

On The Other Side

May 24, 2020

Hey, as we get started today I want to ask you what your favorite childhood book or story was when you were growing up. Do you have one? Now, maybe you weren't much of a reader when you were a kid, but maybe your mom or dad or one of your grandparents would read you a bedtime story.

Do you have one that comes to mind? Maybe talk about it with a group of people you are watching this with or, better yet, why don't you throw it into the chat? We'd love to hear from you.

Maybe for you it was Dr. Seuss's *Green Eggs and Ham*. Or maybe his other book *Oh the Places You'll Go*. Maybe it was that classic book from elementary school *Charlotte's Web*. My personal favorite was *Goodnight Moon*. I loved that book.

In fact, I would read that book to my kids when they were little. Admittedly, it got a little awkward a few years ago when they were like, "Dad, we are teenagers. We're done with *Goodnight Moon*." I was just like, "It's a good book. I want to read it."

What about this book? *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*? Now, unless you've been living under a rock here lately, perhaps the title of that book describes how many of us are feeling nowadays. I know there have been plenty of mornings when I wake up looking a lot like Alexander on the cover of that book.

If you're not familiar with the story, Alexander is this little boy who wakes up in the morning and he just knows he's going to have a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. For starters, he goes to bed at night with gum in his mouth and the next morning when he wakes up it is in his hair.

He goes into the kitchen for breakfast and his brothers, they get prizes in their cereal, but Alexander only gets cereal in his cereal. He doesn't get the window seat on the bus he wants. His best friend tells him at recess he doesn't want to be friends any more with him. At lunch they run out of dessert. After school he goes to the dentist only to discover he's got a cavity. Alexander is just having a rough day.

And I would imagine that all of us have had moments in which we've had days where things don't go our way. And in those seasons, it's natural, it's human even, to wrestle with negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

But what we choose to do with those negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors actually is a really big deal because it is shaping the person you are becoming. And another word for this idea of becoming would simply be the word:

Growth

Growth is this idea that you and I are becoming someone different. We are changing. We are hopefully getting better. Growth is not neutral, you are either growing or you are not. But

here is the thing about growth. Growth always implies some sort of resistance—think an adolescent who is going through growing pains as they experience a growth spurt one summer. And it's painful, because gravity is resisting the growth. Or think about a seed in the soil. It's resisting the dirt so that way a plant can grow.

Growth always implies resistance of some kind. And resistance is usually painful. It's uncomfortable. And it's usually the discomfort and the pain that we point to and say, "That's the reason why I'm having a bad day. That's the reason why this is a difficult season of life." But I want you to think about this equation right here:

Bad Days => Exponential Growth!

This is true if we endure, show resilience, and lean into the strength God provides, and never quit. I love how James describes this in chapter 1, verses 2 through 4 in the New Testament. I want to read The Message paraphrase because I love how it says it.

James writes this, *"Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. So don't try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way."*

I love the word picture it gives there. Under pressure contents get revealed. It says when you get pressure from all sides, your faith life comes out into the open.

Several days ago, I was in the pantry with my youngest daughter Kadence. She goes into the kitchen and pulls out one of those Izzy drinks. I don't know if you know what those are, but they are supposedly like a little bit healthier version of a carbonated drink. I'm not sure they are, but she likes them and they are good.

She pulls out one of those drinks. And I notice out of my side vision that she takes the can, she shakes it twice, and proceeds to open it. When she does, I can begin to hear the fizz and the contents of that can starting to come out.

And man, I turned around and ran over, and jumped on that can like a live grenade. I took it underneath my shirt because I didn't want it to blow up all over the pantry. I rushed it over to the sink. I turned around and she is standing there, wide-eyed, hands like this. She is like, "Daddy, I had no idea it was going to do that."

I said, "Why would you shake the can?"

And she said, "I thought you were supposed to do that."

I think she had gotten it mixed up with like a bottle of orange juice. Usually with orange juice you shake it a couple of times and open it. I think she got her wires crossed, and that's what she did. But it was a very vivid reminder right then and there that contents get revealed under pressure.

Oftentimes there are things in my character that it's easy to sort of cover up or maybe to not even notice when days are good, when seasons are going well. But when life gets difficult, the contents get revealed.

I want you to know and understand this important truth today:

Growth and comfort are rivals.

And if you value comfort too much, then you're going to limit your ability to experience personal and spiritual growth. But if you want to grow, then it's going to require you to endure through a fair amount of discomfort and pain. You're going to have to learn to navigate the terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days.

