

Strength During Difficult Times

#2020. We all know what that means at this point. It has been a year where it seems everything went wrong and chaos is at every turn. A global pandemic hit the world and changed everyday life tremendously. Local congregations that were ready to assemble for Sunday worship, were now resorting to virtual methods. Stores were closed. Jobs were lost. Financial uncertainty was widespread. Trust in various leadership positions were questioned. Meanwhile, God was looking down to see how many would look up to him and have peace in the will of God.

Most people know where to go in Scripture during difficult times. As soon as someone refers to maintaining faith in difficult times, it is a certainty that the Book of Job will be mentioned. There is, without a doubt, a common agreement that Job's story is one of the strongest stories of maintaining faith. However, the entire Bible is scattered with stories and verses of this very thing.

God knows that life will have turbulent times! That is because this physical life is Satan's hunting grounds. It's no coincidence that God's Word contains so many passages of encouragement in difficult times.

Isa. 41.10 – Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous hand.

Be not dismayed. Dismay is defined as **losing courage**. God says we should not be dismayed because He is our God. As Christians, we have that relationship with Him. God has said **“I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:4)**. Instead of being dismayed, we should live according to **Joshua 1:9** where it was said to be strong and courageous because God will always be with you.

God will strengthen you and help you! How many Bible stories do we read of those that did seemingly impossible tasks due to God's strength? Do you remember a story of a small man that killed a giant with nothing but a sling and a stone (**1 Sam. 17**)? What about a man who killed 600 Philistines with an ox goad (**Judges 3:31**)? What about a military strategy that involved marching around a city in the open seven times. (**Josh. 6**). All these examples required one thing: faith. The strength of these examples came from a faith in God. The unimaginable made possible through the power of God.

In the face of immense difficulty and seemingly impossible odds, always remember that God is with you. There could be trials that God has allowed to put your faith to the test. A trial from God is not His way of getting you to fail. A trial is a way to measure your faith. Trials can come with varying degrees of difficulty. However, even when a situation may seem impossible, you should take 1 Cor. 10:13 to heart.

1 Cor. 10:13 - No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able,

but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

This is the key to any trial we face. Not only will God provide a way of escape. He will not tempt you beyond what you are capable of. When that seemingly impossible circumstance arrives, take courage in knowing it is within your capabilities to conquer.

Such times, like 2020, can be viewed as a trial from God. When there are so many shots hitting to multiple facets of our lives, it is easy to be angry, frustrated, and/or lose hope. Will we allow things such as a pandemic, that may threaten our health, to strip us of our hope in Christ? Will we allow those times to take away the courage we have in God? Will we allow any other trial to overcome us and disrupt our sight of God?

What is very important during whatever current situation you face, is to pray. It is our direct line to God. In **Philippians 4:6**, we are not to be anxious about anything. Instead, we should pray earnestly and humbly that God know our requests. However, we should not expect an immediate answer, nor should we expect an answer at all. What we desire may not be God's will. Jesus, in **Luke 22:42**, prayed to his Father to spare him from death. However, Jesus didn't expect his wishes to supersede God's will. He ends this verse with **"Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours' be done."** Jesus knew what he wanted in such a difficult circumstance, but He also knew that wasn't what mattered most. What mattered was the will of God being done. We should pray with the same humbleness. We should pray to God with our requests, but with the mindset of God's will as important.

In a similar fashion, we know that Paul prayed three times to remove a "thorn in the flesh". (**2 Cor. 12:7**) We can conclude from **v. 9**, that God did not take it away but instead reminded Paul that His grace and power are all that is needed. However, that is not the key point I want to make here. Look at Paul's attitude with this seemingly difficult issue. Paul in **v. 7** and **v. 9** flips this difficulty into a blessing. Instead of allowing this difficulty to wear him down and lose hope, he considered it a way a humbling himself. It "kept him from becoming conceited". It allowed him to take pride in his weakness. It also allowed him to grow in his relationship with Christ. To end this thought, he wraps up with **v. 10**.

2 Cor. 12:10 - "For the sake of Christ, then I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

For the sake of Christ, Paul was CONTENT with weakness and difficult circumstances. He understood that whatever physical weakness he had was not what determined true strength. If we view difficult times as an opportunity to grow spiritually, then we have found true strength. These difficult times may have weakened us physically and/or emotionally, but in such weakness, we can be made strong with God.

In such difficult times, there is a hymn that has strong advice. Let me list a portion of those verses of this hymn.

"When upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed. When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost"

“Are you ever burdened with a load of care? Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear?”

I'm sure the majority started singing the chorus...“Count your blessings. Name them one by one”. How impactful are those lyrics to our everyday lives? How often are we burdened with a load of care that seems too heavy? Well, thankfully the chorus tells you what to do. Count your blessings. It reminds me of a somewhat comical story:

A group of sailors found themselves trapped in a severe storm at sea. They were throwing what they could over the side to stay afloat. The captain casually walked around on deck, surveying the situation. One of the sailors ran up to him in a panic. The sailor yelled out over the storm, “Captain! Everything has been thrown overboard! What do we do?”

The captain smiled and said, “Just stay calm.”

The sailor’s eyes widened, and he frantically looked all around him with his arms extended. “How can you say that? The ship is about to sink!”

The captain reach up and grabbed his hat. He reached out and rung the water out of it. He smiled and looked at the sailor. “There’s nothing to fear lad. Our clothes are already soaking wet and it’s too cold for sharks.”

When a situation seems dire, it’s best to start counting your blessings even if it’s one. In doing so, you remind yourself who is in control. The more you count, the more you realize how present God is in your life. In the beginning of verse 4 of “Count Your Blessings”, we see this point.

“So, amid the conflict, whether great or small. Do not be discouraged; God is over all.”

No matter how difficult a situation may be, God is over it if you allow Him to be. Revisiting **1 Sam. 17** and the literal giant of a task David faced, we see the power that we have in God. David was not discouraged because he knew that God was over all. David was physically weaker than Goliath. However, eluding back to Paul’s statement(**2 Cor. 12:10**), David was made strong in God. A physically stronger Philistine warrior was made weaker because of his reliance in physical protection. One small stone, thrown with trust in God, toppled a seemingly impossible circumstance.

Difficult times will come over the course of our lives. We must always remember who we have on our side. Like Paul, we should take righteous pride in our weakness and see our strength with God. Like David, we should overcome our difficult circumstances by facing it head on with the power of God. The best way to overcome difficult times is to start counting our blessings to “SEE what God hath done”. Lastly, we should fear no evil, for God is with us. (**Psa. 23:4**).