

June 23-24, 2007
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Questions You May Have Asked
#4: What Gives You Hope?

How do you respond to adversity? How do you respond to the challenges of life that inevitably come our way? Are you tempted to give up? Do you want to get even? Do you want to run and hide? How do you respond to adversity?

Mark Easton is a city councilman in Utah. He lives in a nice neighborhood. He had a beautiful view of the East Mountains, until a new neighbor purchased the lot below his house and built a home. Apparently, the new home was 18 inches higher than the ordinances would allow, so Mark Easton, mad about his lost view, went to the city to make sure they enforced the lower roof line ordinance. Mark and his new neighbor had some great arguments about this, even a lawsuit. Hard feelings developed between them. But in the end, the new neighbor had to drop the roof line - no doubt at great expense.

Recently, Mark Easton called the city and informed them that his new neighbor had installed some vents on the side of his home. Mark didn't like the look of these vents and asked the city to investigate. When they went to Mark's home to see the vent view, this is what they found . . . (Show the picture).

Obviously, the neighbor was a little miffed and wanted to express his feelings. Getting even isn't the best way to respond to adversity. How do you respond to adversity?

I know that some of you may be shocked, even appalled at what you have just seen in church. But the reality is that when adversity comes our way, we each can choose how we respond. Responding the way Mark Easton's neighbor did is not the best way. Because it holds on to the anger. It doesn't let it go. It doesn't give hope and healing a chance to come to the surface.

Sometimes, how we respond to hurt, pain and suffering in our life does not leave room for hope and healing to come into our lives. That is why I ask, how do you respond to adversity?

Today we are continuing our sermon series on *Questions You May Have Asked?* We are asking the question, *What Gives You Hope?* Hope is most needed in our life when adversity comes our way. When pain and despair begin to overwhelm us and get the best of us. Have pain, adversity and despair ever come your way?

In our scripture for today, we meet two followers of Jesus, who are on the road, away from Jerusalem after the death of Jesus. They have been so caught up in the events surrounding the death of Jesus that it is simply overwhelming. They are feeling pain. They are feeling despair. They had hoped for so much in Jesus, that now his death was almost too much.

So they are on a journey away. They are hoping to leave their pain and despair behind them. Have you ever tried to run away from your pain? Have you ever tried to move away from adversity?

While they are walking, Jesus comes up beside them. They don't recognize him. And they keep walking, trying to bring him up to date on all the tragedy that had taken place. They tell the story of their hurt. And in this telling the story, the seeds of hope and new life are born.

When we are hurt, we need to find a place to be honest about what is happening to us. I am not sure why, but expressing our hurt, expressing our feelings, being honest about what is happening to us allows us the freedom to see a new way into the future.

If you are here and you are dealing with adversity and looking for hope, do you have someone you can talk with? It may be a friend, it may be a spouse, it may be a parent, it might even be a counselor, but do you have someone? Are you including telling your story to God?

After Jesus listened to them, then he started to talk and reinterpret the scripture. Later, we discover that this was a very meaningful exchange for the two. **What this passage reminds us is that no matter how tough the road we are on is, Jesus comes to meet us on that road, to open up new possibilities for life.**

What I have discovered at the lowest points of my life is that God is there. God cares about me. God cares about you. In those moments when I have felt completely abandoned by others and those who love me, I have experienced the presence of a God who will not let me go.

When I am asked, what gives me hope, the answer is easy. It is faith in God, who cares for me and will not abandon me. I experience the presence of God not only in my daily time of prayer and reading scripture. **But I experience the presence of God when I am a part of the community of faith, when we gather at the church to walk hand in hand, to make a difference in this world.**

Maybe you have heard the story of a nine-year-old boy sitting at his desk and all of a sudden, there is a puddle between his feet and the front of his pants are wet. He thinks his heart is going to stop because he cannot possibly imagine how this has happened.

It's never happened before, and he knows that when the other boys find out he will never hear the end of it. When the girls find out, they'll never speak to him again as long as he lives.

He believes his heart is going to stop. He puts his head down and prays this prayer, "Dear God, this is an emergency! I need help now!"

He looks up from his prayer and here comes the teacher with a look in her eyes that says he has been discovered. As the teacher is walking toward him, a classmate named Susie is carrying a goldfish bowl that is filled with water. Susie trips in front of the teacher and inexplicably dumps the bowl of water in the boy's lap.

The boy pretends to be angry, but all the while is saying to himself, "Thank you, Lord! Thank you, Lord!"

Now all of a sudden, instead of being the object of ridicule, the boy is the object of sympathy. The teacher rushes him downstairs and gives him gym shorts to put on while his pants dry out. All the other children are on their hands and knees cleaning up around his desk. The sympathy is wonderful.

But as life would have it, the ridicule that should have been his has been transferred to someone else - Susie. She tries to help, but they tell her, "Get out. You've done enough, you klutz!"

Finally, at the end of the day, as they are waiting for the bus, the boy walks over to Susie and whispers, "You did that on purpose, didn't you?"

Susie whispers back, "I wet my pants once too."

Susie understood. We are in this together. We are here to help each other out. We are here to help each other walk hand in hand and discover the presence of God that is all around us.

The next time you find yourself facing adversity, just stop and ask yourself. What is the best way to respond? Is it to get even? Is it to run away?

If that is how you have acted in the past, why don't you try something new? Be honest about the hurt and pain you are experiencing. Give it to God. Join together with others to help you stay focused on God.

May God help us to live faithfully.

Amen.