And on the other side of our discomfort and pain lies the potential for exponential growth. God wants you to grow. God wants you to experience personal and spiritual growth in every way: your spiritual growth, in your marriage, your relationships, your parenting, your finances, and especially your character. God wants you to grow.

In fact, God wants you to grow more than he wants to rescue you from uncomfortable circumstances. You see, God will often keep you and me from going around something uncomfortable so that we might go straight through it.

In this current season, none of us are comfortable right now. But one of the things that means is that we all have the opportunity to experience exponential growth like maybe no other time in our lives. But we've got to be resilient. And that's what we've been talking about in this series.

I want to welcome everybody, wherever you may be joining us from around our city, or around the world. If this is your first time joining us, throw it into the chat. If it's your first time, we'd love to welcome you.

We've been in this series call *Resilience*, and we've been studying the life of a guy named Joseph. We're wrapping it up today. If you missed out, you can go back and get caught up.

Joseph was a guy who was talented, gifted, and called by God. And God wants to use Joseph in incredible ways in his life, and eventually he does. But Joseph's life takes a 13year detour that was actually pretty painful.

His brothers abandoned him. They sold him into slavery. He gets accused of something he didn't do. He gets forgotten in prison. Finally, Pharaoh has a dream that no one can interpret, and Joseph interprets the dream with God's help. And he says, "There is going to be seven years of plenty and seven years of famine, so you'd better get ready for the seven years of famine."

So, Pharaoh puts Joseph in charge, and he is a phenomenal leader. He gets Egypt ready for the famine. Two years into the famine, guess who shows up? His brothers, who had betrayed him all those years ago.

And Joseph recognizes them, but they don't recognize him. And last week, if you joined us, Pastor Ryan did an amazing job of describing how Joseph set his brothers up. He wanted to see if their character had really changed. And so, his brother Benjamin, Joseph sort of frames him up and his brothers come to Benjamin's rescue.

There is this really powerful moment where Judah, who was the very brother who sold Joseph into slavery, it was his idea. Judah steps up and says, "I'll take Benjamin's place. I'll stay in Benjamin's place."

It was not only so meaningful for Joseph, but it was a foreshadowing of Jesus, our Savior, who would step up to take our place. You see, it's no accident that Jesus comes from the line of Judah. And right there we see that this isn't just some great story about a young kid who grows up to be a great leader. This is a story about a foreshadowing of our Savior Jesus Christ. That's where we left off last week.

I want to wrap up Joseph's story today by starting in chapter 45, verse 1. Follow along with me. *"Joseph could stand it no longer. There were many people in the room, and he said to his attendants, 'Out, all of you!' So he was alone with his brothers when he told them who he was. Then he broke down and wept. He wept so loudly the Egyptians could hear him, and word of it quickly carried to Pharaoh's palace.*

"'I am Joseph!' he said to his brothers. 'Is my father still alive?' But his brothers were speechless! They were stunned to realize that Joseph was standing there in front of them. 'Please, come closer,' he said to them. So they came closer. And he said again, 'I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt.

"'But don't be upset, and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives. This famine that has ravaged the land for two years will last five more years, and there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors. So it was God who sent me here, not you! And he is the one who made me an adviser to Pharaoh—the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt.'"

Now, did you notice the refrain that Joseph kept coming back to? He kept saying, "God has sent me, God has sent me." He didn't say, "You betrayed me." He didn't say, "God had abandoned me," which I think I would have been tempted to say. But Joseph says, "No, God actually sent me here."

Joseph had realized something. God had sent him through his discomfort and his pain so that he might experience some exponential growth in his life that would then bless so many people. That's a real mark of spiritual maturity that took a while for Joseph to grow into.

You know, when my middle daughter Kennedy—it took her a little bit longer to learn how to walk in comparison to our other kids—the day came right around the time when most kids would learn to take their first few steps, and Kennedy was scooting around the house. She would sit on her backside and scoot around the house.

She would hold up her arms and ask us to carry her around. Part of the problem in delaying her ability to learn how to walk was whenever she would cry we would pick her up and take her wherever she wanted to go.

Her older brother and sister, they would walk up to her and they would scoop her up and take her around. It was delaying her ability to walk. Anytime she would cry out in discomfort, we would come and rescue her.

And so, we had to have a family meeting. We said, "Listen, even though Kennedi is going to cry, and even though she is going to want us to pick her up, we're going to have to not do it. We're going to have to resist it and let her cry, let her be uncomfortable, so that she finds the motivation to learn how to walk."

That was easier said than done. I probably had the hardest time with it. Whenever I would hear my little girl cry, I would want to go immediately to her and calm her down. As her dad I had to come to this realization that I needed to let her cry. And I needed to let her sit in her discomfort and her pain for her own good, so she would learn how to take some steps on her own.

