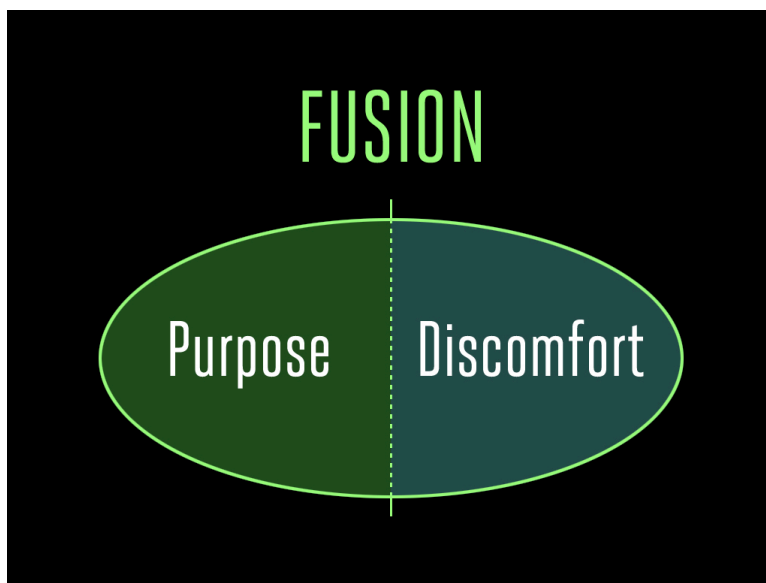


Take your seats, get comfortable.

PRAY

- God would speak to us
- that we would **grow in understanding** as we study the Bible together
- that **God would sharpen us for his purposes**, and each one of us will take on the work and purposes of God, and **continue faithfully** for the rest of our lives.



Tonight I want to speak about **a subject that I feel God's been challenging me on** in the last month or so.

It's a topic that's **come up three or four times recently** as I've read books, listened to podcasts and just read my Bible.

When that happens – when the same subject or bible verses hit you several times in a short space of time, **it's worth being attentive to it.**

It could well be the Holy Spirit flagging something up.
Maybe it's just coincidence, but maybe not. Maybe it's God.

It's the relationship between purpose and discomfort (and/or suffering).

How the two are really fused together, and there's no way round it. (Even though I desperately want there to be one!)

My message really centres on this verse:

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

Matt 16:24-25

I also want to touch on peace, faith and joy.

How God is after the complete picture, and although we may embrace discomfort, God wants us full of joy.

He wants us cheerful, he wants us peaceful.

Although there's tough things He's calling you to, there's many, many good things as well.

Thinking about this verse – ‘take up your cross and follow me’ – it’s a very familiar verse.

One I’ve known and been living with as long as I remember.

But I feel recently it’s taken on a new flavour.
My understanding of it’s got a little bit deeper.

I would say it started when I listened to a sermon by Tim Keller (a very clever American preacher, generally appreciated by guys like **Mark Driscoll**, **John Piper** and **Andrew Wilson**. You can find his books in our book shop).

There was just a couple of audio clips that jumped out.

It’s from his preach ‘**Real security and the call of God**’.

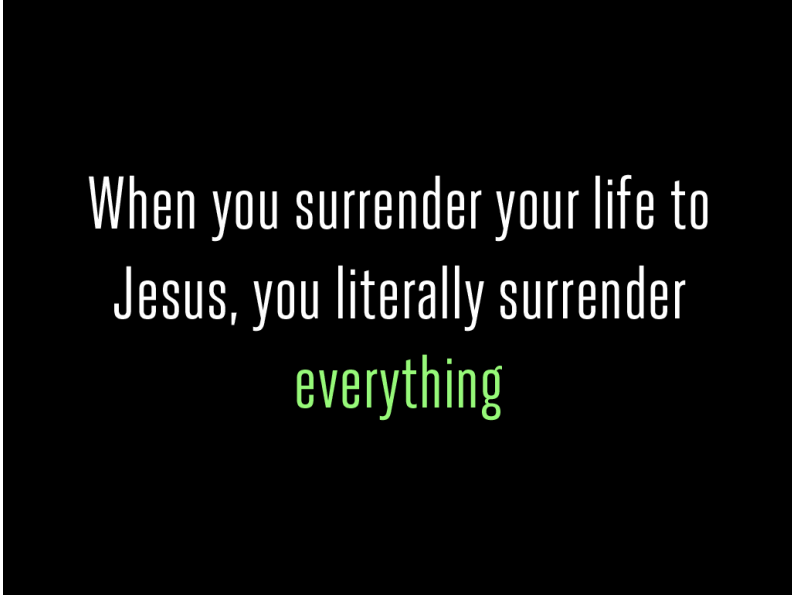
Well worth listening to – I’ll post the whole thing up on Facebook later.

