

Searching: Finding Treasures in the Darkness
6th in a series of 7

Welcome to Timberline Church and thanks for joining us for this time of worship and celebrating the love of God! This is week six of, 'How to get through what we're going through' and we have been blessed to hear story after story of Gods' faithfulness in the midst of tragedy and loss.

Interview: This morning we are going to hear from Jim Snyder. Jim has been at TL since December of 2004. He is married to Lorrie and has one engaged son named BJ and one married son named Bryan and here is a great picture of the Snyder family. Jim lives on Frogtown Road south of Willow Street and has been in the building industry most of his life and is currently employed by Brentmore Construction. He has been serving as an Elder here at TL for the last several years.

Maybe by this time you have come to believe that these interviews are only about death or near death experiences... but loss is much bigger than death as we are about to see this morning.

- You lost your job in September of 2009, what were the factors involved in that and how did it impact you?
- Did you see the handwriting on the wall or did it catch you by surprise?
- As your pastor I felt like you were overwhelmed with work and providing for your family and I asked you to take a break from leading the youth. How did that go down with you?
- Which was more difficult; losing your job or stepping down from Youth Group and why?
- How did you manage to make it through without suffocating? What was the defining moment? (God speaking to you in your truck)

Thanks Jim for joining us this morning and at the end of the message I'm going to invite you up again so we can wrap up the morning with what you have learned from this experience

Slide #4 Star Wars: Audio Clip - Sword comes in

Star Wars Blurp:

In a distant galaxy eons before the creation of the mythical planet known as Earth... vast civilizations have evolved... and ruling the galaxy is an interstellar Empire created from the ruins of an Old Republic that held sway for generations. It is a time of civil war, as solar systems have broken away from the Empire and are waging a war of rebellion!

Whether it is Star Wars or Jim Snyder or you and me... there is always a war going on! Satan was beating up on Jim when he lost his paycheck job and then made it even more difficult for him when he lost his real job... teaching the next generation. But God has blessed Jim and provided for him and given him a new perspective on loss and what it means to finish well... but there is always a battle going on!

Slide #5 Series Title:

Satan makes us go through what we are going through because he hates us and therefore we struggle with loss on many different fronts.

Week one we talked about Shock and we learned the value of crying out to God. Week two we looked at Sorrow and we found out that we can't go over it, under it or around it... we must go through it... by learning to grieve our losses. Week Three we discovered that in order for us to Struggle with God we need to learn how to lament and complain to God in a healthy way.

Week four we learned that grief can destroy us, define us or develop us... and the best way to allow grief to develop us is through Surrender!

Last week we talked about Chocolate Chip Cookies and how the individual ingredients of life, by themselves, can leave a bitter taste, but when we allow the spirit of God to mix them all together... we can actually be Transformed by trouble.

The title of the message this morning is...

Slide #6 Searching: Finding Treasures in the Darkness.

Some people like the darkness. I am one of those people. I enjoy walking outside in the dark. I don't like 'Ready Lights' or these pole lamps that people leave on all night... I understand the value of them... but I still don't like them. I have a brother in law named Ron who is hard core astronomer and he loves the darkness. He lives in suburban Oswego NY and he gets annoyed with all the lights in his neighborhood that never go out at night, because it makes it difficult for him to view the stars through his telescope.

Some people hate the darkness and others are even afraid of it so they sleep with lights on and carry flashlights with them and they are always prepared... because their worst nightmare is being alone in the dark. Kay Warren, Rick's wife, is one of these people. She has always been afraid of the dark and not just a little bit scared or a little bit afraid, but massively terrified by the dark. She told her congregation that she avoids darkness at all cost because bad things come out of the dark... like robbers, thieves, kidnapers and monsters. Maybe some of you here this morning can identify with Kay Warren!

A few years ago when her son Matthew's darkness and depression began to really surface and thoughts of taking his life began to increase in frequency... she experienced a lot of sleepless nights and her fear of the darkness intensified. Only this was a kind of darkness that flashlights and 'Ready Lights' could not chase away... this was an emotional darkness... the kind of darkness that Jim described as being out of air... like he was suffocating.

One such night occurred in 2009 as she was up late, fearful of the things he was thinking, saying and experiencing. Since she was exhausted and feeling very frightened by this darkness settling over her... she went to her computer and began to research 'darkness' in one of her Bible programs and she came across some interesting verses..

Slide #7

2 Samuel 22:12 He made darkness his canopy around him — the dark rain clouds of the sky.

Another translation reads this way... "He wrapped himself in a trench coat of black rain-cloud and darkness."

As she was seeking comfort in God she realized that this verse was describing exactly how she was feeling... surrounded by darkness... like Jim being out of air!

