



Introduction

Tonight, we are starting a new series that we are calling “Living Hope.” The purpose of this series is to explore what God has to say to us about our mental health and the struggles that we sometimes find ourselves in.

Before we get started there are a couple of things that I want you all to keep in mind as we go through this series.

First, I am not a licensed counselor or therapist. I say that because mental health struggles are real and painful, and there are people who are specially trained and educated to help you deal with those. Just like a person who has the flu would go to a medical doctor, someone who is struggling with depression or anxiety should talk to someone who can help them in a way that I can't.

What I can do is show you the things that God says to us in the middle of our hardest struggles. And that's really what this series is about: seeing God's heart for us when we are struggling. Sometimes there can be a lot of stigma and stuff surrounding mental health, especially for Christians. Sometimes we feel like we shouldn't feel this way, or that we aren't allowed to talk about mental health issues. In reality, God knows that we have hurts and He has a lot to say to us about those struggles.

The second thing I want to say is that this is a series for everyone, not just people dealing with depression, anxiety, or another named struggle. All of us will at some point struggle with suffering of some kind. They may not always be called depression, but we all have seasons of sadness. It may not prevent us from trying things, but we all have moments of fear and worry. So, don't think that this doesn't apply to you! It's important to know what God says to all of us in the middle of our struggles.

Tension

The truth is, when we are really struggling, it can be hard to remember that God still cares for and loves us. There can be moments when we are struggling and we feel so low that we cannot imagine God loves us. In fact,

we might even be tempted to think that He has given up on us. If we are honest, it can be easy to question whether God really cares because, why would He let us feel this way? The truth is, sometimes we come the closest to God in the middle of our deepest pain.

Truth

What we need to realize is that no matter how deep our pain goes, God has never moved away from us. In fact, it is in those moments that He offers us a glimpse into His heart for us. We are going to spend a few moments looking at some passages that show us how God feels for us when we feel broken.

The first one of these verses comes from the book of Isaiah, in chapter forty-two. In this passage, God spoke to the nation of Israel about the coming Messiah who will rescue them. He spoke about how He would put His Spirit on the Messiah, that the Messiah would not be loud and arrogant, but also that the Messiah would establish justice upon the Earth.

In other words, this Messiah, who we now understand was Jesus, would be a meek and humble servant of God who would use kindness and gentleness in dealing with His people. He wouldn't be like the oppressive kings and dictators that the Israelites had known up until that point. The Messiah, Jesus, would be patient with them and care for them. Here's one verse that is especially powerful:

He will not break a bruised reed, and He will not put out a smoldering wick; He will faithfully bring justice. (Isaiah 42:3)

This verse uses a couple of metaphors to show us how Jesus interacts with us when we are weak and broken.

First, it talks about a bruised reed. What does that mean exactly? Well, if you've ever seen a plant that is bent over, you'll notice that the stalk is weak at a certain spot. In other words, it is bruised. When someone sees that a branch or a stem may just snap where the plant is broken, many people may just remove the plant and throw it away. But these verses tell us that Jesus is not like that.

When we are feeling broken, we are like those bruised reeds. We are hurting and suffering, and it feels like everyone is kicking us while we are down. But not Jesus. He understands our brokenness because He lived it Himself. And He won't break us further. Instead, He begins to help us heal.

The second metaphor is of a smoldering wick. Picture a candle that has almost completely burned out. It has lost all its fuel, all its ability to do anything. Sometimes, we find ourselves in that kind of brokenness. The kind where it feels like we just don't have any energy or willpower to do anything; like we're a smoldering wick. But Jesus doesn't snuff us out. He comes to us and cares for us. He is with us.

It is amazing to know that in our most painful struggles, Jesus doesn't push us away. There are all kinds of people who are ready to tell us to get over it, grow up, just stop being sad, or any other number of terrible things to say. Jesus is not one of those people. Jesus hears us. Jesus sees us. Jesus does not push us away.

Jesus cares for us in our brokenness. Here's another verse, this time from the book of Psalms, that reinforces this:

The sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit. You will not despise a broken and humbled heart, God. (Psalm 51:17)

This verse tells us that God does not despise a broken and humbled heart. When we are struggling, we sometimes tell ourselves that we just need to get over it. We fool ourselves into believing that God just wants us to stand up, brush ourselves off, and get over it.

In reality, God wants us to come to Him with our brokenness. He wants to help us with it. He doesn't want us to fix ourselves and then come to Him. Instead, He wants to comfort us while we are broken and struggling and be with us and lead us on the path to healing.

God doesn't just care for us when we care about Him. He doesn't just care about us when we feel good about ourselves. He doesn't just care for us when everything is going right. He cares for us all the time, and He cares about our struggles.

Resolution/Application



Icebreaker

- What kind of things do you find easy to do? What kind of things make you nervous? What used to make you nervous but doesn't anymore?

Discussion

- Why do we struggle with anxiety, whether in general or during specific situations?
- What does it feel like when you are struggling with fear, anxiety, or nervousness?
- How could God have meant for fear to be a helpful thing for us? Why are our emotions and reactions corrupted and broken?
- How can moving towards God help us deal with our fear and anxiety?
- What does it mean that "the Lord is near?"
- Why is it important to remember God's promises when we are feeling fearful and anxious?

Prayer

- Invite students to share a little about a struggle they are having, whether it is with schoolwork, friends, or home. Spend time praying over all the requests.
- If a student confides something that reveals they are in a dangerous situation, be sure to notify someone who can help them be safe.

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