

A Challenge to All Who Call on the Name of the Lord - Part 2

by Hamp Sirmans

God's heart towards us does not change, even in times of uncertainty, and he invites us into his tender care during times of change.

Duration: 52:17

Scripture: Deuteronomy 11:11-12, Psalm 121:1-2, Jonah 2:2, Jonah 2:7-8, Matthew 6:33, Hebrews 2:11

Topics: "Challenge"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the vulnerability that comes with change in our lives. They use examples such as the transformation of a butterfly and the changing seasons to illustrate this point. The speaker also addresses the common struggle of questioning why our circumstances are difficult if God is good. They emphasize that unforeseen events do not mean we are out of touch with God, and that God does not always warn us of upcoming challenges. The sermon references biblical figures like Moses, Job, and David to show that sudden and unexpected changes can happen to anyone, but it does not indicate the lack of God's kindness and goodness.

Transcript

We began a series last week called the challenge to all those who call on the name of the Lord and that we began to discuss some areas where Christians can be hindered from growing in their walk with the Lord and in their pathway, some areas where we can face a great deal of opposition. And as we go through these areas, the enemy comes in and can use many different weapons and ways to hinder us. And last week we talked about offenses and we talked about being offended with God, we thought about being offended with spiritual leadership, we talked about being offended with others, we talked about it being offended with ourselves.

And today we're just going to go right into another area of vulnerability for the Christian. And hopefully, as we look at these different areas, we can gain some insight into our walk with Christ and hopefully we'll be challenged that when we do face these areas, we're going to trust the Lord to help us through them. Because every area that I'm going to talk about in this message, this is the second part of it, we're going to face it.

Somewhere along the line, you're going to face these areas and it's going to be a challenge to us to allow the Lord and to trust the Lord enough to bring us through. Let's pray and then we'll get into what we're going to talk about today. Father, we just come before you.

And Lord, this is a very simple message, it's very easy to entreat. God, when it's brought by your spirit, there's a grace and there's a strength that comes with it. And I'm praying for that today, Lord, that this would encourage, this is what build up, that it would edify, exhort, as your word says in Timothy 3.16. God, it would bring about a greater level of stability.

God, that it would encourage the body to grow into the stature and the measure of Christ and to understand some of the things that we face in that process. Lord, we love you today. We give you this time in the word.

It's a sacred time. It's a time set apart to hear what you're saying to us as a body. Now, we've been before you as individuals.

Now, speak to us as a body. And God, encourage us and enlighten us in your word and into your ways, Lord. In Jesus' name, amen.

Well, let's begin today's message with something that every Christian, like I said, is going to face in this life and growing in the grace of God and in your experience with the Lord, and that is change. Change. That may not seem like something that would present a problem.

However, it is. In many, many people's lives, change can be one of the greatest difficulties to face in life, whether you're saved or unsaved, going through things, going through sudden changes, as we're going to talk about. It can be very difficult to cope with a sudden flux of experience that we have not kind of prepared ourselves for.

It can be very difficult. But we know that without change, life would be impossible. Without change, life would be impossible.

God has designed this natural life that it is in a constant cycle of change. My wife and I purchased little gifts for my daughter, Bethany, for her birthday. And it's a butterfly kit.

And they send you caterpillars in a little container, and you can watch the whole change process take place. And, you know, last night we got into a funny situation. We were transferring them from their small container into what will eventually be their habitat, where they're alive in our home, so they're not flying around the house.

And it's very interesting because they've made the transition from the caterpillar up into the point where they'll be their most vulnerable into the crystallized stage. And they've turned into these very odd, weird-looking shapes. And last night, I was touching one of them, and it started shaking, and I thought something was wrong with it.

I went to the instruction manual, and that's all part of their defense mechanisms. All they can do when they're vulnerable like that is just shake and try and, you know, ward off anything that's coming around them. They're very vulnerable.

And, you know, we can be very vulnerable in that process of change. We can be brought into change and into our lives and feel very vulnerable. And that's one reason that change is very difficult, because it can leave us feeling very vulnerable.

Now, we see this change process not only, you know, in the life of a butterfly, that's very simple to see, but we also see it in the four seasons. God has ordained the times, the seasons, so that this world can bring forth life without four seasons, that we would be living in a wilderness. There would be no fruit, there would be no life, the earth wouldn't be able to sustain life, but God has ordained it, this pattern of seasonal changes, so that life can continue on over and over again and continue to bring forth life.

