

610 What Can I Do Now?

Phil Sanders

God's Answers to Life's Questions

Hard times come to all of us. What do you do when life crashes in all around you? There is an answer for you in the word of God. Stay tuned for God's answer.

Christian friend of mine in Oklahoma recently suffered from viral meningitis. He had to remain confined to bed for fifteen weeks. Since light and sound bothered him, he spent most of his time alone. He couldn't read but a few pages of his Bible at a time. About all he could do was spend his time alone, thinking and praying. It was a difficult experience, as he felt his active life come to a halt. But through it all, he learned some valuable lessons and grew spiritually in ways he never imagined. I hope you don't suffer as he did. But, if life comes crashing down, you can learn some valuable lessons of life.

The events of just one day can leave our lives changed forever. We can find ourselves like Israel in Egypt. As long as Joseph was alive, the children of Israel were favored and blessed. But a new king arose over Egypt that did not know Joseph, and life was never the same. The Egyptians feared an uprising, so they appointed taskmasters over Israel "to afflict them with hard labor" (Ex. 1:11). You might have some new event that leaves you hurting and trapped in a life you don't want. It could be the loss of your health (as my friend had), the loss of a job, the loss of your freedom in prison, or the loss of a member of your family. Your life can crash in a day and never be the same.

Everyone faces hard times. The difference in whether we do well afterwards is in how we react to those problems and what we do next. Some people get caught up in despair and lose their opportunity to grow. They may turn to harmful habits or grow bitter and abandon their faith. But others grow stronger and better. They seem to find strength in the midst of their troubles and with time grow full of faith, courage and joy in the Lord. One such person was the apostle Paul. A prisoner in Rome, threatened with the death penalty, Paul could still say, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I will say rejoice!" (Phil. 4:4). What faith!

Paul knew that whatever problem he faced, he would not face it alone. He found joy in the Lord Jesus, because He had a strong relationship with the Lord; and no matter what happened to him, that relationship would continue. Paul said, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). He understood that even if the physical things around him were going bad, there was the spiritual inside of him that remained intact. Living was Christ, and dying was gain. If he died, he knew that he would be "with Christ, for that is very much better" (verse 23). He had the joy of Christ in this life and the presence of Christ in the hereafter. This sustained him through it all.

Suffering is suffering, but God is able to use the harshest things of life for good. While we find suffering to be bothersome and an interruption to our purposes, we must never discount the ability of God to take those harsh things and use them for our best interests. We often assume that the best thing is the removal of everything that is unpleasant, but sometimes our hurts shape and equip us for a greater service in the kingdom of God than we ever imagined. Paul said in Romans 8:28, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Not all things are good, but God can cause it to work for good.

James by inspiration also wrote an encouraging message in James 1:2-4, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." Rather than complaining about your difficulties, realize that God may be using

them for your growth as a person and helping you to find the ability to endure. Suffering challenges us, but it also helps us become mature, lacking in nothing. Suffering tests our faith, not to destroy but to build it up. Just as one must exercise his body to strengthen it, so we must exercise our faith.

One of the reasons Jesus could endure so much was because of his deep close relationship with His Father. Mark 1:35 says, "And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed." Luke 4:16 reminds us that it was his custom to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. Luke 5:16 says, "But Jesus Himself would *often* slip away to the wilderness and pray." In Luke 6:12 we find that "He spent the whole night in prayer to God." When Jesus was crucified, the first words out of His mouth, was "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

The very last words out of Jesus' mouth as He was dying on the cross was, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Luke 23:46). Jesus loved His Father and obeyed Him to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:8). The love of God and the suffering of one of His children are not incompatible. Jesus did not get angry with His Father. Jesus understood the importance of what He was doing; but, my friend, that didn't make the nails hurt any less. It did not take away the sting of his fellow-Jews mocking Him. It did not erase the humiliation of the cross, the men gambling over his clothes, or the agony of bearing the sins of the world. Suffering and love are not incompatible.

It was because Jesus suffered in obedience, that God highly exalted Him, "and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11). The Lord of glory was first the crucified Savior; the cross came before the crown. So it is in life that we too must humble ourselves in obedience to the Lord. We need that mindset, that attitude of being a servant. When we are at our lowest, we find that God is at His best to help us through those trying and difficult times. The tough times bring about a new and better you.

It is easy at times to get caught up in our suffering and miss what God is able to do in our lives to make better people out of us. Sometimes it takes a little time on our backs in illness or in distress for us to begin looking up to God for the help we need. When my friend could do nothing else, he prayed. He prayed like he had never prayed before—constantly. He was and is a strong Christian, but this close association with God brought about some powerful changes in his life for the better. God can do great things in our lives too. He can help us grow into better and more spiritual people through the harsh things that come our way. He gives us the opportunity to grow.

