

You Can't Control the Future (series: *You Don't Have What it Takes*)

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As our kids Meghan and Slater are shooting towards adulthood at what seems like a breakneck pace, a question I'm asking them with a lot of intentionality is, "*What do you want to be when you grow up?*"

And since they're 14 and 17—really close to being grown up, I notice they don't answer it as quickly they did when they were little.

Because now it's close enough that it's not "pie in the sky" conversation—it's more like impending reality.

But when they were in elementary school and when we—way back when—were in elementary school, if an art teacher said the assignment was to draw a picture of what you wanted to be when you grew up—we didn't spend half the class thinking about what we'd be.

(Just for kicks) Take a second and tell someone next to you at least ONE of the things you wanted to be when you grew up.

<<< audience discuss >>>

I'm just curious—with a serious show of hands—how many of you are doing now, what you wanted to do way back then?

About as close I get is "playing drums." Church, or working in a church never entered my 7 yr old curly headed brain.

I wanted to start here just to show us that the topic of "our future" is a very concrete, very tangible thing.

When we were kids, our future was a million miles away. But now that we are HERE—in the future—looking back—it doesn't seem all that far away.

The future is always closer and more connected to today than we think.

Every good story has conflict—and for people who follow God there's conflict between how the world tells us we should see the future and how God tells us we should see the future.

What I mean is, our culture tells us we need to plan for the future, be very concerned about the future and that we should work hard for most of our lives and then when we get to our future, we should retire, play shuffleboard in Florida and forget everything we ever knew about fashion ☺

In our culture we get very worked up about the future. The future is something we should be in control of. (Very much in the same way we like to be in control of things on a daily basis.)

Life is just one big thing for us to control and manage. And so we obsess about the future, worry about the future, try to control the future—control our destiny---it's kind of the American way!

But God says to us,

"Don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today." Matthew 6:34 nlt
(Theologians to refer to this as the *Bobby McFerrin Creed*)

And so I feel this conflict: the world says, "Hey—*make your future.*"
And God throws me a curve and says, "Don't worry about tomorrow—today's trouble is enough for today."

Let me read you that passage in context. I'm reading Matthew 6:25-34 nlt for those playing along at home.

<<< Matthew 6:25-34 >>>

Let me say that passage in one sentence:

The path to the future is finding God and following Him today. (audience say)

And that sentence sounds simple and like a "no-brainer"—and it seems like we could just stop there. But we can't. Because "today" has conflict (trouble) and that's *not* easy—that's NOT a "no-brainer."

Like every English teacher know-- every good story has conflict. And it's true. There has never been a movie or book that you've loved that didn't have conflict—the conflict is *why* we like it!

(The conflict in)

To Kill a Mocking Bird was Atticus Finch & justice v. bigotry

Braveheart was William Wallace and Scotland's freedom v. England's tyranny.

Titanic was the "haves" v. the "have-nots" or the life of predictability v. a life of adventure.

AVATAR was the "Na-vi" v. greedy humans.

Sports is all about conflict. When the game isn't close we call it a "bad" game—because there wasn't enough conflict.

And the best superstars are known *in relation to* the opponents they were in most conflict with:

Stauback v. Bradshaw

Palmer v. Nicklaus

Magic v. Byrd

Manning v. Brady

Conflict isn't just about sports and stories.

You can only read the first two chapters of the Bible before there's conflict. In chapters 1 & 2, God's creating and it's "all good."

And then the first sentence of chapter 3 says, "The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made." Conflict enters.

And then by verse 6 of chapter 3, "...So she (Eve) took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it too."

And from that point, the Bible is full of conflict.

The Bible is the original book of the conflict of Good v. evil. And so likewise, our life is in essence, the struggle of good v. evil—our life is a life in conflict.

And so the path to our future, is wrestling with today's conflicts—not by ourselves—because we don't have what it takes by ourselves.

The path to the future is finding God and following Him today—through the conflicts we have before us.

Or as **Matthew 6:34** said, "Today's trouble (conflict) is enough for today."

Every great Bible story that we've ever read or heard has conflict. It's good v. evil, or man v. man, or man v nature.

Why am I telling us this??

