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CHANGE YOUR LIFE | CHANGE YOUR WORLD

HOW TO SURVIVE ANYTHING

An interview with the apostle Paul

HARD KNOCKS

Why they're good for us

RAINBOWS FROM RAIN

This beauty comes only one way

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PERSONALLY SPEAKING

We know that both heredity and environment help make us who we are. We hear from infancy that we have our mother's eyes or our father's chin—visible evidence of the role of heredity.

It's also obvious that children who are stimulated intellectually are more likely to excel academically, and that athletes who have the best coaches and training programs are more likely to reach their full potential—proof of the role of environmental influences.

How decisive a part heredity and environment each play in shaping our lives has been the subject of debate since ancient times. What is relatively new is the extent to which both factors are now being used to try to explain personal behavior and social trends. Geneticists are searching for "behavioral genes" that they say could account for such problems as alcoholism, divorce, domestic abuse, and depression, while social scientists point out links between personal problems and social conditions—high crime and drug abuse rates in poverty-stricken inner cities, for example.

The underlying message being given by both camps is that we are prisoners of our circumstances—either circumstances that stem from our genes, which we have no control over, or from our environment, which we have limited control over. But in the quest for scientific explanations, two other factors are frequently overlooked: the human will and the all-powerful "God factor." When in sync, these two are capable of overcoming the negative effects of both heredity and environment. That's good news for you and me, because it means that circumstances don't need to dictate our level of happiness or success in life. With determination and God's help, you can rise above any trouble that threatens to undo you.

Whatever problem you may face—a physical handicap or serious illness, marriage or relationship problems, emotional difficulties, parenting challenges, trouble at work, financial struggles, a vice or addiction—we hope the following articles will help you overcome it.

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FOR ACTIVATED

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FACE THE storm

BY ANNE SPRING

Some YEARS AGO, WHEN OUR CHILDREN WERE SMALL, my husband and I were on a freighter sailing from Europe to our new field of service in South America. Due to long delays in the loading of the ship's cargo, we found ourselves setting sail in the dead of the Mediterranean winter, close to the time of year when the apostle Paul was shipwrecked off the coast of Malta (Acts chapter 27; 28:1). We prayed that our fate would not be the same as his.

Two days out of port, we were caught in a storm. Even though our ship was heavily laden and lying deep in the water, the Force 12 gales caused it to reel violently. The children thought it was great fun, but the rest of us struggled to keep our composure and our stomachs where they belonged. Even the seasoned crew members were seasick.

We heard radio reports that a couple of other ships had already sunk. Would this be *our* end? If so, I wasn't going to go down without a fight. There was nothing I could do physically to change the situation, but I could *pray*. And so I did, like I had never prayed before! "Jesus, please help us!" I implored. "You're our only hope! Calm the sea! Give our captain the wisdom, faith, and courage he needs to get us through this. And help me to get over this horrible seasickness so I can think straight and pray better."

"Go to the bridge." I recognized that voice in my mind immediately. It was Jesus. "The captain is also praying. Pray with him and encourage his faith."

When I stood up, Jesus gave me the strength to make my way to the bridge. The captain was alone there, and yes, he was also praying desperately. We held vigil together until we passed below Sicily, where we found refuge from the storm. The ship and its contents had sustained some damage, but no one had been hurt. Our prayers had been answered.

The Lord reminded me of this experience after some recent difficulties, and He showed me an important lesson from it: Face the storms of life unafraid. Climb up on top of the situation. Rise above! Get up there on the bridge, and take firm hold of the Captain's hand. Jesus is our Pilot, and together we will soon be in safer waters. It takes faith to pray and gumption to act on those prayers, but faith coupled with action gets results.

It's human nature to resist difficulty, to hide from it and hope it goes away, but that's not the way of winners. Don't take the storms of life lying down. Get up and fight! The battles of life may sometimes seem overwhelming, but the victory is yours, waiting right around the corner, and it is worth fighting for. •

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BLACKOUT

BY VIRGINIA BRANDT BERG

In the Northeast Blackout of 1965—the largest blackout in U.S. history—at least 25 million people in Ontario, Canada, and the U.S. Northeast, including New York City, lost electricity for up to 12 hours. Such outages were commonplace in other parts of the world and still are, but this one was totally unexpected and caught everyone unprepared.

