

Even if... I will...
Preached 5/30/2017

I love this theme of our worship service this morning: “Even if.... I will...” because it allows our worship of God to flow directly out of the experiences of our lives. One of the things we continually emphasize here is that the Knollwood’s culture here can’t be one of just pretending life is always good and full of sunshine where nothing bad ever happens. A life of pretending that we are recipients of God’s many blessings day after day after day – never encountering problems in our lives. And that if we do encounter problems it’s because of a lack of faith in God and the solution is that we need to have more faith and then the problems will disappear. That’s not what we’re about. Because life has problems but God wants to use those problems in our lives to transform us to be more like Jesus. Ongoing problems in our lives are not a sign of God’s displeasure with us, otherwise some of the greatest faith filled people in the Bible were lacking in faith. Our focus can’t be on eliminating problems from our lives but rather how to effectively deal with the problems that God allows into our lives.

So let me pause for just a minute and ask you: “What is your most recent “**Even if...**” scenarios that God has allowed into your life? Just this week I know that members of this church were presented with the following “Even if...” scenarios.

- Nervousness about an upcoming surgery
- Nervousness about selling a house and finding a new home
- Feeling overwhelmed by the general circumstances of their lives
- Overwhelmed by living situations that you never anticipated
- Concern over money issues
- Living with an ongoing medical issue
- Struggling with addiction issues
- Starting a new job
- And many others.

These issues are not going to quickly go away no matter how hard you pray – because we live in a fallen world where these types of things will continue to come up.

There are some great examples of this “**Even if... then I will**” approaches to challenges in the Scriptures.

One of the points that we need to understand early on is that we need to understand is that we often have very little control over the “Even if’s” in our lives but we always have control over our response to them.

We’ve got some great examples of this throughout the Scriptures.

- **Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego** were Israelites and followers of God who found themselves deported to the land of Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar erected a giant statue of himself and demanded that everyone bow down and worship it but Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused so they were hauled in front of the King and given one last chance to bow down otherwise they would be thrown into this really hot flaming furnace prepared for anyone who disobeyed. And look at this response:

Daniel 3:16-18 (NIV) *Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, “King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s*

hand. But **even if** he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.

You seen they couldn't control the situation they found themselves in, unless they wanted to compromise their commitment to God. But since they were unwilling to do that they found themselves in this sticky situation where it appeared their lives were about to be snuffed out. But what was their "I will" response. We are trusting in God no matter what. He may deliver us...but even if He doesn't we're still not bowing down to your statue or any other god.

- **The prophet Habakkuk** expressed an *"Even if...then I will..."* scenario that most of us could relate to.

Habakkuk 3:17-18 (NIV) *Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, **yet I will** rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.*

The prophet is expressing a commitment he's made that even if there is no sign of God's blessing in my present circumstances, this is still going to be my response. Even when my present circumstances don't seem to shout out God's love and protection and blessings upon my life – yet I will rejoice in the Lord and I will be joyful in God my Savior. What's your other options? To sit and moan and complain to God about your current situation and to lay awake at night worrying about it and until you're not sleeping and then you getting increasingly more crabby and difficult to live with and then you develop an ulcer and or turn to other artificial means of coping with your pain and disillusionment and discouragement.

The prophet Habakkuk is saying that he will not allow his circumstances to dictate his response to them. No matter what the outward circumstances are, I will still rejoice in the Lord and be joyful in Him. Our joy needs to be found in God and not in our outward circumstances. What's better – to find your joy in things which are always changing or in God who never changes?

- **The Apostle Peter** had an example *"Even if...I will..."* moment recorded for everyone to read and learn from. It took place in the Upper Room where Jesus had all his disciples gathered around him and he was telling them that soon he would have to go to the cross and die and that this very night all of the disciples would fall away on account of Jesus. Peter stands up and boldly declares: *"**Even if** all fall away on account of you, I never will." "Truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." But Peter declared, "**Even if** I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same. (Matthew 26:33-35 (NIV))*

Of course most of us probably are well aware that Peter didn't fare so well in his bold declaration. He in fact did deny Jesus three times as Jesus had predicted. However another key piece to this is something Jesus said to Peter in the midst of this exchange that is recorded by Luke.

