

"What Now?"

Hard times come to all of us. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders and this is a Bible study, "In Search of the Lord's Way." What do you do when life crashes in all around you? There's an answer for you in the word of God, so stay tuned for God's answer.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way. We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. God's Word is a rich resource and gives us the answers that we need for every problem of life. So, we open these pages to find the truth that helps and heals. We're grateful that you joined us today, we'd love to hear from you, and we want to be a part of your life each week.

A Christian friend of mine suffered viral meningitis some years ago. And he was confined to bed for fifteen weeks. He couldn't tolerate light or sound, so 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 think and pray. It was an exceptionally difficult experience, since he felt his active life come to a halt. But through it all, he learned some valuable lessons and grew spiritually in ways that he never imagined. I hope you don't have to suffer as he did. But, if life comes crashing down, you can learn some valuable lessons of life.

The events of one day can change our lives 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" (Exodus 1 verse 11). Now you might have some new event that leaves you hurting and trapped in a life that 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. And your life can crash in a single day and never be the same.

Now we offer the information on this program free. And if you'd like a printed copy of our study, "What Now?" mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number, 1-800-321-8633. And we also stream this program on our website at www.searchtv.org and on YouTube.

Larry Owsley will lead the Edmond church in song, we'll read from Habakkuk 3:17 to 19, and explore what we can do when things happen.

Our reading comes from the book of Habakkuk in the Old Testament. Habakkuk chapter 3 verses 17 to 19. And There Habakkuk is talking about how he's going to face a very difficult time.

Though the fig tree should not blossom
And there be no fruit on the vines,
Though the yield of the olive should fail
And the fields produce no food,
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold
And there be no cattle in the stalls,
Yet I will exult in the LORD,
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.
The Lord GOD is my strength,
And He has made my feet like hinds' feet,
And makes me walk on my high places.

God is still good to us even when the worse things happen. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we're thankful for Your love. That You can be with us through good times and bad times. Help us always to love You, to love others and to do Your will. In Jesus name, Amen.

Everyone faces hard times. And the difference in whether we do well afterwards is in how we react to those problems and what we do next. Sometimes people get caught up into their problems and fail to grow as they should. They may turn to harmful habits or grow bitter because of what took place. And when they do that life is difficult for them and it's hard. People may abandon their faith, but others grow stronger and better even when times are tough. So people 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. He was a prisoner in Rome, he had been chained, and facing the death penalty. Paul could still say, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I will say rejoice!" (Philippians 4 and verse 4). And I think, what faith he had!

Now Paul knew that he would never face a problem 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 close friendship would continue. Paul said, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1 verse 21). And even if the physical things around him were going bad, his love for Christ remained intact. Living was Christ, and dying was gain. If he died, he knew he would be "with Christ, for that is very much better" (verse 23 says). He had the joy of Christ in this life and the presence of Christ in the hereafter. And this sustained him through it all.

Now suffering is bitter, yes, but God is able to use the painful things of life for good. We must never discount the ability of God to use those harsh, harsh things 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." Now not all things are good, no, but God can cause it to work for good.

James by inspiration also wrote an encouraging message in James 1:2 to 4. He said, "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 difficulties, realize that God may be using them for your growth as a person and helping you find the ability to endure. Suffering challenges us, but it also helps us to 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.

Now, Jesus was able to endure so much suffering because He stayed close to 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 and verse 16 reminds us that while it was his custom to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, He was going to go there because He wanted to be close to God. And Luke 5 and verse 16 says, "But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray." In Luke 6:12 it says we find that "He spent the whole night in prayer to God." And 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 and verse 34).

As He was dying on the cross, Jesus said, "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 (Philippians 2 verse 8). And we must understand: God's love for us and suffering as one of His children are not

incompatible. Jesus did not get angry with the Father at Gethsemane or on the cross. Jesus understood the importance of what He was doing; but, my friend, that didn't make the nails hurt any less. It didn't take away the sting of his fellow-Jews mocking Him. It didn't erase the humiliation of the cross, the men gambling over his clothes, or the agony of bearing the sins of the world. The cross of Christ reveals suffering and love are compatible. They can agree.

Because Jesus suffered in obedience, 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" (Philippians 2 verses 9 to 11). Now the Lord of glory was first the crucified Savior; the cross came before the crown. So we too must humble ourselves in obedience to the Lord. We need that mindset of being a servant. When we're at our lowest, we find 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's so easy to focus on our suffering and miss what God is able to do to make better people out of us. It may take time on our backs in illness or in distress for us to see our need for God. When my friend, Patrick Peters of Clinton Oklahoma, 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 people through our struggles. And He gives us the opportunity to grow.

When life crashes in on us, it gives us first a time for re-creation (that is not recreation of fun but an opportunity to re-create ourselves and become a new person). We may lose some precious things in a low point, but we get the opportunity to recreate ourselves, to make ourselves better. We have time to sharpen our saws rather than work ourselves to death. We can evaluate our lives and see what we're doing or not doing. A good pause enables us to 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's the hurts of life that wake us up to how we have lived futile and empty lives.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:16 to 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. Now a funeral reminds us what ought to come first in our lives. Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 7:1 to 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 ourselves. It's easy to get so caught up in the urgent things of life that we miss the important things. My times of trouble may remind me that I haven't the Christian I ought to be, the husband I wish I had been, or the father my children need. Perhaps I have buried a talent that I should be using for God's work. Or it could be that this suffering is

equipping me for a whole new ministry that I never imagined. Suffering can be an enormous learning period, where the lessons taught far outweigh the disappointments. God may be working on you.

Paul spoke of his own suffering in 2 Corinthians 1:3 to 4 and how afflictions equipped him to help others in their suffering. He said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the 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 understanding 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. Sadly, some live without God or the comfort of their families. Tragically, some never enter a church door until they must go to a funeral of a loved one. Now it's 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 worship at church; Christians find 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 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—and that's God Himself! Don't give up on what God can do in your life. Let him be in your heart. And 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 to 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 preparing us for greater service.

Let's pray. Father we're thankful that even in the hardest of times You're able to take things that are so uncomfortable and help us to become better people. Help us to trust in You, to love You, to love others and to do Your will. In Jesus name, Amen.

Isaiah 40:28 to 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 it's better to pray for strength and help.

God sees things that we can't see, knows things that we can't know. He sees our future and may today be preparing us for something important 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'll give you the wings of eagles to soar. He'll give you the ability to go on when others have quit. Trust in God, just as Jesus did. Stay close to Him. You can do great things in your life. And when God re-creates us in the image of His Son, He enables us to 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.

Are you close to God? Are you a Christian? Do you have hope in Christ? You can become 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're a wayward Christian, why not come back to the Lord today and live in love and faith.

We hope you've been blessed by today's study of God's Word. If you want a free printed copy of this message, "What Now?" mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call the Search office toll-free 1-800-321-8633. Now our programs appear on our website at www.searchtv.org. And you can download copies at our website or call and request them. We also offer free bible correspondence courses by mail. They'll help you study God's Word. We also appear on YouTube. Our channel is "SearchTVMinistry." So tell your friends about it. And then like the programs you watch.

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