

Series: "TRUTH BE TOLD"

Text: Psalm 40:2 TLB The Living Bible Others are all NLT, Lori

Title: "Life's Up and Down Pathway"

Introduction: GOOD MORNING, BMZ! Glad you are with us as we CONTINUE this SERIES CALLED: "TRUTH BE TOLD"! TRUTH is a TRICKY thing these days. In our current culture, we have pretty much over the PAST FEW DECADES, REDEFINED what "TRUTH" is. Truth has become something INDIVIDUALS get to decide for themselves as opposed to an ULTIMATE TRUTH to be DISCOVERED, learned and followed.

In JOHN 8, Jesus said if you will REMAIN/DWELL in my teachings and don't run away from them, even though they are DIFFICULT, eventually you will REALIZE Jesus is teaching TRUTH. And Jesus said ... John 8:31-32 = <sup>31</sup> *Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. <sup>32</sup> And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* <sup>1</sup> We desire to be free, don't we..... rather than live in bondage and have no freedom!

The PROBLEM: We don't always like to LIVE out of TRUTH. We live out of what we HOPE, WISH, DESIRE to be TRUE. If we ignore REAL, OBJECTIVE, DISCOVERABLE TRUTH, then we can keep living life the way we want and not be responsible for what Jesus said. Living that way can take us to some bad places as we move through life's up and down pathway.

As Pastor Stan has been sharing, we want to discover TRUTH like GRAVITY from our BIBLES. GRAVITY is REAL, isn't it? It has it's pull..... What are those things that APPLY to EVERYONE, like GRAVITY DOES? Often, we get BLIND-SIDED by NEW TRUTH that comes front and center and we must DECIDE if we are going to IGNORE it and go on our merry way or if we are going to LISTEN to that TRUTH. Most of us know, the BEST thing to do is embrace what is true and make the adjustments in our LIVES and VIEWPOINT and live life out of TRUTH ... like gravity!

GRAB your MESSAGE NOTES ... *If you haven't already, I invite you to take out your 3-HOLE PUNCHED MESSAGE NOTES and CONNECTION card. You will see that there are blanks to fill in ... Please take the time to do so. Grab a PEN and write down whatever else you think is important to you and your faith journey. After worship, drop off your CONNECTION CARD and take your MESSAGE NOTES home. Please Re-read the Scripture and the notes to keep growing and learning. **For those of you joining on-line, you can go to our website, [www.bmzchurch.org](http://www.bmzchurch.org) ... find the NOTES and follow along ... LET'S PRAY (turn off marked lights during prayer)!***

<sup>1</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible, New Living Translation* (In 8:31-32). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

Today we celebrate Mother's Day.... and that's the truth, isn't it? Of course, not everyone is able to celebrate that day, but we do kind of set it aside to honor mothers or those who perhaps filled the gap in lives and were like mothers even if they were not really mothers. There is an old song about mother and I wanted to share those words with you to think about, so they are printed in your program....

M O T H E R (that's Mother.... M O T H E R)

"M" is for the million things she gave me "O" means only that she's growing old  
 "T" is for the tears she shed to save me "H" is for her heart of purest gold  
 "E" is for her eyes with love-light shining "R" means right & right she'll always be  
 Put them all together they spell MOTHER, a word that means the world to me.

"M" is for the mercy she possesses "O" means that I owe her all I own  
 "T" is for her tender, sweet caresses "H" is for her hands that made a home  
 "E" means ev'rything she's done to help me "R" means real and regular, you see  
 Put them all together they spell MOTHER, a word that means the world to me.

