

## Growing in Christ During Times of Hardship

- *Every Christian will face times of hardship. These times of testing show us where we are in our Christian walk.*

### Psalm 34:17-20 NKJV

**<sup>17</sup> The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles.**

**<sup>18</sup> The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit.**

**<sup>19</sup> Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all.**

**<sup>20</sup> He guards all his bones; Not one of them is broken.**

- *Psalm 34 provides us with precious insights into God's faithfulness and tenderness toward us as we go through times of trouble and hardships.*
- *If we turn to God during difficult and trying times we will reap tremendous spiritual benefits that will produce eternal fruit for the glory of God.*

**<sup>17</sup> "The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles."**

- *It is through times of trouble that we deepen our prayer life and learn how to more fully share our hearts with Him.*
- *It is also through times of hardship that our faith grows as we witness and experience God's faithfulness as He delivers us from the troubles we face.*
- *As we grow in the Lord the timing between when we cry out to Him and when His deliverance is manifest is often lengthened. This affords the necessary time for our faith to grow stronger.*

**<sup>18</sup> "The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit."**

- *It is through times when we are brokenhearted and humbly turn to Him that our relationship with Jesus grows more intimate and precious.*
- *In his times of solitude, David learned to be a man after God's own heart. As Abraham overcame disappointments and learned to trust God and became a friend of God, we too can develop a deep intimacy and friendship with God.*
- *"The Lord is near to those ..." — What a wonderful thought! In times of sorrow Jesus is right there to comfort and encourage us. All we need to do is take our attention away from those things that cause us pain and devote ourselves to Jesus.*

<sup>19</sup> “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all.”

- *“Many are the afflictions of the righteous” — Those who seek to walk with the Lord are not immune to the difficulties and sufferings of life. In fact, sometimes we will experience times of persecution and trial because we are followers of Jesus.*
- *God does not promise His children that they will be free from hardships and affliction, but He does promise that if we trust Him, we will experience His mighty hand of salvation that is strong to deliver us.*

<sup>20</sup> He guards all his bones; Not one of them is broken.

- *Verse 20 is a promise to the righteous. But what is the nature of the promise and how are we to understand this promise? Sometimes those who faithfully serve God do have mishaps and even literally suffer broken bones.*
- *To understand this verse properly we must understand it as a spiritual principle. This promise is in actual fact a Messianic prophecy that reveals a marvelous truth.*
- *John 19:36 refers to Psalm 34:20 as a Messianic prophecy which was fulfilled in Jesus as He hung on the cross.*

**John 19:36 NKJV**

<sup>36</sup> For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, “Not one of His bones shall be broken.”

- *As Jesus and those crucified with Him hung on their crosses, the high Sabbath of the Passover was fast approaching. The Jewish religious leaders requested that the Romans remove their bodies from their crosses before the end of the day, so as not to defile the Passover celebration.*
- *In order to quicken death by asphyxiation, they broke the legs of those being crucified. However, when they came to Jesus He had already died, making it unnecessary to break His legs.*
- *Although this prophetic word about Jesus was fulfilled because not one of His bones was broken, the question remains, “What was the significance of this prophetic word and its fulfillment?”*

**Exodus 12:46 NKJV**

<sup>46</sup> In one house it shall be eaten; you shall not carry any of the flesh outside the house, nor shall you break one of its bones.

- *God gave very specific instructions regarding the Passover lamb. The priests were to be careful that not one of its bones was broken while slaughtering, preparing, and presenting it as an offering to be eaten.*

- *That Jesus did not have one of His bones broken reinforces the truth of who Jesus is—the true Passover Lamb. This is the same truth that John the Baptist proclaimed about Jesus—“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).*
- *We can clearly see a link between the Passover lamb in the Old Testament and Jesus Christ the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. However, there is a still deeper meaning that can be found in this Messianic prophecy.*
- *“He guards all his bones; Not one of them is broken.” — The Hebrew word “bones” has another meaning. It can refer to “self, substance, the essence of who we are.”*
- *The first time the Hebrew word “bone” is used in the Bible is when Adam saw Eve and declared the oneness of their identity and essence. “This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh.” (Genesis 2:23a). Adam was making more than just a statement about their physical bodies but the very essence of who they were.*
- *The Hebrew word “broken” in the phrase “not one of them is broken” means more than something that is broken in two. It means something that is “shattered, crushed, to break down, to break in pieces.”*

#### Psalm 51:3-4 NKJV

<sup>3</sup> For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me.

<sup>4</sup> Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight—That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge.

