



OBSTACLES ARE FOR
overcoming

GET ACTIVATED

Obstacles Are for Overcoming

A Get Activated Book

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Introduction

POETS AND PHILOSOPHERS HAVE OFTEN LIKENED LIFE TO A RIVER THAT FLOWS FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE SEA. The river widens in some places and narrows in others. It ambles through pleasant valleys and plains. Tranquil spans give way to turbulent, frothy rapids that splash into sparkling, crystal pools. On and on its waters flow until they are swallowed up by the wide, open sea.

Just like the river, at every stage, whether restful or raging, the life that is placed in God's hands and flows along the path of His choosing is beautiful. But what attracts the most tourists, photographers, artists, and the like? What inspires the most awe? The gentle and silent stream winding through the plain? No. It's the majestic waterfall, where the river hurls itself in utter abandon into a deep, rock-strewn chasm. There, if you will look closely, somewhere in its mist is a rainbow.

We all appreciate the pleasant valleys and plains, and sometimes we wish we could stay there forever. But life flows on. God knows what lies around the next bend, and He will guide us through the narrow gorges, the white water rapids, and yes, over the heart-stopping waterfalls.

With your hand firmly in His, you can not only make it through the problems and perils of life, but thrill to such challenges. This book tells you how.



When we feel we have nothing left to give
And we are sure that the song has ended,
When our day seems over and the shadows fall
And the darkness of night has descended,
Where can we go to find the strength
To valiantly keep on trying?
Where can we find that hand that will dry
The tears that the heart is crying?

There's but one place to go and that is to God
And dropping all pretense and pride,
We can pour out our problems without restraint
And gain strength with Him at our side.
And together we stand at life's crossroads
And view what we think is the end,
But God has a much bigger vision
And He tells us it's *only a bend*.

For the road goes on and is smoother,
And the *pause* in the song is a *rest*,
And the part that's unsung and unfinished
Is the sweetest and richest and best.
So rest and relax and grow stronger,
Let go and let God share your load.
Your work is not finished or ended;
You've just come to a bend in the road.
—Helen Steiner Rice

A Trouble-Free Life?

MAYBE YOU HAD THE IMPRESSION THAT ALL YOUR PROBLEMS WERE GOING TO GO AWAY THE MINUTE YOU RECEIVED JESUS AS YOUR SAVIOR, OR AT LEAST THAT LIFE WOULD GET A LOT EASIER. You have felt His comfort and care, but you still face many of the same daily struggles. Maybe you have even more troubles than before, or a whole new set of them.

“*Why, God?!*” you may protest. “I thought You were going to *solve* my problems!” Just when you hoped you had found the cure to all your ills, you find out that’s not exactly the way it works. You still have to contend with obstacles and problems, setbacks and sorrows. But while it may seem that much is the same, what has changed is that you now have *help*.

“Where there is a will, there is a way,” the familiar saying goes. That’s true in a sense, but it leaves out the one all-important factor: you need God! You need *His* power and strength, and you received His promise of that ever-present help when you asked Jesus into your life.

So if you have financial headaches, or health worries, or find yourself in an emotionally trying situation, don’t

despair. If you have problems in your marriage, or in your relationships with your parents or children or friends or boss or coworkers, don't despair! If you feel doomed to struggle for the rest of your life because of your social status, or lack of education or job skills, or whatever, don't despair! If you are physically impaired, don't despair! If you're not happy with yourself because you feel you'll never be as smart or as beautiful or as handsome or as charming as you wish you were, don't despair! If loved ones or friends just don't understand or don't agree with your newfound faith, don't despair! Jesus will get you through every difficulty and help you solve every problem—if you will let Him.

While your circumstances may not change—at least not immediately—God can help you rise *above* circumstances. If the obstacles won't move out of your way, He'll help you go over or under or around them. He may not take away all your troubles, but He will bring you *through* them.

The Christian's life doesn't get easier; it gets *better*. How wonderful that life can be once you have learned to use God's power and grace to help you overcome the obstacles! Stumbling blocks become stepping stones. Wings are fashioned out of weights. You can gracefully rise above the daily problems, afflictions, and hardships of life. Obstacles are for overcoming!

God hath not promised
Skies always blue,
Flower-strewn pathways,
All our lives thru'.
God hath not promised
Sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow,
Peace without pain.

God hath not promised
That we shall not know
Toil and temptation,
Trouble and woe;
He hath not told us
We shall not bear
Many a burden,
Many a care.

God hath not promised
Smooth roads and wide,
Swift, easy travel,
Needing no guide;
Never a mountain,
Rocky and steep,
Never a river
Turbid and deep.

But God hath promised
Strength for the day,
Rest for the labor,
Light for the way,
Grace for the trials,
Help from above,
Unfailing sympathy,
Undying love.

—Annie Johnson Flint

Why God Allows Troubles

WHY DOES GOD ALLOW HIS CHILDREN TO HAVE TROUBLES? Well, there are many reasons, but they can best be summed up in one word: benefits. He sees the benefits.


Tests and trials strengthen and shape our character. They make us better people and better Christians.

The story is told of a violin maker who searched for years for wood that would give his instruments a special, haunting resonance. When his search finally ended, it was not in a tree nursery or sheltered valley grove, but on a craggy mountaintop, just below the timberline, where the winds had blown so fiercely and steadily that the branches of the trees all pointed one way and bark had no chance to grow on the windward side. Wood from those storm-beaten trees had the closest, most intricately woven grain of any wood he had ever found. It was firm, tough, and strong, and it gave his violins their special sound.

Even so, when God fashions His children for their place in His kingdom, He doesn't put them in lush lowlands, but high on rugged mountainsides where they must learn to withstand the storms of life. Those who endure

become strong and sturdy. They are God's choice stock, whose lives give forth a special beauty.

The tests and trials of life also make us more aware of our own weakness and inability, so we learn to depend more on Jesus. Like the tree on the mountainside that sinks its roots deep into the crevices between the rocks, we hold on to the Lord for dear life. He proves to us in those difficult, desolate places that He is enough to sustain us. We turn out stronger for it, because we learn to draw on His strength.



For every hill I've had to climb,
For every stone that bruised my feet,
For all the blood and sweat and grime,
For blinding storms and burning heat
My heart sings but a grateful song—
These were the things that made me strong!

For all the heartaches and the tears,
For all the anguish and the pain,
For gloomy days and fruitless years,
And for the hopes that lived in vain,
I do give thanks, for now I know
These were the things that helped me grow!

'Tis not the softer things of life
Which stimulate man's will to strive;
But bleak adversity and strife
Do most to keep man's will alive.
O'er rose-strewn paths the weaklings creep,
But brave hearts dare to climb the steep.

I walked a mile with Folly;
She chattered all the way.
But never a thing I learned from her,
For all she had to say!
I walked a mile with Sorrow,
And never a word said she.
But oh, the things I learned that day,
When Sorrow walked with me.