And what's true in the natural life is also mirrored in the spiritual life, that just as there are natural changes in this world that we see every day, we don't even recognize right now we're in winter, there's no fruit on the trees, there's nothing that speaks of life, we're in that season, we see these natural things going on around us. But just as this world and everything we see around us goes through changes, we do too. The Christian, the believer will undergo many changes and seasons that are ordained of God.

There are seasons in your life, there are times in your life. Ecclesiastes, there's a time to sing, there's a time to mourn, there's a time to laugh, there's a time to cry, there's a time for war, there's a time... For everything, there's a season and there's a time. And we're going to go through things that are ordained of God that's going to bring growth and it's going to cause us to expand in our Christian journey.

It's going to cause us to grow because God wants to enlarge us. God wants to bring about a life that is his life and that is a continual outflow of living. And he wants us to bear his fruit.

No matter what we're going through in our life or what we face, no matter what season we're in, God desires for there to be an enlargement. Maybe today you feel like a tree, just no sap, no life, no fruit, no leaves, nothing. You just feel naked.

That's all part of the process of what God is doing in our life so that there will be an abundance of more life to follow. Psalm 1-3 says this, talking about the man that puts his trust in the Lord, and he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth fruit in his season. His leaf shall not wither and whatsoever he does shall prosper.

Jeremiah 17, 7 and 8 says, blessed is the man that trusts in the Lord and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters and that spreads out her roots by the river and shall not see when he comes, but her leaves shall be green and shall not be careful in the year of drought. That's fearful or filled with anxiety in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.

So God wants to produce such a life within us that no matter what we go through, there are resources to draw on that will cause us even in winter, even when we shouldn't be growing, we're growing. And we are bringing forth the life of God. Now, to produce such a life, we will undergo many challenges and changes that will test and try us.

If we do not realize this, we will face a great deal of discouragement and hardship. If we don't realize this as a natural process in the Christian journey, we're going to go through a great deal of hardship. We're going to be asking, why? Why me? We're going to be wondering in our prayer life.

We're going to be straining and striving. We're going to be discouraged. But we need to understand that this is very much a part of our life.

Paul says, does not nature itself teach you? Things are going to change and we must be ready for it. Things are going to change. They're not always going to be the same.

And we've got to be ready when change comes. We must recognize it as an essential part of our journey. An essential part of our journey is this aspect of change.

It is in the midst of change, we are to remain open to God. We are to be pliable clay in His hand. And this is the greatest challenge I think that we face as Christians, that in the midst of change, we stay soft towards God and we continue to walk softly before Him, open to His voice, yielding to His spirit, not shutting Him out, not growing hardened, not wandering off in a place of unbelief, but remaining open to the Lord and being pliable to Him.

And to come into a place where we find the strength and grace of God to move forward in that time of change because the devil wants you to sit still. The devil doesn't want you to change. The enemy wants to keep you stagnant.

He wants to keep you stale. He wants to keep you barren. And so he's going to resist change in your life.

And so that means he's going to resist the workings of God in your life and he's going to resist you. And he's going to come at you when change is happening, as we're going to talk about, he's going to attack you. And he's going to come because he knows you're vulnerable.

He knows that you're weak. He knows that you've got a lot of questions. But, you know, the Lord is there and we need to find the strength of God in every change that we undergo to go through it and to be bettered by it instead of hindered and stopped and brought down.

Now, there's two main areas of change that I want to discuss today with you, two areas of change that we're all going to go through. And I want to talk with them because under these areas, in these areas, I want to pinpoint some things that we're going to deal with as we go through this change. So you're going to know what you're going to face and what we're going to feel, some of the lives of the enemy, all of that.

I want to use these areas of change, discuss them with you today to pinpoint things that you're going to face. And there are a whole lot more that you could add to this list. I'm sure I could talk to many of you.

I don't want to talk about the major things that the Christian is going to face when they go through these areas of change. The first area of change I want to talk about is a change in circumstances, change in circumstances. This goes without saying that sudden changes in our lives can shake the strongest Christian's faith.

I don't care how strong your faith is. I don't care how much you pray, how much you seek God. Sudden changes in circumstances can shake you to the core.

They can rattle you. They can knock you off course. They can bring you low.

All it takes is one phone call, one trip to the doctor, one person's bad decision, one person's mistake, and our whole future is completely and forever changed. Everything, everything. I was thinking through this about different people, not just in the Bible, but throughout the history of the church, through people's wrong decisions, bad decisions, mistakes, that person's life completely changed.