- *Psalm 51 records David confessing his sins before God after Nathan the prophet confronted him regarding his sins of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah.*
- *David made an interesting statement when he described the chastisement that God inflicted upon him when he chose to cover up his sins. “Make me hear joy and gladness, That the bones You have broken may rejoice.” (Psalm 51:8).*
- *In contrast to Jesus’ bones which were not broken, David described his time of sin and rebellion as having his bones crushed. As David tried to hide his sins and transgressions, he compromised the very essence of who he was. He was no longer a man of integrity or a man after God’s own heart.*

#### Exodus 12:5 NKJV

<sup>5</sup> Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats.

- *What does it signify that none of Jesus’ bones were broken?*

- *The Passover lamb had to be spotless and without blemish and Jesus was the spotless Lamb of God. The bones of evil doers are crushed, but the bones of the righteous are preserved.*

#### **Luke 23:4 NKJV**

**<sup>4</sup> So Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd, “I find no fault in this Man.”**

- *Pilate, the governmental authority who condemned Jesus to be crucified, himself testified that Jesus was spotless and without fault. His declaration confirmed that Jesus qualified to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*
- *Jesus endured unimaginable physical, emotional, and spiritual agony as He went to the cross.*
- *Jesus was betrayed and rejected.*
- *Jesus was spat upon and mocked.*
- *Jesus was scourged in the most painful and inhuman way.*
- *Jesus was crucified on a cross to bear the sins of all mankind as the perfect sin offering.*
- *However, no matter what Jesus endured, even having to carry all the sins and curses that had befallen mankind, the core of who He was and is, was never affected.*
- *Even on the cross as Jesus became the sin offering for all mankind, carrying all our sins, failures, transgressions, curses, and sickness in His body and soul, He remained the spotless loving Lamb of God.*
- *In the midst of His agony as He hung on the cross He looked up to Heaven and prayed for those who were cursing Him and who had crucified Him and spoke words of love and forgiveness. “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” (Luke 23:34a).*
- *Not one of Jesus’ bones was broken! No matter what men did to Jesus or what He had to endure, the core and very essence of who He was remained intact and unaltered.*
- *Not even all the evil of man’s actions or all the attacks of the hordes of the devil, nor all the unimaginable agony could alter His true identity and nature. Jesus remained as He always was—the spotless Lamb of God, the Messiah, the Son of God, holy, pure, and loving.*
- *When rereading the verses that proceed, “He guards all his bones; Not one of them is broken” in Psalm 34, we can see the duality of the meaning of these verses.*
- *One meaning is in the form of a Messianic prophecy describing Jesus as the righteous one who cried out to His Father and who suffered many afflictions but who was delivered from them all.*
- *Jesus was not overcome by suffering, He overcame suffering.*

**“who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear,” (Hebrews 5:7).**

- *These verses contain a second application and a promise for those who choose to fully rely on the Lord with a humble heart that fully trusts and obeys Christ.*

- *In all the afflictions and hardships we may encounter during our lives, the Lord is there to comfort and deliver us from each one.*
- *“Not one of our bones will be broken.” Nothing we face or experience will be able to crush us or shatter the integrity that we have in Christ. We will remain free from defilement and bitterness, allowing the sweetness and fragrance of Jesus to come forth. We will not be dominated by fear but by faith, hope, and love.*

## 2 Corinthians 4:8-11 NKJV

<sup>8</sup> We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

<sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed-

<sup>10</sup> always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

<sup>11</sup> For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

- *In 2 Corinthians, Chapter 4, Paul testified that no matter what hardships he endured, none of them were able to shake him or destroy his total confidence in Christ.*
- *“We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed” — Paul faced circumstances that in the natural were overwhelming, but they were unable to crush him.*
- *“we are perplexed, but not in despair” — Paul faced problems that seemed insurmountable, but his hope in Christ was not shaken.*
- *“persecuted, but not forsaken” — Paul was mistreated and harassed, but he was never alone because Jesus was always with him.*
- *“struck down, but not destroyed” — Paul was trampled down by the circumstances of life but they were unable to destroy the core of who he was in Christ. He continued to be resilient and persevere.*
- *“always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.” — To the world, Paul’s statement seems a great paradox. As Paul identified with Jesus’ suffering, he also identified with Jesus’ life.*
- *“For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.” — Not only was Paul able to identify with Jesus’ life, he was able to fully experience and be a conduit of Jesus’ life!*
- *A theology that ignores the reality that as believers we will go through times of trials and hardships, fails to prepare Christians to deal with life’s difficulties. This results in unnecessary disappointments and confusion when difficulties do arise.*
- *A theology that does not focus on the joy of our salvation and the wonderful peace and security we can experience through Christ as the Holy Spirit leads us, robs believers of the unlimited confidence, strength, and delight we can receive from God so we can live overcoming lives.*
- *Through all of the adversity, persecution, and suffering Paul had to endure “not one of his bones was crushed.” Paul never became embittered toward people or disappointed with God. He was able to focus his eyes on Christ with a heart filled with thanksgiving, faith, and love.*

