

How would you finish the sentence: "When life gives you lemons you \_\_\_\_\_"? However old you are I'm sure you have experienced your fair share of bad days or sour situations. I'm sure we have all learned that Christianity hasn't given us a "get out of jail free" card, like in the game of Monopoly. Life isn't a game filled with chutes to slide down or ways to skip ahead ten spots if we just land on the right spot on the board. Being a Christian doesn't mean that life will be perfect or easy. But, it does mean that our yoke and the burdens we bear can be easy. Putting it simply, the "stuff" doesn't have to drag us down. In Matthew 11:30 Jesus says, "Serving me is easy, and my load is light." We will experience our ups and downs/highs and lows in this ever changing, onward twirling life. So, when life gives you lemons what do you do? Here's my recipe for some lemonade:

**#1 Remember that God is always good.** Ask yourself about the character of what is happening to you. If it doesn't line up with God's character that we see displayed in His Word, then don't blame Him for what is happening. Let me put it to you this way: God is always good even when His people aren't. I've had Christians treat me wrong. You probably have too. I've seen far too many people I love take steps away from Christ when they chose to blame God for what someone else was doing to them. Don't hold a grudge toward God and harden your heart when "good" people let you down. Being a Christian doesn't make you perfect. Many times over we will need to choose to forgive other's actions. The Bible is always true and it says "Every good and perfect gift is from God." (James 1:7)

**#2 Find your rest in Him.** A couple verses before Jesus says "my yoke is easy and my burden light" He gives us some instruction. Verse 28 says, "Come to me, all you who are tired and are carrying heavy loads. I will give you rest." All the spas in the world can't fix what God can. Time spent with Jesus when your heart is broken, your spirit is tired and your body is weak is the very best remedy. Pray, more simply put, talk to God. Read the Bible and let it's words encourage you. Worship Him. Spend time singing about the great things God has done, who He is and what His character consists of. Stir your spirit up by singing and speaking what God has done and will do. You lay down your burdens by surrendering your heart and your worries and fixing your eyes on Jesus.

#### DISCUSSION TIME

- What was your biggest misconception of what being a Christian meant?
- How do you remind and encourage yourself that God is always good? Talk about how "God is always good even when His people aren't."
- How can we teach kids that worship is a way that they can lay down their burdens and find rest?

Last week we talked about remembering that God is always good and how Jesus' invitation of the Christian life is to find your rest in Him. Those are two things that we can remind ourselves of every day. Don't let the troubles and the challenges stack up too high before you lay the pile down at His feet. Have you ever tried to carry too much at once? I'm pretty good at strapping on a bunch of bags and luggage. Things I need to get from point A to point B. But it never fails that something starts to slip and make the entire load harder to bear. Maybe you've experienced trying to carry too tall of a pile of folded laundry through the house only to have it crash to the floor. Or even worse, a stack of dishes! Our heavy loads can make big messes when we lose our grip. If you're a control freak or Type A personality, I completely understand how much of a challenge it is for you to let go. But, that's what Jesus tells us to do so we can experience His "light" load. I remind you of 1 Peter 5:7: 'Turn all your worries over to him. He cares about you.'

There are a lot of Christ follower, Bible believing people in this world that are trying to manage a load that they don't have to bear. Stop carrying too many bags. Stop balancing too big of a pile. You are a child of the Most High God. You are loved. God wants to help you experience life His way so you're not running yourself ragged- overloaded, over-worked, over-tired- doing life your way. The best example of worship you could model to the kids you're leading is a heart that rests by putting your trust in the Lord.

#### DISCUSSION TIME

- *Share a time when you tried to carry too much by yourself. I'm sure there's a funny outcome that you can laugh about now.*
- *Listen to a recording of the hymn "'Tis So Sweet To Trust In Jesus." What lyrics speak to you?*
- *How can we teach kids the joy and rest that comes from trusting in the Lord? How does our praise help in the process?*

I recently saw a piece of artwork on Instagram that said: "Worship your way through each day." Worship is a lot like prayer in the fact that you can do it easily anytime, anywhere. And both things are ways we communicate and speak straight to God's ear and heart. It doesn't matter what time of day or where you are. Whether it be worshipping in the shower or on the drive to the coffee shop, a picnic lunch or on a walk. Our countenance and our verbal expression can offer up worship to the most high.

I couldn't help but laugh when I saw a meme that asked the question, "Was it a bad day? Or was it a bad five minutes you milked all day?" Ooh, it's funny cause it's possibly true for you and most likely for someone you know. In our conversation with a friend the other day, I shared with them what I heard Eric Metaxas say: "We aren't supposed to have vices, we are supposed to say 'God heal me'." When something happens to mess up our day and cause a road bump to our attitude, too often we reach for the wrong thing.

