

Understanding God in a Confusing World

5-6-20

Living in Life's Tension (part 1)

I. Announce:

A. **Slide1,2** Andrew L share.

B. **Slide3** May Food Drive - 9-11am Murr Community Food Pantry.

II. **Slide4 Intro: *Living in Life's Tension*** (part 1)

A. Understanding God in a Confusing World. *How to Live with the God We Love.*

1. (next 3) Living with a Hide and Seek God. **Living Forward in Faith and Back in Wisdom.** Living His Master Plan.

B. **Living in Life's Tension.**

1. Tension = *the state of being stretched*. Mental or emotional strain. Normally seen as negative, *I feel tension in the room*. I'm presenting it in the **positive**.
2. **We've all heard of the legend of Mozart.** How his mother/father, to get him out of bed would play a **short cord sequence** leaving it **unresolved**. He'd come downstairs and **play the final cord**. This became known as *Mozart's alarm clock*.

C. Our God is **the God of Tension** and so we need to learn how to **live in** the tension.

1. **Real faith doesn't allow for easy answers.**

III. **Slide5 IDENTIFY THE TENSION** (Abraham)

A. Abraham was a **man of faith**. But, **Real Faith doesn't allow for Easy Answers**.

1. The 19th century danish philosopher/theologian, **Soren Kierkegaard** said, **Slide6 Faith demands the ability to remain caught in the balance. Living the question. Suspended in tension.**

B. Kierkegaard explains it in his book *Fear and Trembling*, which tells the story of **Abraham** being asked to slay **Isaac** in Gen.22.

1. He deepens our definition of **faith** by pointing out faith can be *perplexing, unreasonable, and scary*.

2. **Picture the story.** Abraham gets up early in the morning of the sacrifice and **says nothing to anyone, not even his wife.** But what could he say to her right? What God is asking him to do is outside the bounds of **reason, wisdom, and ethics.** He can't tell anybody about it. It's the ideal example of **unreasonable faith.**
 3. There's no **morality** or **logic** Abraham can **lean on** to **defend or explain** to his wife or others **what he's about to do.** God is calling him to do something in **faith** that is **completely unreasonable.** Let's say it this way: **true faith is ungrounded, the resolution...isn't always apparent.**
- C. **Close Up. Illus:** Imagine trying to fly a **magnet** through the center of a **metal pipe** without letting it touch the sides. There is **constant energy** pulling the magnet toward **one side** or **the other** to ground it on the side of the pipe. Keeping the magnet **in the center** requires a lot of **tension, energy, and effort.** But if it **slips** just a little in one direction, it grounds on the pipes wall **and suddenly the tension and difficulty are over.**
1. **That's how Abraham must've felt:** caught in the middle, completely in tension between **what he knew God asked of him & what he must have wanted to do.**
 2. **The sides of the pipe** represent all the things that **make it easier to trust God:** eg. **certainty, reason, understanding, etc.** It's how we **escape faith,** grounding our trust **in something other than faith.**
 - a) **We look for something more stable, or controllable.** We look for some kind of **guarantee** or **security blanket** to make it **safer** and **easier.**
- D. **Gen.22** not a story about **sacrificing sons or selling everything your own.** It is a chapter about **God's call** and **our response.** *It's about our willingness to live by genuine faith.*
1. Anytime God calls you to something **extreme** or **absurd** *Kierkegaard's favorite word for faith,* **we** can feel a little bit like the magnet flying through the metal pipe. We're trying desperately to move forward, **but** every moment we want to **veer off** and **ground our faith somehow.**

- a) We look for something to **relieve** our **uncertainty**. Something to give us a sense of **why** God is calling us to do that. **Or** to figure out how everything will turn out. We long for **certainty**. We hunger for **closure**. And we seek to resolve tensions as **fast** as we can.
- b) **Obedience** then is frequently *the opposite*. It's a move based on **trust**, **not** in a **certain future**, **but** in **a dependable God**.

