

A Deeper Walk with God

Before You Settle on a Lesser Life, Consider This

Edited Transcript

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Good morning, men. Please turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter four. I dictated a note to myself this week because I had this kind of like epiphany, this thing I wanted to talk about today. I dictated, "Today we're going to look at a passage that changed my life, and I hope it will change yours too." When I looked down at my phone, what had been transcribed was, "We're going to look at a passage this week that changed my wife, and I hope it will change yours too." We're going to get to that, but before we do, I'd like everybody to take out your smartphone if you have one or your tablet and look up, go to MIMBibleStudy.com. While you're looking up MIMBibleStudy.com, I'm going to tell you a story about a man who said he wanted to invite a young guy in the community to Launch, the Launch series.

He said to me yesterday, he said, "I'm really excited about this, so I'm going to send him all of the information and invite him to come." I said, "No, because that won't work. Tell him about Launch, but then tell him that you'll stop by and pick him up and bring him to that first meeting on that Friday morning." Here's why I told him. In business, you can generally expect, in my experience, something on the order of 75% of the time that people tell you that they're going to do something that they will. You've heard me say here before that the most unpredictable part of my career has always been who's going to do what they said they would do. You just don't know. 75% in business.

Here's the thing. You have, perhaps, invited men to this Bible study. I know that I have. I would estimate that the number of men who have said that they wanted to come, now, not including the men who said they weren't interested like the Buddhist I talked to yesterday, great guy, just not interested. Of the men who say they do want to come, I would estimate that only 10% of them actually follow through. 75% of promises in business kept. 10% of promises about coming to the Bible study kept. Well, you would think that by accident more 10% of the men would remember to come. There must be something else going on. There is. There is a spiritual warfare that takes place when we're talking about helping men. I mean, if you were the devil, you would definitely want to do everything you could to disrupt the possibility of that relationship forming with that man and a group of guys who might actually care about how his life turns out.

I want to encourage you not to make your list of three up and let those people know but actually tell the person that you would like to come or persons you'd like to come that you will be here with them, that you're happy to pick them up, text them in the morning, text them the night before, but that your level of engagement with them would be a little bit higher. Now, at MIMBibleStudy.com, click on the link there that says Launch. Click on that link, says Launch. Here's all the information that you would want to show to somebody. What I would encourage you to consider, I've been doing this all week long as I've thought about people, I've been copying this link and texting it to men who I think would, in their 20s and 30s, that I think might be interested, then, also, a few businessmen who I know have guys in their

20s and 30s working for them that are trying to establish or looking for strategies to build their own careers and families.

Then, if you'd scroll all the way down to the bottom, you'll see it says download flyer. Thank you for putting that on there, Brian. I had no idea that was on there until yesterday afternoon. I clicked on the link. If you want to click on the link, you can do that too. Then, it says you can print the flyer, and so I did. Basically, what it is, is it's that big launch, the same thing as these cards that you have on your table, same thing as cards you have on your table, exactly the same thing, but in this big size here. You could email that to somebody as a PDF or print it off. There are a couple strategies. Guess what. Launch starts in two weeks from today. I want to encourage you to help include in what we're doing the next generation of men in our city, so we're constantly recruiting all the next generations to come to the Bible study.

Now, we always do a couple of shout outs. We're going to also do that this morning. The first one goes to employees of Robertson's Woodworking. You got to love this. Donald Robertson in High Point, North Carolina has a woodworking company, and he started a group of five men, just started, Tuesdays at 3:30 PM at their custom furniture shop in High Point. Donald writes, "Our purpose is to grow closer to God in our daily walk with him, become the men God wants us to be, overcome problems in our life, have godly marriages, and raise godly children." God bless you, Donald Robertson, owner of Robertson's Woodworking. That's our first shout out. Second one goes, oh my gosh, we have a special shout out today to Jim Angelakos.

Jim Angelakos is the Man in the Mirror Bible Study administrator. He is an associate pastor at Faith Assembly. He was a ministry consultant at Man in the Mirror for 11 years, and he has been a change agent with Man in the Mirror for 25 years. We just did a staff spotlight email, and he was in there, said, "Oh my gosh. We should be giving Jim Angelakos a shout out too." I wonder if you would join me in giving a very warm and rousing welcome to the employees of Robertson's Woodworking and a big shout out to Jim Angelakos. Yeah. One, two, three, hoorah. Well, that's fun. That was fun. Jim's married to Rebecca and has three lovely children, son who's married. He's expecting his first grandchild.

Our series is **A Deeper Walk With God**. The title of today's message: **Before You Settle on a Lesser Life, Consider This**.

