

“Rising Above Hardship”

Sometimes we feel like there’s no reprieve from the battles we face in life. But we must always remember that Jesus Christ was shown to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead (see Romans 1:4). When Christ lives in us, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead will raise us to life, and work in us, and in our circumstances! Adversity strikes all of us, in a lot of different ways. Sometimes it feels like going through a short, dark tunnel. At other times, it feels like the hardship we are enduring will never end. 1 John 3:8 reminds us, “... *For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.*” That victory was accomplished at the cross, but its final culmination has not yet been fully realized. As we traverse through hardships, then, I pray that you will be encouraged by these four principles.

First of all, when facing hardship, *we need to fully embrace the sovereignty of God.* The fact that God is sovereign means that He can do whatever He wants and He is in control. Because He’s a good God, we trust that whatever He does (or allows) is for our good. A question that haunts many is, “Why?” But that question often goes unanswered. If we linger too long on the frustrations of unanswered questions, then it will hinder us in our efforts to press through the adversity we’re passing through. Even when we don’t understand, we must trust in the goodness of God. Sometimes, we need to stop trying to get an answer and start trusting the sovereignty of God. When the bottom dropped out of Job’s life, even though he didn’t understand why these severe trials had struck him, he resolved, “...*Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?*” Job got a hold of this truth: *God is too wise to make a mistake, and too mighty to have to explain Himself.*

Secondly, when facing hardship, *we need to avoid too much self-examination.* Now, it’s always good to consider our situation, and ask God what we can learn from what we’re going through. But dwelling too much on the unanswered aspects of our hardships can lead to some distorted thinking, and can potentially exaggerate our negativity. So, rather than spiraling down in negativity and allowing the monster of despair to grow, we need to think good thoughts about ourselves and God during times of adversity. One secret is to look at other people’s needs, rather than our own.

Third, when facing hardship, *we need to feed ourselves spiritually.* The Word of God has tremendous power; we need to nourish ourselves, spiritually, by feasting on our Daily Bread. Keeping the Word of God near, during tumultuous times, is a great idea. It’s the Word that will bring us help, strength and consolation. Talking and listening to Jesus through prayer and worship is another necessity for spiritual growth. We also need to stay connected to one another during times of adversity. There’s a tendency to withdraw and isolate ourselves during troubling times; but we need each other, and we need to stay encouraged by gathering together in the name of the Lord. I like the way one Pastor said it, “*Jesus is still meeting people, where people are meeting together, to meet with Him!*”

Finally, when facing hardship, *we need to allow God to stretch and grow us*. Sometimes, struggles are exactly what we need in our lives, in order to become the kind of person God wants us to be. Troubles strengthen our resolve and refine our character. God is able to shape and mold us when we persevere through the fire of affliction. Don't short-circuit the process by looking for an easier way out.

Discussion Guide/Action Steps

1. Do you trust in the goodness of God, even when you don't understand?
2. Are you thinking the right kinds of things in your heart?
3. Are you resolved to focus on other people's needs, rather than your own?
4. Are you reading the Bible? Praying? Worshiping? Staying connected to God's people?
5. Are you allowing God to use adversity to grow you to become more and more like Jesus?