



The Struggle

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Just about everyone you come across today is going through some kind of struggle in their lives.

Most people bear such a heavy burden, quietly and alone, focused on making sure it looks like they have everything under control. They forget they don't have to have it all under control, and they certainly don't have to walk their road alone. They forget that there is hope and help, if they would only look for it.

You're probably going through a struggle right now, even as you read this.

Maybe it's in the form of depression or panic attacks, so debilitating that you physically shut down and can't do anything, wanting to scream and rage and cry and knowing that you can't really do that and, even if you did, it wouldn't help anything, and the fear and pain and destruction would still be there, gnawing at your insides, making you want to die, to do anything to escape from the torture, and wondering how much longer you can survive in the face of constant mental, emotional, and physical exhaustion.

Add to that the chorus of voices telling you that “everything will get better if you would just cheer up,” adding insult to injury, not understanding that you’re actually quite ill, that if it were only a simple matter of cheering up you would have done it a thousand times already, that you in fact have already tried that many times and more. But, it doesn’t work like that when you’re sick. The only people who know how it works are those who’ve been through it before, and many are reluctant to share for fear of reawakening that dragon in themselves. And you don’t blame them.

Almost worse than those telling you to cheer up are those who pity you, who give you the sympathetic looks when you walk by, each sad little smile reminding you that they know what you used to be and no longer are. Lately you’ve been avoiding people more and more because you don’t want to bring them down, much less yourself. But is that a good thing or a bad thing? You just don’t know any more, and it’s getting so hard to think clearly...

Maybe you have cancer or another serious disease, and you’re not sure whether you’ll live or die. You’re in and out of the hospital constantly, doing the treatments they tell you that you need (the ones you can afford, anyway), and you have no idea if they’re even doing any good. You wonder what the point of all this is, and how much longer it’ll go on. You’re getting so tired that sometimes you think death would actually be a relief.

You begin to wonder what will happen if you die sooner rather than later, as many of the signs seem to be pointing to right now. How will it end? Will it be painful? Frightening? Hard? Can't be harder than this, right?

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But, what about your family and friends? How much will they hurt, and how will their lives be torn apart? Or even more terrifying, what if their lives go on the same as before? What if the impact you made in life was so little that all they do is shed a few tears, say a quick goodbye, and never think of you again? What if they're relieved that you're gone, since you've been such a burden on them anyway?

And then gradually you realize that your mind has been running away with you, that yes, you may die, but you may also live, and all the fear and doubt about your value and the love of family and friends is nothing more than the ramblings of a frightened mind in a deteriorating body. But this reminds you that death may come sooner than later, and the vicious thought cycle starts all over again...

Maybe your child is very sick, and you are faced with the horrifying prospect of seeing the most precious human being on the planet not only suffering, but possibly dying right in front of your eyes, and you are powerless to help.

You stay strong for them when they are awake, telling them it'll be okay, that they're doing great, that it'll all be over soon. And you tremble at those words, because you wonder if they think about what that could really mean as much as you do. When they're asleep you break down into sobs wondering how you'll be able to do this, how any parent would ever be able to do this, the most painful scenario one could imagine.

You sit by their side day and night, holding their hand, kissing their cheek, bringing forth every memory in your mind, every moment of their tiny life in vivid relief against the dark backdrop of your fear, hoping that your love will be enough to stem the evil tide slowly rising.

Praying for a miracle, outwardly hoping for the best, but inwardly fearing the worst, you keep your vigil. Understanding that you would instantly give anything and everything, including your own life, to make this little one whole again, begging to be allowed to do it just this one time, but knowing that you can't, that no one can. And you are afraid...

Maybe you're an entrepreneur or you run a small business, and you constantly feel the tension between the way things are currently done, and the way you know they could be done, and that you're the one to do something about it. And that is nothing compared to the tension of knowing that you have no safety net, that you are solely responsible for the success or the failure of this project, and that this risk you have taken affects not only you, but those you love and care for as well. Isn't it unfair to drag them through the mud alongside you, when all they want is the peace and security they know you could provide if you only set your mind to that very achievable goal, as opposed to tilting at windmills that no one else seems to be able to see?

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Starting to second-guess yourself, you begin to wonder why you ever chose this path in the first place, even after you've failed time and again in the past. What makes you think this is the one that's actually going to work? Maybe the others were right, maybe you should just go take one of the jobs you've been offered and ease all this stress, but that wouldn't satisfy your desire to succeed in creating something out of nothing.

