

Sunday, September 30, 2012 at Willow Glen United UMC

Lisa Jacobs - I'm the Youth Director for this church, and two others. I am more nervous than I ever am preaching now because Rebecca is our Pastor- with a- PHD in all John Wesley and other incredible things and her husband who knows about 400 languages! The bar is set high! My own style is a lot more about personal experience and how God speaks to me through it and scripture. I hope I am not interpreting the scriptures in a way this isn't linguistically correct.

You know what I tired of? Laziness. I am sick of excuses. I am sick of people playing the victim.

Before I continue with the list of other things I am sick of, let me say that I am not above making them. Here is an example of things I make excuses about

Drinking Diet Soda- Addicted to Diet Mountain Dew even though I have given up all other forms of processed sugar and I know the detriments of diet soda I still drink a ton of it every day.

Cleaning my office and car. I hate how messy I let it get. It makes me crazy. I always think I am gonna change it. But I am busy and I use that as an excuse to not do it.

Having local friends- too tired, too many night meetings, too emotionally spent from ministry. I make one excuse after another about hanging out alone instead of with people.

The list could go on.

So I am not speaking from a place of perfection or completion. I am a work in progress, and the day I start to think I have nothing to work on and I have reached completion is a scary day. With that being said

I am frustrated that lots of us think that just because we are alive, we deserve the best of everything whenever we want it and when we don't get it, God hates us or the world hates us. I am sick of people doing good so they get good back. I am tired of hearing that things should be easy and that we want good things to happen for us or our kids or our lives but we are rarely willing to work hard for that to happen. I am tired of hearing that this place of worship, or school, or gym or xyz doesn't meet my needs exactly where I am personally at this time so there is a problem with that School or church or gym instead of a problem with me or my perspective. I am frustrated by people who say they are having a hard time coping, or grieving or are lonely or depressed...but are unwilling to seek the help of the 100's of accessible, intelligent, compassion and wonderful counselors and therapist out there. I get tired of hearing people say that they can't eat healthy or there is no way they can work out or that it just isn't their fault. I am under impressed when I hear people say that they just can't possibly get clean or sober, even though they have the children who are watching them ruin their families because they choose alcohol or drugs or gambling or internet pornography over the well-being and health of their families.

I get tired of hearing those things because I know it can be different. I have seen people, who could easily use excuses and who could play the victim card if they wanted to but have chosen to defy all odds.

A woman in my boot camp was over three hundred and fifty pounds when she walked in the door. Her partner Michelle has had crippling breast cancer for 7 years. They adopted two kids, one with special needs.

She comes to boot camp at 5:30am, even though she is the biggest person there by 100 lbs.. Even though she is often up late into the night helping care for her wife who is in excruciating pain. She has lost 40 lbs. in the last 7 months and she ran her first 10k (6.2) two weeks ago. She could have chosen to never walk into the doors of my boot camp because of her size and ability level and how far she would have to come and how many odds she had to defy, but she did anyway.

And then there is Gina- A student from the JYM who was morbidly obese at 13, 14, 15, and 16 and early in her high school years her mother died of cancer. Gina could have continued to eat her pain away but instead started working to drop the weight in a healthy way and lost half her body weight, was interviewed on the today show and is now featured in a book about people who have changed their lives. She could have continued to stay in the lifestyle that was easier, but she chose the tougher path.

Or Alexis Briski, who was a 12 year old in our church 3 years ago and who was dying of cancer. When all the rest of us were asking why God are you punishing Alexis and her family Alexis said often with confidence that she loved God, that she knew God loved her and that he wasn't doing it to her. The last words she spoke were the Lord's prayer. There were multiple odds stacked against her, but she chose that attitude anyway.