- *As Christians, we may look at the life of Apostle Paul and the high standard and example he set and feel overwhelmed and discouraged when we compare our life to his, especially if we are going through a time when we are struggling to simply put one foot in front of the other.*
- *Sometimes sermons meant to challenge us to trust God in a greater way can sound like an impossible goal that we will never be able to achieve, especially to those who are struggling with fear, addictive habits, selfishness, pride, or any of the works of the flesh.*
- *Recently someone shared with me an allegory of the Christian life. It goes something like this...*
- *A pilgrim was walking along a path called The Christian Life. As he walked along he came to a fork in the road. One path had a sign saying: "Trusting God" and the other path had a sign saying, "Pleasing God."*



- *Both paths looked similar and as he thought about which path to choose, he said to himself, "I know what is required to please God." So he chose the path named "Pleasing God."*
- *However, as he began to walk down the path of "Pleasing God" he found that every time he failed to keep his commitments or failed to do what he knew he should, he felt condemned, ashamed, and discouraged. He became more aware of his inability to act and think in ways that would be pleasing to God.*
- *Instead of finding delight in prayer and studying the Bible he became proud when he spent the allotted time doing those things, but he felt condemnation and discouragement when he failed to do so.*

- *After a time the pilgrim decided to turn around and return to the fork in the road and take the path named “Trusting God.” To his delight when he began to trust God, his life began to conform and change. As he trusted God, his life became pleasing to God.*
- *Religion is shame-based. The Gospel is grace-based.*
- *Religion focuses on keeping a set of rules. The Gospel focuses on a vibrant relationship with Jesus.*
- *Religion causes us to focus on our failures and sins in a vain effort to use shame to cause us to change. The Gospel causes us to look to Christ and to embrace His love and mercy so that through His grace we will change.*
- *Religion is trying to be good without God.*

#### **Romans 1:17 NKJV**

<sup>17</sup> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

- *Our walk as Christians is a faith walk.*
- *However, it is not a blind faith walk. It is having faith in a real God whom we know and who is always with us.*

#### **Hebrews 13:20-21 NKJV**

<sup>20</sup> Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,

<sup>21</sup> make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

- *Hebrews, Chapter 13, provides us some insights that will help us to grow in our Christian walk.*
- *“Now may the God of peace” — Our peace is found in God and when we have lost our peace we can turn to Him to find that place of peace again.*
- *“who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead” — Our greatest delight is knowing we serve a living Saviour who can do all things!*
- *“that great Shepherd of the sheep” — We need to remember and embrace the truth that He is the great Shepherd and if we submit to the leading of His Holy Spirit, He will lead us in the right path. We don’t need to carry the burdens of this life and fret about the future. Instead of trying to navigate the labyrinth of life we can rest in the loving arms of the Good Shepherd.*

- “through the blood of the everlasting covenant” — *Our relationship with God is not a contract or a temporary or conditional relationship based on our performance. We are joined with God in an unconditional and everlasting covenant sealed by the blood of Jesus. He remains faithful even during those times when we fail.*
- “make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight” — *It is God who is doing the good work in us and will bring forth those things that are well pleasing to Him. Our part is to choose to trust Him, submit to Him, and allow Him to lead us along the path He has planned for us.*
- “through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever” — *Everything that makes us complete is accomplished through Jesus Christ, and not in any way by our own strength, abilities, or intellect. So when God brings us through in victory all the glory rightfully goes to Him forever and ever.*

“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.” (2 Chronicles 16:9a).

- *God is not looking for the strong but the willing—those who are willing to remain loyal to Him and who put their trust in Him.*
- *Faith is a journey. It is okay to struggle with trusting God as long as we turn to Him in the midst of our struggles so He can teach us step by step and day by day to grow in our faith in Christ.*

Hebrews 12:2 NKJV

<sup>2</sup> looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

- *Jesus is our example of how to pass through times of suffering and hardship without being crushed.*
- “looking unto Jesus” — *The Greek word “looking” literally means “to turn the eyes away from other things and fix them on something, looking to, fixing your gaze on.”*
- *What can be more wonderful, delightful, and joyous than fixing our eyes on Jesus and His love and all that He has done for us!*
- *Often, when Christians are going through a difficult time they become transfixed on those things in life that are causing them pain, disappointment, and grief. However, God has provided a source of unlimited joy and comfort when we turn our attention to Jesus.*
- *Instead of thinking about the uncertainties of life, look to the One who is steadfast and unchanging, who is our rock and anchor. — “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8).*