Because you and I—even though we read the Bible—we slip into thinking that life and our future is supposed to be controlled and smooth. But biblically that ain't so!

(I'm going to read from Donald Miller's new book "**A Million Miles in a Thousand Years**." You need to know this passage has to do with kayaking and he uses kayaking and paddling as a metaphor for living our lives.)

<<< read pgs 177-179 >>>

In the middle, life gets hard. On the way to our future—life gets hard. (just like Matthew said, "Today's trouble is enough for today.")

For a lot of us here this morning life is hard—and we feel like we're in the middle and we're paddling and it doesn't seem like we're going anywhere.

And yes, I know this is supposed to be a talk about our future, but the way to the future is through the hard middle. How we deal with today determines our tomorrow.

What's the hard middle for you right now?

Is it trying to have a baby that never seems to come?

Is it finding yourself single at a time in your life you never thought you would be?

Are you in a challenging vocational place because of a shaky economy?

Are you consumed with images and stories of people in Haiti that you can't seem to help?

Is God leading you to take a big leap of faith, but he hasn't bothered to shade in all the details?

Are you outnumbered and overwhelmed with the diaper-wear-ers in your life?

Are you just bored—here in the middle?

Does most of your excitement come vicariously through a TV show? Or online experiences?

Are you wondering if a new spouse would be better than the one you have?

Did you excitedly come to Christ, but somehow today your spiritual life feels stagnant and you wonder if you should even keep trying?

Has your last child left home, and now you and your spouse are struggling with just being you and your spouse?

(selah)

Wherever we are today—we need to know that how we navigate the hard middle of life will dictate our future.

When we get to our future we will find the results of our decisions today.

When we get to our future we will sort through our "hard middle" decisions like a box of so many recipe cards.

And if we navigated those decisions—those conflicts—without God, based on our feelings and worldly advice, we may get to the future—look back upon today—and say things like:

"That was stupid..."

"Boy that was Selfish..."

"What was I thinking?..."

"Seemed like a good idea at the time..."

The path to the future is finding God and following Him today. And the truth is every day we are creating a path that leads to our future.

We can desire and hope with all of being to be at Lucas Oil Stadium today at 3:00. But if we head north on 31 after church, we will never get there.

Why? Because our path right now, determines our destination later.

We can desire and hope with all of our being that...what? What is it you hope for?

That your marriage will last. Or be healed.

That your family now will not continue unhealthy habits from you or your spouses family?

That your life will leave a legacy?

That what you have done with your life will have mattered?

We can't control the future, but our decisions today determine our destination—they lead us to our future.

We never catapult into the future—we never instantaneously time-travel to the future--we walk there--one day, one decision at a time.

We walk there either in relationship with God—following Him—striving to be like His Son. Allowing his Word and His Spirit to guide our steps.

Or we walk toward our future, a day at a time following our own plans.

(selah)

To seek the Kingdom of God above all else, means that in the middle of our conflicts, the answer is always the same:

It's looking to God's Word—what does the God who has no beginning and no end say about what's going on in my life today?

It's seeking wise Christ followers—people who've made more crossings than us—and saying, "Help me sort this out? Help me find God and submit to Him in the midst of this conflict?"

To seek the Kingdom above all else—means we don't choose the easy out---we don't choose our course based on we feel.

I'm guessing Noah didn't "feel" like building an ark.

I'm guessing Jesus didn't "feel" like a 40 day fast in the desert.

I'm guessing Sam Burke didn't "feel" like moving to Kokomo was an upgrade from sunny California.

But I know that finding God in the midst of those decisions was the path to their futures. ///

So if you and your spouse have paddled poorly in your marriage for years and you hate where you are—the easy answer—maybe what you FEEL like doing is to get out of the boat.

But the wise—God-honoring-- more difficult answer is more paddling---paddling with God---getting paddling lessons?

It's choosing to enter into a much harder but more rewarding story.
And it's a story WITH God and THROUGH God—because we DON'T have what it takes.

The path to the future is finding God and following Him today—and that's hard because life is full of conflict.

And guess what? God ALLOWS conflict. (proof text = Bible)

I didn't say he orchestrates it. I'm not saying that He creates bad things. But He does allow them.

