

Courage That Conquers Down—But Not Out!

INTRODUCTION

Who ever has a smooth ride in life? No one I know! From relationship hassles to family troubles to jobs that don't inspire, to overload from study – you name it life can be the pits at times.

All too often we can get discouraged. Discouragement is no respecter of persons. In fact, discouragement seems to attack those who are successful more than those less successful; the higher we climb, the further we can fall.

Paul was “under great pressed” and “despaired of life itself” (2 Cor. 1:8). Great as he was in character and ministry, Paul was human just like the rest of us. Life can get too much sometimes and we need to know that God is there when it does!

What was Paul's secret of victory when he was experiencing pressures and trials? He makes it plain that when you find yourself discouraged and ready to quit, get your attention off yourself and focus on God. Out of his difficult experience, Paul tells us how we can find encouragement in God. He gives us three simple reminders.

REMEMBER WHAT GOD IS TO YOU (2 COR. 1:3)

READ 2 Corinthians 1:1-11

Paul certainly could not sing about his circumstances, but he could sing about the God who is in control of all circumstances. Paul had learned that praise is an important factor in achieving victory over discouragement and depression. “Praise changes things”.

Praise Him because He is God! Paul praised God for *present* blessings, for what God was accomplishing then and there.

Praise Him because He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! It is because of Jesus Christ that we can call God “Father” and approach Him as His children.

Praise Him because He is the Father of mercies! To the Jews, the phrase ‘*father of*’ means “originator of.” God is the Father of mercies because all mercy originates with Him and can be secured only from Him.

Praise Him because He is the God of all comfort! *Comfort* is not sympathy. God's comfort strength into our hearts so we can face our trials and triumph over them.

When you find yourself discouraged because of difficult circumstances, it's easy to look at yourself and your feelings, or to focus on the problems around you. But the first step we must take is to look by faith to the Lord and realize all that God is to us.

WHEN YOU ARE IN DIFFICULT TIMES DO YOU PRAISE GOD?

IF SO SHARE ONE OF THOSE INSTANCES.

REMEMBER WHAT GOD DOES FOR YOU (2 COR. 1:4A, 8-11)

He permits trials to come. The most frequently used word for trials means “narrow, confined, under pressure,” and in this letter is translated *affliction, tribulation, and trouble*. Paul felt hemmed in by difficult circumstances, and the only way he could look was up.

There are only three possible outlooks a person can take when it comes to the trials of life. If our trials are the products of “fate” or “chance,” then our only recourse is to give up. Nobody can control fate or chance. If we have to control everything ourselves, then the situation is equally as hopeless. But if *God* is in control, and we trust Him, then we can overcome circumstances with His help.

God encourages us in our trials by teaching us from His Word that it is He who permits trials to come.

He is in control of trials (v. 8). “We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life”. Paul was weighed with a load too heavy to bear. But God knew just how much Paul could take and kept the situation in control.

God enables us to bear our trials (v. 9). The first thing God does is show us how weak we are in ourselves. God wants us to trust *Him*—not our gifts or abilities, our experience, or our “spiritual reserves.”

God delivers us from our trials (v. 10). Paul saw God’s hand of deliverance whether he looked back, around, or ahead. God doesn’t always deliver us immediately, or in the same way. Sometimes He delivers us *from* our trials, other times He delivers us *in* our trials.

God works out His purposes in the trials of life, if we yield to Him, trust Him, and obey what He tells us to do. Difficulties can increase our faith and strengthen our prayer lives. Difficulties can draw us closer to other Christians as they share the burdens with us. Difficulties can be used to glorify God. So, when you find yourself in the trials of life, remember what God is to you and what God does for you.

WHAT IS YOUR NORMAL PRACTICE WHEN TRAILS COME YOUR WAY?

REMEMBER WHAT GOD DOES THROUGH YOU (2 COR. 1:4B-7)

In times of suffering, most of us are prone to think only of ourselves and to forget others. We become wells instead of channels. Yet one reason for trials is so that you and I might learn to be channels of blessing to comfort and encourage others. Because God has encouraged us, we can encourage others.

Paul made it clear that we do not need to experience *exactly* the same trials in order to be able to share God’s encouragement. If we have experienced God’s comfort, then we can “comfort them who are in any trouble” (2 Cor. 1:4b). Our experiences don’t alter the comfort of God, it remains sufficient no matter what our own experiences have been.

WHEN HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO ASSIST SOMEONE ELSE AS A RESULT OF YOUR TRIALS?

WHO ARE YOU PRAYING FOR WHO IS IN A TRIAL RIGHT NOW?