We've seen, you know, a lot of Fannie Crosby's hymns in the church, Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine, Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior. She wrote over 3,000 hymns, and she was blind, but she wasn't born blind. When she was just an infant in her life, a doctor applied the wrong salve to her eyes and it blinded her forever.

One person's mistake completely altered the life of another. Beyond her control, beyond anything that she could do, her life was changed by one bad mistake, one person's fault. And it's tempting to believe that when sudden change happens to a Christian, that there's something wrong with our faith.

We're tempted to believe that when sudden change is coming to our life, that they're there because we lack something, or our faith is not of a quality that it should be. And so, we begin to question, we begin to wonder about different reasons why many feel maybe they have these circumstances come into their life and they feel like they like the faith that can shield them from sudden calamity. If I would have had faith in God and trusted Him more, I would have been shielded and padded and insulated.

Right? You ever been there? Many questions can run through the believer's mind as they are faced with great and sudden difficulty. Here's some of the things that I've been through and faced in my own life. Number one, I thought that God insulated me from all forms of great and sudden difficulty.

All of a sudden, something happens beyond your control and you begin to think your theology doesn't make room for it. And there are a lot of Christians out there that have a wrong perception of what it means to walk with God. And they think that because they've been invited into such a great life and everything, that it's an insulation, it's a shield.

You know, you read the scriptures where it says God's a shield, a refuge, a tower, the righteous run into it, all of that. And they think that they're going to be insulated from sudden calamity. That it's just never going to happen to me because my theology, my belief is that God is not going to allow anything that is great and sudden and difficult in my life.

Number two, some people, as I mentioned just a moment before this, that the reason that this has happened to me is because my faith is weak. This is all coming on me because my faith is weak. A third thing that people can think of when they go through sudden changes in circumstances that are difficult and hard is, I must be out of touch with God.

I must be out of touch with God. I never saw this coming. If I was in touch with God, I would have heard something.

I'd have known something. God would have told me. So I must be out of touch with him.

And number four, and this is something that is a very common struggle, if God is so good, why are my circumstances so rotten? If God is so good, why are my circumstances so rotten? How do I deal? Now, this is just four I've chosen. You can think of a whole lot more. Probably, is there a God? Does he care for me? You can think of a lot of different other ones that are pertinent and real to you.

But how do we deal with the fears and questions that arise when suddenly everything changes? Everything changes. Firstly, we must realize that we are not exempt from sudden change. Being a Christian does not mean that we have opted out of sudden change.

Doesn't mean that we've opted out or taken a sidetrack out of the human experience, that all of a sudden we are immune from sudden change in our life, that it cannot happen to us because I'm a Christian. It's not going to happen. As I said before, you know, our theology sometimes can be that God just isn't going to allow certain things to happen in my life.

But is that really the truth? Is that really the way that it is? There are many men and women of God that have walked with him that have undergone sudden, drastic, and unforeseen circumstances that altered their lives forever. I think about Joseph. You know, when he made the decision to obey his father and go down to visit his brethren.

We talked about him recently in some messages here. He never would have thought that by the end of that day, he would have been in a pit. Never.

I'm sure he never would have dreamed that or imagined that, that he would have been stripped of everything that was common, everything that was known to him, all his comforts, the favor of his father, all of that just taken out immediately like a rug being snatched out from under him. And all of a sudden, this young man is taken from such a place of privilege in his father's house to a common slave. And he's sold as a piece of property into Egypt.

Think about him. That was a very sudden change. Think about Moses.

In a fit of rage and anger, he kills a man. And his whole life in Egypt changes. And he's sent out.

He flees out to wilderness where he doesn't know what's going to happen. He doesn't know. And he's taken from a place of privilege and put into a wilderness.

And I'm sure that he wondered, how could this happen to me? Job, Job, we read his unforeseen, sudden change comes into this man's life. In a moment's time, he loses everything. Everything that is near and dear to his heart is stripped from this man.

He loses his finances. He loses his children, everything that is in his health. So everything is taken from him.

Suddenly, it happens. I think about David. He goes from one moment, everybody's singing his praises.

Is this the one that killed 10,000? You know, this is the one that's killed 10,000. And the next minute, he's like a hunted animal, running from cave to cave, cave to cave, sudden change. We are not exempt from sudden change.

We're not exempt from that. In an instant, life can suddenly change for all of us. The Bible says that the rain falls on the just and the unjust.

That doesn't mean just the rain of the blessings that comes down. God does bless. But it also means the storms of life.

