

Discipleship 101

a beginner's guide to Christianity

Chapter 6

How Jesus helps us in everyday trials

Jesus is a remarkable person, God in the flesh. It was important that he came in the flesh, to become part of humanity so that he could reconcile humanity with God. We'll say more about that in the next unit. Here, we'd like to comment on how it is relevant to our day-to-day lives.

From birth to death, Jesus had a difficult life. He had moments of joy, and moments of pain—and we are no better than he is, so we cannot expect a trouble-free life. In this world, Jesus said, we will have trials. He warned his disciples about the cost of following him: They would have to take up the cross each day, willing to suffer and die, if need be, for their faith in Jesus Christ (Luke 9:23).

Whether or not we believe in Jesus Christ, we will have troubles. But when we believe in him, we can be confident that he *understands* our troubles. He knows what we are going through. That does not make our troubles go away, but it helps us to know that not even God in the flesh was exempt from trouble. Jesus learned from the things he suffered (Hebrews 5:8) and *because* of that, he is “able to help those who are being tempted” (Hebrews 2:18).

When we struggle with the downside of being human, it helps us to know that our Savior struggled with it, too. We have a Savior who knows what it's like. In Jesus, we can see that God himself is willing to suffer. That means that even if we can't understand our trials, we know that there is a good reason for them. Paul tells us that we will not only share in Jesus' resurrection life, we also share in his life of suffering (Philippians 3:10-11). We have difficulties in this life, but many joys as well. The two go together.

Rejoicing and trials

Peter wrote, “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials” (1 Peter 1:6). Most non-Christians and even some Christians continue to be



Depiction of Jeremiah after being lowered into a cistern (Jeremiah 38:6).
Illustration by Ken Tunell

surprised and puzzled by this combination of trials and rejoicing. How is it possible to be joyful when we suffer? Of course, we are not rejoicing *that* we have a trial (there is no particular virtue in suffering itself), but we rejoice *despite* our trials. How can that be?

Let's notice what Peter wrote: “In *this* you greatly rejoice.” What is the “this” that gives us great joy? In context, we see that it is salvation, the fact that we can be confident that God will give us an eternal inheritance. We have a wonderful future guaranteed for us. This has been demonstrated to us by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and God's power is shielding us until we receive the promised glory (verses 3-5). The same power that raised Jesus will also raise us to glorious immortality!

Peter speaks of joy again in verse 8. He acknowledges that we do not yet see our Savior. We do not yet have our promised inheritance. In fact, we are suffering grief in all kinds of trials. But yet we can rejoice. Why? Because “you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (verse 9). We rejoice in the salvation we are already receiving through faith.

Faith involves our minds, our hearts and our wills. It means that we understand and accept certain things about God. It means that we respond emotionally to these things, such as with love because we understand he loves us, and with joy because we understand that he is giving us so much, and with trust because we understand and believe his promises for our eternal salvation. And when our understanding and our emotions are in agreement, then our wills are also. The decisions we make throughout each day are pleasing to God because he has brought us to the point that we *want* to do his will.

But we do not yet have the promised inheritance. We have not yet reached the time when there is no more crying and no more death. We all experience both crying and death. Our pains and sorrows are caused by our enemy — sin. We rejoice because we know that Jesus has conquered our enemy, and he promises that we share in his victory!

We suffer because of our own mistakes and sins. We also suffer because the people around us are captives of sin, and sin hurts not only the sinner but innocent bystanders, too. We are often the innocent bystanders who suffer from the fallout of the sins of others. And Satan, the enemy of God and the archdeceiver, works hard to feed and encourage the sinful nature in every person, thereby bringing even more pain and destruction to all, including persecution on the saints.

God not only promises to help us in our trials, he also promises us *trials!* Christ did not come to bring us a trouble-free life. Instead, he warned us that we would have strife within our families because of him (Matthew 10:34-36), that we would have trials (John 16:33) and that we would be persecuted (John 15:20). We enter the kingdom through many trials (Acts 14:22), and every Christian will suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12). We should not think it unusual when trials afflict us (1 Peter 4:12).