"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." (Luke 22:31-32 (NIV))

While Peter did deny Jesus he ultimately grew from that and did precisely what Jesus had prayed for. He became a great leader in the early church and boldly stood up and proclaimed in front of thousands gathered on the day of Pentecost that Jesus is Lord and Savior.

Lesson: Often God uses our failures to grow us more into Christlikeness. So, even when you fail don't give up, as Judas tragically did, but grow stronger from it.

- **The Apostle Paul** is another individual who had plenty of "**Even if...**" moments throughout his life that could have convinced him that this Christian life isn't all it's cracked up to be – or at least the life of a missionary. In 2 Corinthians he summarizes his experiences with this assessment.

2 Corinthians 1:8-9 (NIV) *We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death.*

We don't specifically know what troubles he's referring to that caused such tremendous pressure and despairing of life. But later on in this letter he recounts many of the troubles that he experienced throughout his ministry thus far. Let me read those for you right now. And as I'm reading them as yourself, "If this were my Even if's, how would I respond?"

Read 2 Corinthians 11:23-27

Perhaps you can understand why he said that given these circumstances he said that he felt like he'd received the sentence of death and that he despaired of life itself.

Right after Paul describes these difficult circumstances in his life he describes his reaction to them. "*If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.*" That seems like a strange statement. Why would you boast about your weaknesses. In our culture we're generally taught not to let people see your weaknesses. Hide your weaknesses and only let them see your strengths. That's the way to get ahead in life. But Paul is clearly taking a different approach here. Paul explains this approach to the "Even if's" in life in the very next chapter. He writes this:

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (NIV) *Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Paul learned a very valuable lesson in this experience with the Lord. God humbled him and reminded him that God can often do far greater things through our weaknesses than through our strengths. Because when we look strong and capable to people and accomplish some really good things – they are impressed with us. But when we are weak and God uses us to accomplish great things – people's attention is directed to God instead. And that ought to be our goal in all of our "**Even if's...**" that God is glorified in and through our lives and through our reactions. Through our "**I will's...**"

Paul describes this same principle in the middle of his letter to the church at Corinth as well. And he uses an analogy that most of us can relate to.

2 Corinthians 4:7-11 (NIV) *But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body.*

Paul says that each of our lives are like jars of clay. And as jars of clay they are very fragile and easily broken. But that's okay because we don't want people to get caught up in examining our lives. When we are broken and appear weak God can display His power and compassion and grace brilliantly through us. Therefore all the "Even if's..." really present an opportunity for us to show off God's brilliance in our reactions, our "I will's..." Therefore our "I will's..." in every circumstance ought to be that we want to God to show forth brilliantly in our reactions to life's challenges and disappointments and heartaches. So, when you're reacting to a challenge or disappointment in your life ask yourself first – if I react this way am I allowing God the opportunity to show forth brilliantly. Because often when we're hurt we tend to lash out at others or blast away at others out of hurt feelings. Then the attention is drawn to us rather than focusing it on God. We don't make God brilliantly loving through our responses to life. He already is brilliantly loving. But we have this incredible opportunity and mission in life to allow God to use us to show His character to others through our reactions to life.

Finally, Paul summarizes his reaction to all the "**Even if's**..." in life in verses 16-18.

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (NIV))

Who wants to live life losing heart? Nobody wants to experience that. And Paul could have easily lost heart in his life and ministry with all the hardships he had to endure. What continually brought him through every one was where he focused his eyes on. He intentionally chose to focus his eyes not on his problems or "**Even if's**..." but rather he focused his eyes on Jesus and the anticipation of spending eternity with him.

It's similar to what David did when he defeated Goliath. When he arrived in the Israelites camp to check up on how his brothers were doing he found them hiding in their tents out of fear of Goliath. It says that "they had lost heart". But when David saw Goliath he didn't focus his sights on Goliath's size but rather focused his mind and heart on the bigness of God and when he did that, Goliath didn't seem so huge and intimidating. Sometimes your troubles in life look like Goliaths. But my advice to you, based on Scripture, is to not focus on those problems and challenges, but rather to focus on God and praise Him and ask Him to shine brilliantly through your fragile pot so people might be drawn to Him and His love for them.

"Even if... I will praise you."