This article is taken from a talk given shortly after the incident.

WAS LISTENING TO A NEWS REPORT ABOUT THE BLACKOUT IN THE NEW YORK AREA, when one man who had been there said he could never express the feelings he had when the power, which he had always taken for granted, suddenly came back on. It made

me think of the personal blackouts I've been through, such as a severe accident from which it seemed I would never recover. When I did, how glorious it was to be out of that darkness and into the light once more, free from the pain and ill health! Only those who have been through such blackouts know how wonderful it is when the lights come on again.

When you're in the midst of darkness, the thing that makes it blacker still is the thought that you may never come out of it. I want to assure you, though, that the lights *will* come on again if you will put your trust in God and not waver. This is where those with faith in God are at a great advantage, for they know the day will come when God will send deliverance. Faith is the victory.

It was pretty dark for the apostle Paul when he was in prison, but he had such faith that he was able to live above his circumstances and conditions, so much so that he wrote in Philippians 4:11–13: “Not that I speak in regard to need, for 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, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” The joy of the Lord was his strength (Nehemiah 8:10).

No wonder Paul could say, “None of these things move me” (Acts 20:24). I'm sure there were those in that blackout who felt just that way. The blackness didn't strike terror into





their hearts or take from them their feeling of security. They had an inner source of strength, a supply that was above all circumstances. Paul did too, and that is why he could write, “We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4:8–9).

There is an old saying, “When you come to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on!” When Paul came to the end of his rope, he took a promise from God’s Word—“God will not leave you nor forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31:6; Hebrews 13:5)—and held on.

God has given so many wonderful promises to hang on to, and they can shine like stars in your blackout. And by the way, that’s another thing that someone said who went through the blackout. The thing that impressed them

most was that they could see the stars. It had been a long time since anybody in New York had seen the stars. Let me give you a few “stars” to help you through the next dark place you pass through:

“The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them” (Psalm 34:7).

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all” (Psalm 34:19).

“Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. Those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing” (Psalm 34:9–10).

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous run to it, and are safe” (Proverbs 18:10).

“The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble” (Psalm 9:9).

What a wonderful feeling when in the dark to know that God is there!

I received a phone call from a woman who had

fallen and sprained her ankle. She was weeping with pain, so I hurried to her home and took her to the hospital. I prayed for her complete and speedy recovery and for the pain to subside, but the whole time she didn’t stop talking about how bad things kept happening to her, and about how God must not love her because He didn’t treat her right. I don’t think she heard a word of my prayer. She didn’t have any stars in her night at all. The lights didn’t come on for her, no matter what I said. She never let God have a chance. How sad!

How we handle everyday difficulties prepares us for bigger or more important future events. If we can learn to live above the circumstances and conditions that cast dark shadows over our days, we will be ready for any big blackout that may come. He says, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). •



IT HAPPENED TO ME

Feasting on Worms

BY MEGAN DALE

It was

6:30 AM. I HAD WOKEN EARLY, only to be met by the sight of a rained-out world on a day our extended family had planned to go on an outing together. I didn't mind the rain much. Heaven knew the land needed it. I paused and looked out into our garden to see a little brown bird hopping around, eyeing the soggy earth in hopeful expectation of finding a meaty feast in the form of a hapless almost-drowned worm.

At the moment I felt like that poor worm. For months prior to this, dark clouds had slowly been gathering over our little family. Our young son was facing developmental delays that resulted in him having frustrated, heart-wrenching tantrums and affected his happiness on a daily and sometimes hourly basis. He often even awoke in the middle of the night crying out. When he was himself, he was a sweet, sensitive, affectionate, and

delightful little boy. But we needed to know more about his challenges so we could better meet his growing needs, and we needed to know *now*, while he was still young and malleable, before the secondary and sometimes more tragic effects of low self-esteem and depression entered his tender little life.

