

## Coffee with Phil. 29. An opportunity for a redirect

### **Introduction.**

Well, hi, and welcome to the podcast. Hi and welcome. My name is Phil Strong and it's great to have you with me today. What an afternoon I'm having. So let me just tell you about my drama, my melodrama before we get started on today's podcast. But here I am at home, working from home this afternoon, a little bit of peace and quiet because there's quite a bit of chaos going on at my workplace right now.

So I decide to come home, and this late in the day I make myself a cup of tea, I scratch together the tea leaves out of the bottom of the tin because it's the last of my Melbourne breakfast tea that I have and I'm cherishing the opportunity to enjoy that this afternoon while I spend time with you, and then I get the computer fired up, I get the headphones on and everything plugged in and I swoop across to type something on the keyboard, and yip, you guessed it, I knocked my cup of tea over on my desk and it went across the mouse pad it went across to the reference material I've got there, which is nicely tea stained, now needs drying. It was on my lap, it was in my chair, it was on the floor. And also today, because I'm not at the office, usually what I do is I mindmap my sessions on a whiteboard and I scan them up into the cloud, I just use my iPad as a reference to help me, but today cause in my home I don't have a whiteboard, so I'd written my notes out on paper, and so said paper covered in tea, which leeches the ink and makes it very difficult to read what I've written. All of this man, the struggle is real friends, the struggle is real. So not only did I lose my Melbourne breakfast tea, I've had to go back and find something else, and no French Earl Grey in the cupboard. Woe is me and so here I am enjoying a Madagascan vanilla in the afternoon, and for your sake I hope that it inspires me.

So, not sure where you're at, what you're doing. A friend of mine messaged the other day to say he was having a vanilla latte while enjoying my podcast, and I found that refreshing to hear, and so don't forget to follow along on the Phil Strong author Facebook page. Make sure you follow the podcast on Spotify or any other platform that you choose to get the notifications that the latest episode has hit your device.

Today I want to speak about the journey through the wall. This is a concept that I'll explain, but there's a lot going on in my world right now, and I feel like I'm being invited by God to journey through the wall, and I will explain what that means, as long as I can read my notes that are covered in tea, they're hanging in the sink in the kitchen, but I've got a photo of them here and I'm trying to decipher what's in front of me.

Look a journey through the wall is a moment in our life, it comes more than once, and for me I sometimes like to call them a 'come to Jesus moment', 'a come to Jesus moment' where we know we're at a crossroads, we know we're at a significant moment in our lives. The Lord has led us there. He's giving us an invitation, and in this case I'm calling it a journey through the world. It's like there's an obstacle, there's something that need to pass through.

Well, you wouldn't believe that the circus continues, here's the dog barking at her shadow in the hallway, so apologies for the intervention that was necessary there to make our life more comfortable. Look the journey through the wall is not so much a story of crash and burn. I had thought about labelling this episode crashed and burning, but it's not quite that, it's more of a realisation that life brings us to a crossroad and this is an opportunity, I've called it an opportunity for a redirect, and I do believe they're initiated by God. I do believe they're an invitation to each one of us. I think it comes several times in our life, but I'm gonna quote quite a few different authors today, as I've been on a journey exploring this myself in my come to Jesus moment, that is a journey through the wall. This is an opportunity for a redirect that usually involves a rethink, and hopefully after a rethink there's a rewrite of what I call the standard operating procedure, or how I live my life.

Before I define what the wall is, or what it means to journey through the wall, I wonder what this means for you. I always like to invite you into my journey, but in listening to my journey and contemplating what I share with you, I hope you're reflecting in your own life. Have you had a moment where you've been invited into a crossroad moment to, a come to Jesus moment, a redirect that involves a rethink? and look, sadly, some of you will be saying no.

You may be saying no because you're too young. You're still trying to find yourself. But some of you might be saying no because you're either numb, deaf, or blind to what life is doing around you. Sometimes our body sends us a message, a signal we have a situation healthwise where the body says hey, take notice now. Sometimes there's a crisis. There's a family situation, a relational situation, or perhaps even a job situation that causes us to stop and rethink. But sometimes people just think 'Oh well, this is life it's going to happen' or 'God's going to work it all out in the end' and you fail to realise that God is using your circumstances as a flashing light signpost to invite you into something deeper, and that's what I want to talk about today.

