

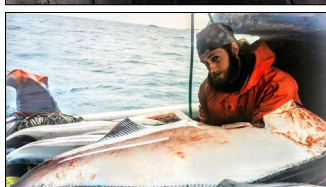
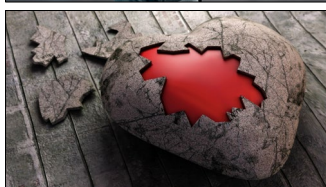
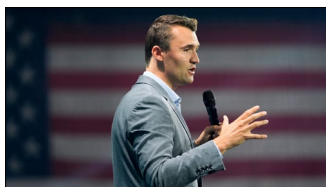
When Panic Attacks

Finding Clarity in Adversity

September 21, 2025



Today we're learning how to hear God *through our adversity, anxiety, and anger*. Cuz everything in *this world declares* the glory of God [ROM 1:20; PS 19:1] and *this world is full of* adversity, anxiety, and anger! So, if God is God, all the hard stuff we *suffer* has gotta be *revealing* His *goodness, kindness, and justice* in one way or *another* – so the question we're all asking is this: **How?**



Cuz *sometimes*, it's *hard* to see. And it sure feels like this is one of *those* times. And I'm feeling *sick* about it. Cuz for a *while*, we've been a *country* with deep *political* division, conflicting *moral* outrage, and *pain* as far as the eye *can* see. And while we *all* watched the *apathy* of *this* world *subtly undermine* the *hope* of our *faith* – our *brothers, sisters, and children* have been slowly *suffocated* by the sadness and cynicism of a culture that has *lowered* its *standards* so *radically* – that **surrender to our struggles now qualifies as success**. So let's set the record straight: **we're not here to settle for less; we're here to reach for more!** Cuz

Greater is He that is in you, than *he* that is in the world. – 1 John 4:4 KJV

And in a time of *addiction* to *apathy*, Charlie Kirk's death seems to have *shaken* almost everyone *out of complacency*. Cuz *regardless* of how you view his personal *politics* or *faith*– no one can deny the *courage* in his *convictions* or the *injustice* of his *murder*. And *regardless* of how this situation has *manifested* as *adversity, anxiety, or anger* in your life, I think we can all agree that *at minimum* – **it's a victory over apathy**.

And *that* should be *proof* that God's still on the throne – cuz His *battle* has always been with our *heart* – and **the apathy of a lukewarm life is the ultimate enemy of our Ally** who fights for us to *feel* both the *courage* to have *hope* – and the *satisfaction* of real *victory*. So, if you're having a *hard* time finding your *footing* while this world is *rocked* by *storm* after *storm*, I hate to tell you, but God's got you *right* where He wants you.

Cuz **storms don't create confusion about who has control, they create clarity in where to find it.**

[Just listen to how Paul puts it:] We do *not* want you to be *uninformed*, brothers and sisters, about the *troubles* we experienced ... We were under *great* pressure, far *beyond* our *ability* to *endure* ... Indeed, we *felt* we had received the sentence of *death*. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who *raises* the dead. – 2 Corinthians 1:8-9 NIV

You ever been on a *boat* in the middle of a *storm*? Lord knows I have! It was the closest I think I've come to death, *twice*! Cuz when you're *long-lining* in the middle of the night in the North Pacific *without* any land in sight, your *boat* is your whole *world*. And when 30 foot swells rock your 28-foot world, you *reflexively reach out* for *something* to keep you *steady*.



