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**DAILY  
BIBLE  
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

# When Struggling is Okay.

Monday, April 24, 2017

It's no secret that our country loves superhero-themed movies. They are, time and time again, some of the highest grossing movies at the box office. These movies rake in billions of dollars world-wide time after time. Why do we have such a fascination with superhero stories?

There are probably endless answers to this question, however, when we examine most these superhero stories, we see a theme.

Some sort of out-of-the-ordinary event happens to a regular person (radioactive spider bites Peter Parker, the military does an experiment on Steve Rogers, Bruce Wayne's parents are gunned down by a robber, etc.) and after the event, they do extraordinary things.

Part of what draws us en masse to these stories is that the heroes typically start out as normal people. These normal people struggle with being bullied (Peter Parker) or not having the right physicality to join the military. We identify with some of the struggles they have as normal people and as we follow the story, part of us wishes that we could conquer our struggles the way that they do. What we don't realize, however, is that in our lives, and in our relationship with Christ, we are offered a similar choice that these superheroes are offered. Unfortunately, we typically miss it.

This weekend, we kicked off a new series, *Heroic*, in which we are going to talk about how we need to identify the villains in our lives in order to live the life God has for us.

We all struggle with something and our struggles are very real. However, if we simply accept the fact that we're struggling, we'll find ourselves stuck in a never-ending cycle of struggle. This is not how we were meant to live. This is not how we experience love, joy, and peace.

How do we solve this problem? What is the antidote? First, we must admit that the struggle is real. Everyone struggles, but not everyone admits it. Instead, we'd rather live hypocritically than authentically. Essentially, this is when you do everything you can to convince everyone around you that everything is alright and that you're living a God-honoring life, even when you know that your secret practices reveal the opposite. Hypocrisy isn't when you say one thing and do another. Instead, it is when you pretend to live one way and actually live another.

All of us know that we want to live God-honoring lives. We want God to produce the fruit of the spirit that he promises. For some reason, however, we find

ourselves stuck in a rut. We want to do good things to honor God, but we find ourselves living a different way.

So what do we do? How do we fix this problem?

We have to know that however this problem manifests itself (whether it be lust, anger, greed, bitterness, idolatry, etc.), the sinful action in which we are engaging isn't the real problem. As Ben said this past weekend,

***The struggle is not the villain.***

Just like the superheroes in some of our favorite movies, the mere fact that we are struggling with something is not the real issue. The real issue is something deeper. Like a runny nose is a symptom of a cold virus, our outward struggles are symptoms of a different virus.

How do we identify the real villain? If it's not, ultimately, the struggle, then what is it?

Ben gave us a technique to help us identify our villains this past weekend: Ask why five times. When we know that we're struggling - when there's something we are doing that doesn't align with our claimed faith - then we need to ask why five times. When we ask ourselves why, we are getting to the root of the issue. We are identifying the real villain.

Today, we're going to take a look at two verses from Paul's letter to the Galatians. Often, we can read right through a passage and not take time to reflect on it. However, sometimes the answers to some of our deepest issues are contained in just a verse or two. Before you read these verses, take time to pray to God and ask him to bless the reading of his word.

**Prayer:** *Father, help me to understand your word today. Give me the wisdom, humility, and intellect I need to take in the verses before me. Finally, help me to live them out today. I ask all of this in the name of Jesus, amen.*

### **Galatians 5:16, 24**

<sup>16</sup>So, I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves.

<sup>24</sup>Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there.

What is Paul's answer to our problem of living a sort of "double life?"

Though listed later, the first thing we need to do is found in verse 24. We are called to “nail the passions and desires of [our] sinful nature to [Jesus’] cross.”

We do this by bringing our villains to the light. When we ask why five times, we can identify the real villain, and once we do that, we can then bring it into the light. When this happens, the Holy Spirit produces the fruit we desire. He then guides us into a life that is consistent and non-hypocritical. The heroic choice we can make is to identify the villain.

In verse 16, he writes that we need to “let the Holy Spirit guide our lives.”

Let’s first start by **having** the Holy Spirit. Only believers in Jesus Christ have the Holy Spirit. We aren’t peaceful, patient, loving, merciful, or caring enough, because we aren’t letting the Holy Spirit produce these things. The life we’re pretending to live isn’t the life that we’re really living and we just feel stuck. This is why we need the Holy Spirit. It is **his** job to produce these things in our lives, it is **our** job to yield to him so that he can do his work. The first step in living the life that God wants for you is to know the struggle is real, so you can identify the real villain and bring it to the light.

