

10 Principles to Ponder When the Unexpected Happens



**How Are
You to
Respond?**

Shawn M. Laughlin

*10 Principles
To Ponder When The
Unexpected Happens*

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet is written to offer hope through a perspective that sees tragedy from a Biblical perspective. It is written for those who have trusted Jesus Christ alone as their Savior and consequently have the assurance of eternal life based on the substitutionary death of Christ for our sins on the Cross of Calvary and the promises of God.

Man has no means by which he can be declared righteous before God. As a sinner before God, he is worthy of God's wrath, has no hope, and is without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12). However, our loving God provided a way for man to become righteous before Him. Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins by dying in our place on the cross of Calvary. There the justice that God demands as payment for sin was once and for all satisfied. Christ made the full and final payment for all of man's sins.

*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.
(1 Peter 3:18)*

With sin completely dealt with, man can now be saved from the punishment he deserves by simply accepting through personal faith the payment Christ made for his sin through his death and consequent resurrection from the grave.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

The Bible is clear that salvation is offered freely, as a gift, to any and all who would simply realize that as sinners before a holy God, they are helpless to save themselves. Salvation from Hell is received as a gift the very moment an individual places his faith in Christ alone, who now promises him everlasting life.

And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:11-13)

Trusting in Jesus Christ alone as one's only confidence for salvation guarantees a perfect hope (a certain future) in Heaven. Having guaranteed hope for Heaven then forms the basis for having a hope while living on earth. This is true in all of life's uncertainties, even when life takes an unexpected turn for the worse.

10 PRINCIPLES TO PONDER WHEN THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS

When the unexpected happens, what are you to do? How are you to respond? It happens every day—someone, somewhere, gets news that is not welcomed and is hard to receive: a relative is killed in a car accident. The phone call from the doctor tells you that it is cancer. Your seemingly healthy child contracts a debilitating disease for which there is no cure. Your son or daughter serving in the armed forces is hurt or killed. It can crush you instantly. It is devastating and can rip your guts right out.

As a believer in Christ, you are not exempt from problems and difficulties. If you stop to think about it, there is not really very much that you are in control of. Some things are obvious—you cannot control the weather. You are not in control of the other driver, though at times you wish you were. You cannot control the actions or attitudes of another person. There is very little you are in control of. But the one thing that you are in control of is your internal attitude and your response to or in adversity, even when the unexpected happens.

Your difficulties may or may not be related to your desire to live for Christ: they may be part of life itself, they may be the results of poor decisions, or they may be the result of someone else's decisions. They may not be related to any assignable cause. But they will come.

To not expect difficulty and adversity and hardship in this world is the wrong expectation. You will have to deal with adversity to some degree. There is no getting around it, for Christ said in John 16:33: *“In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”*

How can one be cheerful in the face of a catastrophe or in the middle of misfortune or when struck by a tragedy? Is it really possible? How should you as a believer in Christ respond when life takes an unexpected turn?

Let me give you several principles that will help you to view your circumstances in light of the timeless principles of God's Word.

PRINCIPLE 1:

Praise the LORD with Biblical Principles in View.

Though this is not perhaps what immediately comes to mind when disaster strikes, it is nevertheless an important attitude to have. An excellent example of this principle being manifested is seen in the life of Job. When Job lost his property, his possessions, his servants, and his children—some of the very things that most of us hold dear—he had the following response:

Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD."
(Job 1:20-21)

Job worshiped! Job's response indicated that he understood his place in life relative to God. He understood that he deserved nothing from God and that God did not owe him a thing. When tragedy strikes, it is not uncommon for those who are afflicted to exclaim in some fashion that they do not deserve the distress they have been subjected to. But that is the wrong conclusion. Job's response indicated that he realized that all he had received in life was by God's grace, and therefore he had no right to complain when what he was given was removed.

It is important to keep in mind that God owes us nothing. He is not obligated to give you what you or what society may deem you are entitled to. If we got what we deserved from God, we would be cast into the Lake of Fire, for this is

the just penalty for our sin. God is sovereign and has every right to give and take away. But God is also good, and He is infinitely merciful. Please note this truth from the following verses:

The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works. (Psalm 145:8-9)

Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. (Lamentations 3:32-33)

Because of these wonderful truths, regardless of what he received or did not receive, Job praised God for God is worthy to be praised. Notice:

You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created. (Revelation 4:11)

Job responded humbly in reverence before God because He understood God's character and his own position before Him.