And *one* of those times, I was *hanging* off the edge of our boat to try and *grab* a *buoy* at the end of a 5 mile line – and *stumbling* in the dark, I reached for a *rope* that I *thought* was tied tightly to the *cabin*. So, when the slack *let out*, I was *leaning* so far over the edge that each *boat-rocking* wave dipped me *into* the black abyss. *Terrifying*. But the moral of the story is twofold: 1. **Storms expose what we trust to steady us** and 2. **Storms expose if what we trust is trustworthy.**

Cuz, it's only when we experience *crisis* in this world that we're *stripped* of the *illusion* of having *control* and we're forced to reach out and put our faith in something other than ourselves. Cuz **faith starts with reaching out but reaching out starts in adversity.**

And I've *always loved* the way Tim Keller paints the *same* picture: Imagine you're standing on a cliff right as it *gives out* and you *slip off* the edge. And as you start to *fall*, you spot a branch. What do you *do*? Do you *pause* to see what *kind* of tree it *is* so you can research the *wood density* and what kind of *root system* it *has*? *No!* You *grab it!* That's how *crisis* compels us to *reach out* in *faith* – and *that's* when we can see that **we're not saved by the intensity of our faith, we're saved by the object of our faith.** And often times it's only *after* we reach out in *desperation* that we *experience* faith's *confirmation*. Cuz the *longer* the branch *holds you* through *your* emergency, the more *confidence* you have in the *strength* it has to *save* you. So, why *wouldn't* God *allow* adversity if it led to *trusting His strength* to *save*?!

Like Corrie ten Boom said: **"We don't realize Jesus is all we need until Jesus is all we have."**

And that's what we talked about last week in the stories of the disciples *struggling* against *their* storms: God can use the *panic* of our peril to *prove* there's *power* behind our faith:

[To recap:] Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke Him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. – Matthew 8:24-26 NIV

And that's how a tiny mustard seed of faith can turn our anxiety into God's glory: **we just treat His branch as our best bet** so reaching out for Him is our reflex to worry. Cuz once we do, we know He's worthy of trust. But the scary truth is, we *don't know* if *our faith* has the strength to save us until we *need saving*. So God takes advantage of our adversity cuz **suffering transforms our perception of God into an encounter with God.** When we *have to* rely on Him, faith *changes* from an *idea* to an *experience*. And unfortunately, it's usually *after* our problems *exceed* our *ability* that we're willing to reach out in faith and say, "**Lord, save us! We're going to drown!**"

But that's not the *only* way we reach out. And if we read the exact same story in Mark, we can see some subtle differences in the hearts of the same disciples that should convict each one of us:

A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. – Mark 4:37-39 NIV

Did you spot the difference? "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" became "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" And although *verbiage* is *close*, the heart behind each *reach* is a million miles apart. Cuz when each of us *chooses* our *response* to adversity, it's not just *what* we reach for, but *how* we reach. Cuz in *every* storm, *each* reach has *two* options: **we can cry out or we can lash out**. And sometimes it can appear as a razor-thin line, but we need to acknowledge it's always a deadly-dangerous decision.



I mean, did you notice how His own disciples subtly demoted Jesus from "Lord" to "Teacher" when Jesus took *one extra second* to prove His power to save? And did you hear how "Save us!" cuz we *trust* you can transformed into the *doubt* of "Don't you care?!" Yikes! That *small step* can become a *big mistake* if it makes us *hesitate* to *grab* a branch for even *one second*!

So, **have you hesitated?** When you started scrolling through your feed after Charlie was shot, and found out that the wounds to our nation were deeper than you imagined, was your instinct to steady yourself by *crying* out to a God you trust is in control – or did the *disparity* lead your heart to *lash out* at God by subtly questioning His control?

Well, regardless of your *response*, right *now* we need to *weigh* our hearts on an *honest* scale; and *here's* how: **ask yourself who's really in charge.**

Is God your supervisor or just an advisor? Are you taking things into *your own hands* cuz God's taking *too long* to do what *you* think *He* should do – or are you *trusting Him* to guide *your steps* – even if it takes you somewhere you don't want to go? *Ask yourself*: if He asked *you* to *wash* the feet of *your assassin*, would *you* do it? Cuz *Jesus did* [Jn 13:5]. And if you've *already* drawn your sword *against* your enemy and *lashed out*, would *you* obey Jesus if He told you to *put it away* so He could *heal them* before they *kill Him*? Cuz *He's done that too* [Luk 22:50-51]. And would you *believe* that sometimes *enduring injustice* might be the biggest *weapon* in a *more important war*? Cuz

