Have you ever just had a bad day?

Tell story of jumping through the window as a six year old kid, bleeding everywhere. I had opened a vein on my left wrist and had a gusher on my right as well. My grandma wrapped my hands and wrists in two white towels wrapped around my arms which were completely soaked in blood by the time I got to the car….bloodying them up and then grandma can’t find the keyhole for the ignition of the car because she is so nervous?

We are facing crisis after crisis after crisis in this world. It’s hitting us like Paint ball…

* A Global Pandemic (worst epidemic since 1918 and the Spanish Flu which killed between 50-100 million people worldwide.
* An Anxiety Pandemic

We are living at a time of extreme anxiety and fear. Teenagers, especially high school seniors, are struggling now more than ever.

A [Pew Research Center survey](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/03/30/people-financially-affected-by-covid-19-outbreak-are-experiencing-more-psychological-distress-than-others/) conducted in late March found that people in your age category, more than any other is likely to experience high psychological distress when thinking about the outbreak.

Dr. Harold Koplewicz, an adolescent psychiatrist and President of the Child Mind Institute said this about high school seniors, “They are stressed now because of the lack of structure of school, missing big chunks of their lives—whether it’s dating, graduation, proms, classes—and there’s worry about their parents’ finances and there’s worry about everyone’s health,”

* + Many high school seniors especially are struggling with questions like,
		- Am I going to be able to get a job?
		- Are my parents going to be able to keep theirs?
		- Will my college of choice even be open in the Fall?
		- What if I get sick?
		- When will all this social distancing end?
		- Will life ever get back to normal?
	+ More and more teens are turning to alcohol, vaping, cutting, drugs to deal with the anxiety and it breaks my heart.
* An Anger Pandemic…take a look at the protests and riots that have happened in light of the George Floyd murder and you can see why so many people are angry! There is Black Lives Matter anger, Blue Lives matter anger and All Lives Matter anger.
* A Confusion Pandemic (how is the church supposed to respond to the pandemic and the protests…how can we simultaneously play our part in racial reconciliation, teenage discipleship and keeping everyone Corona free in the process….how can our youth ministry survive and then thrive in the midst of all of the ministry pivots necessary to do youth min in this new reality?)

How God uses crisis to do a great work in us and through us:

1. God gives us great comfort in the midst of our great hardships so that we can provide great comfort to others.

*“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”*

*“The words****all comfort****in this passage come from the ancient Greek word paraklesis. The idea behind this word for****comfort****in the New Testament is always more than soothing sympathy. It has the idea of strengthening, of helping, of making strong. The idea behind this word is communicated by the Latin word for****comfort****(fortis), which also means “brave.”* Pastor David Guzik

Think more personal trainer than therapist or counselor.

* Bench pressing without a spotter is dangerous (my incident at the gym with weights flying off.)
* Bench pressing with a spotter…The Spotter challenges you and, if you need to, helps you a bit to give you the maximum strength.

Isn’t it interesting that the Holy Spirit is called our comforter in John 15:26,

“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.”

The Holy Spirit is our spotter! And we spot for others!

How can we become better “spotters” for our staff, volunteers and for our teens, especially during this challenging time?

* I think of Raylyn who actually works at Dare 2 Share as is also a youth sponsor for my daughter Kailey. Raylyn is constantly checking on Kailey to see how she is doing. She is a great spotter for my 15 year old girl and many others! Emily who works at Dare 2 Share as well is a spotter for her. It reminds me of Titus 2:3-5 where Paul challenges to Timothy to have the older women pour into the lives of the younger women!

Discipleship is more than just the transference of information. It includes comforting, “strengthening, helping to make strong.” As the pressures of life come down on our teenagers we help them push against it. We don’t do all the work for them but challenge them to keep pushing in the power of the Spirit.

We are comforted by the Holy Spirit and we are used by the Holy Spirit to comfort others. He spots for us and we spot for others.

1. God allows us to go through great hardships (outwardly) that produce great pressure (internally) so they can produce great faith (upwardly.)

“***“****For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort,* ***which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer****.**And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort. We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters,[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+1%3A3-11&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28809a)*] about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself.* *Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.* *He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again.”* 2 Corinthians 1:8-10

* 1. Our external hardships help us experience the suffering of Christ.

“***“****For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.”* 2 Corinthians 1:8

Think of that, God allows us to get a taste of the sufferings of Christ so that we can experience the comfort of Christ!

I grew up doing manual labor. When I was 14 years old I had my first job as a custom hay hauler in the panhandle of Texas and then, for 8 years, I was a roofer. There’s something about doing manual labor that humbles you and makes you grateful for a little shade and a cold drink. I always wanted my son to experience the hardships of manual labor to make him better in life.

Since the time he was little we worked many weekends in the summer cleaning up an old deserted family farm that had been used as a dump. We would tear down buildings and throw stuff away. Over the course of time we filled 50 construction dumpsters full of junk. But the prize was this, my son learned how to work hard. Since then he has spent a summer moving rock, another summer roofing and now is building us a porch in our backyard…for a price of course.