Play clips from mini-pod and speakers, or iphone and computer speakers

Clip 1 – just under 2 minutes. Try to stay awake! ;) Try to listen carefully.

So there we go.

I think that's a really, really good summary of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.



When you surrender your life to
Jesus, you literally surrender
everything

When you surrender your life to Jesus, you literally surrender everything, including:

- your will, your control, your safety, comfort and security
- your ability to plan the future and have life as you want it.
(friends, family, relationships, money, possessions...)
- your ability to make decisions based on your own understanding and knowledge. (basically giving up your common sense!)

How many of us know that all those things are incredibly difficult!

In some sense it was easy to pray the sinner's prayer at the beginning of your walk, to give your life over to Jesus on paper.

It's much harder to live it out in real life, day by day.

You had the **example of Abraham** in that passage.

It never really struck me before just how much faith was really being demanded of him through those trials and challenges.
(you read everything with the benefit of hindsight)

Years of waiting, years of seemingly unanswered prayers.

Must have felt like torture!!

Clip 2

So for me Tim Keller really hit the nail on the head there.

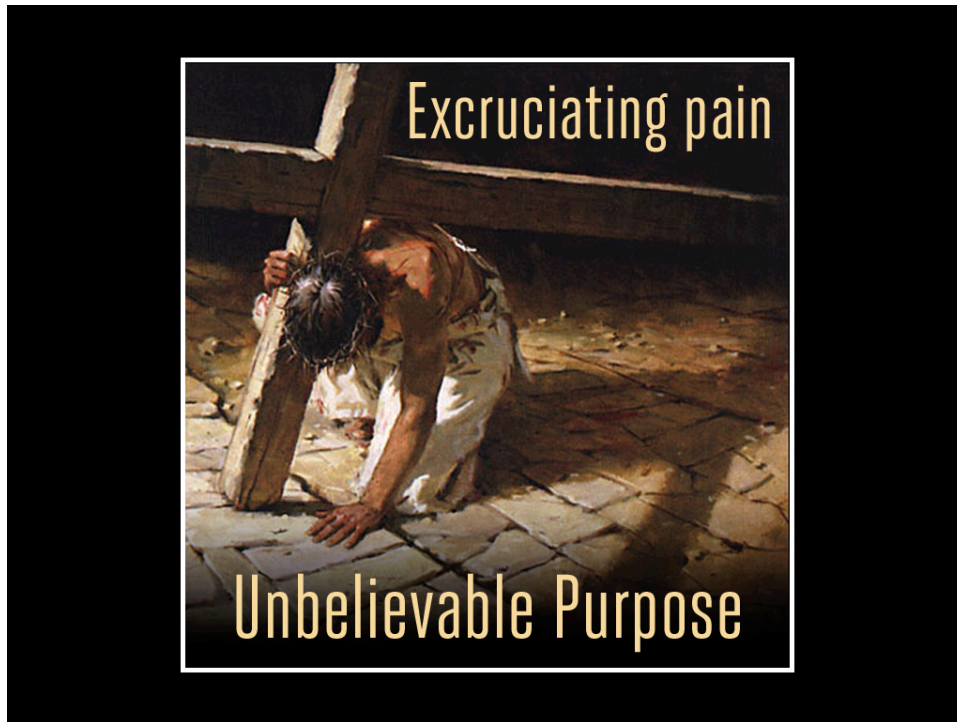
Purpose and discomfort are two things that go hand in hand.

