**Finding Joy In hard Times**

Many people think when they become Christians that life will be easy. They think God will take care of all the difficult situations and they can fly through life care free.

This is not the story the bible tells us. In the bible, we see the people closest to God facing many trails:

* Job: Lost all his kids, Lost all his wealth and even his health
* Joseph: Thrown in a well, sold into slavery and thrown into prison.
* Daniel: Taken from his home, made a eunuch and thrown in to a lion’s den and his friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into a furnace
* David: Hid in caves for several years as king Saul tried to kill him
* Most of the prophets lived in fear for their lives because their messages were not popular
* Paul: was in prison many times, whipped times without number, Five different times the Jewish leaders gave him thirty-nine lashes. Three times he was beaten with rods. Once he was stoned. Three times he was shipwrecked. Once he spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. (2 Corinthians 11:23-26)

The fact is: if you are following Christ you will have trials and persecution

1 Peter 4:12-13 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed

2 Timothy 3:12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted

God will use trials to test us. We find in the bible God left Hezekiah to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart (2 Chronicles 32:31).

**🡪Sometimes God leaves us to show us what is in our Heart**

Deut. 8:2 And you shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not,".

The way you act during trials and suffering says a lot about who you are and who you place your faith in. It is easy to say God is good when everything is going well. But it is how you act in bad times that will tell people who you really are. The Bible tells us that we should rejoice in hardship and be joyful in trials

Romans 5:3-5 More than that, we **rejoice in our sufferings**, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

James 1:2-3 My brethren, **count it all joy** when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Have you ever found joy in suffering? Think of a butterfly who starts out as a caterpillar and then encases himself in a cocoon. He has to struggle to get out of that cocoon but It is that struggle that develops his wings so he can fly. We can compare it to working out. It is not easy lifting weights, doing aerobics or running mile after mile. It is hard work and can cause pain but we find joy in it because we have a goal in mind and desire the end results. Same with life. We can go through hard times but if we stay focused on the goal of living a life pleasing to Christ and the end result of an eternity with Christ all the rest doesn’t seem that bad.

The bible often compares our trials to a refining fire like that used to purify Gold and Silver

Isaiah 48:10 Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction.

So, we can be assured that we will all go through trials but know that God uses those trials to build our Character and test our faith. He is refining us to be more like Christ and reflect his glory (2 Cor 3:18)

We should find joy that God cares enough for us to put us through these trails. Like a parent giving a child freedom to do something that they know will not go well but will teach them something they need to always remember (like telling a child not to touch a hot stove over and over again. If you let him touch it once he will learn). Like God we love our Children but sometimes we would rather have them go through a little pain now than suffer greatly latter.

* Trials will produce faith if you put your trust in God

Out attitude is usually tied to our circumstances. If good things are happening to you and around you it is easy to be joyful (Happy) and if bad things are happening, we get depressed or angry. Our circumstances can change moment by moment causing a rollercoaster of emotions that you can’t control. But it doesn’t have to be that way!!!

* Your joy doesn’t have to be tied to the moment by moment circumstances of your life

We can learn a lesson from Paul and Barnabas who traveled to many cities preaching the good news of Christ. Many people believed but sometimes they were persecuted and thrown out of town.

Acts 13:50-52. But the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. So they shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

They did not let their circumstance bring them down; they shook it off, and went on to the next town. Even though they were rejected and persecuted, Luke wrote 'The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.’ Their joy did not come from their circumstances, but from their relationship with Christ.

Paul later wrote in Philippians 4:11-13 … I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me (Christ Jesus).

Paul concentrated on the invisible and eternal knowing that God was in control of His situation. His mind was fixed on Jesus and that is where his strength came from (vs. 13).

There is another time, recorded in Acts, where Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison

Acts 16: 22-31  the crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods.  And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely.  Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.  About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,

Paul & Silas could have sat there worried about what would happen next or even been angry that they were serving God but now sitting in prison. Instead they found that there was a joy and peace obtainable that surpasses their understanding and circumstances.

Philippians 4:6-7 do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. **And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

We may not always understand the peace we receive but we can be sure that God can and will bring peace to a broken world if we call on Him.

