Maintaining Hope

Have you ever felt ignored by God? Have you wondered why others are blessed, while the Lord continues to allow suffering, disappointment, and hardship in your life? Scripture records the stories of faithful believers who were able to maintain their hope in the midst of painful circumstances. The apostle Paul is a perfect example. He experienced persecution, beatings, unfair trials, imprisonment, and sickness, among other frustrations. Let's explore what he discovered about rising above adversity.

Fulfillment in life does not hinge on our circumstances.

A. **A change in scenery will never bring lasting joy.** Some people believe that personal contentment is linked to one's circumstances. Consequently, when they become frustrated with life, they might quit their job, sell their house, divorce their spouse, or buy a new car. A little while later, they begin to feel unsatisfied again.

   - Have you ever believed a certain circumstance would bring you contentment, and then been disappointed when it arrived and didn't satisfy? Describe the situation and how you felt.
   - From this experience, what did you learn and how can you apply that to your current circumstances?

B. **Paul discovered that the "secret" to contentment was not found in things, but in a Person** (Phil. 4:11-12). As believers, we find joy in our relationship with the Lord, not in our circumstances.

   - What hardships did Paul experience, according to 2 Corinthians 11:24-27?
   - Having experienced all that, why did Paul say he was content? Read 2 Corinthians 12:10 and Romans 15:13.

God can show us how to be satisfied, regardless of our circumstances, if we will rely on Him. When we don't find our joy in the Lord, we'll spend the majority of our time trying to improve circumstances (or escape trial) rather than serving Christ.

God's grace is sufficient during adversity.

A. **Paul discovered that God's power is most evident when we are weak.** God did not remove Paul's thorn. But what the Lord gave him was far better in the long run. God granted Paul the grace he needed to endure his hardship victoriously (2 Corinthians 12:9). Weakness forces us to depend on God's power.

   - Have you ever experienced God's power at a time when you had little strength of your own? If so, describe that situation.

B. **God's grace is more than sufficient for anything we will encounter.** Paul left his home and family to plant churches in hostile environments, and as a result, he was persecuted, imprisoned, stoned, and left for dead. Yet, somehow he was content.
In what area of life do you need God's strength?
Write a prayer, asking God to show you how to depend on His strength to overcome this difficulty or weakness.

The key to advancing through adversity is to view it as suffering for Christ's sake.

A. **Paul understood his purpose in life—to bring glory to God by preaching the gospel.** Therefore, anything that happened to him in the process of obeying God was really for Christ's sake. He wrote:

Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Cor. 12:10).

- Think about a recent hardship or disappointment in your life. How does the point above give you a new perspective on that trial?

B. **Like Paul's mission in life, yours is to glorify God through spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ.** This doesn't mean that you'll necessarily serve God full-time vocationally. But when you become consumed by His call, everything will take on new significance. You will begin to see every facet of your life—including pain—as a means through which God can work to bring others to Him.
- God may choose to delay your deliverance so He can use your suffering for His sake—either now or in the future. What hardship are you currently experiencing?
- How can others see Christ in you through that situation?

**Closing:** God's grace is sufficient for whatever you're facing. If you'll draw near to Him, suffering will ultimately bear spiritual fruit in your life and in the lives of others. As part of the Father's divine plan, you can experience hope and joy, regardless of your circumstances.

**Prayer:** Father, how grateful we are that You accept us where we are. You can use every experience of our lives. Teach us to find hope in You. Make us effective vessels through whom others will find You as their Savior. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.
