

How to Handle Hardships

2 Corinthians 1:8-11

You may not be going through a hardship right now but it's just a matter of time, because life is full of difficulties and you will go through hardships. The Bible teaches that this is not a perfect world. Because there is sin in the world people do wrong things and suffer the results. Jesus said, *"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33). The Bible is brutally honest about this. In Ecclesiastes 8:14 we read, *"Sometimes something useless happens on earth. Bad things happen to good people, and good things happen to bad people."* What King Solomon is saying here is that we don't always get what we deserve.

There are two mistakes that you can make regarding hardships. One is to think all the good things that happen to me prove I'm good, and that all the bad things that happen to me prove I'm bad. That's wrong. In Luke 13 Jesus is talking about two calamities that happened in His time. In Luke 13:1-5 we read, *"Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.'"*

Basically Jesus said that there were a few innocent people worshipping at the temple and they were brutally killed by Pilate. Then he said there was a tower that fell on eighteen people and killed them. He then posed the question, "Was it a result of their sin that caused this calamity?" And then He answered His own question. He said absolutely not! The point the Lord was making is that natural disaster is not God's way of bringing judgment on evil people. Therefore all the bad things that happen to people are not necessarily proving that they are bad or evil. Notice what Jesus also said in Matthew 5:45, *"For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."*

Now, that doesn't negate cause and effect. Most of the problems we have in life are our fault. I would say that majority of them are. We do reap what we sow, but not always. And sometimes we suffer innocently. You see, not everything that happens is God's will. When I hear people talk about a tragedy or a disaster and they say, "Well, it must have been God's will?" I have a word for that. "Baloney!" Don't blame God for the tragedies or disasters. God grieves too and not everything that happens is His will.

God's will is not always done in this world. 2 Peter 3:9 says *"It is God's will that all should repent and none should perish."* Question, do all repent? No. Do some perish? Yes. Why? God will never force His will on your will. That's why we're to pray in the Lord's Prayer, *"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* Why? Because God's will isn't always done on earth. How is it done in heaven? It's done perfectly. And so we're to pray, "God, just like your will is done perfectly in heaven, we want that to be done on earth". If it was being done, we wouldn't have to pray for it.

My message today is not to explain suffering because that would take a whole series, but instead I would like to talk about how to handle suffering and hardships. I would like to give you at least 4 principles on how to deal with hardships.

1. Refuse to be Bitter

In Job 21:23-25 we read, *"One person dies in full vigor, completely secure and at ease, well nourished in body, bones rich with marrow. Another dies in bitterness of soul, never having enjoyed anything good."* Some people have no happiness at all. They live and die with a bitter heart or soul. You have to decide

when you go through hardships “Am I going to allow this to make me a bitter person, or better person?” Job in essence is saying that you have a choice, “you can either choose happiness in life or you can choose bitterness.” It’s your choice, but you can’t have both. You can’t be happy and bitter at the same time.

Sometimes it bugs me to hear people who constantly whine and complain. I’ll be honest with you; I have no place in my life for constant whiners. Why? Because being in the ministry I’ve seen people who had every right in the world to whine and didn’t. They had every reason in the world, the disasters, and the crisis that they’ve seen in their life and they still maintained a positive faith attitude. On the other hand I’ve seen other people who hardly have anything go wrong in their life and they still complain and whine about everything.

Happiness is a choice. You refuse to be bitter, because bitterness always hurts you most. Look at this verse: “*Watch out that no bitterness takes root among you. It causes deep trouble, hurting many in their spiritual lives*” (Heb. 12:15 LB).

Sometime ago I watched a preacher by the name of David Ring who has cerebral palsy. Here is a guy who lost his mom and dad at a very young age and who was ridiculed in school because of his medical condition. He can’t speak very well and he stutters. But I love his attitude and his good humor. He once said that there should be an eleventh commandment which is: “***Thou shalt not bellyache.***” Refuse to be bitter, because it causes problems in your own life. It never changes anything. Blaming others never changes anything. It only makes you feel worse.

Have you ever noticed what insurance companies consider to be acts of God? Like hurricanes, disasters, floods, fires and storms. Can I tell you what real acts of God are? It’s when a baby’s born, when a person is healed, when a marriage is restored, when a family gets back together; and when someone receives Jesus in their lives. NOW, that’s an act of God!

How do you keep from being bitter when the inevitable hardships of life are going to come? You do at least two things:

1/ Don’t get discouraged

Remember what Jesus said, “*I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world*” (John 16:33). It is inevitable that trouble and hardships will come but notice what Christ said, “***BUT take heart! I have overcome the world.***” What He is saying is don’t be discouraged, take courage because I have conquered the world and I am in control! He also says that in Him we have peace even when we go through difficult times. Also in Him we as believers are overcomers. Romans 8:37-39, “*But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” NOW that’s great encouragement!!

2/ Focus on what's left not what's lost

Look with me at 1 Thess. 5:16-18 it says, “*Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.*” What’s God’s will for us in a crisis or hardship? It’s that I be thankful in everything. For the problem? Of course not. God doesn’t expect you to be thankful for a calamity. But you should be thankful for what’s left, not what’s lost. You need to choose to focus on God’s goodness, because gratitude and sadness cannot exist in the same mind. Start counting your blessings and all the good things in your life. You cannot be grateful and sad at the same time. And the fact is that there are people in this world who wouldn’t mind having your problems. Many are worried about where they are going to get their next meal and how they will be able to survive their deplorable

conditions. It's like the old expression: "I complained I had no shoes until I met a person who had no feet." You focus on what's left, not what's lost. Have a heart filled with praise and thanksgiving!

2. Receive from Others

As believers we need to be connected in community and fellowship. Galatians 6:2 says, "*Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.*" It is a big mistake to isolate yourselves from others when you're going through a crisis. Usually that's what people do; they get all alone by themselves and they feel nobody understands their problem. But you need other people when you are going through a hardship. You need their perspective, their support, their encouragement, and you just need their presence.

God says we need each other. You need to be a part of a church family. I'm not talking about just being an attendee. I'm talking about being a member of God's family. Because when a crisis comes, if you don't have those relationships in place, who is going to help to hold you up? God says, we need to receive from each other when we go through difficulties. We need to encourage each other.

3. Remember What's Important

Hardships have a way of clarifying values. They have a way of pointing out what matters and what really doesn't matter. They define our values. Jesus said, "*Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions*" (Luke 12:15). Life is not measured by how much one owns."

What is Christ saying here? Don't confuse your net worth with your self-worth. Don't confuse your possessions with your purpose in life. Don't confuse what you're living on with what you're living for. A person's life does not consist of what they possess.

What you discover in a hardship is that the greatest things in the world aren't things. What matters are relationships.

Here is the point, if you want real security, you must build your life on something that can never be taken from you. Can you lose a home? Yes. Can you lose a career? Yes. Can you lose a marriage? Yes. Can you lose your health? Yes. Can you lose your youthful beauty? Yes. Can you lose your relationship with God? No.

If you want real security, then you build your life on something that can't be taken from you. The Lord says, "*I will never leave you or forsake you*" (Heb. 13:5). The Apostle Paul says it like this, "*I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day*" (2 Tim. 1:12). God will keep me and what I have committed to Him. I am in His strong hands and no one take me from Him.

4. Rely on Christ

Rely on Christ no matter what. This is one of my favorite verses, "*I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength*" (Phil. 4:12-13).

Set your hope and faith on Christ.

"We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. 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. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many" (2 Cor. 1:8-11).

Set your hope and faith on Christ. Rely completely on Him through your hardships. Jesus said that He will be with us to the very end, "*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*" (Matt. 28:20).