

I. Introduction

- A. Every life is a story, and there is one element that makes every story a story: CONFLICT. Think about it. If you take conflict out of any story, you don't have a story at all.
 - 1. Take the wicked witch out of the Wizard of Oz.
 - 2. Take Sauron and Saruman out of the Lord of the Rings.
 - 3. Take the Nazis out of the Sound of Music.
 - 4. Take the Oakland Raiders out of the NFL.
- B. And you don't have a story at all. Good stories move forward because of missed romances, misunderstandings, and the classic clash between good and evil.
- C. As soon as you reach Happily Ever After, the story is over. You can't start there, you can only end there.
- D. So the Bible begins in the Garden of Eden—Adam and Eve. You only get three chapters into the Bible before the conflict begins. Really it's a total catastrophe. When Adam sinned, the whole human race sinned with him, so to speak. That catastrophe welcomed conflict into the story of mankind.
 - 1. Adam would do his thing, fighting against thorns and thistles every step of the way.
 - 2. Eve would do her thing, with great pain, and difficulty.
 - 3. Even the created world would groan, the Bible says, waiting for the glorious happily ever after.
- E. That story is a famous story. The whole world has heard it. It's a classic story, and have you ever asked yourself why?
- F. That's because every one of us, every single day, feels the pain of living broken lives in a broken world as fallen members of a fallen race—conflict, loss and catastrophe.

II. Stress

- A. In 1967 a couple of psychiatrists studied 5,000 medical patients. They wanted to see if there was a connection between stress and illness. Today, we take that for granted. But not back then.
- B. They looked at 43 stressful life situations, and asked patients to check which ones they'd gone through. They discovered a very strong connection between stress and illness.
- C. So much so, that they created a point scale. Each of those 43 stressful situations was scored. They called them Life Change Units. When you score 300 life change units or more in a 12 month period, you're at a very high risk for physical illness.
- D. Now, I'm not going through the whole list, and it just seems weird to me to put a point value on human suffering and loss—when it happens to you, it feels like the end of the world. But here are the top dozen:
 - 1. 100, death of a spouse
 - 2. 73, divorce
 - 3. 65, marital separation
 - 4. 63, imprisonment
 - 5. 63, death of a close family member
 - 6. 53, personal injury or illness
 - 7. 50, marriage
 - 8. 47, dismissal from work
 - 9. 45, marital reconciliation
 - 10. 45, retirement
 - 11. 44, change in health of a family member
 - 12. 40, pregnancy
- E. There's a second list for teenagers and young adults, so I'd like to lay that one on you too.
 - 1. 100, unwed pregnancy
 - 2. 100, death of a parent
 - 3. 95, getting married
 - 4. 90, divorce of parents
 - 5. 80, acquiring a physical deformity
 - 6. 70, fathering an unwed pregnancy
 - 7. 70, jail sentence of parent over one year
 - 8. 69, marital separation of parents
 - 9. 68, death of a brother or sister
 - 10. 67, change in acceptance by peers
 - 11. 64, pregnancy of an unwed sister
 - 12. 63, marriage of parent to stepparent
- F. Definitely a lot of stressors missing here. What about bankruptcy? What about losing your house? Or failing a college class, or abuse, or crimes against you? Where is the death of a dream, or the loss of a business, or the empty nest?
- G. I'm not trying to bring anybody down. I just wanted to acknowledge that every person sitting in this church carries a burden every day.
- H. You sit here with it. You feel it. And you wonder if anything I say, if anything the Bible says, can recognize that weight and help you carry it.
- I. What if I told you that no matter how much catastrophe you carried with you into church today—what if I could promise you on the basis of God's Word, that even if a 1,000 life change units pile on you right now—that none of that can ever spoil the happily ever after God has planned for you in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- J. Here's how the Bible puts this:

III. Text

- A. *16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16, NKJV).*
 - 1. We don't lose heart, God says. Don't quit. Why not?

