

YOUR PERSPECTIVE: The SHARING of the TOUGH STUFF

James 5:13-20

An ancient Arabian fable tells of three merchants who crossed the desert. In the daytime, they would pitch tents for shelter from the desert sun. When the stars came out, they would ride their camels in the cool of the night. At one point, the merchants crossed a dry riverbed under the stars.

“Halt!” said a voice from the darkness.

All three men jumped down from their camels and huddled in fear. “Who’s there?” one of them ventured.

“Don’t be afraid,” said the voice in the dark. I won’t harm you if you do as I say. See those pebbles at your feet?” By the dim starlight, the merchants saw thousands of pebbles in the riverbed.

“Each of you—pick up a pebble and put it in your pocket.” The three merchants obeyed. Each took a pebble from the riverbed. “Now, leave this place,” the voice said, “and don’t stop until daylight.” The merchants mounted up. One said, “What’s this all about?” “I will say only this,” the voice replied. “In the morning, you will be happy—and sad. Now, go!”

Baffled, the three merchants proceeded on their way. As they traveled, they wondered what the voice meant by saying that they would be both happy and sad.

When morning came, the merchants stopped. Each man pulled the single pebble from his own pocket and saw that it sparkled in the morning sunlight. The “pebbles” were in fact precious gems. One man had a ruby; another an emerald, and the third, a sapphire.

“Jewels!” one merchant said, his face shining with joy.

“Oh, no!” wailed the second. “There were *thousands* of jewels all over the riverbed! Each of us took only one! Why didn’t we grab handfuls?”

“Look!” shouted the third, pointing behind them. A desert wind had whipped up erasing their tracks. “We can never find our way back there. The voice had spoken truly. The merchants were happy and sad. They had found wealth in the desert—but they could have taken more.

Life is not always a desert. Perhaps for many of us, it very rarely is. And yet for others by whom you are seated this morning, the toughness in living has been a desert for what seems to be too long a run.

So, what do you need when you are going through a desert? And what are those treasures, those jewels, that might be right under our feet but we cannot see because we’ve been navigating in the night?

We are charting our way through a series these Sundays entitled “A Cord of Three Strands.” Ecclesiastes 4 reminds us that “two are better than one...and a cord of three strands is not easily (or

quickly) broken.” One of the greatest things about this book is its real-life accuracy and honesty. It teaches us that we live

***In a world of unavoidable tough stuff,
(and the only way to be)
we are unbroken conquerors (is) when we are
woven together with the Lord and godly companions.***

A strong cord woven from three strands...

Strand 1	me (someone who unashamedly belongs to Jesus Christ)
Strand 2	God (the Father who through the Spirit shepherds my walk with Christ)
Strand 3	Companions (who walk with Jesus Christ)

In these early weeks, we’ve been concentrating on strand 1 – me. As strand 1, I need God’s perspective about the unavoidable tough stuff. Two weeks ago, we

**#1 TOUGH STUFF IS PURPOSEFULLY REDEEMED BY
A LOVING GOD SO THAT WE MIGHT KNOW HIM BETTER
IN BECOMING LIKE HIS SON JESUS. Romans 8:28-29**

Romans 8: 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

My heavenly Father – the one who gave me birth in Jesus – orchestrates the tough stuff that interrupts and invades my life with purpose. Last Sunday, we noted that our perspective includes

**#2 OUR TOUGH STUFF PURPOSELY PREPARES US TO
INHERIT AND EXPERIENCE INCOMPERABLE GLORY**

Romans 8:16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. 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. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Our Father is always crafting our life experiences to create in us the character of Jesus. He is always preparing us for our inheritance. Now let’s add a 3rd piece to my perspective as a strand.

**#3 THRIVING through the tough stuff REQUIRES
SHARING (with the other strands) the tough stuff.**

Central to this idea are passages from our “following Jesus” manual, the New Testament.

Romans 12:9-10 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another (or, “be devoted to one another”) with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

Hebrews 10:23-25 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider (or “let us take thought”) how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

James 5:16-20 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. ¹⁹ My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul (i.e., his life) from death and cover a multitude of sins.