They come to all men, all of us, every one of us. They come to us. Our strength, when things happen and change happens, is knowing that God does not change.

God doesn't change. He is a constant when everything out of the ordinary is happening. His mind does not change towards us.

This is our comfort and peace when it appears through circumstances that we are on the outside of God's blessings. You ever felt there? I'm outside of God's blessings. But his mind doesn't change towards us.

His heart doesn't change. James 1 17 says, Every good gift and perfect gift comes from above and comes down from the father of lights with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. There's no change in his character.

God's mind and heart does not change towards us. He invites us during times of change into his tender care when things are spinning out of control or seemingly spinning out of control. He does not judge us nor condemn us when our emotions are erratic because of sudden change.

And that's good to know. That's good to know that he doesn't judge us, that we're left wondering our head. That is part of the human experience.

What in the world has happened? God doesn't look down and say, Well, you should have been, you should have more faith and you wouldn't even ask that question. Oh, you have little faith. God doesn't look down.

If anything, he's there for you. And he doesn't condemn you. When you start to go through that natural process of dealing with sudden change.

He doesn't run from us. We're when we are trying to cope with transition. God doesn't run from us.

When we're learning how to walk into this transition, God doesn't run from us. He's there for us in transition. Matter of fact, sometimes he's the only thing that's stable.

That you know, that's where, you know, we have to understand that when sudden change happens that we're not exempt from that, there is something constant. This is what being a believer is about, that we have a constant in our life, someone that will be there for us no matter where the chips fall. No matter what happens, God will be there for you.

Even though many thoughts and temptations flood your heart, thoughts, temptations, even when you fail, trying to cope with change, trying to deal with it, God is not there. The Bible says a bruised reed, he'll not break. A smoking flax, he'll not quench it.

Dealing with change, God is right there. And he wants us and he invites us during those times to turn our attention towards him. And that doesn't mean that everything is going to go away, it just means that we've got somebody there for us.

No matter what is changing all around us, we must always remember, God's heart towards us does not change. Though it looks like the shadows are overshadowing our life and we're out of God's favor, it can never be for a child of God, that is walking with him in unity and loving God, it can never be that you're out of his favor, never. Because God's love towards you is constant and it never changes.

Jesus said we are to expect tribulation, circumstances beyond our control and face them with the fact that he has made it through and he will bring us through as well. The Bible says this hope that we have is an anchor for our soul, that Jesus has went through this and that he's going to pull us through. It's an anchor for our soul.

And I get the picture, you know, of an anchor, Jesus being our anchor in heaven. And on the other side of that, I see us tied to him. When change comes and when hard, difficult circumstances, when it happens, I see us with a rope tied around us.

And when we don't have the ability to go through it, it's him on the other side pulling us through it, pulling us to the anchor, pulling us through to victory and to glory. The Lord is there rooting for us and pulling us through it. We're anchored to him and he's pulling us through all of that.

So if he made it, then we can, if he can go through change and transition, then we can face it. And we can, by his grace, make it through. Number two, secondly, sudden change is not a good indicator of the strength of your faith.

Sudden change is not a good indicator of the strength of your faith. In other words, if you think because you've got such a great faith that you're never going to be put in a position where things happen to you that you are totally blown away by, then you have a false understanding of what true faith is. True faith doesn't make you exempt from sudden change.

If anything, it's going to make you more vulnerable because that person is going to be tested above others. I think about Job. It wasn't that he had poor faith.

The quality of his faith was poor because he was, it was because God said, look at this man. Can you find anybody like him? It was because, but Job thought it's my fears. It's because I don't have enough faith.

I'm, I'm thrown into this. God has found something in me, but it was, it was the opposite. God said, this is a person that will make it through.

I know the quality of his faith. It's not the opposite. Sometimes we think that it's the opposite.

So when sudden change happens, it's not a good indicator, a good indication whether we have strong or weak faith. Faith is not a shield that protects us from sudden change. Do you understand that? Faith doesn't protect you from sudden change happening.

The temptation for the believer when faced with sudden changes to immediately question their faith and devotion to God. What did I do wrong? Are sudden changes in circumstances sometimes an indication of something we've done wrong? Does God sometimes use circumstances to get our attention? Yes, he does. We must bring a balance here because sometimes hard circumstances are a result of our hardness of heart.

