



# The Struggle is Real

*November 2020*

## **Day 1—The Struggle is Real**

*By Melissa Weber*

## **Day 2—When Chaos Comes**

*By Amanda Turnbull*

## **Day 3—He is Here in the Chaos**

*By Melissa Weber*

## **Day 4—Transparency in Chaos**

*By Brandi Clark*

## *The Struggle is Real*

I slumped myself down onto the recliner. I was so exhausted my brain hurt. I was so defeated my heart hurt. I was so tired my body hurt. I felt the reoccurring paralyzation that comes when you are so overwhelmed that even if you knew what to do next, you wouldn't be able to successfully execute it because the communication highway between mind and body has been disengaged. I picked up my phone and I typed:

"I need help. I am drowning in life. This is very hard for me to write. I need a life coach or something. The problem is I don't know what I need. I keep asking God for help but my head is so messed up I don't even know what to do to begin. If you have any suggestions or know someone who could tell me how to be a productive adult \*sigh\* I would greatly appreciate the insight."

This message was the equivalent of SOS! On Titanic! Sinking! SOS! I am still not exactly sure what I thought the response from my two Christian sisters was going to be but, a few minutes later when a "quite honestly, I'm right here with you!" and a "do they have a 3 for 1 special at an asylum!" text came through my phone, I realized their messages might as well read: SOS! Look over your shoulder! On Titanic! Sinking! SOS! The struggle is real!

What transpired that day was not an enabling of my pity party, nor a rampage of Christian platitudes, not even a hint of the Bob the builder theme song: "Can we fix it? Yes we can!" What transpired that day was raw honesty. The kind of honesty that stops you in your tracks, makes you think, leaves you better off than it found you, and asks nothing in return. It was the exact honesty I needed that day. I needed to see that I was not alone and that two of the ladies I probably compare myself to the most were in the same boat I was.

The struggle is real! Yes, it may color itself with any of the numerous possibilities of issue combinations but, at the end of the day none of us is immune to struggle. I've heard it said that we are always in some sort of season of the struggle cycle. In the middle of...On your way out of...Or heading into the struggle.....

John 16:33 sums it up best: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

You will have trouble! In other versions of the Bible the word trouble is replaced by "trials and sorrows" "tribulations" "suffering" and "oppression"

Over the next few weeks we will be looking at the struggles and chaos of life. How we can be prepared for the storms, recognize our self-sabotage, come along side one another, and take heart for Christ has Overcome the world.

## *When Chaos Comes*

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

Jesus tells us that we will have trouble. Hopefully by this point you have realized that just because we have Christ, our lives aren't guaranteed to be perfect. We live in a broken world and we have sinful nature (as do other people!) That isn't what we're talking about today...today we are looking at how we handle chaos when it comes.

We have countless examples (both good and bad) in scripture of how people handle chaos, but the most interesting examples that come to mind is how the disciples handled Jesus' arrest and death.

Put yourself in their shoes...they gave up everything to follow Jesus. They experienced his miracles, persecution and teachings. They witnessed amazing things and were fully invested. Then Holy Week came. Think of the events of that week and how you would have felt...now think about how do you handle chaos in your own life when it comes?

Are you concerned with self-preservation like Judas did when he chose money over loyalty?

Do you react with anger like Peter did when he attacked a guard in the garden?

Do you just go into denial mode like Thomas?

Do you run away or avoid chaos like most of the disciple did?

Do you want to do what is right, but handle it the wrong way like Peter did when he denied Jesus?

Do you allow the chaos to take you to dark, depressing places like Judas did when he chose to end his life?

Or do you hold fast and do all you can to honor God in the moment like John did?

Honestly, I would like to think I would be a John, but in reality I would be hacking off people's ears like Peter.

The struggle is real...everyone has some version of chaos in their lives at any given moment. That doesn't have any measure on your faith. You aren't somehow a better Christian because your life is great. What God is looking at is how you handle the chaos.

I believe God gave us all of these examples to show us that we are all different. Everyone handles stress and struggles differently. There is nothing wrong with getting frustrated, as long as that doesn't lead to sin. There is nothing wrong with withdrawing and needing some time alone, as long as that doesn't lead to all out depression and isolation.

Seek God! Cry out to Him, pray to Him....heck...scream at Him! But the point is you are turning to HIM! He knows the struggles we will face. Scripture tells us that there isn't a struggle or temptation that anyone in the world has or ever will face that Jesus himself didn't experience. He walked the life of a human and overcame this dark, overwhelming and sinful world. PRAISE GOD! We don't have a God that is so far above us He doesn't understand our smuggles! He knows you. He knows your chaos and He knows your heart. He knows how you're going to react.

That isn't a free pass to just deal with chaos in your own sinful way. What God wants is for us to acknowledge where we are and how we handle struggles and let Him work in and through us to help us reflect Him more and more as we deal with the struggles of this world.

Even in your darkest hour, you never know who is looking at you and seeing the power, hope and awesomeness of the Lord because of the way you handle the chaos!

## *He is Here in the Chaos*

I found myself facing another confrontation with someone who if given the right topic of discussion could at any given moment turn a pleasant conversation into WWII.

As I took a deep breath and braced myself for the onslaught of negativity. I heard the still small voice of God say I am here!

