

Sermon Notes

(A basic transcription with modifications for style and clarity)

GETTING OUR TRIALS IN PERSPECTIVE

Cliffton Veal, August 5, 2017

The world that we live is becoming increasingly a dangerous place. It may not be all that dangerous where you live if you live in Peoria, or Saint Cloud, Minnesota, or Anniston, Alabama, although I'm sure there could be a certain amount of danger there, too. Big city America can be very dangerous. Big city anywhere, whether we're talking about Paris or London or whatever, the world is becoming a more dangerous place overall.

So much of the danger that we see is motivated by hatred. Hatred of different ideologies, hatred of various forms of government and hatred of other individuals.

From April 7 until mid-July 1994, to give you an example, the world stood back and witnessed the murder of nearly one million Rwandans. Unspeakable horror and incredible mind-numbing death toll. Most of those killed were Tutsis. Does it make sense that there would have not been reprisals after original killing fields quieted down and the Tutsi government came in? Well, there were. There were many. We may never know how many. But some think there were a huge number. That's possible. Extreme hatred. "You killed my family; I'm going to kill you and your family." It was Satan at his best. It was one of Satan's finest hours, if we can use that term. Because that's what Satan wants to do. He wants to incite violence and hatred, just the absolute opposite of what God wants.

I'm not trying to shock you by saying this, although quite frankly it is shocking every time I think about it. You have heard all of these things. But once again, I'm just using this to indicate the fact that hatred and intolerance lead to violence, lead to death, lead to horrible things and they are very common in today's world.

Mankind has a history of yielding to Satan's way of life. The violence and hatred engendered by that way are not something that most of us have experienced, though some have. Some of you have. But the Bible warns us of times to come. Times to come, yet in the future, where many of us will be touched by possibly that kind of violence. Touched by or massively affected by the situations around us.

John 16:2 they shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time comes, that whosoever kills you will think that he does God a service.

Brethren, that is a biblical statement. A biblical declaration. What will God allow to happen in your life — in my life? What will He allow to happen? I can guarantee you one thing, He will allow trials in our lives. You know that because you've all been through some; many of you are going through some now. We know from God's word that the apostles, for example, were tried; sometimes tried mightily. Why? So that they would be strengthened for times yet future.

So, the question is, brethren: When trials do come upon us, how should we react? When the trials are there, what do we do? How do we react?

Let me be clear right up front, all of us, as I said, all of us will have some kind of trials. Some of those trials unfortunately we will bring upon ourselves because of our own intransigence; because of our own foolishness, frankly.

There is always something to be learned in every trial, no matter the source of the trial. No matter why it comes upon us. There's something to be learned in every trial. We need to be very careful, that when we do find ourselves in the midst of a trial, that we don't draw a wrong conclusion. And we, being human beings, can very easily do that.

It would be wise for every one of us to look at ourselves, to examine ourselves. To look at our attitudes, to look at our approach to life, to other people, to our job. To look at our actions. It could be that we think we are just fine, when in reality we are not just fine. It could be that we are causing our own problems and that's what we need to be very careful not to do. But we will not know that if we never look at ourselves, if we never ask God to help us to see ourselves as we really are. Help us to see what is happening in our lives and why. If we ask, He will help us.

But let us say that we have done that. We've done that. We have examined ourselves and maybe there's been a trial that's come along, but it doesn't seem like we have caused that trial. And yet, there it is. We are faced with a very difficult problem; we are faced with a trial. Possibly a very severe one.

Let us look to God's word and see if we can glean some information about other people who have gone through trials. Let's look first in the Old Testament and see what we might learn from some of these examples.

Turn with me to Genesis chapter 39. This will help us to see God's perspective on trials in our lives.

Genesis 39:1 Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there.

In other words, we know the story, he was literally sold into slavery. By his brothers, no less. They were very upset with him.

...And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there.

2 The LORD was with Joseph... (Interesting.)

2 The LORD was with Joseph and he was a successful man...

This was a man who was sold into slavery by his own family. And the scripture says:

2 The LORD was with Joseph and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.

3 And his master saw that the LORD was with him...

So not only was God with him. Not only was it evident to Joseph himself, it was evident to those in the household. It was evident to those who were dealing with him; to his master.

