

**Why Your Life Sucks**  
*It's All in Your Head*  
January 19, 2014

**PRELUDE – We Are  
Worship Songs – We Are / Christ is Risen / Jesus I Come**

**Feature – “It’s All in Your Head”**

Good morning everyone.

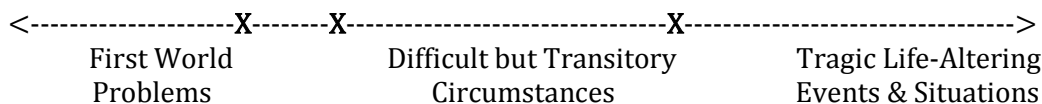
As Ladell said, this morning we’re continuing in our series “Why Your Life Sucks ... and what you can do about it.” But before we get into what I want to talk about today, I want to first say how thrilled I was that so many people were so deeply moved and touched by the metaphor and terminology I used last week. I would have never guessed that the “continuum of suckage” would have had such a profound effect on such a large number of people.

Actually, it’s kind of funny. I heard so much feedback about the phrase that I decided to Google it and see if anyone else had ever used it. Turns out that I may have come close to actually inventing a concept: of all the billions and billions of webpages in the world, only four links came up! I’m sure my parents are proud.

Anyway ... that’s probably a good place to start this morning – with the “continuum of suckage” – especially for those who were not here last week and who are wondering, what in the world is he talking about.

The idea was that everything you and I don’t like about our lives right now – everything that we think makes our life “suck” – falls somewhere on this continuum ...

**... which looks something like this:**



At the left end we have what might be called “First World Problems” – inconveniences and minor disappointments that are experienced only by privileged individuals in wealthy countries like ours.

As I was preparing for this message I came across a short video which I think illustrates this end of the continuum quite well. Let’s take a look.

<<END SLIDE SET 1>>

**Video – “First World Problems” (2:00)**

<<BEGIN SLIDE SET 2>>

The point I made concerning this part of the continuum is that it really does do a disservice to the term “suck” to use it to describe things that fall into this category. In my opinion, as I said last week, “suck” is a little bit of an off-color term so, if you’re going to use it, at least reserve it for things further down the line such as ...

**... difficult but transitory circumstances.**

Things that happen in this category have a much greater impact on life than first world problems but, in reality, they're predominantly temporary in nature. Bronchitis sucks while you have it, but you'll probably recover. Bankruptcy sucks while you're in it but you can get out if you work hard enough. Addiction sucks but, if God gives you strength, you can overcome them.

Then, at the right end of the continuum, there's the category of tragic and life-altering events; situations where there's no possibility of a "do-over" and they leave a permanent scar on your heart. The pain might subside at some point, but there's no going back to exactly the way it was. You either figure out a new normal going forward or you roll over and die, figuratively and maybe even literally.

Several weeks ago, as I was preparing for this series, a guy in our congregation sent me an email saying, "I saw your new series title and I don't know what you have planned to speak about or how you will be approaching each topic, but, being someone who has felt like his life has sucked for the past two years, I'm willing to share my story if you feel ... it will help others gain perspective."

I took him up on that offer and he and I sat down in front of the video camera and recorded his story. I want to show you part of it right now because I think it's a pretty good illustration of what we're talking about on that right-most end of the continuum. And I'm sure you'll recognize him because David Allen has been up front on stage as a singer and actor for many years here at North Heartland. But I'm also sure most of you will be surprised to hear of the tragedy that struck his family in 2012.

Let's watch.

<<END SLIDE SET 2>>

**Video – "1 Suckage" (2:00)**

Wow. And you think *your* life sucks.

As we were talking, I also asked David to describe how his life has been impacted since all of that happened. Here's what he said:

**Video – "1.5 Impact (1:30)**

<<BEGIN SLIDE SET 3>>

Now, obviously, what happened to David and his family represents an extreme. But it does put things into perspective, doesn't it?

We'll hear more of David's story later but this is probably a good point to jump into what I want us to talk about today.

**Thought Power**

Last week we learned that regardless of where we are on the continuum it's likely that we ended up there for one

of two reasons.

**Reason #1. You got there because of what you did or did not do.**

You didn't do what you should have done. Or you did what you should not have done. And that's why your life sucks. It's your fault. And the sooner you own that, the easier it will be to move forward.

**Or ... reason #2 ... You got there because you live in a sin-cursed world where things don't go as they should.**

That's why David's life has sucked for the past 20 months. He didn't ask for it. He didn't bring it on himself. His brother lost the battle to the downward pull of sin and death, and David and his mom and his dad got sucked into it.

Now, if you weren't here and you want to understand more about these reasons (and what to do about them), you can check out last week's message in the media section of our website.

