

Monday

For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay. “Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.”

Habakkuk 2:3-4

The Lord promised Habakkuk that He would accomplish His purposes, and that Habakkuk should wait patiently, because the Lord’s decree would surely happen. Verse 4 refers to the king of Babylon being puffed up. The Lord would judge Babylon in His time, despite their pride and arrogance. But no matter what is happening in the world, the righteous should live by faith. As believers, we are saved by faith, but then we must continue to live by faith in God. Habakkuk learned to wait patiently for the Lord (see Hab 3:16-18), knowing that the Lord would fulfill His promise to judge Babylon, even as He would first use Babylon to judge Judah. Even in those difficult days, Habakkuk learned to rejoice in the Lord as he walked by faith.

In our prosperity, we often do not feel the need to walk by faith for our daily needs. But difficult times help us recognize that we do not really control as much as we think that we do, and they remind us of our need to trust in God. We do not know what the future holds, but we do know that God is trustworthy and faithful. So in these uncertain times, we have the wonderful opportunity to trust God and walk by faith. Let us learn to walk by faith today, and let us continue to walk by faith even when circumstances change and we feel that life is returning to normal.

1. Under normal circumstances, do I feel like I’m in control of my life? Does this lead me to forget about my daily need to trust in God?

2. As Christ taught us to pray for our daily bread, we should be trusting in the Lord for our physical needs. What daily needs do I have this week? When I am tempted to fear or worry about them, will I commit to praying and trusting God for them (Philippians 4:5-6)?

3. We can trust and rely on God because He is faithful and true. Often it is helpful for us to think on God’s promises to encourage us to continue to trust in Him. What are some Biblical promises of God that can help me trust in Him and live by faith?

Tuesday

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

James 1:2-4

We face many kinds of trials in our lives. Whether a health crisis, financial problem, family struggle, or some other type of difficulty, we will face trials in life. But how do we respond to those trials? James calls on us to rejoice. He's not simply saying that we can still have joy in the midst of the trial, although that is true. He's telling us to have joy *that we are facing the trial*. That's not natural for us, nor is it easy for us. How can we rejoice that we are facing trials?

In order to rejoice in trials and difficulties, we must look beyond the circumstances and see the bigger picture. Joseph provides a wonderful example of seeing God work good even in the midst of great difficulties. Joseph knew his brothers intended evil against him, but he still saw God working good through that. James tells us that one of the things that God builds through our difficulties is endurance and steadfastness. God wants us to endure in the Christian life and not give up, and He uses trials and difficulties to build that endurance. So as we go through trials today, we can rejoice that God is building endurance and steadfastness in us.

1. Am I rejoicing that the Lord is allowing me to go through difficulty? How can I rejoice even in the face of hardship, knowing that God intends it for my good (Romans 8:28)?

2. We don't always understand everything about God's plan or why He allows particular trials and difficulties into our lives. As we learn from the book of Job, sometimes the trials we go through are *not* the direct result of sin in our lives. But each of us does still need to grow in the Christian life. If I examine my life honestly, where do I need to grow? What area of my life is confronted by the difficulties I am currently facing, and by God's grace, how can I grow in this area?

3. How can I model joy in the midst of difficulty to those around me? As I spend time with my family this week (and perhaps with others at work), how can I model rejoicing in the Lord even in the face of trials?

Wednesday

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

Hebrews 12:1-5

As we go throughout our Christian lives, we can look to Jesus for encouragement and an example. Christ perfectly exemplified joy in the midst of suffering. Christ endured the suffering of the cross, but He did so for the joy that was before Him. Christ endured the cross for the joy of providing salvation for us and bringing God great honor and glory. First and foremost, Christ's death and resurrection provides salvation. But it also sets an example for us by showing us endurance and joy. Just as Christ endured the cross, we should run the race of life with endurance.

When difficult times come, it is easy for us to grow discouraged. We can be tempted to give up and walk away. But we are called to endure in the Christian life. When we are tempted to grow weary or fainthearted, we can see the example of Christ's endurance, and we can rejoice in the salvation that Christ has provided for us. In order to do that, we need to focus on eternal truths instead of temporary circumstances. Instead of simply looking at the difficult circumstances around us, look at the eternal salvation that God gives to us. Rejoice in that salvation, and let that joy help you endure as we follow Christ today.

1. What weight or sin in my life is making it difficult for me to follow Christ? How can this be laid aside? Am I willing to lay it aside?

2. In what areas of life am I struggling to be faithful to God? How can the joy of salvation encourage and help me to be faithful in these areas?

3. Christ is both the founder and the perfecter of our faith. He provided salvation, and He will complete His work in us (Philippians 1:6). How can this truth encourage me and help me endure?

Thursday

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

1 Peter 4:12-13

We don't like suffering and difficulties. We like when things go well and we don't have any problems. So sometimes it's surprising to us when a difficulty does come. Sometimes we can have the misconception that faithful followers of Christ shouldn't have difficulties in life. But problems do come, even to faithful believers, and we should never be surprised when they come. Peter wrote to suffering Christians in Asia Minor, and he told them not to be surprised or think that a strange thing was happening to them. Suffering and trials are quite common, and we should not be surprised by them.