...his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand.

4 So Joseph found favour in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority.

5 So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake...

So not only was Joseph himself blessed. The household in which he was serving, God actually blessed them. Let's go back just a minute. As I said, he was sold into slavery. I can imagine Joseph thinking, "I've always been honest. I'm praying every day for God's help. Surely this will turn out well, eventually." We'll go on, in continuance of the story.

...and the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had in the house and in the field.

6 Thus he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

A good-looking guy.

7 And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me."

I won't get into a lot of details there, but we know what that means. He was a good-looking young man and she wanted him.

8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand.

In other words, “I have a responsibility here, we cannot do this and I will not do this.” And we know the rest of the story without going through all of it right now. She continued to desire him and actually attacked him as if it were and he, doing the right thing, fled from the situation. She grabbed his coat and then began telling lies. “Well, this man attacked me.” She told absolute lies. “And look, here’s his coat.” It was a very messy situation. Very, very messy.

20 Then Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king’s prisoners were confined. And he was there in the prison.

When the wife lied and said, “He attacked me”, the master of the house believed the wife in her lie and put Joseph in prison. So he was sold into slavery, kind of raised back up to a position of responsibility, and then this incident occurred with the wife. Then, bam, he’s in prison again. Not a very nice situation.

21 But the LORD was with Joseph...

How do we figure that! The Lord was with Joseph? Yes! That’s what God’s word says. Amidst all of the difficulties that were happening. Amidst all of the lies and being cast into prison, the Lord was with Joseph.

...and showed him mercy, and He gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

Once again, He was giving him favor. He was blessing him and those around him.

Without going through the entire story, we know what happened. He helped the king’s cupbearer to get out of prison.

23 The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph’s authority, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper.

Then come the stories of the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker and Joseph’s interpretation of those dreams.

Genesis 40:12 And Joseph said to him (the cupbearer, also referred to as the butler), “This is the interpretation of it: The three branches are three days (etc., etc.)...

He tells him what the interpretation of the dream was and tells him he will be re-established. Then in verse 14, Joseph says to the butler:

14 “But remember me when it is well with you, and please show kindness to me; make mention of me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house.

Get me out of prison! Please!

So once again, going back. He was sold into slavery and God was with him. He went into Potiphar’s house, he was raised up and God was with him and blessed him. If that part wasn’t

a trial, being sold into slavery certainly was. Things were seeming to be going pretty well, then Potiphar's wife did what she did, told the lies that she did and then he went to prison. He went to prison; that had to have been a tremendous trial. Yet we see that the Bible says:

Genesis 39:21 But the LORD was with Joseph...

He probably prayed. He probably thanked God for the help that he was given when things were going well. When things turned sour, I'm not exactly sure what he said. But he went to prison anyway. Then the situation with the butler and the baker. "Please remember me. When you're talking to Pharaoh, please remember me." But he didn't. That's the interesting part.

Genesis 40:23 Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

The trials just keep coming. Desperately wants to get out of prison. He helps the man. He says, "Please remember me." But he wasn't remembered.

Genesis 41:1 Then it came to pass, at the end of two full years...

It's not, God let him be there a couple more weeks and then finally the butler talked to Pharaoh. No, no, no. Two years passed. Joseph knew that God was with him. It may not have seemed like God was with him. But he knew that was the case. Two full years passed, then we have the situation where

...that Pharaoh had a dream; and behold, he stood by the river.

And then the butler remembered, I knew someone who told me my dream, and he gave the meaning of that dream to Pharaoh. And then he was raised up once again.

So, slavery, Potiphar—up. Potiphar's wife—back down. In prison, butler—back down. Staying in prison for two more years and now—back up again. This time, of course, we know that Joseph was elevated tremendously and given a tremendous amount of responsibility.

God was with him through all of these trials. Horrible trials. God was with him, all the way.

I think that if we had been God, we would have said, "I'll give the young man a break. You can't forget that he was innocent. He didn't do any of the bad things that they said he had done." I think we would have appreciated his attitude and we would have told ourselves, "Let's just get him out of prison."