Or Paige Albers, a senior in the youth group and Austin McLaggan, a youth group grad at Cal Poly this year. Both girls were extremely busy students. Both girls got great grades and had a lot of things going for them. But they saw a need in our community- A need for students from all the Santa Clara county high schools in which are unconnected, to connect and they started the "SVIC " organization which now has

representative from 28 different high schools who meet to do collaborative projects that benefit all students in our city, They've meet with the city council, been interviewed multiple times for the mercury news and done advocacy around issues of poverty, bullying and much more. Now one of our other students Mikaela Manuel sits on the committee as well. They are busy girls, but they did it anyway.

Then there was the kid I saw running at the cross country meet I attended this week who had cerebral palsy. Yes, running 2.9 miles up and down hills with cerebral palsy. He could have chosen to stay at home.

In Parenthood, one of the very best shows on TV, Max is a young boy with Asperger's. He is use to having a vending machine in his school where students could get skittles. He noticed one day that the vending machine was gone for good...nowhere to be found. And for a week straight it was all Max could focus on, talk about and obsess over. It's not fair. It's not fair...he told everyone he knew over and over again until those people didn't want to be around his attitude about life being unfair anymore. They were sick of hearing him say the same old thing.

Guess what? Life on this earth isn't fair. I don't know why we think it should be. As soon as we can wrap our heads around it we might be able to better understand our role as members of a large, diverse and differently-abled global community.

I am not saying that feelings of grief are invalid. I am not saying there aren't moments of our lives where the pain does feel too much or the burden too large or the calling too exhausting. I think it is healthy to express that we feel that way. It is completely Biblical to work those issues within a community of faith, in the midst of deep relationships and in the light of the character that we know of God by our experience and

through scripture. What I think God is trying to say to us through these scriptures is that the feeling is fair, but the action you take from your feelings of pain is what God is wanting to direct and guide. The steps you take out of your despair or out of your go-to- excuses or out of your exhaustion is what matter the most to God.

I love Psalm 27. This psalm is ascribed to David. The psalm addresses the issues of fear and faith and waiting on the Lord in the midst of life's difficulties.

Things weren't going swimmingly for David. He had enemies, He was being persecuted. He felt abandoned. He was being harassed. But when he cried out to God he made bold statements and I don't think he even believed those promises. Sometimes I think he said them to God so that he could begin to believe them. Have you ever heard of fake it until you make it? Or do what is right even if you don't feel like it until it starts to feel right? I think when we read these things we imagine he truly believes them, and while he might, I don't know many people who say such bold things and believe them wholeheartedly. He might really be thinking-

7:3 Though a host encamped against me.... seriously a freaking host encamped against me...THAT'S NUTS!

My heart will not fear? (even though it is really really afraid)

Though war arise against me,.... a war...do you hear that, a war!

In spite of this I shall be confident.....? YEAH RIGHT!

27:4 One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek:... GOD I AM begging you.

That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,

To behold the beauty of the Lord,

And to meditate in His temple.....

God accepts those kind of prayers- the wondering, questioning, say it till I believe it, HELP ME prayers.

When I was a young college student and struggling my 3rd time with some unhealthy body image issues my counselor at Westmont said this. "You have an assignment this week"...and she knew me well enough to know I do NOT LIKE TO DISSAPPOINT people and I am a rule follower and I also wanted to stop feeling so bad about myself. I committed. She said "For the next 14 days until we see each other again I want you to stand in front of the mirror and look at yourself for an amount of time that seems uncomfortably long for you. I want you to look deeply into your own eyes and say to aloud to yourself- "You are beautiful". 5 times a day. No excuses. Do it whether you like it or not. I don't care if you want to. This is good for you.

So I did it. And I didn't believe a single word that was coming out of my mouth.

Daily.

I didn't believe it.

Until the day that I did.

I had said it long enough. I had looked deeply enough into the person God has created "Intimately in my mother's womb with purpose and care" and I heard my own heart say to myself. "You are beautiful".

