

The Value of Struggle

How many of us have ever experienced struggle?
How do we feel about it?; positive, negative or both?
Today I want to take a look at the role and value of struggle in our lives
Some of the reasons we experience it and what some of the outcomes can be.

Opening Prayer

First of all; What does it mean to struggle?

Noun strenuous effort an energetic attempt to achieve something
an open clash between two opposing groups (or individuals)

Verb

make a strenuous or labored effort exert strenuous effort against opposition
to [experience difficulty](#) and make a very [great effort](#) in [order](#) to do something:
to [move somewhere](#) with [great effort](#):

It often has implications and overtures of change

One of the things I have been musing about recently is that “Change come thru effort”
I don’t think I have ever defaulted toward Jesus
Our ongoing relationship with the Lord takes effort on our part, but it is absolutely worth it.

Struggle is a part of the human condition. We all have struggles as a part of this life.

Lets look quickly at some Biblical examples:

Abraham – What cost is there to following God

Go to a place I will show you

Sacrifice your son – God will supply

Joseph – The cost of taking the moral high road – Potipher’s wife

Prison and helping other

How to deal with his brothers after they sold him into slavery

Moses – working towards God’s original design and understanding God’s sovereignty

Making a major mistake and allowing God to requalify him for His purpose

Let my people go

Leading a million people into the desert without food or water

Daniel – How to address his captors and still obey God

In eating only vegetables not meat offered to idols

In continuing to pray to the Lord with the risk of death

Jonah – obedience to what God called him to do

He hated the people God sent him to warn

He was in the belly of the fish for 3 days and had some time to struggle with what to do

He was angry that the people repented and God stayed his judgement

King Saul – (bad response to struggle)

Not listening to Samuel and being disobedient to what God has told him to do with plunder

Engaging the witch of Endor – using a Medium to contact a deceased Samuel

Jesus – in obedience to the plan of God from the beginning of the world

Satan’s temptation of Jesus – He had the opportunity to take a short cut and relieve the distress

In the Garden – “if there is another way, not my will, but Yours be done”

Which brings me to part of my story

In the darkest period of my life, 1999 I was a national staff member in campus ministry. I made some decisions and took responsibility for them that cost me my job and career. My family moved back to Ohio and we lived with my parents for 7 months as I was overwhelmed by life.

I was reading the book *Inside Out* by Larry Crabbe.

He made this statement that has affected my life ever since, “when life is difficult we can make decisions to not lose everything, BUT, there is a way to respond that is pleasing to God and that has to be our response not in a way that relieves all distress”

I had always been able to “pull myself up by my boot straps”

In other words I could always relieve the distress, whether actually dealing with it or burying it.

Handling life was a struggle for about a year and a half, but I kept praying “God don’t take away the distress (struggle) so that I learn everything you want in this time and don’t have to go “around the mountain” again. I wish I could say that this is always my response but it isn’t.

We often desire more than anything to relieve the distress.

We make decisions to avoid the hard questions that need to have solutions

We avoid the conversations that are tense and can create conflict, but may bring resolve. (it is a risk)

Jennifer and I call this process the horrible/beautiful

Struggling with the horrible to bring about the beautiful (caterpillar into butterfly)

In looking at Biblical figures I cannot recall any that did not struggle with some decision that shaped their future, both for good and for bad.

This struggle or as I call them the “beatings” bring us to who we need to be, they grow us up into the people God intended us to become. Without them we stay in childish delusion. And I am convinced that God does not want to have a bunch of “babies” in heaven.

God wants and is willing to have us struggle as free will triune beings to help galvanize our chara

With what things do we Struggle?

The struggle of the triune

The struggle of the sin nature and living a Godly life

[Ephesians 6:12](#) For our **struggle** is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

We are created as triune beings: Body, Spirit, Mind.

These three are in constant struggle for dominance and it is usually a 2 against 1 battle

Most of the time Body and Mind dominating Spirit to get what the flesh wants

Sometimes Spirit and Mind to put Body in check (fasting and spiritual disciplines)

In our struggle against spiritual forces of evil, God wants us to be mature and strong with means working (not defaulting) on Spiritual disciplines especially becoming Biblically literate which only comes thru the reading and study of the Bible.

We know a lot of things but we live what we believe

I was reading in A Discipleship Journey a couple weeks ago and on page 203 it talks about living a Godly life is an act of spiritual warfare.

Often we become so focused on the “world” (body and mind) that we forget that there is a very real battle (struggle) against the Spiritual realm.

WE struggle with Answers vs. Solutions Reacting vs. Responding

I think this is part of trying to relieve the distress. Instead of embracing it.