I had a wonderful mother who lived a long life of 93 ½ years.... She was able to live in her own house with a helper until she went to be with Jesus 5 ½ years ago. I was the one close by – just down the road – in her later years and would not trade for anything the memories of having her up the road as well as bringing her to our house from Sunday afternoon until Tuesday morning for a few years.... Just special times together in that later season of her life. We were blessed with the lengthy life of both of our parents with both living into their 90's. AND we also had two wonderful grandmothers in our lives until we were adults.... They were the kind of grandmas who were at home... Not out in the work world you know.... That has changed, hasn't it?! One of my most favorite memories of childhood is going to stay with my grandparents on their farm down Shaw Hollow out of Fennimore OR going to the CITY of Mt. Hope to stay with our mom's mom. I would go stay with Grandma ANY chance I got.... Including spending the weeks of VBS with her most summers. I am truly thankful for all those ladies as we remember them this day. But, I am fully aware that many do not have that opportunity to grow up with great grandmas, grandmas and even sometimes not moms. Think of pioneer days when many lost their lives at young ages due to the difficult circumstances of life... and now days we have cancer and heart disease and drugs taking young ones too. For some there are no real memories of a MOTHER like we think of on this day. Hopefully someone stepped into that role in your life if you lost your mother too soon. There are just things we need to learn from those mothers or mother figures in our lives along the way. Also, when any of these happy holiday/celebration occasions come up, we also need to remember that it isn't always so joy filled for some.... many of us have been blessed with good memories of our mothers.... And some have not. That always saddens my heart, but I know that it is a reality of life's up and down pathway for some. If you are one of those, I'm truly sorry. We then need to kind of put ourselves in the other ones shoes and try to be more understanding of past situations and what led to a 'not so good' memory.... And that is hard. Never easy.....

I was also thinking of women in the Bible.... Mother's and what they went through....

At Bloomington we are reading through the New Testament together this year... and sharing about our weeks reading after worship the weeks we can! We have completed Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John and are just moving into Acts now. So we've met some of the moms of Jesus day. We're going to think a bit about his mother, Mary in just a little while. A New Testament mother Mary

I'm also reading the Old Testament over the year.... Now that's gruesome at times.... We don't hear so much of the individual women because women basically had no worth in that day and age. But you may remember from when I've been here before – we have looked at Naomi and her daughter in law, Ruth... Old Testament mothers Naomi and Ruth. Naomi lost soooooo much in her life... her husband and her two sons. She and one daughter in law came back to her home. Ruth met Boaz and married him and became a part of the lineage to Jesus! We met Rahab also one time when I was here - the woman who hid the spies and who believed in our God. She was saved when the walls of Jericho came tumbling down and she married Salmon and was also a woman in the lineage to Jesus.

When I think of Biblical mother's, I do especially think of Mary, mother of Jesus. Can you imagine..... TRUTH BE TOLD.... An angel speaks to you and tells you that you will be having God's baby... God's child... God's Son.... Like WOW!!! Would you believe that angel? Mary accepted the news.... believed.... This young girl.... Not to be a mother yet... but things changed, didn't they? It couldn't be easy..... Think about explaining to others.... Family, friends, small community... everyone knows soon enough. So this young, engaged girl sets off walking and riding on a donkey from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be counted in the census..... yes, at nearly full term of her pregnancy. And then those conditions to give birth.... Where the animals live.... In a small area of a cave. No sanitizer. No monitors. No doctors and nurses. Just Joseph and the animals. And Mary's firstborn arrives. Life's up and down pathways. But you know how it is... the joy... the UP of a new baby along that pathway. Everyone loves a new baby, right? But more struggles come and God leads them to escape to Egypt to get away from the horrid Herod who is trying to eliminate the child born around that time. Later, back in Nazereth, this child grows in wisdom and in stature, we are told. Mary becomes the mother of others too..... although we're not told much about the family. And all along, Mary knows the TRUTH like gravity.... That this child is God's own Son..... that there was not an earthly father involved prior to the arrival of Jesus at their house. It's hard to imagine Mary's feelings through all these years of raising Jesus and the other children. I imagine a typical household of that time with lots of work to be done, chores for all, laundry and cleaning and think of the cooking.... None of these things with our modern conveniences., of course. And apparently losing Joseph at some point. Then Mary watching Jesus during his years of ministry.... Not believed by many, plotted against by many, ridiculed and put down, distrusted - followed by many who were on the right path, but also sought after by the devil AND by people. And then maybe the most 'down' of her life's up and down pathway..... following Jesus through the streets of Jerusalem, him carrying that heavy beam to be placed on that cross at the edge of town – already beaten and scourged and barely able to walk this route. Watching her Son be crucified on that cross..... and not able to do a thing about it - others trying to console her. How frightening this had to be.... How utterly sad this had to be for Mary. She believed in her son and knew he had done nothing wrong... he was just carrying out his