And it's God speaking to us, but it's not always that way. How do I discern whether or not my trial was brought on my disobedience? Here's a, here's a very simple way to find out by asking yourself a very simple question. Where was I with God before this trial began? Was I in a place of complaining or thankfulness? Was I obeying the Lord or living in disobedience? Now the answer to that question will ultimately shed some light onto your pathway if it is answered truthfully without any desire to justify yourself.

If you really want to know where your trial comes from, if it's the Lord speaking to you, you've got to be open to the Holy Spirit because I've been here and I've done this. And sometimes it's God trying to speak to me and I've walked in self-justification, but when I really take a deeper look into the situation, it's not that I'm just, you know, doing something that was right, this is that. It's because the Lord is trying to speak into

my heart.

I'm gonna look at this as an example. Jonah was caught in a sudden storm that affected everyone around him. Why? Jonah knew why.

Because he was running from God, right? The storm that he was in was brought on by his disobedience, so it is possible. He was running from the will of God. Will God bring a storm into our lives because we are being defiant? Yes, but all storms and sudden changes of circumstances are not a true indicator of personal disobedience to God.

I think about the Apostle Paul and his storm. Two men and two different storms. One is in a storm because of disobedience, the other is there because he's been obedient.

His obedience brought him into a storm. So our faith will often bring us into storms. Another good indicator to where our storms originate is found in another question.

Do I find God's resources available to meet my troubled soul? Though there may be times of quietness and a short season of stillness from God, the child of obedience will always come into a season of comfort and receive a word from the Lord that will sustain them. So how do I measure? Because if you're in it because you're obedient, God will speak to you. Though there may be a silence for a time and you may go through a lot of confusion, God will ultimately speak to that person and he will comfort that heart.

Job and Paul both received a promise from the Lord to help them through. The child of obedience will be strengthened through the storm by the presence of the Lord and a word of comfort. Acts 27, 21.

I'm going to read this through 25. But after long abstinence, Paul stood forth in the midst of them and said, Sirs, you should have hearkened to me and not have loosed from Crete and to have gained this harm and loss. And now exert you to be of good cheer, for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship.

For there stood by me this night an angel of God, whose I am and whom I serve. If this man was in disobedience, he'd have never had an angel of the Lord come to him and speak to him words of comfort. They would never, he would have never had that resource.

Saying, fear not, Paul, thou must be brought before Caesar and lo, God has given thee all this. He's got a promise from the Lord, a comfort. And he speaks with assurance.

And it says after long abstinence, you know, that took some time for Paul to hear that. He went away and got still. And I'm sure that in all that confusion, he couldn't hear the voice of God readily.

But as he waited on God and as he got along with God, God will always speak to the obedient ear. And that's one way I can indicate is, is a good indication to me whether this storm in my life, these sudden change of circumstances, God's trying to get my attention or it's just something that God has allowed and I'm walking in obedience. It took Paul a little while to get the mind of the Lord, but he could, he could get God's mind in a state of confusion because he was right with God.

The child that is disobedient will not gain the same comfort until their obedience is fulfilled. So here, how do I determine if I'm in obedience or disobedience? You're not going to get the same comfort until your obedience is fulfilled, until you make that thing right, which is wrong. God's not going to comfort you.

Look at Jonah. I want to read this. Jonah 1.1, it says, Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh.

Verse 3 says, But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. Verse 4 said, The Lord sent a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken. And the Bible says that he was thrown overboard, thrown into that ocean.

And then the storm stopped, and then God caused a great fish to swallow him. And then verse, Jonah chapter 2 says, Jonah prayed to the Lord, his God, out of the fish's belly and said, I cried by reason of my infliction unto the Lord. In other words, he's dealing rightly with God at this point.

This storm is a storm brought into my life because of my disobedience. In order for this to be made right, I've got to deal rightly with God. I cannot walk in a self-justifying voice.

I must hear what God is speaking to me. I must hear what God is saying. I cried, he said, out of the belly of hell, cried I. And you heard my voice, for you have cast me into the deep, into the midst of the seas.

He says, God, you cast me here. In the midst of the seas and the floods come past me about, all your billows and your waves passed over me. Verse 7 of chapter 2 says, when my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord.

And my prayer came in unto thee, into thy holy temple. They that observed lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving.

I will pay that that I have vowed. In other words, I will fulfill my obedience to you. Salvation is of the Lord.

And verse 10, as soon as he says this, I will obey you. And the Lord spoke to the fish. The Lord spoke to, and it vomited out Jonah upon dry land.

When Jonah was willing to obey God, God spoke to his circumstances and said, that's enough. I've accomplished, this storm has accomplished what I've wanted to accomplish. He's ready to hear and obey what I've told him to do the first time.

