

A Word on Wednesday from Pastor Tonia

"Ballast or Baggage" 7/20/22

*Endurance produces character
and character produces hope.* (Romans 5:4)

Yikes, but I've got enough character, thank you very much.

We reach out and hold on to dreams of what can be, building on what was, and living through what is. Any set-back, any trauma, a financial downturn, a difficult assignment, a bad diagnosis, a hard decision, the loss of a loved one, of a dream, a possession, a job, stability, or security – throws us off kilter. We even faced a Pandemic. As it lingers, we lack confidence, we are shaken, and we are weary; yet God still gives us hope.

As we deal with hard times, live with and through difficulties, we wonder if we can stand up under them or will they stand in our way, hold us back, or even cause us to come full stop?

Do the difficulties we face become ballast or baggage? Do they stabilize us or hold us back? How do we use them? Do we grow from the unexpected, do they make us stronger, or do we complain, whine, and give up? "The obstacle is the way," Marcus Aurelius tells us. Paul tells us, "Trials give us hope." We learn from every experience, each lesson is an opportunity to improve, to become who we were created to be.

How do we carry the challenges we face in life? Do they stabilize us and strengthen us so we can continue our journey with fortitude and courage, with hope and joy? Or do they weigh us down, hold us back, causing us to become sluggish and negative, woeful, and heavy laden? Are we able to see God's presence in the dark or do we curse God and desire to die?

God gifts us with faith and hope, the ability to see and acknowledge God is at work, to recognize the blessings in our lives, even when what we are going through is not our idea of a good time.

God's gift of faith gives us hope, hope we can learn from each situation. Hope we will grow through our difficulties – each instilling within us a trait which makes us better people, which strengthen us to face the next hurdle and to rejoice in our blessings.

We want to reach out and touch the stars – but first, someone has to get an education, spend hours at the drawing board, getting proposals knocked down, before they finally come up with a way to travel into the heavens. There are investors to impress, land to be located, engineers to educate, astronauts to authorize, rockets to be erected, etc etc etc. People put in years of hard work to do each part of what it takes to get within range of those stars.

Hope, in the face of the obstacles we face, stabilizes us, causes us to try again, and allows us to have joy as we seek direction, remembering God is near.

Knowing God will guide us, we are not alone in this. We all face difficulties. It is not easy for anybody. Some seem to have an easier journey, some tend to start over more times than others, some seem to wallow, and some seem to fly. Some seem steady as they move forward. Some are held back by the baggage they drag behind.

With hope we need to allow the obstacles to form us, stabilize us, and give us strength to continue. Let us value the hard times for what they show us of God and of ourselves – we may be surprised. Quitting isn't an option if you hope to cross the finish line.

The athlete builds up their endurance. It's pretty hard to run a marathon as your first ever race – especially if you haven't prepared for it, building up your ability to withstand the vigor's of putting one foot in front of the other for 26 miles. ONE mile stretches many to the max.

What hurdles do you face in your day, in your home, at your job, in a relationship? What hinders your forward motion in life? We've faced losses – they cause us to grow and learn a new way to live without, to come and see God's perfect plan.

We figure out how to rebuild, as we get up in the morning and get on with life – whatever that now looks like. Or we can stay in bed and pull the covers over our head and refuse to go on - because it's too difficult. I can identify with that feeling, thinking all I want to do is to lie in bed and ignore life – but then what do I win? There'll be no breaking the tape, there won't be a feeling of accomplishment, there won't be a gold star, just a messy bed.

It's difficult to move forward some days. It takes all we have to keep going. Life is hard. Obstacles jump out in front of all of us, unexpected, unwanted, unbelievable, but inevitable. What doesn't kill us makes us stronger. And we want to be strong. We want to be known as someone who endured. Someone with character. Someone with hope.

Do our experiences, the unwanted, the uninvited happenstances, stabilize us or hold us back? Do they throw us off or keep us on track? Does the obstacle become the way or a roadblock? Do we decide to endure, to exercise our character, and live with hope?

Baggage or ballast? Which will it be?

Please pray with me: God of the journey. Thank You for guiding us along the way and for being with us when we go off road. Give us wisdom and strength to know we are loved no matter what pops up in front of us, no matter what we have to climb over or go around. Help us to keep our eyes on You and seek Your will in our lives. Give us comfort in our difficulties, may we learn from each stumbling block. May we have hope in spite of the difficulties we endure. Lord, create character within us which reflects Your goodness and love to others.

Amen.