

FACING AND OVERCOMING DIFFICULT MOMENTS IN A CHRISTIAN LIFE

1 Corinthians 10:13

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It is a very frightening thing to be defenseless in a hostile world. It is indeed a horrible feeling to be completely helpless. When a man is sick, he runs to the doctor hoping to be healed, but when the doctor tries his best and says there is nothing else, he can do, the Sick becomes hopeless. When a man has serious financial problems, he runs to his bank expecting a bail-out, but what will he do when bank insists on using assets he doesn't have as collateral? In the same way, when a child is sick, he looks up to his parents for help and care, but how will the child feel if his parents tell him that the forces battling against him are beyond their capability? It is a terrible thing to feel lonely or forsaken by relatives and loved ones.

Are you facing the worst of times with no one to defend you? Just as a body of water can become stagnant, a person's life can also enter into a state of stagnancy. Stagnancy ultimately leads to lack of productivity, barrenness, fruitlessness, indebtedness, poverty, failure, sorrow and disappointment. Have you ever noticed that sometimes trouble comes in batches? Life can go on smoothly for a while and then all of a sudden, *Bang!* – Things go wrong – not just one thing, but several things at once. And you wonder what hit you.

Somebody once had three flat tires in two weeks. He never gets flat tires. But suddenly he had three in two weeks. And two of them happened at the *same* time! A flat tire is really no big deal. Having two at the same time was a real annoyance, but nothing more. But what if those flat tires were real crises and three of them all of a sudden came all at once in life?

Hardships (from health crises and financial problems to grief and broken relationships) befall every person living in this fallen world – Christians and non-Christians alike. But as a Christian, you have access to the Holy Spirit, who will empower you to overcome each hardship you face when you ask God to help you. Those who have walked with God in time past have in one time or the other given up believing their situations were hopeless, that God had abandoned them. Some even went to the extent of taking their life like king Saul.

ARE CHRISTIANS EXEMPTED FROM CHALLENGES OF LIFE?

If you have money and all the wealth in the world would you be able to make all your problems go away? **John 16:33, Romans 5:3-5, Hebrew 2:18, 2 Corinthians 4:8-11, Psalm 55:22, James 1:2-4, Ecclesiastes 6:1-2.** The truth is, as long as we live in a fallen world, we will always have problems. Jesus was perfect and without sin. However, because He lived in a fallen world, Jesus Himself faced a number of challenges which He had to deal with. The great thing about Jesus is that He conquered and overcame EVERY problem that we can imagine.

HOW DO PEOPLE REACT TO CHALLENGES?

1. Fear
2. Desperate or being impatient;
3. Looking for alternatives
4. Run away
5. Depressed
6. Weep

Case Study 1: Sarah (*Genesis 16:1-6*): After several years of waiting for God's promise to be fulfilled, Sarah sat down one day, had a long thinking session, and came up with an alternative plan which she presented to Abraham, and He accepted it. She had been barren for several years and was tired of being in that state; hence, she decided to give Hagar, one of her slaves, to her husband hoping to get a child through her.

Lessons: When God is leading you in a certain direction, or if He has made a promise to you, any contrary opinion or alternative is borne out of impatience, doubt or unbelief. It is when people can no longer wait for God's plan that they come up with their alternatives. This can take a person out of God's original plan.

Case Study 2: ELIJAH

After His prayer for has been answered, Elijah was excited! His God had been victorious in the confrontation with the prophets of Baal. He had heard the people shouting, "*Jehovah is the Lord!*" He had finally seen the torrential deluge that would end the drought. At the close of **1 Kings 18**, Elijah was waiting at the gate of Jezreel while Ahab went into the palace. No doubt he believed that as the repercussions of all that had happened permeated the upper levels of government, the whole nation would return to the Lord. I can see the prophet trembling with excitement.

In chapter 19 of **1 Kings**, a different picture is painted of the man who just had such a great victory. *“Now Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword”*.

“Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah” (v. 2a). Elijah had probably been expecting a messenger—one who would say, “Come into the royal court; be an advisor; help us get back to the Lord.” However, that was not the message. *Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods [her gods] do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them [one of the dead prophets of Baal] by tomorrow about this time” (v. 2)*.

In other words, Jezebel’s message was telling Elijah, *“Within twenty-four hours, either I’m going to be dead or you’re going to be dead”!* Some wonder why Jezebel sent a messenger. If she was really serious, why didn’t she just send an assassin?

How did Elijah react? *“And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life” (v. 3a)*. Here was the man who had stood up to thousands, many with weapons, on Mount Carmel, and now he ran from this deranged queen. He *“ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah” (v. 3b)*. Beersheba was in the southernmost part of Judah—about one hundred miles from Jezreel. Elijah, who had had little or no sleep and probably nothing to eat, *ran* that one hundred miles. When he reached Beersheba, he *“left his servant there” (v. 3c)*. Whatever Elijah’s reasons, he leaves him behind.