Jesus said, "My kingdom is *not* of *this* world. If it were, My servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now My kingdom is from *another place*." – John 18:36 NIV

For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you. – Luke 17:21 NKJ

And *that's* where us servants *are* supposed to stand up and fight cuz, like we said at the start: **God's battle has always been with our heart!** Cuz *that's* the *source* of *all* other war:

What *causes* fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your *desires* that battle within you? – James 4:1 NIV

So when conflict shakes our country, all that means is **the spiritual war for our hearts is at our door.**



And if you see yourself on the side of Jesus, you need to recognize that **putting love in your heart is how God puts a weapon in your hand!** Cuz loving the person right in front of you – especially the one you want to fight – is how you demonstrate the *power* of having Jesus on the throne. And when our enemies witness how *steady* we are in the *storm*, their same *hurting* human heart starts to consider *crying out* instead instead of *lashing out*. And that's how we "win."

We don't conquer people; we win hearts to the King. And or love is our *protest*, our *strategy*, and our *strength*. So don't do like Peter and swing a sword thinking you're defending the Lord; that's not *courage* – that's *confusion*. And it happens when we're *blinded* by *rage* instead of *focused* by our *faith*. **real courage is bearing a cross for your enemy** to show that you share in the same pain that they're trying to treat – but you found a Savior with enough strength to endure the suffering! And every act of enemy-love becomes a *banner* on *this* battlefield that tells *everyone else* the army of Jesus is *advancing* with enough *power* to *overwhelm* every *enemy* and *overturn* every *heart*! Cuz He keeps *holding* all who *hold up others*; He supplies endless *mercy* to all who are *merciful to others*; and He shares *victory* with all who surrender *vengeance on others*.

Listen, there's no doubt about it: **our country and this whole world is experiencing a storm.** In fact, there's a *good chance* it might be one of the most *pivotal* moments in *human history*. So, it might *also* be one of the most *important moments* to find the *courage of your faith*. And I'm *not* here to tell you *how* to feel about all this – but I *am* here to tell you to bring **what you feel to Jesus**. And I'm not here to tell you exactly *what* you're supposed to *do* now – but I *am* here to tell you to do *something* now! Because *that's* why we're here; to *process* our *feelings* and *choose* our *response*. And all we know for certain is that **our response must be built on truth, rooted in love, and focused on Jesus** or it *won't* hold you through all the *adversity*, *anxiety*, and *anger*.

But, if we *can* hang on to our faith as the *storms* keep raging, **the adversity will expose what we trust and it will prove whether it's trustworthy.** And that reveals *God's goodness* as the One who *actually holds* when everything else *gives way*. *Anxiety* will uncover our need for a *better peace* and *lead* us to encounter *God's kindness* as the One who meets us with *calm*, *not condemnation*. And *anger* will show us *God's justice* by redirecting *vengeance* from *our hands* to *His cross*. Cuz storms *don't* create *confusion* about who *has* control; they create *clarity* in where to find it.

Peace I leave with you; *My peace* I give you. I do not give to you **[weak answers]** as the world gives. **[So]** Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. – John 14:27 NIV

And don't be *surprised* when the world around you seems full of *cruelty*, *injustice*, and *evil* – cuz our *mistakes* make this place a *broken world*, but **God can make faith from our mistakes!** We just have to be committed to *crying out for God* to build *our faith* in *His strength* – and **we have to stop lashing out when His plan doesn't meet our expectations;** cuz *that's* putting faith in *our judgment* over *His*; *that's* reaching for an *insecure rope* on the *edge* of an *abyss*; and *that's* choosing the *cliff* over the *branch*. But *right now* – this world *needs* to see that *our branch* provides *steadiness* through every *storm*, and has enough *strength* to *save* every single *soul*!

Father God, thank You for loving me in spite of my sin; forgive me and cleanse me by the sacrifice of Your Son, my Savior; and free me and lead me by Your Spirit and Word, as I seek to trust and follow Jesus Christ, as the Lord of my life. Amen.