But that was not the approach that God took. That would have been a "short range" solution. Short range. God obviously had something greater in mind for Joseph. He didn't tell Joseph what it was. But Joseph, I speculate, knew something. He knew that God was with him. That is not speculation, he knew that God was with him. He knew that God was working out some kind of purpose. Then he finds himself one of the main protagonists, or one of the main rulers, in Egypt and he's able to help his brothers.

Had God allowed him to be freed from prison immediately after he talked with the butler, what would he have done? He probably would have gone home to see his father. That would have been the end of that story, until the famine came and the brothers ended up going to Egypt and he wouldn't have been able to help them. God knew what was happening.

Often a short-range solution would be the ruin of a longer-range solution. So, as we see, Joseph found himself in a very bad situations for many, many years!

How generous are we with God? How generous are we? How much time do we allow God to do what we think should be done? We think that God should react, we think that He should answer and usually we want Him to answer right away. We give Him time limits, as it were. "I want an answer and I want it now, God." We don't say it in exactly that way, but we do. We want immediate answers, don't we? We all would like that. But that's not the way that God operates. Sometimes He does give immediate answers. Sometimes He does. But isn't it true that sometimes He doesn't. "I've been praying about this for six months, and God just hasn't answered yet!" Maybe He hasn't. But He does have a purpose. He knows exactly what He's doing.

Let's go to Genesis chapter 45 and begin looking at verse 4. At the end of the story, in a sense. Here, as we know, Joseph is raised up again. He is one of the rulers of Egypt and his brothers come because of the famine and all that. He is able to help them. They at first don't know who he is. Then he shows himself to them.

Genesis 45:4 And Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come near to me." So they came near. Then he said: "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt.

5 "But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; (Now, listen to this:) for God sent me before you to preserve life.

Joseph knew that. Joseph realized, yes, it's a horrible trial. It's no joy being in prison. It's no joy being falsely accused. It's no joy languishing for years. But he knew that God was doing something and here it became clear to him. "God sent me before you to preserve life."

Joseph knew that it was God who had sent him there. But wasn't it Joseph's brothers who had sold him into slavery? Yes, it was. But you see, God can use even the wrong and the evil actions of man to bring good fruits into our lives at some point in the future. Let me say that once again, because this is important. God can use even the wrong and evil actions of man to bring good fruits into our lives at some point in the future. So, brethren, when we find ourselves smack dab in the middle of a difficult trial, when everything around us seems lost, we should not over-hastily conclude that God has abandoned us, that He no longer loves us. And isn't that the way we tend to think? We should not think that way.

Joseph's example in the Old Testament shows us that God was always there, even in the most difficult of times. He saw the trials and He had a plan for those trials.

Let's take a look at another example, just briefly. The example of Uriah the Hittite.

2 Samuel 11:2 Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold.

Uriah, we know the story, was a man of high moral values. He really was. He had done absolutely nothing wrong. Yet we know that David, because of the incident with Bathsheba, plotted and actually had him killed. Had him killed in the sense that he sent him into battle and had the other troops withdraw so that he would be killed. David knew that would happen and he did that on purpose. So he killed him! That was absolutely wrong.

Let's take a look at 2 Samuel 12 and verse 1 to see the result. Here we see David talking with Nathan the prophet. Nathan tells this beautiful little story about a man who had a pet lamb. He loved the lamb. It was part of the family and all that, and then someone came along and killed the lamb. David was furious. He was absolutely furious. He said, "That man has to die!" Nathan said, "David, you are that man. You are that man. That's what you did!"

That shows us, that analogy there of a sweet, innocent, lovely little lamb. God loved Uriah. He really did. He loved Uriah. He loves all of us and He loved Uriah. And yet, he allowed him to be killed. That was a horrible trial for Uriah. That was a horrible trial, actually, for David, also. But it was preparation for something in the future. It was preparation. In God's master plan, God's infinite wisdom, He allowed that to happen. But He does have a master plan, and He is infinitely wise.

It's not as if God doesn't know what's happening. God loves us. He loves us tremendously.

Romans 8:31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

If God is for us, who can be against us? We may fall under diverse trials. Sometimes into some very nasty situations. Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? ...