THE SITUATION AS IT APPEARS

We're going to begin by looking at the situation as it appears. You should be at 2 Corinthians chapter four verse seven. We have been learning or being reminded of in this series that, for example, the last time we were together that the most important thing that we can do is to love God with the totality of our being. In a previous series, we learned that part of God's plan is for you to do something great with your life. John 15:8, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." We go about the process of trying to love God, and we go about the process of trying to bear much fruit. Then, life happens.

A little over two years ago, life happened to me, and I developed an autoimmune disorder. It's still undiagnosed. I have mentioned here on a couple of occasions there was a period of about a year where it was so debilitating it took me four hours in the morning before I could actually function. I could not... The thought of picking up that coffee mug was impossible, didn't have the finger strength to squeeze a bottle of honey, and on and on and on. I mean, it was pretty bad, but I've been getting better. Recently,

I've plateaued. I'm on medication, don't mind telling you what it is. It's Prednisone, low dosage of Prednisone, but I have plateaued. Wednesday, so this is happening right now. This message is happening for me right now, and I'm going to bet every dollar in my wallet, and I happen to be loaded today, that this is happening for you right now too.

This week, I said to my wife, "You know, I have plateaued, but I have made a decision that if I have to live like this for the rest of my life, I'm okay with that. I know it sounds fatalistic, and I don't want to be fatalistic. I would rather live an abundant life," and my wife went ballistic, totally nuclear. She said, "What are you talking about? Are you saying that if you had to live like this for the rest of your life that that would not be part of the abundant life?" I didn't want to give her the wrong answer, so I didn't say anything. I realized that what had happened, and this is what happens with all of us, is that our narratives become corroded over time if we don't constantly knock off the rust. I had allowed my narrative to be basically that if I have to live like this, then I can't live like that.

God wants you to do something great with your life. That's part of his plan, but it says here in 2 Corinthians chapter four verse seven, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay." This is me. Let's see. Which one do I want to be? I'll be the green one, and you can be the brown one. We have this treasure in jars of clay. Now, I've talked about this passage before, but I realize it was many years ago based on the amount of dust I had to clean off of these pots this morning to come in here and talk about it. Does anybody remember the last time I used clay jars? I accidentally dropped one the last time. I know that looked accidental, but I actually did that on purpose. This is us, buddy. You know, we're jars of clay. We're fragile. We break easily. We have cracks. I have cracks. You have cracks. We're jars of clay.

Look what the rest of this verse says, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power that's in us is from God and not from us." The light inside you is shining through the cracks. The cracks actually let more light out. If you were the perfect Greek god, if you were Superman and had all your superpowers in place, then no one would be able to see the light that's in you because you wouldn't have any cracks. Part of the process here is that we're jars of clay. Why? Why are we jars of clay? So that the surpassing power of God that is in us will be clearly known to be from God and not from us. Let's read on. Now, this is the apostle Paul speaking, "We are hard-pressed on every side but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."

In other words, what he's saying here is that there are a lot of things going on, affliction, perplexion, persecution, even being struck down or knocked down, but he's also saying that in spite of all those things, we're not crushed. We're not in despair. We're not abandoned. We're not destroyed. In other words, he's saying that even though we're jars of clay, we're still living an abundant life or can live an abundant life if you don't get your narrative corroded and turned around. If it is corroded and turned around, you knock off that rust here today as a reminder. The message here is don't let your circumstances create the wrong narrative of what's really going on. He's not saying here that setbacks are not setbacks. Setbacks are still setbacks no matter how strong your faith is. We do have these setbacks.

You heard about mine. How about you? What is your setback? You know, maybe it's that you're lonely, and you're just so lonely. You just would really love to be married or maybe you are married, but you don't have children. You just would love to be able to start a family. Maybe you have some emotional scars from some period in your life, some hurts, could be father, mother hurts, wounds. Maybe it's church hurts from growing up, but you have some emotional wounds that make you feel like you are in

despair. Maybe it's financial. Maybe you just have never been able to have enough money to pay everything that needs to be paid on a regular basis. After a while, you know, you just say, "This must be my lot in life. I've plateaued. I guess I'll just have to accept it. It sounds fatalistic, but I guess the abundant life is just not available for me."

