

Teacher: Melissa Logsdon

Teaching Title: In the Midst Of

Date: September 10, 2023

- Thesis: Even in the midst of difficulties, God is with us and says we are victorious.
- Key Scripture: Romans 8:37

- **Introduction:** Hello, my name is Melissa Logsdon and I'm serving as Interim Associate Pastor for New Covenant Fellowship. Today, I'd like to share some of my journey with you—how I have come to experience God's presence with me through the hard times. Also, how even in the midst of those difficulties, God brings me to a place of victory, not once the struggle has ended, but while in the middle of it. My hope is that you will be encouraged as I share, just as I have found encouragement.

- **Opening Prayer:** I invite you to join me in praying for this moment. God, Our Comforter, thank you for being with us, in the midst of us, here in this time and place. Thank you for the comfort your presence brings to us and thank you for meeting us in our deepest pain and our greatest joys. May we draw nearer to you as you've drawn near to us. Thank you. Amen.

- **Intro:** Today I would like to share with you some of my story of struggle and of the victory I have found through God to overcome in the midst of difficulties.
 - This is an excerpt from an entry in my journal on April 6, 2023: "God, my arm and leg hurt so bad with this neuropathy. So bad I need your help God. For relief, for healing, for wisdom, for strength, for grace. It hurts so bad to even write today. God I'm afraid living with this pain is altering me in ways I'm not sure I like. My mind is distracted by the pain. My body is held tightly together/bracing against more pain. My emotions are raw from lack of sleep and the ongoing pain. My energy wanes. I find myself rarely getting to live the day I had planned, connections are stunted from lack of energy and the distracting pain. Taking time to do the "Basic survival" tasks seems all consuming some days and other days just impossible. In these moments I find myself standing, or rather, lying down, where I never wanted to be. I find myself in a place I never, ever, wanted to live—trapped in my world—so small."
 - This moment portrays the real struggle that I often experience dealing with autoimmune diseases (plural). I struggle with my body not being able to do what it used to be able to do and what others

may think I should or could do. It can be limiting and isolating. And then my soul can become discouraged.

- Today I'd like to share with you the lesson on my heart of living victoriously in the midst of pain, struggle, and heartache. Of finding our worth in God, not in our abilities, of finding victory because of what God declares, not because of our outward circumstances. And how I have found how deeply God cares about ***our pains, our prayers, and our passions.***

- **1st Point: Our Pains**

- As I share part of my story today, I'm aware it may bring up pain in your own life (past or present) or will call to mind struggles in the lives of our loved ones. Today I'm going to share part of my story about a physical/medical crisis that I have been going through and how there have been some tangible victories, but there are also more permanent losses in my life as well. So, as I share, and if something comes to your mind from your own life or the life of a loved one, please know I hope for healing and reconciliation in this life for us all, but I know that some of this will only come from God's Kingdom fullness in the age to come. There are some struggles, some pain, that we struggle to even manage to breathe through and survive. I hope this time and space, right here, right now, can be a sacred space of struggle, and of hope as we reflect on how God cares about our pains.
- **My story:** Three years ago I had a major health crisis—practically overnight my body went from being able to work full time, volunteer in the community, enjoy active sports like boxing, kayaking, hiking; to struggling to lift a coffee mug or walk across my living room without fatiguing out or nearly passing out. I was 38 years old and all of a sudden I needed a walker to get around my house, help to shower and dress and get out of bed, I couldn't carry a laundry basket or weed the garden. I couldn't sit up for even an hour. I started wearing hats so I didn't have to use energy to wash or brush my hair. To say I was discouraged and frustrated is a gross understatement of where I found myself.

For over 10 years, I knew things weren't right with my body, and truly, there were issues even in college. I would get sick easy, especially during finals. I would fatigue out as if I had a flu. My body required muscle rub from head to toe in order to sleep with minimal pain. I remember thinking: "I guess that's what getting old feels like" even though I was only in my

20's and 30's. So, when my health crisis happened, I guess I shouldn't have been surprised.

In the fall of 2020, I had my gallbladder removed, and for some reason, it was like fuel on a smoldering fire. My body had an inflammatory response to the surgery and triggered autoimmune disease flare ups that have taken the last few years to recover from the effects.

I've got a laundry list of diagnoses including severe fibromyalgia, lupus, and small fiber neuropathy. Pretty much, my body's immune system doesn't just fight infections but overreacts and attacks itself, including killing off my nerve endings. Pretty much, every system of my body has been impacted. I've had over 14 specialist and currently am under care of I think just 7 specialists now. So, medically, my life is pretty complex.

On my journey to figure out what is wrong and how I need to adjust my life accordingly, I looked for hope and encouragement from support groups. But instead of being inspired and encouraged, I found many people with less hope than me. I was looking for tools and tips to make the best of things and instead I found even more discouraging stories of pain and struggle and hopelessness.

So, I set out on a journey on my own to find hope in the midst of pain and struggle. And this is what I want to share with you.