But here's the main point of what I want to say to you this morning. Whether your life sucks because of something you did or did not do or because you live in a sin-cursed world and it just blew up all over you or some combination of the two ...

**Whatever is in your head about your situation will either increase or decrease the "suckage factor" of your life. (repeat)**

To put it another way: what you believe about your situation and the attitude you have toward the events of your life can actually slide you one way or the other on the continuum. How you look at and interpret your circumstances is *that* powerful!

For example, if you have a lot of category one problems in your life but you constantly blow them up, if you constantly rant and rave about them, guess what? Your life will start to *feel like* it sucks worse than it actually does. Keep doing that and eventually you'll start to make decisions out of those bad feelings and things will actually get worse for you in reality. You'll wind up in category two or maybe even category three.

I say this because there's a great illustration of this in the Old Testament books of Exodus and Numbers. The nation of Israel is wandering in the desert after being delivered from centuries of terrible oppression and slavery in Egypt. It was a very difficult journey. It was a category two suckage on the continuum.

And, at one point, the Bible says ...

*They were terrified and cried out to the Lord.*

*They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'?"*

**And then they added:**

*"It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" Exodus 14:10-13 (NIV)*

But that was a flat-out lie. They weren't being honest with God, with Moses or with themselves at that point. The truth was, life in Egypt had been horrible for centuries and had been getting worse by the day, so much so that they had been crying out for God to send a deliverer! Then God sent Moses. And the desert was only meant to be a transitory condition. They weren't going to die there because they were on a God-led journey to a land flowing with milk and honey – the Promised Land!

But they kept on complaining about how bad it sucked; believing the worst about their situation and the worst about Moses and the worst about God until one day, *they acted on that belief* and slid down the continuum to category three.

Here's how it happened.

The spies who had been sent ahead of the masses returned with a report of giants in the land of Promise. Two of the spies said "but it's not an issue because God is with us. God is for us. God has sent us here" while the others said, "We can't do this. We'll all be killed."

The Bible says ...

*That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?"*

And then, they *acted* out of their overly negative feelings.

*And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt." Numbers 14:4 (NIV)*

And, with that, the Bible says, God's patience had reached its limit and the slide to category three – where it's impossible to undo what's been done – began.

God spoke to Moses and told him to say to the people:

*"As surely as I live, declares the Lord, I will do to you the very thing I heard you say: In this wilderness your bodies will fall—every one of you twenty years old or more... Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb and Joshua. Numbers 14:28-30 (NIV)*

*"As for your children that you said would be taken as plunder, I will bring them in to enjoy the land you have rejected. [They] will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the wilderness. Numbers 14:31,33 (NIV)*

Wow.

Now, clearly that's an extreme example. But the point remains: keep filling your head with thoughts of how sucky your life is and it will end up sucking worse than it does already.

Furthermore, I don't think it's a stretch to say that when we do that, *sometimes God will be the cause of the increased suckage*, especially for those of us who are Christians ...

**... which is why the Apostle Paul warned the first-century believers at Corinth:**

*Do not grumble, as some of them did--and were killed by the destroying angel. 1 Corinthians 10:10 (NIV)*

See, if you're a believer in Jesus – if you have come to the place in your life where you have admitted that you are a sinner in need of a savior and you have received Jesus as your savior by faith in what He did on the cross for your sins and in his resurrection three days later – if you're a believer in Jesus, God doesn't want you to be overly negative about the negative in your life ...

**... which is why, a few verses later, Paul adds:**

*No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; he'll never let you be pushed past your limit; he'll always be there to help you come through it. 1 Corinthians 10:13 (MSG)*

See, if you're a believer and you get overly negative about the negative in your life, it's almost like talking smack to God. "God, you're not big enough for this. You're letting me down, here. This is way past what I can bear. You don't really care about me." I think Paul is saying it's not a good idea to go there with God.

Now, don't hear what I'm not saying. I'm *not* saying that we should just pretend that things are good when they're bad or that we should pretend that bad things are good things. And I'm *not* saying that we who are believers should put on a happy face and say "Praise Jesus" even when we feel like dying.

**What I *am* saying is "be honest but don't be extreme."**

Don't go overboard. Don't be driven by negativity. Don't lie about your reality like the Israelites lied about their reality.

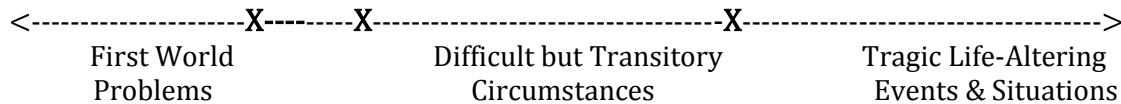
When our girls were growing up sometimes they would get mad at us and say, "I hate you! I wish you weren't my mom (or my dad)!"