Things don't just happen to children of God;
They're part of a wonderful plan.
The troubles, reverses, the sorrows, the rod
Are strokes of the great sculptor's hand.

Feeling the Squeeze

ONE ADVANTAGE OF PASSING THROUGH TRYING TIMES IS THAT WE ARE DRAWN CLOSER TO JESUS, OUR SAVIOR AND FRIEND. We seek safety and security in His arms, and we find that and more. He loves us with a love that is everlasting and never-changing. He has so much to give us, and He desires to help us in so many ways. He wants to spend time with us, and He longs to have us close to Him, always by His side, to teach us, and to make us more like Himself.

Unfortunately it's just part of human nature that when everything goes right, we don't feel a pressing need for God and His help and strength in our lives. When everything is going our way, we often get the very wrong idea that we're strong and sufficient in ourselves, that we don't need Him. We're living happy, successful lives, so we don't need any help—or interference.

We don't see what we're missing, but He does. He knows that we truly do need Him, and He knows how much *more* He has to offer if we depend on Him.

He wants to teach us to lean on Him and avail ourselves of *His* strength, which is infinitely greater than ours.—But how *can* He if we ignore Him or shut Him out of our lives?

If we didn't have troubles and tribulations, we wouldn't feel the need for or find refuge in His arms, and we wouldn't learn to find strength and comfort in communion with Him and study of His Word.

This may not sound like good news to you, but it is: God not only *allows* hardships, but He often *sends* them. He fashions them specifically for us, and He does so for the express purpose of bringing us closer to Him. He puts the squeeze on so we will call out to Him for help. He does this not to hurt or punish us, but to *strengthen* us. He knows that in depending on Him, our spiritual strength and resilience to life's difficulties will grow, and that as we draw closer to Him and become more like Him, we will be much happier and more fulfilled in the long run.

If we will turn to Jesus in our times of trouble, He will prove to us in those trying moments how much He loves us. The problem may not go away instantly, but He will give us “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,”¹ and help us appreciate the *good* that He is working in our lives. As someone once said, “If there were no night, we couldn't see the stars.”

When we are humbled and quiet and we confess our need for Him, He is able to step in and help us. When we're empty, He is able to fill us. When we admit we are incapable, He is able to unleash His power to work through us to accomplish things we couldn't possibly do in our own strength.

1. Philippians 4:7

Difficult times deepen us. They help us move from the shallow plane of daily routines and the mad rush called modern living into the deeper realm of the spirit. And as we experience God's power to pull us through the difficult times, it gives us faith and hope that He will take care of us through whatever storms may yet come our way. "Tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope."²

2. Romans 5:3–4 KJV

Life is *born* of struggle. To enter this world, a baby must leave the comfort and security of the womb and make a difficult and perilous passage through the narrow birth canal. Before an eagle can soar to the heavens, it must push and peck its way out of the egg. Before a butterfly can delight us with its colors and grace, it must escape from its cocoon.



A diamond cannot be polished without friction, without the jeweler's chipping, grinding, polishing and buffing. Likewise a life cannot be brought to its full potential without undergoing some hardship.



Pressed out of measure and pressed to all length;
Pressed so intensely it seems beyond strength;
Pressed in the body and pressed in the soul;
Pressed in the mind till the dark surges roll;
Pressure by foes, and pressure by friends;
Pressure on pressure, till life nearly ends;
Pressed into loving the staff and the rod;
Pressed into knowing no helper but God;
Pressed into liberty where nothing clings;
Pressed into faith for impossible things;
Pressed into living a life in the Lord;
Pressed into living a Christ-life outpoured!
—Walter B. Knight

If you ever feel like the tests, trials and battles are more than you can bear and you just can't make it, remember, the Lord is greater than *they* are. Take them to Him!

—D.B.B.



Once a little boy was trying very hard to lift a heavy piece of furniture. His father came into the room, and noting his son's struggle, asked him, "Are you using *all* your strength?"

"Yes, of course I am!" the boy impatiently exclaimed.

"Oh no, you're not," the father answered. "You haven't asked me to help you!"



Give me a task too big,
Too hard for human hands;
Then shall I come at length
To lean on You,
And leaning find my strength.



We shouldn't run from troubles, or cower when they loom ahead. We should ask God to lift us above them on the wings of prayer.

Burden?—Or Blessing?

MANY THINGS THAT SEEM TO US TO BE CURSES ARE IN FACT GIFTS FROM GOD, ODDLY PACKAGED.

A story is told of a woman who loved the Lord very much and wanted nothing more than to please Him. “I’ll gladly do whatever You ask,” she promised, hoping secretly for some noble and noticed place of service.

To her dismay He handed her a heavy, rough burlap sack and asked her to carry it as they walked through life together. She was curious about the contents of the sack, but it was tied closed with a strong cord and so many intricate knots that clearly it was not meant to be opened just yet.

As they started on their way, the woman sank down under the weight of her burden. “It’s too heavy!” she protested.

“My strength is made perfect in your weakness, and I will always be at your side,” Jesus reassured her. “When the way gets steep or you feel faint, lean on Me.”

So they walked on together, and it was just as Jesus had said. Sometimes the woman stopped and told Him

that the weight was too much for her to bear, and so they bore it together.

By and by they arrived at their destination. The woman set her bundle down at Jesus' feet, and heaved a sigh of relief. Her burden-bearing days were over.

"Come, My dear, let's see what's inside," Jesus said with a twinkle in His eye. With one stroke of His hand the knots were undone, the sack fell open, and the contents spilled out.

"The riches of heaven!" the woman exclaimed as her eyes feasted on treasures of unearthly beauty.

"This is your eternal reward which I prepared for you. It's My gift in appreciation for all you have been through and suffered for Me," Jesus explained.

Astonishment turned to tears of joy. The woman fell at Jesus' feet and said, "Oh Lord, forgive me! I misunderstood all these years. If I had only trusted You, and not doubted and questioned! If only I had understood what was inside the sack, it would have been a *joy* to carry. I never should have grumbled or complained!"

Just so, the problems that to you seem burdensome and uncomely may be the jewels and treasures that the Lord is preparing for you as a reward for bearing the load He has given you.

You may look around and see others whose burdens appear to be much lighter than your own, and you may wish you could trade places. But if God were to grant you your wish, you would find that their burden would be even heavier and harder for you to carry than your own, for it was not meant for you. Each burden is tailor-made for its bearer, and is fashioned with the greatest of love and care. God knows exactly what's best for you. Trust Him.

Can we think it pleases His loving heart
To cause us a moment's pain?
Oh, no! But He sees, through the present cross
The bliss of eternal gain.
—Inglor



Today we may walk a desert pathway, but the end
of the journey is the Garden of God.