Nobody. Nothing can do that, unless we allow it. God will be there. He will be there.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

All things. Not just the good things, not just the pleasant things, not just the happy things. All things. The trials. The difficulties. The horrible situations. The persecution. All of those things can work together for good, will work together for good to those who love God, to those

who are the called according to His purpose. If we are following God, following that calling that He has given us, then anything can and will work for our good and we can learn from it. God is in charge. He knows what's happening.

1 Samuel 17:34 But David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep his father’s sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock,

35 “I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it.

This is the example of young David. We remember the story, how he went before Saul and Saul put all of his big heavy armor on David and said, “You can go out and fight Goliath with my armor.” David said, “No, no I can’t do that”, and he told the story of how he had been out watching the sheep, how a bear and a lion had attacked his animals and what he had done there.

David could have reacted differently to that particular situation with the wild animals. A bear? A lion? Those are not pleasant situations, either! A bear attacking your flock and then attacking you when you try to do something to the bear, or to the lion? David could have said, “Why, I could have been killed! Why in the world did God allow that?” But he didn’t. He realized that God was preparing him. He realized that God would allow this. He realized that there was something for him to learn in his life. And he learned faith from it. He learned that God was there and would protect him.

So, brethren, when we face our lions, when we face our bears, we need to be able to look beyond the present situation. Look beyond the present situation.

We need to realize that, through all of the things that God allows to happen in our lives, or causes to happen in our lives, and it’s one or the other... through all those things, He is preparing us — step-by-step — for other challenges in our lives. You can never forget that.

God was preparing David to be king. We, too, in the future will be kings and priests in the Kingdom of God. And God prepares us for that task through the trials in our life now. Do we understand that? These trials are our preparation. They are part of our training that God is putting us through. God used, among other things, a bear and a lion to help train David, to help prepare David to be king. He will use, hopefully, something else with us. But something in the way of difficulties and trials will be there to help prepare us for future challenges and future responsibilities.

There is one thing we can always be sure of, brethren, and that is, when God permits a trial in our life, He has our ultimate good at heart. Always. Our ultimate good! He sees beyond the present. He knows what He is doing with us. And He has our good at heart.

Hebrews 12:5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;

6 For whom the Lord loves he chastens. . .

Sometimes that chastening takes the form of a trial or a difficult situation in our lives. An opportunity for us to learn. An opportunity for us to change. An opportunity for us to be further prepared to be used by God in the future.

...For whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives.

Every son whom He loves; every son or daughter that He is dealing with will sometimes be scourged. Sometimes be whipped and beaten by life. That is done out of love, quite frankly. It’s done because God loves us and He wants to prepare us for other things that are coming down the line.

If we think about the example of Job, we realize once again that God is in charge. God is the one that sets the limits. I’m not going to get into a lot of this in Job, but I think it would be good to at least mention these scriptures.

Satan came before God and:

Job 1:8 Then the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?”

9 So Satan answered the LORD and said, “Does Job fear God for nothing?

10 “Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.

11 “But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!”

That’s the way of Satan. You hurt someone, and they curse you. And you hurt them again, and it’s strife and violence. And that’s what Satan thought would happen here, but he was wrong. God knew that there were certain things He needed to allow Job to go through that would steel him. That would make him hardened to life and be more of a productive individual in the future. He knew that. And He set limits on Satan.

12 And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person.” So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

Once again, “See my servant Job.”

Job 2:3 Then the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause.”

4 So Satan answered the LORD and said, “Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life.

5 “But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh...

Satan was saying, you wouldn't let me touch him before, but now I want to touch him and let's see how he reacts to that. God said okay, but He set the limit once again.

...and he will surely curse You to Your face!”

6 And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life.”

What I'm emphasizing here is that God was in control! God set the limits. God was the one that determined how far Satan could go and what could happen. And the same thing is true in our lives too, brethren. We need to be careful not to forget that.

To think, “God doesn't even see me now. He doesn't know what's happening. Oh, and this is so horrible.” No. No. God knows exactly what's happening. He really does. And He is in control of the situation.

In the case of Uriah the Hittite, God acted differently. He didn't set those limits. God allowed him to be killed. Why did He do that? I don't know. I don't have the answer to that. I know that God does. God has the answer to that. Within God's great plan He will have a reason for doing whatever He does or whatever He allows to happen.

