

Rejoice in the rough times

Ask anyone on the corner of any street in any city in this country and you'll agree that it's no surprise times are tough all over. Jobs are scarce, prices and unemployment continue to rise, stocks and bank accounts slowly dwindle and housing values plummet. Money is tight and budgets are tighter, futures seem bleak and families are struggling in ways this nation hasn't seen since perhaps the Great Depression. It is enough to bring the stress level in anyone's life to beyond boiling point. But what if I told you it will probably get worse before it gets better? You'd more than likely throw your hands up in hopeless surrender or cop an "I give up" attitude.

But what if I followed by saying that as painful as these times are, I want you to be encouraged? C.S. Lewis is quoted as saying, "Pain is God's megaphone." Pain is often what fuels passion – (I know it has so many times in my own life). It fills us with strength, power and often a greatness that we don't normally even realize we possess. Yes, pain is God's way of waking us from our routine lethargy, our redundant weariness.

I heard a story recently about a man named John. John had a fierce lawyer friend who lived a few states away and although this lawyer was a Christian man he knew how to get in the face of his adversaries and fight for them to gain the win. Therefore, whenever John had a battle he needed fought he knew exactly who to call for help in his fight. After one of his wins, John's friend told him "You know, I kind of like it when you are in trouble. It allows us time that we get to spend together."

Now before you start sending me hate mail, please understand, I'm not saying that the trials, struggles or painful situations you are dealing with in your life are punishment; they are merely wake-up calls from a loving God; a God who desperately wants to spend some time with you, who wants you to rely on Him.

But you should also know, that as you deal with these painful situations in your life, Satan is sitting back mocking God and laughing at your struggles. John 10:10 tells us that "*the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; [but] I (Jesus) have come that YOU may have life, and have it to the fullest*". I want to encourage you to be persistent in your wage against the wars in your life while aiming for those victories. Like the story of the stone cutter I once read. You see, a stone cutter may strike a rock ninety-nine times without making a crack in the rock but the 100th strike may split the rock in two. Each strike weakened the rock, even though there were no outward signs showing. You may be on the verge of cracking and not even realize it. You might know someone who seems to have it all together but inside their world is no different than yours. Persistence is vital for obtaining victory...for overcoming obstacles. Stay focused, stay persistent.

Jesus told us in John 16 that we WILL have trials, it is inevitable, but rejoice, there is hope "*I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*"

God has not caused these painful periods in your life because he is mad at you or doesn't love you- quite the contrary, he simply will do whatever it takes to bring you back to him, even if it means getting out his megaphone.

I challenge you to be one of those on your block that rejoices during these rough times. Make it a point everyday to get into your Bible and spend some time with Him; look for opportunities to be a blessing to someone else (even if they appear to have it all-together). I Chronicles 16:10 says there is "*Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice*. Perhaps as you press through your pain, rejoicing and spending time with the Lord, you can pay it forward and "*Be not simply good - be good for something.*" ~ Henry David Thoreau. Who knows once you realize that you're awake- you might even want to get out your own megaphone.

~ c. michelle bryant is a freelance writer and the author of the devotional *God, are you listening?*