Beauty for Ashes

THE BIBLE PROMISES IN ROMANS 8:28 THAT “ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD TO THOSE WHO LOVE GOD.” That means not just some, or most, or many, but all. That’s quite a promise!

It’s sometimes hard to believe that God can actually get some good out of even the worst tragedies and disappointments. But if we love Him and are trying to please Him, He will. How? Often it’s through the lessons that we learn from times of despair. The experience we gain adds depth to our relationship with the Lord and our interaction with others. It also helps us relate to others better and understand their problems and difficulties, so that we can comfort them in their times of trouble. However, at other times it is difficult for us to see the good that could have come of the difficulty, and we may not fully understand until we get to heaven and see what transpired “behind the scenes” in our spiritual lives that was not apparent to us on earth. But you can rest assured that if you love God, some good *will* come out of your life’s hardships.

So try looking for the good in every situation, no matter how bad it may first appear. That takes conscious effort and prayer and doesn't come overnight, but it will make all the difference in the world when you are faced with problems and setbacks.

If we fail to view our disappointments, hurts, tests, illnesses, and other problems through the perspective that Romans 8:28 gives us, we will tragically miss many of the valuable lessons that the Lord is trying to teach us, and we will rob ourselves of the peace that comes from trusting in this important promise and principle.

"Trials equals good." Understanding and believing this simple equation can make your life richer, more meaningful, and happier. It makes all the difference in the world whether you fear problems and challenges, expecting the worst to happen, or if you face obstacles bravely and full of faith, anticipating the good that the Lord will bring out of them and the strength of spirit you will gain.

Naturally we wonder why “bad” things happen to us. God always has a purpose, although it is not always revealed immediately.

The Lord sometimes uses sickness, problems, and troubles to cause us to draw closer to Him and rely more on Him.—Otherwise we would have a tendency to just rock along.

Sometimes things happen just to keep us humble; sometimes they happen to draw us closer to others; sometimes they happen to make us pray; sometimes they happen to teach us to be more careful and prayerful; sometimes they happen to test our faith. God allows troubles for all kinds of reasons, but ultimately they all fulfill the same goal: to draw us closer to Him so that we can avail ourselves more of His power, and thus be filled with more of His love and joy.

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.”¹ The Lord allows these things as tests to strengthen your faith and to get an even greater victory out of seeming defeat.

But always remember that whatever God does, He does it in love. “All things work together for good to those who love the Lord.”² God is not going to let anything happen to you, His child who loves Him, except what is for your good.

Even though you may have many afflictions or difficulties, as the verse says above, He will deliver you out of them *all*, no matter how many or what!
—D.B.B.

1. Psalm 34:19

2. Romans 8:28

I will not doubt, though all my ships at sea
Come drifting home with broken mast and sails;
I shall believe the Hand which never fails,
From seeming evil worketh good to me;
And, though I weep because those sails are
battered,
Still will I cry, while my best hopes lie shattered,
"I trust in Thee."

I will not doubt, though sorrows fall like rain,
And troubles swarm like bees about a hive;
I shall believe the heights for which I strive,
Are only reached by anguish and by pain;
And, though I groan and tremble with my crosses,
I yet shall see, through my severest losses,
The greater gain.

—Ella Wheeler Wilcox



No physician ever weighed out medicine to his
patient with half so much care and exactness as
God weighs out to us every trial. Not one grain too
much does He ever permit to be placed on the
scale.

Bearing the Burdens of Others


ANOTHER REASON GOD SOMETIMES ALLOWS US TO BE TESTED AND EXPERIENCE HARDSHIPS IS BECAUSE THAT HELPS US UNDERSTAND, SYMPATHIZE WITH, COMFORT, STRENGTHEN, AND HELP OTHERS WHO ARE GOING THROUGH SIMILAR THINGS.

That's what Jesus went through for us. He came to earth and lived as one of us in order to experience life as we do. He felt disappointment and sorrow, physical pain and anguish of spirit—all so He could better relate to us. He can sympathize with our weaknesses and infirmities, the Bible tells us, because He “was in *all* points tempted as we are.”¹ Having been here Himself, He is able to “comfort us in all our tribulation”—why?—so we “may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”²

1. Hebrews 4:15

2. 2 Corinthians 1:4

He has called us to give of ourselves for others, as He Himself did for us. He causes each of us to go through many of the same difficulties that befall our fellow man in order to make us more compassionate and better equipped to help them. It's a wonderful but sometimes painful part of making us more like Himself.



Sickness and sorrow come to us all,
But through it we grow and learn to stand tall—
For trouble is part and parcel of life,
And no man can grow without struggle and strife,
And the more we endure with patience and grace
The stronger we grow and the more we can face.
And the more we can face, the greater our love,
And with love in our hearts we are more conscious of
The pain and the sorrow in lives everywhere,
So it is through trouble that we learn how to share.



Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.

Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.
—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The Good Shepherd and the Loving Father

AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER WE ALL STRAY FROM THE SIDE OF OUR SHEPHERD, JESUS, AND WANDER OFF THE PATH ALONG WHICH HE IS LEADING US. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way.”¹ We get caught up in our own plans and pursue our own interests. We act on our impulses and make important decisions with scarcely a thought or prayer about whether that’s what Jesus would want us to do. Worse yet, we do things that we know are wrong and contrary to God’s law of love and consideration for others, or in disobedience to the instruction in His Word. All of these distance us from our shepherd and guide.

As our shepherd, Jesus trains us in the way we should go. He instructs us through His Word and through the voice of His Spirit in our hearts as to what is right and what is wrong. Then He says to us what He said to His

1. Isaiah 53:6

first followers: “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”² If we believe and take heed to what He tells us, we have His blessing.

But when we repeatedly ignore His instruction and we are unloving in word or deed towards Him or others, sooner or later He lets us suffer the consequences in the form of problems or afflictions. He does this to teach us right from wrong, and to keep us close to Him, listening to Him, and moving in the right direction. It hurts Him to see us struggle or fall, but as our loving shepherd He is duty-bound to help us learn and grow. Sometimes we give Him no choice through our wrongdoing.

God is above all a God of love.³ He loves us dearly, as a father loves his children. But, like any good father, He also disciplines His children for their own good when they willfully do wrong. “Whom the Lord loves He chastens,” the Bible tells us. “For what son is there whom a father does not chasten? 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.”⁴

But whatever God does, He does in love. We may sometimes have to suffer the consequences of our actions when they are contrary to His “golden rule” of loving Him and others, but even then, He doesn’t hold it against us. He knows we’re just human. When we turn to Him, He is quick to forgive and forget, and lovingly encourage and comfort us despite our failings and mistakes. He promises: “I will forgive their iniquity [error], and their sin I will remember no more.”⁵

2. John 13:17
3. 1 John 4:8

4. Hebrews 12:6–7, 11
5. Jeremiah 31:34

God's spankings are sometimes hard to take, but they're a token of His love, His "intolerable compliment," and are good for us if by them we learn our lesson and are thus brought into harmony and happiness with Him.
—D.B.B.