You have this equation where the more uncomfortable you're prepared to be, the more useful to God you're likely to be.

Greater Purpose = Greater Discomfort = More Useful to God.

For me, Tim Keller makes more than a casual observation.

You see the fullest outworking of it in this verse...



"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

Matt 16:24

The concept is entirely biblical, and it's really brought alive this verse.

When you think about what Jesus did on the cross, it wasn't just painful. It was the greatest achievement in human history. He redeemed mankind.

**Pain and purpose were fused together on that cross.
They couldn't be separated.**

And I think that's at the heart of this verse...

When Jesus says we must take up our cross and follow him, he's calling us to embrace both.

Our eye is on mission at the cost of pain. It's something we have to be prepared to sign ourselves up for.

Okay, next up... I have a theory...

And I'm going to attempt to illustrate it through the next diagram

EASY LIFE
slightly pointless existence

●
comfortable
ineffective
desire for purpose

**PURPOSE
& DANGER!**

Hopefully we're agreed that an easy life and a purposeful life are pretty much opposites. Two sides of the line.

At one point or another you might find yourself right in the easy zone

– comfortable, perhaps ineffective, but a desire for purpose.

EASY LIFE

slightly pointless existence



entering danger
becoming uncomfortable
increasingly useful,
but **starting to freak out**

PURPOSE & DANGER!

As you decide to embrace purpose and take a few risks, things start to heat up a little. You start to turn orange.

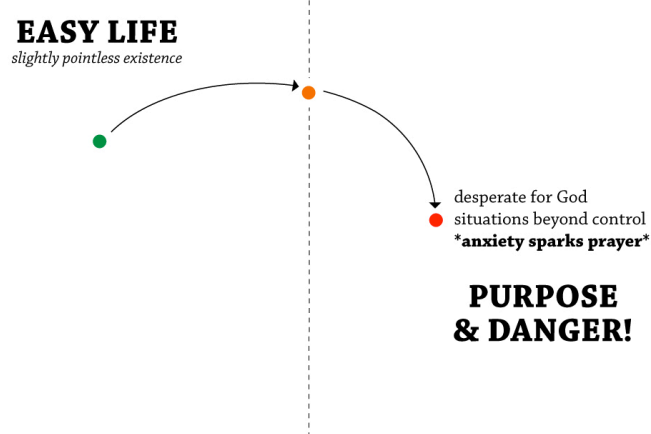
Maybe that's telling your friends about Jesus.
Maybe that's giving financially to God.
Maybe it's taking on leadership and responsibility.

Whatever it is, it takes you out of your comfort zone.

It's taking you into the danger zone.

You experience greater usefulness and purpose, but perhaps you're starting to freak out a little!

Sound familiar to anyone?



Things may progress even further.

They take you right into the danger zone. At this point you're turning red hot.

This is when **1 Peter 5:7** really kicks in:

"Cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you"

and

"Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"

Matt 6:25

Fear, anxiety, worrying – they're all calls to prayer.

I've definitely noticed in my own life that situations that are totally beyond your control are the ones where you're most dependent on God.

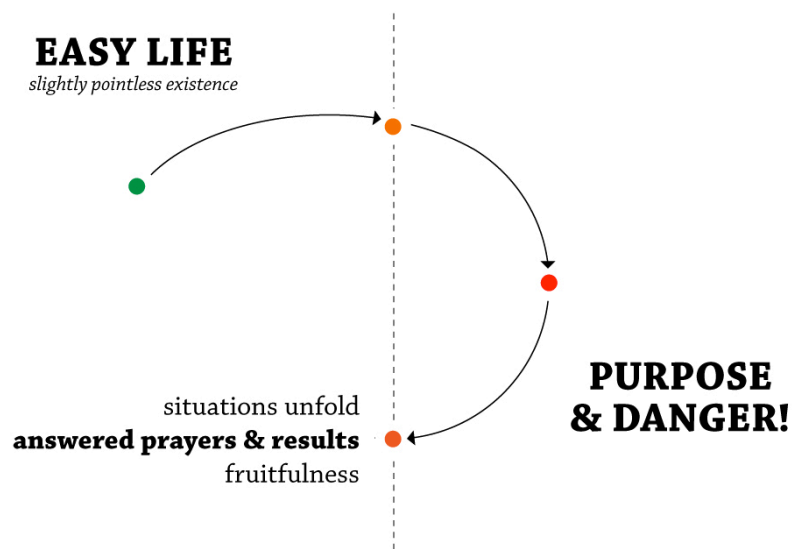
They really spark up your prayer life.

