

More Than Talk

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WHEN LIFE IS AT ITS TOUGHEST

Page 1 A Song In The Night

"And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them." Acts 16:25

There will be many "midnights" in every disciple's life - dark times when we must walk by faith and not by sight. The greatest tests come when God calls us to a task and we obey willingly - only to have the door seemingly closed in our face and circumstances turn negative. It happened to Paul and Silas. They obeyed God's vision to go to Macedonia and brought Lydia to the Lord. But shortly thereafter they were hurled into prison, badly beaten and put in chains. Now it was midnight, and they had a choice - pray or pout - sing praises or seek pity. Knowing that the Lord Jesus had a plan for their lives and that He had many ways to bring that plan to pass, they chose to pray and praise. This resulted in more than their spirits being lifted - so was the jailhouse, as God shook things up and saved more people, including the jailer. It turned out that Paul's and Silas' "midnight" was just God's opportunity to shine His light all the brighter.

So it shall be with you. You can prepare for those "midnights" that surely come to us all in the form of physical, spiritual, mental or material crises. The key is to know you are, to the best of God's light given you, seeking only God's will in your life. Otherwise, you will figure you're just being punished for your sins and probably be confessing those sins rather than praising the Lord and preparing for His surprises ahead.

When you awake, meet with God and commit each moment and step to the Holy Spirit. Trust Him to use your life to touch others. Then know that He will be in personal charge of your tough times as well as the good times. So remember that the next "midnight" you encounter, don't pout in pity but pray and praise. It's always darkest before the dawn.

My prayer: "Thank You, Father, for the example of Paul and Silas on how to trust and praise You in the darkest moments. May that same work of grace be done in me."

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Page 2 No Wonder They're Called "Growing Pains"

"And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience." Romans 5:3

Be honest. Where have you grown more in your walk with Jesus - when things couldn't be better, or when they couldn't be worse? When you thought you had friends all around you - or when you found yourself alone? When you felt as healthy as an angel, or when you were sick as a dog? If we're honest, it's usually the tough times when we know that "No one ever cared for me like Jesus."

We hear very few messages about tribulation. Suffering. Affliction. Yet the Scriptures are full of examples. So are our lives. If we don't see tribulation from God's side - as a means to spiritual growth - we will see it from the human side - and figure that either God is unfaithful or that we are hopeless. But just look at this beautiful chain of life found in Romans 5:1-11. Receiving Jesus by faith brings peace. This opens up access to God Himself and fills us with hope. Next the Lord allows our faith to be tested - tribulations come - and that works patience. Patience brings experience, which fosters hope and leads us deeper into the love of God, the fullness of the Spirit and the joy of God that transcends circumstances.

Don't despair when troubles and suffering come. Jesus is right there in the midst of them. Just quietly love and praise the Lord "knowing that pressure and affliction and hardship produce patient and unswerving endurance." (v 3 Amplified) An Army officer fighting in battle was asked by a reporter, "But isn't the weather unfavorable?" His answer was, "Weather in war is always favorable, providing you know how to use it." Get the point? You are God's soldier, and while here on earth, you are in a war. So let everything - especially tribulations - make you more fit for the battle rather than make you want to surrender.

My prayer: "Lord, I know that tribulations will come to my life just as surely as air comes to my lungs. Please help me to endure every test by giving You glory in the midst of the battle and not just when it is over.

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Page 3 The Course That Must Be Passed

*"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers (various) temptations."
James 1:2*

Here we go again - touching on a subject we will be well acquainted with throughout life - temptation! But doesn't it seem incredible that you are to be full of joy and not sadness "whenever you are enveloped in or encounter trials of any sort, or fall into various temptations"? (v 2 Amplified) Why be joyful when your faith is being tested with fire? The following verse gives the answer: "Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience" ("endurance and steadfastness" Amplified); and verse four tells what our Father is after - you and I being "perfectly and fully developed (with no defects), lacking in nothing."

Just look at the realities and possibilities that come to you during tests, trials and temptations: 1) you obviously belong to God, or Satan wouldn't be working so hard to make you stumble and sin; 2) successfully resisting temptation or enduring an unavoidable trial is like lifting weights - you grow stronger rather than weaker; 3) temptations and tests force you to flee to Jesus or else face certain defeat in mere human strength; 4) it is only those sons and daughters who have been tempted, tried and tested, and yet have remained loyal to Jesus, whom the Father can fully use to strengthen others on the trail.