He chastens us for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness.⁶ In other words, through it He cleanses us, He purges us from the sins and impurities in our own hearts that cause all the trouble, and we're made clean.
—D.B.B.

6. See Hebrews 12:10

Getting Back on Track

IF YOU FEEL YOUR PRESENT PROBLEMS ARE THE RESULT OF HAVING STRAYED FROM YOUR SHEPHERD'S SIDE OR HAVING DISOBEYED YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER, YOU DON'T NEED TO FEEL CONDEMNED. Four simple steps will set things straight:

- 1) Admit your error to Him;
- 2) thank Him for loving you enough to correct you;
- 3) determine in your heart to do better; and
- 4) ask for His help.

God's Word promises: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him; for He knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust."¹

He is only interested in helping us learn and improve. His motive is to make us wiser and more dependent on Him.

Eventually we wise up and learn that our Father knows best and that we'll be happiest if we obey Him

1. 1 John 1:9; Psalm 103:12-14 NIV

and not rebel or run away when He needs to teach us something.

God uses troubles to teach us to do better, but that's not the *only* reason for troubles. Every time you suffer hard times, heartbreak, sickness, or injury, you don't need to worry that you've done something terribly wrong that has displeased God. There are many other reasons for tests and trials. If He *is* trying to get us to change in some area of our lives, we usually know what that is pretty quick. In fact, long before it gets to that point He has usually been trying to give us warning nudges and we just haven't heeded them.

If you don't know why you're having a certain problem, this is the time to ask Him—not in a resentful, doubting manner, but in a humble, trusting one. Tell Him your worries, your fears, ask your questions; then be quiet and listen. The voice of His Spirit will speak to your heart, and He will show you why He has allowed these things.²

He may not tell you immediately or help you understand fully, and that in itself can be a test of faith. It tests you to see how much you will love and trust the Lord and thank Him for *all* He sends your way, which you know will eventually work together for good, even if He doesn't explain the reasons for some of it.

But whether He tells you now or not, Jesus will always encourage and uplift your spirit when you come to Him. He will mend your broken heart, if you give Him all the pieces.

2. If you would like to know more about hearing from heaven and how to receive personal words of strength, encouragement, and instruction directly from Jesus Himself, the book *Hearing from Heaven* in the *Get Activated* series will be a great help to you.

In sickness let me not so much say, "Am I getting better of my pain?" as, "Am I getting better for it?"
—William Shakespeare



Our troubles become *double* trouble when we misinterpret them. The weight of a thing is determined by our perception of it. If we look at our problems as punishment from an offended God, they enslave us. But if we consider them the Lord's cleaning and polishing agents to beautify His jewels—us—we can patiently wait for the happy ending!

—Adapted from J.H.Jowett



The vain regrets of yesterday
Have vanished through God's pardoning grace;
The guilty fear has passed away,
And joy has come to take its place.

When through life's darkened maze I go
And troubles overwhelm my soul,
Oh, grant me, Lord, the grace to know
That You are always in control.

The pain of facing up to truth
And saying, "I am wrong,"
Is soothed by Christ's redeeming love,
Which fills the heart with song.

The Potter Knows Best

LORD, YOU ARE OUR FATHER; WE ARE THE CLAY, AND YOU OUR POTTER; AND WE ARE ALL THE WORK OF YOUR HAND.”¹

Here and in several other passages in the Bible, the Lord is likened to a potter and us to the clay in His hands—clay which He wants to form into a vessel that is fit for His use.²

The potter begins by taking a hunk of clay and placing it on his potter’s wheel. As the wheel turns the clay, he molds and fashions it into what he hopes will be a beautiful vessel. All the while, the clay must move and yield to the movements of the potter’s hand. It takes time.

Sometimes the potter discovers an imperfection, a lump or a mar. When that happens, he will crush the vessel he’s been working on, add a little water to the clay to soften it again, knead it until it’s nice and soft and malleable, and then remake it into a new and better vessel.

At first it probably doesn’t seem like a very good thing to that vessel when its maker suddenly starts mashing and

1. Isaiah 64:8

2. 2 Timothy 2:21

smashing and crushing and remaking it, but in the long run it becomes a *better* vessel for that.

And just when the vessel thinks the worst is behind, into the white-hot kiln it goes to harden it, but it becomes a *stronger* vessel for it.

“The vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. ... ‘Can I not do with you as this potter?’ says the Lord. ‘Look, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand!’”³

Does the clay have any right to question the potter’s judgment? “Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Does not the potter have power over the clay?”⁴

Remember: everything that God does, He does in love. He is making you into a beautiful vessel, uniquely special to Him. He is making you into a useful vessel to bear the water of His love that He wants to pour through you to refresh others. You’re in the best of hands. Trust Him.

3. Jeremiah 18:4,6

4. Romans 9:20–21

God only uses broken men and women—no others will do. The others are too self-confident. God has to break them, melt them, and mold them again in the hands of the Potter, to make them a better vessel. But He won't force it! The breaking depends upon you and your yieldedness and willingness to be made willing—willing to go anywhere, anytime, and do anything, for anybody, and be nobody, to please Him and help others.
—D.B.B.



Have Thine own way, Lord, have Thine own way.
Thou art the potter, I am the clay.
Mold me and make me after Thy will,
While I am waiting, yielded and still.
—Adelaide A. Pollard

Spiritual Warfare

THE BIBLE EXPLAINS THAT WE ARE ENGAGED IN A WAR OF THE WORLDS, A SPIRITUAL BATTLE OF GOOD AGAINST EVIL. “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”¹

Once we have received Jesus as our Savior, we don’t have to worry about or fear Satan’s power because we are protected by the power of the Holy Spirit, which is far greater. The Lord’s protection is just like a force field around us, and the Devil cannot penetrate it! We are overshadowed, we are enveloped. “You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”² The Devil’s aim is to hinder God’s children in any way he can, but he has no power over us because we are the Lord’s. Satan cannot so much as touch us without God’s permission, which God only gives when He has a reason and knows it will have a good result.

1. Ephesians 6:12 KJV

2. 1 John 4:4

But while the Devil has no direct power over us physically, he can try to influence our thoughts, attitudes, and decisions. So we don't need to fear the Devil, but we do need to be on our guard. In order to not be outwitted, we should not be "ignorant of his devices [schemes]."³ To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

The Devil is clever and cunning. If he were to always use obvious methods and come around with horns and a pitchfork, we would instantly recognize his attacks. So instead, he shrewdly twists the truth. For example, you or someone you love is sick or has had an accident, and you blame yourself. You feel that maybe if you had done things differently, the whole thing might never have happened. Such feelings are only natural. God may also be trying to help you avoid similar problems in the future. But if once you've prayed for the Lord's forgiveness and to learn what you need to, you still suffer from overwhelming feelings of guilt and remorse, this is the Devil's doing. If you've made a mistake, the Devil tries to continually remind you of it and magnify it until you lose all hope and faith in God's love. His goal is to convince you that God can't forgive you, others can't forgive you, you can't undo the damage, so you might as well quit. Take a ride on that train of thought, and the Devil has won.

