

Life is Tough, But God is Good

By: Pastor David Holt

Everywhere I go I hear about people that are going through tough times. Everyday our televisions and newspapers are filled with stories of personal hardships. Obituaries often include infants as well as teenagers. As I write this in early 2005, the “tsunami” tragedy just took over 160,000 lives in Asia, and many more may die of disease. Life is truly tough.

Life’s difficulties can include such things as health problems, financial loss, marital conflict, divorce, rebellious children, car accidents, natural disasters, birth defects, and the list goes on and on. Perhaps you are reading this because you are going through something very difficult. My prayer is that this tract will not only help you to get through the difficulty, but will also aid you in growing closer to God through it. **I am convinced that God desires for every one of life’s hardships to draw us closer to Him.** Life is tough, but God is good!

If you are a follower of Jesus, the Bible says that you are not exempt from life’s hardships. In fact, God’s Word promises that, “A righteous man may have many troubles ...” (Ps. 34:19). In addition to the normal difficulties of life mentioned above, a follower of Jesus also faces:

- Spiritual warfare (“the enemy prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour” - 1 Peter 5:8),
- The weakness of our flesh (“I do the things I don’t want to do and don’t do the things I want to do ... who will set me free?” - Romans 7:19),
- The testing of our faith (“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds” - James 1:3),
- The challenges of living for Jesus in an increasingly ungodly culture (“In this world you will have tribulation” – John 16:33),
- The natural drift toward lukewarmness that we all go through (“prone to wander, Lord I feel it; prone to leave the God I love” – a verse from a famous hymn), and
- The challenge of living for One whom we cannot see. Sometimes it would be nice to have Jesus with skin, wouldn’t it?

We should take comfort in the fact that even the Apostle Paul, considered by many to have been the greatest Christian that ever lived, said; “We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we **despaired even of life**” (2 Corinthians 1:8, emphasis mine). Here is Paul saying he despaired of life. He almost sounds suicidal, doesn’t he? Life is tough.

King David said, “How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?” (Psalms 13:1-2). This is the same David who wrote most of the Psalms and was called a “man after God’s own heart” (Acts 13:22).

Furthermore, the prophet Jeremiah became so discouraged that he said, “Cursed be the day I was born! May the day my mother bore me not be blessed” (Jeremiah 20:14). Life is tough, even for the most Godly.

Since life is very tough at times, what can we do to insure that we become **better** and not **bitter** through the difficulty? I have twelve suggestions for you to consider. Do not try to put all of these into practice at one time. I would suggest that as you read this, you prayerfully ask God to show you the ones that are most applicable for you at this time. However, the first suggestion is one that we **all** should do:

1. Cry out to God in prayer. This is the first and most important thing to do. God hurts with you. God wants you to turn to Him. God desires to answer prayer because He loves for you to call upon Him. “Call unto Me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things which you do not know” (Jeremiah 33:3). The Bible is filled with references to “crying out” and God answering. Meditate on these examples and be encouraged to “cry out” to God: “The righteous **cry out**, and the LORD hears them; He delivers them from all their troubles” (Psalms 34:17; emphasis mine). “Evening, morning and noon I **cry out** in distress, and He hears my voice” (Psalms 55:17; emphasis mine). “For He will deliver the needy who **cry out**,

the afflicted who have no one to help” (Psalms 72:12; emphasis mine). Just as a loving parent responds to the cry of his children, so does our loving, heavenly Father respond to the cry of His children. “Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your **Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him**” (Matthew 7:9-11; emphasis mine)? Life is tough, but God is able and willing to respond to the sincere cry of His people. Therefore, be sure that you are in fact one of His children through faith in Jesus Christ. If you have never received Christ, do so now, so that you are sure that you are a child of God (see John 1:12).

As you cry out to God, be sure to allow Him to search your heart, so that if your problems are in any way due to your own sin, you get those sins out of the way. This is why the next most important thing to do is:

2. Confess and repent of all sin. Many of our problems are a direct result of our own sin. A friend of mine once said, “Most of my problems are because of my own wrongdoing.” Now, this is not **always** the case, but let’s be sure we deal with anything that might be contributing to our problems. For example, if we are in financial difficulty due to violating God’s principles of money management, then we need to confess this and repent (i.e. turn from) of it. Sometimes our hardships are God’s way of disciplining us for our sin. “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves” (Hebrews 12:5-6a). I have a friend who had an affair, and he experienced the discipline of the Lord for this sin. His hardship was because of his adultery, and it was only when he repented that he began to experience the blessings of God again. A great prayer to pray at this time is Psalms 139:23, “Search me O God and know my heart and see if there be any wicked way in me.” As the Lord reveals to you your sin, be sure to confess and repent of it so as to get it out of the way. Claim 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness.” In going through this soul-searching and cleansing process, we insure that we are clearing the slate, and that nothing stands between God and us that could bring hardship to us.

