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2 CORINTHIANS 11:22-33

2 Corinthians Series

[PRAYER] So Father, we know that motherhood is a privilege and a real challenge for many people. In the midst of our brokenness, we know that as parents we often struggle and we often miss the mark. But it's on a day like this we want to honor moms and we want to recognize their sacrifice and work, as difficult as it is. So Lord, we want to just come before you and acknowledge that in our own hearts. As we have opportunity today, we ask that you would give us the right words and the gracious words to say to other people, those who are moms, grandparents, those who were surrogate moms in our lives. I just pray that you would bless the interactions that may take place today.

Now Father, as we look at your word, we ask that you would be honored. We come to it with a sense of awe, knowing that your word is living and active. There's a word here for each one of us, young or old. I pray especially for young people today that you would bless them and give them a sense of meaning in this sermon that will apply to their lives ongoing. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Life is unpredictable. It's challenging. You never know what's going to happen in the course of a day. Today we're going to talk about a specific blessing that comes, one of the benefits, shall I say, of being part of the family of God, knowing Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. One of those benefits is being able to experience this sense of peace or well being, even in the midst of the challenges that take place. Bad things happen in our world. I'm sure you can look in your life and see bad things happening all around, whether they're international events or local events or personal events in your own heart or life or those around you. Bad things happen. And when bad things happen, they can affect who we are and how we relate to other people. But see, as Christians there's something different that happens inside of us.

Today I want to share with you a very important benefit of being a Christian and how it will help us to live our lives every day in the midst of the challenging things that we experience regularly. So we're going to look at Paul's second letter to the Corinthians that we have. It is a letter that is really sharing Paul's heart. What Paul wants the people to understand in our passage today in 2 Corinthians 11 is he's going to share some of his own struggles that he faced in life. We're going to read a list of them today, a list of bad things that happened to Paul. And then we're going to talk about how he processed those and how we can process life as well.

Now the reason that Paul is sharing this list with us is because he's writing to the church in Corinth and there were some people in the church. Now the church is made up of imperfect

people and sometimes they fight and argue. But we have a way of dealing with fights and arguments that help us come together because we recognize that God is our Lord and that is the most important thing in any way.

Now Paul is going to share with the leadership there in the church. He's going to share that he really is the valid apostle because some of them (these false leaders) are saying that "Paul is not a 'super apostle' like we are. I don't even think he has integrity," they were saying. So Paul is going to do a little bit of defending himself. He's going to open his heart and we're going to see some of the pain that he experienced following the Lord. As we experience that, we'll gain some good understanding in our own lives how we can proceed day to day. How we're going to live today or tomorrow given the challenges that we have in our lives.

So I'm going to ask you to stand with me and open your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 11:22-33. Should you not have your Bible with you, you can read on the screen. But I encourage you to get a Bible to mark it up, read it regularly, read over the passage for next week that we're going to look at so you're ready for the teaching for next week and so on.

Here's what Paul says in this passage: Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.

You may be seated.

As you look at the list, it's quite a list of problems that Paul experienced. That last verse is referring to the story in Acts 9 where he became a Christian, he comes into Damascus, and he starts to talk about Jesus. So the Jews provoked the leadership, the local authorities to get this guy and try to kill him. So he's lowered down in a basket out of a window. In a city that was fortified like that, some of the houses would be on the wall. The window going out would lead over the wall. So he escaped by being lowered down in a basket. I can see why he would be a basket case given all the problems he is experiencing here. Quite a challenge in his life to see all of these needs. That is quite a list of bad things.

Now we get an inside look. He opens his heart and we get to see all of his challenges. We don't get to see that with each other, do we, for the most part? Sometimes someone shares and we get to hear a problem that they're dealing with and we pray for them. But for the most part, you don't open your heart up and share all the problems you're experiencing in your life. But we all have them. It's challenging to deal with them.

It's been said that if all of us were to take our problems, all of them, somehow put them out on a table, if we all were to do that and we were to look around and see all the problems that everybody had, we'd go back and take ours and say, "I'll keep my own, thank you." I look at that in Paul's life and I say, "I think I'll keep my own problems, thank you." I don't think I'd like to go through all the challenges that Paul experienced in his commitment to the Lord and his adventures to serve the Lord. But we all experience change and pain and challenges in our lives.

