

Sermon – Contending in all times

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1. Intro

Good morning from me. It is great to be with you and thank you for everyone who is joining us online as well. We miss you Ps. Steve and Ps. Esther, but we hope you have a restful time on your well-deserved holiday.

I was keep praying what I should share with you today and for a long time I had nothing. So I started to think about potential topics like Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, Psychopathology of the apostle Paul or exploring about the depthness of the trinity... Right these are things we are thinking about. I am just kidding.

Paul says in: **Philippians 4:11-13** *Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.*

So my topic today is: "Contending in all times"

- Peter McWilliams quotes says: "Be comfortable being uncomfortable"

Let me unpack why this is so present in my current days and hoping that this message help someone who may go through similar situation.

When I came to England I started in a factory in Wolverhampton and after other jobs, I settle with a company which was just great. Very good culture, good work-ethics and nice people. So I settle in this company was promoted a few times and I **ended up in a good position with a good reputation, a decent salary and some good benefits**. All great and good! The only problem was, that in the last 2 years I didn't feel very challenged. I was good at my job and because I done it so long, I knew the answers to almost all question for the job. It was very comfortable.

I heard the quote, don't be too long in your comfort zone. And the matter of fact was, that I was in my comfort-zone. So the urge of new challenge grew, so I challenged myself with other goals outside of work, but as you spending so much time at work, even the goals outside of work didn't feel fulfilling enough. At end of last year, a new door open, it was into a **completely new industry, it would mean a complete career change and literally 80% of my knowledge would not be needed. It would be a start from 0.** **Restarting my career at the age of 30.**

So I had a decision to make, I can either stay in my comfort zone or push myself out of it and trusting God. I made the jump and it is fair to say, that it wasn't and probably fair to say isn't easy or comfortable, even if the new company has been amazing and so

supportive, if you are not in your comfort zone it is uncomfortable. Anybody can relate?

So I speak out of my own experience when I say it is hard to be comfortable being uncomfortable and contending in all times.

“Life begins at the end of your comfort zone,” by Neale Donald Walsch

There are so many challenges thrown at us in this life. Sure, they could be little things like procrastination or figuring out a meal plan for your family for the week. **But then bigger curveballs happen, like health, job, or financial problems. Whatever your challenge, if you want to move past it and grow, you need to push your limits and realize that the miraculous happens outside your comfort zone.**

2. Why is it important to be comfortable with the uncomfortable?

We live in a society which portrays convenience to the highest achievable goal in life for. When you scroll through tiktok, facebook or any other social media and seeing the amazing beaches, the luxury and the relaxation of people and think this is the reality, this is what I should aim for.

The harsh and difficult reality is that life is hard and our character has higher importance to God than our convenience and being comfortable. Let me be clear, being comfortable is not a sin, but God is loving us too much, to leave us there as all of our characters needs **growth to become more like Jesus**. So many people don't like change or changes in their life situations, but are we willing to simply put our trust in the lord and let him orchestrate our lives.

It is in the **uncomfortable, hard places where we grow the most and our character being developed. It is in the loss of family members, in the bankruptcy, the miscarriages, the unfairness of life, which brings us on our knees, but let us look up to God and where our character is being developed.** Sometimes or actually more often, we learn more in the dark, difficult times than the good times. **In the uncomfortableness strength is being developed, character formed, man and women of God made.**

- On my screensaver I had it for years it says: **“Let us not pray for easier lives, but for become stronger in the lord.”**

2.1 Braces

I want to show you a picture of me when I was younger. I appreciate you restrain yourself from any comments about my fashion style, at that time I wasn't married to my wife, who taught me how to dress and still do.

I had the most horrific braces you can even imagine, not just some on my teeth, no my teeth were so bad, that they had to get a bow outside my face. On top of that, I had spring bands in my mouth, so that I won't open my Jaws too much. I had to sleep with this every night, as I had to wear it 18 hours a day. I didn't have a girlfriend and slowly it is dawning to me the reason why...

Why do I show you a picture, because braces is a great picture. What are braces doing?

Braces work by exerting constant pressure on teeth and jaws to change their position and alter the smile. The brackets glued to teeth hold the archwire in place which places pressure on teeth. Over time teeth move into the desired position. Today, I am really grateful for the results and that my parents were strict in saying you have this done, but did I enjoy the constant pressure on my teeth, but was it worthied 100%.

The same is with our character. Sometimes God is putting small but constant pressure in our life's to bring our life character into positions. Moving it slowly where it should be and when it is in position then he will say I can life this off you know. It might hurt for a while, but the outcome is simply beautiful and worthied. If you have an annoying work colleague, who is challenging your character every single working day or a family member is challenging you day in and day out, remember this picture of braces and think my character is slowly moving in the right place.