2. Because even though our outward man is perishing—even though you are racking up Life Change Units faster than frequent flyer miles—that’s just the superficial level of your life.
 3. There’s a deeper level.
 4. “Yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.”
 5. That means that they might take your money, your job, your home, your health, your job, your grades, your diploma, your career, your loved ones—this messed up fallen world, the bad guys—might take everything, **BUT THEY CAN’T TOUCH YOUR SPIRIT**. They can’t take your joy. They can’t take your peace. They can’t take your security in the Lord. And above all else, they can’t take your **VICTORY!**
 6. **BECAUSE YOU HAVE AN INWARD SELF THAT IS OUT OF REACH OF THE BAD GUYS.**
 7. “No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck you from God’s hand.”
 8. No power in heaven or on earth, no loss, can erase the happily ever after that God has already written into the story of your life.
 9. The next verse affirms exactly that:
- B. *17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, (2 Corinthians 4:17, NKJV).*
1. The catastrophes in this life make the glories in the next life that much sweeter!
 2. But there’s something in here that makes the whole thing work. There’s a responsibility that you have. There’s a choice that you have to make.
 3. It’s in the phrase—yet our inward man is being renewed day by day.
 4. What does that mean?
 5. How many times do you put gas in your car each week? Once, twice, maybe three times?
 6. Do you know that your inward life has a gas station?
 7. Every day, day by day, you stop for fuel. Day by day, you renew your inward life.
 8. That gas station is called **DISCIPLESHIP**.
 9. Last week, my beloved Bears lost to our nemesis, the Green Bay Packers. Congrats to Packers’ fans; I’m happy for you, because I know you don’t have anything else to cling to.
 10. I noticed that every single player was suited up. Every single player had a helmet and shoulder pads. They knew they were going to take a hit.
 11. What if Jay Cutler had trotted out onto the field in a t-shirt and jeans, no padding?
 12. He’d have been wiped out in the first play, instead of the second quarter.
 13. Here’s what I’m saying: **DISCIPLESHIP IS HOW YOU SUIT UP FOR THE DAILY CATASTROPHES OF LIFE.**
 - a) Ignore discipleship, and you get wiped out.
 - b) Embrace discipleship, and you still get hit, but you get up.

(1) 8 We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed (2 Corinthians 4:8, 9, NKJV).
 14. Your inward person, your spirit, your bond with God—that has to be nurtured day by day, renewed day by day.

IV. So what?

- A. Bottom line: everyone gets pounded, but not everyone gives up hope. And the supreme game changer is whether or not you set your life on a path of discipleship.
- B. What is a disciple?
- C. A disciple is a person who does four things:
 1. A disciple trusts.
 2. A disciple obeys.
 3. A disciple gives.
 - a) Those three we talked about already. Here’s the last one:
 4. A disciple loves.
- D. Love is the acid test: mature love, virtue love. It’s like the roofing on a new house. It covers everything else. It’s the end of a long process, from the foundation up.
- E. A disciple loves.
- F. Just look at Jesus. He was persecuted. He was impoverished. He was slandered. He was misunderstood. He was hated, attacked, arrested, falsely convicted, and killed.
- G. Nothing stopped His love.
 1. When His own people rejected Him, He had compassion on them.
 2. When one of His best friends betrayed Him three times, Jesus redeemed him.
 3. When His enemies nailed Him to the Cross, Jesus forgave them.
 - a) He never let the chaos become an excuse to fail to love.
- H. What about you?
 1. Is there time in your life for love?
 2. Is there a tender heart beating in your chest?
 - a) When you gear your life toward Jesus, He puts His own love in your heart. It’s a supernatural love. It’s the love of Christ, built into your heart.
- I. Everybody loves in different ways. Some people hug, others are happy with a handshake. Some love through giving, others love through doing. Some love through talking, others through listening. Some love when they get quiet and just pitch in. Others love when they spill out words and stories and prayers and affections.