Discouragement and condemnation are occupational hazards for a Christian. The Devil would like nothing better than to get us to take our eyes off of God and His promises. In place of faith, hope, and promises, he will gladly weigh us down with fears, discouragement, and lies—and it often starts with some problem we encounter. He tries to pile his worries and fears and doubts so high

that we can't see over them to the answers and solutions that Jesus has guaranteed us in His Word.

God has given us a Bible-full of wonderful promises of deliverance, victory, overcoming, protection, healing, wisdom, success, and everything else we need to be happy and whole. These assurances are ours to claim, but our natural human minds tend to hold on to the things we can *see* and *feel*. We have difficulty trusting or believing in that which is unseen or unproven to our senses. God wants us to go beyond that. He wants us to trust Him and believe He is able to work everything out for the best, even when things couldn't look worse.

Another trick the Devil often uses is this: we pray and ask God to help or change a situation, but the answer doesn't come immediately, or it's not the one we expected or wanted. The Devil will try to seize this opportunity to get us to doubt. He will tell us that because God is allowing us to suffer, He is breaking His promises, therefore He must not love us or care about us. If we give in repeatedly to this train of thought, our faith becomes weaker and weaker.

So it's important to learn to recognize these thoughts for what they are—lies from the Devil, intended to drag you down, make you miserable, and rob you of your faith. So fight back and resist the Devil by calling on Jesus to deliver you from the wiles of Satan.

There's always going to be opposition from the forces of evil, but it's no match for God's power: "I give [My sheep] eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no

one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand."⁴
"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the Devil."⁵ We may lose a few battles, but we'll win the war. We're on the winning side and cannot lose!

4. John 10:28-29

5. 1 John 3:8

The Armor of God

THE APOSTLE PAUL, ONE OF THE GREAT PIONEERS AND LEADERS OF THE EARLY CHURCH, LIKENED THE LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN TO THAT OF A SOLDIER: “ENDURE HARDSHIP AS A GOOD SOLDIER OF JESUS CHRIST,”¹ HE WROTE TO ONE YOUNG MAN.

When anyone joins a wartime army, they expect to go to war. If they want to survive, they take their training seriously and learn all they can about their weapons and how to use them skillfully.

In Paul’s day, the Roman Empire ruled the known world, and the armor and weapons of the Roman legions were state of the art. For our war of the spirit, God has equipped us with something vastly better than even the most hi-tech modern weaponry—spiritual weapons. “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal”—not of this world—“but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds,”² or as it is translated in the *New International Version*, “they have divine power to demol-

1. 2 Timothy 2:3

2. 2 Corinthians 10:4 KJV

ish strongholds”—the spiritual strongholds that the Devil tries to establish in people’s hearts and minds.

That’s why Paul admonished the early Christians to “take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.”³

Let’s take a closer look at what these verses are saying:

When you received Jesus, you put on the helmet of salvation. This is the one piece of armor that you can never take off or lose. Once you’ve asked Him into your heart, you are His forever. No matter how much the Devil attacks you, he can never win or take you back. Jesus said, “My Father, who has given them [those who believe on Him] to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand.”⁴

The breastplate of righteousness. Whose righteousness? “The righteousness that comes from *God* and is by faith.”⁵ Even though you have received Jesus, you’re still not perfect or righteous, and you still have faults and commit sins. But the difference is that Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and the shedding of His blood for you brings you forgiveness and cleanses you from all sin.⁶ By con-

3. Ephesians 6:13–18

4. John 10:29

5. Philippians 3:9 NIV

6. 1 John 1:7

fessing your faults and shortcomings to Him, accepting His forgiveness and receiving it by faith, you're putting on His righteousness. So when the Devil attacks you by pointing out your faults and failures, you can fight back with the attitude of "yes, I'm a sinner, but Jesus forgives me and gives me *His* righteousness!"

When you tell others about Jesus and share His love with them, you're preaching the gospel of peace. Surprising as this may seem, this is one of your best protections: God blesses those who spread the good news. As you share God's loving words with others, the Word becomes more firmly planted in your own heart and life. As you strengthen others, your own spirit becomes stronger.

What shields you from the Devil's deadly lies?—Your faith! As you study God's Word and apply it to your daily life, your "shield of faith" will grow into a strong force field all around you that the enemy of your soul cannot penetrate. That's not to say that you'll never have battles, but when you do, you won't completely succumb to them because you'll have faith in God's promises in the Bible—that He is with you and will pull you through no matter what.

Last, but by no means least, is your offensive weapon: God's Word, the sword of the Spirit, which is "quick and powerful."⁷ It's unstoppable! When Satan engages in battle with your heart and mind, seeking to strike your spirit a mortal blow with discouragement, negativity, confusion, despair under pressure, stressful worry, or any of his other wiles, your only hope is to wage a counterattack. Pull out the sword of the Spirit! Pull out a verse or a promise, and

7. Hebrews 4:12

stand on it. That's what Jesus did when the Devil tempted Him at the beginning of His ministry on earth. He just quoted Scripture: "It is written ..." ⁸ The Devil is unable to stand against the power of God's Word. He will turn tail and run every time!

8. Matthew 4:1-11

The Secret to Solutions

YOU MAY FIND THAT AS YOU READ A VERSE OR PASSAGE IN THE BIBLE, ALL OF A SUDDEN AN ANSWER JUST HITS YOU! You may have even read it several times before and it never really clicked, but this time the Holy Spirit whispers in your heart and shows how it applies to your situation, bringing it to life. “That’s for me! That’s the answer!” God couldn’t have spoken any more emphatically if He’d yelled out the answer or screamed it in your ear! It may have been written for somebody else thousands of years ago, but all of a sudden it hits you personally. That’s what is known as the voice of His Word.

Read and absorb His Word during peacetime, when things are going fine, and it will be there for you when you find yourself under attack and beset by problems or worries. The Holy Spirit will bring to mind just the verse or passage you need to dispel the lies of the Devil.

As you become more familiar with God’s recorded Word in the Bible, you will become more aware of the workings of the Holy Spirit and more attuned to the Lord’s voice speaking directly to your mind and heart.

God speaks to His children of today just as He always has in the past, and if you ask Him to speak to you, and you get quiet and listen, He will give you specific words of comfort and guidance that are tailored to your individual situation. The Lord will put His thoughts, His words, in your mind. The Bible promises, “Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left.”¹ This is known as the *living Word*.