To make matters even more challenging for us, four days earlier my husband and I had received the news that his place of

employment would not be available for much longer, and as a result we would have to find a new job and a new house. In the past I had leaped with dizzy anticipation into the arms of an unknown future, hopping the globe and chasing my destiny wherever the breeze seemed to blow me. But now I cowered in the face of such a major change coming right at this crucial time in my son's life.

Four days had seemed like four years as I clung hour by hour to some straw of hope, usually in the form of a Scripture or quotation, in the midst of the deluge. Many great men and women down through the ages faced dark and trying times, and they lived to write anecdotes or poems or hymns about them. I clung to those inspirational thoughts now. Sometimes I quoted one line over and over, like a mantra, just to keep my presence of mind as I continued to care for my children and tend to household duties. It was working, too.

Standing in my doorway, looking at that little brown bird, I heard the voice of comfort I have come to know so well as my Savior's. "You're not the earthworm, dear, but the bird. The rains and storms that I have allowed to fall on your world have provided for you a feast

that you would otherwise have to dig for." Suddenly my perspective changed. Jesus was laying before us a spiritual feast in this seemingly dark and dreary time. Treats we would have had to dig for under normal circumstances were coming to the surface—the special gifts of greater closeness to Jesus and each other, greater love and appreciation for our friends and family, and a fervent desire to commit our daily needs and fears to Jesus in prayer.

Has the rain stopped? Not yet. While some of our prayers have been answered wonderfully (we moved and my husband found a new job) and we are encouraged, we still face major challenges on other fronts. But we will remain bright and happy little birds even through the rain, because odd as it may seem, we're feasting on worms!

P.S. As if on cue, the day after my rainy day revelation, our neighbor's eight-year-old bounded up to me and held out a handful of wiggly worms. "There's tons more in the leaf pile if you want some," he informed me.

That's okay. I'll stick with the metaphor. •

MEGAN DALE IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN AUSTRALIA.

HELP IS HERE

BY RAFAEL HOLDING

The Bible says that God is near to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18) and a very present help in times of trouble (Psalm 46:1). He's more than a shoulder to cry on or a hand to hold. He can reach into the deepest places of your heart. He can soothe the pain and suffering, and replace it with His love, peace, comfort, and yes, even joy. He can do all this through His Words. When He shines the light of His Word on your tears, they turn to rainbow hues. It's sunshine after the rain, light at the end of the tunnel.

Jesus loves you dearly. He wants to express that love to you, but He can't unless you let Him. He wants to tell you why He has allowed certain difficulties to befall you, but He needs you to listen. He wants to help you understand why you're feeling the way you are, and to tell you what you can do about it, but you need to *want* His answers. In your most trying times, His Word—His written Word and His living Word spoken directly to your mind—will come alive to you if you reach out and receive it.



If you would like to experience Jesus' love, joy, comfort, and peace, you can. It starts with accepting Him as your Savior and inviting Him into your life, which you can do by praying this prayer:

Dear Jesus, I believe that You are the Son of God and that You died for me, so I could be forgiven my wrongs and have eternal life. I open my heart to You now. Please come into my life and meet my deepest needs. Amen.

RAINBOWS FROM RAIN

BY MARIA FONTAINE

Many **NORMAL NATURAL THINGS IN LIFE ARE SEEN POSITIVELY BY SOME PEOPLE, BUT RESENTED BY OTHERS.** Take a rainy day, for example. Some might complain about it, while others might consider it a blessing because it waters their crops or grass. Sometimes something that one person would jump at the chance to do and be thankful for, such as moving to a new location, another person could hate and resent having to do. Anything can become a source of bitterness, even things that aren't actually bad in themselves or that someone else might even consider good. It often depends on how you take events or circumstances.

On the other hand, there are some things that are not merely a matter of personal attitude, which we would all agree are not good or desirable in the natural sense: a physical handicap, a car accident, a house burning down, etc. If you have a physical handicap, that is something that has obviously caused you a lot of pain. It's not your imagination, and it's very natural for you to be down about it. Yet even our handicaps can be turned

The beautiful colors
of the rainbow
can only be seen
through the prism of rain.


into stepping stones to a better life; like rungs of a ladder, they can help you climb higher than you could otherwise.