It was so painful as her father. She would give me this look through her big crocodile tears and her pouty lips like, "Daddy, don't you love me? Daddy, don't you care about me?" And everything within me wanted to go and rescue her. I was right there. But I loved her enough to leave her in that so she would learn how to grow. And I'll never forget the day, in the middle of her tears, when she got up and took her first few faltering steps across the kitchen.

There have been plenty of times in my life when I've cried out to God and I've asked him to rescue me, get me out of this, and console me out of my discomfort and pain. And there have been moments when I was like, "God, where are you?"

I'm coming to see in retrospect that he's been there all along. But that he wants me to experience growth. Instead of going around it, he wants me to go straight through it. I'm reminded of that great quote from C.S. Lewis. Maybe you've heard it. "God whispers to us in our pleasures, he speaks in our conscience, but he shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

Now listen, I know right now that you might be in a set of circumstances where it might feel as if God is silent, maybe as if God has abandoned you in some way. Can I reassure you that he is a good, good Father and he is still there? He is close to the brokenhearted. And if you are feeling brokenhearted right now, God has promised he has never been closer to you. He is right there.

But instead of scooping us up out of painful circumstances, he oftentimes, in fact more of the time, sustains us through them so we might experience growth on the other side of that discomfort and pain that we never could have gotten to on our own.

Can I just share this important principle with you? Share it with those that you know.

Almost everything you want in life, but don't have, is on the other side of your comfort zone.

So, you want a better marriage? It's on the other side of your comfort zone. You want more sound finances? It's on the other side of your comfort zone. You want to be a better parent? You want to be a better friend? You want to go further in your career? You want to achieve your goals? You want to grow spiritually to look more like Jesus?

It is all on the other side of your comfort zone, which is why God oftentimes blesses us by not answering our prayers the way that we pray them. He knows that's going to short-circuit growth. So, God chooses to go about it another way. God chooses to sustain us through it and to carry us through it.

This is what we see in the life of Joseph. I want to finish the story. Joseph goes and tells his brothers to go tell his father that he is still alive. He says, "Hey listen, there are five more years of famine, so get my father and our whole family. You can move here, and I will take care of you." They go back.

Later, after Jacob died¹, his brothers don't have the nerve to talk to him to his face, so they send a message. And listen to how Joseph responds in chapter 50 verse 17.

"When Joseph received the message, he broke down and wept. Then his brothers came and threw themselves down before Joseph. 'Look, we are your slaves!' they said. But Joseph replied, 'Don't be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you?'" And in verse 20, and I think this is one of the most pivotal verses in all of Joseph's story, *"You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. No, don't be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children.' So he reassured them by speaking kindly to them."*

You see, Joseph got it. Joseph understood that from his perspective what looked like it was going to be for his harm was actually God intending it for his good. Let me just leave you with a couple of words of application here. Here is the first one:

God will often walk us through our pain, rather than around it.

God often take circumstances that we would never choose for ourselves, and he will use those circumstances like we can never do in ourselves on our own.

And I know I've been guilty in my life of prematurely declaring that maybe God didn't answer my prayer, God had abandoned me, or he doesn't care. And as I look back in retrospect, as I see in my life, I can look at you and say confidently that God has answered every single one of my prayers. He just didn't always answer them the way I prayed them, or in the timeline I wanted him to. I can actually look back and say it was a blessing.

¹ Edit to the original message.

Listen, I'm not an old man. I'm kind of in the middle of the road. I've got a lot more to learn, but I've learned a lot already. One of the things I discovered as I look back is that I am so,

so grateful that God has not answered all my prayers the way that I prayed them. If he had, it would have derailed my life.

If you think about that for a minute, just look back on your life and think, "If God would have answered my prayer the way I wanted, we would have moved to a place we never should have moved to. I would have taken a job I shouldn't have taken."

Or, "I was dating that boy or that girl, and I would have married them, but it didn't work out. I prayed to God to have that work out, but now I look at their Facebook profile and I'm like, 'Whew, dodged a bullet on that one. God really did know what he was doing.'"

And I know it may not make sense right now in the present, but God is working all things out for your good, for your growth, and for his glory.

I'm learning to switch my prayers from "God, get me out of this," or "God give me this," to "God, will you give me the capacity to shoulder this? Would you give me the ability to endure this, to be resilient, to walk through it with your strength." Here is the second word of application:

Surround yourself with people who won't let you quit.

That's the biggest thing right now. And I think that one of the greatest challenges of this current crisis that we're in is just we want to be around people and that's become so challenging. As a pastor, this is excruciating to me, to try to pastor people who I can't be within six feet of.

