

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS FAITH CHURCH 2025 WOMEN'S RETREAT

September 6, 2025

When God Says “No”—Caley Mitchell

I. Intro

Welcome, sisters. Thank you for coming. I want to take a moment to acknowledge that, since you elected to come to this workshop, you are likely experiencing some hard and painful thing. There is something GOOD you have been denied, OR some experience you never wanted to have, but is, in fact, your reality. Can we take a brief moment to silently acknowledge what that thing is in your life? Hold it in your mind before the Lord. Offer it to him. Please pray with me.

PRAY: Father, I pray that these women would be held in your everlasting arms. That as I share what you have taught me, your Holy Spirit would do the work of encouraging, comforting, and equipping these women to endure, faithfully, the time and season you have called them to. I pray that we all would learn the humble art of surrender, and, as we do, that we would be rewarded with a more intimate knowledge of who you are. Show us your heart, oh God. We long to know and hear from you. Amen.

God knows that difficult situation you find yourself in. God sees you. He is not without compassion for you—even if he does not make it go away. “No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly,” Psalm 84:11. That’s you—you’re the upright if you are in Christ. As one of my favorite authors and speakers, Elisabeth Elliot says, “He says no in order that He may, in some way we cannot imagine, say yes. All His ways with us are merciful. His meaning is always love.”

My hard thing is mental illness. Since my son was born in 2018, I have struggled with what I can only describe as sometimes debilitating anxiety. In the postpartum period, I walked through one of the darkest seasons of my life. Naturally, I prayed that God would take my anguish away, that he would heal me.

God has indeed provided for me over the intervening years, in ways I wouldn’t have imagined and healing HAS COME by degrees, but I live in the tension of ‘not yet,’ when it comes to my full healing. There are still times when I have come up against my limitations with frustration, discontent, and even despair. But God has met me in these moments. The living God has revealed himself in ways I would never have known him if not for my suffering. I don’t want you to miss the heart of God in this—He is with you and for you and birthing something supernatural, eternal, and precious in you. As any mother would acknowledge, birth is incredibly painful, and we can’t always see to the other side when we’re in the midst of labor. But there is something beautiful and wondrous awaiting us. It’s glory. “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” (2 Corinthians 4:17)

When we are in the grips of some trial, it is natural to ask why. There are a multitude of reasons we suffer—the brokenness of the world, personal sin, the frailty of human flesh, and even obedience to God. Whatever the cause is, our response should be the same—to take our suffering and surrender it to Christ. In his hands, your suffering is a tool to make you like Jesus, the man of sorrows. Hebrews 12:5 says, “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” And, one of my favorite promises comes just after in verse 11, “[discipline] yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” This discipline does not necessarily imply correction, (it might!) but training. As 1 Peter 4:16 says, “if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.” We glorify God as we patiently bear with suffering as we also bear his name.

II. Lament

The first thing I want to tell you is, it’s okay to groan. What do I mean by that? It’s okay to seek the good thing, to ask God for relief, whatever that may look like in your life. There is a way to ‘groan’ in faith. Romans 8 talks about this groaning, “we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies...” (v. 23b). We groan when we bring our needs and requests before the Lord, expectantly, hopefully. We were not made for this broken world—we were made for eternity, for glory, and it is only natural for us to feel the gulf between here and there.

Nearly half of the book of Psalms is populated with prayers of lament. In his book *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy*, Mark Vroegop defines lament as, “a prayer of pain that leads to trust,” (pg. 28). There’s an important distinction here: lament begins as a prayer of complaint, but it ends in dependence on the Lord and the remembrance of his faithful character. When we are in trial, we must fight the temptation to grumble in faithlessness. I will give two examples to show you the difference between a *faith-filled* prayer of lament, and a *faithless* grumble of complaint.

Psalm 13

¹ How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? ² How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?	} Complaint
³ Consider and answer me, O Lord my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, ⁴ lest my enemy say, “I have prevailed over him,” lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.	} Request
⁵ But I have trusted in your steadfast love;	}

my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
⁶ I will sing to the Lord,
because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Trust or

The psalmist complains of the length of his sorrow, his defeat. And makes his request: that he be heard and answered by the Lord. Finally, he expresses his trust in God's steadfast love and calls to mind a time when the Lord "dealt bountifully" with him.