Maybe it's a career that hasn't been turning out the way that you thought it should turn out. Maybe it is that you're a retired guy. We have a lot of retired guys, and you just don't feel like you're useful. You just feel like, "Okay. My time has passed. All that bearing much fruit, that's passed me." Maybe you've got a health problem like what I was talking about. I think there's a question that weeps to be asked this morning. Are you ready? Have you concluded that because of the thing that has you perplexed and in despair that you can no longer live the abundant life, that it's not available to you? Paul, if anybody that we know about in scripture, maybe Job might beat him, but if anybody in scripture had a life as he's described, hard-pressed, troubles, persecutions, getting knocked down, it would be Paul.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 11 verse 23 and following, we're not going to go there, but if you want to write it down, the address, you can look at it. Paul recounts all of the terrible things that happened to him because of trying to do something great with his life, trying to bear much fruit. He was shipwrecked. He was beaten with rods three times. He was given the 40 lashes minus one five times. He was floating in the sea after a shipwreck for a day and a night. He had to fend off robbers, sleepless nights, living in the cold, homeless, so many different kinds of struggles and persecutions. Then, even the Holy Spirit told him, Acts chapter 20 verse 23, the Holy Spirit told him in every city he went that persecutions and jail awaited him. Then, on top of that, Paul had a health problem.

In Acts chapter... I'm so upset that I actually broke that. I wasn't planning to break that, but I saw the terrazzo floor there. I just said, "This is just too good to be true," and I think that pot was like over \$20. I've got these pots. I've got a bookcase in my office that goes the whole length of the wall. I've got all these clay pots up there as kind of a reminder that we're jars of clay. Now I've got an empty spot up there. Actually, the last time I broke a pot here, instead of buying a new one, I just took the ones I had and spread them out a little bit more. If I'm going to do that now, it will look aesthetically displeasing. I actually probably need to go buy two pots. Anyway, Paul had this terrible problem. We don't know what it was, but it was a physical ailment. Who knows? Maybe it was autoimmune. I don't know.

Anyway, he pleaded with God. It says three times he pleaded that God would take it away. Jesus said to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in your weakness." Here's the Big Idea today. Just as doing something great with your life part of the plan, brothers; **Pain is part of the plan.** Those emotional pains, those physical pains, those financial pains, those relationship pains, all of these things, it's part of the plan. That's why Paul went on to say, "That is why for Christ's sake I boast of my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why for Christ's sake I delight in weaknesses, hardships, insults, persecutions, difficulties. Because when I am weak, then I am strong." Pain is part of the plan. That's the situation as it appears, that we have these pains. We're hard-pressed, perplexed, persecuted, struck down. It appears that the abundant life has gone away, out of reach. Maybe it will come back. Maybe it won't.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON?

Let's take a look at what's really going on. We've already started that, of course. Verse 10, "We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus. Jesus may also be revealed in our body." Now, watch this. "For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake," watch this, "so that his life

may also be revealed in our mortal bodies." 12 and 13 we'll skip. 14 we'll skip. Verse 15, "All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God." The thing that is afflicting you, that is the thing that God is using to reach more and more people. That is the thing that God is using to cause glory to God. There's more at stake here than only what's happening to you.

Chapter five verse five, "Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God." What's really going on here is that pain is part of the plan. Pain is part of the plan. Pain, in verse seven, we see it shows this all-surpassing power is from God. Verse 11, it shows how Jesus is revealed through our bodies, these broken bodies, these jars of clay. Again, verse 15, it's so that God would be glorified. Verse 15, it's so that his grace will reach more and more people. Chapter five verse six, "Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord." I was talking to a guy on the phone this week. He's a big time developer. I met him 10 years ago.

Well, 10 years ago, we were in the middle of the great recession. He had lost most everything and was on the verge of losing everything. He was so broken, so afflicted, but he was also so contrite and so humble that the Lord got ahold of him and radically changed his life, radically transformed his life. The affliction that he suffered, pain is part of the plan, is part of the plan for us to witness. It's also part of the plan for those who need to have their lives transformed because it's how God gets their attention. Bam. You're still smiling. Bam. God uses pain to get our attention. Why? Because as long as we're at home in the body, we're away from the Lord. He was at home in the body doing great, making big bucks, you know, all the things. Recession comes, he's contrite, humble. God gets ahold of him.

Guess what. Apparently, his narrative got corroded too because he told me this week, he said, "I'm back. I'm back in every way. I'm making so much money. I'm doing deals everywhere. I'm the BMOC in my town." He said, "Everything's going great." He said, "I am so spiritually dry. All of this has taken me away from the Lord. Basically, I've come home to where my body is, and I'm away from the Lord." He didn't say it that way, but that's what he meant. Success has taken him away from God. He longs to get back. I don't pray for affliction on anybody, but it would be a good thing for him right now to have a little affliction. Let me just put it this way. I'll leave that up to God, but we do know that it is one way that God works in us and through us to introduce painful circumstances, afflictions, sufferings, persecutions.

