

Explore the Bible Series for March 4: Life's difficulties are faith's fuel

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Life's difficulties are faith's fuel

- 1 Peter 1:1-12

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When I plan a road trip, I never plan the emergencies. I plan the direction of my trip, the stops I will make, where I'll eat and what I'll do. But not planning for emergencies doesn't mean they won't happen. In fact, I go into every road trip expecting difficulties likely will occur.

Why is it, then, as we journey along the road of life, that we are so surprised when difficulties arise? The truth is, we will always face difficulties. Tough times are as sure as a new day.

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But when uncertain times come, it is easy to lose faith. We've all been there. We've all asked those difficult questions: If God loves me, why would he let this happen? Have I lost God's favor? If I learn the lesson he's trying to teach me, will my troubles go away?

God's love is constant

The first thing we need to remember is that troubles do not mean we've lost God's favor. God loves us. Period. The Bible tells us he loves us before we love him and there's nothing we can do to make him stop loving us.

John 10:28 says, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." God's favor is a given. He's given it, and if we don't have it, it's because we never accepted it.

The one certain thing is uncertain times

The second thing we need to remember is that Jesus never promised being a Christian would be easy—"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). We often associate "taking up our cross" with life's petty irritations, but nothing could be further from the truth.

Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* gave us a graphic picture of what taking up a cross looks like, and it's no petty discomfort. Jesus is calling us to a life of sacrifice and loss, of discomfort and unpleasantness. He warns us in Matthew 10 that Christianity is a life of strife: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (v. 34). He insists our faith will be uncomfortable: "All men will hate you because of me" (v. 22).

A different perspective on troubles

Of course, knowing the Christian life brings a certain amount of trouble doesn't help us to manage when troubles do rear their ugly heads. Part of our reaction stems from some expectations we have inadvertently fallen into.

For Christians, life in America is pretty easy. We've never had to choose between our life and our faith. The laws protect religious freedom, and we Christians often are the majority. What that means, of course, is our faith is rarely challenged.

Because practicing our faith is easy, we sometimes forget we are called to carry a cross. Not only that, we begin to believe being a Christian is supposed to solve the problems of life, to make life easier. Rather than realizing uncertain times are a natural part of our Christian journey through life, we are offended God would allow troubles to come our way.

Our lesson this week is a reminder that trials are a natural part of the Christian life. Not only does God not prevent them from coming our way, he allows them to happen because he has a plan.

God's plan

Remember that salvation is based on our faith in the redemptive work God has done through Jesus. Everything we have, everything we hope for, is founded on faith.

God's plan is for us to grow in our faith. He doesn't want us to forget we are on a journey whose destination is eternity. He wants us to remember salvation is the goal, and faith is the vehicle.

When uncertainties arise—and we can be certain they will—we must keep our focus. The question is not why bad things happen, but what are we going to do about them. Rather than feeling sorry for ourselves or trying to escape troubles, we can be grateful we have a God who cares so much about the strength of our faith. As Peter, we can honestly say, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:3).

Trials are a sign God is at work in our lives. They are proof our inheritance is sure, and we must remember they serve the purpose of making our faith stronger. We know this is a critical need since, as Peter says, faith is the agent that turns God's power into a shield until our salvation is revealed in eternity (v. 5).

Too often, we think we need shielding from life's difficulties. But we need to remember life's difficulties are fuel for a strong and vibrant faith, a faith capable of carrying us through all of life's ups and downs.

Life really is a journey, but in the journey of life, our goal should not be the destination. In the end, all that really matters is how we lived our life. It is the journey and not the destination that counts. God wants us to live each moment for him, grateful for that moment, whether it's good or bad. He wants us to settle into the journey and enjoy the ride.

Discussion questions

- What does Peter say is the value of a strong faith?
- When will we see the reward of facing difficult trials in life?
- Unbelievers often watch the way believers handle difficulties, looking for evidence their faith really helps. Think of an uncertain time in your life. What was your reaction? What kind of a testimony did your reaction give? How could you respond better next time uncertainties arise?

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