Let me give you some examples of people in the bible which have been uncomfortable and what lessons we can learn from them.

2 **Jonah** was asked by God to preach the gospel in Nineveh and instead of going he turned the other way and run away. We know the story that he ended up in the sea and a big fish swallowed him and his heart was turned in the belly of the fish and then he went and the whole city was saved.

- The lessons we can learn is that **running away in most cases won't work out.** You will have temporary relief and think you can get away, but it will circle back to you and you will have to face it eventually, but then it is often a lot harder. Anybody knows what I am talking about?

- For example, I can ignore my **financial trouble** and keep spending, but at some point you will have to face it and then it might be harder to pay your debts.
- You can ignore **small foxes in your marriage** and pretend it is not there, even if both of you know it is not dealt with and trying to get help and get it sorted, but these small unresolved issues or foxes can make your marriage a lot harder and more painful to resolve later on in life.
- Or you keep running away from this **difficult conversation of sharing the gospel** with an unsaved person or family member and you just don't find it until it is too late and you regret it that you not even tried.

Jonah teaches us, **that facing the assignment God has given you, can bring great fruit.** Are we prepared to say "yes" to the assignment God has for us and not resist change because it is easier in the comfortable place. **If he has called you to a mission, a place, a position or an occupation, then take it and embrace it to its fullest.**

3 **Esther** is another example. She was the queen and was in great power and influence, but in seeing the king directly and asking him to reverse the law of destroying the Jews, she **faced great risks of being killed herself and being rejected.** However, she didn't back down or run away, but with great wisdom handled this challenge time not only for her, but for all her people. What did she do?

- **Esther faced her fear**, but not acted on it or let her paralyzed her. Fear can be one of the most feelings why people never move forward. They are so fearful of a people, a situation or event, that they not doing anything, but we have been given not a spirit of fear (Philippians 1) ***For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.*** It is not to ignore fear, but to face it and still doing it. Because of fear, people don't write the book, because of fear that people don't move to a new city or country, because of fear that some businesses never being started.
- The 2nd point is, **that Esther didn't do it herself.** In the hard time for Esther to face the King, she didn't do it herself, but asked that every Jew would pray and fast for her. **We need a network around us, that in though times we can send a message and just say, going through a difficult time can you pray** for me or may you fast with me on this difficult situation I face. We need one another and will demonstrate a little later.

2.4 Paul

- Another incredible example is Paul. If you read
 - *2. Corinthians 11,24 - “4 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers.*
- If somebody can say he has a challenging and uncomfortable call from God, then it is Paul. He endured all the hardship, the prisons, the shipwrecked and he continued. He didn't give up. He didn't say it is too hard. He knew the call God had in his life and he went for it with all consequences.
- I heard often the Christian say, **I want to be like Paul, what they really saying is they want the reward and power which Paul had without the process of getting it. We want the fruit without the process.**
- There is the **classic business picture** which shows an iceberg and the top of the **ice-berg** which is above water it says success and what people can see, because it is on the surface. But did you know that the tip of the ice-berg is only a small part as the bigger part is actually underwater and this business picture showed then the price **for success like: Discipline, Stress, Dedication, hard work, Doubts, Failure, Risks**. All these things are under the surface of success.
- I can switch it to the spiritual realm. If you want to be as **powerful as the Apostle Paul, then probably the underneath of this would be: suffering, hardship, picking up your cross, beating, persecution, prayer, study etc.**
- **Smith Wiggelsworth: “Great triumphs can only come out of great trials –**
- **Great faith is the product of great fights.**

4 How to respond in uncomfortable times?

What should you do when you are in a time of being uncomfortable. A time, where life threw your curveballs and you just trying to determine what to do. 4 things I want to share with you:

3.1 Remember that pain and uncomfortableness is temporary, but the character built is eternal.

Think about a diamond. Everyone wants a diamond because it is beautiful! Do you know how a diamond is actually formed and created? **Simply put, diamond formation occurs when carbon deposits deep within the earth are subject to high temperature and pressure. If the carbon wouldn't have the pressure and heat, it would be worthless, but the heat and pressure develop something beautiful.**

The same is with our life's and character. If we would live a comfortable and easy life, it wouldn't carry the same value and beauty as when pressure and heat is taking place.

- *Romans 3-5 says: "Not only so, but we[a] also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. "*

In the hard times, remember that it will grow you. Trials, temptations, struggles and tribulations. They refine us, help us grow, and work to develop our spiritual maturity. And benefit.

- *Romans 8,18: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."*

3.2 You can handle the situation you are facing.

How can I say this? You don't know Manuel what I am going through right now. That's true and your challenges and difficulties might be greater than mine, but what I know has been a huge comfort for me over the years is

- *Corinthians 10,13 "No temptation[a] has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted,[c] he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."*

Have great comfort, that God knows about your situation. He will provide a way out of it. Challenging time will build your resilience to keep going. It will strengthen you after the trial. It will teach you life lessons, which you can tell people about it.