“He who hides his sin will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes it shall find mercy” (Proverbs 28:13). Once you have confessed and repented of all sin, then you are in the best position to resist Satan and any demonic forces that might be coming against you. This is why you need to:

3. Be keenly aware of spiritual warfare. Your hardships may **not** be simply the result of natural occurrences. The Bible is very clear that “our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12). When a person is experiencing marital conflict, they will feel like their spouse is the enemy. When people have trouble at work, they may view their boss as the enemy. But God’s Word is clear that the ultimate enemy is Satan. The Apostle Paul said, “We are not ignorant of his (Satan’s) devices” (2 Corinthians 2:11). Yet, many Christians are ignorant of Satan’s schemes. “Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Some of life’s difficulties can be the direct attack of demonic forces upon your life. The more serious you are about following Jesus, the more you can expect demonic attack. Be careful not to blame **all** of life’s difficulties on Satan, but seek to be very discerning so as to know when the difficulty is Satan’s doing. I think it is wise to cover the spiritual warfare base whenever we are going through a tough time. **I have found that it is better to cover the spiritual warfare base and not need to, than to need to and not cover it.** The way to cover the spiritual warfare base is to follow the pattern given to us in James 4:7, “Submit to God, resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.” You can pray a simple prayer like this: “Lord, I submit my entire life to You. Take control of my life. In the Name of Jesus and based on His victory at the cross, I bind and rebuke all demonic forces that are attacking me. I command them to be gone, and to go where Jesus sends them.” Though we are in a battle, we can be confident that Jesus has already won the victory, and we can enforce that victory over our lives (see Colossians 2:13-15). “Greater is He (God) who is in us than he (Satan) who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). Now, in order to keep Satan and his forces away from you, you need to:

4. Be careful not to sin. When we are down and going through hardship, our defenses are weak and we are more prone to sin. Be extra careful during such times. Be on your guard. Temptations may increase during a tough time, but remember “no temptation has overtaken you, except that which is common to man. And, God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear, but with the temptation will provide a way of escape, so that you may be able to endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). Make a commitment to God and a close friend that you will **not** do something that you will later regret. God blesses obedience, especially when you don’t feel like it. Don’t let Satan deceive you into believing that sin will satisfy you or meet your ultimate needs.

Now, by this time in tract, you might be realizing that getting through this difficulty is not easy and requires a real effort on your part. You might be saying, “I don’t know if I can do this alone.” Well, guess what? **You and I cannot make it alone.** We need the help of others, and that is why God gave us the body of Christ. Therefore, I encourage you to:

5. Get support from others. “Two are better than one ... if one falls down, his friend can help him up.” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10). “Bear one another’s burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:1). “Pray for one another that you may be healed” (James 5:16). During hard times we need the prayers, love, support, and counsel of Godly people. God did not make us to make it alone. God made us to need others. If we will humble ourselves and ask for the help and support of others, we will benefit from their assistance. Even Jesus had His “Garden Friends” that He poured out His heart to when He was in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (see Matthew 26:38). Are you developing Garden Friends? Don’t be too prideful to admit that you are struggling and need the help of others. I have found that friends feel honored to be included in my struggle. They want to help. Another way to get help during hard times is to:

6. Ask God to empower you with His Holy Spirit. One of the most powerful truths I have discovered in God’s Word is that God wants me to feel weak and inadequate so that I will depend on the power of the Holy Spirit each and every day (see my tract “Embracing Your Weakness”). This may

be one of the most important lessons to learn through your hardship. The Apostle Paul was going through a particularly difficult time in his life. It was so hard that he pleaded with God to take away his “thorn in the flesh” (see 2 Corinthians 12) I think his thorn in the flesh involved some kind of physical pain, because “thorn” implies pain and “flesh” often refers to the human body. Paul describes his difficulty by saying, “To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness’ For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:7-11). Notice, rather than remove Satan, and rather than remove the difficult situation, God’s solution was rather that Paul depend on His power and thus experience God in the midst of the hardship. Through our hardships, we too can learn that God’s power is greater than our fleshly strength. God wants us to live each and every day in the power of His Holy Spirit. Therefore, ask God right now to fill you with His Holy Spirit! Allow this hardship and any others that come to show you that when you are weak, His Spirit in you can be very strong. God loves to do in and through us what we cannot do on our own. In order for this to occur, we must humbly admit our need and ask God to fill us with His Holy Spirit.

