

LIVING
IT OUT



**DAILY
BIBLE
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

Good *Meh*-dicine

February 5, 2018

Winter in Ohio. Year after year, it leaves me feeling as though I've been visited by an unwelcome guest. I dread its arrival and its company; and by the time it mercifully departs, I am of the opinion that it has long overstayed its welcome.

It's around this very time each year – with the holidays but a fading memory and spring still a distant destination – that the cold winds seem to blow hardest. The wind chill plummets and the heating bill rises; the days get shorter, and the icicles grow longer. It's enough to leave many of us asking, “why *do* we live here?”

Two years ago, a business trip took me to Finland in February. Upon my arrival, I was only slightly surprised to note that the temperature in Helsinki was actually 10 degrees *warmer* than the weather I had left behind in Toledo. Yep, that's winter in Ohio for you!

Of course, winter isn't just a climatic season; the term has also come to symbolize challenging seasons in our lives. If spring represents birth and renewal, winter is its seasonal counterpoint, often symbolizing darkness, cold, loneliness, and even approaching death.

This past weekend, Lead Pastor Ben Snyder kicked off the (*How to Survive*) *The Dead of Winter* series by discussing how we can survive the “meh” of winter. As Ben noted, the dead of winter speaks to some of the places in our life that we don't want to deal with. And the holiday hangover and bitter cold weather can leave us feeling lonely, depressed, burned out, worried, or just plain “*meh*.”

Ben pointed out that God wants us to know that just because we feel _____, doesn't mean that we have to stay that way.

As someone who grew up in Northeast Ohio, I actually recall the winters of my youth with a degree of fondness. Looking back, I remember the snow far more than the cold. It seemed the snow was much deeper back then (of course, that recollection may be influenced by the fact that I was also a little shorter at the time). But winter also had an upside. My friends and I enjoyed rocketing down toboggan chutes, skating on frozen ponds, building snow forts (to provide shelter during snowball fights), and, of course, hoping for the holy grail of midwestern childhood: the snow day.

The point is that our perspective has much to do with how we view – and survive – winter, whether we're referring to the season or the challenges that it symbolizes.

Proverbs 17:22

A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person's strength.

As French novelist Victor Hugo once wrote, "Laughter is the sun that drives winter from the human face." And while we cannot simply laugh away all of life's challenges, there is ample evidence that a posture of optimism, appreciation, and faith – in essence, the cheerful heart referenced in Proverbs 17:22 – can make it easier to endure life's difficult seasons. When viewed through this lens, we begin to see that our perspective really can help shape our reality.

As we read in Matthew 6:25-27, faith is the antidote to worry. And, as Psalm 118:24 reveals, joy is a natural companion to faith:

Psalm 118:24

"This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."

Over the coming days, *LivingItOut* will unpack three principles for getting the "meh" out of winter:

1. **Acknowledge** Here;
2. **Awareness** of There; and
3. **Action** forward.

Questions:

Do you find yourself dreading the Dead of Winter? If so, what do you typically do to survive?

Next Steps:

Take time this week to consider how you can pivot from focusing on what is broken to rejoicing in what is good in your life. As we learned this week, a cheerful heart is good medicine. Look for opportunities today to share and enjoy humor as effective medicine for "meh" moments.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I thank you for the love and light you provide in all of life's seasons. Help me to always appreciate your gifts and be both forever faithful and grateful to you. Amen.

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

Where Am I?

February 6, 2018

Where am I? Have you ever wondered that, for example, when you took a wrong exit or stood in a mall parking lot with that bewildered look on your face as you searched for any hint of your car (or one that even looked like it)? What did you do in that moment? Did you pretend you were on the right road, or already sitting in your car? No! That wouldn't have helped your situation at all. You first had to figure out where you actually were before you could get to where you wanted to be. And, did the fact that you were lost in the mall parking lot mean that you lived there? Of course not.

The same rule holds true in life. Just because you might feel sad at the moment, doesn't mean you are a miserable person. If you got angry today, it doesn't necessarily mean you need anger management classes. We experience numerous emotions and emotional states in life, but such feelings don't have to define us.

Christ, while fully God, was also fully human. He experienced sadness when he discovered his friend Lazarus had died (John 11:35). He experienced frustration with his disciples on several occasions (Matthew 15:16, Matthew 17:17). He burned with righteous indignation when he cleared the Temple (Mark 11:15-17). But, these emotional experiences did not define Jesus. He was not an angry, frustrated, depressed human being. Make no doubt about it: he was the Son of God!