Now, as if the previous trials were not enough, Job was further tested. God allowed Satan to strike Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head (Job 2:7).

Satan's contention was that even the most righteous of men would curse God when his life was on the line or in the face of extreme pain. But notice again how Job responded:

Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!" But he said to

her, “You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips. (Job 2:9-10)

Job’s wife succumbed to human viewpoint and despair as the intensity of the trial increased. However, Job did not. He acknowledged God’s sovereignty and responded reverently with Biblical principles in view. This is to be always the case because of Principle 2.

PRINCIPLE 2:

Recognize that God Never Makes a Mistake.

God is absolutely sovereign. This truth is repeatedly expressed throughout Scripture. Notice the words recorded in the book of Daniel.

This decision is by the decree of the watchers, and the sentence by the word of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men. (Daniel 4:17)

God rules in the kingdom of men. He is the absolute ruler in the universe. This principle is also set forth in a conversation that the preincarnate Lord Jesus Christ had when visiting Abraham in Genesis 18.

And the LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.”

*And the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know." Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it? Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! **Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?**"* (Genesis 18:17-25, emphasis added).

The answer, of course, is that God always does right. Always. We have alluded to the fact that God is sovereign. But God's sovereignty and His omnipotence are governed by His righteousness. Therefore, God always does what is right. He has the authority and power to do whatever He wants to do, whenever He wants to do it, in whatever way He wants to do it, and for whatever purpose He wants to accomplish. But in functioning this way, He always does what is right, for He cannot violate His righteousness.

When God judged the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, it was a righteous act. What this means for you as a believer in Christ is that in your life, when the unexpected happens, God is acting righteously, and though you may not understand why the unexpected happened, the truth remains constant: He makes no mistake. It is impossible for Him to do so. In reference to Jesus, we are told these words in Mark:

***He has done all things well.** He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.* (Mark 7:37, emphasis added).

Jesus Himself said:

*“He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for **I always do those things that please Him** (John 8:29, emphasis added).*

Jesus does all things well. What He does is always pleasing to the Father. This is great cause for rejoicing. If he did not, there would be no hope for the future and no peace in this life.

A poem that I found years ago written by A. M. Overton is mounted on the wall of my study:

“He Maketh No Mistake”

My Father’s way may twist and turn,
My heart may throb and ache,
But in my soul I’m glad I know
He maketh no mistake.

My cherished plans may go astray,
My hopes may fade away,
But still I’ll trust my Lord to lead,
For He doth know the way.

Though night be dark and it may seem
That day will never break,
I’ll pin my faith, my all in Him,
He maketh no mistake.

There’s so much now I cannot see,
My eyesight’s far too dim;
But come what may, I’ll surely trust
And leave it all to Him.

For by and by the mist will lift
And plain it all He'll make;
Through all the way, though dark to me,
He made not one mistake.

A hymn entitled “Children of the Heavenly Father,” which has comforted my soul numerous times, contains the following stanza: “what He takes or what He gives us shows the Father’s love so precious.”

This principle must be believed. The psalmist, who was ready to faint in his hardships, stated in Psalm 27:13: “*I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.*”

God is sovereign and He is good. He is righteous in all his ways and gracious in all his works (Psalm 145:17). This is why the psalmist wrote:

Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; And His greatness is unsearchable. (Psalm 145:3)

PRINCIPLE 3:

You Need to View the Situation, Circumstance, or Issue in Light of God’s Love for You.

When the Lord Jesus Christ went to the cross to pay the full penalty of your sin, He demonstrated the highest degree of love that can be manifested. He once and for all satisfied God’s just requirement for sin.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
(Romans 5:8)

When an individual places his complete trust alone in that finished work, he becomes forever a child of God and the object of God’s eternal love. We are told in Rom 8:35-39 that nothing

or no one can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

Since God did His most for you when Christ died in your place on the cross, He is not going to do any less for you now. That is communicated in book of Romans as well.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? (Romans 8:31-32)

When the unexpected happens, you need to dismiss the notion that God in some way is punishing you. The punishment you deserve was fully meted out on Christ when He died as your substitute on the Cross.