7. Give thanks for everything you can think of.

*“God whispers to us in our pleasures,
speaks to us in our conscience, but
shouts in our pains: it is His
megaphone to rouse a dead world.”*
C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain

When we are going through tough times, it is natural to focus on the negative and thus forget about all the things we have to be thankful for. God’s Word says, “In **all** things give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:18; emphasis mine). When we are in the valley, we need to walk up the hill of gratitude and make a list of all the things we have to be thankful for, even the little things like health, food, shelter, and family.

Particularly give thanks for the many blessings we have in Christ: salvation, forgiveness of sins, eternal life, the indwelling Holy Spirit, your church, the Bible, etc. (see my tract “The Blessings of Salvation”). It is amazing what giving thanks will do for your attitude. I remember a particularly hard time in my life several years ago. My precious wife suggested that I make a list of all the things I had to be thankful for. I hate to admit that my initial response was something like, “I don’t want to do that. Who are you to tell me what to do? I am a pastor. I am the one who gives out advice.” Of course I didn’t actually say this, but I was sure thinking it in my mind. However, I did take her advice and made the list. And sure enough, I found my attitude heading north! Chuck Swindoll once said that life is 10% what happens to us, and 90% how we respond to what happens to us. Perhaps right now you need to take out a sheet of paper and list all the things you can give thanks for. It will probably end up much longer than you ever imagined. Life is tough, but God is good. “Every good and perfect gift comes from above” (James 1:17).

8. Spend time with God. Don’t neglect your time in the Word and prayer. “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path ... Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Thee” (Psalms 119:105,11). “He who meditates on the Word day and night will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water ... which yields its fruit in its season” (Psalms 1). Spending time with God is where we are strengthened, renewed and comforted. King David, who wrote most of the Psalms, is often struggling with God when he writes these Psalms. However, even in his struggles we see him spending time with God and pouring out his heart in desperate search for God. I am impressed that in so many Psalms, even when David is struggling, he still ends the Psalm by praising God. Speaking of the Psalms, this is a great part of God’s Word to read when you are going through difficulty. You will find great encouragement by the many emotions expressed in the Psalms. In reading the Psalms you will realize that you are not alone in your pain.

9. Remain in the difficulty. This piece of advice may be the hardest for you to receive. What do I mean by “remain in the difficulty?” I simply mean

that you not give up or try to squirm out of the hardship, but rather that you allow the hardship to have its full effect on your life. For example, if a marital conflict is your challenge right now, getting out would mean getting a divorce instead of remaining in the hardship in order to be fully developed. Hang in there until God’s will is perfectly accomplished through the difficulty. In our flesh, we want **out** as quickly as possible, but God wants to come **into** our hardship. We want circumstantial change leading to **happiness**, but God wants character development leading to **holiness**. And often character is developed most through hardship. If we try to squirm out of the difficulty, we may short-circuit what God wants to accomplish in us. James 1 in the Living Bible says, “Dear brothers, is your life full of difficulties and temptations? Then be happy, for when the way is rough, your patience has a chance to grow. So let it grow, and **don't try to squirm out of your problems**. For when your patience is finally in full bloom, then you will be ready for anything, strong in character, full and complete” (James 1:3-5; emphasis mine). God uses difficulties to deepen our character and broaden our influence for Him. Trials should lead us to seek God more fervently. Furthermore, being developed through the hardship can increase our compassion for and effectiveness in ministering to others. “God comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort others with the same comfort we ourselves have been comforted with by God” (2 Corinthians 1:4). The best people to help someone going through difficulty is someone who has been through something similar and come out on the other end. I don’t like hardships any more than you do, but I have seen that through tough times, great good can and does come **if** I hold fast to God. Therefore, be willing to remain in it until God accomplishes what He wants to. He will bring you out in **His** perfect timing.