Why is there cancer and auto accidents and earthquakes and politicians?

Because in chapter 3 of the first book of the Bible sin entered the world and bad stuff will continue to happen until Jesus comes back and sets it all straight.

But guess what? Conflict is good for us.

"We can rejoice too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation."

Romans 5:3-4 nlt

Here's that verse in one sentence: ***God uses conflicts to mature us.***

Let me ask you a question: in the future do you just want to be at the same level of spiritual maturity that you are today? (5 yrs, 10 yrs...)

Or would you like to be fully mature in Christ? Would you like to have a faith that makes younger people ask, "What's your secret? How do live in that loving, caring, confident, wise place all the time?"

If this church isn't full of people who are willing to find God in the midst of conflict and allow themselves to be molded in the midst of it—this church will never reach its full potential in this city.

When we choose to find God today—in the midst of conflict—and choose to submit to Him—we're choosing the path of maturity. We are setting ourselves up to live a future where we are more spiritually mature than we are today.

IF we will let Him--God will use conflict to change us, mold us—to mature us.

(selah)

Curtis Stout and Bruce Donaldson went to Haiti on January 1. Eleven days later the worst earthquake in 200 years hit. On January 12 Curtis and Bruce entered into conflict the likes of which few of us in this room can fathom.

The easy decision would have been for them to get out of their boats and come home. Clearly. And none of us would have thought less of them for it.

But God was not surprised by the earthquake and Curtis and Bruce's timing.

(God wasn't on His iPhone texting Martin Luther—heard a rumble and said, "*Oh my Me—what was that?!*")

And there is nothing good about that earthquake, but even in the worst kind of conflict, God will continue to be God—which means He will use it as an opportunity to draw people to Himself and mature His sons and daughters through it.

When Curtis and Bruce get to the future and are sorting through the recipe cards of their decisions in days gone by...

Of their time in Haiti in 2010 I will not be surprised if they pull out cards that say things like:

"Saw things I never thought I'd see—and found God in ways I never knew I could..."

- or -

"It didn't make sense to stay in Haiti –but God shaped my life in a profound way in the weeks and months after that earthquake..."

(pray for them)

Parents with kids of any age at home—can I speak into you for a minute?

There is such an ethos in our culture where it is the goal of parents to keep our kids safe. To keep our kids sheltered and protected.

But what if our goal wasn't *safety and protection*—what if our parenting ethos was to equip and teach our kids how to navigate conflict?

What if instead of fighting every battle for them, we taught them that in life, things will come at them that will knock them off their feet at times---but God can help them through it and help them get back up.

And what if we taught them that's it's NORMAL in life to face challenges that are bigger than us, and because we have the Holy Spirit in us, we can navigate whatever the world or the evil one throws at us?

What if we raised a generation that didn't live to be comfortable, but raised a generation that wanted to live out a great story and they understood that every great story has great conflict –and what if they actually believed that God uses conflict to further mature them towards Christ-likeness?

(selah)

We can't control the future. But the path to the future is in finding God and following Him today.

And the secret of paddling through the "hard middle"—the secret to navigating today's conflicts and decisions—the way we live that leads to a future with less regrets, is to "Seek first the Kingdom of God above all else, (Matthew 6:33) Which is a life not seeking first selfishness or safety.

I want to read to you all of chapter 40 from the book of Isaiah.

Because seeking first the Kingdom of God (maybe more than anything else) requires that we have the right perspective on our lives—which means that we really GET--that God is so big, so vast, so powerful, so eternal---and that our lives REALLY ARE so small, and we will be on this planet such a short time.

In this passage our lives are referred to as "grass." And in this passage it tells us that God is coming, that this world is just a little bit of history---that our lives of conflict and story are just LITTLE pieces of a much larger story and a much larger God.

And at the end of this chapter God tells us that even though we are little and our time is short—God cares immensely for us and that His strength and love is available to us beyond our imagination and capacity.

(ask God to show up...)

<<< read Isaiah ch. 40 >>>

<<< song: Everlasting God (whose lyrics are from ch 40) >>>

<<< pray out >>>