

Learning to Love Being Uncomfortable

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SEPTEMBER 6TH, 2015

Sermon Summary

Overview

It is natural to want to be comfortable, but your destiny is in danger if you only live in the comfort zone. Breakthrough often comes through discomfort. “The Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.” (Matt. 11:12) We need to get comfortable with being uncomfortable. Adversity and difficulty are rich soil for growth in our lives—if we lean into God and press in to the situation. Nothing is too difficult, nothing is too hard in Christ. (Phil. 4:13) All things are possible to him who believes (Mk. 9:23). Are we willing to stick with it, press on, and stay the course in the face of difficulty? As we experience the powerful effect of perseverance, we will begin to love being uncomfortable, because we know that our persistence in the discomfort will produce transformative fruit in our lives.

We All Want Comfort

It is natural for us to want to be comfortable. We look for comfort. We want comfort. For example, statistics show that 20% of American adults are “binge drinkers” – as defined by drinking at least 5 drinks within 2 hours on a somewhat regular basis. What is all that drinking about? It’s about being able to let go of whatever it is that they are holding on to or feeling bad about – it’s about being comfortable. Statistics also show that the Average American adult watches 4 hours of television a day – 28 hours a week – almost a full time job’s worth of television weekly. In other words, it is 2 months of non-stop tv watching per year. In a 65 year lifespan, that average adult will have spent 9 years glued to their television. What is all that television about? It’s about being comfortable.

But the question is, “is comfort what we are really pursuing?”

A mantra of the millennial generation is “I’m not feeling it.” What is that statement all about? Comfort. If it makes you feel uncomfortable, you “are not feeling it.” Our dispositions towards retirement are similar. Many of us want to retire by 50. But, research has shown that, if you retire at 55 your chances of dying by the time you are 65 are 80% higher than the person who doesn’t retire until they are 65. Similarly, the incidence rate of heart attack in men within two years of retirement is staggering.

We all have a desire for comfort, but what we haven't really thought about is how dangerous living in the comfort zone is. It keeps us absolutely stuck and stagnant. We have to start re-training ourselves to be comfortable or at home with being uncomfortable. In fact, true comfort only comes through discomfort in the same way that true peace only comes through conflict. When peace is sought without a willingness for conflict, compromise is imminent. When comfort is sought without a willingness for discomfort, escapism (tv, drinking, etc) is imminent. Through practice, we can learn to love discomfort because we will love the fruit of what happens when we lean-into the difficulty of our lives instead of avoiding it. Physical training – working out – is a great picture of this. The workout is uncomfortable but the result of the workouts makes it all worth it.

Now, seeing this principle play out in the arena of physical fitness is pretty clear, but it applies to all of life. If you want to have good relationships, you are going to need to get uncomfortable! If you want your finances to come into order, you are going to have to get uncomfortable!

Pressure is the Path

And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:21-22) The word tribulation means "pressure." There's an issue of perspective here. We too often think "pressure is bad." But the early church knew differently: "pressure is expected." When we expect pressure, we lean-in when we see it or feel it. When we despise pressure, we shrink back when we see it or feel it. If you don't lean into the difficulties of life, even the smallest problems will knock you on your rear, but if you are leaning in, you can take on big problems head-on!

There are things we can do in life that have nothing to do with the circumstances and situations surrounding us – but have everything to do with what is inside of us. If we have an understanding that "*We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God*" we will not be surprised and discouraged when there is pressure! Jesus said "*the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.*" (Mt. 11:12) Those that lean-in take ground!

"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." (Mt. 7:13) The "narrow" gate is "pressure" in the Greek! There is a wide and comfortable road that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Fewer people tread the difficult and narrow path. We are all looking for the breakthroughs – the mountaintop experiences with the Lord – but if we live in a breakthrough mentality we are actually going to find ourselves not being good disciples. Discipleship is the hard work of waking up in the morning doing what you need to do to be a good man, a good husband, a good father, a good wife, a good worker, a

good servant, a good carer of the lonely -that's what it's about! And here and there breakthroughs come in!