Once again, God is in control.

He was in control during the years of Joseph's incarceration. When he was sold into slavery, when he was in prison, God was in charge.

God was in control when David had Uriah the Hittite killed. He allowed it to happen, but He was in charge.

God was in control when Satan attacked Job. We just got through reading that. He said you can go this far, but no further. God was in control.

And He is in control when we go through trials. He is in control.

The Apostle Paul went through some pretty harrowing things.

2 Corinthians 11:23 Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure...

Have you ever been beaten? Some of you have, I'm sure. I've never been horribly beaten. We got some whippings, as they were called, when we were young kids and had misbehaved. But I mean actually beaten with stripes? Most of us have not experienced that.

...in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.

In situations where his death was imminent; where he could very easily have died.

24 From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.

25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned...

There again, I know I have said this in earlier sermons: the process of stoning. You don't stone someone to aggravate them. You stone them to kill them. He was stoned and they wanted him dead, but he didn't die.

...three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep;

26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—

28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

The Apostle Paul had been through a lot of things. A lot of things. Once again, I think, if we were God, we would have spared him most of that, wouldn't we? Let's just give him a simpler, easier life. But God our Father did not. God Almighty said, "I have a purpose for the Apostle Paul, and he's got to go through these things." And we saw some of the things in God's Word that he went through. And God said, "Yep, he's going to go through them and he will learn something from them."

There is an entire generation in some parts of the world, notably Western Europe, partially United States, who seek only to ensure that their children... I lived in Germany for a number of years and the post-war generation, or let's say the generation that went through World War II—one of their main goals it seems is that their children would never have to go through and suffer what they suffered. Granted, there was a whole lot of suffering caused by that same generation, I'm not trying to negate that. But I saw it very clearly. They didn't want their children to have to go through the deprivation. Europe was a place of deprivation. It was a place of famine, trial and persecution during and after World War II. Many in that generation wanted to make sure their children never had to go through that. In the United States there was rationing of food stuffs, but there wasn't famine. We weren't starving in the United States,

but many people were starving, whether they were German, French, Hungarian or English. Many people were starving in Europe around World War II and thereafter.

But let's get back to the Apostle Paul. God allowed many different trials in Paul's life. There were reasons why He allowed them — just as there are reasons why He allows trials in our lives. God has His reasons.

God thinks about the future. He thinks about what might help us in the future, and sometimes that involves going through some kind of a trial now. What will help us in the future, not just making our lives more comfortable now. "Let's give them a nice, comfortable, easy life in this present situation that they're in." That's not the way God thinks. He thinks, "What do they need? What can I give them, even if it's in the way of trials, that they may learn some things and be better able to help and serve later?"

Let's look for just a moment at a scripture which demonstrates a level of maturity of the Apostle Paul that is incredible.

2 Corinthians 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

God was working mightily with the Apostle Paul, so mightily that evidently, according to what Paul was saying, even he himself was afraid, "I might get a big head about this. I might become exalted."

8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.

9 (This is interesting.) And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."...

"So Paul, what you need is a bit of weakness." And He gave it to him. Through some kind of a trial, through this thorn in the flesh. We don't know exactly, no one does, exactly what that thorn in the flesh was. There's speculation it was poor eyesight. We don't know. But God knew He needed to afflict the Apostle Paul in some way. Put him through a trial. Make him weak.

... "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." (And then the Apostle Paul says:) Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

That is an amazing attitude. The Apostle Paul said, "I realized I was getting a little too exalted, so God gave me some infirmities. He knocked me back down a few notches and I learned from that. And I'm happy that God did that, because I needed that, and I saw very

clearly that it was God's doing." That is an amazing attitude and insight. Do we have that same insight? We certainly can have.

10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

I don't think he took pleasure when something happened that really hurt. "Oh, this is wonderful. It's so pleasurable, that pain I'm going through." I don't think that's what he is talking about. What he is talking about is, "I see the goal. I realize that God is in control. I see that God has allowed me to go through this situation and it is helping me to be more humble and it is helping me to serve God better and to serve Jesus Christ and to serve the Church. Therefore, I am happy with that." Can we say that? Do we see that? An amazing attitude that the Apostle Paul had.

