

Message: Turn to Jesus

What do you do when you're down? Who do you turn to?

Pastor Chuck Swindoll received a call a few years ago in the middle of the night. He tells us what happened next: “With a quivering voice the young man who chose not to identify himself began:

I have a gun. It is loaded. I plan to use it on myself tonight. Somebody told me you could help me. I don't see any reason to keep on living and failing. Tell me why I shouldn't kill myself. [He began to sob.] Talk to me, *fast* . . .

In the eyes of the young man who called late that night, there was no hope. He was reaching out in desperation, grasping at straws in a last ditch effort to live.

Joseph Parker, a great orator, pastor and author for several decades, said it well three years before he died:

‘There's a broken heart in every pew. Preach to the sorrowing and you will never lack for a congregation.’¹

That’s a statement of the need of those who come to church, as well as a testament to the quality of the preacher.

Author Percy Shelley called sorrow “a mother with a family of sighs.”¹ So many people are bent over by the burdens and stress of life that it’s hard to imagine what it would be like to stand up straight, free from weight of the world and able to see light and hope.

The media are filled every day, even hourly or by the minute, **with news of impending, ongoing or recent disasters and crisis.** Today’s modern, electronic age is a marvel. We are connected in so many ways to the world around us. That connection begins with our family and friends, but then extends through social media, TV and radio broadcasts, and the internet, until there is no corner of the world that is not visible.

I believe this leads to great stress in our lives. Major, life-changing stress includes such events as marriage, divorce, the end of a relationship, death, major illness or disease, disability, moving, child

¹ <http://www.insight.org/resources/devotionals/sorrow-and-hope.html>

birth, loss of a job, unemployment or underemployment, dropping out of school, and more. **Is anyone here dealing with one of these issues?**

Perhaps I should **ask a different question: how many of these issues are you dealing with today?**

A classical definition of burnout equates three major stress events with toxic, burnout levels of stress. The results of burn out are well documented: changes in appetite resulting in weight loss or weight gain, insomnia or oversleeping, loss of energy or increased fatigue, restlessness or irritability, feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate guilt, difficulty thinking, concentrating, or making decisions, up to thoughts of death or suicide or attempts at suicide. These are the same symptoms one suffers when they are depressed. Burnout and depression are linked, regardless of your susceptibility.

Living in the multi-tasking, connected world of today enhances the stress we have to deal with every day. In the past, when we visited friends or family, we would be exposed to their major stress events when we visited or spent time with them. But we would go home and have a chance to de-stress, to be free from the weight of the additional stress. That isn't the case anymore. Through text messages, tweets, video calls and instant access, we are constantly exposed to ever-increasing levels of stress. We aren't just stressed by family and close friends, but by saturation through the media.

Most people that I talk to are way over the three major life-change level of stress. The typical person has 6-7 major stress events, more than twice the number required to experience burnout. Sadly, and not uncommonly, I have talked to young people who are trying to find a way to manage more than 20 major stress events! The mother of sorrows is sighing loudly with little chance of seeing the light. Is it any wonder that depression is the most rapidly growing phenomena in youth today?

The world offers little hope with these problems. Philosophy and humanism offer no help. Without God, everything comes to an end. Period. There is nothing after life to offer hope to anyone burdened and bent over by the weight of the world. There is no way to stand, no light

and no comfort. The epitaph of the rich and famous holds sway,
“The one who dies with the most toys, wins.”

What can we do? What will you do?

First of all, you are welcome here! We are a community led by God to reach out and help the hurting. That’s our mission statement and it’s printed in the bulletin. However, I do need to offer a caveat. Clinical depression is more than just sadness you can “get over.” If you are genetically and chemically pre-disposed to clinical depression, bi-polar or suffering from symptoms related to mental illness, I encourage you to get professional medical help. We are your church family and will not withdraw or run away, but we will not be able to treat you in the same way a professional can.

To see what God teaches us through the Word, let’s look at the stories of three men who were greatly affected by stress, loss and death. Each of them responded in a different way, with a different result. They show us three different ways to deal with stress and the sorrow that comes with it. The three men are Judas, Thomas and Peter.

What stress were the disciples experiencing? Let’s review: they were suffering because of a death, they were out of a job, they had lost their status and position, they were afraid of persecution, imprisonment or death, they all failed when they ran away leaving Jesus to the authorities, and they were hiding in fear, behind locked doors. That’s six major stress events, more than twice the number required for burnout. The disciples were stressed out and burnt out. **What did they do?**

Let’s begin with Judas Iscariot. By all accounts, Judas had it made. He was chosen by Jesus to be one of the twelve apostles, with promises of position and authority in the kingdom of God. Judas was trusted with the group’s money. He was close friends with Jesus. The problem is he was stuck on the idea of the Messiah as an earthly king. When Jesus foretold his death, Judas’ dreams of status and riches were dashed.

