able to apply God's truth to your life. Whenever you're in a trial, never forget this passage in Psalm 40. He is in a very, very dark place. He describes it as being a pit of despair; filled with mud and mire. He is speaking figuratively. Notice his response. Psalm 40:1 it says, "I waited patiently for the Lord to help me." The first lesson that you can discover is to wait. To wait how? Patiently. Few of us like waiting for anything. How many of you have been out on a Friday night to a restaurant and you have given your name and ask, "How long" and they answer "45 minutes" and you turn and walk away? You think to yourself I am not waiting that long. We hate waiting. We hate waiting in line. We hate waiting for anything. I wonder if we have trouble waiting for God? We have this expectation or this preference for God to answer in a certain way, in a certain time. Then we get frustrated when it doesn't happen according to our expectation and then we just try to move on and answer or solve the problem on our own. But it's often times during the waiting, during the dark times of your waiting, that God does His greatest work. I wonder if God never has a chance to answer or help you because you haven't waited patiently? No matter where you are at right now, hit the pause button and say, "God, I don't understand why I am going through this, but I am going to trust You and I am going to wait." I love how the Psalmist refers to God—he refers to him as LORD.

If you're new to your faith, you must see Jesus not just as your Savior, but as your LORD. Lordship means that God is God and I am not. You're not. He is Lord over every area of your life. That means that

I live my life where nothing is off limits to the Lord. I surrender it all. Whatever He wants to do for His glory. For His good pleasure. I am going to trust Him with it. He is over my finances, my relationships, my career, everything. We trust the Lord. Help me Lord in these areas of my life. Know this: When you're facing a trial and are in a dark place and it causes you to become broken, humble and dependent on Him, it's a good thing. That's what waiting implies. I'm going to wait patiently, and I am going to be dependent on you Lord. I don't know how long I am going to be here, but I am going to trust You and your timing. We must wait patiently on the Lord and not pretend things are ok. I wonder how many times we are in a dark place and we don't want to tell anybody, and we just want to keep it to ourselves. The reality is if we are ever going to be rescued from the dark place, we have to admit that we are stuck. Identify it. Recognize it. Maybe take a moment and write in your notes My dark place is and fill in the blank. What is your greatest challenge you are going through right now? What is the trial? God sees you and you are not alone. You're in the presence of a church family that wants to pray for you and help you. Don't hold on to it. Don't isolate yourself. Isn't it the tendency when you're in a dark place to isolate yourself? Turn the isolation into alone time with the Lord.

Scripture goes on to say in the other half of this verse, "I waited patiently for the Lord to help me and He turned to me and heard my cry." Isn't that good news? Your God is listening! He is active. He cares about what you're going through. He cares about your weakness. Jesus, He endured and went through all of the same temptations and trials that we face. He understands. You serve and worship a God who understands and loves you. Who has great compassion and empathy for you. Believe that to be true. Notice the Psalmist says that He turned and heard my cry. There is this desperation, right? This brokenness. God is close to those who are broken. There is a place in scripture where it says He saves every tear, He knows the tears. That God loves you so much and He cares about what you are going through. You're not alone. Go to the Lord. Don't run away. Don't quit. Don't suppress it. Go to the Lord. Ask for help. Cry out for help. Don't let your pride get in the way. Don't be so stubborn that you don't ask for help. That is a dangerous spot when you're in a dark place. Trust the Lord. Ask for help. Ask others. Ask a trusted friend. Ask your small group to help you. You're not designed to carry it alone. That is why the Bible says to carry each other's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ. We are a family. We are supposed to carry each other's burdens and pray. God sees your trials. He sees your dark places. He sees the broken, fractured relationship. He sees the broken dream. He sees the personal sin. The addiction. The stronghold. Where it doesn't seem like you can overcome on your own. When you're in a dark place, look for the light.

Psalm 40:2 it says, "He lifted me out of the pit of despair, out of the mud and the mire. He set my feet on solid ground and steadied me as I walked along." Raise your hand if you know that in the past God delivered you from a trial. Without a shadow of a doubt, it was His mercy, grace and power. Look around this room. You're not alone. If you're going through something right now, listen to our testimony that God will hear you. He will, in His timing, lift you out of this dark place. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." He is that light. May we look to Jesus. May we look to the Word of God. He will help us. He will provide a way out. This is His promise. It is true.

Notice next he says, "He has given me a new song to sing, a hymn of praise to our God." A third truth that you can apply to your life if you're in a dark place is that you can sing your anthem. Find your song. Maybe some of you are like me and you can't hold a note if it had a handle. But you are created to worship. Find your song. It's really easy when you feel good, and you're on that mountaintop, when things are going well; that's a great time to worship the Lord and trust God. But can you trust God in the dark place? I love the story in the book of Acts where Paul and Silas are in jail and they have shackles around their wrists. They began to sing praises to the Lord and during that time of worship, God provides a miracle. Just as we are to wait on Him, sometimes He is waiting on us. He wants to shape your character and your faith to become stronger. He is waiting for you. Maybe He has heard your cry and your prayers, but maybe He is waiting for you to worship Him. He is waiting for you to sing. Then it gets His attention. Maybe it's an old song you learned when you were a kid. When things are not going good, can you sing that song? Can you worship the Lord? When you worship, it's so powerful, because it takes eyes off your trial and puts them on the Lord. When you worship, something happens inside of you. Your faith begins to rise. Your trust begins to deepen of the Lord and you begin to have more faith. The evidence of things you can't see. You're able to say God you are all powerful. You're full of grace and mercy. I am going to trust you today with the impossible. You sing that anthem.