In particular, for me it's a constant struggle being a **freelance** graphic designer. I'm often finding myself totally in the red zone.

ESP. with regards to finances and cash flow.

But in it, we've seen some **real big answers to prayer.**

So for me, this is an out working of this useful/uncomfortable scenario.

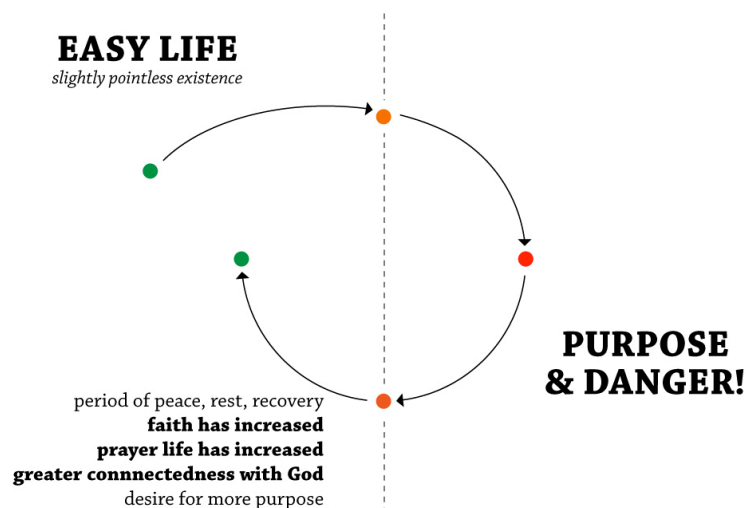


As these situations play themselves out, **you can experience many answered prayers.**

You **start to see the results**, the fruitfulness of the Holy Spirit in your work.

In this, the intense heat starts to cool off.

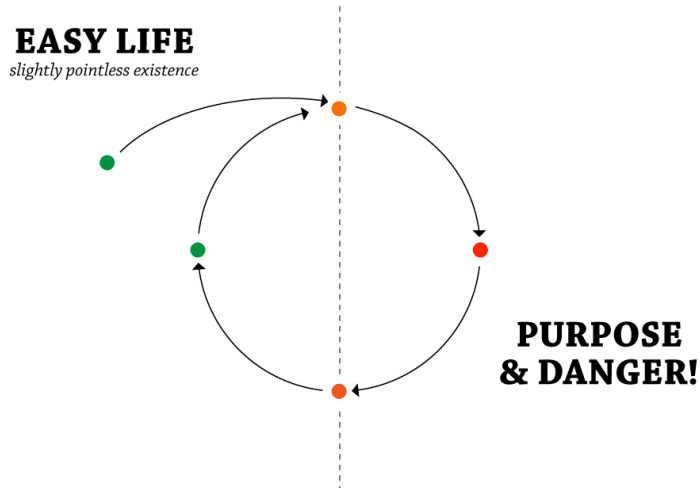
There's **real satisfaction with your work, real thankfulness to God** that he didn't leave you or abandon you in that dangerous place.



I also believe **God grants you real periods of peace and rest**, so for a while you **go full circle**, heading back into the easy zone.

In completing that kind of cycle, **your faith is increased**, **your prayer life has increased**.

You feel **a greater connectedness with God**, and you're stronger as a Christian.



But of course, **you don't remain in the easy zone**, you eventually head back round again and again.

Main Point: Repeatedly plunging into discomfort and purpose is what keeps your relationship with God hot.

We're going to have some discussion questions at the end, and we're going to **break down into groups**. Two of the questions will be:

Q: What purposes is God calling you to right now? What is God calling you to that is outside of your comfort zone?

Q: Where is discomfort & pain present in your life?
Is it related to following Jesus? (sometimes it's just life)
If so, are you prepared to keep paying that price?

