

Series Slide

There's an old Twilight Zone episode from 1959 called "A Nice Place to Visit".

A gangster named Rocky gets shot during a jewelry heist and he wakes up to a guy dressed all in white...who says that he's his guide in the afterlife. Rocky calls his guide "Fats".

Fats tells Rocky he can have anything he wants. He sets Rocky up in his own penthouse with all that a 50s gangster could hope for.

He asks for money and women- and he gets it. When he plays blackjack or shoots dice- he wins. When he hits the slot machine- it's a jackpot every time.

When he shoots pool, all the balls go in the pockets right off the break. So he's pretty happy...for a short while.

But things start to shift when he asks Fats if he can see some of his old friends.

To which Fats' replies "All of this is your own private domain. It was set up just for you alone. The other people are just kind of props in a movie."

Through the remainder of the episode, Rocky gets more and more frustrated that there is no chance at him doing anything other than getting everything he wants right when he wants it.

He knows it's not real. He realizes that part of what he likes about life is the risk, the friction, of doing anything. If it's all a setup about him in his own private universe... where he's the star of the show and everyone else is just a prop...well... he doesn't really want to be there.

Finally he tells Fats- "I'm bored!"

"Everything is great- it's just the way I always imagined. But if I have to stay here another day I'll go nuts.

I don't belong in heaven. I want to go to the other place."

Fats replies, "Heaven? What ever gave you the idea you were in heaven. HAHAAAAHA" Then Rod Serling's classic voiceover comes in as the narrator and says

"Now Rocky has everything he ever wanted, and he's going to have to live with it

for eternity...in the Twilight Zone.”

That episode did what the Twilight Zone always did so well- turn your expectations on their head. In fact, a lot of us believe Heaven is a place of infinite pleasure where you get everything you want. You become the star of the show and everything is bent to your will.

But actually, like Rocky found out- a place that is all about you, without any real relationships- where your will is always done- is a closer to hell than it is heaven.

We're talking again about Transcendent Purpose today. The Good Life is made up of 3 components

Spiritual Connection- you have to a relationship with God

Deep Relationships- known and loved

Transcendent Purpose- the life you are living has to mean something

“Meaninglessness doesn't come from being weary of pain.

Meaninglessness comes from being weary of pleasure.”

- G.K. Chesterton

Rocky's experience in that Twilight Zone episode was the hellish experience of being weary of pleasure.

And its not unlike the dopamine-chasing culture we live in today.

You are not made for a frictionless existence. You aren't made to be the center of your own private universe. And sadly, that's what so many of us think of when we think of heaven.

Title Slide- “Optimizing My Will: How Suffering & Friction Bring Transcendent Purpose”- Genesis 1-4, Matthew 4:1-22, Luke 22:39-46

The bend of our modern society- from AI to technological adaptations to our relationship with drugs and medication- is to run quickly away from friction, from difficulty, and from suffering- even boredom...and if its possible- we want to optimize everything.

To get the best product with the least amount of friction.

What I want to show you today is that you aren't made for that. And that is a life that will drain purpose and meaning from you...while persevering through difficulty and friction and suffering will actually increase your sense of purpose..and will make life much more enjoyable to live.

Genesis 1:28

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth.” --(CSB)

POINT: Friction Before the Fall

Subdue- to subjugate— in other words its not going to be easy.

The garden was a pattern- to go out from the garden, into the wilderness and replicate.

Genesis 2:15

15 The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it.

Humans are placed in the garden to WORK- you need some push back to work... friction. WATCH OVER- protect it- from what? Well at the very least there was something that threatened the life in the garden. Wind? storms? IDK- but they had an assignment- and it wasn't just made up.

Genesis 3:1

Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You can’t eat from any tree in the garden’?”

Before the fall of humanity- there was spiritual opposition to God.
So- there was the opportunity for real temptation- perhaps this is what they were supposed to protect the garden from.

Genesis 3:17b-19

The ground is cursed because of you.

