

A SERMON SERIES AND SMALL GROUP GUIDE  
FOR WAITE PARK CHURCH

the

STRUGGLE

is real

FOCUS SEASON  
JANUARY 2020 ISSUE

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# A Note from Kory

We all have struggles in life. All means all. Whether we like it or not, the Bible never tells us that Christians will never struggle. In fact, we read passage like...

- “In this world you will have trouble...” (John 16:33)
- “Do not be surprised at the fiery trial that has come to test you...” (1 Peter 4:12)
- “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds...” (James 1:2)

The Bible doesn't promise us an easy life without struggle. It only promises that God will be with us through the struggles. Not only that, but the Bible tells us a couple of things about struggles.

First, it tells us that struggles can be useful for building our faith. Romans 5:3-4 says, “we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.” Today, we often deal with struggles by ignoring it, hoping it will go away or by becoming discouraged, thinking something is wrong. But we are called to embrace struggle as a means of growth.

Second, it tells us that God is with us in the struggle. Yes, Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble...” but here's the whole verse, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” When we are “in Christ” he walks with us and we can overcome.

This series is about embracing the struggles we all face. We have a God who is greater than any struggle we can face, who will walk with us and grow us by means we would never vote for. The five topics we have chosen came from you! These are the struggles of people in our own congregation—the struggle with:

- Change
- Connecting with others
- Mental Illness
- Shame
- Disappointment

*Embrace the struggle!*



I hope that during these weeks you will come to embrace the struggle, though I suspect there will be moments where it might be painful. Most of all I hope this is a time where you experience the presence and help of God—that your trust in him grows to the point that you know there's nothing you and God can't handle.



# THE STRUGGLE TO CONNECT



We live in a disconnected world. In fact, while our society talks a great deal about coming together, it seems to be specifically set up to push us toward disconnection. Whether it's political polarization or social and other types of media that compete for our attention or the fact that people move more and don't often live around family, people are finding it harder and harder to develop meaningful, committed relationships. We believe the Church—as the family of God—should be the best place to do this. This week, we'll look at what it takes to develop meaningful connections with others.

## WEEKLY SCRIPTURE

### TO STUDY AND EXPLORE

Galatians 6:1-10  
Colossians 3:12-17  
1 Peter 4:7-11  
Ephesians 4  
1 Peter 2:11-25  
Romans 14

## PRAYER FOCUS

Lord, lead me and guide me  
in my relationships.  
Give me grace to love and care  
for those you have given me.  
Search my heart and show me those with  
whom I am not at peace.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

### AS YOU REFLECT THIS WEEK

- What would you consider to be qualities or characteristics of a spiritual friendship?
- What circumstances (or even parts of your personality) hinder you from forming meaningful friendships?
- What areas of growth do you have when it comes to being a better friend for others?
- Where is God wanting you to grow when it comes to your relationships with others?





# THE STRUGGLE WITH CHANGE

It seems as though the world is changing faster than we can keep up with. With new technologies, a shrinking globe and even a moral landscape that seems to be constantly changing it can be easy to feel we have no anchor and many people feel life has left them behind. How do we find our bearings in this changing world? Should we embrace change, protest it, or just put our head down and do our own thing? Most of all, how can we stay anchored in God? That's what we'll be pondering this week.

## WEEKLY SCRIPTURE

### TO STUDY AND EXPLORE

Isaiah 40  
Ecclesiastes 3:1-15  
Job 38-39  
Acts 17:24-28  
Philippians 4:4-13  
Psalm 37

## PRAYER FOCUS

Lord, you are the anchor of my life.  
I acknowledge how much I need you.  
In my changing circumstances and unknowns,  
show me how to navigate it in step with you and  
your ways. Use these situations to develop my  
character.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

### AS YOU REFLECT THIS WEEK

- What significant changes have you experienced in your life in the last several years?
- What significant cultural changes/trends have you noticed in the last several years?
- How does God's eternal and unchanging nature shape your perspective on change?
- In what ways can change (in and of itself) be beneficial?
- In what ways can change (in and of itself) be difficult?





# THE STRUGGLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH



We all know mental health issues like anxiety, depression and bipolar disorder are common in our world today, but we don't often talk about it. We're quick to ask for prayer for cancer or when we're having surgery, but we tend to hide our struggles with mental illness. The result is that we often don't get the support we need from the body of Christ. So, how should we as believers think about and, more importantly, respond to mental illness? We'll deal with that struggle, this week.

## WEEKLY SCRIPTURE

### TO STUDY AND EXPLORE

Matthew 6:25-34  
2 Corinthians 12:1-10  
Romans 8:18-30  
Romans 8:31-38  
Psalm 139  
Psalm 34

## PRAYER FOCUS

Lord, you are greater than my mind can even comprehend. Help me to discipline all my thoughts to be obedient to you and your Word. Transform my mind as I spend time in your Word, so that my life reflects you more. Give me strength to persevere and glorify yourself through my weakness.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

### AS YOU REFLECT THIS WEEK

- What experiences have you had with dealing with mental health issues in your own life and/or with those close to you?
- What have been the most helpful ways for you to respond to mental health issues?
- What events, circumstances, behaviors or habits tend to trigger or contribute to your mental health issues?
- How has your faith shaped the way you respond to mental health issues?
- What insights does the Bible have when it comes to our experience with mental health?