IV. Slide7 WRESTLE WITH THE TENSION

- A. He is the *God of tension* and so we need to learn how to *live in* the tension.
1. Real faith doesn't allow for easy answers.
 2. I'd like to point out the word *IN*. The key is not living to **get past it**.
- B. *Walking by faith rather than sight* requires awareness that our eyes can play tricks on us. *Reality can be deceiving*. And *the true path* is often counterintuitive.
1. **eg. Falling through ice**. If you fall through the ice into water the idea is to **swim for the dark not the light**. **Why?** This is counterintuitive. But the ice itself looks **white** from underneath, while the hole in the ice, the path of salvation, appears **dark**.
 - a) Walking by faith rather than sight requires awareness that our eyes play tricks on us, reality can be deceiving, and the true path is often counter intuitive.
 - b) **Life isn't always logically grounded**. We need to follow God when it feels *absurd*.
- C. **Life isn't always logically grounded**. We don't always get **concrete answers**.
1. **Slide8** Sometimes Scripture doesn't always give us *concrete answers*, **but** instead makes us ask even **more questions**, because of **paradox**.
 2. **eg. Jesus says if anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes even their own life such a person cannot be my disciple**. **But then** on the cross shows incredible **care** for his mother.

3. **Paul** says that *we are saved by faith, not by works*. Then **James** turns around and says that *without works, faith is dead*.
- Are these passages in **conflict**, or are they *paradoxically* pointing out different aspects of **faith** and **obedience**?
 - We die to live. We serve to gain. We give to receive. Lose your life to find it. The first will be last. The weak will be strong. Walk by faith, not by sight. Suffering can be a blessing.*
4. An essential part of life is learning to *live the questions* that faith brings into our lives. *adapted from Henry Nouwen*
- Wait on the Lord. Pray through your pain. Except confusion. This is an honest picture of faith. *Life is relentlessly difficult*.
 - Slide9** Life is messy. God is mysterious. And excepting this tension filled truth, no matter the circumstances, is the pathway to peace.¹
- D. Walking in the paradox is only possible if **God's view** is bigger than the **human view**. Do you agree that we have *a limited view* of reality?
- E. **Faith** is the art of living forward in obedience, not in the absence of questions like **Slide10** these, but in the face of them. **Faith** marches *through the paradox*. GP
- Prov.3:5,6 *trust in the Lord with all of your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your path's.*

V. **Slide11a** RESOLVING THE TENSION

- A. Wait, I thought you said Brian we have to *live in* the tension? Yes. No.
- Yes**...that's most of life. But it's **not wrong** to desire *the resolve*...it's how we're wired.
 - Slide11b** I guess it's *learning how to live in the tension AS you look for the resolve*.
- B. How do I find the resolve?

¹ The Grand Paradox, pg.13

1. *Seek the **resolve** in **God**. Seek the **resolve** in **the narrative of Scripture**.

C. **What tension are you facing?**

1. **Maybe your tension is...** God has forgiven you, **but** you haven't forgiven yourself.
2. **Maybe your tension is...** you want to bring glory to God in your job, **but** you don't know how that looks practically.
3. **Maybe your tension is...** do you know the Bible says to not worry about tomorrow, **but** that's all you ever do.
4. **Maybe your tension is...** you want to have a great marriage, **but** no matter how hard you try you feel like you fail.
5. **Maybe your tension is...** you know in comparison to the world, we are among the wealthiest of people, **but** we feel strapped and broke.
6. **Maybe your tension is...** that you know God loves you, **but** you feel abandoned in the midst of your pain and suffering.
7. **Maybe your tension is...** you know God desires us to live in community, **but** you still feel lonely and isolated. (esp during Covid)

D. **I'm not going to try to *resolve* any of these for you. Why?** because maybe, just maybe, it will drive you (and me) to **Jesus. To Scripture. To find our resolve in Him.**

E. **Slide12** Paul said, ***Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.*** Rom.7:25 (I want to do what's right, **but** I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate)

F. **Prayer:** Lord teach us to ***march through*** the paradox.