I'm going to tell you about one that came out in our small group. Paul Jurik is a Marine. He's right here in the back. He was telling us this story I've got to tell you. This is bizarre. He had a sore on his back, so he goes to the doctor and they take off a tick. They take the tick off of his back and give him antibiotics and send him home. So he's fine and he's healing and he's good. But he gets billed a couple weeks later in the mail for a huge amount of money. Now the guy is a Marine. He's got good insurance.

So he calls them up and he says, "I don't understand my bill. How come I've got to pay so much? I've got good insurance."

They said, "Well let me look this up." The lady looks it up and says, "Well you're covered with the antibiotics and you're covered with the office visit, but we had to do a blood test on the tick and the tick didn't have insurance."

He said, "What? The tick didn't have insurance?" This has got to be the craziest story. So he's paying for the tick to have insurance so he could get the blood test results back from the tick.

I don't know what to do with that kind of stuff. I'm just glad I have my set of problems and not someone else's in life.

Young people, I want to talk to you for a moment because I think that there's something very important that will prepare you for life that we're going to talk about today. As a young person, you're on a mission. You have to understand this is a very important shift that takes place in your adolescent years (those years between 12 and 25, and hopefully on the earlier side), which is a shift toward a mission-oriented view of life. I have a task to do. I'm on a mission. I'm not just here riding a merry-go-round having fun. I have a job to do. When you make that shift, something very important happens.

You need three things during your adolescent years you need to grab onto that will help you to be successful: skills, character, and worldview. Skills, character, and worldview. Those are the three big things you're working on in your life. You go to school, of course, to develop some skills. You might take on a hobby that involves sports, music, drama, whatever. They're helping you develop your skills. Character is developed just by living life and knowing how to respond well to those. Worldview is established by the way you believe and think about how our world is organized and what your mission is in it. Worldview is this understanding that you need to

accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, and you're on a mission to grow in Christ and share that message with others. God is in control of our world and He's designed a plan for us.

Now if you can get those three things (skills, character, and worldview) down during your adolescent years, you'll be much more successful as you go forward. But do you know there are a lot of young people who miss that. They believe that their goal during the adolescent years is to have fun. That's what they believe.

I asked a fourteen year old, "What's a good day for you?" He said, "If I can get on Facebook and spend time with my friends and I can play my video games," that's a good day for him. I've got to tell you, if you believe that that is your task of adolescence is to have fun, you're going to miss out on some very important things because you're going to hit your twenties and you're going to have to go back through the things you should have learned in adolescence. You're going to hit your thirties; you're going to be doing things you should've been doing in your twenties. You want now to be working on your skills, your character, and your worldview.

We're going to talk a little bit about worldview today. If you can get these things and believe them and understand them, it's going to free you up greatly to be able to manage the challenges of life. Because I've got news for you, life is hard. It's hard. It's a hard place to live. And it's only made harder if you get involved in addictions or you get involved in starting a family not in the way God designed or you get involved in personal habits that are a problem. It complicates your life in ways you don't want to be a part of. So I'm telling you, there's a way to do this thing that we call life and adolescence is a great time to get these ideas down and understand them. Life is hard. There are challenges.

I'm going to throw that scripture up again. Look at the challenges that Paul experienced. Notice how many times he experienced situations that were really difficult. I know. You experience situations that are difficult in your schooling, in your home that are challenging. Notice the word 'danger,' how often it's mentioned in the passage. Starting in verse 26, danger over and over and over again. He experienced a lot of danger. It's not just the external things though, but he had internal challenges too.

Look a verse 28. *Besides everything else* (in other words, on top of all those things), *I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches*. He had some internal struggles because he was concerned about people outside of himself, which you will too experience because there are people, as we all know, that are experiencing problems and challenges nearby us. Sometimes it's family and friends. Sometimes it's neighbors. Your heart just goes out to them because they're suffering inside. Bad things are happening. It's a challenge. So your heart goes out. So there's all these challenges that we will experience in life. Lots of them. We need to have a plan. We need to know how to process this.