Sometimes you wish you weren't built this way, that you could be happy in a job where you just go to work, put in your hours, and then come home to spend the rest of your time in the simple pleasures of life. No more nonstop days trying to do the work of three people. No more sleepless nights with your mind churning and thrashing like a feverish patient, trying to find the answer to yet another problem. No more friends and family talking behind your back, saying that it's one step forward and two steps back, and that if you were really smart, you'd give up this foolish dream of yours and act like a responsible adult.

But then you realize this would mean no more mental breakthroughs where you make the connection that no one else yet sees. When you look at all you've put together and realize that no one else has ever done it quite like this before, and that this project could literally change the world. These are the good moments, but they are few and far between, hidden in a tangled morass of doubt, uncertainty, and fear. And you're never quite sure if you're on the brink of success, or the brink of disaster...

Maybe you're going through the intense emotional pain of a broken relationship, and you can't bring yourself to forgive the other person. Perhaps you can't even forgive yourself. Craving the love and comfort of someone special to you, but feeling that somehow you must not be worthy of that experience, you replay every broken promise, every hurtful look, every painful moment, trying to figure out where it all went wrong and what you could have done to prevent it.

But then you realize all the things they could have done to prevent it, and now you're fighting against all the anger welling up inside you, realizing how incredibly unfair this whole thing is, and how your life is now miserable because of the choices they made while you were attached to them, and yet were powerless to stop them from spinning everything out of control.

And you don't want to think that way, because you know that both sides were partially to blame, and pinning everything on them is a copout, but what if this is one of those few times where it's not a copout, where they actually did totally screw up a good thing, and you were left to deal with the wreckage?

After spinning round and round with these thoughts for hours and days and weeks and months you finally understand that sometimes there's nothing more to be said, and nothing more to be done, and nothing more to even be thought. But that still doesn't make it better. The pain may subside, but there will always be scars, and you never know just how deep they go...

Maybe you have no money. Work is scarce, bills are due, debt overshadows you, and help is far away or nonexistent. You may be in this situation through no fault of your own, but that doesn't stop you from feeling like a failure, from hanging your head in shame whenever anyone tries to talk about "helping you out a bit," or from beating yourself up over it. Wondering what will happen to your family if you can't afford a place to live or food to eat. Thinking there's no way

something like this should happen to you, but knowing there's a very real chance that it will, and it's frightening.

Then again, you may be in this situation through every fault of your own, and you know it, just as everyone else does. You wish you had never been stupid enough to get here in the first place, but now that you're here, all you want to do is fix it and never get in this deep again. But there's no easy fix, and you're so scared that you won't be able to right the ship, and besides, now that you're upside down and floundering, what's the point anyway? You may as well just accept the label that everyone's given you, and give up on being anything other than completely worthless.

Every hour of every day these conflicting thoughts run through your mind, always with the constant pressure of money looming over you in some form or another. Pretty soon you're going to buckle, and you're scared of what's going to happen then, but you don't know how to make things better, so you remain confused and timid...

It may feel like you're the only one who's ever had to go through travails of this magnitude, but the simple fact is that you are not. Billions of people go through these struggles every day, the world over. You are not alone.

When you're lying awake at night wondering how you're going to get through everything you have to deal with, it may help to remember this:

People weaker than you have succeeded.

People stronger than you have failed.

At least that's what it looks like on the surface. But when it comes to making it through all the pain in your life, the external circumstances don't matter as much as we think they do. It's all about faith. And I'm not talking about faith in yourself, either—the belief that you'll get it done through sheer determination. Yes, that's a part of it, but most of those who run on pure drive and determination will ultimately tire out and fade at the end.

That's the beauty of having true faith. It doesn't tire out like determination does. When determination tires, nothing gets done, and all is lost. But when faith tires, it rests in hope and love. It abides. It grows stronger in rest. Because faith knows that it can't do this alone. It puts its trust in something more important than itself... in God, or a higher power, and also in others.

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There are always those who believe in you, who support you, who love you. Sometimes they're right by your side. Sometimes they're not. Wherever they are, seek them out. Talk to them. Listen to them. Cherish them.

They're right about you, you know. They see the best in you—the part of yourself that's always there, but that you don't always feel—the part of you that's beautiful, strong, and resilient. Let them remind you of who you really are.

Struggle is the human condition, but hope is the human spirit.

And there is always hope. 🌱

Info

ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Nate St. Pierre strives to build projects that change the world, with a focus on philanthropy and micro-giving. Along the way he does freelance work as a web marketing consultant. He writes once in a while, too. You can see all his projects, work, and writing on his personal site, natestpierre.me.

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