The next time you feel like you can’t cope with the stress and strain of pressing problems, take some time to read God’s Word. In the Word—the recorded Word and the living Word—you can find the solutions to life’s problems. The Word will not only give you faith in the Lord and His ability to see you through, but in it you will find practical solutions to everyday problems. The Holy Spirit will bring to your remembrance a specific verse or passage, or Jesus will whisper fresh new words into your ear as you commune with Him.

1. Isaiah 30:21

The secret is God's Word! It's the secret of power and victory and overcoming and fruitfulness and fire and life and *everything*.

—D.B.B.



I am the Bible.

I am God's wonderful library.

I am always—and above all—the truth.

To the weary pilgrim, I am a good strong staff.

To the one who sits in black gloom, I am the glorious light.

To those who stoop beneath heavy burdens, I am sweet rest.

To him who has lost his way, I am a safe guide.

To those who have been hurt by sin, I am healing balm.

To the discouraged, I whisper a glad message of hope.

To those who are distressed by the storms of life, I am an anchor, sure and steadfast.

To those who suffer in lonely solitude, I am as a cool, soft hand resting upon a fevered brow.



The Devil can't stand the Word. "Resist the Enemy and he'll flee from you."² He'll turn tail and run!

Take up that white-hot sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and cut the Devil to the heart!

—D.B.B.

God Is in Control

NOT ONLY CAN YOU TRUST THAT ALL THINGS THAT COME YOUR WAY WILL WORK OUT FOR YOUR GOOD, BUT YOU CAN BE ASSURED THAT THINGS DON'T "JUST HAPPEN" TO CHILDREN OF GOD. Each event that comes your way is a part of God's personal and unique plan for your life. And He knows exactly what you need to experience and learn in order to fulfill that plan.

Some of the crises and calamities that come our way are of our own making. They are the result of our own carelessness, mistakes, and wrong choices. Some are the result of others' mistakes. And yet others are personal attacks on us by the forces of darkness—the Devil and his minions. But whatever the case, we can have faith that God is in control of our lives and destinies. Nothing can happen to us without His permission.

However, God has also given each of us the freedom of choice. Though He helps and guides us all He can, the final decisions of what we do and how we act or react, are up to us. God won't force us to make the right decisions, nor to follow His plan for our lives. But there *is* a

plan, there is a purpose, and if we trust Him and do those things which we know are pleasing to Him, then we can rest assured that we will remain on the path of His will, and that it will lead to His blessings and the fulfillment of His every promise.

God's hand is upon you, His child. He is intricately involved with and concerned about every detail of your life. When you are going through times of difficulty, that can be one of the most comforting things to think on.

I asked God for strength, that I might achieve;
I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to
obey.

I asked for health, that I might do greater things;
I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.

I asked for riches, that I might be happy;

I was given poverty, that I might be wise.

I asked for power, that I might have the praise of
men;

I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of
God.

I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life;

I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.

I got nothing that I asked for, but everything I had
hoped for.

Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were
answered.

I am among all men most richly blessed.

—Attributed to an unknown Confederate soldier

Be a “Live One”

WHY DO CHRISTIANS—ESPECIALLY ACTIVE CHRISTIANS—SOMETIMES SEEM TO HAVE MORE THAN THEIR SHARE OF TROUBLES? This little story explains.

John and Sam were friends. One day, John asked, “Sam, how come you’re a Christian and yet you have all these troubles and trials and tribulations? Here I don’t even believe in God, and yet I don’t have nearly as much trouble as you do!”

“Well, John, I don’t know. I guess I’ll have to think awhile before I can answer that one,” Sam answered.

A few days later the two went duck hunting.

John shot into a flock of ducks, and several fell into the shallow water of the pond from where they had just flown. Some of them were dead, but others were just wounded. John knew from experience that sometimes the wounded ducks will get up and fly off again if you don’t grab them quickly. So as Sam ran to the spot where the ducks had fallen John called out,

“Bag the live ones! Bag the live ones! Don’t worry about the dead ones! You can collect them later!”

When Sam came back with the ducks, he had a smile on his face.

“I think I’ve got the answer to your question!” he said. “You see, I’m a *live* one! The Devil is afraid I’m going to get away, so he tries to bag me first. You ... well, you’re a *dead* one. He’s already got you, so he’s not a bit worried about what you’re going to do!”

And that’s just the way it is with us. The Devil can’t get us back once we’re saved—we’re the Lord’s forever! But he sure tries hard to keep us from being *active* Christians. But don’t let his attacks slow you down or hinder you, because if you keep persevering, you’ll win the battle and receive the reward that the Lord has waiting for you! “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.”¹

1. James 1:12 NIV

When Problems Persist

SOME PROBLEMS ARE SHORT-TERM, SUCH AS A BOUT OF FLU OR A FALLING OUT WITH SOMEONE AT WORK. Others may last much longer: a chronic illness, a disability or an addiction, the loss of someone dear, or an ongoing battle to overcome a personal weakness such as anger or moodiness. You may have to struggle with such difficulties for weeks, months, or even years.

Sometimes problems persist even when you feel you've already done all you could: you've been praying, reading and following God's Word, claiming His promises, and trying to trust Him. Still you see no answer, which can be discouraging.

In cases like that, God may be testing you to see whether you will continue to trust and believe and thank Him for all the *good* He sends your way, even when it seems He is not answering your prayers. "We walk by faith, not by sight. Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed."¹ God loves to see His children's

1. 2 Corinthians 5:7; John 20:29

faith manifested, and He promises to greatly reward those who bravely endure the trying of their faith.

If God is working in your life to bring out a special quality, the process may take some time. Lumps of coal aren't turned to diamonds overnight; so it is with our lives.

When you think you've reached the end of your rope, just hold on a little longer. Patience is often the key that opens the door to God's blessings, and sometimes we must be content to wait for His answer. While we may expect God to put an end to our problems right now, He may know that later is a better time. God's timing is impeccable. "He has done all things well."² Trust Him!

Faith is believing. Faith is trusting. Faith doesn't quit. Faith refuses to call anything impossible. Faith refuses to be robbed of its joy and peace by circumstances or battles.

If we refuse to concede defeat, but rather hold on to God no matter what, if we determine to believe His promises, even though we may not see the fulfillment immediately, victory will be ours in the end. Such faith cannot be defeated. He will always come through for us.

It is impossible to despair when you remember that your helper is omnipotent.



Learning patience seems to be one of God's most frequent lessons, yet one of our own rarest virtues, as it tests our faith and drives us to the Lord and His Word, to whom and which we might not otherwise give so much time and attention. It's one way God has of getting our attention.
—D.B.B.