Elijah did not stop at Beersheba, the city bordering the Sinai wilderness; he pressed on. *“But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree” (v. 4a)*. Some translations have *“a broom tree.”* *“And he requested for himself that he might die” (v. 4b)*. Is this not ironic? He was fleeing for his life so that he would not be killed by Jezebel, yet now he was saying, *“I wish I were dead.”* He continued, *“And said, ‘It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers [my predecessors, God’s spokesmen who came before me]” (v. 4c)*. Apparently, he thought he would be *“better than his fathers.”* He thought he could do what they had not done: turn Israel back to the true God. It had not happened, so he said, *“I’m turning in my prophet’s badge. I am ready to die.”*

Here we have a classic case of discouragement: a man who is down, a man who thinks that his situation is hopeless, a man who feels trapped by circumstances. Chances are, all of us have been there at least once in our lives. Just how did Elijah end up under the juniper tree?

First, he was guided by human reason, not divine revelation. He got off track regarding his relationship with the Lord. Up to this point, he had waited until “the

word of the Lord” came to him before he took the next step, but not this time. He began to rely on his own judgment rather than God’s will.

Second, as a result, Elijah could not think clearly; his thinking processes were short-circuited. If he had been thinking clearly, he would have reasoned that if he could defeat the thousands on Mount Carmel with God’s help, he surely did not have to be afraid of one woman. Instead, negative thoughts filled his mind; they began to whirl through his head.

Third, he gave in to fear. When we give in to fear, it mushrooms. When Elijah gave in to fear, he did not stop running for one hundred or so miles! *Fear is the sand in the machinery of life.* It saps your strength; it gives you work to do without proffering the right solution. It brings about anxiety and worry and ultimately leads to depression if not properly checked or managed.

Fourth, he was unprepared for the let-down that can come after victory. Every coach knows about that let-down. Victory makes us vulnerable. Even congregations of the Lord’s church can have a let-down after an attendance drive or other special event. Elijah was not ready for the let-down. Just imagine after the church had spent one month and a week to invite a brother to teach on evangelism and if the desired result is not achieved, can cause a let-down. It happens a lot of time.

Fifth, he cut himself off from his sources of strength. He cut himself off from God; he had not waited for the word of God. He cut himself off from men; for whatever reason, he had said good-bye to his servant. Elijah has been called “*the loneliest man alive.*” Depressed people are often lonely. The strange thing is that, even though they are lonely, invariably they have cut themselves off from others. “*I don’t want to see anyone. I don’t want to be around people.*” God made us so that we need others. “*It is not good for . . . man to be alone*” (**Genesis 2:18**). Even Jesus, in the Garden of Gethsemane, wanted His disciples to “*keep watch*” with Him (**Matthew 26:40**). Elijah had cut himself off from his support system.

Sixth, he let himself get overly tired. He apparently had not eaten for several days. He had run for miles. He was exhausted physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Elijah broke. At this point, it is usually difficult to face life’s challenges.

Seventh, he gave in to self-pity. “*I’ve tried so hard,*” he said, “*but I haven’t accomplished anything. I’m no good!*” Some think that attitude reflects humility, but it does not. It indicates the opposite. It is a subtle form of selfishness, thinking too much of self. Self-pity is a monster. It whispers lies in our ears, then begins to exaggerate, making everything seem worse than it is. Self-pity can even make an individual consider suicide. “*It is enough now, O Lord,*” Elijah said. “*Take my life.*”

Do you see where Elijah is? Discouragement and depression came to this great man of God. It can happen to anyone. Moses wished that he were dead (**Numbers 11:15**), as did Job (**Job 3:1ff.**) and Jonah (**Jonah 4:3**). Even Paul despaired of his life (**2 Corinthians 1:8**). It can happen to you.

CONCLUSION

- A. God eventually blessed Sarah at the appointed time
- B. God gave her a son that was an heir of promise
- C. In the case of Elijah, God took care of Elijah's physical needs: rest and food (vv. 5-8).
- D. God dealt tenderly with Elijah as He turned Elijah's attention from his problems to Himself (vv. 9-14).
 - 1. God first used questions to draw Elijah out of himself.
 - 2. Then He used sounds to draw Elijah out of the cave.
 - 3. God gave Elijah meaningful work to do (vv. 15-18).
 - 4. Note that God answered everything Elijah had said earlier.
 - a. Elijah: *"Israel has forsaken Your covenant";* God: *"Hazeal, king of Syria, will punish Israel."*
 - b. Elijah: *"Ahab and Jezebel have thrown down Your altar";* God: *"Jehu will destroy the dynasty of Ahab. There will be no worship of Baal after that."*
 - c. Elijah: *"They have slain Your prophets";* God: *"I will provide a replacement [Elisha]."*
 - d. Elijah: *"I only am left";* God: *"Seven thousand have not bowed the knee to Baal."*

God was telling Elijah that his life was not over; he had meaningful work to do. a. *"There may not be another showdown on Mount Carmel, but there will still be dramatic moments."* God also planned for him the important work of training younger men! God gave Elijah a friend and companion (vv. 19-21). Elijah got out of the dark cave and went to do God's bidding. He had *"jumped the tracks,"* but God put him back on track!