In contrast, Numbers 20:2-5 says:

²There was no water for the community, so they assembled against Moses and Aaron. ³The people quarreled with Moses and said, "If only we had perished when our brothers perished before the LORD. ⁴Why have you brought the LORD's assembly into this wilderness for us and our livestock to die here? ⁵Why have you led us up from Egypt to bring us to this evil place? It's not a place of grain, figs, vines, and pomegranates, and there is no water to drink!"

Notice the people complain to Moses, the representative of the Lord. But their request is not genuine—"if only we had perished when our brothers perished..." And instead of REMEMBERING God's faithfulness and power in the 12 plagues, the parting of the Sea, and his deliverance, they call "evil" what he has done for them! There is no TRUST, no remembrance of God's activity—only complaint. This is the distinguishing feature between faithful prayers of lament, and faithless complaining.

The reason why I call the last element of lament "trust or remembrance," is because there are times when, in the midst of our pain and perplexity, we do not FEEL like we trust the Lord. In fact, we may feel very doubtful and fearful. But we can actively choose to call to mind past acts of God's faithfulness. This may look like remembering and thanking God for specific incidents in our own personal history, or meditating on examples of God's faithfulness to his people in the Bible. Both can be helpful tools in stirring up faith and trust in our good God when our fear, disappointment, or pain looms large.

God already knows our pain, our doubts, our perplexities, even our anger at his denials. In our prayers, cries, and sighs, we put ourselves into the proper posture to process our feelings in the presence of God. Not only that, I think that if we skip this important step, we miss the very heart of God. Because his heart is one of merciful compassion for the downtrodden, it is a fatherly heart. Psalm 103:13-14 says, "As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust." And Psalm 34:18 says, "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit." Bring your lament to his feet and listen for his answer. It is his very presence.

Practically speaking, HOW do we lament? I think the easiest way is to pray the Psalms of lament. There are a variety of ways to do this, but find what works for you and

feels authentic. I love to write, so I'll take a Psalm and go through it, verse by verse and rewrite each thought in my own words, adding my own personal details. When I pray, I often journal, so I try to be aware if the Lord is bringing any scripture to mind—to look it up and hear his voice or to pray it back to him.

You can also try reading scripture, or prayers aloud with feeling. You can pray in different postures. The Bible often refers to people kneeling, standing, or lifting our hands in prayer. Find a posture that feels authentic to your prayer and allow it to connect you with the Lord. I used to pray on walks and would sometimes kneel down in a beautiful spot on a trail or in a park. You can try composing your own prayer of lament based on the structure I mentioned. I find singing or listening to worship songs that express what I feel and a sense of trust in God very helpful.

Lament is an act of worship and submission. We worship God because he is worthy of our worship, not only because or when we FEEL like worshipping him. When we're in the hard place, we worship him while we WAIT to feel like worshipping him. Our worship is the kindling for the fire of faith. We keep piling it on, knowing that God WILL spark the blaze, even if we don't know when or how. Worship is the way that we submit to God's sovereignty in our lives. We must recognize God's wisdom and ways as above our own when he has delivered us a 'no' in response to prayers for a 'good thing.'

III. Common Pitfalls and Temptations

When we're in a hard season, it's important to remember that our feelings are valid, but not permanent. Our feelings may be strong, but they are not TRUTH. God's word is TRUTH. It doesn't change the way that our feelings do. Jeremiah 17:9 says "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" In contrast, David wrote, "The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever." (Psalm 119:160) What a world of error we can enter if we choose to trust our feelings over and above God's word!

I'm going to talk about some other common pitfalls and temptations that I've encountered when walking through times of hardship, so that we can be on our guard against these—self-pity, unbelief, and shame.

A. Self-Pity

I think one of the biggest reasons we fall into the sin of self-pity is because we lack a proper theology of suffering. We live in a culture that promotes self-actualization, comfort, ease, prosperity—the American dream. And whether we realize it or not, false teachings like the prosperity gospel have influenced our thinking. We think, 'If I'm a good Christian, God will bless me...and his blessing will look like what the world tells

me is good.’ This worldly attitude of entitlement is pride and can only be checked by the truth of God’s word.

1 Peter 4:12-13 says, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.” And James 1:2 tells us to consider it joy when we face trials of various kinds because it builds perseverance. Romans 5:3 adds to that idea—suffering produces endurance, endurance character, character hope. Hebrews 2:10 tells us that Jesus himself was “made perfect,” through suffering. This doesn’t mean Jesus was in any way “imperfect” or lacking beforehand—the Greek word has a connotation of completeness, that something has achieved the purpose for which it was made. Jesus achieved his ultimate purpose in suffering according to the will of his Father. When we expect, and even embrace suffering as an essential part of the Christian life, we are much better prepared to avoid the temptation to self-pity than if we view suffering as a sign that something is wrong.