Now this would be quite a downer of a sermon if we just talked about all the problems we have in life, because we could spend a lot of time doing that. I could tell you a lot of problems, you could tell me a lot of problems, and we wouldn't get too far because we'd just be complaining. That's what complaining is. There are two kinds of people in the world – complainers and solvers. A lot of people just complain. We're going to move to the other side and see what God

has for us. Because we understand this worldview that Paul had and that the Bible teaches, we know how to put these challenges in place in a better way.

A common problem today is that people look at their identity differently than how God would design it for us. See God has given us identity in Him. In fact that's the bigger part of who you are. You've got little problems over here. In fact I would say all of Paul's problems are here, the little ones that he's dealing with. I know they don't seem little, but they're little compared to his identity. So the secret to Paul's ability to remain on track with the Lord, to feel the sense of well being that God gives us because we're Christians, to have the joy that he talks about in Philippians 4, the peace that He wants us to have that surpasses all understanding. All of those things he has... why? Because he invests his emotions into this identity instead of investing his emotions into his situation.

If we invest our emotions into our situation, we end up with that problem. In fact some people think their identity is their situation. So a person might say, "I'm divorced." Or a person might say, "I'm unemployed," or "I'm sick," for example. When a person says that it's as if they're saying, "That's my identity. That's who I am." When they do that, they're making a mistake because their emotions are then tied into that. So what happens when they get up in the morning? "I am this person." But I would suggest that the Bible is teaching us there is a whole new way to think about life, a worldview that says, "My identity is in Christ. I can enjoy this relationship with Christ that gives me this meaningful life in the midst of the struggle."

There are other people who invest their identity in their accomplishments. Like they were able to finish their to-do list today. If I ask some of you, "What makes a good day?" Some of you would say, "Well I got my to-do list done," or "I made a sale," or "I had a good conversation with someone." Is that what makes a good day? Is our identity tied into the things we accomplish, or our situation, or is it tied into something bigger? It's that bigger thing that God would have for us because I want you to understand this big thing over here, that identity, that's the bigger part of you where nothing can harm you, nothing can threaten you, nothing can hurt you, and you are protected within that identity.

When someone challenges you or yells at you, if you're in this identity in Christ, you have a different kind of response than if you're threatened by that. It's just bigger. It's a bigger kind of an identity. We as Christians have a different way of dealing with life than other people do. So even in the midst of the challenges that we experience we can experience that joy that God would have for us.

Now Paul is eager to teach this idea to the Corinthians. That's where we come to this next verse, the one with the pot. Because this is out of 2 Corinthians 4, earlier in the passage, where he says this very idea: *We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.* In this identity, if we recognize ourselves as this identity is our relationship with Christ, then there's power in there that allows us to live life. All of it is in this jar of clay.

The jar of clay is the challenges that we face in the course of the day, the fact we're weak. We've been making that statement regularly. I am weak, but I am experiencing the power of God.

Right? Well that's what he's saying here is God's power in me that allows me to experience challenges. So now every challenge that I experience is powerful. It's something that God can use to grow me. It's something God can use to allow me to share with other people His grace. Now I take on this whole different worldview, I take on this whole different perspective because now I'm following the Lord and what He has for me.

It's like I've said before, when we pray, we don't want to just pray, "Lord, would you give me this, would you give me that," and then we say, "God doesn't answer my prayers." If you want God to answer your prayers, here's the prayer you pray: "Lord, how can I fit into your plans today? What can I do?" Because as you fit into the Lord's plans, then everything in life fits in place. You get out there and you have a problem in traffic, or you get out there and you have a problem with a coworker, or you get out there and you're having a problem with a mate. And then you end up with some real issues. Or you can just say, "I want the Lord to guide me." All of those things that become opportunities for growth, for ministering, for being the person God wants you to be. Why? Because your identity is in Christ.