Whatever the mountain you face, remember not to focus on your mountain, but on the creator of heaven and earth! Sometimes we focus on our issues. Sometimes we look at the mountain and it is so big, but remember who is bigger, your heavenly father. Jesus says to speak to the mountain in Mark 11. I don't want to belittle your problem, but lift up your perspective on God, who is far greater than anything you or me are facing. So with your God you can jump over walls.

➤ *Philippians 4,13: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me."*

Let's lift our perspective to him!

3.3 In times of need, we need each other

Let me illustrate this. Imagine this is your life and other people life's. And you are on fire! Life is great and your light is shining and burning amazingly. Good times, but then there might be stress, job losses, death, sickness (represented by this water) and it can simply take over. And when we trying to get back to the flame, this is what happened, it doesn't turn on again...

But a home church, close friends' family being close to your life who can lit up your life again. The bible describes it as a body, we need each other. If we are in isolation, it is a dangerous and lonely place.

So maybe you are the lighter which has no flame right now, I encourage you to find flames around you who can re-lid re-candle your spark. And if you are in a blessed time, share the light with others, you may go through a difficult time.

3.4 Most of all is to lean into God

It is tempting during uncomfortable times, to escape onto Netflix, social media or addictions to "ease" the pain", but God is merciful, he is your good heavenly father and he wants to be there for you. Romans 6,19 says "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. ". An anchor on a ship is to keep the ship steady regardless how high the waves are or how strong the storm is, it keeps the ship steady. **So does Jesus with your life. He will keep you steady. So lean into him, pursue and search for him and it is never to late.**

➤ *Hebrews 13,5: "I will never leave you or forsake you"*

We can often over read this, but God said “Never”. There isn’t a single second, where God is not with you! In the darkest of dark times, the most horrific and difficult times, he is never leaving or forsaking you! God is with you and for you!!

In summary:

- Remember it is temporary
- You can handle it
- We need each other
- Lean into God.

5 Application

So what is my application for you today. Well firstly if you are in a challenging and difficult times I encourage you not to give up. Keep fighting the good fight. Focus on God. If you are in comfortable times, then maybe challenge yourself and **get hungry. Hungry for development, hungry for the next step in your spiritual journey, hungry for more of Jesus!**

Can I be very honest with you. **Preaching is for me very uncomfortable.** Seeing and listening to Ps. Steve who literally be able to simple stand up and preach powerful messages week after week and seeing myself that I started this sermon back in May I can feel uncomfortable. Part is, that I feel I am not a level which I should be or other people are, but also my English language is still uncomfortable to me.

Or when we started home church just a year ago. I was uncomfortable. How do I lead this home church, what should we do with the kids, should we sing and worship or only pray? I had all these questions and when people actually turned up and I said to myself, I let the Lord lead this home church, so I am not preparing we to discover together the bible, **it was uncomfortable to let go of control and let the Lord lead.**

Or prayer walking. Is there anybody here who **first did a prayer walk and was full of confidence and absolutely love it and enjoyed it?** The first time? Probably nobody or you are a natural evangelist and just enjoying connecting with people, which I am not! **So the first few times, it was hard, it was weird and then even speaking with people is even harder.**

Why do I tell you all these 3 examples, **because being uncomfortable isn’t necessarily bad,** as it challenge you to trust the lord.

- To get up on stage and believe that the lord will speak to you through this message, and it is not depending on my English or illustrations, but the lord speaks to you.
- Or home church to give up control and let God lead the meeting, which turned out every single time better than I imagine and people feel encouraged by God.
- Or prayer walking to develop the hunger for my neighbourhood to be changed and saved and let God provide opportunities to speak with people.

- *2 Cor. 12:9-10 "And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" ...Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."*

I conclude to simply say: "Do it". Take the next step in your journey. We all are going through the similar discomforts and uncomfortable situations. Have the courage to take courageous steps to being uncomfortable but learning to stay comfortable in these times. Lets stand together.

5. Prayer

- *The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you. Pslam 9,9-10.*

As I spoke about the rekindle of fire. If there is anybody here who says the worries and difficulties have taken over me and I just need a brother or sister who rekindle my life-fire, I want to simple give the opportunity to come forward and some amazing encouraging people will be here to pray with you and to speak into your life and help to rekindle the fire.

Maybe an altar call

- *In order to go to the next level, we have to learn, receive the change at this point in our life .*
- *Sometimes in the circumstances, we have to learn, change something , reveal something*
- *We want out as soon as we can, but sometimes we out before we learnt what God wanted us to do*
- *But we have Jesus in this time... The rain will fall on the riggtoueous and the unrighteous*