I've attended a lot of Alcoholics Anonymous meetings with teenagers. I've heard this and loved it- "**You can't think your way into a new way of living...you have to live your way into a new way of thinking.**" Sometimes you have to do the action until you believe it. Sometimes you have to say

the words until they become true. **Sometimes you have to be the person before you become it.** And to begin to see things differently I think we have to listen to God's instructions at the end of Psalm 27

Wait for the Lord;

Be strong, and let your heart take courage;

Yes, wait for the Lord.

The message version says

“Stay with God. Take heart. Don’t quit. I’ll say it again. Stay with God.”

Wait. Stay with God. Don’t quit. It doesn’t say don’t reach out for help. It doesn’t say don’t grieve or feel sad. It doesn’t even say it will get better. I just says wait. Wait. Wait. Don’t quit. Stay connected to God. Wait.

I know a little something about waiting and so do a lot of graduated families from the JYM.

I was first hired in 2002, 10 years ago to begin a youth ministry at three churches that didn’t exist. To dream up something for students who were not yet attending and to vision for something that had yet come to fruition. We planned and hoped and collaborated and when I first began hosting events, sometimes 20 kids would come and sometimes I would sit by myself until about 30 minutes into an event and realize, no one is coming. Sometimes I would plan a retreat or a trip and 2 kids would sign up...and we would do the trip or event, but it wasn’t how I had dreamt it up in my head. And it wasn’t that those 20ish kids I was working with and loving and knowing at the beginning weren’t amazing kids and they were worth every effort, but in those first few years of ministry I had dreamt big and we were starting off way smaller than I imagined. I wanted to have deeply moving and spiritual conversations and I was sad that it didn’t start off that way, or even go that way for a long while. I didn’t trust that God was working or moving. I didn’t feel adequate. I didn’t feel successful.

But I waited. And prayed. And worked. A lot. And dreamt. And while it isn't perfect and never will be, the fruit is here and evident and the seeds we planted and watered 10 years ago didn't blossom immediately, but man did it blossom. Our current Assistant YD was an 8th grader with whom I wished I could have spiritually deep conversations with those first few years and all the while when I was thinking God isn't moving in her life because our conversations aren't deep, Kat was growing in her faith, choose a college that helped her develop a passion for serving the impoverished, understanding racial reconciliation, and called her to ministry. She is currently the children's director at CPUMC and our JYM Assistant and her passion for God is palpable.

Last night we had 105 children and teens here for our babysitting night and did you know that 65% of that group WAS NOT FROM ANY OF OUR CHURCHES? Want to know how to reach people in our community? Come to Babysitting night or youth group- where by word of mouth and reputation the JYM has over 35% of our active students aren't church affiliated. We waited. And worked. And God provided. We are going to celebrate the hundreds of students and families whose lives have been affected and changed over the 10 years of the JYM with an anniversary party on January 6th. We'll have a semi-formal dinner and dancing evening with guest speakers and a movie/documentary featuring interviews from all sorts of students. I'd love if you put that Sunday night Jan 6th on your calendar and came to celebrate with us.

And now we come to Hebrews, a scripture similar in theme to what Psalm 27 was trying to articulate. Hebrews is in the NT and this book was specifically being written to the Jewish people of

Jesus' time who did believe he was the Messiah and were trying to reconcile their Jewish laws and traditions with the new law of salvation through Jesus Christ.

The beginning of the NT scripture can relate to the way the JYM began, with pioneers and donors and prayer warriors and faithful people from all three of our churches who laid the groundwork for the beginning stages of a ministry which has radically transformed the lives of hundreds of students. It started with *"1-3 Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls! In this all-out match against sin, others have suffered far worse than you, to say nothing of what Jesus went through—all that bloodshed!*

LOVE LOVE LOVE LOVE this- Don't give up. It gets better. It always does. Even when teens don't show up to events. Even when the answers aren't what you wanted or expected. Even when life isn't fair. God gets it. His son was put to death on a cross. It wasn't fair. But it turned out pretty well in the end.