What did he do? Judas turned away from Jesus. He betrayed Jesus to the authorities with a brotherly kiss. He was paid thirty pieces of silver, which was quite a bit of money in those days. Some believe he was going to use the money to buy the Potter’s field and start a business.

It's moot, because Judas realized what he had done: he betrayed an innocent man to people who were looking for an excuse to murder him. Matthew 27:3-5 tells us Judas repented of his deed, but he didn't go to God or seek out Jesus. Instead, Judas went and hanged himself. The sorrow, guilt and shame overwhelmed Judas and he died, spiritually and then physically.

If we turn away from God, we are becoming spiritually dead. Physical death will follow. It's just a matter of time. When we listen to the lies the world tells us about ourselves we are on a path that leads to death.

Next, let's look at Thomas. Like the other disciples, Thomas was part of Jesus' inner circle. He was at the last supper with Jesus, participated in communion and had his feet washed. Thomas didn't betray Jesus, but Thomas did let doubt and fear overcome him. All of the disciples were hiding and afraid, men and women. Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene and then to the disciples in a locked room on the evening of the day he was raised. He showed them his hands and side, gave them peace and breathed on them.

But Thomas wasn't there. And so, like many of us, Thomas only believed in what he could see and prove for himself. It didn't matter what the other disciples said, Thomas wouldn't believe Jesus had risen from the dead unless he saw for himself. When Jesus appeared a week later, Thomas was there. He saw Jesus' hands and side, and when asked by Jesus if he still doubted professed the truth, calling Jesus Lord and God. Jesus' response is telling (John 20:29), “*Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.*” Doubt and fear defeated Thomas.

What did he do? Thomas didn't turn to Jesus in his doubt and fear. Thomas relied on his own knowledge and understanding, no matter what anyone else said. Does this sound familiar to anyone? Don't we do that? Our doubt and fear go hand-in-hand with our pride and lack of trust. We become like the good seed planted among the weeds, choked out by the cares and concerns of the world. When we are burdened by the stress, sorrow and worries of this world, we prefer to “go our own way,” rather than trusting in our brothers and sisters in Christ. By going

our own way, we are not trusting God’s power and authority over this world. Even worse, we are not open to accept Jesus as our risen Lord at the prompting of the Holy Spirit. We are overcome, rather than overcomers. We are spiritually blind, which makes us uncertain about anything in life.

Fortunately, we have the example of Peter. Peter is the poster child for those who are bold, rash and occasionally unwise. Peter didn’t understand a lot of what was happened at the end of Jesus’ earthly life. Peter misunderstood the meaning of Jesus’ transfiguration. He didn’t understand Jesus’ lesson on discipleship when he refused to let Jesus wash his feet. Peter denied Jesus three times, severing his relationship. Even though Peter struggled and made a lot of mistakes, Peter was trying. Peter was the only one who got out of the boat to walk on water. He was the one who first called Jesus the Messiah. Peter ran to the tomb to see that it was empty for himself.

What did he do? Peter turned to Jesus! Peter turned to God in his sorrow, fear and doubt. Peter turned to Jesus in those times when he didn’t understand what was going on. Peter didn’t give up! Peter kept trying, even after he failed. Peter turned to God when his heart was full of bitter sorrow when he betrayed Jesus. Peter turned to God when he heard the tomb was empty. Peter turned and came any time and every time Jesus called. By turning to God, Peter was forgiven. By turning to God, Peter was restored and reinstated. By turning to God, Peter overcame his flaws, failures and feelings to love, trust and obey God in all things, including the very manner of his death.

What will you do? When things are at their darkest, when the stress and strain of life’s challenges weigh heavily on you, when alcohol, sex, drugs, harmful actions or suicide seem like the only escape, what will you do?

Will you be like Judas and turn away from God, only to lose everything, including the only hope we have in this world, the promise of eternal life in Christ?

Will you be like Thomas, waiting on the sidelines for Jesus to come and take you by the hand, leading you on the path? That’s a life half-

lived in doubt and fear, waiting for a Savior who may not come because you are lukewarm, without true belief or faith.

Will you be like Peter and turn to God, no matter how dark things may be? Will you turn to God when your failure is so great it casts a shadow on you and your loved ones? Will you turn to God when you are depressed, burnt out and ready to give up? Will you turn to God when you are thinking about suicide? Will you turn to God when you are unemployed, sick, tired, lonely, and weary? Hear God in 1 John 5:4 and believe: *“everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.”* Let us stand and see the light through hope in Jesus Christ. Turn to God and you are on the path to eternal life.

Blessed are those who believe Jesus is alive!

Psalm 133 (NRSV)

How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the LORD ordained his blessing, life forevermore.

John 20:19-31 (NRSV)

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.