

## Falling Forward – Paul Falls Forward

March 19, 2017- Pastor Randy

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Today I am continuing our focus on falling FORWARD when we have been knocked down by misfortune. Misfortune is the experience of harm due to no fault of your own. We bear responsibility for missteps and mistakes, but not for misfortune. Last week we looked at the life of Joseph and saw that he experienced the misfortune of being mistreated. In his case, his experience of misfortune was due to the sin of others. When other people betray us or hurt us in anyway, we become vulnerable to becoming bitter. Bitterness is poison to your soul.

What we learned from Joseph is that while betrayal is a decision made by others, becoming bitter is a choice we make. The ability to resist bitterness requires the power of the Holy Spirit and a mind renewed on God's Word.

Today we are going to learn what the apostle Paul has to teach us about our response to misfortune. If you are like me, you are not as inclined to listen to someone teach you about a subject they don't have personal experience with. Paul experiences make him more than qualified to speak to us about suffering hardship. Here is his catalogue of hardships:

*"Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my feeling that weakness? Who is led astray, and I do not burn with anger?"*

I hope you noticed from that list of hardships that Paul experienced both kinds of misfortune I have described. He experienced the misfortune of mistreatment from people. He was beaten numerous times, imprisoned, and pelted with stones by people who were opposed to his preaching. He was even persecuted by so-called Christians. Paul also experienced misfortune that was unrelated to the actions of anyone. He mentions being shipwrecked

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three times in his second letter to the Corinthians and we know of at least one other time he was shipwrecked, which is recorded in Acts 28. He wrote about the dangers and difficulties that he faced during his missionary journeys. He often suffered from the cold as well as from hunger and thirst, deprived of food or drink. Paul absolutely has the credibility to address this issue of suffering.

Read Romans 8:18-37

The most well-known and oft quoted verse from this passage is Romans 8:28, which reads,

*And we know that God causes ALL THINGS to work together for GOOD to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*

But we need to read this verse in its context to get a better understanding of what Paul meant when he wrote that God causes “all things” to work together for “good”.

What are the “all things”?

8:18 *“For I consider that THE SUFFERINGS of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”*

8:35-37 *“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will TRIBULATION, or DISTRESS, or PERSECUTION, or FAMINE, or NAKEDNESS, or PERIL, or SWORD? Just as it is written, “For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

*But in ALL THESE THINGS we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.*

It is true that God does work through “all things” in an absolute sense. It is also clear from the context that the “all things” that Paul is referring to, the things God is causing to work together for good are the very things that we don’t consider good. They are sufferings that fall into both categories of misfortune; that which is caused by people and misfortune for which there is no one to blame.

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What is the “GOOD”?

8:29 *For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined TO BECOME CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF HIS SON, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;*

8:18 *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with THE GLORY that is to be revealed to us.*

This passage is intended to serve as a word of encouragement to God's people. He is encouraging them to persevere in the midst of suffering by reminding them of the following

1. Your misfortune doesn't negate God's love.

Be careful not to interpret God in light of what your circumstances are, Instead, you must interpret your circumstances in light who God is!

2. Your misfortune is temporary, God's glory is eternal. There is SUFFERING NOW, but GLORY LATER. Paul repeatedly pointed Christians forward to the future. We will not respond properly to misfortune unless we have a long view of life; an eternal perspective. In 2 Cor. 4:17-18 Paul wrote, *“For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.”*

In order to persevere in difficult times, you must have a hope for the future. You have to know that faithfulness in the present will be rewarded in the future. But you also need to know that...

3. The Holy Spirit is available to you in the NOW. In Romans 8:26 Paul wrote, *“And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. Lean on Him!*

4. God's love and his Spirit will enable you to overcome.

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Romans 8:37 says, *But in ALL THESE THINGS we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.*

In 2 Corinthians 4:7 Paul wrote, *“We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.”* Listen and look at verses 8-9:

*We are **pressed** on every side by troubles, but we are **not crushed**. We are **perplexed**, but **not driven to despair**. We are **hunted** down, but **never abandoned** by God. We get **knocked down**, but we are **not destroyed**.*

5. Paul took positive action after every misfortune. Paul's first missions trip began on the Island of Cyprus and his ministry there was very productive. It resulted in the governor of Cyprus accepting Christ. In the next city he and his missions team traveled to, many people welcomed his message and were converted, but some Jewish religious leaders incited a mob that literally chased them out of the city. What did Paul do? Did he pick up his ball and go home? No, he went to another city and began to preach there. Again his message was embraced by many but also angered many others, enough that they conspired to kill him. Fortunately, Paul and his team found out about the plot and they fled before they were attacked. And where did they go? They went to another town and began to preach. In this town, the people who did not like his preaching didn't just plot to stone him. They did stone him. Fortunately, God protected him from serious harm. So what do you think he did next? He left the next day for another town and began to preach again!!

In Acts 28 we have an account of Paul experiencing the misfortune of being shipwrecked. After having survived that misfortune, we immediately read about him praying for sick people. Paul understood the importance of not dwelling on his misfortune but instead keeping his focus forward on what God wanted him to do. He still had good news to tell others despite his experiences of persecution and hardship.

The great danger for all of us when we encounter misfortune is to set up camp at the foot of Mt. Disappointment. The more you stare at, and focus on your misfortune, the more likely your disappointment will turn into

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discouragement, your discouragement into depression, and your depression into disillusionment. The Devil wants to use your misfortune to paralyze you. You have to take some kind of positive action ASAP.

*“A moment of conscious triumph makes one **feel** that after this nothing will really matter; a moment of realized disaster makes one **feel** that this is the end of everything. But neither **feeling** is realistic, for neither event is really what it is **felt** to be.” - J.I. Packer*

Your experience of misfortune is not your final destination!

1. Your misfortune doesn't negate God's love.
2. Your misfortune is temporary, God's glory is eternal
3. The Holy Spirit is available to you in the NOW of your pain.
4. God's love and his Spirit will enable you to overcome.
5. Take positive action after every misfortune.