One of the greatest “remedies” for self-pity, is remembering our Savior on the cross. The cross reminds us that there is much to be grateful for. When we see the god-man on it, see him truly, it dispels our unbelief in his goodness. Even if you feel there is nothing else to be thankful for, the salvation offered us by Christ’s death on the cross is an unparalleled gift. Colossians 1 describes it this way, “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (v.13-14) And Paul even goes on to say, “And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him” (v. 21-22). We were his sworn enemies! Slaves serving in the camp of the kingdom of darkness. Our every deed an offense against the kingdom of the Beloved Son. But rather than vanquish us, God has rescued us! And not only has he made us citizens of an infinitely better kingdom, but he has made us his very own children, adopted as heirs with Christ. As it says in Romans 8, **verse 16-17** “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, **provided we suffer with him** in order that we may also be glorified with him.” Suffering is part of the package of ‘sonship.’

We are right to grieve the loss or lack of good things. We are valid in feeling the sting of rejection or injustice at the hands of another. Grief says, ‘I am sad because I have been hurt,’ but self-pity says, ‘I am sad because I DESERVE better.’ Self-pity stems from an underlying pride. The danger of self-pity is that it looks inward rather than upward. It deepens distrust towards God, it shuts down gratitude and robs us of contentment and joy. It can be something as simple as, “if only God gave me something

else instead of ____, then it wouldn't be so hard," or "then, I would be happier." We don't have to call suffering "good," but we are called to "rejoice in all circumstances."

B. Unbelief

Another common temptation in times of hardship is unbelief. Our God is big enough for our questions and doubts, however, we must be vigilant against doubt that leads to unbelief, distrust or despair.

Doubt and despair are scary places to be, but even there, we are not outside of God's grasp. 2 Corinthians 1:8-10 says, "For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who RAISES THE DEAD. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again." When we are in places and seasons that stretch us beyond our abilities, we are given an opportunity to grow in our faith. His purpose is this—we learn to depend on an unlimited and all-powerful God. We may see no way out, but if we choose to trust the Lord, we will see his hand in our deliverance. And choosing to trust does not depend on feelings; it is an act of will. We may FEEL despairing and yet, we may still CHOOSE trust.

How do we do this? We must take hold of God's promises. Ah, you say, "but I don't know the outcome. I don't know what God WILLs for me in this." (I have said this to myself). It's true that there is no promise that says everything will turn out how we want, pain-free, easy. But we do know that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him," from Romans 8:28. We know, "Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning." (Psalm 30:5). We know the "Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials," (2 Peter 2:9). We know, "...after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace... will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you." (1 Peter 5:10) And we know, "He will wipe every tear from [our] eyes." (Revelation 21:4).

If promises about a possible outcome feel thin and indistinct to hold firmly in your battle, then LOOK, LOOK, LOOK at God's character. Shift your gaze from the hoped for deliverance to your Deliverer. Who is he?

- "The Father of compassion and the God of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3)
- "The God who gives endurance and encouragement" (Romans 15:5)
- "Our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1)
- The Good Shepherd who holds fast his sheep (John 10)
- Our help who "will not let your foot slip" (Psalm 121)
- "God... rich in **mercy**, because of the great **love** with which he loved us..." (Ephesians 2:4)

- “The Lord...the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth...” (Isaiah 40:28)
- Our Redeemer who says, “Fear not, for I have **redeemed** you; I have called you by name, you are **mine**” (Isaiah 43:1)
- The one who SEES, HEARS, and KNOWS our pain, (Exodus 3:7)
- And, our Deliverer, “I am **with** you to deliver you, declares the LORD” (Jeremiah 1:8)

We must wrestle with, meditate on, and preach the word to our hearts to fight the sins of unbelief and despair. Be specific—what is it that you are doubting? Is there an answer in scripture? Be creative in *how* you meditate on the word! Make up a song, write scripture on a notecard and put it in your pocket. Make art out of it! Put up post-its around your house. Get those glass markers and write on your mirror. Listen to the audio Bible or sermon podcasts. Subscribe to a Bible reading plan or verse of the day that comes to your inbox. Immerse yourself in the word—breathe it in until it is a part of you, the thoughts you think, the words you speak. PRAY these scriptures to the Lord. Maybe your prayers sound like the man in Mark 9 who prayed, “I believe, help my unbelief!” I know that’s how mine often sound. God delights to do what he has already promised in his word to do. And we know his word does not return void.