A little back-breaking suffering is good for you. What’s true of my son is true of us.

* + 1. This suffering sanctifies our souls.

*“Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin.****2****As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.”* 1 Peter 4:1,2

Just like we take steel wool and use it to scrub off baked in food on our pots and pans, and just like it takes time and pressure to scrub away the stuff that’s really stuck to the insides of those pots and pans, suffering is the steel wool that God uses with time and pressure to cleanse us from sin.

I’ve seen this over years and years of grinding away at Dare 2 Share, always wanting to see more. Raising money and pushing hard to get more and more teens trained in evangelism. God has used all of that to make me more holy. He has scrubbed away a lot of arrogance and pride through this time but he has also making me more fit to be a vessel used by him.

I believe God is using the crisis we are facing in this nation, both with the pandemic and the protests to scrape away a lot of junk from our hearts.

* + 1. This suffering demonstrate our Gospel.

*“This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant. Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.”* Colossians 1:23,24

Our suffering, especially for preaching the Gospel, demonstrates Christ’s patient suffering to a watching world!

Have you ever wondered why one of the thieves on the cross changed his mind?

Matthew 27:44 both thieves on the cross hurled insults at Jesus at first, but after 6 hours of watching him suffer without retaliation one put their faith in Jesus. ? In Luke 23:39-43 one of them ended up believing in Jesus and Jesus said, “Today you will be with me in paradise?”

What changed his mind? Six hours of pure suffering with no cursing, retaliation or hatred…but with only forgiveness and love in his heart for his persecutors.

In the same way, Paul’s patient suffering was a witness to a watching world.

So is yours and mine!

Joni Erickson Tada…17 year old took a dive into a shallow pool and broke her neck….quadrapaletic…written books, done amazing artwork, started a global ministry, began a radio ministry….spoken at large conferences and evangelistic outreaches, including for Billy Graham…how many have come to Christ after watching her suffer and her attitude in it. Heaven only knows! Forty years and millions upon millions of people have been impacted by her testimony!

God uses our suffering to demonstrate the Gospel

* 1. Our internal pressure helps us live in utter dependency on Christ.

*“We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself.* *Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.*” 2 Corinthians 1:8,9

Commentary…we don’t know what he endured, but, whatever it was, he and his crew thought they were going to die…the sentence had been delivered and it was death!

 **Maybe you feel a sentence of death in your soul…**

* **The death of your ability to minister to teenagers because of Covid 19**
* **The death of a youth ministry budget (sadly, youth ministry budgets are often the first to be cut when church budgets shrink)**
* **The death of a dream…perhaps you thought that your youth ministry would be way stronger by this time in your ministry**

But God uses all of that to increase our reliance on him. Look again at the words of 2 Corinthians 1:9, “But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.”

I thank God for how he has used this pandemic to increase our faith in him. Almost every day I’ve had the opportunity to go on a prayer walk, asking God for wisdom to lead well during this time. Our President, Debbie Bresina, has turned up her prayer focus even more and has led our team to do the same. We came up with new value statements and the first one is “Pray Fiercely!”

Whatever you are going through, even if it feels like a sentence of death, is God working to make you rely even more on him, who raises the dead!

Firstly, God comforts us so that we can comfort others. He encourage them on as he, through his Holy Spirit encourages us on. He spots us so that we can spot others.

Then God uses the great hardships outwardly to create great pressure inwardly that builds in us a great faith upwardly…he makes us rely on him!

Finally,

1. God uses our great faith in Him to leverage a great movement for Him.

 *“On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.”* 2 Corinthians 1:10,11

Archimedes once said, "Give me a lever and a place to stand and I will move the earth."  While this might be a bit of an exaggeration, Archimedes clearly understood the power of the simple lever.

Show flat bar and explain…leverage…lever-age…the longer the leverage the more the power.

Faith is leverage. The bigger the faith the more the power.

* Use nail and board as an illustration

God strengthens us during this whole time. I’m going to read the whole passage from 2 Corinthians 1:3-11 once again and share one last story about comfort during crisis (read from open Bible)

I started with that story of jumping through the window, how I cut my hands and wrists up, how the white towels wrapped around my hands and wrists were soaked in blood and how my grandma was so nervous, that she couldn’t find the ignition hole for the key.

Right when it seemed hopeless, out of nowhere a black man came and knocked on our car window. To be honest, this is the first black man I ever remember seeing. We lived in a largely Latino area, with a handful of whites, and almost no blacks. But here he was knocking on my grandmother’s car window.

She rolled it down and he asked her, “Mam are you okay?”

She said, “No, my grandson went through a window and is bleeding too death and I’m too nervous to drive.”

He said, “Scoot over Mam.”

He drove us to the hospital and gently encouraged us along the way. He calmed her down and me down. He then went into the hospital with us, waited for me to be stitched up and then drove us all back home.

That man was like Jesus in a crisis situation. Just when we think it’s too late he shows up, comforts us every step of the way and makes sure we make it all the way home.

And just like Jesus comforts us we can comfort others, especially our teenagers during this time.

Pray a GOSPEL Prayer