

The Struggles We Face

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To know that God is your Father is one of the most revolutionary truths that can enter your heart. It changes the reality of the Christian life from the ritual of religion to the warmth of family life. To live life with God as your Father gives you greater insight into the promise that God loves you and has destined you for glory. To know that God is your Father means that you can go through life with no fear. As is it written in Romans 8:25,

For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption [becoming an heir of God] by whom [which, i.e. the spirit] we cry out, "Abba, Father." [NKJV]

But we must not allow the truths of God's Fatherhood and loving care to lead us down life's road looking through rose-colored glasses. We must not think that now God is our Father, life is going to be smooth sailing, and that we will never be confronted with another problem again. To live by faith is a great adventure that often leads down rough roads.

But nothing is as discouraging as when you feel that you are in a particular struggle all alone. When no one seems to care, then misgivings about the Christian life begin to plague us. We are never really very strong when we feel alone.

But in the Christian life we must not rely just on the help of other believers, (as great as their help can be and should be). Other believers may not be able to offer the exact help we need, or they may be facing a struggle as well. But God, our Father, has given to us in His Word, the records of hundreds of men and

women whose faith triumphed in the midst of trials, in order to inspire us and give us hope.

*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses [the record of men and women in the Bible], let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and **let us run with endurance** the race that is set before us, **looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith**, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

*For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, **lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls**. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. (Hebrews 12:1-4)*

The lives of the men and women of the Bible, and especially the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, shows us that we can endure hard circumstances and overcome them. These examples also show us that the trials we face are only temporary.

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)

God is our Father, and as a loving Father, many times He allows us to go through difficult situations for our spiritual growth.

And have you forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as sons:

“My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves he chastens ,and scourges every son whom He receives.”

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

(Hebrews 12:5-13)

The word “chasten” is from the Greek word paideia. This word means to train and develop a child by instruction with discipline, reproof and correction. This is what God wants to do with us in the struggles we face in life. When we are young believers, God seems to meet our every need at every turn. And this is how it should be – for babies. A baby simply needs to cry out and instantly Mom or Dad rush to their side to meet the need. This is how parents and child bond and how the child learns to trust the parent. But

Mom and Dad cannot (and should not) rush to the child’s side as the child gets older. Children must learn to grow up. They must receive disciplined instruction and training to learn patience, self-control and responsibility. Children must learn to use the abilities and strengths they have as human beings. Then as they grow stronger by what they have experienced they learn to do more, bear more, and to be more confident in life.

So it is with the Christian life. At the beginning of our new life, God as our Father rushes to meet our every need so we can get grounded in our new birth and learn to trust Him. But sooner or later He wants us to grow up. He wants us to see our abilities in Christ. He wants us to see that no matter how hard the problem is that we may be facing, he will never leave us or forsake us. Therefore, God will allow us to go through tough times not because He wants to tempt us to fail, but because He wants us to see that we can succeed! Again we can look to the life of Christ to see how the Father works in “chastening” His children.

Then Jesus, when He was baptized, came up immediately from the water; and behold the heavens were opened to Him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:16, 17)

What a wonderful and exhilarating experience! God is declaring His pleasure and delight in the Father and Son relationship. But look at what occurs next.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to

Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But he answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:1-4)

This seems almost incredible! Right after this glorious experience between Father and Son, Jesus is led by the spirit of God to be tempted by the devil! Why would God do this? Is He tempting Christ to do evil? Is He unaware that He is putting His Son into harms way? No! God cannot be tempted with evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone to do evil (James 1:13). But God is "chastening" His Son. He is putting His Son into a very difficult situation so that he can learn to flex his spiritual muscles. God is teaching His Son that even after forty days of fasting and perhaps only a little sleep, he can beat the devil with the Word of God! He is teaching His Son that even at his weakest moment, he is more than a conqueror because God is his Father!

And Jesus Christ is learning these great truths not by just writing down notes in his Bible, but out in the rough world of reality. Jesus Christ is earning his Master's degree in the school of life. Look at what Luke says about Christ after this experience.

*Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time. **Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit** to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. (Luke 4:13-14)*

As a result of this very difficult situation, Jesus Christ became stronger spiritually. This is what God your Father wants for you too. If He allows you to go through tough times it is because He wants to discipline you for your profit.

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. (1 Corinthians 10:13, 14)

As a loving father, God will expose us to as much pressure as we are able to bear. He will do this to teach us how strong we truly are with Him. But He will never expose us to more than we can handle. Nor will He allow us to become weak and flabby by exposing us to less than we can endure. God knows just what we must experience to grow. He knows just what will help us mature and to develop godly character. The key to victory in these situations is to "flee from idolatry." When the pressure is on we must rely upon God and His Word. We must remember that we do not live by bread alone "but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who [which] was given to us. (Romans 5:1-5)

What a wonderful thing to know that you are justified from all guilt of sin by faith, that you have peace with God, and that you stand in the very center of God's grace. All of His divine resources are at your aid. And how wonderful to

know that as a result you can “glory in tribulations.” You can triumph in tough times!

An athlete may feel like he is a champ but he will never know for sure until he gets into the competition. There in the competition he learns the extent of his skill and strength. And he can then rejoice in his victories. This is what God wants for us. In going through tribulations we get to see our strengths and perhaps weaknesses. Our tests of endurance helps us to burn the chaff in our lives. In tough situations we learn perseverance and develop a Christ-like character. In going through tough times we learn to be merciful with those who need mercy. We learn to be compassionate and giving. Having gone through a struggle teaches us how to offer real help to our fellow believers instead of shallow spiritual clichés.

Therefore, we must not think that there is necessarily something wrong with our faith or our relationship with God or the power of the gospel to improve our lives, simply because we are in the midst of a fierce fight of faith. Yes, we should examine our lives to see if this problem is the result of sinful actions or attitudes on our part. But even if they are we can still learn something from it all by the grace of God. Every situation we go through should help us become stronger and more secure in our faith. Writing to the Colossian believers the apostle Paul prays,

that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; (Colossians 1:10, 11)

Paul knew that as these believers progressed in their spiritual lives they would face many struggles. But if they relied upon God they would have strength to be patient. Sometimes we cannot still the storm but we can

wait it out patiently! And patient endurance is a key to real victory.

Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:

“For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.”

But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul. (Hebrews 10:35-39)

We cannot be fooled into thinking that the Christian life is trouble free. When we do think like this we are perplexed when trouble comes. And we begin to wonder if the gospel is inadequate to really meet life’s troubles. We begin to think our faith is weak or worse yet, that God has somehow let us down. We need to see that are perhaps being chastened by our Father and that there is a great lesson he wants us to learn in the midst of a particular problem.

In Daniel, chapter three, there is the record of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. These three young men refused to bow down to the idol that their king had set up for all to worship. As a result they were commanded to be burned alive in a fiery furnace. God miraculously saved them, but only **after** they were captured, bound and thrown into the furnace! Most of us would love to see ourselves living powerful and miraculous lives like these men. But are we willing to face the fiery ordeal they faced? Are we willing, as they were, to stand steadfast and not bow even if it means we burn? I am sure that as a result of this very serious situation

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego learned the reliability of their God.

Like a good parent, God will not allow His children to grow up weak and irresponsible and self-absorbed. He will bring us to the school of life and give us every opportunity to succeed! He wants us to know that even at our weakest moment we are far stronger than any foe. This is the lesson that the apostle Paul learned well.

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." 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 distress, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

Paul's thorn in the flesh was a messenger from Satan. At almost every turn Paul was faced with difficult situations (2 Cor. 11:23-29). But through it all he learned that God's grace in Christ was more than sufficient to help him endure and succeed, even when he felt himself the most weak..

Sooner or later God will take every one of us down some rough road, not because He wants to see us hurt or fail, but because He wants us to see that we can triumph in everything. We can run the race set before us with patience and we can win. We simply need to trust our heavenly Father's wisdom and love

and keep our eyes on Christ. Our faith in God and Christ will never let us down.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it be tested by fire, maybe found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith – the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:3-9)

In all these struggles of ours that we may face, may our faith "be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

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