



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### **When You've Lost Everything**

**Based on an outline by Rick Warren**

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Psalm 69:1 *“Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. 2 I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me. 3 I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched. My eyes fail, looking for my God. 4 Those who hate me without reason outnumber the hairs of my head; many are my enemies without cause, those who seek to destroy me. I am forced to restore what I did not steal. 5 You know my folly, O God; my guilt is not hidden from you.”*

The worst natural disaster in American history happened this wk. The destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina was devastating.

- Thousands dead,
- Hundreds of thousands lost everything,
- Billions of \$ in damage along the coast,
- with a great American city, New Orleans fighting for its life.

There are always 3 stages after a disaster:

- o RESCUING - finding & saving those still alive (which can take *days*),
- o RESUMING - getting services running again (which can take weeks or even months), &
- o REBUILDING- (which can take years)

There's an entire book of the Bible about rebuilding a city: *Nehemiah*. He notes rebuilding is **“hard work”**. It's *much harder* than starting from scratch! *You have to deal with all the damage first*. Even more difficult than rebuilding a city is rebuilding a life.

- The fact is—you can't live without loss.
- In YOUR life, you're going to have storms of stress & floods of failure.
- We always want to ask **“Why?”** But that is the unanswerable question! We're not going to know why on this side of eternity. Besides, even if we know the “why,” it doesn't encourage us.
- Here's the most helpful question to ask **“What?”** *What* should I do now that it has happened?

Today I want to talk about rebuilding when you have lost everything. You cannot live without loss. If you haven't already faced a major loss - your turn is coming. *It's just a matter of time.* When it happens, you'll need to rebuild your life.

### **First, RELEASE YOUR GRIEF**

After the devastation comes the devastating emotions of grief, fear, depression, and anger. They can paralyze you. What does God want you to do with those feelings? He doesn't want you to **Resist** them - "I won't let myself feel anything." Or **Rehearse** them over & over. Don't sit there and second guess what might have been. (I've heard a lot of that on the news, from politicians.) Don't **Reduce** your feelings like it's no big deal. Or **Repress** them and push your feelings down inside. A lot of people are *stuffers*. *One day they explode!* If you don't deal with your feelings now- you will eventually!

*Instead, you **Release them** - to God in prayer! **PS. 18:4-6.** "Death itself stared me in the face, but in my distress I cried out to the Lord". Life isn't always happy. Jesus said it's ok to grieve. "Blessed are those who mourn". So tell God exactly how you feel. He can handle it! **PS. 62:8b** says "Pour out your heart to Him." In the storm you need a "refuge". God wants to comfort you. Don't turn *from* him, turn *to* him!*

**Second, RESIST BITTERNESS!** You must decide: Do I want to be bitter ...*or get better?* It's your choice- but you can't be *both*. You are as happy as you *choose* to be! (It's a choice). You've seen this on the news—the different reactions to the devastation are as different as the people. The truth is: There is no correlation between life experiences and real happiness! - Many people go thru major loss & still stay positive.

- Others become filled with self-pity, and complain the rest of their lives.

After 14 yrs in ministry- I have little sympathy for "*whiners*" and negativity. Many people endure devastating circumstances, yet remain cheerful. While other people whine at every little problem! **HEB 12:15b** says "*Let no bitterness take root among you...it causes deep trouble, hurting many.*" Bitterness never changes anything. It only prolongs the hurt.

*So how do you resist bitterness?*

#### **o Accept what cannot be changed.**

Truth: Much of life is beyond your control

*The only way to overcome some things is to accept them!*

Your past is past. Nothing will change it now.

#### **o Focus on what's left, not what's lost.**

Find something to be thankful for. Gratitude destroys depression.

Truth is, there are people who'd love to have your problems.

#### **o So, Play it down & Pray it up.**

**Third, REEVALUATE YOUR LIFE.** Disasters have a way of changing our perspective. It clarifies our values. We realize what matters most. Think about this flood:

o If you **measure your life by the things you've accumulated** (car, clothes, toys) & *one day those things are all taken away*, it forces you to reevaluate what life is really all about!

o If your definition of family is tied to your house or yard or neighborhood & suddenly it's completely destroyed, it forces you to re-think the true meaning of a family.

o If your concept of church is a building, & it is instantly reduced to a heap of rubble, it forces you to realize that church is people, not a bldg! Jesus said: "Wherever 2 or 3 are gathered in my name..." A small group meeting in a home is a CHURCH!

