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SERIES: CHRISTMAS: HOPE IS BORN
PART 1: HOPE WHEN YOU FEEL DEFEATED

I want to discuss with you today, “How to experience God’s hope when you’re feeling defeated.” We’re looking at hope during this season of the year for a very important reason. There is something about the Christmas season that tends to turn up the volume on whatever’s going on in our lives. Notice that? If things are going good, the Christmas season makes it just that much better. You’ve got a new baby, new grandchild, maybe a new house, a new job. It turns up the volume on that and makes it seem even better.

But if things are going tough, it can turn up the volume on your pain. I don’t want any of you to go through that this Christmas. I’m talking about both the little defeats and the major defeats of life that all of us face at different times in our lives.

If you want a definition of major defeat, the major feeling of **defeat is when you’ve given your all, and it’s not enough.** We can especially feel that during the Christmas season. You’ve given your all to a marriage and it wasn’t enough for the marriage to work. It’s a major feeling of defeat. Or you’ve given your all to a child, and it wasn’t enough. You’re still not connecting. You’ve given your all to a job, but it didn’t work out, and you’re facing this Christmas without a job. Or you’ve given your all to making a change in your life. And you’re facing the end of one more year, and you’re looking back and thinking, I didn’t change like I wanted to at all. So you have this sense of major defeat in life. We’ve got to find out what God’s answers are for those feelings.

Whether it’s little or whether it’s major, Jesus Christ has an answer. Jesus knew that we’d face little defeats. He knew that we’d face major defeats. So here’s what He said about it. John 16:33, “**Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.**” Trouble’s going to be a part of our lives for a lot of reasons. Because you do wrong things and make bad choices and that brings trouble in your life, or

other people around you do wrong things, make bad choices and that brings trouble in your life.

And you're going to face defeat because you have an enemy. The Bible says satan is our enemy. He's working for our defeat, so we're going to face some defeat in this world.

Jesus said it's going to happen. But that's not the end of the story. The end of the story is you can have hope, because Jesus says, "I have defeated this world." Things that happen to us in this world do not have to have the last word in your heart. Jesus says that He wants to have the last word in your life.

So we're going to look today at how Jesus Christ can help us live a life of hope. He was born into the world to bring us this message. During this Christmas Season there are...

Two action steps to take to experience God's hope when you feel defeated:

I. Decide to let hope define you—and not defeat

When you start to feel defeated during this incredible season, you can take charge over those things and circumstances that are meant to cause you to feel defeated.

A. Two keys that determine when you're letting defeat define who you are:

1) When you are thinking and talking negatively to yourself

You know the easiest way to see if you're letting your defeats start to define you? In what you say to yourself: "I am such a loser. I'm stupid. I am so careless." And so on. Some of the ugliest words that some of us ever speak are the words that we speak to ourselves under our breath. When you're saying those things all the time, it's an indication that you're letting the defeats

begin to define you in what you call yourself. I know some of you are thinking, “That’s how I motivate myself! By saying those things to myself.” How’s it working? Is it really that motivational? It doesn’t make you feel better about life, does it? It doesn’t help you trust Jesus with the issues you’re facing. It usually makes you feel irritated and even angry—not only at life and yourself, but also at the other people around you. It just doesn’t work. And it’s an indication that you’re letting your defeats begin to define you.

2) When you allow yourself to live separate from others

Another indication is when you start to hide out from people. When you start to say, I’m just going to be back here, apart from life. I feel defeated. It’s Christmas party—pity party—Christmas party—pity party and you choose the pity party. You know what a pity party is. It’s when you’re consumed with yourself, and you refuse to let the hope and joy of Jesus be your comfort and guide, and you cut yourself off from those brothers and sisters who can tell you the truth.

I have no idea how you’re feeling about yourself right now. I do not know that. But I do know what God says about you. However you happen to feel about yourself as you walked into worship today, God says this about us. Look at what Paul says about how it is God’s hope that gives him a different perspective on defeat. Romans 8:35-39, **“Can anything ever separate us from Christ’s love? Does it mean He no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? ³⁶(As the Scriptures say, ‘For Your sake we are killed every day, we are being slaughtered like sheep.’) ³⁷No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. ³⁸And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. ³⁹No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** Paul cries out that nothing can ever defeat us or separate us from

God's love that has been revealed in His Son Jesus Christ. This is what Christmas is all about. Don't let defeat define you.

