

Sermon Series: *“Real Trouble, Real Hope”*
Getting Through Tough Weeks

Dear Friends in Christ:

One of my recent, daily email devotions from *“Insights for Living”* began with this personal story from Dr. Charles Swindoll, noted pastor and teacher, author and theologian, who shared: *“The past couple of weeks have been some of the toughest of my life.”* He went on to write: *“My emotions have spanned the spectrum: shock, sorrow, intense disillusionment, disappointment, and utter bewilderment. I have prayed - without much benefit. I have read the Scriptures - without much peace. I feel like Job, who admitted: My spirit is broken.”* It sounds to me like that Christian pastor was experiencing **“real trouble”** and in that honest, vulnerable moment was searching anew for **“real hope.”**

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No doubt we have uttered that phrase: *“The past couple of weeks have been some of the toughest of my life.”* Emotions and laments run the gamut of response as we run the gauntlet of life, sometimes just trying to make it through one day...one hour...one minute! There is no exemption for Christians...no free pass for pastors...no pie in the sky promises that ultimately shield any of us from what it’s like to live in this real world where sin and

death do their thing...day in and day out, day by day! Just listen to the prayer list week after week and you get a glimpse of “*real trouble*” – some of it of our own making and much of it just the unbridled and seemingly unfair reality of life in a broken world – even for those who seek to love and serve God!

Just listen to the “*real trouble*” litany of the Apostle Paul as he commends his ministry to the Corinthians, speaking about past “*afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, [and] hunger.*” (2 Corinthians 6:4-5) Listen to the Gospel as Jesus prepares His disciples for the challenges they will face in following Him, saying: “*Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.*” (Matthew 10:16)

I don't mean to be such a downer on this Father's Day weekend, but it's tough out there on many a day, the “*wolves*” of discouragement and rejection, pride and sin nipping at our heels even though we try to fight them off! There are “*predators*” out there every day seeking to rob us of joy, challenging our faith and hope; guilt from the past or present making us feel so unworthy; situations and circumstances that are seemingly unresolvable; people whose words and actions so wound our spirit that we lose all hope of forgiveness, peace and love! “**Real trouble!**”

You know what was bothering the author of my daily devotion? He was having what he referenced as a

“minister’s fainting fit.” [I’ve had a few over the course of 43 years in ministry.] He was so discouraged as a pastor, seeing *“the hopeful turning aside, the godly growing cold, [leaders] abusing their privileges, and sinners waxing more bold in sin.”* In other words, he felt like a failure because the people he served were losing their hope in tough times! They were giving up and giving in, and sadly, so was he, forgetting there are times in ministry and in life where you just have to stand firm, and trust, and believe, and maintain hope in Christ!

So how did the Apostle Paul; how do followers of Christ and how do we sustain hope, *“real hope”* in times of *“real trouble?”* Look at what the Word of God teaches, the Apostle’s witness directing us in our walk with God to spiritual resources. Here’s how you sustain real hope: *“By purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left.”* (2 Corinthians 6:6-7)

What that means is when the last two weeks of life have been a *“Hee-Haw”* rerun of *“gloom, despair and agony on me;”* when you’re feeling *“if it weren’t for bad luck, you’d have no luck at all,”* you don’t just whine, moan, grumble and complain, fussing at God and making everyone around you more miserable! No! You turn it over to the power of God! You quit thinking it’s all about you! You take up the *“weapons of righteousness”* and *“fight the good fight of faith,”* remembering that Jesus

Christ, the Son of God, won the victory on Calvary's cross so that you and I who believe might hang on to "*real hope!*"

"*Real hope,*" you see, [and we keep on saying it, don't we?] is about faith, trust, and dependency on Christ – no matter what is happening around us or to us. It's the only perspective that offers present day peace and everlasting hope, because the focus is on God's promise to be "*with us*" and see us "*through!*" Look at the ironies and contrasts that Paul highlights in his journey: "**Through** honor and dishonor, **through** slander and praise." I just love that – it's my favorite word in all of Scripture: "**through!**" The Apostle goes on: "*We are treated as impostors, and yet are true;⁹ as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed;¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.*" (2 Corinthians 6:8-10)

Now that's the attitude I want to have; don't you? It doesn't ignore "*real troubles*" or minimize the struggle or make the Christian faith some wimpy religion that promises everything is going to be "*hunky dory!*" No, it's a perspective of faith that believes, as the Book of Lamentation declares: "*The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.*" (Lamentations 3:25) It's what I like to call the "arrogance" of our faith that even though "*grief*" comes our way; we know "*the Lord will have compassion according to the abundance of his*

steadfast love.” (Lamentations 3:32) It’s the promise of our faith, spoken so powerfully by Jesus, comforting the very disciples he sends out to serve, saying: “*When they deliver you over, do not be anxious about how you are to speak...for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour.*” (Matthew 10:19)

Frankly, my friends, I don’t know how anyone survives “**real trouble**” without “**real hope**” in Christ. That’s why Paul speaks so “*freely*” and boldly to the Corinthians, his “*heart wide open*” that they would “*widen their hearts also.*” (2 Corinthians 6:11-13) There are indeed some “*tough weeks in our lives,*” and sometimes we make the journey so much tougher because we just won’t “*open our hearts wide enough*” to rely on “*the steadfast love of the Lord.*”

You know, our Lord came to this earth and experienced a pretty tough week himself, didn’t He? Jesus was betrayed, rejected, mocked, ridiculed, beaten, denied, condemned and crucified! He suffered, just like we do! He died, just like we will, but rose again so that we might see the Father’s love, and by the Spirit’s power, trust and believe!

*Come Lord Jesus, come into our hearts today.
Come Lord Jesus; come into our hearts to stay!*

Amen.