

Faith for Life: 30s
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There's a pretty big change from our 20s to 30s. In our 20s, there's a lot of excitement and optimism. It's like Christmas; we've got all these new toys to play with and it's great. We are now independent and free to pursue what we want; we get to chart our own course in the world. We start making more money. We might live in a new city. We travel. Even our responsibilities are exciting because it's stuff that we care about. We begin that new job that we trained for; it's exciting and stimulating. We start giving ourselves to causes that matter to us. Some in their 20s start families. That's fun at first, too. Kids are kind of like puppies. They are soft and cute; they've got the new-baby smell. We dress them in cute clothes. They learn new tricks like walking and talking and we say, "good boy!" Sure, there are sleepless nights and diapers to change, but we can live with that. We're thrust into the world in our 20s and forced to be an adult, but we come to discover we like it.

But then the 30s strike back. And we think, "I don't want to be an adult anymore." By the time we reach our 30s, the novelty of being adult has worn off and the weight of the responsibilities begins to drag us down. The demands of the new job and career were exciting at first, but those demands have grown with greater responsibilities and now work is stressful. When we lived in our apartment, we didn't have any home repairs and maintenance concerns. But now in our first house, it seems like the roof is always leaking, the furnace always needs repairs, and the lawn needs to be mowed. We've taken on more responsibilities at church or in the community. Those causes that we care about place demands on our time, our pocketbook, and our mental energy. And what about our relationships? Marriage gets hard. The increased demands of life puts strain on our marriage. This whole one-flesh thing can be a pain. And kids? Oh, man the kids. Puppies don't stay cute and cuddly; neither do kids. Parenting starts relatively easy, but the more kids change and the world changes the harder it gets. Diaper rashes were our biggest problem in the early years, but now it's online predators, my kids ADHD, bullies at school, and disobedience and disrespect. Life gets difficult in the 30s; in exhaustion we say, "Adulting isn't fun anymore!"

The question in our 30s is this: *How do I get done all that I must?* We feel so overwhelmed by our responsibilities. We feel stressed. There's not enough time in the day. We're not saving enough for our future. We wonder, "How will we make it? How will we get everything done? How do I measure up to my work responsibilities? Why can't I be the parent I want and need to be?"

Do those of you in your 50s and 60s remember these feelings? It's an overwhelming time, isn't it? I hope your remembrance of this time increases your compassion for your younger brothers and sisters in Christ, especially those with young families. It's one of the reasons why I treasure those of you 50 and 60 year olds who volunteer in the nursery or in Beginners Church. Our younger moms and dads need time with each other; they need time to connect with other

moms during M&Ms. They need a chance to break away for an hour to hear God's word taught in the services or during our SS classes. If you are in the 2nd half of your life and your kids are gone now, don't forget about your little brothers and sisters in the Lord. Yeah, you can't help with everything (and that's not the expectation), but you have experiences and resources our younger families don't have and you can be an enormous blessing to them.

How do I get done all that I must? There are practical responses and advice to that question, but we're not going to spend much time talking about those. It's a real blessing being in the body of Christ when we need advice about these things. Take advantage of that here; we have each other to bounce ideas off of. Young women, ask the advice of your big sisters in the Lord. Ask what they did when their kids did this or that. Ask them their best ideas of managing their busy work and home life. My young brothers, seek the advice of the wise men in our church body. There are men in their 50s and 60s who have great advice about money, work, owning a business, managing employees, investing in their children, and cultivating a healthy marriage. I know our big brothers in the Lord would be happy to encourage you with practical ideas that helped them.

Today, we are going to focus on the foundation. We are going to look at the resources God has to sustain our souls when we feel maxed out. Because we are really talking about capacity. Our prayer to God in our 30s might be, "God, will you help me do all that I must? What truth, what grace, God, do you have for me as I approach my limits?" I have three thoughts from God's word that I think will help us as we reflect on our question.

Firstly, and I don't want to spend a ton of time on this, *adjusting our expectations* might very well pay big dividends as we struggle with increased demands and responsibilities. We make life harder than it needs to be by expecting it to be easy. When we wrongly presume that life will be a joy ride, our discouragement and disappointment only grows when we realize that it's not.