Don't be surprised or shocked when you find yourself surrounded by tests and temptations. Just walk straight toward Jesus every time. How? By opening your Bible and asking God to give you the strength of His promises and the wisdom to know how best to handle what comes your way. Life is a school, the Holy Spirit is your teacher, and trials and temptations serve as exams. With Christ's power you can pass the course with flying colors.

My prayer: "Father, I know that my life is like a ship in the waters. Help me to so seek and trust You that though storms rage all around on the outside, no waters of sin and compromise will be able to enter the ship on the inside."

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Page 4 How God Turns Pain To Gain

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28

Don't ever misread the above promise from God. It doesn't say that "all things **are** good" - but that "all things **work together** for good" to those who love the Lord and fit in with His purposes. And note those two conditions once more if you and I are really going to be able to fully believe that God will use the positive and negative, good and bad, triumph and tragedy that happen to us and turn it all into eternal good. 1) We must love Him. 2) We must understand that His call on our lives is not to a pain-free earthly existence but to our being molded into the very image of His Son, our Lord Jesus.

Commit your whole life to God in a fresh dedication. Then, one day at a time, acknowledge Jesus as Lord of all and trust your life to Him. You can be certain that He will allow nothing to happen that He will not turn into true spiritual riches no matter how it looks in the present.

I read a story by Marion Bond West that helps me to trust the Lord in spite of changing circumstances. Marion was by a shopping center and noticed all the whining and screaming children and their grim-faced mothers trying to control them. Then a young mother in a wheel chair exited the store with a little boy in her lap. West said, "She was the happiest-looking mother I'd ever seen. Her son was wondrously contented. Once out of the store, she began doing wheelchair spins - round and round - as the little boy laughed...I could almost hear the child think, 'Look at my mama. Isn't she something!'...I uttered a silent prayer: Father, teach me again that joy never depends on circumstances." What are the most difficult problems and pains that confront you right now? Believe that your Father is working them all out for your good. Because He is!

My prayer: "Help me get it, Lord - that as I turn to You in love, You turn all things that happen to me for my good."

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Page 5 We're Almost Home

"That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." I Peter 1:7

When I think of faith tried with fire, I see Abe Schneider's face before me. He was a Jew who met Jesus the Jew and was forever changed. Abe's wife filed for divorce, his children were taken from him, and even his own brothers drove from the East Coast to California in order to beat up their "traitor brother" and force him to deny the Messiah. His mother entered a church he was attending and began slapping his face while screaming, "You don't belong here!" Other believers who watched said Abe's face glowed like that of an angel. The toughest moment came when he saw his children look back at him as they were led away for the last time.

Could you or I have endured such a test? Amazingly, Abe counted it a privilege. He had us all memorize Isaiah chapter 53 so we would forever have to review the agony of Jesus' sufferings on our behalf. Many years passed and Abe's godliness, guilelessness and goodness marked him as a rare saint. His wife died of cancer but not before Abe led her to Jesus. He never remarried because the Lord was his all in all. I witnessed a special sight - his mother coming to meetings where she beamed with pride in her son. She, too, had been won through love and died trusting the Savior. Finally, Abe went home too, with his final act being to lead his nurses to the Lord. The trial of his faith had been passed.

Now it's our turn, dear friend. But no matter what you may have to go through, saturate yourself on the following unchanging truths that I shall share using the Amplified Bible: 1) you have "been born again to an ever living hope..." (v 3); 2) you have "an inheritance which is beyond the reach of change and decay...reserved in heaven for you" (v 4); 3) you are "being guarded (garrisoned) by God's power...(v 5); 4) it is only "for a little while you may be distressed by trials and temptations" (v 6); 5) all tests you will ever face are "So that the genuineness of your faith may be tested...This proving of your faith is intended to redound to your praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ...is revealed." (v7)

What does all this tell you and me, dear saint? All that we endure will be golden when we see Jesus. Trust on! Toil on! We're nearly home.

My prayer: "Thank You Father, for the gift of faith that causes me to believe. Now give me grace to endure what You deem necessary to purify my faith through the fires of testing."