Jonah 3.1 says, and the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time. Thank God the second time the word came. When he was ready to fulfill, God started speaking to Jonah again.

God started to speak into this man's life again and started to direct his life. So we see the parallels between the obedient and the disobedient. That the obedient in their storm, in their sudden calamity, will always have a word from the Lord.

And they'll know that in that, that this was not brought on by some act of disobedience. But the disobedience will only have turmoil, confusion of faiths, until they make that thing right, and then God will begin to speak again and bring them out of the storm. God ended the horror of the fish's belly when Jonah acknowledged his disobedience.

Once that was accomplished, he could hear once again the word of the Lord. Number three, because unforeseen things happen in our lives, it does not mean that we are out of touch with God's Spirit. Another temptation is to question your ability to hear and discern the voice of God.

Why didn't I hear the Lord speaking to me? Maybe I was not able to hear his voice warning me because I'm out of touch with him. God does not always let us know when hard times are coming. He reserves the right to be sovereign Lord of our life.

God is not always going to tell you that there's a sudden change coming into your life. He doesn't always do that. And we must give him the right to be Lord of all, sovereign of all.

It is part of our spiritual journey and our development to learn to trust God in that way. Number four, rotten circumstances are no indication as to the kindness, tenderness, and goodness of God, right? I'm in rotten circumstances. Does that mean God is bad? No.

It just means we're living in a fallen, wicked world that's filled with many dangers and snares. This does not mean that God is not good. It simply proves to our hearts that this world is bad and that we are pilgrims and we are searching for a better land.

Beyond the veil of sorrow, there's a very kind and tenderhearted God that pities his children and is there to meet them with the grace that is sufficient to pass through this world. We must recognize that nothing catches God by surprise. He is sovereign in our lives.

And with every hard circumstance, there's a measure of Christ to meet the need. How many of you believe that? The promise he gave to Israel is our promise. When you go into the land, he said, I'm going to cause honey to flow out of your rocks.

What does that mean? God says in every hard circumstance, if you're courageous enough to look for it, I'm going to cause a measure of sweetness in Christ to come out. I'm going to cause your hard places to yield the sweetness of Christ. And you're going to come out with a testimony of the goodness of the Lord.

It is the brave and courageous Christian that says in the hard place, somehow it will bring God glory and me to a greater place in him. That's courage. That's hope that's alive in our heart.

Now let's talk about the second. We talked about circumstances. But now let's talk about changes in spiritual perceptions.

Let's talk about spiritual enlargement. Because if we are to be spiritually enlarged, we are going to go through spiritual change. There's going to be a metamorphosis.

There's going to be a change in our life. One of the most uncomfortable things that can happen in a believer's life is when God begins to take them to another level of greater understanding and a place of spiritual enlargement. This can be one of the most difficult things to understand.

It can be very hard when you, all of a sudden, you don't understand what's going on with you. The heavens feel like brass. It just seems like what in the world? We don't realize it.

But there is, God is bringing us to a higher place. He's bringing us into a spiritual... So there are going to be changes. Maybe outward circumstances aren't going to change, but spiritually, there's some changes that can take place.

Paul said we're to be changing from image to image. God wants to take us from being a one-dimensional Christian to having a depth and breadth that we have never known in our lives before. One dimension.

You know, we can stay in that one dimension, but God wants to take us beyond and make us into... and develop us in a fuller and a more expanded version, a greater unction of His Spirit. Many times, God is trying to expand our understanding of Himself and we fight it because it does not fit our current view of Him. We fight it.

We don't even realize that we're fighting against the Lord. We're trying to stay. No, the grass is green here.

I want to stay here in this pasture. I've gotten so much nourishment out of this. I do not want to go further in my journey.

I'm comfortable. And the shepherd's pulling us all the while to greener pastures, but we don't realize it. And the devil knows that during the time of transition from one place in Christ to another, we are vulnerable to hear outside voices because it is a place of transition where everything that we have known and believed is being challenged.

You ever been there? Everything you've known or you thought you've known about God, all of a sudden, it's gone or it seems like it has no effect on your soul. And then the voices from the enemy can come in. And we can become very vulnerable to these voices at this time.

And we can resist it, as I said before. One of the hardest things to undergo is spiritual enlargement. Why? John 12, 24 gives us the best description of the process of spiritual enlargement.

Jesus spoke to his disciples. He says, unless a corn of wheat fall on the ground and die, it abides alone. But if it die, it shall bring forth more fruit.