What causes us to get upset so much and to lose this sense of well being that God wants us to have? I would suggest God wants us walking around everywhere with this sense of well being, today is a good day. I would suggest that's a part of who we are. That's what He wants for us. Why don't we experience that? I think we experience it because of expectations that we have. Expectations are inside of our heart and we invest our emotions inside of our expectations. I expected this to be done by this certain time and when it doesn't happen, we start getting upset. We get upset and anxious, we get upset and angry, we're disappointed. And so our expectations get us into trouble.

Now the Lord has a lot of ideas for dealing with this idea of disappointment and emotional challenges that we experience in our lives. I want to share with you some Google responses. I want you to see how the world talks about how to deal with disappointment.

"Expect nothing and you'll never be disappointed." You probably heard that before. "Expect nothing and you'll never be disappointed." That's true. If you expect nothing, you'll never be disappointed. But what a terrible way to live. I'm going to go around expecting nothing all day? That's a tremendous price you have to pay (according to Google) in order to not have disappointment in your life. Expect nothing.

A variation of that statement is this one, which is "if you expect the worst, you'll never be disappointed." You probably heard that too. Well I suppose you could go around expecting the worst, but then you'd be like Eeyore in Winnie the Pooh. "Oh it's a terrible day. Oh." You'll never be disappointed, but you'll go around miserable all day. That's not a sense of well being. You might avoid disappointment, but you're not going to get where you need to be.

So what's the opposite of that, according to Google? "Expect the best and you'll get it!" Well that's going to be ridiculous too, because you don't always get it. You can't just expect the best and think you're going to get it. Wow. I think that's a problem. There's got to be something different here about our expectations because our expectations get us into trouble regularly in relationships.

So here's one that people often say: "Hope for the best, expect the worst, and take what comes." That's like destiny and fate. Oh boy. I think we need some more help besides Google.

I want to just suggest that expectations are the problem. Notice the word 'expect' is used in each one of those because even the world knows that expectations get us into trouble. It starts in a marriage relationship, doesn't it? You expect this; if it doesn't happen, then I'm going to let you have it with this. Or I expect you treat me this way and you didn't, so it just creates this conflict. If you want to have harmony in your marriage relationship, you need to drop the expectations. Or at least don't invest your emotions into those expectations. Because expectations get us into trouble.

So what is God's solution to this? I know you're eagerly waiting for not the Google solution, but the God solution. So let me show you what I would suggest is the solutions that God gives for expectation. He says this: *But those whose hope (or their expectations) are in the Lord (here's what's going to happen to them) they'll renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*

So what does mean? *Those whose hope are in the Lord.* Here's what happens with expectations. With expectations we put our expectations into circumstances and people and get ourselves in trouble. Right? We don't want to do that. If you want to have this well being inside you, you're going to put your expectations in the Lord. You're going to say, "Lord, whatever happens here, I know you're in control. I want to put my expectations in you because I don't know what's going to happen today, but I do know that you're in control of it. So I'm going to go with whatever happens and I'm going to trust you to work in my life."

My father used to say, "Whenever I lose my keys and I'm hunting all over for my keys, I say to the Lord, 'Lord, this is your time I'm wasting. You know I could be doing things more productive than looking for my keys. But if you want me to waste my time looking for keys, I'll go look for keys.'" I like that. I lost my keys this last week and I was thinking about my father. I don't like wasting time like that. But realizing that for whatever reason that's just where I need to be right now is looking for keys.

But it's not just keys. Lord, I'm living with this person, this child in my home, or my spouse, and this is all part of what I need to do, so maybe I need to take more time in order to be gracious to this person. Or maybe I need to... all of that is part of the growing that allows us to have our identity in Christ and put our hope in the Lord.

Do you see the difference here? We still have expectations about life. But the expectation is that God is going to do amazing things. He can change the schedule because interruptions are often God's way of getting my attention. Instead of me getting irritated – "Oh. What are you trying to do here, God? You obviously want me to do something different than what I had planned." So interruptions are this way of God saying, "I want you to do something different."

Now God is directing the traffic. He's doing something different in our lives and we have this sense of well being because whatever happens today, I'm following the Lord. That doesn't mean

we don't plan. There are some people who think if you're Spirit-led then that means you don't plan. That's not true. Okay? There's a lot of planning that takes place in the Bible.