Slide #8 Job 19:8 He has blocked my way so I cannot pass; he has shrouded my paths in darkness.

Another translation says it this way, "God has put this impassable wall across my path and I feel trapped."

And Kay is thinking... why is God doing this...not only am I in this shroud of darkness but God has actually put this wall of darkness up in my life and I can't get through it.

Slide #9 Psalm 13:3 Look on me and answer, O Lord my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death;

And as she continued reading into the night, trying to find answers, she began finding verses that described exactly what she was experiencing... how she felt this darkness so deep and so profound that she didn't know what to do with it. It felt like God had hidden himself from her... like he was playing a game of hide and seek with her and even though she was crying out to him... she couldn't find him.

I'm wondering if any of you can identify with her... or with Jim! This darkness of the soul has not been experienced by everyone... and yet we never know who might be next in line when tragedy strikes!

And then she landed on several verses out of Isaiah that defines the message for this morning.

Slide #10 Isaiah 45:1-3 This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut:

Slide #11 I will go before you and will level the mountains; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron.

Slide #12 I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, who summons you by name.

And when she read this last verse she had three instant reactions... and maybe some of you can identify with her:

Slide #13

Reaction #1

I don't want to be in the darkness. I don't care what's in the darkness. Get me out of the darkness. Get my son out of this darkness."

Reaction #2

Are there really treasures in the darkness? Is it possible that there are really treasures that are hidden out of sight?

Reaction #3

If there are treasures in the darkness... count me out because it means I need to go into the darkness to find them and that takes me back to the beginning... I don't want to be in the darkness! Let me tell you the context of this verse. In Isaiah the Israelites had been in captivity and there is a Gentile, a non-Jewish king named Cyrus the Great. And God says he's going to use this non-Jewish king to deliver the Israelites from their captivity to the Babylonians.

In chapter 45, God gives this prophecy through the prophet Isaiah of what was going to happen and how he was going to use Cyrus. He says that Cyrus is going to become very wealthy by finding treasures in the darkness. That he's going to find secret riches that have been hidden away so that Cyrus would know that God is real and that the God of Israel was the one that was talking to him.

That's what happened! Cyrus did deliver the Israelites and he did find riches... although he had to dig for them. Apparently the Jews while in captivity, before they were exiled, buried their jewels, their gold and anything that was valuable to them... to conceal it from their oppressors.

So Cyrus found these treasures, literally buried and he became wealthy from that. And because of that wealth, he was able to conquer and fulfill the call that God had on his life.

The older I get the more I have learned to love history, but the reality is... I couldn't care less about Cyrus from thousands of years ago, and the treasures he found. My concern is for today! You see I'm a very practical guy... if it doesn't impact my life now or the lives of others around me now... don't waste my time with the details!

Slide #14 What does it mean when God said...I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel?

What does this verse tell us about God and what we can expect from him in dark times and how can we then find treasures in the darkness! Let's go to our notes.

Slide #15 Treasures in the darkness means...

1. God has concealed treasures in the darkness of our suffering.

Wait! This is what he says...

Slide #16 Isaiah 45:3 I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places...

He has concealed these treasures. There are several fascinating verses in the Job story that give us insight into what is being concealed. Remember Job, he is the guy who lost everything and people today talk about the patience of Job because of the way he responded to loss. Here is what he said...

Slide #17 Job 23:8-10 But if I go to the east, he is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find him. When he is at work in the north, I do not see him; when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him. But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.

There are unexpected good things, the gold, that occur in the midst of darkness...in the middle of the horrible, the terrible, the catastrophic and the painful moments that we encounter. They are concealed and at times it seems like God himself cannot be found... but in the end we discover gold!

Sometimes these treasures, these good things, just come to us. We don't work for them... we just stumble across them, or they land in our laps, like winning the lottery! Other times... we need to dig for them or intentionally go after them as Cyrus had to do. Jim's journey started back in 2008 and some of the gold... he got right away... some of the gold was concealed and wasn't uncovered until several years later, because he had to dig for it and we will find out more about that at the end of the message this morning.

Sometimes when our lives are in such extreme darkness, when the suffering is so deep, when the things we are going through are so painful, the effort to look for even one blessing in the mess... is massive.

We have been talking about some of these times of extreme darkness over the last several months, things like, tragic accidents, an overdose, suicide, becoming widowed, a cancerous brain tumor and breast cancer. When we face things like this... it feels like it takes all the energy we have just to find something good hidden in among the mess... but the gold is there! Let's go to our notes.

Slide #18 Treasures in the darkness means...

2. God has the power to intervene in our darkness.

Wait! This is what he says...

Slide #19 Isaiah 45:3 I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel...