Don't let the weather, or emotions, or circumstances get you down. You are not defined by these situations. Your identity comes from the God of the universe. If you are feeling "meh," **Acknowledge Here** by identifying exactly what it is you are *feeling*. Where are you feeling stuck? Ask yourself "why" you are feeling that way to identify the real issue. Once you can answer "Where am I?", then you can begin figuring out where you want to go, which we will talk about tomorrow.

And remember, don't confuse your emotions with your identity. Acknowledge who you *are* as a follower of Christ: a handpicked son or daughter of God almighty with an inheritance greater than you could possibly imagine awaiting you.

Questions:

Where are you in life? How are you feeling? Are you happy with where you are? Do you feel there is any hope for change?

Next Steps:

Make a line down the middle of a paper. Over the left hand column write, "What I am feeling." Title the right hand side, "Who God says I am." On the left side of the paper, make a list of how you are feeling (sad, depressed, joyful, happy, tired, etc.) Read the following verses of scripture, and write down who God says you are on the right hand side of the paper.

Some references for you if you need them: Galatians 3:26, 29; Galatians 4:5-7; Ephesians 1:5; 2 Corinthians 6:18; Colossians 2:10; 1 Peter 1:4; 1 Peter 2:9

Prayer:

Holy Father, thank you for choosing me to be your child. I can never thank you enough for saving me from this world. Please fill me with your Spirit and convince me beyond a shadow of a doubt what my true identity is in you. Amen.

Greener Grass

February 7, 2018

Yesterday, David talked about the principle of **Acknowledge Here**, answering the question “Where am I?” Today, we will talk about the second principle, **Awareness of There**. The question for today is “Where do I want to be?” And, as Ben Snyder pointed out, “not here” is not a helpful answer.

Proverbs 29:18 (KJV)

Where there is no vision, the people perish...

If you long for the greener grass on the other side of the fence, are you able to articulate where exactly that is? Do you have a vision for where you want to go?

I lived in Florida for 17 years. I loved it. When I moved back to Toledo, I was miserable! What had I done!? I gave up all that beautiful warmth and sunshine for the bleh and meh of Northwest Ohio. By February, I was crying on a daily basis. Then, summer came, and guess what? There were no fire ants. I could actually walk barefoot and sit on the ground! You cannot do that in Florida. It was great until fall came around. At that point, I started to dread what was coming until I decided to ask God to change my heart. Instead of bringing a feeling of dread into the winter season, I asked God to give me a better vision of what the winter season could be. I prayed that he would help me see the beauty that is really all around me. I prayed all through the fall as the leaves changed and then fell. As the temperatures dropped, I felt an excitement that I had never felt before, even when I was a kid growing up in Toledo when cold and snow meant fun.

That year, we had record snow falls and record low temperatures. I found some really warm snow pants, and I was out in it every chance I got. I had a blast! It was the best winter I can remember. On the days that I was unable to leave my house because of level 3 snow emergencies, I found joy. I would sit with God, look out my window, and just marvel at his power and beautiful creations.

What had changed? My awareness of “there” changed. I grew in my awareness of the good things God had for me instead of focusing on what I didn’t like about the winter season. First I acknowledge that I struggled in the winter months, and then I created a vision for what winter could be. It could be fun, peaceful and a chance to reflect on God’s beauty. When I trust that God is good and his plans for me are good, I can know that just because it’s (cold) today, doesn’t mean it always has to be that way.

Questions:

What is the worst part of this season for you?

Do you have a vision beyond your current reality?

Do you have others in your life that can help?

Next Steps:

After acknowledging the “here”, pray for God to give you a vision for “there”. Journal some ideas of where you think God might want you to be.

Here are some great verses to think on or maybe even memorize to help you start living in God’s “there.”

Prayer:

Father, thank you for your amazing love and grace. Thank you for making me aware that your “there” is anywhere because you are always with me. I praise you for leading me to green pastures and ask you to help me be aware of your beautiful creation, no matter where I am. Amen.

Walk to the Mailbox!

February 8, 2018

If you are struggling more than usual this year with cabin fever, welcome to the world of this former Buffalonian. February “meh” is an annual occurrence there because there is usually five feet of snow on the ground by February first with no end in sight. The wind chill is a stunning -10 or lower on a daily basis, and winter doesn’t end until April. But be of good cheer; this isn’t Buffalo! It will be over before you know it.

The good news is that while you wait, you CAN beat it—armed with some ingenuity and the Bible.

The final step to surviving the dead of winter is **Action Forward**. It is not enough to just acknowledge the “here” and grow in your awareness of “there.” Your choices are to either wallow in *Meh*-bruary or get to work. You can change it into an energized, hope-filled month instead of a “gain 10 pounds” month while binge-watching “The Crown.”