Though God does chastise His children in love (Hebrews 12:5-11), one must not conclude that all tragedies are an indication of God's displeasure. When the disciples walked on the earth with Christ, there was a time when they indeed thought that all things negative were due to individual sin. Notice:

Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:1-2)

Their natural human viewpoint immediately attributed this man's blindness as God's judgment for sin in either his life or in the lives of his parents. Jesus' answer completely dispels this thinking:

Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him." (John 9:3)

This man's blindness was not the result of some specific sin in his life or his parents' life, and we can take comfort knowing that when unexpected tragedies strike, a specific sin is not

always to blame. It is wrong to assume that a person who comes down with cancer or a disease or some other ailment or is the victim of an injustice or is in an auto accident that it is God's judgment due to sin in their lives.

This point is brought out further in the first five verses of John 11.

Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. (John 11:1-5)

What is made clearly evident here is that Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters. The Holy Spirit does not want you to miss that. Notice what the text does not say: "Now since Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters, he did not allow any evil or sorrow to come upon them." That is not what we read at all! Notice the next verse:

So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. (John 11:6)

Jesus did not immediately drop what He was doing to come to the rescue in order to heal Lazarus and spare his sisters and others some grief. In fact, He allowed Lazarus to die and to be buried and be in the grave some 4 days before He arrived on the scene.

This chapter makes it clear that God had good reason to delay. For in verse four, Christ states that this trial was for the Glory of God! What this means for you today is that though God loves you supremely, He will not prevent an

unexpected trial to happen, but will allow it to come to pass for your spiritual betterment and His glory!

Some might falsely conclude that if God really loved Lazarus and his sisters, He would have not allowed Lazarus to die. This is human viewpoint reasoning. Remember that Jesus does all things well, and He allows trials and difficulties for our spiritual growth and edification. God was not displeased with Lazarus or his sisters. Reading the rest of the chapter shows that God used the trial to bring others to salvation and to glorify Himself. This is cause for rejoicing. Jesus, in fact, did all things well.

When God allows the unexpected to happen, the situation must be viewed properly. Do not allow natural human viewpoint to cloud the reality of God's love. Rather, allow the reality of God's perfect love for you to give you the proper perspective in the trial. This leads to the next principle.

PRINCIPLE 4:

Do Not Second Guess Yourself or God in the Difficulty.

In John chapter 11, when Jesus was coming into the town of Bethany (where Lazarus had been buried), He was greeted by Lazarus's sister Martha who says in verse 21: *"Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."*

I want to focus on the word *if*. Often times when a tragedy strikes, we look for possible ways that it could have been avoided. Thoughts like: "If only I would have called the doctor sooner" or "If only I would have stayed home last night" (or a whole host of other "if" statements that would apply) can run through your mind and torment you at such times. It is easy to "kick yourself" for missing something that would have, in your mind, prevented the crisis.

But these thoughts need to be dismissed. In spite of whatever decisions we do or do not make, God is sovereign and still directing all things in His providence.

In our text of John 11, Martha insinuates that Christ could have perhaps prevented Lazarus' death had He been present. What this conclusion fails to acknowledge is that Christ did not need to be present in order to prevent Lazarus from dying. As God, He could have willed it so from any place on the planet. What she was really doing was second guessing God. What we could conclude from her statement to Jesus is that if she were God, she would have prevented Lazarus from dying.

But again, Jesus does all things well and used this situation as a teachable moment. Martha had a tendency to walk by sight and not by faith. She had a tendency to be consumed with the moment and miss the bigger picture of the Glory of God. When Christ was about to raise Lazarus from the dead, notice the response of Martha:

Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days."
(John 11:39)

Her focus was not on Christ and His glory at all. Yet, in the next verse we read:

Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"
(John 11:40)

If Martha was willing to walk by faith in the fact that Jesus does all things well, she would have seen that Christ was in full control of the situation and had His glory in mind. This is always the case. Jesus is in full control. He knows the end from the beginning and has a plan for His glory in the midst of the trial.

PRINCIPLE 5:

Thank Your Heavenly Father that This Trial Is Working Together for Good.