When life crashes in on us, it gives us first a time for re-creation (not recreation but an opportunity for becoming a new person). We may lose some precious things in a crash, but it gives us the opportunity for recreating ourselves into new and better people. It allows us time to sharpen our saws rather than working ourselves to death. It helps us to take a strong look at our lives and what we're doing with them or not doing with them. A good pause can make us look in the mirror and see ourselves as we truly are. We may not like what we see and may wish to start a different path that matters. Sometimes it is the hurts of life that wake us up to how we have lived futile and empty lives.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is

producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” Don’t we all need renewing once in a while? Don’t we all need to be reminded of the things that matter? Don’t we all wish we had another chance to make things right and do things right? Seeing the eternal resets our whole way of thinking.

Second, we need to re-prioritize. One of the values of a funeral is that reminds us what ought to come first in our lives. It helps us take the garbage out and to replace it with what is clean and loving and good. Solomon said in Eccl. 7:1-4, “A good name is better than a good ointment, And the day of *one’s* death is better than the day of one’s birth. It is better to go to a house of mourning Than to go to a house of feasting, Because that is the end of every man, And the living takes *it* to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, For when a face is sad a heart may be happy. The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, While the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure.” We can learn from our sorrows.

Third, a difficult experience can help us re-define our roles in this life. It is easy for us to get so caught up in the urgent things of life that we miss the important things. My troubles may remind me that I haven’t been the Christian that I ought to be, the husband I wish I had been, or the father that my children need. Perhaps this experience reminds me that I have buried a talent I should be using for God’s work. Or it could be that this suffering I am going through is equipping me for a whole new ministry that I never imagined. Suffering can be an enormous learning period, where the lessons taught far out-weigh the disappointments. God, my friend, may be working on you.

Paul spoke of his own suffering in 2 Cor. 1:3-4 and how that equipped him to help others in their suffering. “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” Suffering teaches us compassion and under-standing for others. Because we have walked a road of sorrow, we can help guide others who have to walk down that same road of hurt and loss. While the experience itself is hard, it equips us with hearts that can reach out to help others and give them the hope they need in life.

Fourth, our troubles help us re-connect with God and with our loved ones. Nothing brings people closer together than a tragic event. Nothing gets our attention like sorrow and suffering. When we hurt is when we need each other the most. How sad that some people live their lives without God or the comfort of their families. Some people sadly never enter a church door until they must go to a funeral of a loved one. It is hard enough to hurt, but no one needs to hurt alone. Let your sorrows lead to prayer and Bible study. Re-connect with God. Start going back to church; there are people there who have

found comfort in God and can help you find that same comfort. Don’t suffer alone.

I recently learned that 60 percent of the American public had never read a whole book, and only six percent will read a whole book this year. How long, my friend, has it been since you read one of the 66 books of the Bible? The Bible can nourish our souls and give us the strength we need to face the hardest moments of our lives. It can point us to help, to hope, to peace, and to life, when everything seems to be crashing in around us. The greatest need of your life and mine is still what it has always been—God Himself! Don’t give up on what God can do in your life. Let him in to your heart. Be obedient to His will. Give yourself to Him, take up that cross and follow Him.

Here is a promise of God that I know is true. Peter said in 1 Peter 5:6-10, “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you. To Him *be* dominion forever and ever. Amen.” God sometimes lets us suffer, but that isn’t the whole story. He hasn’t abandoned us. He is equip us for a greater service. Are you close to God? Are you a Christian? Do you have assurance and hope in Christ? You can have that by becoming a child of God by believing in the Lord Jesus, repenting of your sins, confessing His name before others, and by being baptized. If you are a wayward Christian, why not come back to the Lord today and live in love and faith.

In a time of need, Isaiah gives us great hope. Isaiah 40:28-31 says, “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. He gives strength to the weary, And to *him who* lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, And vigorous young men stumble badly, Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up *with* wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary.” We often pray for the Lord to take away our pain. Perhaps we would better pray for strength and help.

God sees things we can’t see, knows things we can’t know. He sees our future and may today be preparing us for some important matter later in our lives. Don’t give up on God. He hasn’t given up on you. He will perfect, strengthen, confirm, and establish you. He will give you the wings of eagles to soar. He will give you the ability to go on when others have quit. Trust in God, just as Jesus did. Stay close to Him and see what great things He can do in your life. It is only when God rebuilds us, re-creates in the image of His Son that we reach our full potential. You may think your life has crashed, but it just may be the beginning of something more wonderful than you ever imagined.

Copyright 2005, Phil Sanders
Concord Road Church of Christ
8221 Concord Rd., Brentwood, TN 37027
1-877-226-5747

phil@God-answers.org

www.tv.God-answers.org