I do think we are conditioned to imagine life as much easier than it really is. Our flesh obviously wants life to be easy and comfortable. And culture isn't helping us keep realistic expectations either. Obstacles and challenges don't sell. Fun sells. Comfort sells. So, it's unsurprising when these desires for ease and comfort morph into expectations. But, in reality, God's word tells us we should expect the opposite. We should expect hardships. We should expect sufferings. This world is rigged and bent towards frustrating and challenging experiences. Ease isn't normal; suffering and challenges are normal. In fact, God purposefully makes life challenging so that we will grow in Christian maturity. That's what sanctification means. Sanctification is the process by which God matures us, grows us, and shapes us into more faithful followers of Jesus. Do you know how he does that? Through trials. Tests. God gives us tests to show us what's truly in our hearts so we can turn away from sin and turn to him.

While trials are good for our soul, they are hard to endure. God is growing your faith by stretching you beyond your limits at work managing your responsibilities or managing other staff or giving you coworkers or supervisors that are difficult to relate with. God is refining you, dear friend, with the increased demand at home with your kids or spouse. You might curse those challenges, but God is saying, “Do you see? Can you see what’s in you? Do you see how much you need me?” As hard as life can get and as challenging as the trial is (James 1:2-4) Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If we don’t expect these trials, we’ll quickly lose our equilibrium in life and suffer more than necessary. But if we do expect them, we’ll have the right resolve to face them.

Korby has a story she has given me permission to share. As she was feeling more and more overwhelmed by the demands of responsibilities of a growing family, her mother spoke some truth into her life when she might have been looking for a little sympathy. She asked Korby very simply, “Korby do you want to be a wife?” Korby said, “Yes.” Then she asked, “Do you want to be a mom?” Again, Korby said she did. And then her mom said, “This is what it is.” Korby says that was pivotal moment for her. That word of truth helped her adjust her expectations. It didn't magically take away the frustrations, but it helped her face these challenges well. Adjust your expectations.

The second truth from God we need to hear and believe to help us when we struggle with our challenges is *God strengthens us when we embrace our weakness* (REPEAT). We find this teaching in 2 Corinthians 12. Paul tells us in this passage that he was given a challenge, an obstacle that was too great for him to bear. He called it a thorn in his flesh; we don’t know exactly what it was. He was rather vague about the specifics. But it was a challenge that stretched him; in fact, it was so uncomfortable that he pleaded with God to take it away. Maybe you’ve prayed prayers like that, too. “God, take away my son’s autism and all the troubles that come with it for him and for our family; we can’t manage this. God, I can’t last at my job much longer. Do something! I’ve gotten myself in a bind, Lord; it’s too big for me. Where are you?”

Paul prayed that God would take his problem away. But he didn’t. Instead, God gave him something else; read with me vs. 9-10 (READ). Instead of God giving him relief from the suffering, God gave him truth from heaven. Let me ask you a question: Do you think truth from heaven is a better gift for you in your time of struggle than relief? That’s a pretty important question.

If you have a Bible like mine the phrase, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness,” is in red letters. That means the Bible translators think those are the words of Jesus himself. Jesus is telling Paul, “My grace is with you, Paul. It’s enough for you. I know you want relief, but keep hanging on. Because for you to see and experience my power, you need to remain weak and humble.” I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to miss out on

experiencing and knowing the all-sufficient power of Jesus in my life. I need to embrace my weaknesses. Not curse them. Not despair over them. Not deny them. I need to embrace them.

What should we do with our weaknesses? Vs. 10 gives us the answer, “For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with my weaknesses.” Here might be the most important lesson for you to hear today, 30 year olds struggling out home, overwhelmed by your demands: You want God to change your challenges, but God is using these challenges to change you. What if I told you all that frustration, all the struggle, all the disappointment is part of God’s divine plan to change you into being a more godly woman, a more godly man? He’s teaching you to rest in him, to believe in his promises, to be content with your weaknesses so you can experience the power of God in your life.

There’s one more response from God, I believe, that will help us when we feel we’ve reached our limit. There’s another question we might ask ourselves a lot when we are in our 30s: “What about me?” With the increased demand of work, parenting, marriage, responsibilities, we can feel somewhat neglected and forgotten. We give, give, give and wonder, “When is it my turn?”

The cultural answer or advice to this struggle is, “Put yourself first.” Sometime, go and google, “Oprah Winfrey put yourself first” and you will find scores of articles and videos where the queen of talk television champions this message. And it seems right. Doesn’t it seem that the remedy to a tired, burned out, fatigued life is “put yourself first?”