Peace is not the absence of trouble, but the
presence of God, even in the most troubled situation

"I have said these things to you, that in me you may
have peace. In the world you will have tribulation.
But take heart; I have overcome the world."

John 16:33

I have no idea where I heard the top quote. It's not a bible verse, it's just a phrase I read somewhere, possibly in a book, and wrote it in the front of my bible about 10 years ago.

I really like the way it put it.

Peace is not the absence of trouble, it's the presence of God.

I think it's a really good definition of peace. Peace in your spirit, in your soul, is something most people desperately want.

We can make the mistake of thinking it comes from having an **easy** life, or a **successful** life.

We can make the mistake of thinking money will solve all our problems.

But none of that scratches the surface.

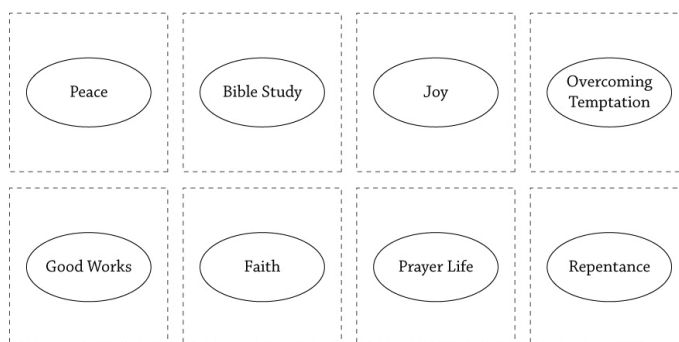
Peace is the presence of God.

In **John 16:33** Jesus makes the same point. In him we can have peace, but in the world we will have tribulation.

Peace is united with Jesus, and following Jesus is united with troubles.

So in an unexpected kind of way, **if you want to have peace, you have to embrace troubles** in this world.

SEGMENTED APPROACH



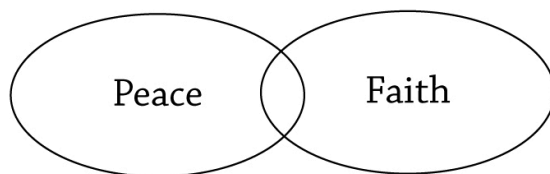
Here's what I think we do a lot as Christians, in the way we think. (or at least *I think*)

We have all these **different aspects of Christianity** that we tend to think of as **individual ingredients**.

So you might look at the list and think, '**oh, I need to pray more**', or '**I'm miserable, I need more joy**'.

You might need to read your bible more. And **all those things might be true, but we think of them as separate things**.

But in practice, I think we find that they're all quite closely related.

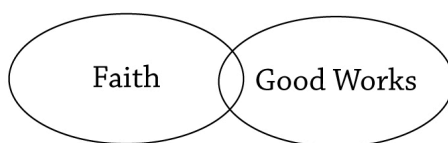


“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”

Romans 5:1

Faith and peace are connected

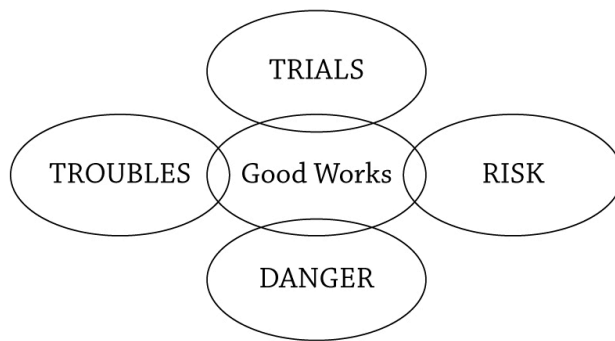
If you want peace, it's obvious you have to trust God



“Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

James 2:17

But then if you have faith, good works are the natural result.