- **2nd Point: Our Prayers**

- In my journal entry that I shared with you, when I referenced finding myself where I never wanted to be, it was in reference to this verse I'm about to share with you, that I had found last year. When I found it, I couldn't relate to it at all, but I wanted to. Here's what it says: We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand—out in the open spaces of God's grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise.--Romans 5:2b MSG
 - When I read that, I wondered, how in the world, given all the pain and disappointment, can I get to a place of declaring this, honestly? I think in that moment my soul prayed a prayer that my heart wasn't brave enough to dare to pray. And I found that in the midst of our pains, God cares about our prayers.

- The great thing about the scriptures, is we can read of how people have gone before us on this faith journey: the questions they've asked, the prayers they've prayed, the hope they've received. And we benefit from these accounts for our faith journeys.
 - In Psalm 138:7 we read, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble (go on in the center of trouble) thou wilt revive me." and in another translation it reads, "By your mighty power I can walk through any devastation, and you will keep me alive, reviving me".
 - And in Habakkuk 3:17-18 NLT, we read this declaration: "Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!"
 - Then in Romans 8:37 TPT this hope is found: "Yet even in the midst of all these things, we triumph over them all, for God has made us to be more than conquerors, and his demonstrated love is our glorious victory over everything!"
 - **I needed that "Even though" and "and Yet" mindset for the struggles I was in the midst of**
- Not only are the scriptures full of people asking this same question, so we find ourselves in good company, but we find models of prayers to pray and hope to hang on to during the struggles of life. God is with us, He hasn't left us. We are in no way more victorious once we overcome a struggle, because God declares us victorious "In the Midst Of" the struggles. It's a position of victory we get to enjoy because of Jesus, we get to live with hope and that allows us to encourage others and pray for others and put our actions: whether prayers or projects to bring this hope to others. To not be defeated and to not give up.
- For me, this mindset, helped me to continue to get up each morning, to believe I would have the strength for the day's struggles and rest when I just couldn't battle. To go through the hundreds of appointments of tests, treatments, and therapies. To research and implement walking, meditation, yoga, nutrition, medicine, and rest. To reach out and bring encouragement to others in their struggles while in the midst of my own struggles.

- **3rd Point: Our Passions**

- (Picture) Have you ever seen the Japanese art of Kintsugi? They take broken pottery that we would declare as worthless, and they not only restore it to usefulness, but they infuse it with GREATER VALUE than it had in its original state by adding gold paint to the broken places. And in doing so, not only is it of greater value, but they also have not tried to conceal the broken places, but rather highlighted and esteemed those places. For there is glory in the piece because of it.
 - While this illustration may not be a perfect representation, I feel that it does a pretty good job of showing us God's heart. God longs to take our broken pieces and mend them together and support them and show us our great value and worth (maybe not according to the world) according to God. We can experience and extend love even when feeling/looking broken. And it may even seem more beautiful, more sacred, more holy. Because even in the midst of our pains, God cares about our passions.
 - This allows us to declare along with the psalmist in Psalm 66:12b, 20 TPT, "We've passed through fire and flood, YET in the end you, God, always bring us out better than we were before, saturated with your goodness... I will forever praise this God who didn't close His heart when I prayed and never said no when I asked for help. God never once refused to show me tender love."
- So, as I reflect on my journey, I find God repeatedly reminding me that my life doesn't need to be perfect before I can be of worth and value. But rather, the God plans for my life are in no way hindered by my loss, my lack, my struggles, my pain. And in fact, God can and does, use all of it, when we turn it all over, and make something beautiful in the midst of the struggle and pain. Because God deeply cares about our pains, our prayers, and our passions.
- During the first year of waiting for my lupus to go into remission, I had started to do a lot of watercolor paintings. I have been an artist my whole life, but the busyness of life, had resulted in my artistic pursuits going dormant often. With me home, unable to work, I started painting a lot. I would give my artwork as gifts and write encouraging notes to friends. A friend encouraged me to sell my work—something I never thought I was good enough to do. And God gave me a name for my studio: AND YET Designs. I started selling my work privately and through craft shows. And when people ask, I share with them the principle of "AND YET"—hoping to encourage others how I have been encouraged.

- **Closing Thoughts**

- As I close out, I want to share with you one more excerpt from my journals: “ANDYET... Each day is a new day. Each day I come and fill myself up afresh with hope, encouragement and new strength for the day. And I do it. I do the day, and in the midst of all the fatigue, insomnia, pain, neuropathy, overwhelm, and exhaustion, I somehow break out of my small pain bubble. I do yoga and stretch my body and lift my spirit and breathe through the pain. I reach out to friends, family, and neighbors. I care about my community. I create art and comfortable environments. I fight for laughter, joy, love-happiness. Beauty. And somehow, in the midst of all of this, I find it. I find myself standing where I always hoped to stand, in the wide open spaces of God’s grace and mercy (Romans 5:2b)”
- So, here’s the takeaway I hope we can all come to declare—even in the midst of the most trying times—along with David in Psalm 27:14 TPT: “Here’s what I’ve learned through it all: Don’t give up; don’t be impatient; be entwined as one with the Lord. Be brave and courageous, and never lose hope. Yes, keep on waiting—for God will never disappoint you!”