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Lesson 9

How Can I Handle Life's Problems?

Introduction

Problems are a part of life. There is no getting around the reality. As long as we live on earth, we will have struggles and setbacks, problems and pains, trials and troubles. Expecting otherwise is foolish. It will only lead us to disillusionment and frustration.

Key Scripture:

“But humans are born for trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.”
(Job 5:7)

Job said, “But humans are born for trouble as surely as sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7).

Take it from a man who encountered more hardship than most could ever imagine – hardship is inevitable. We will all face trouble in this life. None are immune.

Conversation Starter

I once was a Christian who expected life to be rosy. I believed all would be great, so long as I did everything God wanted me to do. My faith came to a crossroads when difficulties began to emerge – problems with people, unfulfilled dreams, tragedies in my family, struggles with sin, and battles with emotions. I realized I needed truth to help.

I began to study God's Word for answers. Knowing I needed insight, I read books, listened to sermons, and consulted believers who were more mature in the faith. In this lesson, I would like to share some simple biblical truths that aided me in my journey. My heart is to equip you with truth to help you handle life's problems.

Have you had to learn to deal with trials as a believer? Do you think the tough times of life can make some Christians falter in their faith? Why or why not?

A trial can be defined as a temporary period of difficulty and struggle in life. It can revolve around one's finances, one's family, health, career, or relationships. A trial can touch any part of life. The options are endless. All of us will face seasons of struggle from time to time. I once heard a preacher say, "You are either in a trial, coming out of a trial, or getting ready to go into a trial." I like to say, "There is no perfection until the Resurrection." As long as we are living in this fallen world, we can expect hardship.



Consider four actions that can help you handle life's problems.

1. Don't Be Surprised. (1 Peter 4:12)

Peter had to admonish first-century believers in this regard. Writing to readers who were being persecuted because of their faith, he said, "Dear friends, don't be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you, as if something unusual were happening to you" (1 Peter 4:12). At its root, the word rendered "surprised" contained a Greek word from which we get our word xenophobia, a term that describes of a fear of foreigners. The word was used positively in the first century to describe one who entertained strangers. Peter used it to encourage his readers to not regard trials as being strange or foreign to their Christian experience. They should have seen hardship as a natural part of the normal experience of the Christian life.

Key Scripture:

"Dear friends, don't be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you, as if something unusual were happening to you." (1 Peter 4:12)

Apply

The apostle's words have meaning for us. In a society dominated by self-help religion, prosperity-focused teaching, and life-enhancement mantras, we must remember the way of the cross sometimes involves pain. If we forget this reality, we may soon become spiritually discouraged. Worse yet, we may give into dissatisfaction and disillusionment. To follow Jesus well, we must maintain a sober awareness that hard times are a fact of life.

Key Scripture:

"Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials." (James 1:2)

2. Be Joyful. (James 1:2)

It may seem strange to most, but the Bible regards trials as an occasion for joy. When writing to first-century Christians who were experiencing hardship, James said, "Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials" (James 1:2). The word rendered "joy" referred to inner-happiness, gladness, or delight.

Interestingly, James used what would be equivalent to a past tense verb to speak of the act of considering. His point was to urge his readers to think of each past trial in their life as an occasion for joy. Every struggle and strain in life is to be regarded as a special opportunity for rejoicing in the Lord.

James' teaching utilized a command in the original language. His intent was to encourage his readers to take action on joy. They needed to exhibit personal responsibility for rejoicing in their afflictions. One language scholar has said the spirit of James' command was "Do it now and once for all." The Bible does not mince words...the pursuit of joy is to be our foremost priority when we face life's struggles.

James' point was to remind his readers that they could have joy in the midst of their pain. In his day, Greek philosophers were known for promoting a detached sort of happiness that ignored pain and suffering. James never espoused such a form of detached denial. Instead, he upheld joy in the midst of pain. Those who are in Christ always have a reason for rejoicing. Even if death and disease hit their home, they can find reason to sing. Difficult people and problems don't have to dominate them. They can still rejoice in the hope of Christ.