Each of us has something in our life that could seriously hinder us if we allowed it to get us down. But the wonderful thing is that God has made a way for us to overcome those things. In fact, He intends for us to. Because His help is always available, circumstances do not have to dictate our behavior.

We certainly don't have to be limited emotionally, mentally, or spiritually by the problems of our distant or recent past. In fact, God often allows those "bad" things so we will fight to overcome them and grow stronger in the process. Instead of looking at obstacles or mishaps or bad experiences as terrible drawbacks and horrible handicaps, we can use those things to better our own lives and the lives of others.

Look at all the men and women throughout history who rose above seemingly insurmountable odds to become great. They had to fight harder to overcome those obstacles, but in so doing they became stronger. Instead of complaining that life had given them a "lemon," a bad deal, they "made lemonade out of their lemons." Because of their supposed handicaps, they rose higher than they would have otherwise.

Beethoven was stone deaf when he composed some of the most beautiful



music ever written, and Thomas Edison was deaf when he invented the phonograph. Alexander the Great was a hunchback. Homer was a blind minstrel. Renoir painted some of his finest masterpieces when his fingers were so twisted by rheumatism that his artist's brush had to be strapped to his hand. Handel's right side was paralyzed when he composed his greatest work, "The Hallelujah Chorus!"

Very often it's also the people who have overcome difficulties who are in turn able to help others have the courage and faith to overcome theirs. Their personal examples are proof that it is possible to rise above seemingly impossible situations.

If Helen Keller hadn't been blind and deaf from infancy, she never would have had the opportunity to become the inspiration that she was and continues to be to millions, and she never could have said, "I thank God for my handicaps, for through them I have found myself, my work, and my God."

Life is not a cloudless journey,
Storms and darkness oft oppress,
But the Father's changeless mercy
Comes to cheer the heart's distress;
Heavy clouds may darkly hover,
Hiding all faith's view above,
But across the thickest darkness
Shines the rainbow of His love.

—Flora Kirkland

It takes
both rain and sunshine
to make a rainbow.

Booker T. Washington was born a slave and worked in coal mines and salt mines before becoming an educator, a spokesman for African American causes, and founder of a college for young African Americans.

Jerome K. Jerome lost his father when he was 12. At 14 he had to go to work to support his mother and sister. His life got even harder when his mother also died, but eventually Jerome became a writer, not of sad stories but of humor. After such a hard beginning in life, he said, "It is from the struggle, not the victory, that we gain strength."

There are so many advantages to having problems and difficulties! If we didn't have any, we'd be complacent and meander along casually, not building the strength of character that comes from overcoming adversity. The beauty that often results from suffering wouldn't have a chance to blossom in our lives. We wouldn't appreciate our loved ones as much, or find true friends in those who come to our side in times of need. We wouldn't have as much understanding or compassion on others who are going through the same things, or know how to help them.

Sometimes troubles are the only way God can get us to turn to Him for help, or teach us to put our trust in Him, or to get us to yield to Him, or to stop us from doing something wrong. He also uses our trials and difficulties to humble us, to teach us patience and mercy, and to help us not be self-righteous, among other things. If we never had any trials, we wouldn't find our strength in God. We also wouldn't experience the thrill of discovering that He will come through for us! •

The truest strength

BY MISTY KAY

I cannot look, I cannot see,
I cannot understand.
I lay myself down helplessly
In the hollow of Your hand.
The clouds that now encompass me
And seem to block my view,
Are sent by You, unfailing Love,
To draw me close to You.

I cease from all my struggling,
I rest from all the strain.
I only live to love You, Lord,
And glorify Your name.
There is no great achievement now,
No great works done for You,
But somehow in the stillness sweet,
My spirit is renewed.

When pain has overtaken me
And human strength is gone,
Emotions cloud all over me
And days and nights are long,
I look up into Your eyes
And find strength within Your smile.
Your Spirit gently comforts me
And holds me through each trial.