How do you combat defeat?

B. Choose to let God's love define you

You are not defined by your defeats; you and I are defined by the God who made us, who loves us. So build your sense of self-worth on who God says you are. Not on your circumstances. Not on your job. Not even on your relationships. Build it on who God says you are.

The first Christmas, Mary needed a message from an angel. She was going to bare a baby who was going to be named Jesus. It was going to be a virgin birth. There were a lot of things the angel needed to explain. But before explaining any of those things the angel helped Mary to see who she was in God's sight. Luke 1:28, **"The angel went to Mary and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favored. The Lord is with you.'"** Those words, "highly favored," are the kind of words that would be used of a king in that day. Mary had to think when the angel is saying this to her, "Who me?" She had no idea how God was going to use her. She had no idea what God wanted to do through her life. The words didn't sound right. They didn't sound like they fit. But they did.

What does God say about you? Please read with me out loud Ephesians 1:4-8, **"Even before He made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in His eyes. ⁵God decided in advance to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. This is what He wanted to do, and it gave Him great pleasure. ⁶So we praise God for the glorious grace He has poured out on us who belong to His dear Son. ⁷He is so rich in kindness and grace that He purchased our freedom with the blood of His Son and forgave our sins. ⁸He has showered His kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding."**

You want to know what God says about you? God says, “You are of immeasurable worth to Me. You are My son. You are My daughter.” It doesn’t matter whether you have a great job right now, or you don’t like the job you have right now. You’re employed or you’re unemployed. You’re financially well off or you’re struggling. Whether you’re single or married. Whether you’re getting good grades or bad grades. Whether you’re healthy or sick or you’re feeling valued. Whether you’re feeling on top of the world or feeling defeated by the world God says, “I love you. You have no idea how valuable you are to Me.”

That’s the truth that God tells us in the Word. That’s why Jesus came into this world to give us the good news of how much God loves us. Many of us, we’ve got this little problem. God says these things about us. But there are other people who’ve said things about us. We’ve got this long list of people. Some of them are very important to us. Parents and brothers and sisters and people we’ve worked with, friends. They’ve put up their own set of labels—their own price tags on our lives. Essentially they’ve taken our lives and they’ve sprayed graffiti—ugly words on our lives. Some of the cruel words people have said—you’re still living with today.

So how do you get through the graffiti to see what God has said? When it comes to graffiti, they now have this stuff called Vandal Guard or All Remove. You use it to coat a wall so that if somebody comes and sprays graffiti on it, it doesn’t stick. You can easily come and wipe it right off. We need that for our hearts. We need that for our lives. There are going to be people in all of our lives that try to spray their idea, their ugliness, even their hatred—it’s their own hurt, their own pain—and they try to spray that on our lives. You and I need something powerful enough to make it so that that doesn’t stick.

The only thing that is powerful enough is the awesome love that God has for you. When you and I accept His love it is like Vandal Guard to our hearts. Yes, people will say things. Yes, it will hurt. But you have the ability to wipe it off and see the true, real way God feels about you. That’s powerful enough to trump anything.

The Bible says this in 2 Corinthians 5:17, **“This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!”** I know it’s a lot easier to remember the negative than the positive. When it comes to this question of what you and I are allowing to define us, it’s not always easy. It has to be worked through sometimes.

C. Two questions to ask yourself on who might be influencing how you define yourself:

1) Who am I listening to?

If you want to allow God’s love to begin to define you rather than your defeats--or what other people are saying about you to define you--then the first question you have to ask is, who am I listening to? If you listen to negative people, then you’re going to feel negative. If you flood your mind with negative thoughts, you’re going to feel negative. But if you listen to what God has to say about you, you’re going to be lifted up. That is why the Bible is so important. As you spend time studying, memorizing and reflecting on God’s Word, you can choose to accept what He says about you and not what other people say.