The Bible tells us that God will give you perfect peace if you keep your mind on him and trust him (Isaiah 26:3). God doesn’t offer you a trouble-free life but he does offer us perfect peace if we just Trust in Him.

Paul also recognized that his hardship and weakness would be used to show God’s strength in Him.

 As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 12:10 - For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong (in Christ).

We should be willing to suffer hardships to show Christ strength in our lives. There is nothing more powerful than to go through some tragedy or difficulty proclaiming the name of Jesus with joy in our hearts. This is a great testimony to the power of Christ. You hear stories all the time where people go through some great tragedy but come through still giving Glory to God.

The Story of Grove Norwood is a perfect example of a tragedy that happened in someone’s life but instead of living in anger and bitterness they found Joy. Grove Norwood forgave the hit and run driver of his 4 year old daughter and even helped build a new home for him and his family which then inspired the initiative to establish a Seminary inside Texas prisons.

Or the story of Corrie Ten Boom, a Christian who helped many Jews escape the Nazi Holocaust during World War II but ended up in a Nazi prison herself for her actions. She suffered many indignities and lost most her family but afterward traveled the world speaking about Christ love and forgiveness and she even meet and forgave one of the camp guards who had been known as one of the cruelest.

We see this happening with Paul and Silas in the prison

Acts 16:26-31 and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened.  When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.  But Paul cried with a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” 29 And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas.  Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”  And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

Paul and Silas’s persecution ended up being the saving grace for the Jailer and his family. It is those moments when Christ brings us through some trial that we find our testimony and can witness to others.

Spending time praying and praising God brings a deeper peace that is hard to be shaken if you just keep your focus on him knowing he can do all things.

* Psalms 56:11 I have put my trust in God. I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?
* Nehemiah 8:10 … do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.
* [John 16:33](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+16%3A33&version=ESV) I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

You do not have to live your life in fear, worry or anger. If you just give every moment to God you can have the same peace and joy that Paul & Silas did.

It is not easy to find Peace & Joy in every situation. No one would fault you for being angry or upset when things go wrong, that is what the world expects of you, but God offers an alternative that we can choose. It is not always easy but it can change your life and the lives of others around you. People will notice when they see how you handle yourself in difficult situations. They will wonder how you can have such peace and this is a great opportunity to share God’s Love with them.

It is sad when we as Christians act poorly in difficult situations. What does that say about our faith to others.

Remember the things of this world are only temporary and your final destination is in Heaven with Christ everything else should just fall away as minor detours on your way there.

**I want to leave you with this story**

There once was a King who offered a great prize to the artist who could paint him the best picture of “peace”. Many artists submitted paintings in hope of winning the prize. The King looked at all the pictures, but there were only two he really liked and he had to choose between them.

One picture was of a calm lake. The lake was a perfect mirror for the peaceful towering mountains that were all around. Overhead was a blue sky with fluffy white clouds and all who saw this picture thought that it was a perfect picture of peace.

The other picture had mountains too.  But these were rugged and bare. Above was an angry sky with dark clouds from which rain fell and lightening flashed. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a ragging waterfall. This did not look peaceful at all. But when the King looked, he saw behind the waterfall a tiny bush growing in a crack of the rocks. In that bush a mother bird had built her nest and there, in the midst of the rush of angry water, sat the mother bird on her nest........... Perfect peace.

Well to the crowds amazement the King chose the second picture. The King explained, "peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hardship.  Peace means to be in the midst of all those things and still be calm in your heart. That is the real meaning of peace."

Many people think peace means everything in their life is going perfectly and wonder why God lets bad things happen but then the only time they go to church is when they have problems. So, if God were to give us a perfect life chances are we would forget about him. If he lets problems in your life we realize how much we need him and turn back to him.

Usually, we will lose our peace when we are not in control of what is going on around us but this is when we should find our peace knowing God is in control. Peace isn’t living a perfect life it is something you find when life is out of control. Like Paul and Silas singing while in prison or Jesus sleeping in the boat during the storm.

Jesus says in John 14:27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

Never give up and never let anyone or anything take your joy and peace away from you – it is a gift from God

[There is no Peace on earth but there is peace in Christ](https://youtu.be/Waitmz6C100).