But God’s way is counterintuitive, isn’t it? I get tempted to think, “What about me?” I’ve been working so hard, giving so much, sacrificing, it seems, on a regular occasion. But God helps me fight those thoughts with Jesus’ teaching in Mark 10:42-45 (READ).

When I ask, “What about me?” I’m looking to be served. I want others to put down what they are doing and start taking care of me. I want to stop serving so I can be the recipient of the service from others. But look what Jesus is saying. Receiving service isn’t the kingdom way; offering and giving service is the kingdom way. That’s what it means to be great. That’s what it’s like to be like Jesus; to be a servant.

Here was the revelation for me: *Life is found in serving, not in being served* (REPEAT). I was deceived into thinking and believing that I needed and I deserved service; I was deceived into believing that life is found in being served by others when in reality Jesus is telling you and me that true life is found in serving. When I remember that, I’m given new strength, new resolve, to press into the high demands of life without self-pity.

Now, you can’t and won’t be a servant until you die to yourself. If you won’t die to yourself, you won’t be a servant. Jesus told us to die to ourselves; he said (Lk 9:23-24), “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”

Did you see it? You actually gain what you're looking for if you die to yourself. You want life, true life from God. But you don't find that by demanding and claiming it yourself. You gain it when you trust God to give it to you through a faithful life of service.

I thought I knew what it meant to die to myself was until I got married. And then I thought, "Oh, this is what it means to die to yourself." And then I had kids and it hit me again, "Oh, this is what it really means to die to yourself." And then they grew older and had greater demands; and then the demands of my church family, my work life, my civic life began growing more and more and every time I had to say, "Oh, this is what it means to die to myself." Day by day, trial by trial, we come to the crossroads, "will I die to myself or not?"

You can't be a servant to others if you're living for yourself. Trust God to take care of you. Lay down your attempts to hold onto your life and believe that God will give you all that you need for this life and for the life to come.

Now, dying to yourself doesn't mean there isn't a place for self-care. Self-care is different than the cultural value of "loving yourself" or "putting yourself first." Can I tell you the difference? The difference is the ultimate prize. When you put yourself first (or love yourself) you prize yourself the most. You see yourself as the ultimate good. But that's opposite to what God teaches. God is our greatest prize. The ultimate good is God. And he calls us to be a servant to others, not seek service.

Appropriate self-care keeps God at the center and a life of service as the path towards life. Self-care takes God's word seriously that you are a limited, weak, needy person who requires ongoing growth and care to be able to keep serving others in the name of Jesus. Did you catch the goal? The ultimate goal of self-care isn't my good, it's the good of others and God's kingdom. When we keep the true goal in mind, self-care is a strategic necessity to provide the maximal service to others.

For many years in our 30s, I'd try and negotiate retreats for Korby. I'd arrange 2 or 3 days away in a motel in the city of her choice so she could get a retreat from our house full of boys. And she'd do whatever she wanted to do; rest, read, watch TV, spend time with God in the scriptures and pray, shop, whatever. I wanted the best for my wife and the only way she could continue serving our family the way I know she wanted to was to practice some self-care. But she didn't go thinking, "I can finally put myself where I rightfully belong... first." No, she went with the hope and need of rest and refreshment so she could live God's best life for her now, which is a life of service.

It just might be the case that you need rest, refreshment, self-care more in your 30s than any other time because the demands have grown so much and you haven't quite learned how to manage and settle into them. So, make sure you take that rest. But do so remembering your true calling... a life of service.

If you're in your 30s, do you resonate with this question, "How do I get done all that I must?" Are the demands of work, family, money, life getting the best of you? Let me encourage you by saying "you'll make." God will see you through. But it does require change. You need to change your expectations. You also need to embrace your weaknesses; when you do you will experience the power of God. And finally, you have to change your goal from being served to being a servant. But you won't be a servant if you live for you; believe Jesus' words. If you seek your own life, you'll lose it. But if you give your life away, you'll find it.

Key Vs. 2 Cor. 12:9

Questions for the week

- Do you feel you have the right expectations about the challenges of life? In what way have your wrong expectations impacted your outlook and experiences of trials?
- Think about your weaknesses in light of 2 Cor. 12:9. What do you need to believe from this passage to say, like Paul, "I am content with my weaknesses?"
- How does remembering your calling as a servant help you in your struggles?