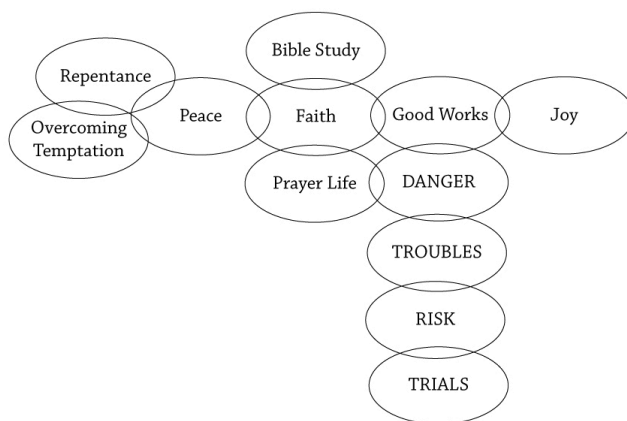


“in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

John 16:33

But then if you pursue good works, it's surrounded by all this nasty stuff like trials and troubles.

But the picture you ultimately end up with is this:



So rather than the segmented approach we started out with, we realise that they're all interconnected.

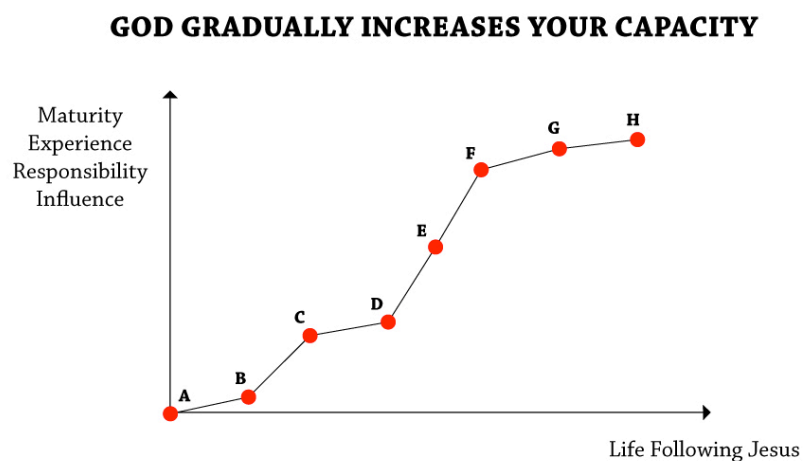
God's **gradually growing in us the whole picture**, and the **Holy Spirit** is needed in every part of life.

(This is obviously just my limited illustration – there's probably loads of other circles you can add in).

My key point: if we want the peace, the joy, the faith – all the good stuff then we also have to embrace works, trials, risk and troubles.

We have to be prepared to enter in that 'danger zone'.

One last picture before we end...



"Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin"
Zechariah 4:10

Zechariah 4 says:

“Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin”.

Every work (every purpose) starts with a small beginning, and grows over time.

Throughout all these different purposes of our lives (prayer, courage, giving, serving, witnessing etc) **God takes us from A to B to C to D.**

He gives us manageable tasks that push us a little, **and bit by bit he takes us from one point to the next.**

He doesn't take us from A to F in one go.

Example of finances

- A: giving nothing
- B: giving sporadically
- C: engage in more regular giving
- D: better and financing and budgeting
- E, F, G: generosity increases

Two final quotes:

"Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life."

"Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart."

Steve Jobs

Steve Jobs was the founder of Apple. So all your iPhones, iPods, MacBooks – they exist because he existed. Very clever man.

He wasn't a Christian, but he had some great wisdom.

Point: You have nothing to lose.

If you're a Christian, eternity is secure. You're going to live in paradise that's way beyond your imagination.

You're going to have more comfort, peace and security than you could ever hope for.

Never lonely again. Never poor again. Never stressed out and overworked again.

This life is short and we have nothing to lose.

Q: What purposes is God calling you to right now?
What is God calling you to that is outside of your comfort zone?

Q: Where is discomfort & pain present in your life?
Is it related to following Jesus?
If so, are you prepared to keep paying that price?

Q: What elements are weak or missing from your walk with God?
e.g. prayer, joy, bible study, courage, faith, good works

So I'm going to finish with some questions.

Lets break down into groups and discuss.

Two's and three's. Two's – make sure you're the same gender!
Go through each of the three questions and discuss.

When the discussions over, pray about those things.
Lay hands on one another. Pray for the Holy Spirit.

Pray for the Holy Spirit in mission and purpose.