Jesus said, If you want to follow me, take up your cross. Be willing to suffer, even to lose your life, if

Five facts about trials

1. We have difficulties whether or not we believe in Jesus.
2. Jesus promised that his followers would have trials.
3. Jesus also promised that eternal joy would be vastly more than our temporary trials.
4. There is joy in heaven and on earth whenever anyone turns to God.
5. Faith in the future gives us reason to rejoice despite our troubles.

you want to follow me. The Christian life involves suffering; we should not be surprised when it happens. Jesus said that a servant is not greater than the master. If Jesus, our Lord and teacher, became a human to suffer and die to serve us, if suffering was part of his training (Hebrews 2:10; 5:8), it should be no surprise that it is also part of ours. In these trials, we can rejoice only because we know that Christ has promised us something far better.

Not worth comparing

But despite the suffering we sometimes experience, we rejoice in salvation. How can we rejoice despite our sufferings? Paul gives an oft-quoted explanation: “Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

Paul explains that we will receive a great inheritance — in fact, we are “co-heirs with Christ” (verse 17). We will share in his inheritance of glory. Today, we share in his suffering, but the day will come when we will share fully in his glory. The present suffering is part of God’s plan for us. It is part of what prepares us to fully enter the glory of Christ. “We share in [Christ’s] sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” (verse 17).

Our Lord was a man of sorrow, yet he was also full of joy (Isaiah 53:3; Luke 10:21). When he suffered, he did so with the assurance that deliverance and glory would follow in due course (Hebrews 2:12).

Jesus told his disciples to rejoice in their salvation. Truly, the glory ahead is so great that we can rejoice with Jesus and all believers despite our present-day difficulties. The joy of salvation and the hope of glory

are so much greater than our present pains, that there is no comparison. It's infinitely more than a million-to-one ratio!

May God grant us the eyes and ears of faith to believe in and stand on his great and precious promises! He is with us, his beloved children, even in our darkest moments. He never forsakes nor leaves us. He will see us through to the end, through every trial, every pain and every sin. He is always beside us and he never stops loving us, even when we are too weak to know it. Praise God for his eternal love!

Joy in the gospel

We have been promised great rewards, and that gives us great reason to rejoice — no matter what the circumstances we happen to be in now. Paul wrote, “In all our troubles my *joy* knows no bounds” (2 Corinthians 7:4).

And our own joy is increased all the more by the salvation of *others*. Paul put it this way: “What is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, *you* are our glory and joy” (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20). Just as there is joy in heaven whenever a sinner repents, there is also joy on earth, in all who see life from God's eternal perspective.

It is no surprise that the people of God find great joy in the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ. To the church at Philippi, Paul wrote: “The important thing is that in every way...Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice” (Philippians 1:18). Paul rejoiced to learn of people who responded in faith to the message and would be present in God's family when our Lord and Savior comes.

The apostle John shared the same joy: “It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth. I have *no greater joy* than to hear that my children are walking in the truth” (3 John 3-4).

As the children of God, we share this joy with all believers, with the angels in heaven, and with God himself — joy in the preaching of the gospel, joy in

hearing of people who come to faith in Christ and joy in people who continue to walk in the path of faith. Such pure joy in the redemption and salvation of people made in God's image, such fruit of the Holy Spirit at work in us, shapes our passions, our values and our goals.

The use of our time, the habits of our thoughts, the health of our emotions and the quality of our words and actions toward one another are positively influenced by this life-cleansing joy in the love, kindness and power of God. Our private worship time, our collective worship with the church, our volunteer work, our giving of time both to the church and to people in need, our participation in small groups for prayer, study of the Word and worship — all these spring from the joy of God in us, joy produced by his gracious work in our lives and in the lives of others.

Even our financial support for the work of the church is a reflection of our joy in the things God values. Our giving to the church demonstrates the importance we place on the treasures of the kingdom of God as compared to the things of this world.

Through the church we reach out as the body of Christ with the gospel message, and we give the gospel credibility as we give ourselves to God's transforming work in us. God desires that we each serve him in a personal way *and* that we serve him and one another as a body, the body of Christ. “You are all members of one another,” Paul wrote. We are not called to be in relationship with God without one another.

We are called into the *fellowship* of the people of God, into the *household* of God. In Christ, we have communion with God and, through Christ, with one another. Jesus' command is that we love one another, and it is *as his body*, the church, that we proclaim the gospel in the world and teach his ways.

Together, we can have an even greater impact than we can as individuals, even though our individual impact is also essential to the health of the whole body. The gospel is a great source of joy for us all — joy in receiving the message and in giving it to others!

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