



Giving Thanks For The Hard Things

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INTRODUCTION

We love things to be easy, don't we? In fact, we constantly create gadgets to make life easier. How did we ever live without blenders and refrigerators and washing machines and cell phones and wifi? We can go shopping merely by checking a box and pushing a button. We can avoid the pain and hassle of how life used to be before all this. So much better now, right? But isn't it amazing how all of our pursuit of "easy" doesn't seem to make us better humans or stronger people or the best version of ourselves. In fact, when what is easy goes away, we get mad. But what if the best version of us can only come through hard things? This matters because as Christ-followers we discover that it is the hard things that God uses to shape us the most. And so we can be thankful for the hard things.

FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever seen a child when a parent tries to make everything easy for them? From what you have observed, what effect does that have on the child as they grow up and face the world?
2. Can you think about the hardest thing you have gone through? (Maybe you're still in it, that's ok). How did that affect you? Have you been able to see anything good from going through it? Is there a painful residue that makes you feel stuck in it? If so, stop and ask the Lord for wisdom.

Read aloud Luke 6:27-31 (p.1163 Christian Basics Bible) and Matthew 5:43-45 (p.1076). What is the easy thing to do in each of those and what is the hard thing? Jesus commands us to choose the hard thing. Why does Jesus say that - what outcomes happen when we obey?

Read Romans 5:1-5 (p. 1287). Then let's break down a few reasons why you can thank God for the hard things:

Reason #1 - Jesus already did the hardest thing for you. When we are in trouble or pain, that grabs all our focus and attention and we want to do everything to make it stop. But when we get God's perspective on our problem, it completely changes our experience. According to Romans 5:1-2, Jesus has put us in a position where we never have to go through anything alone because your standing with God is secure. No matter what we are going through, Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection reminds us that even in the very worst circumstances, God is with me. And because Jesus suffered for me, he knows how to comfort and help me in trials and temptations. How has knowing that your standing with God is secure, helped you in the hard things?

Reason #2 - God is using hard things to make you stronger. Reread Romans 5:3-4. There is one caveat to this – you must cooperate and trust the Lord with it. God uses hard things to make you stronger when you stop running away and complaining and start entrusting yourself to God in it all. What happens when people run away from their problems, spiritually, emotionally and socially? Conversely, what happens in your life when you break cycles of family dysfunction or forgive or stop complaining and begin thanking God?

Reason #3 – God is using hard things to create a better future. Remember Matthew 5:44-45? What does your future look like when a better version of you is living in it? God is creating a better future by creating a better you to live in it. What areas of your life do you feel like God is working on you, if any? How does knowing these three reasons help you to entrust yourself or your loved ones through it? Is there a step to do a hard thing God has placed on your heart now? If so, don't wait until you feel good to take the step – take it and God will meet you in your obedience to create a better future with you.

MEMORY VERSE

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.

Romans 5:3-4