We need to learn to rejoice in pressure! The person who is difficult to work with is an opportunity! We are so often so immature! We feel hurt if our boss walks in and doesn't say "hi" to us! That's an opportunity for developing our emotional maturity! If we can change the way we see our circumstances and begin to be more comfortable with being uncomfortable, we will see an increase of fruit from situations that used to get us down. So many things in life are difficult, we have to start seeing the opportunity for blessing in those moments. We have to start saying "I'm going to lean into difficulty, not run away from it." *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.* (James 1:2-4) Maturity – being perfect and complete – is about being able to walk the faith walk even when the road gets tough.

A Personal Inventory: Where do You Need to Lean-in?

Nevertheless, everyone of us is a comfort seeker and each of us are way more comfortable in our lives than we realize. Take the following inventory:

- How are you doing financially?
 - 1=You are worried about finances all the time; you live above your means and spend what you do not have.
 - 10=All your needs are taken care of and you are incredibly sacrificial in giving and you don't worry about it at all.
- How are you doing living a pure and righteous life?
 - 1=Self-evident. Your thoughts and your actions consistently trip you and others up.
 - 10=Your thoughts and actions build you and others up.
- How well are you taking care of your body?
 - 1=You don't care for your body well. You are in poor shape, are often tired, lethargic, and even sick.
 - 10=You focus on eating the most healthy things, exercising regularly and diligently, and keeping good rest as a priority. You are rarely sick, daily full of energy, and in some of the best shape of your life.
- How are your closest relationships? (e.g., spouse, children, closest friends, family members)
 - 1=You are not even sure if you have any close relationships.
 - 10=You have multiple, great, close relationships – people you are laughing with and crying with. People that know your greatest struggles and biggest dreams. You are surrounded by

a life-giving group of family and friends who know you and you know them. You pray together, you laugh together, you are doing life together.)

- How close do you feel to God on a daily basis?
 - 1=You're struggling to even believe in God b/c your heart is so hurt or life has been so hard that you are wondering if God is real or if He even cares about you.
 - 10=You are present to God throughout the day. You are present to His presence. You are aware of His sweet voice. You are connected to His Word – it's rich and your heart is stirred. You have a longing to follow Him more than you have ever had.
- How whole is your soul?
 - 1=You have no peace. You wake up and go to bed anxious. You are tense and everything is hard.
 - 10=There is a smile on your face consistently. There is peace in your heart. When people get offensive, you don't get offended; you are able to bless them in return.
- What kind of difference are you making in the lives of others?
 - 1=If you died suddenly people would not really notice from the standpoint of the difference you are making in their lives.
 - 10=People's lives would be radically altered if you were not here because of the assistance, help, love, and grace that you are bringing to them.

We have chosen comfort over discomfort because we have been hurt. We've been let down. In many of these areas, we've chosen the path of comfort. The challenge is to begin leaning-in again. The challenge is deciding "I am going to intentionally make myself uncomfortable. I am going to lean-into life right here and right now." The trial James is speaking about in James 1 is that same Greek word again: "pressure." We need to respond to James' call – to consider the difficult circumstance that we are in as pure joy – as a great opportunity for growth! If we will keep leaning in to the pressure, we will find ourselves growing, changing, and maturing such that someday that area of the above inventory that was a 2 is going to become an 8. If you are not willing to lean in to the pressure, you will not ever be able to say "all is well with my soul." However, if you are willing to lean in, you will see victory in every single area of your life!

Points to Ponder . . .

- What are some areas of your life in which you've become comfortable / stagnant? How can you lean-in in that area in order to see change come to pass there?
- Why is it so hard for us to lean-in to difficulty? How do you tend to respond to difficulty? What have you learned to do (or could start doing) that would cause you to press-in instead of running away from opportunities for growth?
- Kris Vallotton says "our stances determine our circumstances" not the other way around. How is this message empowering? What difference do you anticipate it making in your life. How do you think it will make that difference?