Instead, we should be joyful. Particularly when we suffer for following Christ, it is a joyful thing. Sharing in Christ's suffering does *not* mean that we partially pay for our salvation, where both we and Christ suffer to pay for our sin. The Bible clearly teaches us that Christ fully paid for our sin, and that salvation is freely given to us as a gift. But as a believer, we can identify with Christ and grow in our fellowship with Him when we face suffering for His name. In addition, we can rejoice, because we also look forward to the day His glory is revealed. We can rejoice today even in difficulty because of the future hope that we have in Christ.

1. Am I surprised when trials come into my life? Do I feel like it's unfair or unjust? If so, how can my thinking be changed so that I think Biblically and realize that trials and difficulties are a common thing in a sin-cursed world?

2. 1 Peter 4:15-16 warns that there is no value in suffering physical consequences for our own sin, but encourages us that we can glorify God when we suffer as a Christian. Am I willing to stand up Biblically for the name of Christ, even in the face of opposition? In my life, what does it look like to stand up for Christ?

3. 1 Peter 4:19 says, "Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good." As we saw on Monday, we should entrust ourselves to God even in suffering and difficulty. As I trust Him, how can I also do good? What good Biblical things does God want me to pursue this week with my family?

Friday

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

Philippians 1:3-5

Acts 16 records the founding of the church in Philippi when Paul and Silas visited the city. Paul enjoyed a strong relationship with the Philippian church, and as he began this letter of joy to them, he told them that he thanked God every time he remembered them. He also prayed for them, but he prayed with joy. He is writing to this Greek church from a prison in Rome, and he had been separated from this church for some time. Yet the fellowship in Christ that they enjoyed together brought him great joy.

This is a unique time in our nation and in our church. The church is designed to be a group of believers gathered together to worship God and to build one another up in the faith. While it is difficult to be separated from one another while we are unable to meet together, we can follow Paul's example of care for the Philippian believers. Separation from the church should lead us to appreciate the times of fellowship that we *do* have even more. We also can rejoice in the fellowship that we can have together, and even as we are separated, we must spend time praying for one another.

1. Pastor Young often said, "We make time for what's important to us." If prayer is genuinely important to us, then we should already be praying for one another. But we live in a busy society, and we often are busy with things that can distract us. But right now, time for prayer has been made for us. Many of the things that make us busy and distract us have been taken away. Will I commit to using the extra time that I have to pray for one another? How can I put this into practice and spend more time in prayer?

2. Paul said that he thanked God every time he thought of the Philippians. That's not too surprising with a church with whom he enjoyed a strong relationship. But it's quite remarkable that Paul also always gave thanks to God for the Corinthian church, a church that often opposed him and caused him many problems (1 Cor 1:4). How often do I thank God for the fellow believers that He has put into my life? Who is a fellow believer that I can struggle to get along with? Will I commit to thanking God for this person and praying for this person?

3. Who are two people within the church that I can contact this week in order to encourage them and know better how to pray for them? When I contact them, what things have they asked me to pray for?

Saturday

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

2 Corinthians 8:1-2

2 Corinthians 8-9 addresses the topic of giving as Paul was collecting offerings from various churches to help the poor in Jerusalem. Our giving is ultimately rooted in what Christ gave for us (2 Cor 8:9). In encouraging the Corinthians to follow through on their commitment to help the poor, Paul pointed to the example of the churches of Macedonia (the region of northern Greece). The Macedonian churches themselves were facing great affliction and poverty. Yet they still gave, and they gave with an abundance of joy.

God has blessed our nation with physical prosperity, and often we take that prosperity for granted. We don't experience or understand abject poverty like many have experienced throughout history and many experience in various parts of our world today. But our economy is struggling, and things are difficult and uncertain for us today. But if our joy is rooted in our eternal salvation, then temporary physical difficulties should not rob us of our joy. Like the Macedonians, we can still have an abundance of joy even in the face of physical difficulties.

1. Under normal circumstances, where do I often put my confidence and trust? Even in prosperity, do I still acknowledge my need for God, or do I tend to trust in my good circumstances? How can our current difficulties challenge me to place my trust and find my joy in an unchanging God instead of in changing circumstances?

2. The Macedonians faced a severe test of affliction and extreme poverty. But they still joyfully gave to help the poor in Jerusalem. Even in times of financial uncertainty and distress, am I willing to look beyond myself to the needs of others? Who can I help this week who is in need? How can I help them?

3. 2 Corinthians 9:8 says, "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work." In times of uncertainty, it's easy for us to worry and lose our focus on God. But God's grace is sufficient, even when times are hard. How can I trust in God's grace instead of worrying? Instead of worrying, how can I depend on God's grace and abound in every good work?