The Positive Power of Praise

WHEN YOUR HEART IS WEIGHED DOWN WITH WORRY, FEAR, SORROW, OR PAIN, INSTEAD OF DWELLING ON YOUR LOSSES AND WOES, THINK ABOUT JESUS AND HIS LOVE. Count your blessings. Think about the love of your family and friends. If you can't think of anything else to be thankful for, you can at least be grateful for all the problems, troubles, and ailments you could have but don't because God has spared you from them!

Look on the bright side. Think on the *good* things. "Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things."¹

Thank God for all He has done. Chase away the Devil and all his shades of night by letting the light in—God's positive light of Scripture, the Word, prayer, praise, songs. Do anything you can to occupy your mind completely with positive thinking! It's a kind of work therapy. It's a

1. Philippians 4:8

prayer and praise therapy. It's a Scripture therapy, and it chases away the shades of night.

If you're thinking about the Lord and putting Him in the center focal point of your concentration and your consciousness, then this pushes the Devil and all his doubts and lies and fears into the outer fringes. You can't be positive and negative at the same time. Fill your mind and mouth with the light of praise to God, and it will push the darkness out.

Keep your face to the sunshine and you cannot see
the shadow.

—Helen Keller



Talk happiness. The world is sad enough
Without your woes. No path is wholly rough;
Look for the places that are smooth and clear,
And speak of those, to rest the weary ear
Of earth, so hurt by one continuous strain
Of human discontent and grief and pain.

Talk faith. The world is better off without
Your uttered ignorance and morbid doubt.
If you have faith in God, or man, or self,
Say so. If not, push back upon the shelf
Of silence all your thoughts, till faith shall come;
No one will grieve because your lips are dumb.

Talk health. The dreary, never-changing tale
Of mortal maladies is worn and stale.
You cannot charm, or interest, or please
By harping on that minor chord, disease.
Say you are well, or all is well with you,
And God shall hear your words and make them true.
—Ella Wheeler Wilcox



Reflect upon your present blessings—of which every
man has many—not on your past misfortunes, of
which all men have some.

—Charles Dickens

Things Could Be Worse

WHEN GOING THROUGH A ROUGH TIME, IT HELPS TO PUT YOUR TROUBLES IN PERSPECTIVE BY CONSIDERING WHAT SOME OTHERS HAVE GONE THROUGH.

Take the Apostle Paul, for example. He suffered plenty. “Five times I received forty stripes minus one,” he writes. “Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren.”¹

Having gone through all that, you’d think that of all people he’d have reason to complain or feel that God had maybe forsaken him. But to the contrary, He continued to trust God despite his troubles, saying: “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 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,

1. 2 Corinthians 11:24–26

both to abound and to suffer need.”² What was his secret to overcoming the obstacles? It’s found in the next verse: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”³ He leaned on Jesus, and Jesus gave Him strength. And through this, Paul became a great man of God and an inspiration to millions ever since.

David Livingstone, called the Apostle to Africa, was born in poverty and struggled from childhood for his education, while supporting himself and his family. When he decided as a young man to spend his life as a missionary, he was mocked and scoffed. Even those he loved tried to dissuade him. When he finally arrived in Africa, life presented one hardship after another—not only the difficulties of daily life and natural dangers, but many spiritual tests also.

Yet he looked beyond his present circumstances, as summed up in these words spoken to students at Cambridge University: “Anxiety, sickness, suffering, or danger, now and then, with a foregoing of the common conveniences and charities of this life, may make us pause, and cause the spirit to waver and the soul to sink, but let this be only for a moment. All these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall hereafter be revealed in and for us [in heaven]. I never made a sacrifice.”⁴

Adoniram Judson, the pioneer missionary to Burma, persevered for 30 years despite constant sickness and persecution. It took six years for him to win his first convert, but 100 years later there were over 200,000 Christians in Burma, largely as a result of the work that he had begun.

2. Philippians 4:11–12

3. Philippians 4:13

4. Speech to students at Cambridge University (4 December 1857)

Hudson Taylor, a great missionary to China who suffered many hardships and heartbreaks, had this to say about difficulties and trials: “All God’s dealings are full of blessing; He is good, and doeth good; good only, and continually. ... We may be sure that days of adversity are still days of prosperity also, and are full of blessing. The believer does not need to wait until he sees the reason of God’s affective dealings with him ere he is satisfied; he knows that all things work together for good to them that love God.”⁵

Becky, a young Chinese woman born around the time of the Cultural Revolution of 1965, was shunned and persecuted by society and government authorities after becoming a Christian. In spite of serious health problems including a bout with leukemia, beatings, the kidnapping of her daughter, interrogations, and imprisonment, she and her husband continued quietly yet firmly practicing their faith and telling others about God’s love through 12 years of extremely adverse conditions. In 1992 she was able to travel out of the country and has been ministering to other new Christians in China by mail, encouraging them to keep the faith as well.

Take Advantage of Your Handicap

WHETHER FROM BIRTH OR THE RESULT OF AN ACCIDENT OR DEBILITATING ILLNESS, A PHYSICAL HANDICAP CAN BE ONE OF THE MOST TRYING OF HUMAN EXPERIENCES. The irreversible loss, the limitations, the stigma of being different from others, the humiliation of having to depend on others for even the simplest things, the big questions—“Why me, God? Why this?!” No one who hasn’t been there could possibly understand.

If this is you, take heart! There *is* one who sees and understands exactly what you’re going through. He cares for you more deeply than you will ever know in this life, and He wants to help you lead a full, happy, productive life that touches and enriches the lives of many others.

Once again, the secret is in absorbing God’s Word. His Word will give you courage to trust Him, and faith to believe that somehow this is all part of His loving plan for you. His Word will be a source of comfort and inspiration. His Word will put your life back on a positive course.

It has been said that suffering makes people either better or bitter. Those who dwell on their losses are likely to become bitter and end up losing far more in the spirit than they have lost in the physical. Bitterness is cancer of the soul.

But there are others who face the same tragedies and handicaps bravely. They refuse to give up, but rather strive all the harder. They call out to God for help and find faith, strength, and courage that others who seem to have everything don't even realize they lack. Genius is born of their desperation. They beat the odds. They become a source of inspiration to the rest of us. By God's grace, they help make the world a better place.

John Milton was blind when he wrote his great epic poem, *Paradise Lost*. So was Fanny Crosby when she wrote more than 6,000 hymns, including some of the most famous and best-loved Christian songs of all time. Beethoven was deaf when he wrote some of his greatest symphonies.

Helen Keller was both deaf and blind, yet she learned to write and even speak, and has encouraged and inspired hundreds of millions—"handicapped" and "whole" alike. "I thank God for my handicaps," she said, "for through them I have found myself, my work, and my God."

Contemporary examples also abound.