2) Who do I look to for approval?

That one is going to get tough. I know as we come to Christmas, some of you are thinking about being with some of your relatives. The truth of the matter is you just dread being with some of those relations. That can be for a lot of reasons. But, I’ll tell you one of the most powerful reasons. One of the most powerful reasons is you’re going to be with them one more time, hoping one more time that they’ll give some kind of approval, some kind of love that they’ve never given you (maybe it’s a mom, maybe it’s a dad, maybe it’s a brother or sister)—they’ve never said, “I love you,” they’ve never said, “I’m proud of you.” You’re hoping maybe this Christmas, it will be different. You go in with your hopes high, and you walk out once again and they didn’t give it to you. They didn’t give you the approval. What do you do? Some of us are so good at this. The relatives can be long gone and dead, but we still feel it when we go back home. It’s still there in our lives.

Here's the good news. You do not need their approval to live the kind of life that God wants you to live—because you have His approval. If I am looking to another person for approval, then they hold power over my life. But when I look to God for approval, then, all of a sudden, I am free to live the kind of life He made me to live. So you have to ask that question, “Who am I looking to for approval in my life?” Look to God. He's the One who made you. He's the One who sent Jesus into this world at Christmas to say, “I want you to get the message. I love you more than you could possibly imagine.”

The second element of living a life of Hope that allows us to live above a sense of defeat is to...

II. Choose to let defeat be an opportunity for transformation

There's a powerful verse in Romans 12 that describes how you are able to experience God's transforming power in your life on a daily basis. Please read this verse out loud with me, Romans 12:1-2, **“Dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all He has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind He will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship Him. ²Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.”**

Christians who struggle with a sense of defeat usually perceive the world through the lens of the culture. Paul says that true meaning and significance comes from living our lives from the perspective that our entire life is meant to be lived before God as an act of worship every day and not just for one hour on Sunday. We worship God by giving ourselves in sacrificial service to Jesus. Every aspect of our lives becomes spiritual, and, as an act of worship. One of the major ways each one of us can experience true transformation during this wonderful, full and busy season is to not get pressed into the mold of the values of our culture with greed, gluttony, tension, stress, anxiety, and worry. Notice Paul says let God transform you into a new person by changing the

way you think or by the renewing of your mind to how God thinks about things. When you learn to think and see the world the way God sees it, you begin to learn that God's will for you, His purposes and plans, are good, pleasing and perfect. They are not torturous, boring, mundane or manipulative. His will is good, pleasing, enjoyable, full of life and victory, and perfect.

The phrase, **“Then you will learn to know,”** is the Greek word dokimazein, which means that as you renew your mind to think according to God's word, the Bible, which means through your mind's renewal and the presentation of your life as a holy sacrifice to our Father, you can actually discern God's will. As you act on God's truth through a process of testing and examining God's Word, you will discover that God's will is good, pleasing and perfect. This gives us hope, loved ones—which is a life of joy.

That's what Christmas is all about. God came into the world to proclaim that. Luke 2:10-11, **“The shepherds were terrified, but the angel reassured them. ‘Don't be afraid!’ he said. ‘I bring you Good News that will bring great joy to all people. ¹¹The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!’”** Jesus Christ was born to die so that sin and satan do not have to have a stranglehold on us any longer. We have this assurance and hope that our sins have been forgiven, and the Holy Spirit lives in every one of us who have repented of our sins and have confessed Jesus as our Lord, and we're living our lives for His purpose and glory.

There are two actions you can take to choose to let possible defeat be an opportunity for transformation.