*To live the life God wants for you, you need to bring your villains to the light. What is a villain that you have been trying to hide?*

*Confession is a gift God gives us, but we have to use it. Is there someone you trust enough to confess your struggles? Confess them to God first and, if it helps, confide in one other person.*

**Prayer:** *God, you know my struggles. You know the weight that I’ve carried secretly. Please, help me to identify the real villains in my life and bring them to the light so that I can live the life you have for me. I ask all this in Jesus’ name, amen.*

# Can We Have Superpowers?

Tuesday, April 25, 2017

Over the past several decades, the superhero movie genre has grown into a box office juggernaut. Beginning with Christopher Reeve's portrayal of Superman in 1978, audiences have flocked to movie theaters through the years to experience the adventures of characters such as Spider-Man, Batman, Iron Man, and Captain America.

From the Avengers to the X-Men, these characters and their stories have struck a popular chord with moviegoers. But what is it that makes these characters and stories so compelling to so many?

On some level, I believe we enjoy witnessing characters – bestowed with strengths we can only dream of – fighting for good in a quest to emphatically defeat the forces of evil. It's inherently satisfying to see the villain get his comeuppance in dramatic fashion.

When we think of these superheroes on the silver screen, the first images that typically come to mind involve their superpowers: superhuman strength, lightning-fast speed, and the ability to fly, spring razor-sharp claws, or sling webs from their wrists.

What many of us may not appreciate is that we too have access to superpowers as we wrestle with our own villains. Now before you scoff at this suggestion, consider Galatians 5:22-23, which speaks to the qualities produced by the Holy Spirit. Among these fruits are love, joy, patience, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Have you ever considered these attributes as *superpowers*? Strange as it may seem, I believe there is great *power* wrapped within the beauty that love, goodness, faithfulness, and the other attributes of the Holy Spirit represent. When we walk with the Spirit, we are endowed with superpowers that strengthen our minds and steel our souls, creating a powerful weapon against the villains of sin in our lives.

Of course, real life is rarely as dramatic as the tales depicted at the cinema, but the villains in our lives are real, and every bit as dangerous. In kicking off the Heroic series, lead pastor Ben Snyder spoke of how we all struggle with villains in our lives. But within every struggle, he noted, is an opportunity – an invitation – to be heroic.

In Galatians 5:16-18, we read about the warring desires of our sinful nature and the Spirit:

## **Galatians 5:16-18**

<sup>16</sup>So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. <sup>17</sup>The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. <sup>18</sup>But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses.

When we follow our sinful nature, rather than the Holy Spirit, the inner villains gain a foothold. These villains, which are as considerable as they are varied, include anger, jealousy, selfish ambition, lust, immorality, and other sins (Galatians 5:19-21).

But the Holy Spirit offers us invaluable help – superpowers, if you will – to contend with these villains.

In his commentary on Galatians, pastor and author David Guzik says, “There is no way anyone can fulfill the lust of the flesh as they walk in the Spirit. The two simply don't go together. The Holy Spirit doesn't move in us to gratify our fallen desires and passions, but to teach us about Jesus and to guide us in the path of Jesus. This is the key to righteous living – walking in the Spirit, not living under the domination of the law.”

There are a couple of distinctions here that are worthy of our consideration. First, the “lust of the flesh” extends beyond mere carnal lust. As Martin Luther wrote, the lust of the flesh “takes in all the corrupt desires with which the believers are more or less infected, as pride, hatred, covetousness, (and) impatience.”

The second distinction to consider is how vital it is to live in the Spirit, rather than simply obeying the law of Moses. New Testament scholar Kenneth Wuest wrote, “The Holy Spirit strove with men before the Mosaic law was given. He still continues to do so ... no preacher ever enables the Christians to whom he ministers to live a better Christian life by putting them under the Ten Words from Sinai and by letting them smell the brimstone of the Lake of Fire.”

The mistake we can make, Wuest suggests, is in substituting Mosaic law for the restraint of the Holy Spirit. “A policeman on the street corner is a far more efficient deterrent of law-breaking than any number of city ordinances placarded for public notice,” he concludes.

We may not often feel “heroic,” particularly when considering our susceptibility to sin. But allowing the Holy Spirit to guide our lives provides the confidence to bring our villains into the light and the strength to contend with them from the front foot.

In a cruel twist of fate, actor Christopher Reeve, who famously portrayed Superman, suffered a catastrophic spinal injury in 1995. The debilitating nature of the injury, which left him paralyzed from the neck down, provided a stark and sad contrast to the hero he had once portrayed. After the accident, Reeve reasoned that his life, though forever changed, had been spared because God still had something for him to do. Indeed, he became an inspirational and influential advocate for spinal cord injury research.

By virtue of playing Superman, Reeve had often been asked about his definition of a hero. Before his injury, he commonly responded by saying that a hero was “someone who commits a courageous action without considering the consequences.” With this newfound perspective of life after his injury, he significantly altered his definition of a hero. “I think a hero is an ordinary individual who finds strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles,” he said.