What could happen in your life if you reached for God throughout your day. What if you took time to worship Him for a few minutes morning, noon and night? What if instead of checking your phone's notifications you set it down and spent a couple minutes giving thanks for God's blessings for you and your family? We have a direct line to the throne room of Heaven. Why aren't we using it more?

Jeremiah 33:3 "Call out to me. I will answer you. I will tell you great things you do not know."

#### DISCUSSION TIME

- Name some benefits of spending time in prayer and worship throughout your day?
- Study and discuss Psalm 88:9: "Lord, I call out to you every day. I lift up my hands to you in prayer."
- How can we encourage kids to reach for God in whatever is going on in their life? How do we help them understand that worship is a tool to do just that?

People get all kinds of crazy and mad when people spoil what happens on a favorite TV show online. One person makes a status update commenting about what happened on the show and the other people who haven't watched the episode yet get upset that the other person just ruined it for them. Some viewers need the element of surprise. I'll be honest I'm not that way, especially when I know I can't watch it that day. Once I see people reacting online, I'll just google it to find out what they are reacting to. It takes the mystery out of watching, but I'm okay with that. I'd rather know then wonder.

Have you ever skipped ahead to the end of a book to see what happens or how something may end up? Whether it's a book, show or a movie, there are ways for us to find out the outcome. The same is true for our Christian life. The Bible tells us about the end. It gives us a taste of what the future will be. Guess what? God wins. Good beats evil. Life triumphs over death. Heaven's reward is far greater than Hell's curse. This life we are living is not just for today. Rather, the things we choose to do today will impact our eternal future. I love that worship is included in Heaven. (Rev. 7:11&12) If we're going to worship in Heaven, don't you think that our worship here on earth matters? I'd say God thinks worship is very significant.

As a Christ follower, this is how the story ends in Revelations 7:15-17: "They are in front of the throne of God. They serve him day and night in his temple. The one who sits on the throne will be with them to keep them safe. 'Never again will they be hungry. Never again will they be thirsty. The sun will not beat down on them.' The heat of the desert will not harm them. The Lamb, who is at the center of the area around the throne, will be their shepherd. 'He will lead them to springs of living water.' 'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.' "

#### DISCUSSION TIME

- Which one are you in books and shows? Skip ahead to find out the end OR be surprised?
- Why do you think God told us what the end of earth and the eternity of Heaven would be?
- Since worship is included in Heaven, don't you think it matters on earth too? How can we help kids see that worship matters to God?

Determination...I feel like that is something that most of us continually need to work on. It's not something that is elementary or too far below us. Most of us have some area of our life that could benefit from the fruit and labor of determination. You may be the King of excuses. Or maybe you are really advanced in the art of procrastination. Whether it be at home, work, a hobby or a relationship, I guarantee there is something that needs the hard (and heart) work done to rip out the old and be determined to stay the course until you achieve what you're after.

Over the years in ministry, you see people quit and give up. Often I scroll my social media feeds to even see people I knew in previous seasons of life not even living for the Lord. I always wonder what the shift was? What changed? What was done to them? How many times did they cross the line, ignoring their conscience only to no longer be able to see how far over the line they now live? Continually do the heart work to keep your relationship with the Lord in a healthy place. I truly believe God is always good even when His people aren't. Never confuse the two.

My Father has been in ministry for over 40 years. It's not that everything in those 40 years that's been done to Him was perfect. There will always be seasons where you are in the battle and have to choose to live your life according to the Word even when your flesh probably desires something different. But something I have noticed about my Dad is how he stirs himself up in the Lord. 2 Timothy 1:6 tells us to do this. *"This is why I remind you to help God's gift grow, just as a small spark grows into a fire. God put his gift in you when I placed my hands on you."* If you want to stay determined to be who God created and called you to be, then don't forget to encourage yourself in the Lord through His Word, times of prayer and the highway to His presence: our worship. Longevity in anything starts with a seed of determination that you water and nurture to grow and flourish.

#### DISCUSSION TIME

- What energizes your relationship with the Lord? How do you encourage yourself in the Lord?
- What's your favorite worship song of late? i.e. "Waymaker", "The Blessing" or another? Share what is helping you draw closer to the Lord. Maybe even make a playlist of your team's favorite worship songs that you can share with each other to help you stir up the gift inside of you.
- Worship is often a choice. How can you help kids learn to enter into His gates with thanksgiving no matter what kind of day they are having?