# THE STRUGGLE WITH SHAME



Everyone has done something they are ashamed of (or should be). This kind of shame is normal and can even be helpful. But there is a kind of shame that can be debilitating. It's not the kind that says, "I hurt someone and I'm ashamed of what I did." It's the kind that says, "I'm ashamed of who I am." The Bible tells us that on the cross, Christ broke the power of sin and shame. If so, why do so many still struggle with it? This week, we'll dive into the struggle with shame to see where we can find freedom in Christ.

## WEEKLY SCRIPTURE

### TO STUDY AND EXPLORE

1 John 1:8-2:2  
John 4:1-26  
John 8:1-11  
Romans 5:1-11  
Philippians 3:7-11  
1 Timothy 1:15-17

## PRAYER FOCUS

Lord, remind me of how mighty and beautiful you are. I embrace the gift of Jesus sent for our freedom as our Savior. I am no longer captive to fear and shame. Fill me with your joy and a deeper understanding of your love for me.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

### AS YOU REFLECT THIS WEEK

- Is there anything in your life that keeps you from being fully known? Is it possible that this is shaping how you see yourself?
- Where are you tempted to get your identity from? If you're unsure, it might be helpful to consider times when you felt "small" or times when you felt proud.
- When in your life have you felt shame?
- When you feel shame, what tends to be your response?
- What does God want us to do with our shame?



# THE STRUGGLE

# WITH

# DISAPPOINTMENT



Growing up, there are a great many things I wanted to do and to be. Now, more than half-way through life, many of these dreams are unrealized and I know they never will be (like playing in the NBA!). Time can be very unforgiving. Many people live with a great deal of disappointment and this disappointment can leave them feeling their life has been wasted. But what does God have to say about this? Stick with us this week, and let's learn!

## WEEKLY SCRIPTURE

### TO STUDY AND EXPLORE

Mark 14:32-42  
Psalm 23  
Hebrews 4:14-16  
Psalm 42  
2 Corinthians 4:7-18  
Proverbs 3:1-12

## PRAYER FOCUS

Heavenly Father,  
let your presence meet me in the midst of my  
disappointment. Help me to see how you are  
working and moving through this situation. I lay  
my desires at your feet; please replace them with  
your will.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

### AS YOU REFLECT THIS WEEK

- What have been some of your biggest disappointments in life?
- How do you tend to handle disappointments? What's your natural reaction?
- In your experience, how do "expectations" affect your disappointments? How do we manage a level of healthy expectation?
- What lessons do you think God tries to teach us through disappointment?
- What insights does scripture have when it comes to disappointment?



# IDENTITY IN CHRIST

Our past experiences shape how we see ourselves.

We're told that actions speak louder than words and so we assume that our choices define who we are. When we do things that cause us to hide certain parts of our lives we can begin to believe lies about ourselves:

"They won't love me if they know the *real* me."

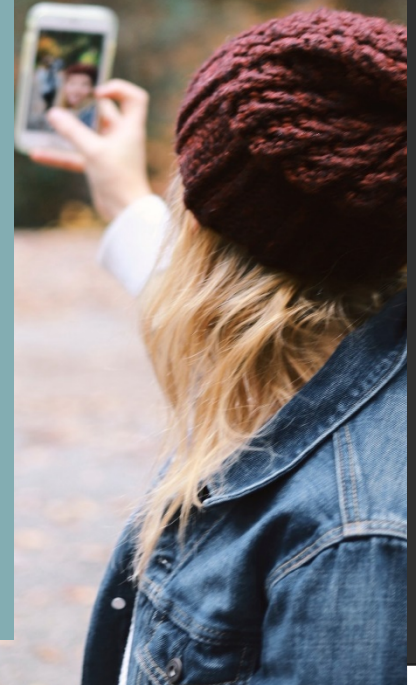
"I'm unlovable"

"I'm unworthy of love."

The truth is, you are loved by the one who knows you best. You are deemed worthy of love by God – the all-knowing, all-seeing, all-perceiving judge of the Universe. The only One fit to judge.

He has the final say. His opinion is ultimately the only one that matters.

Read through the verses below, choose one that resonates with you and meditate on it. Study its surrounding context. Consider memorizing it and repeating the passage to yourself throughout the week.



## YOUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST

John 1:12	A Child of God	Romans 8:28	Called According to His Purpose
Ephesians 1:7	Redeemed & Forgiven	John 15:16	Appointed to bear fruit
Romans 6:6	No longer a slave to sin	Genesis 1:27	Made in God's image
1 Peter 2:9	God's special possession	Galatians 2:20	Loved by the Son of God
John 15:15	Friend of Christ	Ephesians 2:10	God's handiwork
Philippians 3:20	Citizen of Heaven	Colossians 3:1-4	Hidden with Christ in God
Romans 8:37	More than a conqueror	Psalms 139:14	Fearfully and wonderfully made
2 Corinthians 5:17	A New Creation	Galatians 3:27	Clothed with Christ
1 Corinthians 6:19	A temple of the Holy Spirit	1 Corinthians 6:20	Bought at a high price
Romans 8:17	Coheir with Christ	Romans 8:1	Free from condemnation



# LOOKBACK

Prayerfully reflect and respond to these questions...

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

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HOW HAVE YOU GROWN?

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WHAT'S YOUR NEXT STEP?

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take a photo and share it with your small group  
or post it to social media and tag @waiteparkchurch









# THE STRUGGLE IS REAL

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