And you know what we would say? "You can be very angry at me. You can even *say* how angry you are at me. But what you cannot do is lie about it, because you really don't hate me and you really don't wish I wasn't your mom (or dad). Those things aren't true. And we're not going to say them in this family."

It works the same way in God's family. It's OK to be honest about the suckage in your life but it's not OK to be

extreme and tell lies.

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Now, I want to take just a bit of a time-out, kind of like we did last week, and give you a minute to think about a question:



**As you look at the suckage continuum, what are you telling yourself about the things in your life that aren't as you wish them to be?**

What kinds of thoughts are going through your head about those issues, and maybe even coming out of your mouth, on a regular basis? Let's take a short minute to think about that.

<PAUSE>

Last week I mentioned that the three **Xs** on that line are issues in my life right now that I'm dealing with. And last service as we were looking at this God said to me, "you know, you have to do this exercise, too." And it occurred to me, with the **X** on the far right, I had been telling myself my whole life that if this happens, when it happens (it's going to happen), life is going to be so hard and it's going to be miserable and this is going to blow up and that's going to happen. And, I've got this whole scenario going, all this negative thinking about something that's going to be pretty challenging in my life. God just said, again, it really does matter what you allow to reside in your head about your situation because it will either increase the "suckage factor," which is kind of what's happening in my life, or it will decrease it.

Author Marci Schimoff, in her book *Happy for No Reason*, writes of the legend of a Cherokee elder who told his grandson about the battle that goes on inside of people.

"My son," he said, "the battle is between the two 'wolves' that live inside us all. One wolf is named Unhappiness. The other is named Happiness."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "Which wolf wins?"

The old Cherokee replied, "the one you feed."<sup>i</sup>

### **Decreasing Suckage**

So, how do we feed the "good wolf" (so to speak)? What can we put in our heads that will decrease the "suckage factor?" What kinds of thoughts might help to slide us in the other direction on the continuum or maybe even get off of it altogether?

That's a great question – one that's spawned a multi-billion dollar industry of books and seminars and conferences

all under a broad umbrella labeled “the power of positive thinking.” And if this was a positive thinking seminar and I was a motivational speaker, at this point I would tell you things like ...

- You’ve just got to believe in yourself
- You have the power within you to overcome
- Follow your heart; it won’t lead you astray
- You can do it if you try, V-I-C-T-O-R-Y!

Well, maybe not *that* one.

Seriously, I don’t mean to make fun of positive thinking because I think it’s generally a good thing. Attitude matters. But when your life sucks, even if it’s only category two, I think you need something a little deeper, something that’s rooted and anchored outside of you. You need the kind of encouragement that’s not dependent on your ability to actually change your circumstances (because they might not change); the kind that’s not dependent on how successful you are at taking responsibility for your screw-ups or slogging your way through the crap that this sin-cursed world has dumped on you.

And if you are a believer in Jesus – if you are a Christian – you already have that available to you. You might not know that you do, but you do.

### **The Apostle Paul describes it like this:**

*Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God’s right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth.                      Colossians 3:1-2 (NLT)*

*For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.                      Colossians 3:3-4 (NLT)*

What you have going for you, if you’re a believer in Jesus, are the realities of heaven. Set your sights on that.

But when Paul says to do that, I don’t think he is telling us to sit around and try and imagine what’s going on in Heaven right now – are they rooting for the Patriots or the Broncos this afternoon? I don’t think he’s saying become so heavenly minded that you’re no earthly good.

What I think he’s trying to say is to *change your perspective* to match the reality as seen from God’s point of view.

**Specifically, stop focusing so much on your continuum of suckage and start focusing more on things from the perspective of “I belong to Jesus; I am a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven” and all that it means and all that it will mean.**

Now, there are literally about a hundred implications of all that that means (and will mean) but in the interest of time, I’ll share just three of them with you. These actually came out when I was interviewing David.

One of the things that really impressed me was how he was trying to implement this idea in his life; trying to see

things less and less through the lens of the tragedy and how bad it was and, instead, looking more and more through the lens of “I belong to God ... and that matters.”

I want you to hear what he said. See if you can pick up on the three ideas that are coming out of that reality. Let's watch.

<<END SLIDE SET 3>>

**Video – “2 Focus” (2:10)**

<<BEGIN SLIDE SET 4>>

Did you catch the three ideas that come from looking through the lens of belonging to Christ? Here's what I heard (and I'll list them in reverse).

