

“So...where is God in the stress?” It was a good question...honestly it was a beyond great question, asked kind of to me, asked kind of rhetorically on Thursday morning when I was stuck in the midst of an intense stress spiral, while also being aware of the fact that at least five other people in my life were stuck in the exact same spiral. Y’all I don’t know what was in the air on Thursday, but it was like all you could do was inhale stress everywhere you turned. And because I tend to be deeply, *deeply* stubborn when I’m stressed, and frankly even when I’m not stressed, I heard that question and just wanted to be like...*I don’t know!!!* Not exactly the most pastoral and faithful response...I know...but that’s where I was at. Where is God in the stress? In that moment, I had no clue. Absolutely zero clue. I couldn’t see through the stress to the answer...so I sat in my stubbornness lamenting the state of the world, the state of basically everything, and mostly just wanting to be like...humph...I don’t want to deal with any of this.

I’m guessing...I’m guessing and honestly I’m desperately hoping that I am not the only one who has felt this recently. That gnawing, pit in your stomach amount of stress that makes you want to ignore everything around you, because nothing feels like it’s working. Maybe that’s been you as you have stared at about the eight zillionth email from your kids’ school and

tried to figure out what it means, for you, for your kid, for their future, for your own sanity. Maybe that's been you staring at a Chromebook that doesn't work or technology that isn't cooperating and made you want to just sit on the floor and cry because how in the world are you supposed to do this for one day, let alone nine weeks, let alone possibly longer? Maybe that's been you prepping to return to school, as a teacher, wondering how you can teach for hours behind a mask, wondering how much risk you are entering into, wondering if things are going to change at the drop of a dime. Maybe that's been you facing down your tenth Zoom meeting of the week and you're just tired of staring at a screen. Maybe that's been you wondering how in the world you can face another day of work when everything feels stressful and hard and takes ten times the effort than it should. Maybe that's been you wondering if you're ever going to be able to just get out of the house and *live your life* again. Maybe that's been you when all you really want to do is go sit at a restaurant or go to the movies or do anything "normal" and not have it feel like a massive *thing*. Maybe that's been you when you miss the people in your life so desperately, but you are just also sick and tired of seeing them across FaceTime. Maybe that's been you looking at the state of the world and politics and social issues and a 24 hour news cycle that never stops and you just want to scream because nothing

feels like it will ever be fixed or right again. Maybe that's been you when social media has been wearing you down and ringing you out, but it's also the closest thing you have to connection in our current world. Honestly, maybe that's just been you getting up in the morning because the world, life, everything just feels hard.

So...where is God in the stress...

There's a part of me...that stubborn little part of me that always lingers a bit, that still wants to just fold my arms and say I don't know...but then there's the part of me that tends to push through my brain and nudge my arms apart and make me take a deep breath so I can take a step back and think and actually see the world around me...the part of me that tends to sound not a whole lot like me, but the people in my life that love me and force my stubborn to stop being stubborn, that says...we are God for each other in the stress...that says, when you take out all the church politics of the gospel, Jesus is reminding the disciples that wherever they are together, God, Jesus himself is present with them, not only dwelling in the mystery of the way the Holy Spirit daily surrounds us, but also in the very practical, very tangible presence of each of us with one another. We are God for each other. We are the presence of God for each other in the midst of every single thing that we have going...and I think...sometimes we forget that.

We err so frequently on the side of being harsh, distant, and distracted with one another. Let's face it, we all have our own world of junk to deal with and so sometimes the idea of having to be there for someone else is exhausting, and yet...that's what we're called to do. *Owe no one anything, except to love one another.* We are so quick to jump to all the reasons we have to be frustrated with each other, to ignore one another, to jump on one another with biting words and critical judgment, to pit ourselves against each other, to feel that our stress, our lives, our everything is more important than anyone else's, that we forget the most basic call that God, that Jesus gave to us...to love one another.

It's been the way of humanity since humanity existed. This is not new to the 21st century, though I think we've found ways of perfecting the cruelty we inflict on each other. But let's face it, Paul acknowledged this 2,000 years ago to a community *he didn't even know yet*, but is betting he knows exactly how they act because they're human beings, erring on the side of division, bitterness, revenge, and keeping score, rather than on the side of love and care and compassion and gentleness. So, he just stops the whole conversation dead in its tracks...all those things you like to point to that your fellow human beings owe you, all those things you think you owe others, erase it off the table. The only thing you owe anyone, the only thing anyone

owes you is love. That is how you show up for one another, that is how you support one another, that is how you be a community together, that is how you live life together, that is how you stall hatred and bickering and awfulness and stress in its tracks, by loving one another. Because when everyone is focusing on caring for one another, then things generally *work*, and things flow together and suddenly all the things that breathe stress into a situation have all the air sucked right out of them and all love leaves is God and grace in the room with you. For Paul, that is supposed to be the hallmark of a Christian community, that at the end of the day, the show up for one another with love, not seeking to wrong to one another, but to support, uplift, and walk with one another.

And we could talk about all the reasons and ways we get this wrong. All the ways we fight against that instinct, but honestly enumerating all those things are just going to breathe stress back into the situation and its going to make me stubbornly go back to having no clue where God is. So instead, let's talk about all the ways we get this right. So, where is God in the stress? God is in the school administrator that calmly and patiently answered your questions and walked with you through your tech problems when you wanted nothing more than to rip your hair out. God is in the teachers who are striving amidst a world of chaos to love your kids and

teach them and do their best to keep them safe and make sure that they get through these nine weeks or these next few months with a solid amount of knowledge and compassion in their brains. God is in your kids who are walking with you in the chaos. God is in you as you walk through the insanity of this world with your friends, your family, your loved ones when they dump their own stress at their feet and you say, ok, we can deal with this. God is in the faces of a Brady Bunch Zoom gallery, of people who just keep showing up and putting their best foot forward, trying and trying and trying again to keep the world flowing and working. God is in your families whether you see them in person or across screens who just keep loving you so hard even when the world feels awful. God is in check in text messages and socially distant lunches and walks in the park and ecstatic welcome home greetings from your pets and in the smile of someone you know loves you full stop, no matter what even when your stress makes you act like a crazy person. God is all around us, because we are all around each other.

But it's up to us to decide how we're going to be with one another. In grocery stores and restaurants and on sidewalks and in church buildings and on social media and in parks and in our cars and on the phone and everywhere in which we encounter each other. Are we going to cling to our bitterness and our stubbornness and our own self assurance that we are

always right and no one knows better than us and our prejudice and our inclination towards negativity and hatred and frustration and treat each other accordingly? Or...are we going to be God to one another? Are we going to live and breath and talk and act like God is in the room with us? Are we going to just love each other and frankly, love ourselves? Somewhere along the line, we have decided that being gentle with ourselves and others is the wrong thing to do, that grace is a cop out, and because life isn't simple, the ways we treat each other shouldn't be simple.

Yet...there's Paul...*owe no one anything, except to love one another.* Amazingly, grace is that simple. Amazingly, finding God in the midst of our stress is that simple, when we're willing to love and be loved with one another. Grace isn't a cop out. Gentleness doesn't make us weak. Love doesn't make us blind to the hard of the world. Grace gives us the assurance that even when we're stressed and screw up, we can get back up and try again. Gentleness lets us face our problems and our stress with a different kind of determination because it's not demanding of perfection right off the bat. Love doesn't make us blind, it actually better opens our eyes to see the world around us, the people in front of us, God next to us. So...where is God in the stress? Right next to you...or in a text message...or on FaceTime...or on Zoom. Go be God to one another. **AMEN!!!**