

Do Not Lose Heart. Sermon Study Guide- 01/07/18

Ephesians 3:1-13

- Pray together as a group
- If you have time, read the entire text of Ephesians 3:1-13

Introduction to the text:

In these verses, Paul is talking about difficulties and trials he is experiencing as he follows Christ and shares the Gospel message.

The Bible is the most honest book ever written. Like our lives, it doesn't deal with suffering in just one chapter or one book. The theme of suffering is woven through many chapters and books of the Bible.

None of us are exempt from trials and difficulties that happen in life. There are no easy answers to the "why?" Yet, the hope we do have is that God promises to be with us in the middle of our difficulties. He enters into our pain and gives us the grace and strength we need to endure as we seek to follow Him.

There are three lessons we can learn from Paul as we navigate life's trials and difficulties:

Lesson 1: How can I share Christ?

Read Ephesians 3:1-6

What is amazing to think is that Paul is in prison, not because he did anything wrong, but because he wouldn't stop talking about Jesus. Even as He is in prison, he keeps preaching about Christ.

- Paul is saying, "Even as I'm suffering and going through difficulties, I want people to know the Gospel message". Paul's whole goal is to get the word out about Jesus. His desire was to be a faithful servant, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to him (v. 7).
- At the forefront of Paul's mind, as he is going through trials and difficulties, is this thought:** *How can I **help** other people? How can I **serve** other people. How can I **introduce** other people to Jesus?*

Discussion Questions:

Describe a trial or difficulty you have recently experienced or are currently experiencing.

How can you or have you used life's hardships to point others to Jesus?

Lesson 2: How is God growing me?

Read Ephesians 3:7-9

As Paul walks through trials and difficulties, he is also growing and maturing in his faith. We see Paul's humility. Paul says I'm the very least of all the saints (v.8) That was not mock humility but his honest assessment of himself.

Paul allowed God to use the trials and difficulties of life to mold and shape him more and more into the image of Jesus. The more trials and difficulties he faced, the more dependent He became on God.

Romans 8:28 says,

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

The promise of Romans 8:28 is that **that God can use all situations to draw us nearer to Him. He can also use trials to produce more of His character in us.**

Pastor Driscoll writes:

God can actually use the hardest parts of our life to be the sweetest parts of our life. He can use the most painful parts of our story to be the most encouraging parts of our story for someone else.

Discussion Questions:

How have trials and difficulties drawn you closer to Christ?

How have you seen God produce more of His character in you as you walk through trials and difficulties?

How has God used your story to encourage others?

What should we do in those moments when God feels distant as we go through trials and hardships?

The Importance of Honesty:

One of the things we see in Paul is his honesty and willingness to share about his trials. It's good to be honest. As we walk through difficulties, we should be honest with God honest with God's people.

Many of us don't want to burden anyone with anything. We think, "Well, I need to be self-sufficient."

Yet, one of the gifts God gives us as we go through hardships, is the gift of other believers who can walk beside us and encourage us.

Discussion Questions:

Why is it difficult to be honest when we walk through trials and difficulties?

How can you as a small group seek to be more honest with one another?

Lesson 3: Do Not Lose Heart

So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.- Ephesians 3:11-13

As we walk through hardships, we need to remember the ultimate victory that is ours in Christ.

Romans 8:38-39 says,

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

*Christ's death, resurrection, and exaltation at God's right hand guarantees our victory over anything and everything that would separate us from His love. When following Christ brings distress, we sometimes distance ourselves from Him. **But Christ never draws back from us.** – Lutheran Study Bible*

Whatever the difficulties and trials in life, , we can be assured that God is with us. He is near. God doesn't always give us an answer, **but He gives us his presence.** That is an amazing gift.

We also have hope because Jesus has gone before us, and He understands what we are experiencing.

Pastor Driscoll says:

Remember, Jesus suffered the most. He suffered horrifically, he suffered unjustly, and he suffered righteously. And the good news is that Jesus will bring all suffering to an end. In a world that's filled with suffering, we don't have a God who's immune from it and separated from it. Rather He enters into it, He tastes it and experiences it, and He identifies with us in the midst of it.

No matter what season you currently are in, no matter what trials or difficulties may come your way, remember this:

Jesus knows. He is with you. He loves you, He grieves with you, He's been where you are. He enters into our pain and gives us the grace, courage and strength we need to endure as we seek to follow Him.

Discussion Questions:

How does it encourage you to know that Jesus understands what pain and suffering are like?

When and how have you experienced Christ walking beside you as you go through hardships and difficulties?

Prayer Items:

- Pray over any difficulties or hardships those in your group may be experiencing.
- Ask God to reveal to you how He is at work in the middle of life's difficulties.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to encourage and strengthen those in our church who are going through hardships.

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