I would suggest we plan. Okay, I plan. I make my to-do list for the course of the day, but somehow in the midst of that to-do list, there's this overarching statement that says your will be done and not mine, God. So God may in this day help me get my to-do list done in record time so I have some extra time. What do you want me to do with that? Or more often than not, my to-do list takes longer than I had expected and maybe God wants to do something in the midst of that. Or ban the to-do list all together because something more important is going on. The goal is not to get my to-do list done and find my identity in the to-do list. My goal needs to be to follow the Lord. Put my expectations in Him that He is doing something and I need to follow. I don't even know what He's doing sometimes, but I need to follow Him and trust Him.

They will renew their strength. This is the idea of power again. You want this power to live life in the course of the day? It comes in your ability to trust God in the midst of your day. That starts now.

I say to young people my favorite years of teenage life are thirteen and fourteen. Because if you can get your act together at thirteen and fourteen and become organized, you can follow the Lord during that time, you get some convictions about what you're going to do, your health and so on, you'll avoid the problems. Fifteen and sixteen and seventeen and eighteen and nineteen are where people often find themselves addicted to smoking, or getting involved in addictions of some kind, or misusing their sexuality. All of those things are damaging to a person. Let's get it together. Thirteen and fourteen, tremendous years for a person to start getting themselves pointed in the right direction. What they can't have as their goal in life is "I'm just going to have fun." It's got to switch to a mission-oriented view of life and that mission-oriented view of life is, of course, for all of us. When we have that then we have the power of God. Our strength is renewed. Why? Because our hope is in God.

And then he gives this beautiful illustration of the eagle. In our neighborhood right now we have four bald eagles. You've probably seen that on the news. People are coming around and looking at the bald eagles in our neighborhood right now. In fact yesterday my neighbor reported that the bald eagle came down and grabbed a rabbit right out of her yard. This is the rabbit that's in my yard too back and forth. I won't be seeing that rabbit again. But there's this bald eagle. So we're enjoying the majesty of the bald eagles flying around. He was flying over my house the other day and he's squawking and squawking and squawking. Really interesting. But this eagle is a majestic bird. It is able to fly high and there's a majesty about that.

That's why the illustration is being used there. I think that sometimes we say it's hard to fly like an eagle when we live with a bunch of turkeys. But the point is we may live with turkeys, but we don't have to act like the turkeys. We can fly above because we have this thing that God gives us, this identity of having our expectations placed in God instead of in our challenges so that we are not conformed to our challenges, but we have this identity in Christ. If you get the identity thing, that's part of the worldview that will help you to propel forward in life

They will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. I like that song we just sang which was about running. It's a great song.

I want to tell you a story from the Old Testament. I love this story because this is the story of the Israelites getting ready to go into the Promised Land. This is the morning they wake up and they're going in. This is in Joshua 3:1-4. I'll throw it up here in just a moment. But here's what happens. They've been wandering in the wilderness for forty years. Now they come to the Jordan River under Joshua's leadership and he's going to lead them across and they're getting to the Promised Land that they've been promised forever. I mean this has been so long they've had this promise and now they're going to get it today. Today is the day we get into the Promised Land.

See, I think Christians wake up every morning with that kind of expectation because their identity is in Christ and they're following the Lord. Today is the day that I'm going to experience the Promised Land in my own personal life. If you are in danger or you've got all those things and that becomes your identity, then you get up in the morning and you say, "Oh no. Oh no. It's morning. What's going to happen today? How can I avoid getting into trouble today? How can I avoid this problem or that problem?" So we live with this fear of discontent or disappointment. There's a whole other way to live that I get to go into the Promised Land and experience the blessings. Every day is like that for the Christian.

So the Bible tells us that they were gathered there. In fact let's just read it and see what it says. *Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. After three days the officers went throughout the camp, giving orders to the people.* Here's what they said to the people as they're getting ready on that morning to go into the Promised Land: *"When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the Levitical priests carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it."*

Now the ark of the covenant was this piece of furniture that the Israelites carried around that represented the presence of God. In the camp they had specific instructions that the ark would be placed in the middle of the camp and all around the three tribes on each of the four sides (twelve tribes all together) would camp around the ark of the covenant, symbolizing the importance of having God in the center of your life. This ark of the covenant was a representation of the presence of God. When they went into battle the ark would go before them and they would defeat the enemy because they were following the Lord. Wow. It's such a beautiful picture.