First, deal with the “ations”- the agitation, aggravation, and frustration of being stuck with the choices of cooping yourself up until spring or going outside and freezing to death. Here is a suggestion: layers. No kidding. If you dress for the weather and wear cold-killing clothes, you will be amazed at how powerful you feel when you walk to the mailbox yelling, “Take that Old Man Winter. You can’t stop ME!” Once you get past the irritation of taking 12 minutes to get all those layers on, the joy of being outside and not being miserable outweighs the effort of getting ready. In just a few days, you will be even more encouraged and energized because your walks will actually start lasting longer than your prep time.

Second, stop letting your grumpy inner self feed you lines about what a miserable human being you are, what a lousy job you do serving God, etc., etc., etc. Instead, before engaging in your daily internal dialogue, ask yourself if what you are saying is going to bring life and vitality to your day. Or, is it going to sap you of your joy and hope? Have you ever noticed that when nights are long, days are gloomy, and when something in your life goes wrong, that voice in your head helpfully offers up, “you idiot” to define your worth? Before it happens again, get prepared.

Psalm 139:14, 17 (NIV)

¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well ... ¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them!

Memorize these verses while you take that warm walk on a cold day or the next time you start feeling like a loser.

One more action directive from God's Word:

1 Thessalonians 5:14-18 (NIV)

¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. ¹⁵ Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

If you choose to live out these verses daily instead of succumbing to the winter blues, you will be busy and rejoicing all the way to springtime, being blessed and blessing others every day.

Questions:

Does your joy and enthusiasm come to a screeching halt this time of year? What do you do to overcome it? If the answer to the previous question is "nothing," what are you waiting for?

Next Steps:

Read **Hebrews 12:1-2**

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. ² We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne.

Circle the words of action in these verses and write out how you can make them a part of your life today.

Prayer:

Hello Lord, thank you for loving me more than I can even understand. I am always amazed and humbled that you demonstrated this love for us in that "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8, NIV). Please help me to live out that love in all that I do for both myself and others. Please help me to use your Word to change how I think about myself and others. Please help me to be motivated to fight cabin fever with action and by living out your directives in 1 Thessalonians 5:14-18. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

This post was written by Martha Preckler, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study

Learning to Laugh

February 9, 2018

No one in the the whole world has seen the movie *Trolls* more often than I have. I know you think you have, but you haven't. All of the singing, all of the smiles, and all of the laughter. I am pretty much an expert on *Trolls* now, so I know full well that the entire purpose of this movie is to promote happiness, even in situations that say otherwise.

We can still laugh and experience joy even when it looks like we cannot. Studies have shown that some people tend to laugh in very unlaughable situations, such as during moments of stress, anger, anxiety, frustration, and nervousness. Have you ever wondered why that is? Could it be God's way of helping us to know that it won't be like this forever? God designed our bodies to react to laughter by increasing endorphins (a happy chemical) and reducing stress. We burn calories each time we let out a good chuckle as well. Not to mention that laughter induces a reaction that boosts our immune system, triggering a fight against diseases and infections. Laughter truly is the best medicine!

Proverbs 17:22

A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person's strength.

Psalm 118:24

This is the day the LORD has made.

We will rejoice and be glad in it.

In my wedding pictures, I am smiling and laughing in every shot. Not because I was so unbelievably happy (I mean ... I was), but because everything that could go wrong ... did! It rained, my dress got dirty, my hair poofed like crazy, and I ended up wearing flip flops down the aisle instead of the beautiful jeweled heels I purchased as I almost broke my ankle trying to walk in them. The minister almost knocked over the unity table, the music skipped during the wedding procession, and my husband was late! During all of these events, the only thing I could do was laugh! Why not?! I knew things were going wrong, but I had to focus on the goal ... to marry my husband! I knew all of this stuff would be over soon, and it wasn't going to last forever!

Even in our MEH moments, let a giggle and a "thank you Jesus" roll off of your tongue! It won't always be like this!

Questions:

When was the last time you laughed so hard you cried? Who in your life inspires a good giggle out of you? How often during the day do you let yourself laugh ... accidentally or on purpose?

Next Steps:

Look for life's funny moments. Watch a comedy special or your favorite movie, and let your endorphins do their thing! Give yourself permission to let out a big ole' God-approved laugh!

Prayer:

Dear Jesus, thank you for creating us to laugh! Thank you for loving us so much that you have given us the ability to smile even in the midst of our not-so-happy moments. We know your plan for our life, our day, our moment is good, and we know that you are behind each tear and each smile we share. Please help us to look for you while we go through dreary days and see the beauty in winter as we look forward to the spring. In Jesus' name, Amen.