

Bible Studies for Life for August 30: Will you remain faithful?

August 18, 2009

A well-known saying is, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” Following Christ has its tough moments. God never promised following his will would be easy.

For example, you have been asked to lead out in a new Bible study course being offered at church on Wednesday nights. The study is over a subject you are very well versed in. The first night has an attendance of 20 but several weeks down the road only seven are attending faithfully.

One late Wednesday afternoon, a coworker sends an e-mail to you, “Hey, I have scored second row seats behind the Rangers’ dugout tonight, do you want to go?” The coworker knows you are a huge Rangers’ fan and the winner of the game tonight will take over first place in the American League West.

The first thought that runs through your mind is yes, and the second thought is, ‘I have to teach at church tonight.’ For the next few minutes you begin to rationalize—the course is almost over, attendance has dwindled, it would be easy to find someone in the class to be the leader and I deserve a break. What about the commitment made to teach the course from start to finish? Will you take the offer to attend the game, or will you teach?

All Christians face decisions that require sacrifice in order to remain faithful. This lesson is about following God’s will even when doing so involves paying a difficult price.

Reach out to believers for encouragement (Matthew 26:36-38)

Before Jesus was arrested, he “went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, ‘Sit here while I go over there and pray’” (v. 36). Gethsemane was probably a garden on the Mount of Olives. Jesus went there to pray, because he knew what was ahead for him on the cross.

Jesus did not go alone into the garden. While the other disciples stayed outside of the garden, Jesus took “Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled” (v. 37).

Why did Jesus take the three disciples—Peter, James and John—who were closest to him into the garden? Jesus was in great anguish over his approaching divine appointment to take on the sins of the world on the cross. His human nature was struggling, and he wanted the three disciples to give him human sympathy and support.

Jesus told the three, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me” (v. 38). The sorrow Jesus experienced was the same sorrow we feel when a very close loved one dies.

Our brothers and sisters in Christ can be a huge encouragement when following God’s will involves paying a difficult price. Don’t delay in asking a fellow believer to pray for you during your time of need. Also, remember to be an encourager to other believers who are seeking to follow God’s will by asking them, “May I pray for you?”

Find strength and commitment in prayer (Matthew 26:39-46)

“Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will’” (v. 39). Was Jesus asking the Father for a way out? No, he was not.

The prayer shows us the terrible agony Jesus was in. Some say his agony was worse than death. Here was the sinless Son of God about to be

separated from the Father so he could take on the sin of the world. Jesus took our sins upon himself to save us from hell.

This time of prayer by Jesus affirmed his commitment to obey the Father's will. Jesus never was in conflict with the Father's will.

What significance can we find in the fact that each time Jesus returned to the disciples, who accompanied him, he found them asleep?

"Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. 'Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?' he asked Peter. 'Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.'" (vv. 40-41).

Jesus knew the disciples were spiritually willing, but their human weaknesses could cause them to stumble. Satan's enticements to sin strike us when we are most vulnerable. Jesus is telling the disciples in order to overcome temptation they must keep "watch and pray." "Watch" means to be diligent as we seek God's help in turning away from temptation. Don't stop praying; increase your time with the Father. In prayer, all believers can find strength and commitment to obey the Lord.

Consider difficulties as opportunities to glorify God (1 Peter 4:12-14, 19)

When I was in seminary, I was the pastor of Mount Carmel Baptist Church of Tioga. The drive from our duplex in Arlington to the church field each Sunday was 90 minutes. One particular Sunday morning, I was not paying attention to the speed limit signs and was stopped for speeding just outside of Lewisville. To make matters worse I had forgotten my wallet which also had the proof of insurance card and my driver' license in it.

I explained to the officer my dilemma and told him I was on my way to church. His answer to me, "I stop many pastors speeding on this road, sign here please."

I took a defensive driving course, which allowed the speeding infraction to be removed from my driving record. The fine for no insurance was dropped because I could prove I had insurance at the time I was stopped.

As I attended defensive driving classes. I asked the Lord to somehow turn this into an opportunity to bring glory to his name. The defensive driving instructor opened the class by allowing each one of us to share the story of why we were there.

The course was held at a mall, at the lunch break I went to the food court. As I was eating my meal, a high school junior asked if she could join me. She started off the conversation by asking if I really was a pastor. She needed someone to talk to about some issues in her life. I was able to share the gospel with her, and she assured me she was a believer.

I was glad the Lord used me to encourage this high school student. Have you ever considered turning your difficulties into opportunities to glorify God?

Christians will go through trials and sufferings. Peter writes, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you" (v. 12). Believers are to rejoice when they suffer for the cause of Christ.

There is a reward for those who suffer because they are obedient to Christ. "If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rest on you" (v. 14). When we suffer because of our loyalty to Christ, he will be with us during the ordeal. This is also an opportunity to give special glory to God (v. 16).

During times of trials, we are to continue doing what is right. "So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good" (v. 19).

God has never said following his will would be an easy stroll through the park of life. When we are obedient to the Lord, we are going against the world. The world will challenge us not to be obedient. God has provided the resources to help us stay the course of faith and obedience.