

How To Handle Trials

By Dr. Gary M. Gulan, ©1983 (Rev. 86,89,92,95,05)

Introduction: While facing or experiencing trials, it is easy for us to think "No one cares" or "What am I going to do now?" God's Word relates to our everyday needs. "What help does God's Word offer the Christian who is facing a trial?" I would like to offer you 15 helpful hints to handling a trial. These are easy to list on paper, but difficult to place into one's life. These are not listed in any order of procedure or importance. These are not the final answer to handling trials, but merely a starting place.

1. PRAY AND ASK GOD FOR WISDOM, (Ja. 1:5; 2 Cor. 12:8; Phil. 4:6).

Prayer is the essential quality of the Christian's special position in Christ, (Heb. 4:16; Rom. 5:2). The early Christians devoted themselves to prayer, (Acts 2:42). Christians are commanded to be "constant" in prayer, (Rom. 12:12), and "steadfast" in prayer, (Col. 4:2). Especially when under attack or going through a trial, prayer is a part of the Christian's armor, (Eph. 6:18). Christians are to be prayerful instead of being anxious or having anxiety, (Phil 2:20). We also can receive great help from others who pray with and for us while in trials, (2 Cor. 1:11).

'Prayer' (Greek "proseuche") denotes the petitioner's attitude of worship. 'Petition' (Greek 'deesei') denotes prayers as expressions of need. 'Thanksgiving' (Greek 'eucharistias') should accompany all Christians praying, as the supplicant acknowledges that whatever God sends it is for his good. "Requests' (Greek 'aitemata') refers to the things asked for."²

2. FIND GOD'S WAY THROUGH THE CIRCUMSTANCES, (1 Cor. 10:13).

The Apostle Paul writes, God will provide a "way of escape" (Greek 'ekbasin') from trials. This word was used of sailors lightening their ship in the midst of a storm by throwing overboard weighty cargo, (Acts 27:18,38). Christians can endure a trial rather than being destroyed by the storm of a trial. This reveals that God will be right there with us knowing what is needed within the trial. The "way" through a trial is God's way. The "escape" God makes for the Christian many times is how to make it through a trial.

3. CAST ALL YOUR CARE UPON GOD, (1 Pt. 5:7).

The apostle Peter states, "cast your care upon Him because He cares for you." The word "casting" (Greek 'epiripto') means "throwing something on something else, or throwing something on someone else." In life, Christians need to play a sort of "spiritual baseball" with God. We need to throw the ball of our "cares" to him and leave it with him. The danger is we want God to throw them back to us or we take the ball back from God after we throw it to Him. David stated the same words, "Cast your burden upon the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken," (Ps. 55:22).

4. COMMIT THE KEEPING OF YOUR SOUL TO GOD, (1 Pt. 4:19).

Peter states, "Those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him..." (1 Pt. 4:19). Peter uses the word "commit" or "entrust" (Greek 'paratithemi') which is a banker's term referring "to a deposit for safe keeping." Jesus used the word for "commit" in His seventh word from the cross, when He said, "Into your hands I commit My spirit," (Luke 23:46). The Christian must "give" or "commit" his life to God and the outcome that God wants. Those who suffer

according to the will of God receive encouragement knowing God's will is going to be accomplished through the trial.

5. LOOK FOR GOD'S SOURCES OF COMFORT, (2 Cor. 1:3-7).

Paul mentions "troubles" (Greek "thlipsei") meaning, "pressures or distresses" which all Christians will experience. Within these circumstances, we need to look for God's "comfort" which He brings to us while we are in trials. Paul highlights three titles for God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion, and the God of all comfort. God is the God of "all" kinds of comfort. God has limitless compassion and never-failing comfort for the Christian facing trials.

6. APPLY GOD'S GRACE AND POWER TO THE CIRCUMSTANCES, (2 Cor. 12:9).

Christians cannot handle trials on their own. Human ability and human strength, cannot bring to our life the help that is needed. We need supernatural help and strength. Divine power is best displayed within the difficulty of a trial, rather than removing the trial. God gives grace within trials to help our human weakness. The grace of God, in the form of human enablement and strength, is more than is "sufficient" (Greek "arkei") to meet any trial that is inflicted upon us.

7. CALL ON GOD FOR ASSISTANCE, (Heb. 2:18).

Christ's "aid" (Greek "boetheo") is "to run to the side of those who cry for help." It is giving needed aid or assistance for one's safety and relief. Jesus suffered and knows what it is like to be human and face earthly trials. Jesus can help others to endure trials.