I wanna talk about this and I wanna ask the question what is the wall? What is the wall? So, I've described it as a crossroads. Author Pete Scazzero in his book *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, which we will reference in the show notes. You'll find the links below. Peter Scazzero defines it as a moment of crisis. Something happens that causes us to stop and reflect. Life happens to us, and you know, you maybe thinking of certain seasons in your life where you've had that confronting, I can't escape this, I need to go through it, I can't go around it.

Franciscan monk Richard Rohr, I've just finished reading his book called 'Falling Upward'. He calls it a spirituality for the two halves of life, and I found it a deep and challenging read to connect my level of thinking with his level of thinking was my first challenge. But Richard Rohr describes the moment that I'm describing here, he defines it as being led to the edge of our own private resources, so that our ego can die, that's right, our ego can die, and we can choose to surrender to God's deep inner work.

I'm also reading a new book by a guy called Sean Nemecek, and again we'll reference it in the show notes. But he describes this moment as a 'realisation that our inner life with God is not sufficient to sustain our outer life'. In essence, we depleted or we're empty. Now one of the things that's fascinating to me is each of these three authors Scazzero, Rohr, and Nemecek, they all make reference to a writing. By Saint John of the Cross in 1577 called *Dark Night of the Soul*. Now I haven't yet fully read his writings, Again, it's very deep and reflective, but he says "The Dark Knight of the soul is that season of life that we each must pass through", he says "it's contemplative, it's painful, and it's necessary".

The reason why I'm describing these to you is I'm hoping that you can do what I've done and connect with what's happening in you in order that you can go on the journey with God so that he can do the deep inner work in you, as I'm seeking to see as a fruit of the journey. I'm saying 'come on God, don't waste this opportunity. Don't let me waste this opportunity. But would you come and do the work that you see necessary'.

But each of these authors make it very, very clear that there is an opportunity, and the opportunity comes, but we can press in, or we can choose to divert the course, and herein lies the challenge for each of us.

When we look at the idea that we might even deny God's invitation. It seems ironic, doesn't it? That we as gods people would say no to the best thing he has for us. But how often do we see that? And I think of the times where I've declined his invitation to do something that I knew was good for me, Peters Scazzero, the author I referred to earlier, he says "look, the opportunity here is to choose to avoid pain, because as human beings we often like to avoid pain, or alternatively, we avoid the personal change that might come through introspection" it's a word he uses to mean looking within oneself, to find oneself, and here in also lies the challenge, and this is what scares me a little, as I think about my own journey, is sometimes as Christians we smile, we grin and bear it, and we use blind faith as an excuse to avoid God's discipline through the essential suffering that he brings into our lives. We're not to avoid the suffering, we're to embrace it, knowing that when we have persevered to the fullness of the process, that not only joy but completion and growth comes as a result of it.

Richard Rohr, on the other hand, in speaking of the human propensity to avoid or divert the course, he says "we choose to remain driven by our ego, we choose our personal strength and our control aside from God", and as such, he says, "we retain our immaturity for the remainder of our days".

Now when I read that I was like, 'ohh, that's not the choice I want to make, not the choice at all' and so what I have attempted to begin is to embrace the invitation, and so the journey through the wall implies a positive choice to embrace the suffering, embrace the lessons that God's got through suffering, and embrace the invitation that God presents as the wall, this is choosing to press in, and we've got to understand that, this is what's really been the revelation to me through reading these books that I've referenced today, is that the invitation is God's invitation to us as his children, to experience a deeper knowledge of his love for each of us, personally, and an awakening inside of us to how that love can completely transform us.

Now I guess for me, as I've looked at this journey myself, I've got the benefit of hindsight and experience. God and I have history, as I said to you, I have had many come to Jesus moments, and I remember when I first travelled up to Redding, CA to visit a couple of people at Bethel Church, I was encouraged by Andy, a friend of mine, to register myself for a Sozo prayer session. Sozo is an inner healing ministry, I've really had no knowledge of it whatsoever at the time. But I was told it was good for me, it would turn me inside out, but I would experience God's love in a fresh way, and you know what? I just trusted my friend I was like, well, if you say it's good for me I'm here, I'm doing it.

And I remember the 90 minute session. It was a sort of a, like not so much a counselling session, but it was a facilitated pre session where the goal of the lady who was leading it was to help me to connect with God in a greater way and to access the healing, and the love, and the grace, and the affirmation, the identity that God had for me in that moment. And I remember at the time thinking as I was praying, prayers of forgiveness, and repentance, and asking God for insight into his love for me. I remember almost like thinking outside of the experience was like I was watching what was happening as I was opening my heart up to deep, deep, deep surgery, the Lord was doing.