Many believers are very familiar with the promise given to believers in Romans 8:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. (Romans 8:28-29)

These verses have undoubtedly comforted many over the last two millennia. This principle is 100-percent true and must be believed. God is taking this trial, though not good in and of itself, and causing it to work together for good so that you and other believers involved can be conformed into the image of Christ.

I was asked the following question once by a dear saved lady who spent much time assisting her mother in a nursing home: “How is my mother being an invalid in a nursing home working together for good? Why doesn’t God just take her home?” The answer I gave (which is one of many possible) went as follows: “Since we are merely vessels to be used of the Lord as He sees fit, it could be that your mother is being used as a vessel to teach you something about serving others for the glory of Christ.” We do not know the beginning from the end, but we do know that God does and He makes no mistake. He takes all things that affect the life of every believer, the good and the bad, the nice and the not so nice, etc. and uses them to mold all believers into the image of His Son. For this we can give thanks.

The unbeliever, who has no such hope, has nothing real by which to gain comfort in the face of tragedy. He is left to his own inadequate resources to seek to cope in crisis. Let me encourage you to thank God for His mercy and His promise to not let the tragedy be in vain.

PRINCIPLE 6:

Realize that Jesus Knows and Feels Your Pain.

In John chapter 11, after Christ had visited with Martha, Mary, the other sister of Lazarus, came to Christ weeping in grief over her brother's death. Note the response of Jesus:

Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!" (John 11:33-36)

Jesus wept. There is not a more compassionate being in the universe than Jesus Christ. In His omniscience, He knows your pain intimately, and He weeps with you. He is not cold and calculated and distant and uncaring, but very close.

He has emotions and understands pain, for He experienced the ultimate pain on the cross. Hebrews expresses this in chapter 4:

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:14-16)

Jesus Christ is the perfect sympathizer. He knows our weaknesses, our short comings, and our struggles and He cares. And He desires to help. That is why in verse 16, each believer is admonished to come boldly or confidently to the Savior who will provide grace and mercy to help in time of need. Peter said it this way:

Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.
(1 Peter 5:7)

Christ cares for you. He demonstrated this ultimately by going to the Cross to bear the wrath of God in your place. He does not abandon His own (Hebrews 13:5-6) but is faithful to care for you in time and in eternity. As mentioned earlier, God's compassions fail not.

*Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed,
Because His compassions fail not. They are new
every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.*
(Lamentations 3:22-23)

PRINCIPLE 7:

Faith-Rest in the Promises of God

One of the most important things to do when the unexpected happens is to allow yourself to be comforted through the unfailing promises of God. This requires your faith. There is a fixed principle communicated in Hebrews 11:6:

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.
(Hebrews 11:6)

The Exodus generation failed to believe the promises of God, hardened their hearts, and missed out on God's blessing of the rest.

Therefore I was angry with that generation, And said, "They always go astray in their heart, And they have not known My ways." So I swore in My wrath, "They shall not enter My rest." Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:10-13)

These verses tell us that this generation went astray in their hearts via unbelief. The heart is where we believe and therefore where we breakdown. The admonition to you and me as believers living today (in verse 12) is to beware or to take heed so that an evil heart of unbelief does not rob us of God's peace which resting in the promises of God provides. God calls a heart of unbelief "evil." Unbelief dishonors God and deprives you from receiving the benefit of the promise of inner rest and peace. The writer of Hebrews summarizes this truth in chapter 4:

Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. For we who have believed do enter that rest. (Hebrews 4:1-3)

God wants to give you spiritual rest in your trials. But the promises in His word designed to give you rest must be appropriated by faith.

In 2 Corinthians 12, we are told that when Paul was allowed by God to be given a thorn in the flesh from Satan to buffet him, God refused to remove it. Though this thorn in the flesh was very painful, God comforted Paul by giving him a tremendous promise that he rejoiced over:

And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."
(2 Corinthians 12:9)

Having the assurance that God's grace would be sufficient and that God's strength would be adequate for this painful trial, Paul responded with these words:

Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.
(2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

Paul could rejoice in the difficulties he received for Christ's sake. The word "weak" in verse 10 means "without strength" (i.e. Romans 5:6). God gives grace to the humble. When you humbly acknowledge by faith your inability to handle trials before God, you can faith-rest in the assurance that God's strength will be in the right measure and His grace sufficient. This is not just nice theory. This is as true for you as the promise of John 3:16, the truthfulness of which is unquestionable.