And though my body trembles now
My spirit is at peace,
For I hold to the Master's words
Which cause the storm to cease.
Your power stands unfailingly,
Your every promise sure.
You give me faith, You give me grace,
Sufficient to endure.

I lift my heart in praise to You
For all that You have done,
For every battle we have fought,
Each victory we've won!
And though my body pains me still
My spirit is at ease
For I have found the truest strength.
In You is perfect peace.

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POINTS TO PONDER

Overcoming Adversity

Smooth seas do not make skillful sailors.—*African proverb*

The good things of prosperity are to be wished; but the good things that belong to adversity are to be admired.—*Seneca (4 BC–65 AD)*

'Tis easy enough to be pleasant,
When life flows like a song.
But the man worthwhile
Is the one who will smile
When everything goes dead wrong.
—*Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1850–1919)*

I can't change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination.—*Jimmy Dean (1928–)*

You cannot control what happens to you, but you can control your attitude toward what happens to you, and in that, you will be mastering change rather than allowing it to master you.—*Brian Tracy (1944–)*

Reflect upon your blessings, of which every man has plenty, not on your past misfortunes, of which all men have some.—*Charles Dickens (1812–1870)*

The only disability in life is a bad attitude.—*Scott Hamilton (1958–)*

Discipline is learnt in the school of adversity.—*Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948)*

In the middle of a difficulty lies opportunity.—*Albert Einstein (1879–1955)*

All the world is full of suffering. It is also full of overcoming.—*Helen Keller (1880–1968)*

Troubles are often the tools by which God fashions us for better things.—*Henry Ward Beecher (1813–1887)*

ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS

Getting Over Divorce

Q: *Despite a good beginning, my marriage didn't work out and some months back it ended in divorce. I can hardly bear the loneliness of coming home to an empty apartment day after day. My thoughts wander to events of the past, and I feel such pain. How can I get over this?*

A: Divorce can be a heartbreaking and devastating experience. What you dreamed of and worked toward and sacrificed for has ended badly, and you're left with only hurt and disappointment.

But there is hope of future happiness, and it is found in the true saying, "God will mend a broken heart if you give Him all the pieces." He understands the pain, the feelings of being misunderstood and treated unfairly, and the temptation to become bitter. Take your aching heart to Him in prayer. He can take away the bad memories, the bitterness, the anger, and the despair. It will take time, but all of these bad feelings can be healed by His love.

He can give you peace of mind and a renewed interest in life. All is not lost. Where there is life, there is hope. You can love again, and you can be loved again in return. Turn to Him and let Him help you let go of the disappointing past so you can move on to a brighter future.

You may be brokenhearted now, but think of it as training in love. If you'll let this brokenness make you better instead of bitter, you'll grow in love for and understanding of others.

God's Word says, "A broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51:17), and "Thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones'" (Isaiah 57:15).

So take heart. Jesus will put you back together again in the way He knows best if you'll put yourself in His hands. He will fashion a sweeter, more loving, more understanding you, so that even this heartbreak will work together for your good.

On the practical side, you may like to try the following:

1. Ask God to help you to accept what has happened. Don't keep holding on to the past.
2. When hit with thoughts of regret, immediately put them out of your mind.
3. Focus on the present and don't fret about the future.
4. Doing something for someone else is a great way to forget your own troubles!
5. Write down what you learned from the relationship. Put into words your own mistakes as well as what you will try to avoid in your next relationship. Save the list for the future, but don't keep reviewing it if it just reminds you of your past mistakes.
6. Spend time with your family and friends.
7. Make new friends.
8. Take up a new hobby or learn something new. Make a plan to accomplish something you've never done before.
9. Every day, no matter how down you may feel, write down something that you are thankful for. •

How to survive anything

An “Interview” with
the Apostle Paul

BY ABI F. MAY

*Neither death nor life
... nor anything else
in all creation, will be
able to separate us
from the love of God.*

“I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38–39 NIV). That is one of the most outstanding proclamations of faith ever made, and it was made by a man who endured years of troubles and tribulations that most of us, thank God, will never have to go through, the apostle Paul.