Spiritual enlargement. Why is it difficult? Jesus was speaking about the cross. Spiritual enlargement involves a cross, a place where everything that is unlike Christ is challenged and broken.

Ofentimes, it can seem if it's somebody else's fault. But in reality, the Lord is behind the scene. Spiritual enlargement will always involve a cross.

It can be a spiritually dry time. Sometimes our journey will take us to barren wildernesses where there seems to be no sustenance. I think about this in the life of Christ on the cross because that was spiritual enlargement.

He was about to give life to the whole world and to be taken to a place, a throne of glory. But before the throne, there was a cross. There was a cup.

There was a cross and there was a crown. But before the crown, there was that cross. And Jesus said on the cross, I thirst.

I thirst. It can be a dry time. It can be a very hard time, a dry time.

It can also be a time where there is great temptation to grow bitter. Think about Jesus on the cross. What did they offer him? Gall and vinegar.

The vinegar represents bitterness. The enemy was trying to infuse bitterness on the cross into Christ's mind and heart, questioning, wondering, lies about God, who he was, all of those sorts of things. The gall was an anesthetic.

It was something that was given to those on the cross to temporarily relieve their pain. And the devil would try and get you into bitterness so that you can temporarily relieve and vent the pain. But if you're not careful, you'll be caught in the gall of bitterness.

And the work, the spiritual progress can be stifled and the enemy knows that. The temptation to grow bitter is right there. It's on your lips.

But when we taste it, well, we'll get to that in just a moment, it can be a time of great confusion. During this time of spiritual enlargement, it can be a time of great confusion. And we can make very bad decisions when we are in such a time because our own judgment can be clouded by what is going on in our lives.

It's not the best time to make decisions when we're in this place of turmoil, where things are being taken. It's not the best time to move out because it's at that time God is doing a work. Job 10.21, before I go, whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death, a land of darkness as darkness itself and the shadow of death without any order and where the light is as darkness.

Speaking of the cross, no order confusion, chaos can be during this time. So you can see why it's hard to cope with these things. As we're going through spiritual enlargement, it's very difficult to cope with chaos, with temptations to grow bitter, being spiritually dry, having our issues and our heart being revealed and our failures and our temptations.

And we begin to see all these things. It can be very hard. It can be a time of great opposition and darkness.

The devil is keen on when a person is going higher in the Lord. It is his desire to stop all spiritual progress by any means necessary because he's there at that cross as well. And he wants to stop you.

That's what he's there for, is to hinder and to stop you. How do I make it through? Firstly, we must learn to let go. Many people resist the cross unknowingly.

They bind the devil, strive in prayer, and do all manner of things to escape their pain. The greatest release is when we finally let go, just trust God. Jesus said, into thy hands I commit my spirit.

Paul put it another way. For none of us live to himself and no man dies to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord.

So if I'm going to die in this state, so be it, but I'm going to die trusting God. If I go the rest of my life living in this state of the cross and dealing with all these things, I'm going to die trusting him. Into your hands I commit my... So be it, Lord.

So be it to you, to me. Tell the Lord today, I yield my life to you. Whatever you allow for my development, I accept.

Give me the grace to accept this cross and yield my life to you. Only then can we know the true power of his resurrection when we have exhausted all the hidden resources of human strength. If I die in this, blessed be the Lord.

If he raises me up, blessed be the Lord. Yeah, I just let go. I yield God the right to do whatever he wants.

I just trust you in it all. I'm just trusting you. Secondly, don't judge your condition by your lack of spiritual fervor, emotion, or whether or not you are feeling his presence.

There are some dry spells that are out of our own making because we're in rebellion, just like Jonah. And God says the rebellious will live in a dry land. But there are some that are for our development.

Every godly man or woman will pass through a dry time. Know that it's common. Know that you're going to pass through it.

You're just going to go through that. You're going to go through a time of drought. But blessed be the name of the Lord gives me the feeling the Lord takes away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. Don't let the enemy make you bitter. Cry out to God.

How do I turn my face away from that gall because I'm so thirsty I could drink anything, even the poison from hell seems to soothe my soul, all the lies, and it just seems to bring me some comfort. What do I do? Don't let him make you bitter. Cry out to God.

Tell God exactly how you feel and then release it to him. David said, I poured out my complaints to the Lord. Psalm 142.1, a prayer when he was in the cave.

I cried to the Lord with my voice. With my voice unto the Lord did I make my supplication. I poured my complaint out before him.