mission for God. Mary HAD to go... she had to share in his agony and suffering. She thought back to her first hours with him when he was born in that manger.... And she knew now the world was crashing down upon her and upon others. She also KNEW he had come from God and would return to God.... for all of us. That this was ushering in new life and new peace for all. I'm sure she prayed for strength during this ordeal in life. And truth be known, we have mother's and others grieving today too. It's up to us to help care for them and help them through this difficult day of this holiday and many other difficult days to come. Modern day mothers live on life's up and down pathway too. When I arrived at a nursing home last week to share worship with residents there, one woman arrived in the chapel. I began chatting with her as I always do and she told me of her loss.... she had been to her husband's funeral the day before – he had died April 25th. The next woman who came in shared with me that she had just lost her son very unexpectedly – on April 25th. And the worker who was helping these ladies in for worship told me her brother had died – on April 25th. Some days we don't have to look very far for some grieving people, do we?

I shared at a memorial service recently... a very, very tough day for so many people..... a mom who loved her son dearly and did all she could for him for nearly 17 years. A dad, a brother, another dad, grandparents, aunts, uncles, classmates, teammates, a whole school ... all who loved him so much and were hurting so, so, so badly on a hard, DOWN part of life's up and down pathway. Scripture truth from Psalm 40 came to me to be shared and I share it with you this day. Psalm 40, verse 2 which says about God: ***“He lifted me out of the pit of despair, out from the bog and the mire, and set my feet on a hard, firm path and steadied me as I walked along.” (TLB)*** I think we can relate to those words on this up and down path of life we are on.... Many joys, much to be thankful for.... And yet, so many times when we find ourselves or those we love and care about in the pit of despair.....Sometimes it's hard to get *lifted out of the pit of despair*.... but this scripture gives us HOPE that we may be able to be at some point. ALL of us experience those downs as well as the ups in our lives. Those downs are real.....extreme tragedy happens on our pathways. And it puts us in a pit of despair. We can pray for God to LIFT us out of the pit of despair..... LIFT us out of the bog and out of the mire..... Prayers to be lifted out of the pit of despair. And God does answer prayers. Not always immediately, but God DOES answer prayers. ***“He lifted me out of the pit of despair, out from the bog & the mire, & set my feet on a hard, firm path and steadied me as I walked along.”*** ***and set my feet on a hard, firm path*** I keep seeing that word hard - h - a - r - d Hard, firm path. With just those words, it's the beginning of the good path. Hard as in not mirky, not like the bog, not like the deep pit - perhaps blacktop rather than quick sand, wooden or concrete rather than the mud we've had this spring. But it takes time for our path to be that kind of hard/firm. It's like the downs of life are hard: horrid awful rocky desperate places for many. It's hard and we don't know when it will feel better when we are in that situation. We just know how hard it is: H A R D path: horrid, awful, rocky, desperate. But the Psalmist looks at that hard path as good. If we can look ahead too - it's good and firm and can lead us OUT of the pit of despair. We can get to the point where H is for healthy and maybe even happy. A can be for adoration.... Adoration of God and all God blesses us with as we look for the real TRUTH of the ups and downs of life's pathway - Seeking out truth like gravity. The R for redeemed – Jesus went through so much for us - suffered and died for us - to fulfill the plan God had all

along and turn death into resurrection - destroying our death and making it a beautiful up of that pathway - leading to eternity in God's heavenly realm. It takes our diligence to get to the truth given to us in Scripture setting all the earthly interruptions aside and focusing on the truths that set us free and turning HARD to healthy/happy, adoration, redeemed, and destroying death through the resurrection of Jesus - truth for us all. Moving along that healing path takes time, it's not easy in any way, shape or form. It's hard work. It's an exhausting journey. It takes giving it to God. God placed all of our burdens on His Son Jesus when Jesus took our sins, our cares, our troubles, our burdens to the cross with Him... we hear Let Go and Let God and we're going to have to do that again and again and again to get on that firm path when climbing out of the pit of despair.... **Steady me as I walk along** we read. Man, it's just "keep me half way upright" at times, isn't it? But steady me, Lord. Steady me. Steady me along life's up and down pathway, Lord. Steady me by reminding me of all that Jesus did for me and for you. For each one of us. Steady us by reminding us to look to God for strength. Rely on God to steady me along life's up and down pathway. Remind us of Good Friday when Jesus went to the cross for every one of us. Remind us of Easter morning - Resurrection day when we are assured of Eternal life. We read in Matthew 28:5-6 <sup>5</sup> *Then the angel spoke to the women. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying.*" Assurance that we will be REUNITED with family and friends in God's heavenly realm. We shall see Jesus as He is and we will be reunited with family and friends. THAT's the Gospel – the good news of Jesus – the TRUTH for all of us – the truth that sets us free. When we recognize God's truth through his Son Jesus – believing in Him ... The TRUTH like GRAVITY of who we are dealing with, we know God through him. We will gain strength for life's up and down pathway – each one of us!