Here's what I wrote. God allows what he could easily prevent because he loves us so much. He has fashioned us into these clay pots. In chapter five verse one, "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven." Do you get that? This is a tent city. We're living in a refugee camp. The world is a tent city filled with clay jars, mixing metaphors. We're living in tents. This body is a tent. It's a temporary dwelling. This body is a temporary dwelling. Looking around the room, praise God for some of you that it's your temporary dwelling. What's going on in that tent has nothing to do with whether or not you're leading an abundant life.

Now, my developer friend, I'm going to be talking to him about this too, by the way, I just want him to see... Actually, another guy I know, I actually sent this text to yesterday. He's in the hospital having a biopsy for a tumor on one of his organs. I sent this to him yesterday. What's really going on here in this thing that has you afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, whatever, what's really going on is that it's a pain that's part of God's plan for our lives. Does willingly afflict us? He does not willingly bring affliction. He doesn't not willing, inside of Lamentations, but he does allow it in order... How do we respond?

HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?

How should we respond to all of this? Well, the first thing we should do is we should understand that God, watch this, watch very carefully, God has so ordered his creation that no man will ever find any lasting satisfaction apart from him.

When men do wander or stray from the Lord, then he will often use pain as part of his plan to get the attention of that man. I know of one man right now who's in a depression. He's in a depression because the world has not turned out to be his oyster, and he just can't let it go. He just can't let it go that he's not going to be mister rich. He just can't let it go, and so he is depressed. What I can not tell him, but what I would like to tell him is that this depression that you are going in is something that God can use to bring you to your senses. This depression that you're going through is part of the plan. Now, I would never say that to him because you don't talk to a broken heart like that. Better not ever let me hear you talking to anybody like that. You don't talk to somebody with a broken heart like that.

You listen, and you love. Then, when they're ready, you can speak some truth into their lives, but you don't, "Let me tell you what you need to do. In your case, let me tell you what you need to do." That's the first thing, is to understand that. The second thing, in verse 16, it says, of chapter four, "All this is for your benefit," it said, "The grace is reaching more and more people, overflowing to glory to God." Verse 16, "Therefore, for that reason, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day." That's what my wife told me. Instantly, bam, I got it. I understood what she was trying to say. I had gotten my wires crossed. The riverbeds in my brain, the synapses where information flows had gotten all clogged up and needed to get Roto-Rootered out. I guess that's mixing metaphors too.

We fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. Chapter five verse one, again, "Even if the earthly tent is destroyed," that means you die, "we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven." How should we respond? First is to understand that God has designed creation this week. Second, do not lose heart. Third, it still hurts, so go ahead and groan. Go ahead, groan. It doesn't mean you're not living the abundant life if you groan. Look at verse two, "Meanwhile, while we're waiting for this permanent home, while we're living in this tent, we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked." Watch this. "For while we are in this tent, we groan in our burden." It's okay to groan. That's part of the deal.

Now, where do you do this groaning? You can do it to God directly just like Paul did. You can plead for him to take away the thorn in your flesh. You can do it in your groups. You can groan in your groups. It's okay to groan in your groups. Try not to grumble, but groan in your groups and be transparent with each other because your brothers are going to help you through that and experience the abundant life. Now, the responses are understand that God has designed his creation this way; number two, do not lose heart; number three, go ahead and groan, but don't do this in public. At our gym is a person, it's a woman, and several years ago, she asked me how I was doing one day. She's really a wonderful person. I told her the truth. I could tell that by telling her the truth that it completely overloaded her circuitry. It was too much.

We need to be careful about our groaning. That's why we need to either groan directly to God or groan in our small groups where we have some relationships. What about all those guys that are walking by like the man who walked by last week, just was walking by and came in, that are isolated? What about those guys? Well, let's invite them to be part of your life. Let's invite them to be part of your group, Bible study here or Bible study elsewhere, part of your church. I would say to you about whatever has you

perplexed or afflicted or broken down or making you feel persecuted, accept it as part of God's plan. Embrace it. Embrace what's happening and rejoice always, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus because, as the Big Idea today says; **Pain is part of the plan**. Isn't that amazing? Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, I just pray that this question that weeps to be answered correctly, that we would not let the thing that has us feeling afflicted, we would not confuse that with living an abundant life, and we would accept it and embrace that pain is part of the plan and that you're using this to shine light. You're using this pain to bring more and more people to Christ. You're using this pain to bring glory to God. We don't lose heart. They're light in momentary problems. They're achieving for us something much greater. I pray for each one of these men that you would, whether it's the first time they're hearing this or they're being reminded of it, that they would be able to remember that pain is part of the plan. In Jesus' name, amen.