**You will eat from it by means of painful labor
all the days of your life.**

**18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.**

**19 You will eat bread by the sweat of your brow
until you return to the ground,
since you were taken from it.**

**For you are dust,
and you will return to dust.”**

Pain comes into play as a curse of sin. The work isn't just difficult- its painful. Thorns and thistles aren't just friction- they are meant to wound. Now there is not cooperation there's conflict.

Sweat of your brow is a Hebrew phrase that indicates frustration and anguish.

That is the curse.. Friction- the push back of creation against humanity- is normal and good. the Pain or Frustration that we associate with work- is a part of the curse.

From the start of the OT, now let's go to the start of the NT, the gospel of Matthew. In particular, we're going to look at a parallel scene to Genesis 3.

Jesus is referred to in the NT as "the second Adam"- Jesus' mission- was that man failed to do- God himself would do on their behalf. When the serpent tempted Adam he failed. Lets see what happens when the serpent tempts the second Adam.

Matthew 4:1-4

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

2 After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 Then the tempter approached him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

4 He answered, "It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Notice-

First- He goes out into the wilderness. Where Adam sat back and let the serpent come from the wilderness into the garden- Jesus goes OUT to the wilderness- which is what man was called to do in the first place.

Second- Look at the natural friction. Don't eat- you get hungry- this isn't a part of the curse- but it is discipline of friction to create something good- a focus on spiritual connection to his Father.

The temptation- OPTIMIZE- FEED YOURSELF. IF YOU HAVE THE POWER TO GET THE PRODUCT WITHOUT THE FRICTION- DO IT.

Notice- its about bread. Remember the curse- you will not eat bread without pain. Jesus doesn't skip the pain or th friction. I'm not taking a shortcut. The process is a part of what I'm called to.

Then- he answers the serpent with a commitment to his Father's word. This is a direct quote from Deuteronomy- so its the word of God speaking about the word of God to the WORD of God- Jesus.

Man shall not live by bread alone- there is more to life for humanity than getting what we want right when we want it. We are called to be dependent and wait on what God says.

Matthew 4:5-7

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city, had him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written:

**He will give his angels orders concerning you,
and they will support you with their hands
so that you will not strike
your foot against a stone.”**

7 Jesus told him, “It is also written: Do not test the Lord your God.”

The devil now comes back and brings God’s word- (Psalm 91) with a twist.

Doesn’t God guarantee your comfort?- Why don’t you jump and let’s get those angels going. Then everyone would know you are the messiah.

This is another shortcut. Optimization. The point is the product right? Let’s skip the next 3 years of ministry and just show people right now who you are.

Jesus reply- again from the Scripture in Deuteronomy- “I’m to trust my Father’s plan not test it.”

Remember the first Adam- Did God really say- Let’s test what he said to see if it’s true. But the second Adam- trusts...not tests.

Matthew 4:8-10

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 And he said to him, “I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me.”

10 Then Jesus told him, “Go away, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”

It’s more optimization. Reduce friction. Bypass suffering. If you are the king- and the whole point is that you rule over a kingdom- does it really matter how we get to that point?

Let’s optimize this. Let’s reduce the friction. Let’s cut out the process and get to the product. Worship me. The lord of the shortcut...instead of that oppressive father of

yours that makes you do things the hard way. UGH! Nobody likes him!

Jesus says- Wrong- Be Gone! The point- the transcendent purpose of life isn't merely arriving at a finished product- its serving the LORD- its the journey with him- through all of the friction...that's the larger meaning here.

Matthew 4:11

11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and began to serve him.

Then, there is relief- joy- sabbath rest. But only as Jesus resists the temptation to optimize and shortcut.

One more stop- Out of the wilderness and back to a different Garden- the Garden Gethsemane.

Luke 22:39-42

39 He went out and made his way as usual to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. 40 When he reached the place, he told them, "Pray that you may not fall into temptation."

Look at the deep relationship- the spiritual connection- as Jesus is pursuing a transcendent purpose and calling his disciples up into that purpose.

Here we are in a garden- with the second Adam saying- Temptation is going to enter this Olive Garden- and it ain't gonna be endless soup and breadsticks. Pray that you won't fall- of course- they all did fall.