That is why Paul could say with conviction in less than ideal circumstances these words:

I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:12-13)

As you walk by faith in the promises of God, you appropriate His sufficient strength and grace.

PRINCIPLE 8:

Entrust the Situation, Trial, or Circumstance to the Lord.

Because God has promised that His grace is sufficient, every child of God can rest in the truth of Philippians 4:6-7:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

Verse 7 says that “in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving,” we are to make our requests known to God. He is worthy of our trust in *everything*.

Anxiety and worry are not to be the burdens of the child of God. Christ expressed this Himself in Matthew 6:27-34.

Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? “So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; “and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added

to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (Matthew 6:27-34)

Philippians 4:6 says that we are to be anxious for *nothing*. Nothing means nothing. This is not merely positive thinking that all will be well. It is a reflection of the reality that when cares or burdens are entrusted to the Savior, He provides His internal comfort that will be commensurate with the potential anxiety in the trial. His peace will literally “keep your heart protected.”

Yet, you need to remember that though faith is an important element in realizing God’s peace in the face of difficulty, faith is only as good as its object. And the only perfect Object of faith in any trial is the God who made these promises. He will not fail.

Each believer can rest in the fact that God does not test above what one is able to handle and is faithful in the trial to supply a way of escape that the trial can be endured (1 Corinthians 10:13). Having your focus on Christ and entrusting the situation to Him in faith with His promises in view is crucial to experiencing His perfect peace in difficult trials.

You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD forever, For in YAH, the LORD, is everlasting strength. (Isaiah 26:3-4)

PRINCIPLE 9:

Pray for Wisdom and Wait Patiently in God's Strength.

When a crisis arises and the stress and uncertainties mount, oftentimes complex and difficult decisions must be made. It is important to realize that you are not alone. The One who knows the beginning from the end is with you, and He offers an appropriate promise in His word.

This divine counsel is found in the book of James. Writing to believers who were facing severe difficulty, James says:

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (James 1:2-5)

What we clearly see in these verses is that the issue of a difficult trial coming our way is not a question of “if” but “when.” We are instructed to count or reckon upon the trial as “joy.” Why is this? Because God is using this trial to impart to you the attribute of patience and to mature you in Christ. Notice that God designs trials to run their course so He can mature us. Invariably, we want an instant solution to our trials. We want them fixed yesterday. But this is often not God’s way. Part of that maturing process is seeking wisdom from God in the trial.

The word “if” in verse 5 is in the first class condition in the Greek and assumes a reality. It is an assumed reality that when the unexpected happens, you will need wisdom because you lack it. James tells us that when you ask God for wisdom that He will not reproach you for it and will give it

liberally. This is indeed great news. However there is a catch or condition communicated in the following verse:

But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:6-8)

You need to believe that God will give you the wisdom required to deal with what is before you in His time for His glory. However, patience or waiting on the Lord is required. We live in a world that expects things *now*. But notice the words of Isaiah:

Therefore the LORD will wait, that He may be gracious to you; And therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; Blessed are all those who wait for Him. (Isaiah 30:18)

When David was at the end of his rope and about to throw in the towel, he recorded these words:

I would have lost heart, unless I had believed That I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living. Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD! (Psalm 27:13-14)

The Lord is in charge of the length and the depth of your trial. There are things He will accomplish in His time for the spiritual good of all involved. Waiting upon the Lord means He will strengthen your heart. I have been encouraged numerous times with the truth of Isaiah 49:23 and 1 Thessalonians 5:24:

Then you will know that I am the LORD, For they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me. (Isaiah 49:23)

He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.
(1 Thessalonians 5:24)

When tragedy strikes and the overwhelming desire is to fix the problem immediately, praying for wisdom and patiently waiting on the Lord are vital to keeping the proper perspective necessary to see God's purposes accomplished in the trial.

PRINCIPLE 10:

Give God the Glory Regardless of the Outcome.

