YouVersion Devotionals – The Story’s Not Over (Jeremy Camp)

1. Still Alive

As a day unfolds, we can experience a wide variety of different emotions. We may notice it the most during hard circumstances. Perhaps we feel anger, disappointed, hurt, or perhaps in a moment of faith we may even see the good that can come from our trials and learn to value the lesson above the pain. We may go through a season of feeling far from the Lord. When we’re in the desert seasons, feeling alone and tired. But even when things are hard, we can still have hope like an anchor for our soul.  But no matter what the ups and downs look like, or the scars and bruises we carry, I hope we’re always reminded that God is still alive in our hearts. Even though we may go through crazy hard trials- you may feel weak and like you have nothing left to give, but He’s still alive.
We have to learn to face what we can’t control and give everything over to Jesus. When we’re in His presence - He breathes his life back into us even in the driest of places.

“We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies.” 2 Corinthians 4:8-10 (NLT)

Sometimes we go through hardships, but as I look over my life it has been the very hardships that have shaped me into who I am today. There were some areas that needed to be stripped away in my heart and taught me the very characteristics I’ve needed. The hardest trials have caused me to look at my life in ways I never would. The loss of my first wife was one of the hardest trials I’ve walked through but God restored my heart and has given me a wife (of 16 years and counting) and a beautiful family. Walking through disappointments and hurt with people close to us caused us to be fully dependent on God. Even when people let us down, we found ourselves valuing God’s faithfulness and consistency all the more. Sometimes the enemy thinks he will use trials to take us out, but if don’t let our circumstances define us and we look to God for what we need, we will come out even stronger than before.

“It does not matter how great the pressure is, it only matters where the pressure lies;

Whether it comes *between* you and God, or whether is presses you closer to His heart.” (Hudson Taylor)

2. Dead Man Walking

 **“**As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our fleshand following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” Ephesians 2:1-7 (NIV)

 “I was a dead man walking, until I was a man walking with you.”

Freedom and peace never came to me when I was walking away from the Lord. I battled with anxiety, feelings of guilt and shame. I felt like I never measured up. Even though I was doing things pleasing to flesh, it wasn’t ever satisfying. I looked to alcohol and relationships to make me feel secure and better about myself, but I only found true life and peace when I surrendered everything to Christ. We can obviously exist without Christ, but not until we walk closely with Him can we understand the fullness of what life really is. There was a deadness in my heart, and I felt like I was spiritually blind stumbling around, until God opened my eyes and I realized my deep need for His love. I realized He was the only one who could truly fill my heart.

Oftentimes we tend to look for what’s next, thinking perhaps the next thing will satisfy, but when you get what that “next thing” is, you’re left feeling empty. You either keep going constantly trying to find the next thing after that, or we can run to Jesus, the only true source of life that can satisfy. When we drink from Him, we quench our thirst.

3. Father

None of us can walk through this life unscathed by pain. Some of us experience it earlier than others and in various different ways, but a part of living in this fallen world is experiencing brokenness. We feel this the most in our relationships with each other. The hurt we feel may come from a relationship with a close friend, a parent, or someone you respect who you never thought would let you down. Perhaps someone threw you under the bus or betrayed you in order to cover themselves – they used you as the scapegoat and it caused deep hurt. Maybe there were lies and deception along with the betrayal. With the brokenness in your relationship of what was once a treasured friendship, comes confusion with how you got there, disappointment, and a new needed fight to learn to walk in forgiveness. There are moments in these painful circumstances where we might try really hard in our own strength to fight through these things, but when we don’t go to the Lord, we exhaust ourselves and we’re left feeling as if we’re on the verge of a breakdown, if perhaps we don’t have a breakdown completely.

It’s often easy for us to get overwhelmed by our pain and even feel like we’re being swallowed up by our circumstances. We forget we have a Heavenly Father from whose presence it is impossible to hide. He knows our inward thoughts and feelings and He offers us a place of safety to heal from the hurt we’re experiencing.

As Psalm 46:1 says,

“God is our refuge and strength,
    an ever-present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear…”

The enemy would love to convince us that we’re isolated and alone, or that there’s no hope. But I love how that verse describes God as being “ever-present”. He is not some far off, distant God – He is near to us and knows what it’s like to be betrayed and abandoned by the people closest to Him. Don’t give up the fight - find yourself in His healing arms today and let your pain be washed away by His love.

4. Should’ve Been Me

“Yet it was our weaknesses He carried;

it was our sorrows that weighed Him down.

And we thought His troubles were a punishment from God,

a punishment for His own sins!

But He was pierced for our rebellion,

crushed for our sins.

He was beaten so we could be whole.

He was whipped so we could be healed.

All of us, like sheep, have strayed away.

We have left God’s paths to follow our own.

Yet the LORD laid on Him

the sins of us all.”

Isaiah 35:4-6 (NLT)

When I think about the cross, I’m always reminded it is because of my sin that Jesus, an innocent man, suffered so much. I am the guilty one who deserves death instead of Him. I should have experienced the pain and rejection. But because of His immense love and unending grace He took my place. It never gets old to me and I’m forever grateful and blown away that Jesus loved me that much that He would take the weight and punishment of what you and I deserve. He gives us the freedom to come to Him at any time and make the greatest exchange of hope for our hurting. We don’t have to clean ourselves up first to come to Him, He has already paid the price and made the way clear for us to take away our dirt and our shame. And not only that but He also says that we can come boldly to His throne (the place of intimacy) for grace and help in time of need. It would have been enough to just have Jesus take our place, but we have absolute freedom to also have an intimate close relationship with the King of Kings. Outside of Christianity, there is no other religion in this world whose god comes down to them first. Everything else is focused on constantly trying to prove your own righteousness and trying to prove your own worth, but with Jesus – He loved us *first*. He made us worthy because of His righteousness – and no matter how many times I think of all these things, I’m humbled and overwhelmed by God’s love. I pray you will encounter His love afresh today!

5. Keep Me In The Moment

The older I get the faster time seems to fly by. No matter what I do, I can’t seem to slow it down. I’m watching as my kids grow older and I’m often reminded of how much I want to be present and available for them. I don’t want to get caught up in the hustle and bustle of life and make the mistake of looking and living so far ahead that I miss what God has for me today. I realize Adrienne and I only have a few more years until our oldest daughter Bella graduates and it has made us want to be deeply intentional to make the most of our time with her and our other kids.

It’s so easy to get stuck in a rut of days and weeks flying by, but we want to live our lives making the most of every opportunity. I want to put my phone down more and engage with my kids. The outside world can wait, while I pay attention to who is in my life in this moment.

I don’t want to be chasing things that don’t matter in the moment and miss the ones who do.

An old spiritual song said this:

“Slow me down, Lawd, I’se agoin’ too fast,

I can’t see my brother when he’s walking past.

I miss a lot of good things day by day,

I don’t know a blessing when it comes my way.

Slow me down, Lawd.

I want to see, more of the things that are good for me.
A little less of me and a little more of You,
I want the heavenly atmosphere to trickle through.” (Unknown)

When we slow down and pay more attention to God’s agenda and not our own, when our focus is on building His kingdom and not our own, we foster better habits of living with an eternal perspective and keep in mind the things that will last into eternity. I pray God will keep our perspectives focused on the people that matter most. May we have His eyes to see and a greater desire to love well.

“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Matthew 6:31-34 (NIV)