41 Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and began to pray, 42 "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me — nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."

Notice Jesus- He is honest about his grief. He asks for another way- but look- he submits his will to his Father's.

He refuses to optimize if its not the Fathers will.

Luke 22:43-44

43 Then an angel from heaven appeared to him, strengthening him. 44 Being in anguish, he prayed more fervently, and his sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground.

Just like in the wilderness at that temptation, an angel meets him to bring the Father's comfort. Jesus is sweating blood. There is no shortcut now from the pain. The thorns

of the curse that will soon be on his brow- are already piercing him as he takes on the sin of the First ADAM- and every human being that would follow.

45 When he got up from prayer and came to the disciples, he found them sleeping, exhausted from their grief. 46 “Why are you sleeping? ” he asked them. “Get up and pray, so that you won’t fall into temptation.”

And all his friends have given in to their own comfort- avoiding their grief- giving in to sleep. They haven’t joined him in spiritual connection...and they have traded in the transcendent purpose he gave them- for the momentary comfort a few minutes of sleep.

Ok- three points I want to make today.

1) You are created to create with friction.

the curse is not about ease....but about no frustration (Sweat of brow) When God creates- he intentionally sets up a process- be fruitful and multiply. Which means slow, relationship, something not done yet.

Eustress

Nervousness you feel before you do something difficult. Friction.

Distress is a result of the curse- the kind of grief and anxiety and pain that the curse creates.

Yet we avoid friction. Optimization. Reading and writing. Not meant to

download. Sense of good pride when we create.

Aristotle called it Poiesis.

Its the idea when the craftsman creates- the difficulty of the process of creating is actually creating something in him. Its growing and maturing.

You know this- when you make a meal instead of buying it. When you spend time on something and push through the difficulty there is a sense of accomplishment that not only feels pleasurable- it actually makes you better.

Chris Sibben teacher in a school in N VA. Showed his students a film that took more than 200 artists- more than 5 years to make.

The students were baffled. Why do that? “Al could have done it in five minutes”

The comment “AI could have done it in five minutes” is not really about speed. It’s a moral revaluation. It assumes that what matters is the output, not the ordeal. The image, not the seeing. The product, not the person becoming capable of making it. AI offers competence without apprenticeship. Fluency without understanding. A student who internalizes that pattern does not become lazier; he becomes less formed, less present, less able to bear the weight of difficulty without reaching for a prompt.

- Chris Sibben

Adam was called to go through the friction. And so are we. Jesus did not take the shortcuts the devil offered, but was dependent on his Father’s provision through the difficulty.

We are not called to optimize everything- we are called to cultivate and that means we keep friction in our lives.

2) Suffering has been redeemed by Jesus to bless us instead of curse us.

Suffering as Distress.

But because Jesus went to the cross

Romans 5:2-5

2 We have also obtained access through him by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we boast in the hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, 4 endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. 5 This hope will not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Remember- Friction and Poiesis- as you create with friction- something is produced in you.

Now- because of Jesus- in suffering we don’t just have pain- something is produced in us.

In christ, suffering is transformed into friction. It produces in us a character to better testifies to hope.

Romans 8:26-28

26 In the same way the Spirit also helps us in our weakness, because we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with

inexpressible groanings. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because he intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

28 We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose

The Spirit- God himself- is praying for us in our suffering- Unlike the disciples with Jesus- the Holy Spirit is a better friend.

We optimize to miss friction.

We DISTRACT to miss pain and grief and numb suffering. Trying to simulate what we were made for.

We distract with porn- (simulated sex without risk of relationship)

We distract with gambling- (actual risk without the work)

Video games- (simulated accomplishment that actually accomplishes nothing) Doom

Scrolling or entertaining- (to quiet the boredom- a form of suffering- offers little opportunity for thinking or growth- FRICTION

Grief- Go through grief with the Holy Spirit.

G4- tap card

Ephesians 2:8-10

For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift — 9 not from works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.

Poiema- Created for works

Finish with Invitation to believe and be baptized- Oct 18