What God revealed to me in that moment was my struggle with "all or nothing" thinking. I was convinced that the cure for struggling was, well, "not struggling". After all isn't that the goal to live a life with the least amount of struggle and discomfort? However in those three telling words God opened my eyes that my, all or nothing thinking was robbing me from enjoying fully my relationship with Him and straining my relationships with others.

Isaiah43:2 (ESV) says: When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;

and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;

when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,

and the flame shall not consume you.

I think about all the different ways I've tried praying in the past for the relationship I have with this person who seems to have a knack for turning conversations into conflict. But, no matter where my prayers start and no matter how pure my motives they always seem to end up with me begging and pleading to avoid the unpleasant interactions and avoid the struggle all together. After all isn't that how all or nothing thinking works. If I can just avoid this struggle then there is no struggle, Ha!

Fortunately that's not how it works. I say fortunately because God in His Infinite wisdom has a much better plan for us. Think about Daniel, God didn't prevent Daniel from being thrown into the lions den. He showed up in the lions den. Yet we try to avoid conflict. And what about Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego He didn't prevent them from being thrown in the fiery furnace. He showed up in the furnace. Yet we try so hard to avoid anything that brings discomfort.

The promise is God says: "I will be with you" there is something beautiful waiting inside the lions den and in the midst of the furnace. It's a part of your relationship with God that can only be found walking through the waters and not being overwhelmed. Walking through the fire and not being consumed. Something in my heart changed the moment I heard God speak "I am here" and I would not change one moment of the struggle for the promise of being held.

## Transparency in Chaos

When we decide to meet there is no plan of how, "Come to the table", is going to happen. No, script, no outline. We share what is happening in our lives what God has been showing us. We share the good, the bad and the ugly. We are completely transparent with each other. We do not, use this time as a venting session. It is about accountability and how can you move forward. There is not any judgement. I know finding this is quite unusual. I can be my freak self and no one is afraid to tell me to dial it back.

Today I was reading Luke chapter one. I was not planning on using any of this story for this devotional, but God started to show me how transparent Elizabeth and Mary had to be during that time. It is the beginning of the Christmas story. We have romanticized the story and forgot these women and their friends and neighbors did not have the whole story as we do.

I have always identified with Elizabeth. She was old and barren. She had done everything right. Luke 1:6 says Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations. She checked all the right boxes why wasn't she blessed with a child when she was young? I felt this way, many times. God would have never called me righteous but, I went to college, got married and bought a house. And no baby came. I could not understand it. I did everything the "right" way why were others #blessed and not me?

Mary was a young girl. Movies have made it seem she was in her early twenties. She was more likely, a very, young teen. What would people have said about her? I can picture myself going to the well in the morning. Other women are gathered around. Someone says, "did you hear, Mary came back Preggers!" What, are you kidding me?!! That would have been my response. Unfortunately, I know myself, I would not have stopped there. I would have been bitter, how can this hoochie mama teen have a baby and not me? I believe others would have whispered and continued to talk about this family for many years. It would have been extremely hard to believe. Mary would have had to been completely transparent with what God asked her to do. People would assume she was a liar and a cheater. She could have lied and made Joseph lie. Instead she obeyed God and did what she needed to do.

Mary had someone who she could be transparent with. She left immediately and went to Elizabeth. How reassuring it must have been for Mary when Elizabeth saw Mary, she knew she was pregnant. Luke 1:42 says "God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed." I think Mary would have been excited to see Elizabeth was also pregnant. She would have heard of Elizabeth's struggles. Elizabeth and her husband were descendants of priestly lines, Zachariah was member of priestly order Abijah and Elizabeth was from the priestly line of Aaron. People would have talked about Elizabeth's bareness. They would have speculated that she had secret sin in her life and that was why she was not blessed with a child. Elizabeth had had a long walk of being transparent doing what God asked of her and no understanding of the why.

How much do we miss by not being transparent. How much growth and connection do we miss by fear of being judged. I pray everyone has someone they can be real with. I cannot imagine the exhaustion of pretending. I do not have a great filter so my "pretend" cover is usually blown in a few minutes after meeting.

When I finally had my baby. Things were not how I wanted them to be. I was mad at God how could he let this happen. He let this happen so a couple of women could come along side me and help me see who God really is. They told me I would not find joy unless I denied myself and laid all my expectations at the cross. To give it to God. Giving it to God sounds easy in theory but it is extremely hard not to take it back. I was told I needed to serve others and quite worrying about my wants, Serve others? I am exhausted. I have two little kids. My husband works in the oil field. I have no family here. I do not really know anyone. Many, many excuses of why this was not my time to serve.

I was told the best gift I could give my kids was teaching them to serve and letting them serve along side of me. So, we started cleaning the nursery. Little kids are great toy cleaners. They want to help. I could not believe the Joy and peace that came from doing something so simple. From there I went on to help in other ministries. If I am not serving, I have no purpose. You cannot buy or replicate it with anything else. Fully surrendering to God and serving others is how you find your purpose. Service to others is different for everyone. God will make you uncomfortable but its so worth it. 1 Peter 4:10 Each one of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

If you do not have people who you can be your true self, completely transparent with we want you to come to the table. None of us are qualified to do these devotionals or speak at the table. God works through us. He is growing all of us through this process. Grab a cup of coffee and come sit with us. We are relational creations. So, many have had to isolate. We have this gift of technology that can reach anywhere. The great thing about come to the table is it works in person and online. I pray God will show you, everyone has a spot at the table. Come as you are.