

What Comfort Zone?

Theme: As those saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, we are called to cast away our fear, doubt and anxiety despite our circumstances and step out of our comfort zones to face any change with confidence in God's character and the absolute truth of His Word.

MainText: 2 Corinthians 4:7-12

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹ For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. ¹² So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

The Good 'Ol Comfort Zone

- ◆ We like what we know. We feel most secure when in control of a situation. We tend to not like what we don't know.
- ◆ A comfort zone can be defined as a place or a situation where one feels safe or at ease and without stress.
 - * There is a state of perceived mental security.
 - * The concept of a comfort zone has its roots in psychology stemming back to the early 1900s.
 - * In general, this is the natural state we trend towards.
 - * To step outside of one's comfort zone carries a level of risk and anxiety - it's stepping into the realm of the unknown. And again, we like what we know. We really, really like what we know.
- ◆ Comfort zones are actually good things when utilized properly.
 - * Having little to no stress and anxiety is beneficial.
 - * It's good for our physical health and mental well-being.
 - * It's the place where we can use the gifts and talents God has given us most effectively.
 - * There are hidden dangers in the pursuit of finding and staying in the comfort zone.
- ◆ Hidden dangers of the comfort zone.
 - * The temptation to continuously pursue comfort masks a serious issue of the heart - control.
 - * Under the guise of wanting to do something good - lower stress and anxiety, build security or wealth - we can be in real danger of drowning out the the Holy Spirit speaking into our lives.
 - * Comfort zones can also be a change killer.
 - ➔ While most people do not like change, it is an inevitable and continual part of our lives.
 - ➔ Inherently built into being out of our comfort zones means we are in unknown circumstances where the unexpected can happen.
 - ➔ The average person will stay in subpar circumstances that are familiar rather than face the prospect of change.
- ◆ Why is it so hard to leave our comfort zones and step out into the unknown? Enter the fear of the unknown...Change.

Change

- ◆ Often not seen for what it is, change is something most Christians don't like to talk about.
 - * Jesus Christ cultivates spiritual maturity and growth in our lives through changes in our circumstances - both good and bad changes.
 - * Christians may be the most change-averse group of people on the face of the earth.
 - * Walking through change places a spotlight in an area of our spiritual life that we do not like to focus on.
- ◆ Our reaction to change can be an accurate indicator of our personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
 - * Since our fall into sin - as evidenced by Adam and Even in the Garden - we have an innate tendency to distance ourselves from God not only when we sin, but when we perceive our relationship isn't right with the Father.

The Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:7-12

- ◆ **Verse 7: “*But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.*”**
 - * The treasure spoken of here is the glorious good news about Christ (vv. 1-6), and we as Believers have the privilege of preaching it to a lost world!
 - * Jars of Clay - Pottery made from clay was a favorite material for making a wide variety of utensils.
 - It was not a costly material.
 - It was used primarily by the common person; the wealthy used fine materials such as ivory, glass, marble, brass and costly wood
 - * All-surpassing power - The adjective “all-surpassing” stresses the extraordinary quality or extent of something.
 - The power is the Gospel. The Gospel is not merely a message that confronts the mind, but an explosive power that transforms a person from inside out.
 - * Consider the picture Paul is painting in the reader's mind: The Gospel preacher is a container made of common, run-of-the-mill clay that is fragile and easily broken. Yet God has entrusted the treasure of the Gospel to such a container, just as ancient civilizations stored their valuables in common clay pots.
 - God uses what is fragile and yet serviceable so that there is no mistaking the source of the Gospel preacher's power.
- ◆ **Verses 8-9:** Paul uses a literary form of his day similar to a resumé or curriculum vitae. However, rather than list accomplishments or achievements he lays out four pairs of contrasts showing the fragility of the vessels of treasure (jars of clay) and the greatness of the power.
 - * Paul is describing how a life lived outside of the comfort zone for Christ's sake is one of change that will often be uncomfortable mentally, physically and spiritually and can come with great cost. However, he encouragingly declares to all believers that God can absolutely be trusted, He is faithful and is always with us despite what we think or feel.
- ◆ **Verse 8: “*We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;*”**
 - * Hard pressed, but not crushed - Troubled, but not living in a state of anxiety.
 - * Perplexed, but not in despair - While Paul's circumstances sometimes left him not knowing what to do or what direction to take, he never became hopeless of the Lord's appearing for deliverance.

◆ **Verse 9: “Persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”**

- * Persecuted, but not abandoned - Paul was constantly pursued and afflicted by the wicked everywhere he went, yet he points out God is always with him. So it is with us.

◆ **Verses 10-12: “We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹ For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. ¹² So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.”**

- * Paul brings the four contrasts of verses 8-9 to a climax in verse 10 with the main point of always dying, yet ever living.
- * Ironically, enemies were always seeking Paul’s life as he was seeking His (Jesus) life.
- * Just as Daniel was thrown into the lion’s den, Paul - and all believers - are constantly being subjected to such peril. Yet just as with Daniel, Paul and all believers, we have the assurance of inexplicable deliverance by the divine power of God.
- * Why would Paul - and us - put up with a life of trials and hardship for the sake of Jesus? So that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our lives to those who are lost; and that God’s name be lifted on high through our circumstances showing His strength in our weakness.
- * Verse 12 concludes with Paul showing the paradox of the Gospel preacher: It comes at great cost for doing so, but is more importantly of great gain to those who hear and respond to the powerful Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Questions for Reflection:

1. So are our comfort zones bad?

- * Absolutely not! Jesus Christ has blessed us with many things.
- * We must remember that our true comfort zones are actually only found in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Every other “comfort zone” is a counterfeit catering to our flesh.