10. Read about others who have suffered well When we learn about other Godly persons who have suffered but have come forth better instead of bitter, this can be a great source of motivation for us to keep going. Church history is filled with examples of men and women of God who have been mightily used by God because of their suffering and hardships. One biblical example is Joseph (Genesis 37-50). Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers,

and unjustly put into prison, and forgotten while in prison. Yet, through it all we learn “what man meant for evil God intended for good, for the saving of many lives” (Genesis 50:20). This is one of the most powerful biblical examples of God’s sovereignty. In the midst of all of Joseph’s hardships, God was in control. God not only used Joseph’s hardships to draw him closer to God, but He also used these hardships to benefit others. Another example that is more contemporary is that of Joni Erickson Tada. She was paralyzed from the neck down in a diving accident at the age of sixteen. She remains in a wheelchair today. Through this very difficult trial, she has been used of God to reach thousands with a message of encouragement and hope. Daily she is heard on Christian radio stations sharing deep truths that come from her life experience. She would be the first to say that she would not have chosen this difficulty, but is now very thankful for what God has done in and through her because of it. She learned to be content in her circumstances (see Philippians 4:12). Brother Yun, a Christian who has been through incredible torture and persecution in China, says, “Don’t pray for the persecution to stop! We shouldn’t pray for a lighter load to carry, but a stronger back to endure! Then the world will see that God is with us, empowering us to live in a way that reflects His love and power” (The Heavenly Man, p. 287).

11. Never forget that God is good and worthy of our trust. No matter what happens in life, God is still sovereign and good. “The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all” (Psalms 103:19; NASB). I have taught my children to remember the word **sovereign** as “God **so very reigns**.” In other words, no matter what happens, God is still in control. This does not mean He directly causes all things to happen, but it does mean that nothing escapes His notice, and He can be trusted in all things. He promises to “work all things together for the good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). It is so important to have a proper understanding of God’s true character. When we are going through the difficulty, expect Satan to feed you lies like, “This happened because God doesn’t love you. He doesn’t care. If God were a loving God, this would not have happened.” It is so important that we have a proper understanding of the nature and character of God so as to counter

these lies with the truth of God’s Word. Be sure to go back to God’s Word and the many promises in His Word that He is good and worthy of our trust. Knowing God’s attributes is the foundation for a stable life (see my tract “The Balanced Christian Life”). No matter how we feel or what we go through, He is worthy of our complete trust. He wants to help us in our times of need. “Come to Me all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all” (Psalms 34:18-19). Life is indeed hard, but God is indeed good! Hold fast to Him. Never stop trusting Him. He loves you with an everlasting love. Finally,

12. Maintain an eternal perspective. “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). When we are in a difficult time it is easy to simply focus on the present circumstance. However, God wants us to lift our eyes above the present and look to the eternal. An eternal perspective involves looking at the eternal things that can be accomplished through the suffering. This would include our character development as well as the influence our life can have on others. In addition, an eternal perspective involves looking to the eternal reward that is promised to those who persevere through hardship. “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12). There is nothing wrong with seeking to gain all the eternal crowns we can, as long as we do so with the proper motives, and that is the glory of God. Our time on earth is but a vapor compared to life forever with God. Even if we have to go through great hardship while on earth, one second with God in heaven will cause all of our earthly pains to fade into a distant memory. Focus on the eternal and be encouraged that one day all will be made right and glorious. One day there will be no suffering or crying or pain or hardship. Read these next verses very carefully and allow God’s Holy Spirit to encourage you right now:

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’”

Revelation 21:1-4

I hope to see you on the other end! If this tract has been helpful, or if I can help in any other way, please feel free to email me at davidholt@firstfree.org. May God bless you and keep you strong in Him.

“It is not that affliction comes from God; it is rather that He uses it to help us grow in faith; to make us sensitive to the pain of others; to teach us to trust in Him alone. We learn how to be patient and comfort our fellow men as God comforts us. We discover the true hope of our own possibilities.”

Edith Schaeffer in [Affliction](#)

Suggested Reading: [Affliction](#) by Edith Schaeffer; [When God Doesn't Make Sense](#) by James Dobson; [Where Is God When It Hurts](#) by Philip Yancey. [Knowing God](#) by J.I. Packer. [The Power of Crying Out](#) by Bill Gothard; [The Problem of Pain](#) by C.S. Lewis; [The Heavenly Man – The Remarkable True Story of Chinese Christian Brother Yun](#) with Paul Hattaway.

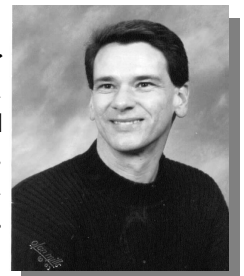
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