His story is told in the Bible’s book of Acts. Church history and his letters to congregations of early Christians fill in some gaps. What is clear is that Paul, in his zeal to share the good news about Jesus, met opposition on countless occasions. He was beaten, imprisoned, stoned, shipwrecked, persecuted, and destitute.¹ Where did he get the strength to not only carry on, but to come through those trials even more appreciative of Jesus’ ultimate sacrifice and more resolute in his faith? If we could interview Paul today, perhaps it would go something like this:

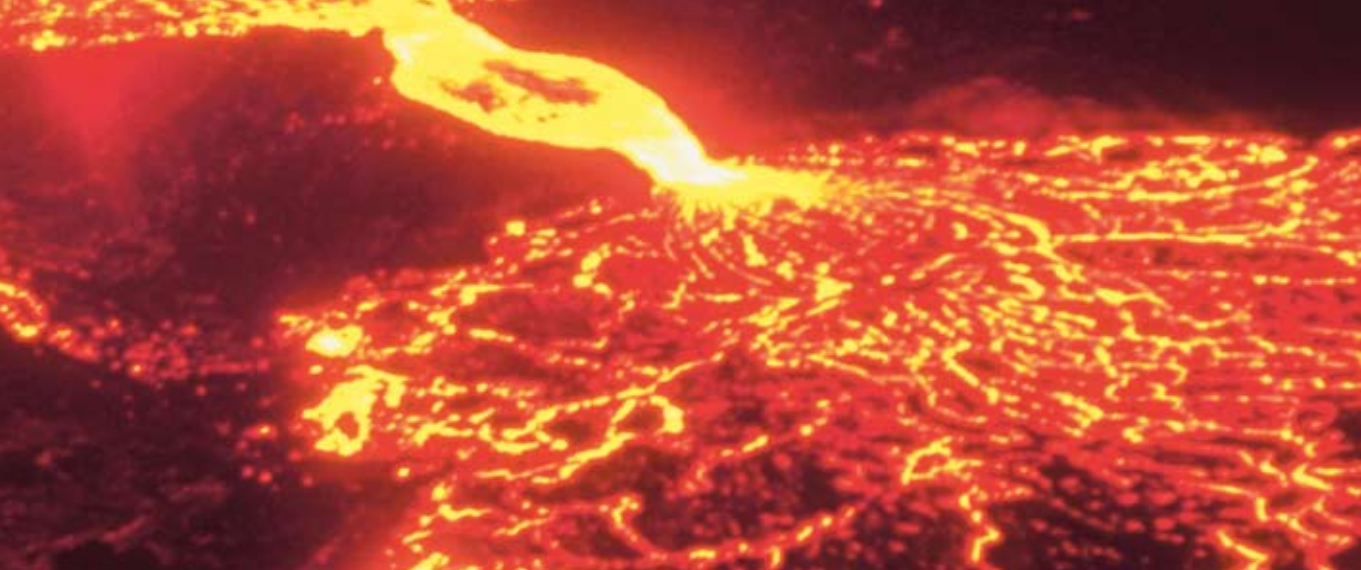
INTERVIEWER: You certainly had a remarkable turnaround following your salvation experience—from attacking the budding Christian faith following Jesus’ crucifixion

and resurrection, to playing a large part in spreading that faith and strengthening its early followers. But you also ran into a lot of opposition yourself. What happened?

PAUL: One incident around 52 AD was typical. I had fled from enemies in what is now Turkey, sailing across the Aegean Sea to Athens, Greece, and journeyed down to Corinth, an important trade center.

I started preaching in the local synagogue, and things went okay at the beginning. Even the leader of the synagogue, Crispus, became a Christian. But another man, Sosthenes, began spreading rumors, and soon I was expelled from the synagogue—Crispus too. So I took my message to the Greeks of that city, and a large number received Jesus. This made Sosthenes and his cohorts even more furious. They kept spreading lies, and I kept on preaching and teaching.