I remember thinking to myself, wow. This some stuff we're doing here, and we're unpacking things, and I'm letting go of things, and this is like a wrenching away of deeply ingrained pain, and hurt, and sin, and hereditary stuff, and all sorts of other things. But I remember thinking, I just feel so loved. I just feel so close to God right now. I have no sense of condemnation, or judgement, or that God does not like me because I'm a dirty sinner. I just had this feeling of overwhelming love as it washed over me, wave after wave, after wave, after wave of his love.

And in that moment I learned something about God. I learned that an invitation that God presents to us is always going to expose us to his love, which is transforming us, and leading us into a greater degree of freedom and experience of his love for us. And you know what in that, I absolutely believe that when we realise how much God loves us, we learn to love ourselves, and so pressing in is the invitation, and that's, I suppose, where I'm sitting right.

Richard Rohr, in his book *Falling Upward*, he says this, he says "We must leave home. We must leave the comfort. We must leave the security, and we must leave the control", and he quotes the Bible and reference to Abraham. The Lord said to Abraham "Leave your father and your mother and go to a land that you do not know" it was a call and invitation by God, to him, to leave their comfort, security, and control, and to go into the unknown, and trust that God had something amazing for him.

I remember in Luke 5 when Jesus called the disciples out of the boat, he said leave your nets and come follow me and there was an invitation to something higher and greater, but the fishermen, Peter, and his brothers, and his friends James and John, they had to leave the comfort and the security, and the control they had in order to embrace what Jesus had for them, it wasn't necessarily an easy life either I might add, it was a life of suffering, and the case of Peter's crucifixion.

Jesus says to us all, should you lose your life, you will gain your life. Herein lies the invitation. What's another benefit of this? Sean Nemecek in his book, he says this is an invitation. If we choose to embrace it, if we choose to embrace it, we're really going to see a breakdown and a deconstruct of the lies, or the false truths that have shielded us thus far, and he says this, "what if our programming is faulty." That the responses, the emotional or spiritual responses that we have learned as children and young adults. What if, though, that programming is faulty? That we choose to construct our lives on something that is not true according to God's view of the world and our lives, and we believe this false construct, and that the success of our lives is based on false truth. Which means it's not successful at all. So even if we're feeling safe, even if we are feeling comfortable, even if we're feeling like we're in control, Sean in his book, is saying, this is a false reality, because it's not in alignment with God's truth.

And one of the things that I've had to unpack recently is asking God about this. You know, as I've been lamenting, crying, and praying through broken relationships, and broken connection with people, and my journey as a church leader I've seen lots of people come, and I've seen most of them go and there's been a lot of self inspection, deep thinking, and really also challenging myself with those that are accountable to, and I discovered as I was doing this, that I've been believing a lie, that the success of our church, and therefore my success, was totally dependent on other people. I had embraced this idea that I needed a strong team around me. I needed the right people around me, people that I would choose, that I like to work with, that complement my strengths, lift me up, but allow me to work, you know, in partnership, you know, strength with strength, and that together we we're gonna knock this out of the park and make it successful, and of course in constructing this false truth I had built, by my own strength and my own wisdom, what I considered to be a strong team, and the Lord said 'what you build with your strength, you must also maintain and sustain with your own strength' and of course I couldn't do it. It wasn't strong enough. It wasn't. It wasn't pure, it wasn't true and ultimately crumbled, and the success that I felt that I had created, in the early days, came crumbling around my feet, or should I say around my face, as I had my forehead to the floor.

And so the lie is that I was dependent on, others, and myself, and our strength, and not on the grace of God, and so this is an example, I suppose, of how we deconstruct the assumptions or the false truth that we have essentially fabricated around us.

And so this is probably why I'm feeling so tired at the moment, because I'm actually pulling my life apart. I'm pulling it apart and I'm saying, 'God, if this isn't true, I don't want it anymore. What? What is it that you want me to see? And what is it that you want me to understand?' And so, are there beliefs that I have about myself, God? And you know, classic question, that I teach others to use, I use myself is 'God is there a lie that I'm believing about me in this situation?' And if there's a lie, I wanna get rid of it, and then I wanna say 'God, what is true according to you?' And I wanna embrace that, and I wanna agree with it, and I wanna say yes and Amen to it, and I wanna make it part of who I am.