And right now, we need each other more than ever. And we're going to have to dig in, show some endurance, some resilience, and we're going to have to continue to lean in and figure out how we're going to continue to encourage each other so we don't quit.

This is the idea behind the author of Hebrews when he writes these words in chapter 12 verses 1-3. He is talking about being encouraged by the faith of the people who have gone before us. And I want to read it once again from The Message paraphrase, because I like how he words it.

"Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside

God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!"

I just want to encourage you right now. I know we are in a marathon, not a sprint. I know we are feeling fatigued. I know this is challenging. Right now, though, this is the time when the church of Jesus Christ should shine the brightest.

This is the time when we run in, we don't run away. And we actually get better through crisis as we minister to the needs of people offering help and hope that can come in and through Jesus Christ.

Can I just stir you up right now as a pastor who loves you? If you've started to drift away from your group right now because you're tired of zoom meetings, then figure out another way to do it.

Maybe get together at a distance outside, sit in a park somewhere with chairs. That way you can be around people. Call someone. Write somebody a letter. Encourage each other. Figure out a way to serve one another.

Can I just ask you to be praying for us as church leadership as we try to plan out what the next several weeks and months look like? We do want to re-gather the church in safe ways that follow government guidelines; we know how important it is that we are not separated and alone.

We're trying to come up with plans and processes. We're praying it through. What can we do? Can we do a drive-by prayer time? Can we do an outdoor worship service? We're trying to maybe do another run of Traders Point tee shirts. We're trying to do anything we can.

Maybe it would be safe for your group to get together at a distance and maybe do a watch party, watch the worship service together. We could be a church in homes as we do our online worship on the weekends. We're trying to figure all that out. We would ask that you would pray for wisdom and clarity as we navigate the next stage of this crisis.

Can I just thank you as a church for your generosity, your love, your encouragement as we stick through this together and show some resilience?

The last thing I want to share with you as we wrap up this series:

On the other side of Jesus' pain on the cross was our comfort and salvation.

And I want you to know that Jesus has never asked us to do anything that he wasn't willing to do himself. I'm reminded of that prayer that Jesus prayed in the garden where he said, "Father, if there is any other way could you show it to me right now?"

Do you hear what he is asking? "God, if there is a way for me to go around the discomfort of the cross would you show it to me?"

And the way God answered that prayer was, “No, you need to go straight through it.”

What kept Jesus on the cross wasn't the nails, it wasn't the intimidation of the Roman soldiers. It was his love for you and me. He knew he was going to have to go straight through that discomfort to give us hope and to give us salvation.

Today, if you are ready to make Jesus the Lord and Savior of your life, I would just want to lead you to that right there where you are watching this from, wherever you may be. All you have to do is acknowledge your sin, acknowledge your inability to go through this life on your own, recognize that he is God, that Jesus is the Mediator and Savior between you and God, and you simply want to surrender your life to him. And the Holy Spirit will enter into you and begin to help you to grow exponentially to look more and more like Jesus.

Part of that response is baptism. Man, that's one of the things I'm missing is actually baptizing people. We want to figure out creative ways to do that too. We're trying to figure out if we could set up an outdoor baptistry, and maybe you show up with your life group or immediate family.

If it's maybe not totally safe to do so, you can just get into the baptistry yourself and the pastor will be outside and lead you through your confession. If you need to, you just lower yourself. That's totally legal. It will work.

But if you are ready to be baptized, we'd love to hear from you. Just follow this link: tpcc.org/baptism. We would love to follow up with you and schedule a time where you can safely be baptized in the coming weeks. That would be the greatest thrill for us.

Can I right now just pray for all of us as we wrap up this series together?

Father, we come to you right now and Lord, I just first of all want to celebrate with anyone and everyone who decided today to give their lives to you. To draw that line in the sand and say, “I'm all in. I want to follow after Jesus.”

May they make themselves known by throwing that into the chat or by following up through the link so we can celebrate with them and pray with them as a church family. God, there is a big party in heaven right now because of that one person who chose to give his or her life to Jesus.

Father, I would pray that you would give us strength, endurance, and resilience as we navigate through these challenging uncomfortable days, knowing that exponential growth lies on the other side of them as we lean into your strength and power and don't quit.

God, we need to be the church more than ever, and we need the church more than ever. Would you give us wisdom to know how to be the church in these challenging times? We know you are allowing this for a reason, and we continue to declare our trust in you as we desire to look more and more like you on the other side of this crisis.

Thank you for Jesus and the hope that he gives. We ask this in your name. Amen.