I showed before him my trouble. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then you knew my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me.

I looked on my right hand. Behold, there was no man that would know me. Refuge failed me and no man cared for my soul.

Tell God like it is. He's not going to cast you out. He would rather you complain to him than to complain to others.

Pour out your complaint before God. Don't receive the bitterness of the devil. Turn your face away from it.

Tell God what's going on in your heart. He'll not despise you. A broken and a contrite heart he will not despise.

And during that time of confusion, it's not a time to move about, but it's time to be still and listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. It is not a time to be moving about and trying to make something happen. God speaks in quietness, not anxiety.

We cannot push God or pry God into complying with our desires. When we do, we breed confusion and anxiety all the more. We must get quiet before the Lord and say, Here I am, your servant.

I'm listening. What are you saying to me in this? Then and only then will we truly hear what God is saying. And lastly, one of the most encouraging things, when there is spiritual opposition coming against you, darkness, because it said there was darkness, that represents the enemy, the heaviness, the oppression, all of that.

And it was darkest at that hour when Jesus cried and gave up his life. Remember, when things are at their worst, you are the closest to the victory. The devil only fights the most vehemently.

He only fights most vehemently when we are on the verge of some spiritual breakthrough. Remember, the strongest weaponry is placed around the most precious asset. Have you come up against Satan's elite? Then you are a threat to his throne.

When the battle is the hardest, that is when you must stand the strongest for God. The road to victory is littered with abandoned crosses, and the largest concentration of them is found at the finish line. Just before God was ready to bring through, people gave in.

We must finish the course to win the prize. Don't ever give up. Don't care how dark it gets.

Those are some points along this journey. God is for us, and He is going to see to it that we go through changes with His grace and His mercy. Are you there this morning? Maybe some circumstances come into your life beyond your control.

Maybe you're on a journey, and you don't understand why is it so dry, why is it so dark, why am I oppressed, what am I doing wrong, looking inward, looking inward. It's part of the journey, pilgrim. I'm not trying to sound like John Wayne either.

I'm just telling you like it is. It's part of this journey. You're a pilgrim, and you're going to go through many... The Bible says, in the land of Israel, when He called them into the promised land, He said, it's a land of hills and valleys, lands of hills and valleys.

But it says, the Lord's over all of them. Stand with me this morning. It's a challenge to us to trust God in all changes, no matter what we face.

It could be a sudden physical affliction. It could be a letter from the doctor, a call, whatever it is. God wants you to know He's there for you.

He's there for you. Let's bow our heads this morning. Hallelujah.

I want to read a scripture to you, then I want to pray. For the land, whether you go to possess it, is not as a land of Egypt from whence you came out. It's not like the world, it's different, where you sowed your seed and watered it with your foot as a garden of herbs.

But the land, where you go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys and drinks of the rain of heaven, a land which the Lord thy God cares for. The eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year, even into the end of the year. Every season that you're in, the eyes of God are upon you, never looking away.

When we were in Egypt, we were without that gaze of God, but now we have the comfort of the Lord. He's not ashamed to call you a son or a daughter. Our strength is to trust Him.

Hallelujah. Let's pray. Father, we come before you in the mighty name of Jesus.

And Lord, there are people at this altar, there are dear, beloved people at this altar that are in great trials, Lord. Inward trials, outward trials, changes all around them. The world seems to be turned upside down, some of them wondering how they could have ever gotten here, but Lord, you see it.

You see it. And I'm praying today that this message would bring the comfort to their heart, to let them know you're going to hold their hand all the way through it, that the floods are not going to overtake them, the fires are not going to burn them. They will not be destroyed.

They're going to be brought through all the way, all the way, Lord. And they're going to come out, Lord, not with a smell of smoke, but with a fragrance of Christ, with the very fragrance of your son, a tenderness and a love and a care, God. Father, expand our borders, Lord.

Enlarge our hearts, O God. Hallelujah, Lord. We love you today.

Let your anointing, God, just fill our hearts with hope and strength. Bring this out by a mighty hand, God, that we can trust you, that we can shout your praises, O God. Be with us now, I pray.

Comfort those at this altar. Lord, if there's any here that are disobedient and they're in a storm because of disobedience, God, chase at them. We do pray that way, that you would bring them back into life, that they would speedily make right that which is wrong so that the storm will cease.

And God, they can continue to hear your loving voice. We give you our lives. We give you our hearts.

We ask you for the grace to trust you and the strength to walk with you now. In Jesus' name.

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