After about a year and a half, Sosthenes got a mob together and came after me. They would have stoned me on the spot, but they were afraid of the Roman authorities. So they marched me down to the palace of the Roman proconsul, who, at that time, was Junius Annaeus Gallio, the elder brother of Seneca, the famous Roman philosopher, and they accused me to him. But when Gallio realized this was simply a religious controversy, he refused to listen any more. I was set free, and the mob turned on Sosthenes.²



On that occasion you got off relatively easy. Was that generally the case?

No, it wasn't. I was beaten a number of times, which resulted in some permanent injuries. I was whipped and stoned, as well, and was imprisoned on several occasions.

You also encountered perils on some of your travels. Surely that must have been discouraging.

An understatement! I was shipwrecked three times, and only by God's intervention did I live to tell the tale. Many times I was so discouraged that I felt like giving up, but I knew I had to keep going because Jesus had called me to spread the Gospel far and wide. I knew that if I quit, I would be failing God. Also, others looked up to me, so if I had failed, I could have caused them to fail. So I carried on, even when I was discouraged and felt defeated. The troubles didn't always end when I wished they would, but Jesus was always there for me.³

It sounds as though you lived quite a stressful life.

I was blessed with a long and fruitful life, but it was under almost continual pressure. In addition to the challenges we've already discussed, I felt compelled to share the love of God in Jesus with the whole world.⁴ That was good pressure, of course, but pressure nonetheless. But regardless of where the pressure came from, I knew I didn't have to manage it alone.

Jesus always gave me the grace and strength I needed to go on.⁵ I never could have endured what I did on my own. I had to rely on Jesus.

Do you think it is inevitable that believers must suffer for their faith?

Jesus didn't call us to a life of ease, but to a life of service to others, and service always involves some personal sacrifice. In addition, anyone who tries to live a truly godly life for Jesus is going to run into opposition.⁶ Jesus said so. "If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."⁷ And history has proven Him right. But it's not all pain and suffering, either. There are more than enough rewards in this life, as well as in the life to come, to put the troubles in perspective.⁸

Do you have a final thought for us?

No matter what you face in life, trust Jesus to bring you through! He's always there, and He won't allow you to be tempted beyond what He knows you can take. He always makes a way to escape—not necessarily an escape *from* troubles, but *through* them.⁹ Hold on to Him, and He will hold on to you! •

¹2 Corinthians 11:23-27, ²Acts chapter 18,

³Acts 18:9-10; Hebrews 13:5, ⁴1 Corinthians 9:16,

⁵2 Corinthians 4:8-9; 12:9-10, ⁶2 Timothy 3:12,

⁷John 15:20, ⁸Romans 8:17-18; 14:17; Philippians 4:11-12; 1 Peter 1:6-8, ⁹1 Corinthians 10:13.

HARD KNOCKS

BY MARIE BOISJOLY

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHY IT IS THAT FROM TIME TO TIME YOU FIND YOURSELF GOING THROUGH THE SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS? Just when you're thriving on some "ups" in your life, something happens that brings you down a few notches on the happiness scale. "Why me?" "Why this?" "Why now?" Instead of helping to turn things around, those questions only make matters worse. Finally you remind yourself that even if you don't understand and can't see anything good coming from your present struggles, God can. He's always got a plan. So you decide to trust Him and hold on, and He works things out in the end.

Not long ago, I was somewhere between the questioning and trusting phases of that cycle when my husband, Ivo, returned from his daily jog and told me about something he had just seen. We live in a hilltop neighborhood with lots of flowering trees and lovely gardens. That's perfect for Ivo, since he is both an avid exerciser and a skilled gardener.

Each morning he passes a certain glorieta—a square with a fountain, some flowers, and lush grass—and that day he had noticed a patch of grass that was turning brown due to lack of water. The rest of the lawn was receiving plenty of water from the sprinkler system, but one failing sprinkler was causing this section to dry out and die.