THRIVING through the tough stuff REQUIRES SHARING my tough stuff. Let’s ask and answer a couple of critical questions about this.

QUESTION #1 What does it mean “to share”?

It means to be in regular, interactive relationship with a few trusted, unashamed followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, among whom there are no “locked closets.” Their goal is more than friendship. They bring an unconditional willingness to share themselves, *to sharpen* and *be sharpened* by one another.

Members of such a group share some life-giving values.

- #1 They reject staying isolated or private (they get it that isolation is dangerous)
- #2 They embrace a “one-another” mindset (Phil 2 oriented to another’s interests)
- #3 They understand the power of humble vulnerability (there is power and healing in vulnerability)
- #4 They live out a commitment to truth and grace

Please understand – the goal of disclosure in such a trusted group is not TO KNOW, but rather TO GROW. Some years back, as part of what was going on in the Promise Keeper movement, Chuck Swindoll shared the questions he and his companions regularly shared with each other:

- #1 Have you been with a woman this week in such a way that was inappropriate, or could have looked to others that you were using poor judgment?
- #2 Have you been completely above reproach in all your financial dealings this week?
- #3 Have you exposed yourself to any sexually explicit material this week?
- #4 Have you spent time daily in prayer and in the Scriptures?
- #5 Have you fulfilled the mandate of your calling as a man of God this week?
- #6 Have you taken time off to be with your wife and your family this week.
- #7 Have you just lied to me/us?

In one area of Africa where Christianity began to spread, converts were zealous about meeting with God every day, time in *daily* devotions. They would find their own spot within the wild thickets and pour their hearts out to God. After some time, the spots became well-worn, and paths created. Soon, one’s prayer life was made public. If, however, someone began to neglect his/her devotional

life, it would soon be noticed by others. Believers would then gently and lovingly remind those in neglect, “The grass grows on your path.”ⁱ

You share with, you are accountable to good friends. Writing on this, Tim Keller offers

Principle: Real true friendship cannot only be forged it must be discovered **BUT** it cannot only be discovered it must be forged. The foundation must not only be built it must be cultivated.

Proverbs makes clear the building blocks, the 4 marks of true friendship

1. Constancy
2. Carefulness
3. Candor
4. Counsel

Constancy → a friend loves at all times. What does this mean? It means all kinds of times. Good times and bad times. You can't be a good friend without availability. Being there when times are difficult—a friend will not let you go to ruin.

Carefulness → a friend is emotionally sensitive to the inner topography of someone else's life. If I can be happy when you're sad I'm not your friend. When you're sad, I'm sad; when you're happy, I'm happy. A friend gives the gift of emotional connection voluntarily.

Candor → a friend is someone who is a truth-teller. Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, which means words that your friend needs that are going to be painful to hear but they need to hear them. Covering the truth out of “love” is the work of an enemy. I love them too much to tell them that. In actuality, who you love is yourself, not them.

Counsel → a friend is someone who is transparent with you; it's someone who is regularly reassuring, as well as challenging. A friend is someone who demonstrates the balance of both encouragement and rebuke.

SHARING means to be in regular, interactive relationship with a few trusted, unashamed followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, among whom there are no “locked closets.” Their goal is more than friendship. They bring an unconditional willingness to share themselves, *to sharpen* and *be sharpened* by one another unto Christlikeness.

QUESTION #2 What should I share?

ANSWER: What's your tough stuff? In the Table of Contents of the THREE STRANDS Devotional,

WHY TOUGH STUFF IN OUR LIVES?	
The Challenging Difficulties of Sin	
Genesis 3:17-19	Difficulty of a crippled creation 26
Genesis 4:7-10	Difficulty from the sin of others 28
Psalms 51 and Romans 7	Difficulty of indwelling sin..... 30
Ephesians 6:10-12	Difficulty of the enemy's opposition 32
1 Peter 5:8-11	Difficulty of the devouring devil 34
Proverbs 16:5,18-19, 21:24	Difficulty of unchecked pride..... 36
2 Timothy 4:10	Difficulty of spiritual defection..... 38
Acts 9:1-5	Difficulty of the persecuted Body of Christ 40

you'll find Biblical
identifiers for where the
tough stuff comes from. It
can come from the
CHALLENGING
DIFFICULTIES OF SIN

There is a substantial need within the body of Christ, among unashamed Christ followers, to move beyond the surface-stuff that sometimes dominates our conversations, and become trusted friends, to be honest with trusted friends, especially when in desert stretches of life – especially when sin (of others, my own) is “eating my lunch.” THEY are the “nearby jewels,” the trusted relationship treasures needed, to overcome.