- **“the author and finisher of our faith”** — *Jesus is the One who began the good work in us and He is the One who will bring it to completion. Our confidence is not in ourselves. Our confidence is in God who is working in and through us to accomplish His purposes.*
- **“who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross”** — *The cross represented the greatest place of suffering and shame. However, Jesus looked beyond the place of greatest shame to see the place of greatest joy—to be once again seated at the right hand of the Father and to have us with Him!*
- **“despising the shame”** — *What does it mean that Jesus despised the shame and how did that enable Him to endure the suffering of the cross?*
- *When Jesus considered the cross and all the suffering and shame that He would have to endure, He compared it to the glory of once again being seated with His Father in Heaven and the joy of redeeming mankind and being able to share His love and unbroken fellowship with us for all eternity.*
- *Jesus counted all the suffering that He would have to endure as nothing, insignificant, and a trifle compared to the joy that would result.*
- *As Jesus went to the cross, He looked beyond the cross anticipating the joy that would follow.*
- *Jesus looked beyond the process to the result.*
- *It was because of the joy set before Jesus that He endured the suffering.*

#### **Isaiah 53:3 NKJV**

<sup>3</sup> He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

#### **Hebrews 1:9 NKJV**

<sup>9</sup> You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions."

- *Isaiah 53:3 and Hebrews 1:9 paint a picture of both Jesus' sufferings and His joy.*
- *Jesus' suffering on the cross is unimaginable and incomprehensible, but what is even more astounding is the joy that gave Him the strength to endure the cross.*
- *As believers, nothing we will experience in this life can compare to the suffering that Jesus endured, but we can experience the same degree of joy as we fix our eyes on Jesus.*

**Romans 8:18 NKJV**

**<sup>18</sup> 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.**

- *Apostle Paul summarized the joy we have in Christ and compared it to the temporal sufferings of this present time and said it is “not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”*

**2 Corinthians 4:16-18 NKJV**

**<sup>16</sup> Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.**

**<sup>17</sup> For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,**

**<sup>18</sup> while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.**

- *The greatest of our sufferings is described in the light of eternity as “light and momentary,” but the glory that we will experience with Jesus in Heaven is described as “exceeding, weighty, and eternal.”*

**Psalm 84:5–7 (NKJV)**

**<sup>5</sup> Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, Whose heart is set on pilgrimage.**

**<sup>6</sup> As they pass through the Valley of Baca, They make it a spring; The rain also covers it with pools.**

**<sup>7</sup> They go from strength to strength; Each one appears before God in Zion.**

- *“Blessed is the man whose strength is in You” – The only way we can make it through the valley of suffering is when God alone is our strength, because all other sources of strength will fail us.*
- *“Whose heart is set on pilgrimage” – The Hebrew word for “set on pilgrimage” means “a track or road that is firmed with stones or fill.” When our heart is set on that narrow and firm road, our journey will result in life and victory.*
- *“As they pass through the Valley of Baca” – The Hebrew word for “the Valley of Baca” means “the valley of weeping.” Sometimes in our pilgrimage we travel not only through the beautiful mountain ranges of God’s glory, or the lush fields of God’s blessings, but through dry desert valleys of God’s testing.*
- *“They make it a spring; The rain also covers it with pools.” – As we walk through dry and difficult valleys of suffering something wonderful happens. Those dry and barren places in our lives become filled with springs of water enriched by the rains from Heaven. They become places of bounty, life, and abundant fruitfulness.*

- *When I look back on my life to this point, my times of greatest growth have always been when I walked through the Valley of Baca. Through those times the sweetness of Jesus became more real to me.*
- *“They go from strength to strength” – As we walk with the Lord through the Valley of Baca, the valley of tears, something even more marvelous happens. We grow stronger in our faith and experience a deeper relationship with Christ.*
- *“Each one appears before God in Zion” – The end of this journey leads us into the very presence of God Himself when we will appear before Him in glory.*
- *“As they pass through the Valley of Baca, They make it a spring; The rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength”*
- *The word that punctuates this journey through the valley of tears is the word “they.” Although we may walk through times of suffering, we are not alone. God has placed us in His Body where we can comfort and encourage each other. It is important that through difficult and painful times we do not isolate ourselves, but reach out to our brothers and sisters to receive comfort, and that we comfort others through their times of difficulty.*
- *“Each one appears before God in Zion” — At the end of this earthly journey, each of us will stand before Jesus and be held accountable for how we lived our lives.*
- *Galatians 6:2 says “bear one another’s burdens” as we walk together through this life sharing our joys and sorrows.*
- *However, Galatians 6:5 says “each one shall bear his own load” since we ultimately will be responsible before Jesus for how we lived our lives.*
- *“Bear one another’s burdens” — We are to be interdependent and allow God to minister through us to one another.*
- *“Each one shall bear his own burdens” — We are not to be co-dependent nor be irresponsible, but take an active role in seeking God.*

### **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NKJV**

<sup>16</sup> Rejoice always,

<sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing,

<sup>18</sup> in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

- *This says it all—rejoice always; pray always; give thanks always!*
- *What a wonderful salvation. What a wonderful God. What a wonderful Saviour.*