2. How do these verses relate to our comfort zones and change?

- * The hardships Paul endured were not divine punishment for his past behavior, rather they were a result of a life lived preaching the Gospel to unbelievers in a world hostile to it.
 - We must remember that our trials and sufferings are not divine punishment for past sin, rather they are consequences of sharing the Gospel to a sinful, fallen world hostile to its message.
 - Trials and sufferings identify the believer with the trials and suffering of our savior, Jesus.
 - The trials and sufferings of which we are assured divine deliverance only come about when we willingly step out of our comfort zone and into ever-changing circumstances, and ultimately serve to show Christ’s strength through our weakness thus bringing glory to His name.

3. What does our reaction to change show us about our relationship with Jesus Christ?

- * When we do not listen to the call of Jesus in our lives - whether it be to share the Gospel with unbelievers, turn away from specific sin and/or simply carry out the will of the Father - we have a serious issue of the heart: Control.
 - We prefer our comfort and self-perceived peace over what Jesus Christ asks of us - knowing that His call may involve the discomfort, hardship and even suffering Paul endured. If suffering and hardship were fit for Jesus here on earth, then why should we be exempt?
 - Given that our sinful nature is naturally inclined to pursue “self” rather than God, it begs the question of what is really holding us back from relinquishing control of our lives to Jesus once we’ve experienced the cleansing, healing and restoration of the Gospel?

- Two simple, yet very insightful, questions need to be asked of ourselves:
 - (1) Do we really trust God? Not just do we say we do, but can we put into action our trust in Him?
 - (2) Do we really believe His Word? When His Word contains a promise that doesn't match up with our experiences, do our actions - not words - declare that His Word is not true?
- God graciously reveals His character in the Bible and offers numerous promises and guarantees to believers. We have many scriptures memorized and can quote them at will. Yet our actions are inconsistent with what we think we know and believe when we struggle to keep control over the circumstances of our lives.
- We can "know of" the scriptures but not truly "know" them if we fail to place God's Word into action in our lives.
- Placing the Word into action involves a combination of totally trusting that God is who He says He is and believing that His Word is absolutely, 100% true.
- * To truly trust God and believe His Word requires more than a passing thought; it requires contemplation and experience. In the most trying of situations, do we trust that the outcome is completely overseen by God?
 - If we have an unbelieving family member, yet we try in vain to share the Gospel with them, do we trust God to be the one who opens their eyes and hearts or do we bare the responsibility (and the subsequent stress, frustration and anxiety)?
 - If we have lost our job or are facing financial difficulty, do we believe that no matter the outcome God is in control and we have not been abandoned or forgotten by God?
 - If our health fails us, do we place our situation squarely in His hands and find peace and joy acknowledging that the outcome may not be what we want?
 - Do we thank the Lord for allowing hardships into our lives since the Bible clearly and repeatedly shows that it is the valleys of life, not the peaks, where Christ does the most work in conforming us to His image and likeness? Remember, there is always suffering before glory in the life of a Christian. It was that way for Jesus as a man, therefore it is that way for us.

4. What practical steps can believers take to get out of their comfort zone for the sake of Jesus Christ?

- * To experience the security, peace and joy the Bible declares we have available to us now in Christ Jesus, we must carefully think through and decide whether we fully, 100% without any doubt believe that every word written by God in the Bible is true and applicable to us right now.
- * We must also carefully and deliberately decide whether the truths and promises of God as revealed in His Word are true despite any circumstance we may face - not just in our mind, but our heart. A simple question that goes straight to the core is asking yourself if any circumstance has an outcome that you don't like, isn't fair or is difficult and painful, has God done something wrong? Of course He has not - He is incapable of doing wrong.
- * We must continually remember what the Lord has done for us that while we were sinners: He sent His son Jesus to live as fully God and fully man to be the atoning sacrifice for our sin; that Jesus was obedient to the Father's will in living a sinless life and was crucified; that He was bodily raised from the dead and sits at the right hand of the Father continuously interceding for all who believe and will return again one day to gather His children; that it was our sin that necessitated Jesus' sacrifice on the cross; and that it is through no works of our own that we are completely cleansed and forgiven of our sin and viewed as righteous by the Father through Jesus' obedience.
- * We must daily remind ourselves that Jesus has not left us here all alone, but has graciously sent the Holy Spirit to live inside of us as a guarantee of heirship with Christ, as an advocate, as a helper and as a comforter who empowers us to do the will of the Father.

- * Once we have acknowledged these truths and decided we will willingly turn control of our hearts over to Christ, we must then be willing to play the trust game with Jesus daily, pick up our crosses and follow Him wherever He may lead us - even into difficult circumstances. Faith is always tested.
- * When we struggle to do these things - and we all will - we must turn in prayer to Jesus and ask for help.
- * We must willingly accept that we do not need to be in control of our circumstances, but that the One who created us will direct our path - come what may.
- * We must resolve to not live in fear, worry or doubt of what the outcome of any circumstance will be based on the foundation of the Gospel, God's character and nature, His Word and the truths given to us in the Bible.