A. Change your perspective on how you view problems

“Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. ³For you know what then your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. ⁴So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing

nothing. ⁵If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and He will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking.” James 1:2-5

I have a tendency to want my troubles, trials, and problems to just magically go away. But what I—what we—have need of is to understand the reason Father God allows pain and problems in our lives. That is how He develops our trust and faith in Him. Notice James says the way God gives us hope for when we feel defeated is to first perceive the present problems and pains as opportunities for us to experience joy! Why? Because it is only when our faith is tested daily, and we successfully pass these tests, that endurance, patience and stamina can grow in our lives. Friends, the key to experiencing God’s hope is to know that, behind all the discomfort and pain, God is deep at work in us, developing our ability to never give up. If there is anything our culture needs right now—especially our children and young adults—it is the vision to see that inner spiritual strength is mandatory to live a life of hope, joy and love. Notice what Paul says is the foundation of maturity. What does maturity look like in a seasoned believer? Someone who gracefully goes through their problems, because they understand it is an opportunity to experience joy. They know that when their faith is tested, their patience and endurance are growing, and when our stamina is fully developed, we will lack nothing when the storms of life hit, because we have done our homework.

This is what Paul writes in Colossians 1:11-12a, **“We also pray that you will be strengthened with all His glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need. May you be filled with joy, ¹²always thanking the Father,...**” The truth is, friends, that life is difficult. Yet most Christians act as if they don’t understand this. Instead, they complain about the enormity of their problems and difficulties as if to shout, “I deserve a life of ease.” I resonate with what Dr. Scott Peck writes in his book, “The Road Less Travelled.” **“Life is a series of problems. Do we want to moan about them or solve them? Do we want to teach our children to solve them? Discipline is the basic set of tools we require to solve life’s problems. Without discipline we can solve nothing. With only some discipline we can solve only some problems. With total discipline we can solve all problems.”**

This is what God wants for each one of us this marvelous Christmas season. First, that you decide to let God's hope and trust in His love for you to define you. Secondly that you choose to let whatever could possibly try to ruin your celebration of Christ's rule and reign in your life this month be an opportunity for Jesus to work His transformation in your life by changing your perspective on problems to His perspective. This takes a decision and daily practice to count it joy when things go sideways, and then ask God for His wisdom, knowledge, discernment and insight.

B. Receive God's gift of joy

In John 16:20, Jesus is preparing His disciples for His death and resurrection, and He tells them, **"I tell you the truth, you will weep and grieve, but your grief will suddenly turn to wonderful joy."** What a beautiful gift Jesus offers us. To us, joy often means a life without defeat, without problems and difficulties. So, of course, we never experience joy, because that's not God's definition of joy. God says to us, "You will face defeat, problems and difficulties, but if you let Me go through them with you, and if you change your perspective so that you understand that these things come into your life so that you can learn to trust Me, down to the minutest detail, and know that I am working My character into your character, so that you will be mature and lack nothing, because your faith has grown strong in Me."

God gives you and me two action steps this morning to put into practice so that we can experience Hope and God's joy and love this marvelous Christmas season. How do you open God's gift of hope to you this Christmas season starting today? Decide to let God's hope and love define you—not your defeat, failure and sin. Reflect on how you're talking to yourself. Are you living in reconciled relationships? If not take action today to get make your relationships as right as you can. Choose to let God's love define you. Who might you be listening to, and who are you looking to for approval? Choose to let defeat be an opportunity for transformation. Change how you see problems from being a burden to being a blessing. Actively receive God's joy.

Some of you, I just invite you to pray this simple prayer, “Father, I would love for that joy that You talk about to be a part of my life. So I come to You and say, ‘I am willing to change. I’m willing to stop doing life my way and to choose Your way.’” You might even need to get specific. To say to Him, “This area, I’m willing to choose Your way.” I want to invite some of you to start a new relationship with Him today. Just simply say to Him, “God, I trust You to forgive me. To do for me what I can’t do for myself. Thank You that You sent Jesus to give His life so I can be forgiven. God, I’m willing to begin to learn to live. I want to live the life that You made me to live. Teach me how.”

“Jesus, we thank You together for the Good News. The Good News is that You didn’t send us into this world to live life all on our own. We are going to face troubles. We are going to face defeats in this life. But You want to be there with us, not only to comfort us, but to grow us and even transform us through the difficulties. Thank You, God, for Your love for us that overwhelms everything. It’s greater than anything we’re going to face or anything that we feel. Help us to sense Your love right now. We pray this in Your name, Jesus.”