So put it back into the sentence again. He says – *"When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the Levitical priests carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it."* First you need to see it, then you need to follow it. Who's doing the leading here? And saying, "God, I've got my to-do list here. Would you be sure to bless my to-do list as I go through?" No, he's not saying that. He saying, "God, I'm going to follow you today. I'm going to go into this place that you called me to be into. I'm going in." It's just a beautiful picture. Because we're going to follow the Lord.

In your day tomorrow, follow the Lord. That was the idea. Every day when we get up, we're going into the Promised Land. Today I'm going to follow the Lord. In the midst of the challenges I'm going to follow the Lord.

But I love the last part of this statement they're making. *"Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before."*

Wow. I like that. Because I've never been this way before. Tomorrow morning I'm going to get up, there's going to be some things that are similar, but I've never been this way before. I think if we have that attitude in our lives about life that I've never been his way before, I need to just trust in the Lord I need to follow His leadership. I need to put my identity in Christ so that I can have this sense of well being tomorrow and today and every day. Because that's what He has for me. He's designed that for me. It's this beautiful thing that He's given me and I need it today to experience the blessings of coming into His presence, of experiencing the blessing of going into life situations, or going into school, or going into work, or just going into the rest of the house to meet the family. We've got to have the presence of God with us. I've never been this way before.

See, I think the problem is with our expectations we develop these expectations that things ought to go this way and things ought to go this way and when they don't, we get angry, we start getting upset. I've never been this way before. And so when you find that the person you're having these expectations about if you realize that they're a hurting person and I just haven't been this way before. I need to have this humility as I go into this situation to allow God to work in my life in this identity picture. Wow.

I appreciate my wife's insight into God's word and commitment to God's word. She often shares with me what's going on in her quiet time. Last night she shared with me a passage I'm going to share with you this morning. But I would just suggest it's just one of those great ways we have to connect with each other. If you want to connect with your children, "Hey, let me share with you something that God taught me." So I'm going to share with you something my wife taught me that the Lord taught her in the last day. It comes from Isaiah 58:11. It just fits so well into the passage. I said, "I'm going to share that tomorrow," when she told me this.

The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

I just like the idea *he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land*, in the midst of the problems. You look at all of Paul's problems that he's defining there and he describes. It's in the midst of that Paul is able to rejoice and be the person that God wants him to be. It's in the midst of the struggles, it's in the midst of the sun-scorched land that you can be like the spring. And I've got to tell you in our world today people need the spring. People are hurting all over the place. They are struggling. They're anxious. They're upset. They're trying to get ahead. They're trying to do whatever. It's like a sun-scorched land and you become the spring.

Now of course this passage is talking about how God is that spring in our lives, but when He is that for us, it enables us to be able to turn around and bless other people. Does it have to be my way, done this way and that way and the other way? Or is there a way that I can care for other people that allows me to be that spring that God is for me in my life?

I just want to suggest we can identify with the situation and let that be our identity or we can have Christ be our identity. If Christ is our identity, then we have greater confidence, we have greater peace, and we have a greater sense of well being inside of our souls that allows us to live day to day. Life is hard. It's like a sun-scorched land. But you can have that special spring inside that you can enjoy. That's the promise that God has for us.

Would you stand with me and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we come before you now as weak people recognizing our tremendous need for you. We are so easily tempted to identify ourselves with our profession or to get our identity from our accomplishments or to get our identity from our pleasure or something else. But Lord, we want our identity to be in you. I pray for each young person that's here today, that you would give them such a strong sense of identity that they will have the courage to make difficult choices and to follow your leadership and to overcome challenges and to experience your grace in a powerful way. I pray that you would prepare them for the challenges of life now. Lord, for all of us we ask that your grace would just reign in our hearts. Grant us your special privilege of your grace today. And this benefit of this well being in our souls we ask you for. In Jesus' name, amen.