When we attempt to live life on our own terms, or worse yet to follow our sinful nature, our villains can represent overwhelming obstacles. But when we embrace – and walk in – the Holy Spirit, we are effectively donning our cape, which wraps us in the powers to combat the villains of sin. And in doing so, we can indeed become heroic.

*What does it look like to let the Holy Spirit guide your life?*

*What villains do you need to bring into the light?*

*How can we enable the Spirit to give us the desire to do as he wants?*

### **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, I thank you for the abundant love and other gifts you have bestowed on me. I pray that you grant me the wisdom to appreciate the fruits of the Holy Spirit, to recognize the powers they represent in battling the villains in my life, and to know that by walking with you, I am on the path to living a righteous life. Amen.

This post was written by Todd Romain, a regular contributor to and editor of the LivingItOut Bible Study.

# The Kingdom of God: How We Miss Out.

Wednesday, April 26, 2017

When thinking about our sins and evaluating our areas of struggle, we often focus on the actual act of sin. Usually, we concentrate on a particular sin and take steps to rid ourselves of the habit. These are good things. It's healthy to reflect on the not-so-Christ-like areas of our lives so we can make adjustments and change our circumstances to avoid temptation for our particular problem areas. But we should recognize, too that the real villain here isn't our sin. Our sins are merely a symptom of the villain inside that is keeping us from living in the Kingdom of God. With each temptation to sin, we can give in to our villainous, sinful nature, or we can use the opportunity to be heroic and allow the Holy Spirit to produce fruit in our lives. The way we produce fruit is by attacking the things that are causing our "symptoms."

Because of Jesus' sacrifice, we no longer have to abide by the Old Testament laws. We have the Holy Spirit to guide us, and the gift of grace through Jesus. But this isn't a free pass to go on sinning. If we put God first and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us, the rest will fall into place.

## **Galatians 19-21**

<sup>19</sup>When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, <sup>20</sup>idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, <sup>21</sup>envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Paul tells us in the verses above what results from following our sinful desires. Someone living this sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God, not because of the things they're doing, but because of a greater problem: not submitting to and trusting God. Simply put, the Kingdom of God is a spiritual rule over the hearts and lives of people who submit to God's authority. It is those who gladly surrender to God's rule who are part of the Kingdom of God. If we are still holding onto our sins, we are not surrendering to God. We need to trust God and attack the negative things. Then the Holy Spirit can produce fruit in our lives and we can become full of joy and peace.

What sin(s) came to mind as you read today's study? Are you willing to submit to God and give up this sin?

How might you rid yourself of this sinful desire?



What fruit do you see coming from being heroic, stepping away from this sin and allowing the Holy Spirit to work?

**Prayer:**

Dear God, help me to allow the Holy Spirit to work in me. Help me to run from sin and eliminate temptations from my life. Thank you for giving us the Holy Spirit to guide us, and grace for when we fail to listen. Amen.

# The Holy Spirit: The Mentor of the Christian.

Thursday, April 27, 2017

Have you ever wanted to be good at something? I mean *really* good. Let's say you wanted to excel at a sport, a musical instrument, or a profession. Seeking out an experienced coach, teacher, or mentor would be a great place to start in acquiring the skills to perfect your craft.

Such a mentor would be able to show you the ins and outs of becoming proficient at your chosen activity. They could challenge you and show you skills to practice to become a true master. But what would you have to do? You would have to put in the work to become skilled. You would have to actually do what your teacher or coach told you to do. You would ask questions, research answers, and put into practice what you learned. You may have to do the same things over and over again until they become second nature. You would meet regularly with and listen to your coach. You would have to imitate your mentor and follow their lead if you wanted to develop the skills and attributes in you that you sought to perfect.

That is the message of today's scripture. If we try to go about our own way of creating godly qualities in our lives, we will fall flat on our faces. Likewise, we will fail if we feel everything depends *on our own efforts*. Today's scripture tells us that only the Holy Spirit can develop godly qualities in us. However, it also tells us to live by the Spirit and follow his leading. We can only do that if we meet with him regularly in prayer, study his teachings in the Bible daily, and imitate his personal qualities. Living in the Spirit means sticking close by God, imitating him, learning about him through his word and connecting with him regularly.

A great teacher can only help you excel if you fully give yourself over to his or her program or method of teaching. You may feel you know better than your mentor at times, but you are not the expert. They are. Likewise, we need to fully commit and yield our wills to God's plans. Just as a great teacher cannot impart his or her qualities upon us if we only have a half-hearted commitment, God requires that we go "all in." Only then will he bring about the godly qualities that signify a true follower of Christ. Is our stubbornness or self-will holding us back from God producing his qualities in us? Do we need to give up the reins and allow him to lead? I guess that depends on how badly we want his finished product in our lives.

## **Galatians 5:22-26**

<sup>22</sup>But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

<sup>24</sup>Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. <sup>25</sup>Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. <sup>26</sup>Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another.