C. Shame

Another common temptation in hardship is shame. Shame is different from guilt. It can arise because we think this shouldn’t happen to a “good Christian,” or because we believe if we just had more faith God would answer our prayers, or because we imagined ourselves stronger and more able than we truly are. Let me speak this truth over you, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1a). If you are experiencing shame from some disappointment in your circumstances or self, God does not want you to live in shame. Jesus willingly took the cross “despising it’s shame,” so that we can live unashamedly. Contemporary theologian and teacher R.C. Sproul once said, “It is no shame to call on Him for help in times of trouble. It is His delight to minister to us in our time of pain. There is no scandal in the mercy of God to the afflicted. He is like a Father who pities His children and moves to comfort them when they are hurting. To suffer without the comfort of God is no virtue. To lean upon His comfort is no vice.”

A lot of my shame came from the stigma associated with mental illness and the feeling that I was somehow weak or disqualified from the work of the kingdom. But Paul, in describing his thorn in the flesh, tells us that in our weakness, Christ is strong and, therefore we can even boast in our weaknesses. Our need brings us to the foot of the cross and that is no bad place to be. As Puritan Theologian Thomas Goodwin once said, “[Christ’s] own joy, comfort, happiness, and glory are increased and enlarged by his showing grace and mercy, in pardoning, relieving, and comforting his members here on earth.” We should not feel ashamed to NEED his grace, mercy, pardon, relief, and comfort. If we do not need these things from him, might I suggest that we examine our hearts to see if some idol has taken his place. Because whether we FEEL weak, guilty,

or needy, we know from God's word that apart from him we are indeed these things. The branch needs the vine. There is no shame in saying so. It is a biological fact. Furthermore, according to Goodwin, we are doing kingdom work—we are glorifying Christ—to turn to him with our need. The psalmist says in Psalm 116, "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord..." (v. 12-13) So he blesses the Lord by asking God to fill him again, to help him again, save him again. This is his act of worship. This is glorifying to God.

I remember in a difficult season, asking my pastor and friend, "how do I glorify God if I'm a puddle?" Or to put it another way, how do I glorify God if I can't DO anything for him? Let me ask you—how did Job glorify God? James says that it was his steadfastness, his display of the Lord's compassion and mercy (James 5:11). In John 9, the disciples ask Jesus about a man born blind—whether he or his parents had sinned, causing his affliction. Jesus tells them that this condition is "so that the works of God might be displayed in him." (v. 3) Our weakness just might be the qualification God is looking for to accomplish his work. Therefore, let us not be ashamed, but let us offer ourselves to God as useful instruments in the Potter's hand—vessels which display his glory however he should so choose.

In this way, we fight our shame by seeing ourselves rightly. This is true humility. Not thinking of ourselves in a negative light but seeing ourselves as we truly are before God, rescued sinners who are—

- Precious, honored and loved (Isaiah 43:4)
- God's special possession (1 Peter 2:9)
- Chosen (Ephesians 1:4)
- Forgiven (Psalm 103:12)
- Free (Romans 8:2)
- Strengthened (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)
- Well-provided for (Philippians 4:19)
- Well-made (Psalm 139:14)
- Known (Psalm 139:1)
- Victorious (Romans 8:37)
- Made New (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- Purposeful (Ephesians 2:10)
- Friends of God (John 15:15)
- Ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 2:14)
- Blessed (Ephesians 1:3)

Remarkably, this is not an exhaustive list of all that we've become in Christ through faith. Yes, we were darkness, but now we are children of light. Does that mean the darkness never comes knocking? I don't know how it is for you, but that's certainly not my experience. But we all live in the tension of who we ARE and YET WILL BE in Christ. Let us all choose to believe and lean into what God's word says about us to walk in freedom from shame and false identities.

In fact, Satan uses shame to keep us isolated from one another. He knows that we are stronger in fellowship and community. One way to fight shame is to bring your hurts and disappointments into the light. Share them with someone you can trust, who will point you to Jesus, weep with you and pray with you. I had a friend once who sang over me. What a precious gift is the family of God! Galatians 6:2 says, “bear one another’s burdens”—and how could we, if no burdens were ever shared? In my experience, there is a great sense of relief in sharing with others. How often do we hear that someone has been through a similar experience, yet we never would have known just by looking at her. Perhaps she knows what you need; or perhaps she can walk with you through it.