But you know every day we make assumptions, and we make assumptions based on what we think is true, and God's really trying to break that down. This is what it means to journey through the wall and Peter Scazzero reminds us in his book that this journey is not one of effort, and you know, I have shared this with you before recently that there is only one way to access the other side of the wall, or freedom, or breakthrough, or true forgiveness, anything like that. The one way we can access that is by grace and by grace alone, and his grace, grace on top of grace that the Lord would come and truly bless us, as we submit to him.

And in some ways I've kind of been a little bit, I feel almost let down by the authors I'm reading because they haven't given me a road map. They haven't given me a 7 point checklist and if you do these seven things you're gonna be home and hosed, man, you're gonna be so sorted, and I think the reason for that is, as I contemplated is that really what they've learned is that you need to say yes to the journey, and you need to allow God to do the journey to lead you moment by moment.

And I wanna talk about this as I close, with the how to, and just really, just a couple of thoughts, and the first one that Sean Nemecek speaks of in his book, that I wanted to bring through, because I think this is probably the most important one to me right now, and I want to suggest that you might embrace this also, is community, community, the right community. I had intended for this podcast to be about boundaries and putting the right people out of your life, and the right people into your life, and I've parked that for another day, but I would say this, that one of the key things these authors are saying is community is vital. Do not do this journey in isolation. Do not hide away thinking you're gonna fix yourself by yourself. Find safe people to help you journey through the wall.

And in his book, Sean speaks of people like a councilor. He speaks of a mentor. He encourages you to have a coach, a life coach, or a ministry coach, or a professional coach. He highly recommends having a spiritual director, someone to help you unpack conversations about God, to direct your thinking toward God. He says you need, say, friends that don't try and fix you. Just friends that want to love you, hang out with you, have fun with you, laugh with you, and cry with you, but not give you advice constantly.

And so you know, think about who the safe people are in your world, and I've made a couple of appointments this week to go and meet with people who I think are safe people, and I'm gonna sit with them. I'm gonna talk about my journey. I'm gonna talk about the different kinds of safe people I'm looking for, and I'm gonna invite them to consider if they want to be one of those, and if they are, then I'm going to walk with them, and in that Sean's advice to me, and therefore his advice to you, would be to trust the guides that God gives you.

Look, as we sorta just land this, I want to do a couple of things. But firstly I just want to remind us that the work of God's grace is what will do it thoroughly and perfectly, and this is me talking to me now, but you can have it for free. I need to remember that it takes longer than I would like. 'So God grant me the grace and the peace to stand in the journey, and trust your leadership, and trust your timing, and trust your process, that I can't control this, I choose not to control it, and I trust you.'

Peter Scazzero says in his review of it, he said, 'look, God's purpose is this. God's purpose is loving union with him, and if his goal is you to experience that loving union in a fresh way, in a dynamic way, I think it's Richard Rohr that calls it the sacred dance, the sacred dance with God the father, son and Holy Spirit. If that's God's goal, then God's gonna make a way. He is truly sovereign and he is our loving father.

Saint John of the Cross in 1577 says 'The dark night of our soul is an opportunity where we get to see the divine light that calls us higher' and I find that astounding. I just contemplate that in the dark night of our soul, we get to see the divine light that calls us higher.

I want to close this podcast by reading scripture to you. We prayed this recently, it was astounding to me the words that King David had written as a song in Psalm 65, and I want to read it to you from The Passion translation of all things. It says this "So God and Zion, to you, even silence is praise. You who answers prayer all humanity comes before you with their requests. Though we are overcome by our many sins, your sacrifice covers over them all. How blessed is the one you choose to live near you in your courts. The beauty of your house, your holy temple satisfies us. You answer our prayers with amazing wonders and with awe inspiring displays of power. You are the righteous God who helps us like a father. Everyone, everywhere, looks to you, for you are the confidence of all the earth, even to the farthest islands of the sea. What jaw-dropping astounding power is yours. You are the mountain maker who sets them all in place, you muzzle the roar of the mighty seas and the rage of mobs with their noisy riots. Oh God to the farthest corners of the planet. People will stand in awe, startled and stunned by your signs and wonders. Sunrise brilliance and sunset beauty both take turns in singing their songs of joy to you."

Friends, may God richly bless you. If you're journeying through the wall and you want to reach out to someone else who's journeying through the wall, send me a message, I'd love to chat.

But may God bless you. May God richly bless you with a divine revelation of how close he is to you, how much he loves you, and how much life and abundance he has for you.

I'll see you next time on Coffee with Phil. God bless you.