What do you think Paul means when he writes, "there is no law" against the fruits listed in verse 22?

What does it mean that those who follow Christ have nailed the characteristics of their sinful nature to the cross and crucified those attributes?

What does it mean to "follow the Spirit's leading"?

### **Prayer**

Let God know how grateful you are for giving us access to his Spirit. Ask God to help you understand what he is trying to tell you through the above Scripture passage. Ask him to show you where you are blocking the Holy Spirit and pray for the wisdom and strength to yield your *whole* will to his.

# Weeding the Heart's Garden

Friday, April 28, 2017

Gardening season is upon us. I've already been out surveying the damage from both winter and the previous summer, when I could not give my vegetable garden the care and maintenance it needed. Weeds abound in the raised beds, and the wood is rotting away as the decomposers God has created are doing their work. It's not a pretty sight and very disheartening. The problems in my garden are very apparent, and with time and effort, I will work with my husband to pull out the plants I did not plant, repair or replace the disintegrating wood, and attempt to restore order to this little corner of my life. In some places, it is apparent that there is chaos and disorder; however, there are also places where the problems are not so visible.

Every Sunday I can dress myself and my family for church in our best clothes. I can brush their hair, pack them all into my sparkling mini-van, arrive at church right on time, and deliver them to their respective classrooms. I can smile at the greeters, sing out worship songs, and clap my hands. I can look great on the outside yet be a hot angry mess on the inside. Sin can be rotting away my insides. The greeters cannot see the angry words that erupted from my mouth when the kids did not wash their hands after using the bathroom or before dinner. They cannot see the bitterness lurking beneath the surface when you see someone who has the life you always dreamed of. Sin is like that: it's easy to hide, but far more destructive to our hearts than the weeds and rotting wood are to my garden.

In today's passage Jesus is speaking to this issue. His disciples had just been accused of breaking the laws created by the religious leaders. Apparently, they thought it was good to wash their hands before they ate, too. Jesus was quick to point out that while his disciples may have broken man's laws, the Pharisees were breaking God's laws. He made them angry and it bothered his disciples. They wondered why Jesus would intentionally upset the religious leaders of their time. He got frustrated with their lack of understanding and reminded them that it's what is *inside* a person that matters. We can hide a multitude of sins, but Jesus can see it all. He could see that, inside, the Pharisees did not care about what the law really said. They were more concerned with upholding the laws they'd created. They wanted to look good outside for the world to see and would do whatever it took to maintain their image.

We are often like the Pharisees. We maintain an image that the world respects and upholds but are unwilling to allow Jesus access to our hearts, to see the sins that lurk in the hidden places of our souls. We don't want to deal with the mess of our hearts; don't want to deal with the anger that is simmering beneath the surface, which causes us to explode at those whom we love; or the greed that

causes us to work long hours, ignoring our families to obtain the newest car or hottest thing. Our hearts are dirty places and can only be cleansed when we allow Jesus access to all of the dark crevices. What is in your heart that you need to bring into the light that Jesus provides?

### **Matthew 15:10-20**

<sup>10</sup>Then Jesus called to the crowd to come and hear. “Listen,” he said, “and try to understand. <sup>11</sup>It’s not what goes into your mouth that defiles you; you are defiled by the words that come out of your mouth.”

<sup>12</sup>Then the disciples came to him and asked, “Do you realize you offended the Pharisees by what you just said?”

<sup>13</sup>Jesus replied, “Every plant not planted by my heavenly Father will be uprooted, <sup>14</sup>so ignore them. They are blind guides leading the blind, and if one blind person guides another, they will both fall into a ditch.”

<sup>15</sup>Then Peter said to Jesus, “Explain to us the parable that says people aren’t defiled by what they eat.”

<sup>16</sup>“Don’t you understand yet?” Jesus asked. <sup>17</sup>“Anything you eat passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer. <sup>18</sup>But the words you speak come from the heart—that’s what defiles you. <sup>19</sup>For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander. <sup>20</sup>These are what defile you. Eating with unwashed hands will never defile you.”

Why do you think the disciples were concerned with how the Pharisees felt?

Jesus was referring to the Pharisees when he was speaking about the plants that were going to be uprooted. Their traditions and rules were not implemented by the Father. Are there any areas of your life that you have allowed to grow that were not planted by the Father?

Think about an area of your life that causes you to sin. Is it a harsh tongue, a prideful spirit, lust, envy? What does this sin say about what is inside your heart? What do you need to do to allow this sin to be transformed by Jesus?

### **Prayer:**

Ask God to reveal areas of your heart that are causing you to sin. Pray for clear direction on how to address this sin and move toward purity of heart. Thank God that he is always willing to help you overcome sin and gives you the strength to defeat temptation.

This post was written by Julie Mabus, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.