Philippians 4:11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:

12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Brethren, when we get to that point, we're at a good point. We may be hurting. We may be suffering. We may be in the midst of persecution. But when we can say this, we have gained a tremendous spiritual insight into how God deals with us, what He does with us and that He is in control and is working to help us. No matter how badly it may hurt or how uncomfortable it may be.

The question is, when there are trials in our own lives, when things go badly for us, when we're hurting or suffering or being persecuted, we're in a trial; how do we deal with it? What do we do? How do we react?

How do we deal with trial in our lives, are we learning to deal with them the way the Apostle Paul did? We obviously know that during a trial, when something comes into our lives that is difficult, we are suffering or in extreme discomfort or whatever. A difficult situation at work—some kind of a trial. When that happens, we know that we are to turn to God in prayer. That is rather basic, it is crucial and it is vitally important. We know that. We know to do that. I know what that's like. I think all of you do, too. You've been in situations. You've cried out to God, "Please help me."

Sometimes we find ourselves in very difficult situations —we find ourselves in trials — and are so overwhelmed that we neglect to do that. We're so overwhelmed, so hurt and whatever, that we forget. I don't know if that's ever happened to you. It has to me. I've talked to many people over the years and I think it's happened to more people than just myself. We forget to take the situation before God. This is the first and the most self-evident thing that we need to

do. We need to not forget that. When a trial comes, whatever the nature of that trial, we go to God and we take that to Him in prayer. We ask Him to help us to learn and help us to grow from it. Help us to endure it, if necessary. But we go to God in prayer.

Over and above that I would like to give you 4 brief points to keep in mind when you find yourself in a trial. The basic foundation is, we go to God. We talk to Him; we pray to Him. But here are 4 other points to keep in mind when you are going through a difficult situation in your life.

Let us never forget that no matter how bad the trial seems, no matter how dark the situation, God still cares for us. God loves us. He will not forget us. He loves us tremendously.

It might not seem that way at the moment, but we have to remind ourselves that that is the case. And it always is. Sometimes we forget that. So let us not forget that. No matter how bad the trial, no matter how dark the situation, God cares for us. God loves us. He is in control and He will not forget us or abandon us.

Matthew 25:40 And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.

If you think you’re one of the least, you’re still extremely important to God. It’s as if God Himself was affronted or hurt because, I don’t care what we think we are. How low we are. What kind of a low opinion we might have of ourselves. We are important to God. God knows exactly what we’re going through. He understands the joy in our lives. He understands the pain in our lives. He understands what we’re suffering through.

We can never forget this. When we suffer, He suffers. He knows what we’re going through. If the Scripture says that the hairs on your head have been counted, He knows exactly how many hairs you have on your head. Then yes, brethren, He knows what’s happening in our lives. He knows what’s happening, what’s going on. He knows what we may be suffering through, what joys and what our tribulations are.

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives...

In the world bad things happen, we hurt and we suffer. And we don’t understand. In the world, people don’t understand. Because they don’t have that spiritual connection with the Father. They don’t have a spiritual connection with their Elder Brother Jesus Christ. We do.

27 Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

Let’s follow that admonition in God’s word. That peace that God will give us, that Jesus Christ has promised us—that will give us stability in trials. That will remind us that God is on our side, because He is.

Once again, I know that it is not always easy to react righteously, to react properly when you're right in the middle of a trial. But I will say this. The more we keep this point in mind, the more we remember somewhere in the back of our minds, or the forefront of our minds (that is where it should come from)... that when trials come, that God is in charge and He is in control. He does love us. And there's something that we can learn from this, even if we caused it ourselves. The more we do that, the more we think on those things; the easier it will become. So always think that way.

1. We simply need to accept the trial. Just accept it.

I'm not saying that we need to have an attitude of defeatism. There are times, in situations we can get into, where we need to do something. We need to act. But other times and situations come about in our lives where there is nothing that we can do. At which point, we just need to say, "Okay God, I'm in this situation. I am in this trial, and I cannot affect the outcome of it in any direct, physical way. Help me to accept that it's here, to work with you on it, to remember that you're in control. Help me to just accept the fact that it's going on." We need to be able to accept the fact that we are in a trial and, once again, look beyond the present; beyond what we see around us. Beyond the immediate situation; the suffering, the hurt, the persecution or whatever it is that we're going through. We need to be able to look beyond that. We need to be "farsighted". The challenge is to be able to look beyond the trial, beyond the present situation.