Just as Ivo stopped to investigate, the neighborhood gardener passed by and also saw the problem. The gardener walked over to the defective sprinkler,



pulled a hammer from his bag of tools, and gave a few short, sharp knocks to the sprinkler head. Apparently some dirt had made its way into the sprinkler system and clogged the head, but those few knocks shook it loose. Right away the water started flowing through the sprinkler again, and with enough pressure to cover the neglected area. In time, that patch of grass would be green and beautiful again, like the rest of the lawn.

God, like that gardener, sometimes allows life to give us a few hard knocks to cleanse us, so we can do better at beautifying our part of His garden. •

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PACKAGE PRAYER

—A Spiritual Exercise

“Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you” (Psalm 55:22).

Soft background music may help set the tone. Begin this exercise by closing your eyes, and breathe deeply and slowly for a minute. Now mentally articulate one by one the concerns and worries on your mind today, such as things you need to take care of, or situations at work or with your children, or health issues.

As you bring up in your mind each thing that you’re concerned about, imagine yourself packaging it up and placing it in Jesus’ hands. As you do, thank Jesus for how He’s going to deal with that problem in the way He knows is best.

Take as much time as you need to unload all of your cares in this specific, methodical way.

Discipline your mind to focus on each problem only as long as it takes to call it up in your mind and picture yourself handing it over to Jesus. Once it’s in His hands, don’t dwell on it any longer or let your thoughts wander to the details, but move on to the next problem.

When you have finished going through your list, thank and praise Him for His unfailing love, His unlimited power, His concern for you, and His help in working out your problems. •

REACTING TO THE TESTS OF LIFE

BY DAVID BRANDT BERG

God allows disappointing incidents and circumstances in order to strengthen us. He tests us to see how we’re going to react. Even disappointment and things going wrong don’t have to keep you down and discouraged, because your faith and attitude can determine the way the circumstances affect you. Often faith and trust in God can even change circumstances completely, as He works on your behalf. It’s all in how you look at it, how you take it.

Circumstances and events don’t have to control you. With God’s help and a positive attitude, you can go through any changes, any disappointments, any circumstances, and come out happy. It’s often life’s tests that bring out the best in you, if you let them.

The Lord has all the power and strength you need for any situation. All you have to do is look to Him, draw on His strength, and ask Him to change things. If, due to other people’s choices, He can’t change the circumstances, then He can help you to change how you feel about things. •

DAVID BRANDT BERG (1919–1994),
FOUNDER OF THE FAMILY
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FEEDING READING

GETTING THROUGH DIFFICULT TIMES

Don’t be afraid of sorrows; they will pass.
Psalm 30:11 ♦ Psalm 126:5 ♦ Matthew 5:4

Seek God’s help in your time of trouble.
Psalm 50:15 ♦ Psalm 91:14–15
Lamentations 3:24–25 ♦ Romans 10:13

The Lord is a close companion to all those who call upon Him.
Psalm 73:23 ♦ Psalm 145:18 ♦ Isaiah 41:10
Matthew 11:28 ♦ Hebrews 13:5b

Hold on to your hopes; tomorrow is a new day!
Psalm 30:5b ♦ Psalm 119:147 ♦ Lamentations 3:22–23

Life can be rough, and it's not always easy to understand why things happen the way they do. When everything seems to be going wrong, it's natural to question My love, but it's during those very times that I want to be closer than ever to you. My love is what will get you through the tough times, and it's *always* there for you.

Unconditional love in its purest form comes from Me. Even when you blame Me for the troubles that have befallen you, I love you and don't condemn you. Even when you question My love, I still love you and I'm not going to give up on you. I'm still going to be right there beside you when you need counsel, when you need some company, when you are desperate for a listening ear, or when you need a friend. I want to ease your mind with the knowledge that there is always someone who loves you and sees endless possibilities in you, someone who enjoys you as you are—and that someone is Me.

No matter what, I will always love you unconditionally. That love will see you through anything. It will be a light in dark places, a compass when you are lost, an anchor to hold you fast in the storm, and a warm blanket to comfort you when you are alone and cold. And it doesn't cost you anything, but is freely given by someone who loves you to the core.

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

LOVE to the core