IV. Receiving Love (Looks like Accepting Help)

This brings me to my next main point. Receiving love looks like accepting help. And I’m going to tell you why this is God’s calling and gift for some of his people in various seasons. I always wanted to be the one doing, giving, helping, blessing, caring. (anyone else struggle with pride??) I never wanted to be the one who NEEDED the care. But, in order for there to be a giver, there also must be a receiver. I have come to the conclusion that personal experiences of need and weakness are essential to the form and function of the body of Christ. I want to read to you a passage from 1 Corinthians 12 that has convinced me it is so:

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ...The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Do you hear it? The weaker parts are **indispensable**. Adjective: necessary, vital, essential. Our weakness and need are part of God’s design for us in the body of Christ, to bring us together. But what I’m really trying to get at is this—please accept help from your brothers and sisters in Christ. Don’t be too proud. Perhaps this is the kingdom work you are being called to. Receiving is a gift and purpose of God, just as caring or giving is. The hand cannot fulfill its God-given role as a hand, without the wrist. And you may not always be a wrist. Maybe in the next season you’ll be an armpit, but we’ll leave that to God’s sovereign will.

In my particular case, I am finding that in the area of my greatest pain and weakness, God is giving me a ministry. But it started with receiving love and help from

Him and others. (It even required me asking for help—a most objectionable task!). And I still ask for help today. And it still feels uncomfortable at times. Whatever season of life we are in—valley or mountaintop, we will only be as effective for Christ to the degree that we are actively humbling ourselves, surrendering to his will, and depending on his grace to accomplish it.

V. Puddles for Jesus: Serving Christ in Seasons of Brokenness

As I already mentioned, sometimes our purpose, our service to God, is being the cracked and broken jar of clay that displays his surpassing glory and power. That's it.

Think of the story of Joseph. He had this incredible dream, this call of God on his life, but it wasn't coming to pass as he likely expected it to. I don't think it's too wild to speculate that Joseph didn't want to be rejected by his brothers, sold into slavery, falsely accused, imprisoned, or forgotten. He must have prayed and wondered why God seemed not to hear him. But in Genesis 39, we are told 4 times that "the Lord was with Joseph." What did that look like in his life? Joseph excelled at whatever he put his hands to. He had integrity and fought sin. He endured hardship without forfeiting his trust in the Lord. Now tell me that's not kingdom work. And his reward was the Lord's presence with him all the days of his life, the restoration and even exaltation of his person, and finally, reconciliation with his family.

We live in a performance-oriented world, where 'service activities' are held in higher regard than character. But the Lord looks at the heart. Seasons of testing are God's instruments to prune us, to grow our faith so that we might bear more spiritual fruit. Participating with God in his sanctifying work is service to him. It requires submission and humility. As James 1:4 tells us, we must persevere in order to be "mature and complete, lacking NOTHING." The heart-break that suffering brings makes us open and teachable. It is the fertile soil in which God grows his peaceful fruit of righteousness. In her book, *Suffering is Never for Nothing*, Elisabeth Elliot writes, "The deepest things that I have learned in my own life have come from the deepest suffering. And out of the deepest waters and the hottest fires have come the deepest things that I know about God." Similarly, David wrote, "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I could learn your statutes." (Psalm 119)

I've certainly found this to be true. God's 'no' brings our weakness and limitations to our attention. This is deeply humbling. The façade of self-sufficiency is stripped away and we can see how much we need the Lord. And when we depend on and cling to the Lord so nearly, we see his goodness in new and profound ways. We see his limitlessness, his faithfulness in the face of our faithlessness. We experience an intimacy with him that stirs our affections for him and our desire for others to know him. Our pain can serve as a catalyst for the Lord's compassion in us—to draw near to those we see hurting around us. The inner fruit that God works in our hearts cannot be long hidden. It will work its way out.

How we respond to disappointment and suffering is essential to our witness in the world. Your neighbor does not need to see another "shiny, happy person" who finds Jesus to be the solution to all her problems. The world doesn't need a church that looks

like the world—pursuing ease and prosperity and convenience. The world, and your neighbor, need to see someone who holds onto their integrity and faith in the midst of deep hurt; not turning to self-indulgence but holding fast to a better and abiding prize—the very person and presence of Jesus. He is our treasure and reward. We need to show our neighbors by worshipping from the valleys of our lives, by loving each other and our Lord when everything else has been lost. Let us pique the curiosity of the spiritually hungry by showing them the source of our strength in the times of our weakness. This again, is kingdom work.