**1. David believes that the experience he's had can be turned around for good as God uses him to encourage others who go through the same or similar experience.**

That's biblical. Paul writes ...

*God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.* *2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NLT)*

And if you belong to Jesus, this is his intention for you as well. He wants to use your sucky experience to encourage others who are also going through it.

**2. Regardless of how it looks right now, he believes that God's ultimate plan for him is good and not evil.**

He quoted the scripture from Jeremiah 29:11 ...

*“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.”* *Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)*

By the way, that word “prosper” is, in the Hebrew, the word “shalom” which describes an overall state of being where life is the way it was meant to be in all of its dimensions: spiritually, relationally, emotionally, physically and even financially.

And if you belong to Jesus, rest assured *that is His intention for you* – that you would more and more experience life as it is meant to be. “Abundant life” Jesus called it.

**3. Finally David believes that God's ultimate plan for his life will trump any short-term difficulty or tragedy. Not only is God's plan good, it's unstoppable.**

God has decided it, God has decreed it, and God has declared it simply because He loves those who belong to Jesus. His favor – his intention of good – is going to be upon them in abundance and nothing will keep it from happening.

That's what Jeremiah meant by “a hope and a future.”



## And that's what the Apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote:

*Our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!*

*So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.*                      *2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (NLT)*

Friend, if you belong to Jesus, if he is your savior, God's goodness towards you is like an unstoppable river. The good that He plans to happen *to* you and *for* you simply because you belong to Christ *is* going to happen. Nothing and no one will get in the way of it – not even you.

See, the good news – the Gospel – is that even if *you* are the cause of the suckage in your life in this life, God's ultimate blessing is still yours. It's yours not because of what you have done but because of what Jesus has done for you.

## Conclusion

Now, as I said, there are many more implications of what it means and will mean that we belong to Jesus that really can change your perspective. And it's so valuable to dig these kinds of things out of the scripture and meditate on them; to let them become part of your mindset ...

**... which is why Paul encourages us      ...**

*Brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*                      *Philippians 4:9 (NIV)*

As these God-centered thoughts take greater hold of your mind and heart, the situation and the circumstance may not change, but your feelings and attitude about your situation and circumstance will. You will begin to see God's hand at work.

And you may even begin to give thanks not so much for the sucky situation itself but for how God is using it in your life.

And as we close, I want to pray for you a prayer of the Apostle Paul, that you can begin to see and experience that in your life.

Let's pray.

*I ask the Father with his great glory to give you the power to be strong in your spirits. (He will give you that strength through his Spirit).*

*I pray that Christ will live in your hearts because of your faith.*

*I pray that your life will be strong in love and be built on love.*

*And I pray that you and all God's holy people will have the power to understand the greatness of Christ's love—how wide, how long, how high, and how deep that love is. Christ's love is greater than anyone can ever know, but I pray that you will be able to know that love.*

*Then you can be filled with everything God has for you. He can do much, much more than anything we can ask or think of.*

*To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus for all time, forever and ever. Amen.  
Ephesians 3:16-21 (ERV)*

Amen.

## **Feature – “My Heart is Filled”**

### **CLOSING COMMENTS**

I'm so glad you were here this morning. I hope that some of what we've sung or talked about has spoken to you. That God has used our time together this morning to encourage you and challenge you a little bit in where you are on the continuum.

1. As we leave this morning I want to make you aware that if you're new to North Heartland and you're wondering why we do the things we do (like the video and the Diamond Rio song), and if you've never been to a church like this before and you're wondering, “what are these people up to?” I want you to know that we have a little experience that's going to happen as we leave this morning called “Next Orientation.” We'll tell you a little bit about why we do what we do and what your next step is if you would like to get more involved at North Heartland. There's a little bit of snack food served, as well. If you want to head down to the Café as you're leaving, we'd love to have you be part of that, as well.
2. Also, and I'm going to push this probably until you're sick of hearing it, but it's important - the Pastor's Blog. Yes, I want you all on my email list. Every Friday I write a little thing that tells about what is happening this weekend and any other important things you would need to know about happening here. I really would love for you, especially those of you who are new, to sign up and get this email. I won't spam you and you won't get 10 emails a week. You'll need to go to our web page, click on the Media link, and then click on Pastor's Blog on the dropdown. You'll come to this little form and you'll need to put your email address there. Every week you'll get an email that tells you what's going on. We'd just like you to be connected so that you can enjoy all the great stuff going on here. In fact, if you're on the blog right now you already know the five movie titles for the movie series which will be starting in two weeks. Lucky you.

With that said, go have a great rest of your weekend.

### **Endnotes**

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<sup>i</sup> From Marci Schimoff, Happy for No Reason.