Story of AS in line. What are you thinking about? Why not just “google it?”

The difference between an answer and a solution

When we get a quick answer we quit trying to solve the problem with alternative solutions.

We don't open our minds to other possibilities that may be more kind or long term and the possibility of thinking win-win

When I need to make a big decision I put myself in a time of struggle to make sure I don't miss something and try to consider all the aspects of the decision. Much to the chagrin of my wife.

For me if the process is not difficult the solution will be incomplete

I don't just look for the answer I look for a solution

Answer - say or write something to deal with or as a reaction to someone or something

act in reaction to (a sound such as a phone ringing or a knock or ring on a door): "David answered the door"

Solution - answer attained by mental effort

Often an answer is our reaction But the solution is our response

One of the things we talk a lot about on Tuesday nights is the difference between living

Lymbically vs. Prefrontal Cortex (explain) Fight or flight (reaction) vs. thought out response.

King Saul got into trouble by looking for answers (short-term relieve the distress)

King David sought God and embraced the struggle to get to solution (don't act against the Lord's anointed)

Let's look at one of Davids times of struggle after being disobedient to God.

II Samuel 24 ¹⁰ David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the LORD, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, LORD, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing.”¹¹ Before David got up the next morning, the word of the LORD had come to Gad the prophet, David's seer: ¹² “Go and tell David, ‘This is what the LORD says: I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for me to carry out against you.’”¹³ So Gad went to David and said to him, “Shall there come on you three^[b] years of famine in your land? Or three months of fleeing from your enemies while they pursue you? Or three days of plague in your land? Now then, **think it over and decide** how I should answer the one who sent me.”¹⁴ David said to Gad, “I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into human hands.”

His response what to rely on God's mercy. Well thought out.

Jesus never reacted He always responded

Satan offered answers, but Jesus responded with solutions.

We often look for answers, but God has solutions, those things for the long term of who He wants us to become. Working us back to His original design
Do we believe God really has a plan for us?
We are not just a mistake or product of evolution or chance

Often when new guys call me about issues with pornography I ask them if they are really ready to change or if they just want the pain to go away?
They want the answer, but if it is to be long-term it has to be a solution.

It has only been in the last 30 years that we could have access to unlimited information. For thousands of years we had to wonder and muse and ponder and seek help from others in solving issues.

Solutions are usually harder to come up with and take some struggle to see past the immediate and into how this works with God's intent for the situation.

When our sons were young they would come to me and ask about doing something with a friend and I would consider all the things I knew about this friend and the possible mischief they would get in to and struggle with saying yes or no. When I came to resolve on the decision I would tell them and if it was no I was surprised at how many times they said "OK, I didn't really want to do that any how" They just wanted the answer

I would also ask them if they wanted the long answer with the reasons for the answer or the short answer It was a mixed response, usually the short answer.
Now when I ask they usually want the long answer.

WE Struggle with expectations

A question that I was asked long ago and still ask myself often is;

With what will I be content?

If we can take the time to struggle to get resolve on this issue it can reduce a lot of future strife.
In the early days of the accountability group we read a book that posed this thought.

We can never get enough of something that almost satisfies

I think this is a challenging statement that we need to struggle to get clear in our lives.
What things do we do that almost satisfy?

A lot of times these are our idols – we go to them but they can't satisfy

It leads to another question, "**Where do I go for comfort?**" I want my answer to be Jesus.

Usually we go to our idol (food, pornography, binge watching, shopping) things that almost satisfy

It is a positive thing to wonder and struggle with coming to resolve on an issue

When we struggle with an issue and get the solution it gives us the feeling of satisfaction and comforts our brains so that we don't have to think about it and take up brain space with it any longer.

Struggle forces (allows) us to consider things deeply

Struggle can bring us to the point where the pain of staying the same is less than the pain of change

Struggle can help to produce character and maturity if handled properly

If not it can cause bitterness, unforgiveness and resentment.

It is good to struggle with sovereignty and original design

[Jeremiah 29:11](#)

For **I know the plans I** have for you,” declares **the** Lord, “**plans** to prosper you and not to harm you, **plans** to give you hope and a future. (Context)

Do we really believe God has a plan and he is willing to have us struggle to find it and become mature in the process.

So many times we mess up, but God is all about redeeming us and restoring us to His original design if we are willing to work with Him and be obedient to His will.

Respond in a way that is pleasing to God not in a way that relieves all distress

WE know a lot of things but we live what we believe

Discussion Questions:

Did anything resonate with you this morning?

Are there things that you need to enter into a “time of struggle” to come to resolve on?

Is there something you need prayer about? Don’t be afraid to ask