Finding the Tension:

The goal of the Bible is to reveal how we can have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ and align our lives with his holy character. Therefore every passage in the Bible speaks to some tension and misunderstanding we have in this journey and attempts to make us more like Christ.

When reading the Bible, the challenge is to discern what tension in our lives is being addressed. Often it is easy to read the Bible without identifying any personal challenge and, as a result, miss the impact and point of the passage.

Identify the various tensions being addressed in the passages below.

**Ephesians 4:29 (NIV)**
*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*

**What root tension does this passage address?**
There is an innate desire in us to tear down others as a means of building ourselves up. We have all used our mouths in ways that have been discouraging and destructive to others. God reveals this is not how his people, who have shown so much grace, are to relate to others.

**How have you personally experienced this tension?**

**What is God’s solution to this tension?**
God calls us to use our mouths in ways that ONLY build up others. Instead of tearing others down we are to focus on how we can meet their needs and build them up. Everything we do and say should only be of benefit to others.

**Colossians 3:23 (NIV)**
*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men,*

**What root tension does this passage address?**
We often lose perspective of why we do what we do. Because we often see ourselves as working for other “imperfect” people, we are tempted to give them less than our best. This may also call into question the very type of things we choose to do.

**How have you personally experienced this tension?**
What is God’s solution to this tension?
God calls us back to the big picture reminding us that everything we do should be for his glory. We were not created for others, but for him. Therefore everything we do, we should do to the best of the ability God has given us and in a manner that brings glory to him.

Romans 8:1 (NIV)
Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

What root tension does this passage address?
Even as believers, we are tempted to walk through life with a sense of spiritual failure; that we don’t deserve God’s love; that we deserve to be condemned. As a result, we accept other people’s statements of condemnation, we fail to forgive ourselves and we diminish our worth.

How have you personally experienced this tension?

What is God’s solution to this tension?
God declares that, in Christ, we are completely forgiven and justified. There is no condemnation coming from God and therefore we should not receive condemnation from others or ourselves. We are to walk in the freedom with the weight of guilt and shame lifted from our shoulders.

Galatians 6:1 (NIV)
Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

What root tension does this passage address?
We often feel insecure or inadequate in talking to other people about their sin. Who are we to judge and speak into the lives of others when we’re not perfect ourselves?

How have you personally experienced this tension?

What is God’s solution to this tension?
This isn’t about us and our issues. It is about us caring for the spiritual health of other people. We are called to assume spiritual responsibility for one another. To turn a blind eye to another believer’s sin is more centred in a concern to protect ourselves than it is to love the other person. Love calls us to have the tough conversations.
Acts 8:1-4 (NIV)
1 And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. 2 Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. 3 But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison. 4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

What root tension does this passage address?
How could a loving God allow his people to be persecuted, tortured and put to death? Does God not care? Does God not see? Why doesn’t God do something?

How have you personally experienced this tension?

What is God’s solution to this tension?
Continue to preach the gospel despite opposition. Not only did God see what was going on, he allowed it. Through persecution the church spread the gospel more powerfully and further than they ever would have otherwise. Through persecution, the conviction and power of their faith became even more evident. Thousands more people are in heaven because people chose to remain faithful and spread the word in the midst of extreme trial.

Ultimately, every spiritual tension is rooted in a faulty belief regarding the character of God and our relationship to him. Because we are either unaware or choose to reject certain truths about God, our lives become distorted and spiritually dysfunctional. God, in his grace, reveals the truth about his nature through scripture and calls us to change our hearts and perspectives to align with him.

As you go through the following passages, determine the spiritual tension. Then try to determine which truths about the character of God, which if fully embraced, would dissolve that tension and bring peace and joy to the individual.

Psalm 13:1-6 (NIV)
1 How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? 2 How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? 3 Look on me and answer, O LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; 4 my enemy will say, “I have overcome him,” and my foes will rejoice when I fall. 5 But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. 6 I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me.
What spiritual tension does this passage address?
The psalmist raises the tension of feeling abandoned by God. He is going through extremely difficult times and God does not appear to notice or care. It makes him question God’s love and attentiveness.

What truths about God, if fully embraced, would remove this tension?
God knows all that you are going through, and he cares.
Just because you do not see how God is at work does not mean he has abandoned you. He is walking with you through the valley of the shadow of death and he sees a way through for you.

Can you think of any scripture passages that affirm this truth?
Psalm 23:4 (NIV)
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Deuteronomy 31:6 (NIV)
Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

Jeremiah 31:3 (NIV)
The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.

1 Peter 5:7 (NIV)
Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

How would embracing this truth change anything?
These truths about God might not change the circumstances, but they would change the degree of peace and joy the person experiences as they go through the circumstances.

What are some ways the psalmist has chosen to act on these truths?
The psalmist “made a decision” to trust the unfailing love of God.
He chooses to sing, praising God for who he is, trusting the future salvation God will provide based on God’s proven faithfulness in the past.

Tension Summary:

The Lie: God has abandoned me.

The Truth: God loves you and is always with you

Response: Trust and Praise
Genesis 3:1-7 (NIV)
1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?
2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"
3 "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. 4 "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."
5 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 6 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

What is the core tension Eve struggled with?
Eve struggled with whether or not God was withholding his best from her. Satan sewed seeds of discontent by suggesting life could be better by rejecting God's word and taking control of her own life.

What character trait of God did Eve choose to disbelieve that led her to sin against him?
Eve ultimately distrusted God's love for her. If Eve had trusted that God loved her and intended only the best for her, she would have rejected Satan's temptation and walked away from the tree.

Provide some examples of how you have experienced this tension in your life.

If you fully trusted that God had his best in store for you, how would that change the way you live?

Romans 11:33-36 (NIV)
33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! 34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"
35 "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

What tensions might this doxology resolve?
Sometimes we wonder if God really knows what he is doing. We may not express it in such a way, but there are many times when, if we were God, we would have done things completely differently. At such times we question the intelligence and wisdom of God.
Provide some examples of times when you’ve distrusted God in this way.

If you had truly trusted the wisdom of God, how might that have affected how you approached life at those times?

Whenever you read any passage of scripture, look for the tension that God wants to address. God is in the process of continually stripping away the lies in our life that prevent us from being who he created us to be.