Several months ago, I was going through a trial. I got my song. I discovered a song written by Hillsong called "Be Still". I must've played that song over 100 times, especially at night when it was dark. I would just play that song over and over. I would worship the Lord. In the presence of the Lord He can bring so much peace that will guard your heart and guard your mind as a result of you crying out to Him. When you trust and you worship the Lord, look what happens. This is the Psalmist. He sings a new song to the Lord. "Many will see what He has done and be astounded. They will put their trust in the Lord." Psalm 40:3. "Oh the joys of those who trust the Lord, who have no confidence in the proud, or in those who worship idols." Psalm 40:4 "O Lord my God, you have done many miracles for us. Your plans for us are too numerous to list." Psalm 40:5 "If I tried to recite all your wonderful deeds I would never come to the end of them." Do you see what is happening here? This transformation is taking place. He is in a dark place and He is crying out to God. God is delivering him. By faith he is saying God I am grateful. I am putting my trust in you. I am worshiping you and He is filling his heart with joy. Where there was grief and mourning in the evening, now there is joy. Proverbs says we are to trust the Lord and not lean on our own understanding. But in all of our ways, acknowledge Him and He will direct our paths. That is what is happening here. The next thing we can learn from scripture is that when we go through a trial, we can trust that God can have great purpose not only in developing our character; not only by doing a miracle and delivering us out of the dark place but He can use the trial that you are going through to be a witness to others. That can only happen when you share your story. When you boldly open up your mouth and share how God is active and at work. I was never alone through that dark time. The Lord was with me. This is how He provided a way out. This is how I grew as a result of that and I am going to testify to God's glory and his faithfulness. Share your story. Psalm 40:9-10 "I have told all your people about your justice. I have not been afraid to speak out, as you, O Lord, well know. I have not kept this good news hidden in my heart; I have talked about your faithfulness and saving power. I have told everyone in the great assembly of your unfailing love and faithfulness." When God delivers you from your dark place and you have seen the light and you're on the other side, be quick to give Him glory! Be quick to share with those who are near and those who are far how faithful your God is. The keys that

unlocked you from getting out of that dark place is the keys that other people need. You have discovered them. They need to learn and be encouraged by your story. Share your story!

My friend, Don Chatham, serves as a pastor on our staff. Several months ago, he had endured a lot of physical hardship with his back. You're going to discover a little bit of his story. He faced his greatest trial. Don, thank you for being here and sharing. We love you.

Don: I am retired Air Force and I had some injuries that caught up with me through my military career. Disc herniations and things like that. I had fed the pain through pain killers and steroid injections. It finally got to a point where I felt like if I was going to continue in ministry I needed to do something more in depth. It was going to be a pretty major surgery about 8 hours. I went into the surgery with all this confidence about the Lord that He would be there for me. I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. The nurses and everybody were looking at me like He really has it together. I was feeling really great. When the 2<sup>nd</sup> day hit and my faith wasn't quite as great. It's easy to worship God on the mountaintop. But when you're in that dark place, He showed me that while I had faith in Him, my trust in Him was not really as great as I thought it was. Getting out of bed that next day, I had a fractured vertebra as I got out of bed with the therapist, my L-2 vertebrae fractured. It went from the fracture, to getting an infection in my 7-inch lower back scar. Then the complications got so bad that I couldn't eat for 4 days and they had to put a tube down my nose so that I could be fed. At that point I realized I could either be inward focused and complain, or trust in the Lord. I came across the story in the Bible about Joseph, same as Pastor John was talking about. Joseph was facing his own trial: betrayed by his own brothers and sold into slavery and eventually falsely accused and thrown into prison. Through the whole story I never saw a time where he complained or became negative. He continued his trust in the Lord even through all the trials he went through. I was determined after reading the story of Joseph to continue on and so as I got up out of bed, you know the hospital wants you up right away to prevent blood clots, so at first, I would walk maybe like 10 feet. The Lord was with me giving me the strength. I knew He was there. Then eventually it became where I was walking part of the hospital hallway and then eventually the whole floor. Then it got to the point where I was walking a whole mile and I got rid of my walker and then the cane. I can say thankfully that the Lord has healed me, and He continues to heal me and as of this past week I can now say this is gone too! (removes back brace and lifts it high in the air).

JVP: Love you my brother. God is faithful! You have never been alone. You didn't give up. You didn't quit. I know it wasn't easy. Now you are here testifying to God's faithfulness in your life.

Prayer

KDD

9/24/18