
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

April 27, 2014

When We Struggle (*Location: Mount of Olives*)

“Jesus left and made His way to the Mount of Olives, as was His custom, and the disciples followed Him. He withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed. He said, ‘Father, if it’s Your will, take this cup of suffering away from Me. However, not My will but Your will must be done.’

Then a heavenly angel appeared to Him and strengthened Him.”

Luke 22: 39, 41-43 (Common English Bible)

Recently, this has become one of my favorite passages in the entire Bible. After thirty years of doing ministry, I expected that desiring and living by the will of God would come naturally. It has not. In fact, as I approach fifty-four years of age, the struggle of my will and God’s will has become more intense. It is some consolation that Jesus experiences the same struggle here on the Mount of Olives. Such was Jesus’ struggle that He asked that the suffering He faced be taken away. I need no further proof than this request that Jesus was, in fact, fully human as we are.

We all face individual moments of struggle. Some struggle with seeking a new way forward after a major life change such as the death of a loved one or divorce. Others struggle with inadequate financial resources. Still others struggle with poor health, estranged relationships with loved ones or any number of new disappointments that come all too regularly. To all of us, in these moments of struggle, the message of these few sentences is loud and clear: do not imagine that because life has suddenly become difficult that you have made a wrong decision, followed a poor pathway in life or arrived at the wrong place. The idea that faithful Christians always have days without struggle is simply a romantic misunderstanding of what it means to follow Jesus; following Jesus always leads to the Mount of Olives.

It is particularly comforting to know that it isn’t unusual to experience the struggle of our will and God’s will. The Apostle Paul once cried in utter despair that, *“I don’t do what I want to do. Instead, I do the thing that I hate.”* (Romans 7:15) Paul knows well the common struggle of self-will and God’s will. We are routinely betrayed by forces – within and without – that cause us to make decisions contrary to our desire to follow Jesus. In these moments, we may be tempted to abandon hope; to throw in the towel and give up the struggle.

In those moments, Jesus demonstrates an alternative to abandoning the struggle; Jesus invites us to prayer on the Mount of Olives. Jesus’ own prayer is a powerful witness to the difficulty of the struggle. Such struggle is too great to face alone. Our strength is not sufficient. In prayer, Jesus not only demonstrates His inadequacy to meet the challenge, Jesus’ prayer results in receiving uncommon strength from above. And Jesus wants us to know that if we share His struggle, we will also share in the power of God that gave Him strength. In those moments when we face a difficulty, when we struggle with what we want and what God wants for us, the Mount of Olives reminds us that the battle must be won on our knees.

Heavenly Father, as You met Your Son on the Mount of Olives and gave Him strength, I ask that You meet me now in my struggle. By the same power that Jesus received, help me to stand in the midst of difficulty and not be defeated. Amen.

Doug Hood

Reprinted from Dr. Hood’s April 24, 2014 blog.