In the days ahead, millions of Gulf State residents & millions more watching them are going to be asking the deepest questions:

*Who is my family?*

*What is a church?*

*What is life all about? What on earth am I here for?*

**LUKE 12:15** "Real life is not measured by how much we own". Never confuse: what you live *on* w/ what you *live for*. Never confuse net worth / self-worth. Last night, on TV I saw Julia Roberts crying when she was with one family who lost everything but said "We were lucky! Why? "Because nobody died!" *The greatest things in life aren't things!*

**1 TIM. 6:7** "We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out." There's only one way to have real security: Build your life on that *which can't be taken away*. Can you lose a home? ... career? ...your health? ...youth/beauty? Even a loved one? Yes. But you *can't* lose God's love for you. Throughout Scripture, God promised: "I will NEVER leave you nor forsake you.."

**In MATT. 16:26** Jesus asks "What good will it be if you gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul?" How is it with your soul? Use this time and any time of loss to reevaluate your life.

**Fourth, when you rebuild, RECEIVE HELP FROM OTHERS.** God never intended for you to go through life w/o assistance from others! Especially if you're going to rebuild your life after a loss- you *must allow others into your life!*

**(ROM. 12:5)** Often when we're in pain- we isolate ourselves. *Big mistake!* You need the support & perspective of other people. This is why our church stresses finding & joining a church family. Then, get involved, and you'll have relationships in place before the crisis comes! We invite you to join our church family. We're having a Discipleship 101 membership class next Sunday, the 18<sup>th</sup>, from 4-7:30pm. See Jan Alford at the Discipleship table after service to register.

You also need to join a small group. Sunday morning by itself is not enough. **The best way to receive help is a Small Group!**

**Fifth, RELY ON THE LORD** Let me be clear: You *cannot* rebuild a healthy life without God. Only by depending on Christ can you find the strength and peace and hope and love you need. And what you and I need can come only from God himself. They're His gifts to you in the midst of what you face.

The acid test of your faith: how you handle *a major loss*. **The key to Crisis control is Christ control.** Martin Neimuller was a pastor who survived 3 yrs in Nazi death camp said it: "You are much stronger than you think when God dwells in you." When everything is being uprooted, and coming unglued in your life, you need to be attached to God. He never wavers. How do you get there? Jesus. Jesus bridges the gap between you and God, when you invite him in to your heart—even in the midst of your chaos.

Let me ask you: What do you need to recover from? - A break up or divorce? A death of a loved one? A broken dream? A financial disaster? A health problem? A crisis in your career? **JOB 22:23** invites us this morning: “*Come back to God Almighty and he’ll rebuild your life.*”

**REFUSE TO BE DISCOURAGED and REACH OUT TO OTHERS.** Hear this: God will rebuild your life as you reach out to others. We get better by helping others! It’s a universal spiritual truth. What we sow, we reap. The more we help others, the more we allow ourselves to be helped by Jesus himself. We simply can’t out-give God. With this week’s disaster, we have a huge opportunity to practice this step. Get involved. Find a way to serve. Join a small group or a Bible study. The men’s prayer breakfast or UMW. Help with the relief efforts.

(And did you know, United Methodists contributed **\$32.4 million** to our emergency fund that is providing relief and rehabilitation in the wake of devastating South Asia tsunamis last winter?) **You be a part of this Relief effort! (see bulletin insert for details) GO TO THE EXTREME! By Praying. 1 SAM. 12:23. By Sharing 1 JOHN 3:17. By Serving GAL. 6:2.**

It’s been a tough couple weeks, but we can rejoice that the power we need and those who lost everything is not of this world but from the God of eternity. And now, God calls us to be a part of His solution! “*Dear God, we can’t help but think of all those people who have lost so much recently. We lift them up to you. I’ve messed up a lot of things in my life, and I’ve had some losses. Today I want to start the rebuilding process with you in charge. I want pour out my heart to you. You know my feelings better than anyone. I need you in my life. I don’t want to be a bitter person. I want to be a better one. Please forgive me for not trusting you and for hurting others. Help me forgive those who’ve hurt me. Help me remember that life is not about accumulating things but fulfilling your purposes for me. I want to let go of my pride and fear that has kept me from letting others get close to me. Help me get into a small group. Most of all Jesus, teach me to rely on you moment by moment- so I can know your peace & hope & courage & wisdom & strength. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*”