She weighed less than five pounds at birth, and contracted pneumonia, polio, and scarlet fever when she was four. She couldn't walk until she was 11. Yet she believed she could do something extraordinary, and she did. At the age of 20 she was the only athlete, male or female, to win three gold medals at the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome. Wilma Rudolph was the "fastest woman alive." She believed she could.

A serious traffic accident forced an 18-year-old Spaniard to abandon a promising career as a goalkeeper with the professional football team Real Madrid. Instead he spent nearly two years in a wheelchair. While hospitalized he took an interest in music after a doctor's assistant gave him a guitar. Several years later he won a national song contest with one of his own compositions, "La Vida Sigue Igual" (Life Goes On). The success led to his first recording contract and opened a new career for Julio Iglesias.

Someone once said, "When God closes the door, He usually leaves a window open somewhere." Your handicap could be your way out. It could be your greatest asset. It could strengthen your character and stretch your soul. It could spur you on. It could inspire new creativity. It could lead to deeper and happier relationships with others. Whether or not it will depends on *you*. Do you look at your handicap as a curse or as an opportunity in disguise?

Don't give up! Don't drown in your sorrows! Make an advantage out of your handicap. Build a bridge out of your broken dreams.

God wants to use your handicap for His glory. If He doesn't deliver you from it, then He must want you to put it to some good purpose. Find it.



When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,
When the funds are low and the debts are high,
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest, if you must—but don't you quit.

Life is queer with its twists and turns,
As everyone of us sometimes learns,
And many a failure turns about
When he might have won had he stuck it out.
Don't give up, though the pace seems slow—
You might succeed with another blow.

Often the goal is nearer than
It seems to a faint and faltering man.
Often the struggler has given up
When he might have captured the victor's cup.
And he learned too late, when the night slipped down,
How close he was to the golden crown.

Success is failure turned inside out—
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt—
And you never can tell how close you are.
It may be near when it seems afar,
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit—
It's when things seem worst that you mustn't quit.
—Frank Stanton

“If We Suffer, We Shall Also Reign”

LIFE IS FULL OF PROBLEMS. If we're not careful, this present world and all of its struggles will fill up our time and thoughts. We get mired in our problems and can't see anything beyond them.

God wants us to look ahead, past our present problems. He wants us to think not in terms of how things are, but how they could be. We need to stop looking down at the mud, and look up at the stars.

When Jesus left this earth and returned to heaven, He explained that He was going ahead of us, to prepare a place for us—a place with many mansions, where there will be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor pain.¹

“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit.”² Knowing what glories, treasures,

1. John 14:2; Revelation 21:4

2. 1 Corinthians 2:9–10

pleasures, and rewards await us in heaven makes our present difficulties, trials, and tribulations bearable.

It will be worth it all, when we see Jesus;
Life's trials will seem so small, when we see Christ;
One glimpse of His dear face, all sorrow will erase,
So bravely run the race till we see Christ!

"Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. ... For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. If we endure, we shall also reign."³

Our time on earth is an important part of God's plan for each of us, but it doesn't end here. Everything we go through now is not only making us into the men and women we need to be in order to accomplish His immediate goals, here and now, but it's also for the *future*, for the next life. It's preparation for all that the Lord has in store for us, short-term and long-term.

So when you're besieged and buffeted by trials, worries, and fears, when life is a daily struggle and you wonder whether it's really worth it, remember what you have to look forward to. When your time on earth is over and you meet Jesus and enter His heavenly kingdom, you'll receive a reward beyond description for having fought the "good fight."⁴

Jesus promises: "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."⁵

3. 2 Corinthians 4:17-18;
2 Timothy 2:12

4. 2 Timothy 4:7-8
5. Revelation 3:21

Yes, life is a struggle. In some ways it may be even more of a struggle now than before you let Jesus into your life, because of the Devil's attempts to stop you from following God's will. But at least now you can know that your difficulties and trials are all for a *purpose*. Your loving heavenly Father watches over you and has planned every detail of your life. He knows exactly what you need, He knows what He wants you to become, and He promises to bring some good out of every difficulty. He will support, strengthen, and sustain you through each test.

He loves you, and everything that He allows to come into your life—whether it seems good or bad—can always work for the best. If you trust Him through it, you will become a better, wiser, more loving, more useful Christian—a tool in His hands, a vessel through which He can freely pour forth the waters of His love and Word to comfort and strengthen others in need.

So when things seem dark, confusing, or cloudy, when tears fill your eyes and despair tries to take hold of your heart, look away from yourself and this world's woes. Look up into the eyes of one who loves you and tenderly cares for you. Find comfort in His loving arms, and find peace and faith through His strengthening words of life.

Look on all that He has blessed you with, and thank Him for it. And then look up and forward to all that He has in store for you, the rewards and blessings that He has promised for those who persevere and hold on. Keeping your eyes on the end of the road—heaven—will be a great encouragement to you, and will reassure you that the difficulties you may go through here are worth it all. As you please the Lord by persevering in your relationship with Him and manifesting His love to others through your words and deeds despite the obstacles, difficulties,

or trials, He will be so pleased that He will bless you with the desires of your heart forever. "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. 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."⁶ Be an overcomer!

6. Psalms 37:4; Romans 8:18

Power Promises

THE BIBLE CONTAINS HUNDREDS OF PROMISES FOR YOU PERSONALLY. They are not mere words, but as Jesus said, they are “spirit and life.”¹ They are power promises that will strengthen your faith in God and propel you over any obstacle.

Here are a few that have been tried and proven by millions down through the ages. You can stand on them too!

When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you ... when you turn to the Lord your God and obey His voice (for the Lord your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you.—Deuteronomy 4:30–31

He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He.—Deuteronomy 32:4

1. John 6:63

The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.—Deuteronomy 33:27

The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer.
—2 Samuel 22:2

Those who know Your name will put their trust in You; for You, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek You.—Psalm 9:10

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.—Psalm 34:19

How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings.—Psalm 36:7

Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.—Psalm 55:22

From the end of the earth I will cry to You, when my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the rock that is higher than I.—Psalm 61:2

My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.—Psalm 121:2

In the day when I cried out, You answered me, and made me bold with strength in my soul.—Psalm 138:3

Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; you will stretch out Your hand ... and Your right hand will save me.—Psalm 138:7

Whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe.
—Proverbs 29:25

Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid. ... The Lord is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation.—Isaiah 12:2

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.—Isaiah 41:10

For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, “Fear not, I will help you.”—Isaiah 41:13

For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you.—Isaiah 54:10

I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.—John 14:18 KJV

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.—Romans 8:28

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.—1 Corinthians 10:13

Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ.—2 Corinthians 2:14

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 distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.—2 Corinthians 12:9–10

I will never leave you nor forsake you.—Hebrews 13:5

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 is tested by fire, may be 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.—1 Peter 1:6–8

May the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect [make you better or stronger spiritually], establish, strengthen, and settle you.—1 Peter 5:10

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