- J. Everybody is different.
- K. It's all good.
1. Love means desiring another person's good.
 2. Love means putting the best interpretation on another person's words and actions, for as long as you possibly can.
 3. Love means building up another person's honor and dignity and worth.
 4. Love means never tearing down, especially behind another person's back.
 5. Love means saying the hard truth, sometimes, like Simon used to do on American Idol, but saying it in a way that can be received.
 6. Love means persevering through hardship, and still blessing other people anyway.
- L. Biblical love is not for the faint of heart; not for spiritual babies.
- M. It is for disciples who have suited up for battle.
1. *11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things (1 Corinthians 13:11, NKJV).*
 - a) A mature love NEVER fails—even if the big, bad wolf is about to take a bite out of you.
- V. What the world needs.
- A. Do you know what our city needs to see?
 - B. You trusting, obeying, giving, and loving.
 - C. And not just doing those four things, but doing them in the middle of your catastrophe.
 - D. And you can do it. You can get there. You can seize the life you were meant to live.
 - E. You can because God will help you. God will enable you.
- VI. What does a disciple do?
- A. A disciple trusts. A disciple obeys. A disciple gives. A disciple loves. Come hell or high water.
- VII. And what does a disciple need to do these things?
- A. You need to build four habits into your life:
 1. The Word
 2. Prayer
 3. Community (fellowship)
 - a) And today we add the last one:
 4. Witnessing/Outreach
 - a) *8 "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8, NKJV).*
 - B. I am here today because somebody told me about Jesus. Somebody loved me. Somebody cared for me. Somebody answered my questions, and put up with my obnoxiousness. Somebody loved me all the way into the family of God.
 - C. I think it would be an amazing thing to fly up to heaven, and to trace out every step it took for God to bring you face to face with Jesus. Every sacrifice somebody made. Every gift somebody gave. Every prayer somebody prayed.
 - D. Aren't you glad for the people who introduced you to Jesus?
 - E. Did they have perfect lives?
 - F. Did they have trouble-free lives?
 - G. No, and yet they loved you enough to tell you about Jesus.
 - H. When I was a kid, every year, my church talked about missionaries. We had a special missionary emphasis week, and a guest missionary would come and preach.
 - I. My favorite missionary was from South America. He was a missionary to remote tribes, where there was no electricity, no telephone, no internet, and travel had to happen by dugout canoe. His name was Charlie Ross.
 - J. I loved hearing from Charlie Ross. He brought all kinds of spears and shields and cool stuff to put on the stage.
 - K. Charlie talked about living in a mud hut. He wore these tall rubber boots. I remember that he would take off a boot, and explain that every morning, before he put on his boots, he would tip them upside down, and shake them, and whack them, and knock on them. That way, all the scorpions and snakes would fall out before he stuck his foot in there.
 - L. I thought that was so cool
 - M. But the coolest thing was his snake skin. Charlie brought a 22 foot long skin of a python. He would ask for a volunteer, and my little 9-year old hand would shoot up, and I'd wave, and beg—pick me, pick me.
 - N. And one time he did—Charlie brought me up on stage, and wrapped the snake skin around me, and explained how a python would crush its prey, and eat it in one big bite.
 - O. I thought that was cool, too.
 - P. But you know what is coolest of all?
 - Q. There will be people in heaven because of Charlie Ross.
 1. People whose lives were first totally transformed on earth because they encountered a man whose whole life pointed to a Savior.
 - a) Even with trials.
 - b) Even with deprivations.
 - c) Even with chaos and calamity and catastrophe.
 - R. I used to think that a missionary was a person like Charlie Ross who fought against pythons to tell people about Jesus. Now I know better. A missionary is actually you and me and every follower of Jesus whose life points to Jesus. It's that simple.
 1. Everybody's life points to something.
 - a) Does your life point to Jesus?
 - b) A disciple loves, but love is not enough. We are His witnesses!
 - c) How much does your life point to Jesus?
 - S. Really, I'm asking you to think about it. Does your life point to Jesus?

- T. You need this; you need to be a witness, because it's why God created you—to point back to Him. He is ultimate reality. God is your ultimate reality check. When you point to Him, you are attuned to reality. When you fail to point to Him, you are attuned to unreality—one is sanity and the other is insanity.
- U. When I was 8 years old, I knew that God wanted me to serve Him somehow. I was either going to be a missionary or a pastor. My journey took me in this direction.
- V. But I still see myself as a missionary—in an alien land that doesn't do deep-dish pizza.
- W. Does your subdivision have a missionary? Does your college classroom have a missionary? Does your store, your office, your branch of the family tree have a missionary?
- X. How about you?
- Y. They don't need you to be a know-it-all. They don't need you to cram Jesus down their throats. They don't need you to act like your problems don't weigh you down. They don't need you to have every answer. They don't need you to be perfect.
- Z. They just need you to point.
- AA. They just need to see you trust, obey, give, and love through the power of Jesus living through you.
- BB. You need to be a witness, to be a disciple, to be like your Master.

VIII. Conclusion

- A. There's a great scene at the end of the Bible's story. It's a prophecy. It hasn't happened yet. It happens at the end of time.
- B. There's going to be an awesome moment in heaven. It will be Jesus' coronation day. The only crown He wore on earth was a crown of thorns. But one day, God will crown Him King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
- C. The angels will be there, shining, and cheering, and singing, and celebrating.
- D. God will be there, smiling, and laughing, and honoring His Son.
- E. The devil and his angels will be there, cowering, and fuming, and hating, and resenting.
- F. And you will be there—God's own son, God's own daughter. And so will every person you helped influence to Jesus.
 - 1. *9 And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, 10 And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:9, 10, NKJV).*
- G. Every life has a story.
- H. And every story has conflict.
- I. But if you have Jesus, you have a happily ever after guaranteed. Don't you want your friends to share in it?
- J. Do you know why people are there from every tribe and tongue and people and nation?
- K. Because of disciples.
 - 1. God, help us to turn consumers into disciples.
 - 2. God, help us to turn crowds into disciples.
 - 3. God, help us to turn rookies into veterans, to bring a happily ever after into every family and home and workplace in our city.
 - 4. God, help us be disciples.