



## **WEEK 3 - THE AGONY OF DEFEAT - MESSAGE BY SHAWN JOHNSON**

### **START**

To get things started, go around the circle and answer this question:

If you could be any animal, what would you choose to be and why?

### **SHARE**

Welcome back to our teaching Series called "Tailgating."

If you have ever been tailgating or seen people tailgating before a football game, you will recognize a few important differences between the tailgaters and the rest of the people there. The tailgaters are sold-out. The game isn't enough; these fans need extra hours prior to the game to chest bump, cheer, eat and talk about their team. The sold-out fans aren't afraid to let everyone else around them know whom they follow and no matter what the score may be, they aren't going anywhere.

The casual fan, however, is different. They tend to blend into the crowd and often times from the outside, you're not really sure what side they are cheering for. They rarely speak up or wear anything in public and could never be confused as being sold out for their team.

In this week's message Shawn talks through one of the tough realities of being a fan, and how our level of dedication doesn't always correlate to a positive outcome. That can be a bitter pill to swallow for the loyal and dedicated follower. Even tougher to swallow is when that same truth seems to hold true in our walk with God.

As Christians we really want to believe that if we walk closely with God in faithful dedication, he'll take care of us; That if we just simply obey and do what we are supposed to that he'll make things go our way when we really need them to. The problem is there are times when it seems like God really lets us down or at the very least he doesn't come through when we want him to. So where does that leave us? How can we reconcile this reality with the promises in scripture that God loves us, will take care of us, and has a plan for our life?

Read:  
2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Is there anything that stands out to you about this passage?

Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible says this about Paul in this instance:

He gloried in his infirmities (v. 9), and took pleasure in them, v. 10. He does not mean his sinful infirmities (those we have reason to be ashamed of and grieved at), but he means his afflictions, his reproaches, necessities, persecutions, and distresses for Christ's sake, v. 10.

And the reason of his glory and joy on account of these things was this—they were fair opportunities for Christ to manifest the power and sufficiency of his grace resting upon him, by which he had so much experience of the strength of divine grace that he could say, When I am weak, then am I strong.

This is a Christian paradox: when we are weak in ourselves, then we are strong in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; when we see ourselves weak in ourselves, then we go out of ourselves to Christ, and are qualified to receive strength from him, and experience most of the supplies of divine strength and grace. (Feel free to re-read if you need to)

How could Paul rejoice in this agony?

In what ways does this strengthen Paul's ministry that it couldn't have been otherwise?

How is this concept of Christ's strength being made evident in your weakness true in your life? If it isn't, why do you think that is? (Hint: this isn't simply limited to physical illness or injury)

## **GROW**

The Bible makes it really clear that God loves us; so much so that he sent his son to die for us and absorb wrath that we simply could not. It is also really clear that he takes care of us, determines our steps, and has a plan for our lives. How could this be true? There are so many followers of Christ that experience pain and suffering. How can Paul say what he does in 2 Corinthians when so much of his ministry doesn't seem to exhibit this love?

Here is a tough reality for followers of Christ: If the truth of scripture doesn't seem to align with what we are experiencing, we must change the perspective of our experience. At face value, it would seem that all we need to do as Christians is "look on the bright side." But that isn't what we're talking about and that isn't what Paul is talking about. We're talking about eternity. We are created for a purpose and what is at stake is far more significant than the difference between a good and bad day.

Read James 1:2-4

What is James saying in this passage?

What is James communicating in this passage?

Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible has this to say:

The suffering state of Christians in this world is represented, and that in a very instructive manner, if we attend to what is plainly and necessarily implied, together with what is fully expressed.

1. It is implied that troubles and afflictions may be the lot of the best Christians, even of those who have the most reason to think and hope well of themselves. As good people are liable to be scattered, they must not think it strange if they meet with troubles.

2. These outward afflictions and troubles are temptations to them. The devil endeavors by sufferings and crosses to draw men to sin and to deter them from duty, or unfit them for it; but, as our afflictions are in God's hand, they are intended for the trial and improvement of our graces. The gold is put into the furnace, that it may be purified.

What stands out to you about this explanation?

There seems to be something intrinsic to trial and suffering that fortifies us in ways not possible when life is "good." How is this? Or if you don't agree, why not?

## **MOVE**

Throughout Jesus' ministry he made it really clear that who we are is far more important than what we do or what happens to us in this life; a truly changed person behaves in truly changed ways. Because of this, he is constantly challenging people to try and understand why they do what they do and to see life through this lens.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul is demonstrating for us a person who grasps this concept. He realizes that he was created for so much more than a temporal existence and welcomes anything that challenges his innate human tendency to be stagnant. The sad reality is that, for good or bad pain, discomfort, and trial spur us to action in a way little else does. When challenges and trials arise, we have a choice to either move toward or away from God.

As hard as it is for us to comprehend, God's ultimate goal for us is not that we live safe, happy lives. Does he care about us? Yes absolutely, so much that we have no hope of ever comprehending how much. Does he want us to be safe and happy? His word says yes, but there is a catch: not at the expense of our eternal souls. In his gracious mercy, he allows things to happen to get our attention or to refocus our attention or to grow us as his children.

We serve and follow a God that sees the whole picture and who will allow speed-bumps in our lives to challenge and grow us more into the likeness of Christ because in the scope of eternity, that is what truly matters.

How does this change how you view your circumstances?

Is this hard to accept? Why or why not?

Where do you still see difficulty in life challenging you? What do you think God might be trying to reveal to you? If you are comfortable, share with the group.

Close with any last thoughts or questions.

## **PRAY**

As a group, spend some time praying for each other and the struggles that we all face. If you are in a co-ed group, consider breaking up into men and women's groups to talk more freely.

## **TO GO**

### **James 1:12**

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

### **Good resources for further reading on this topic:**

Recovering Redemption- Matt Chandler

The Reason for God- Timothy Keller