While I know Paul was talking about a spiritual race- Having endurance, keeping the fight, continuing to press forward, never feel sorry

for ourselves and continuing to train- I can also relate it directly to my experience of running.

About the same time I started the JYM and moved to the bay area I started to dabble in the daunting idea of running. It really was out of complete boredom because my then boyfriend/now husband and his roommate ran and my roommate and I didn't have any other friends and had a lot of free time- remember I said the youth group wasn't an instant success? Anyway...against all odds about 9 years ago I started to run. And I was slow. And it was hard. And I would say that the first five years of running was a battle and I hated it. I knew it was good for me. I knew that afterwards I would feel good. I know that it gave me some natural endorphins which works as anti depressants and for a person diagnosed with major depression, such as myself, this is really important. Most of what I knew was that I couldn't start out by running 8 miles. I ran 1, or 2 miles and added a teeny bit more when I felt like it and not often. I never wanted to. I ran only in perfect conditions and I made excuses if it was too hot or too cold or if I had a night meeting or if I had a morning meeting blah blah blah.

But I never stopped. And for months I kept adding a slow mile here, a slow mile there until the three of us decided to train for a marathon...which meant every Saturday for 5 months we were running for hours and hours training for this one day. In March 2004 Landon, Dawn (my then roommate and I) were about to complete our first marathon. A marathon is 26.2 miles...in a row...on the same day. And we were going to drive to LA to do it. And two days before the race, Landon proposed and I ran my first marathon as an engaged lady kinda thinking that since I trained for the race for 9

months, and I was running with my FIANCE, and it was in LA...home of the Dodgers...and it was my first race...and I was not use to failing...that it would be perfect.

I was wrong. It was horrible. It was 92 degrees. People were laying on the side of the road passed out. Some people yelled "Don't do it. It's not worth it". Med tents were full. We finished an hour later than I thought we would. I could barely move after and we were so delirious that we couldn't find our car for two hours. Yes I was proud. But it wasn't the best thing ever.

And I could have decided that was it. Not so wonderful. Wasn't what I expected. I am done doing this stupid, exhausting running thing. But for some reason I decided to keep working at it. I didn't want to stop at a mediocre experience. So I ran some smaller races, and decided to start doing triathlons and duathlons and half marathons...a lot and I began to fall in love. It became part of who I was. And somewhere at about my 50th race...mostly half marathons (13.1 miles) about 3 years ago I decided to set myself a goal that seemed unachievable. I said that by the time I turned 35, I wanted to run 100 races.

Well I am currently at 92 races and I believe I will hit my 100th race 4 days after I turn 33...a little sooner than I thought. I will be ending my goal with the Los Angeles Marathon on March 17th, 2013 and this time I am going to own it. How have I gotten to 92 races in a shorter amount of time than I thought? By not giving up. By getting up at 4:45am every morning whether I work till 10pm or I take crisis calls at night or I have tired legs or I have a busy day and either teaching 4 Boot camp classes a day on MWF or running for 5-11 miles each day in the pitch dark with some ladies who I love. Mile after mile. day after day. It is the time I pray. It is my time of quiet before ministry gets overwhelming. It is how I take care of myself and my

always racing mind. It is my way to care for the body God gave me. It is my me time....and I don't do too much me time. But as I put in the monthly miles- about 85-90 miles of running a month...I am preparing for the next race...and the next race and then the big race.. Although I am sure that won't be the last.

I needed to strip myself of my excuses...my reasons why I was too busy, too un-athletic (I really was the first 22 years of my life) or too tired ...because those things hindered me from finding out what my body and mind are capable of. The "poor me" mindset would have made me incapable of doing something so challenging. And then I would have never found something I deeply love.