Where are YOU on life's up and down pathway right now? You know, they say we can't buy happiness, but we can buy FABRIC and that's just about the same thing!

One last thought today.... I don't know if you have heard of Rachel Held Evans, but she is a 37 year old young Christian writer – married with two small children. She wrote this about the Labyrinth titled: Take Time to Walk the Labyrinth "The difference between a labyrinth and a maze is that a labyrinth has no dead ends. The famed eleven-circuit labyrinth inlaid in the floor of a cathedral in France has just one path, which takes the pilgrim in and out of four quadrants in a spiraling motion through dozens of left and right turns, before reaching its rosette center. Such a pattern invites meditation and reminds pilgrims the journey of faith is rarely a straightforward one. It has become cliché to talk about faith as a journey, and yet the metaphor holds, she says. Scripture doesn't speak of people who found God. Scripture speaks of people who walked with God. This is a keep-moving, one-foot-in-front-of-the-other, who-knows-what's-next deal, and you never exactly arrive. I don't know if the path is all drawn out ahead of time, or if it corkscrews with each step like Alice's Wonderland, or if, as some like to say, we make the road by walking, but I believe the journey is more labyrinth than maze. No step taken in faith is wasted, not by a God who makes all things new."

And about storms: storms will come. We can't stop them. We can't wish them away. We can't avoid the dark skies and the ominous waves. We all learn in this life, at

one point or another that the storm will reach our shore, perhaps more than once, and it will threaten all we know and all that we hold dear. Through our personal storms we find our resolve, our inner fire and our deepest human reflection of all that is truly needed, and all that, at our core is loved. Storms reveal in us our truest human condition and the beauty of simplicity. The storm may steal our monetary possessions, but as long as it leaves the ones we love safe and whole, we find we are thankful for what remains. For the first time, perhaps ever, we may see the beauty in nothing more than a hug from another person we took for granted just a few hours before. Storms also reveal the good in mankind. Lending a hand to a stranger, giving the last provision to another in need or lifting up a soul who can never repay the favor. Before the storm we may not have given our neighbor time or consideration but after we become changed through perspective and experience. The storms will come for us all in this lifetime, and while we can't stop them, we can allow them to shape us for the better and shift us towards a more beautiful existence and humanity. The value of life is not in what you own but in what you give. The value of life is not in what was taken but in what remains. The storm is coming, we can't change that. What we can change is who we are during and after the storm. What we can change is how we evolve and how we grow. The storm will shift you, make a choice to turn in a direction that makes you better because the more souls who rise up after the storm, the more beautiful our world will become. Be safe through the storms of life.... Life's up and down pathway we are on, aren't we?

Rachel Held Evans, 37, Christian writer/seeker, husband and 2 small children ages 3 and almost 1, died this week from complications of the flu. Life's up and down pathway.

Hold on this week to the truth:

Psalm 40:2 *He lifted me out of the pit of despair, out from the bog and the mire, and set my feet on a hard, firm path, and steadied me as I walked along.*

And John 3:16 *“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”*

God loved, God gave, We receive, We believe ---- the truth be told!

Jesus is there beside us all the way! The TRUTH is: There is ONE GREAT GOD who gives us strength for the journey through our relationship with His Son Jesus & the Holy Spirit living within us. Let's Pray!

Next Steps: *I will memorize Psalm 40:2 this week. I will read Acts chapter 1 this week I will attend the “Truth Be Told” Series over the next few weeks I will honor my mother today and appreciate those in my life who led me during life's up and down pathway!*