He's saying... I'm it. I'm God and there's no one like me. I'm transcendent. I'm above time and space. My thoughts are not your thoughts. My ways are not your ways. I'm bigger than the universe you occupy and I have the power to intervene in your lives!

Slide #20 Isaiah 57:15 For this is what the high and lofty One says-- he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.

The Bible identifies him as the high and lofty one who lives in eternity. There's not a single other being that can say that about themselves. There is no other one but God who is transcendent, who is above it all. He is the only one who dwells like this in eternity. He is huge and powerful and he can intervene in our darkness in ways that only a transcendent God can intervene.

We have stories of God's intervention here at TL. Julie is still living and doing well. At this point God's intervention spared Wendy's life, even though at one point the prognosis was pretty grim and we weren't sure the rescue was going to happen... but it did and she is still with us. Linda made it through surgery and she is a survivor of breast cancer. On May 19th 2014 God intervened in an attorney's office in Lancaster and against all odds, the owner of TL signed this property over to us. It took God's intervention because on round one he called our attorney names and stormed out of the office and we thought this property was lost to us forever. This spring it will 10 years since this miracle happened.

Sometimes this huge transcendent God moves and he does something in our lives and intervenes and what we thought was hopeless and would never change... changes and he is like this! So what does this mean?

In our darkness we need to ask this big, huge, gigantic, massive, transcendent, powerful, mighty God to interject himself into the darkness that we are going through and intervene in such a way that only a God like him can do. The Bible says... ask for intervention, be persistent, ask others to join you... but ask!

And yet there are other times when this massively mighty and powerful God does not intervene. He did not intervene to keep Justin from overdosing or Colleen from losing her life on the back of a motorcycle or Bob Axe from losing his life from a deadly tumor. Some of us here this morning have experienced times when God did not intervene and what we dreaded would happen... happened!

So what do we do when God doesn't intervene? That's a hard question and I don't claim to know a whole lot about it, but I want to take us back to Isaiah. Let's go to our notes.

Slide #21 Treasures in the darkness means...

3. God will be close to us in our darkness.

Whether he intervenes miraculously or not, God will be close to us in our darkness. I'm not sure there is much else to offer. This is what he says...

Slide #22 Isaiah 45:3 I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, who summons you by name.

This big, huge, gigantic, massive, transcendent, powerful, mighty God ... summons us by name! There is something special about being called by our name. There is nothing more personal than our name.

Why do we hate telemarketers.... because they don't know us! They don't know our names! They don't know what we want, they don't know what they are interrupting us from and we know they don't know us because they don't call us by name.

After I pick up the phone and say hello, they say such endearing things like... I would like to speak to the person that handles the PPL account? Isn't that incredibly personable! Or I pick up the phone and say hello and then hear 5 seconds of silence followed by a recorded message... that just makes my day! . Or worse yet I pick up the phone and say hello and on the other end of the line I hear this attempt to know me when they say, hello is this Mr. Nafsgigger... or is Mr. Nafinger home... or is Mr. Slopdigger available? And what do, I do... I hang up! Why... because I want to talk with people who know me and know my name!

Names are important! I want people to know my name! This is why I try to learn your names and I get frustrated when I can't remember them. To name a baby is a major undertaking today. There's a lucrative business in baby names books. If any of you named a baby lately you know what I'm talking about... it's a big deal.

One of the very first things we teach our children is to respond to their name, because their name is personal and intimate.

So God, this huge, majestic, transcendent God who intervenes in our darkness is an intimate personal God who knows our name. He summons us by name because he wants to be close to us.

Slide #23 Acts 17:26-27 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.

He doesn't play hide and seek with us. He's not like a remote clicker... he is near and this is why he sent Jesus!

Slide #24 Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

What does Immanuel mean? It means... God with us!

So this God who gives us treasures in the darkness, this God who has secret riches hidden in the times of suffering, this God who is so gigantic and massive and mighty, who can intervene in our lives – this God is so personal that he knows us by name and desires to have a personal relationship with us.

Invite Jim up:

You experienced a certain amount of insecurity in all of this early on, because you had always sensed God's presence and heard from him and then when you entered into this time of darkness you began doubting as to whether you were still hearing from God.

- Looking back... how have you seen the fingerprint of God in all of this and what has he been teaching you? (Not on the shelf, finish the grieving process, it's not about you, grow up etc)
- How did God take care of you through all of this? (only if there is plenty of time)

Prayer for him on his Journey:

Slide #25 Prayer & Reflection: (I-pod Sunday Special)

Invite Prayer Team up:

9:00 Janelle Beitzel & Bryan Snyder 10:30 Lydia Lantz & Bryan Snyder

Benediction:

God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
Come and see what the Lord has done,

The Lord Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.