And finally the Hebrews verses on disciplining doesn't only relate to running, or persevering through hard times or to spiritual fervor. *So don't feel sorry for yourselves. Or have you forgotten how good parents treat children, and that God regards you as his children?*

My dear child, don't shrug off God's discipline, but don't be crushed by it either. It's the child he loves that he disciplines; the child he embraces, he also corrects. God is educating you; that's why you must never drop out. He's treating you as dear children. This trouble you're in isn't punishment; it's training, the normal experience of children.

It reminds me of what Landon- as a teacher, Athletic director and coach, and I as a Youth pastor see all the time- When you discipline your child/teen out of love, you are letting them know you love

them. You are letting them know you care enough about them being healthy adults to intervene guarding in their future. When you follow through on your expectations from your kid, when you hold them to an attainable but high standard and you do it with **consistency**, you are

training your child to withstand challenges, to not play the victim, to be a person who doesn't blame others. Whenever I ask the oldest students in the JYM about family dynamics and rules etc., the ones whose parents didn't hold them accountable for grades or where they were all the time or who they were hanging out with or what their faith commitment was like, ALL WISH THEIR PARENTS HAD DONE SO. They didn't want to be the ones who were strict with themselves. They didn't have healthy boundaries and nobody helped set them for them.. I know it sounds insane to the younger students who are sitting here thing- Dude, Lisa, my parents have so many rules are you seriously telling them to keep it up? Truth is...I am...as long as they are doing it with love and grace, not holding you to perfection but to a reasonable standard and they are doing it consistently. Students, whether they tell you this out loud or not, need boundaries/parameters/fences and they have to clearly know what those boundaries are. They need to know what is safe so they don't always have to guess. They need to know what is a reasonable amount of messing up and a safe amount and what is dangerous- to their spirit or their body or their brain. When students have flexible boundaries, they thrive. When they have inconsistent, always guessing, never following through, inconsistent discipline, they wonder if they are worth their parents worry or time or love.

It is the same with God! We get mad when we are challenged to do something different in our lives. We get frustrated for being in a hard position. We are angry when things aren't perfect. When God disciplines us out of love- When God set's loving parameters about what he desires for us to do with our lives, what is healthy and life-giving, he is helping us run the race successfully without fear of injury or harm.

In looking at our struggling and how God lovingly created us (we were studying Psalm 139), one in our student leadership team meeting on

Thursday, Mikaela Manuel said- "Maybe the bad things aren't happening too you, but they are happening for you". Let me say that again ""Maybe the bad things aren't happening too you, but they are happening for you" I don't believe God wants us to hurt or causes bad things to happen to people but I DO BELIEVE That he will use every earthly pain and heartache for some kind of good. God used past depression and ED and self-mutilation FOR me, so that I could be present in the pain of someone else...a lot of someone elses...the hundreds of someone elses God has placed in my path of my last 10 years of ministry. God disciplines the children he loves. It is a gift. It makes us better.

The Bible says "To whom much has been given, much is required"

I have been given so much- A lot is required from me by God.

Not because I did something wrong, but because I have chosen to serve a loving God who has gifted me with a job and a family and a business and it is my honor to give back all that I can so that others might come into a living relationship with a loving God.

I am thankful for that. It would be so easy to take a different job- to not witness the pain of families ripped apart by affairs and money and greed. It would be a lot easier to work a 9 to 5 and be home

at nights and read good books instead of hearing of students who cut up their wrists because they feel unlovable and not perfect enough and they are starved for attention. It would be easier to move out of town away from the hundreds of families whose stories I am now intertwined in and whose growth and lives I deeply care about. There are a lot of things in your own life, that might be "easier" or take a whole lot less time if you walked away from. There are many moments when I am sure you've said "I deserve better and this isn't fair and why do I have to..."

But God says this “He who began a good work in you with carry it on to completion in the Lord Jesus Christ”

It isn't happening to you. It is happening for you. Now use whatever life you have, with an attitude of perseverance, for the glory of God with the strength he promises to provide when he says

Stay with God. Take heart. Don't quit. I'll say it again. Stay with God.”