Apply

When you face a trial, God doesn't expect you to ignore it or pretend it doesn't exist. He does want you to know, however, that you can still have a degree of happiness. You can be joyful because of who you are in Him. You can look forward to the New Heaven and the New Earth. You can take delight in the fact that you are loved by Him, and that your name is written in His book in Heaven (Revelation 13:8). Even in the midst of the deepest pain and grief, you can rejoice that He will one day make all things new (Revelation 21:5)! Believers are ones who don't "grieve like the rest, who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Seek after joy in Christ when you experience the storms of life.

3. Learn What You Need to Learn. (Romans 5:3-4)

In His divine wisdom, the Lord made trials to be a training ground for His children. There are some things we can't learn apart from struggle. The Lord knows this, so He uses life's greatest difficulties to teach us life's greatest lessons. Such is one of the reasons why James was able to encourage joy in the face of trials.

The New Testament is filled with admonitions concerning this reality. Over and over again, the Bible's authors held up trials as an opportunity for learning. In Romans, Paul said, "We also boast in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope" (Romans 5:3-4).

The word translated "boast" is one that was often used negatively in Scripture to speak of a sinful type of boasting. Earlier in his letter to the Romans, Paul employed it to speak of the act of arrogant bragging (Romans 2:23). The bad type of boasting should be avoided by God's people (James 4:16). A good type of boasting, however, should be found on their lips. We should always be ready to glory in our trials. Why? Because they can be used to produce Christ's character in our lives.

Key Scripture:

"We also boast in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope." (Romans 5:3-4)

Illustrate

I can still remember encountering one of my first hardships as a Christ-follower. Today the struggle I experienced seems so mundane. It really wasn't that big of a deal, but it seemed like it at the time. Regardless, I recall listening at the time to a sermon series on trials. I was seeking answers, so I consumed a set of preaching tapes during my daily run. One message in particular resonated with me. In it, the preacher encouraged hearers to pray for three things when facing hardship. He said something like this, "When you face a difficulty, ask, ' Lord, what do you want me to know about yourself, what do you want me to learn, and what do you want me to do?'"

Apply

If you want to follow Jesus, you are going to have to know how to respond to life's problems. Never forget that Scripture sees struggles as a platform for learning some of life's most important lessons. The Lord wants to use your trial to teach you to depend on Him. When you face a struggle, enroll yourself in the classroom of Christ. Ask Him to teach you what you need to learn. He will produce things like Christian character, endurance, and hope in your life for His glory!

4. **Endure.** (Hebrews 10:36)

Discussion

What do you think about when you hear the word “endure”?

Apply

Endurance is a dirty word for many modern people. Few like to do anything that hints at anything closely associated with the word. Many think of running when they think of endurance, and very few people like to run! For this reason, endurance isn't often thought of as a desired attribute or activity. We've mostly been conditioned to avoid anything that requires persistent pain.

Key Scripture:

“For you need endurance, so that after you have done God's will, you may receive what was promised.” (Hebrews 10:36)

When we read the New Testament, however, we find that endurance is a pre-requisite for godly living. The author of Hebrews said, “For you need endurance, so that after you have done God's will, you may receive what was promised” (Hebrews 10:36). The author of Hebrews wrote to professing Christians who were thinking of turning their backs on the Christian faith. The temptation to give in and give up was real. He wanted them to know that real believers were ones who endured.

The word translated “endurance” in Hebrews 10:36 is one that spoke of perseverance. It was a compound word that literally meant “to remain under.” The term conveyed ideas of one pressing on and withstanding hardship. It expressed a no-quit attitude that embraced pain of difficulty.

Apply

Christians can endure in hardship because of the promises of God. The aforementioned teaching from Hebrews became personal to me during a certain season of life. My wife and I experienced a prolonged trial for a few years. Life seemed out of sorts. At times, we felt as if we were forever consigned to suffering and misery. During that season, we both found great encouragement in the words, “For you need endurance.” We learned that the spiritual ability to press on is a non-negotiable. If you want to follow Jesus well, know that you must learn to persevere in the face of life's difficulties. Seek God's face and allow His grace to empower you for His glory.

Follow Me Challenges

PERSONAL: Think and act on ways to serve the church, your family, and someone else this week.

PUBLIC: Participate in or invite folks to VBS at Tabernacle (June 7-11). Participate in, donate to, and/or host a Backyard VBS. More information can be found at tabernaclebaptist.org/vbs.

PRAYER: Ask God to open doors for you to serve in a mission opportunity.