And there is a time and season to serve in more intentional, structured ways. I want to be clear because I know there are some “Marthas,” some Type A’s, in the room [raise own hand]. When you are walking through seasons of brokenness is not necessarily the time to sign up to teach Sunday school every week. Maybe it is! But this is where I strongly encourage you to seek God’s counsel in prayer. Seek wisdom from others and move ahead slowly. I think often of Mother Theresa who famously said, “Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love.” Let God move you in love.

Here are some of my personal philosophies about “low bandwidth serving”:

1. Seek the Lord about what you want to do; wait for a ‘yes’
2. Invite people into what you are already doing (presence over performance!)
3. Choose flexible or one-time commitments over long term, regular commitments
4. If you feel called to an ongoing commitment, budget your energy resources to meet this commitment (make it part of the rhythm of your life)
5. Use your spiritual gifts (what comes ‘super/naturally’ to you) to love others and build them up

Rely on the Holy Spirit in this. Not every season is one of visible “production.” It is the Lord’s work, and you and I are only participants in it. And remember what Jesus said of himself—that he is gentle and lowly in heart with an easy yoke. If you have received a ‘no’ from God, hold fast to the truth that his denials, though they sometimes feel severe, are mercies in disguise. Entrust yourself, your life, your hopes to his all-wise and loving hands. I would like to close with this poem popularized by Elisabeth Elliot.

From an old English parsonage down by the sea
There came in the twilight a message to me;
Its quaint Saxon legend, deeply engraven,
Hath, it seems to me, teaching from Heaven.
And on through the doors the quiet words ring
Like a low inspiration: “DO THE NEXT THING.”

Many a questioning, many a fear,
Many a doubt, hath its quieting here.
Moment by moment, let down from Heaven,
Time, opportunity, and guidance are given.
Fear not tomorrows, child of the King,
Trust them with Jesus, *do the next thing*

Do it immediately, do it with prayer;
Do it reliantly, casting all care;
Do it with reverence, tracing His hand
Who placed it before thee with earnest command.
Stayed on Omnipotence, safe ‘neath His wing,
Leave all results, *do the next thing*.

Looking for Jesus, ever serener,
Working or suffering, be thy demeanor;
In His dear presence, the rest of His calm,
The light of His countenance be thy psalm,
Strong in His faithfulness, praise and sing.
Then, as He beckons thee, *do the next thing*.

VI. For Discussion:

Not everybody has to answer every question. Your answers may be edifying or encouraging to those in your group. Be considerate of others' privacy when sharing.

1. What good thing has God said 'no' to in your life? What is the hard reality you are facing?
2. Think of a time when you saw God's hand in your life, in the life of someone you know, or someone in the Bible. How does remembering this situation encourage you? How does it challenge you?
3. Get out your Bible, or Bible app and find a promise that speaks to your situation. Write it on the note card and share it with the group. How can you lean into believing this promise?
4. Considering your personal situation, what attribute or characteristic of God do you especially need to meditate on? How might shifting your focus from a particular desired outcome to God's character be helpful for you?
5. Using your reflections from the above questions, write a prayer of lament to God, using the structure:
 - a. Complaint
 - b. Request
 - c. Trust/Remembrance
6. Think of one person you might want to invite into your struggle. How might it feel to share your burden with them? What barriers do you have in doing so?
7. When you consider the common pitfalls and temptations mentioned in the talk (self-pity, unbelief, or shame) does one stand out as something you're struggling with? What's one step you can take this week to fight this sin?
8. When you consider what you've been through, what area of your life do you see spiritual growth/fruit? How has God met you in your situation?
9. Which aspects of identity in Christ do you need to believe about yourself right now?
 - a. Read the slip of paper with an "identity in Christ" over the woman to your left.
10. What is one take-away from this talk that you will remember and apply this week?
11. Pray for one another!

Suggested Resources

Books

Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers – Dane Ortlund

Suffering is Never for Nothing – Elisabeth Elliot

Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy – Mark Vroegop

Podcasts

Light + Truth – Desiring God

Renewing Your Mind – Ligonier Ministries

The Elisabeth Elliot Podcast – The Elisabeth Elliot Foundation

Truth for Life Daily Program – Alistair Begg

Teachers

R. C. Sproul

Joni Eareckson Tada

John Piper

Playlist



Spotify Playlist: Sanctuary