The apostle Paul was no stranger to negative and unwanted circumstances. 2 Corinthians 11 tells us that while seeking to serve Christ, Paul was beaten several times, shipwrecked, and suffered many perils including time in prison. But he never allowed these negative circumstances to cause him to lose sight of the big picture. When anticipating the hardships he was going to face in Jerusalem, Paul told the Ephesian elders that *"none of these things move me"* (Acts 20:24). And the key to his perspective is found in the same verse where Paul exclaimed *"nor do I count my life dear to myself."*

Paul did not see his life as something to hold on to, but as something to invest for the glory of the Savior. He realized his times were in God's hands (Psalm 31:15). Paul realized that God was caring for him and that he did not have to seek to guard his life for selfish purposes.

He shares this perspective regarding his negative circumstances with the Philippian believers in chapter 1 of the book of Philippians.

This epistle was written by Paul from prison. While in prison, Paul recognized that God was using these circumstances for the furtherance of the Gospel, and this was cause for his rejoicing (1:12-18).

He was awaiting public trial and did not know with absolute certainty that he would be vindicated and released, though that was his personal conviction (1:25-26). But if he would be found guilty, then death would be his sentence. How did He respond? Notice:

For I know that this [my prison experience] will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. (Philippians 1:19-20)

This “deliverance” of which Paul spoke may have been in reference to his release from prison, but it likely included spiritual deliverance. There is a tendency to get depressed in prolonged difficult circumstances; and yet Paul was confident that he would not wallow in self-pity because of the supply of the Spirit of God and the prayers of the saints.

Regardless of the outcome, Paul was determined to stay the course of doing God’s will. He purposed in his heart that whether he lived or he died, he would not be ashamed of his Savior and that with all boldness, as always, Christ would be magnified in his life.

When something is magnified, it is enlarged and brought into focus. Paul deeply understood that Christ was to be the focus in his life. He knew that life was not really about him. He firmly embraced the principle that as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, he was merely a vessel to be used for the honor and glory of his Savior.

So whether the outcome of his time in prison was death or life, he had one objective that trumped everything—that Christ would be magnified or glorified.

How can this perspective exist when the believer is emotionally crushed and the outlook is unsure? The next verse supplies the answer. Paul stated in Philippians 1:21, *“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”*

Jesus Christ is the believer’s life (Colossians 3:4). In all things, He is to receive the preeminence (Colossians 1:15). Every believer has died with Him, and his life is hid with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3). When the believer dies, the gain is that he is immediately ushered into the presence of the One who loved him and gave Himself for him (2 Corinthians 5:8). This blood-bought child of God is now free from all the things that plagued him on earth and that he can gladly do without: pain, the sin nature, injustice, etc.

When Christ takes His rightful place in your thinking, you can utter the same words Paul did, regardless of your circumstances. It is the privilege of all believers to honor and magnify the Lord Jesus Christ in every aspect of their lives.

Paul’s goal was to finish his race for the glory of His Savior. He did. He kept his sights on *“the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 3:14). In writing to Timothy at the end of his life, he stated:

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. (2 Timothy 4:6-8)

Paul realized that to live is Christ and to die is gain. Therefore he could share “in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God” (2 Timothy 1:8).

God knows the outcome of each trial. He allows trials to come to pass and will accomplish what He desires through them. Therefore, you can seek to honor Him whether the outcome is the one you personally desire or not. The goal in all things is to see Christ magnified whether by life or by death.

To top it all off, Paul gives us in Romans 8 these challenging words:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (Romans 8:18)

Jesus Christ won the victory through His work on the cross. He infinitely and especially cares for each one He has saved by His grace. When you face a difficult trial, you can rejoice in the Lord always (Philippians 4:4), for you are forever in the hands of the Holy One Who cannot fail.

Jesus does all things well. He understands your circumstances with perfect sympathy. He will never leave or forsake you. His grace will be sufficient for you. He is the God of all comfort. He gives wisdom. He provides spiritual rest, He will protect your heart. His promises do not fail. He maketh no mistake. And He will receive you one day unto Himself.

The battle is on for the mind of the believer. Trusting God in the midst of an unexpected and devastating trial is critical. God has given His children “*all things that pertain to life and godliness*” and “*great and precious promises that they may be a partaker of the divine nature*” (2 Peter 1:3-4). As you faith-rest in the grace and mercy of the One who loved you and gave Himself for you, you can enjoy His peace and His rest in the face of the unexpected.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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