But that tough stuff may also be those CHALLENGING OPPORTUNITIES the Father is putting before you through your life circumstances.

The Challenging Opportunities in Christ

Job 42:1-6	Opportunity to deepen faith.....	44
Romans 8:23-25	Opportunity for an energized hope.....	46
Romans 15:9-13	Opportunity to depend on the Spirit's power	48
Romans 8:29, Heb. 5:7-10	Opportunity to become like Him.....	50
2 Corinthians 12:7-10	Opportunity to be strong in weakness.....	52
Hebrews 12, James 5	Opportunity to strengthen one another	54
2 Corinthians 1:3-7	Opportunity to bring encouragement	56
1 Peter 3:13-17	Opportunity for a humble witness	58
1 Peter 4:12-14	Opportunity to suffer for His name.....	60

QUESTION #1 What does it mean “to share”?

It means to be in regular, interactive relationship with a few trusted, unashamed followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, among whom there are no “locked closets.” Their goal is more than friendship. They bring an unconditional willingness to share themselves, *to sharpen* and *be sharpened* by one another.

QUESTION #2 What should I share?

- Share the challenging difficulties which sin confronts you with
- Share the challenging opportunities in Christ which the Father is using to craft His Son in you

QUESTION #3 What's the outcome of sharing the tough stuff well?

Two outcomes –

#1 ENERGIZE WHAT THE HOLY SPIRIT WANTS TO DO IN OUR LIVES

- A church team with followers of Jesus who share their tough stuff well, truly energize what Christ has called us to here. Connecting each person (child, student, young family, single professional, each maturing family and couples) to LIFE-DEFINING relationships in Christ.

People often ask, “What’s your church about?” It’s about life-defining relationships in Christ. It is

through Christ-centered, authentic relationships that God's Spirit reshapes each one of us, helps us re-define the way we think and the way we love so that Jesus himself shines through us.

At the end of the devotional, there is an eval any of us can use to figure out if we are experiencing what the Spirit intends through our friendships:

Life Question Self-Evaluation

*A life defined by following Christ in our mission:
Connecting people to life-defining relationships in Christ.*

Personal Question #3: Who Shares My Tough Stuff?

Focus: Fellowship

Core Principle: An authentic Christian life demands authentic relationships with other followers of Christ.

Biblical References:

Hebrews 10:24-25 "And let us take thought of how to spur one another on to love and good works ..."

James 5:16 "So confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed ..."

Romans 12:10 "Be devoted to one another with mutual love ..."

Please answer this spiritual self-inventory

1=Never 2=Seldom 3=Occasionally 4=Frequently 5=Always

Life-Defining Spiritual Disciplines	Response				
1. My closest friends challenge and encourage me to faithfully follow Jesus.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I encourage others by pointing out their strengths rather than their weaknesses.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I share my darker secrets with Christian friends closest to me.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I forgive others when their actions harm me.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I admit my errors in relationships and humbly seek forgiveness from the one I hurt.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I know a Christian I can call at 2 a.m.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I place the interests of others above my own.	1	2	3	4	5
8. My time commitments show that I value relationships over work/career/hobbies.	1	2	3	4	5
9. My friends ask me tough, but good questions.	1	2	3	4	5
10. At Christ Community Church I regularly attend a connect group.	1	2	3	4	5
Who Shares My Tough Stuff?	TOTAL				

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#2 ANTICIPATE a great RUN and A GREAT FINISH TOGETHER with Christ

THE GOAL – to run and finish the race of faith well

Hebrews 12:1-3 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

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REQUIRES SHARING** (with the other strands) **the tough stuff.**

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¹ David DeWitt, *Today in the Word* (June 1992)