8. RELY ON CHRIST'S PRESENCE WITHIN THE CIRCUMSTANCES, (Heb. 4:15).

The writer of Hebrews states, "Christ is able to "sympathize" (Greek "sympathesai") meaning "to feel or suffer along with." God is above His creation (God's transcendence), however, God enters into a personal relationship with His creation and is active in creation, (God's immanence). Often times we think of "sympathy" as someone belittling another. People associate "sympathy" with responses like, "Oh there, there, it will be all right" or "Oh my you poor dear!" Christ's "sympathy" (Greek "sympatheo") for those who suffer a trial, is "to have Christ there suffering along with us and His special compassion." It is being there right with you in your suffering, suffering right along with you, and giving you compassion within the suffering.

9. GO AHEAD AND CRY, (Jn. 11:35; Ps. 6:6; 39:12; 42:3; 56:8; 80:5,5; 116:8; 126:5).

"Tears" are the safety valves of the heart. David "cried" when he had more than he could bear in his trials. God's Word says Jesus "wept" which literally translated states, "Jesus burst into tears," when he thought about Lazarus, His friend, who had died, (Jn.11:35). Tears and crying are not wrong within our human suffering. They show God how much we really hurt.

10. FIND SOME ONE TO SHARE YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES WITH, (Rom. 12:15; 1 Cor. 12:26).

It is important to find someone who will help you to "release" and "unburden" your soul. Paul says weep with those who weep and laugh with those who laugh. Christians should be able to empathize with others. Paul commanded Christians, to rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Christians must enter into the lives of fellow Christians and seek to share in their lives. Christians may have less need for fellowship in times of joy than they would in

times of grief. The problem Christians face is that if loneliness is added to sorrow, then the trial maybe compounded more than the individual could handle.

11. COUNT THE THINGS YOU LOSE AS A SACRIFICE, (Phil. 3:7-11).

In the prior verses, Paul gives an autobiographical sketch of his life. With all that he accomplished and all that he received in life, he had great confidence and was very successful. Paul had it made in life. He then had a crisis, (Acts 9:3-9). He lost his eye sight. We know he had a personal encounter of an "evangelistic kind" which lead to his conversion. However, for three days he experienced a great trial of losing his sight. As Paul looks back on this experience, he remembered a great lesson. The things he considered important and a great gain, now he was ready to give up, making the knowledge of Christ the most important thing in his life. Paul says "consider" means 'to think through or reflect on.' After reflection he considered them loss.

12. SHIFT YOUR PERSPECTIVE FROM THE EXTERNAL AND TEMPORAL TO THE INTERNAL AND ETERNAL, (2 Cor. 1:9; 4:17-18; Heb. 10:32-34).

When trials come your way, it is easy to think about the "losses" such as, our job, our livelihood, our health, our mate, our children, our friends, our material possessions, our wealth, our future. Christians must consider all these things as expendable for the present spiritual lesson or the future spiritual reward.

The writer of Hebrews states that his readers had taken the spoiling of their goods joyfully. They had fixed their perspective so firmly on heavenly possessions that they could take the loss of earthly goods with exhilaration.

13. SEEK COMFORT FROM OTHER CHRISTIANS, 2 Cor. 1:3-7

Other Christians can give great words and works of comfort, especially ones who have gone through similar experiences. Comfort received from God enables Christians to comfort others. God channels His comfort through other Christians. Personal suffering is not merely beneficial to us when we experience it, but is helps us minister to others when they face trials. Experiencing God's "comfort" in the midst of trials equips Christians to communicate God's comfort and sympathy to others.

14. HANG ON, YOUR REWARD IS ON ITS WAY, (Heb. 10:35)

As Christians pass the test of a trial or a temptation there is a reward involved. Some rewards are found in the character building results and some rewards will be realized in the distant future in glory. The writer of Hebrews encourages his readers, not to lose confidence and not to give up. Their reward is very close. A trial is not the time to throw away one's "confidence" (Greek 'parresia' Heb. 3:6; 4:16; 10:29). Christians need to "persevere" within trials.

15. CONSIDER YOUR TRIAL AS A CONTEST, (Heb. 10:32-33)

For the Christian, a trial is something like a "spiritual contest." It was with Job. It was a spiritual chess game between Satan and God. The only difference between an athletic event and the Christian's trial is that the Christian has tools that give the victory and the victory is already available.

The writer of Hebrews uses the word "struggle" (Greek "athlesis") which is used of "an athletic competition." This word is where we get our English word "athletics." Trials, for the Christian, is like being in an athletic contest. We can win and we must be prepared to face the strenuous nature of a trial.

Conclusion: Christians are "Christ-ins" or ones who have Christ living within. God is living in the Christian. God is definitely able to help the Christian in any trial, (Eph. 3:20; 2 Tim. 1:12; Phil 3:21; 4:19). God will not allow us to be put in a place where we are not "able" to handle it, (1 Cor. 10:13).