Let's look at another what I feel is a very encouraging Scripture.

2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,

It's a difficult scripture to understand, I'll be honest. It's difficult to grasp. Because the natural human reaction is, "I hurt, that can't be good. What's going on here? Something's wrong." And there will be something wrong that is causing that pain. But there again, we need to be able to look beyond what's happening now and realize that whatever light affliction; and sometimes it's not all that light... This is what the Apostle Paul said. He called it a light affliction.

...which is but for a moment...

Sometimes, it doesn't seem that light to us, and sometimes it doesn't seem like it's just for a moment. We read about the situation with Joseph, who was in prison or slavery for years. It probably didn't seem very light or very momentary for him. But that's how God views it.

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,

This is what I'm talking about, seeing beyond the trial. Seeing beyond what is happening with us right now, beyond the present. In the *New Living Translation*, it says:

2 Corinthians 4:17 For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!

We need to remind ourselves of that.

2 Corinthians 5:7 For we walk by faith, not by sight.

That's not easy to do, but that's what we need to learn to do. We need to learn to walk by faith. You don't have faith in something that's right there already and it's happened. You have faith in something that will come. You have hope in something that will come. We can hope and have faith in the fact that God will bring us through whatever it is, in whatever way He decides to do it and that we will have learned something from it. Have faith. Walk by faith. That's what the Apostle Paul did. That's frankly what Joseph did. And in many ways, that's what Job did, finally. We need to learn to walk by faith. Assurance that God is in charge, assurance that God is in control. Assurance that God is allowing whatever it is for our good. He has our ultimate good in mind. Going on to Point 3:

3. Sometimes we simply need to change our perspective. We need to change our point of view about the trial.

I'm not talking about changing the circumstances. Because as we said before, sometimes we can't influence the circumstances at all. What I'm talking about is changing the way we view the circumstances. As I said before, it has to do with looking beyond, realizing that God is in charge and He has the big picture. If we don't, He does.

1 Peter 2:18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.

19 For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.

That's a good thing. God sees that as a good thing. Yes, we're going through grief, yes we're suffering, but we know that God is in charge. We know that God has a purpose for what we're going through. It is commendable, it says here.

20 For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.

21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

1 Peter 4:12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;

Other translations say, "...do not be surprised". And yet what do we do? A trial comes upon us, we're surprised! "What's happening? I don't know! Where's God in all of this? Why did He let this happen?"

We don't have the right perspective. We don't have a godly perspective of why God even allows us to go through trials. We have to learn to think differently. We have to learn to take on a godly perspective concerning trials.

As I mentioned at the outset, we need to look at ourselves, we need to examine ourselves, because sometimes we are the cause of our own trials. Many times we are not.

We need to come to the point that we can put it into God's hands, accept the trial and begin dealing with it. Of course, with God's help; only with God's help. Without God's help it would be rather a useless exercise. Being able to view a trial from a godly perspective, which we've talked about extensively here today, will help us to change our own perspective so that perspective will be more like that of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ.

4. We need to remember the fact that God has given us a tremendous source of strength. Strength and help and encouragement, in our brethren. Our brothers and sisters in God's Church. God gives us support and help and strength through them.

We really do need each other. I'm pretty sure, at least in my own mind, that the closer we get to the end (and we are in the end times right now), the closer we get to the end, the more we will need one another. I'm sure of that. Our own strength is simply not enough. We need the help of our spiritual family.

There is a saying I heard once which goes like this: "Ships are always secure in port, but ships weren't made to stay in port". They were made to go out and sail the seas. Sometimes the seas are awfully rough. But we are not single, individual ships floating all alone on a turbulent sea with no help. That's not what we are. When we fall into difficulties, other ships can come alongside us. Our brethren can come alongside of us and give us help. And we, too, can do that for our brothers and sisters in Christ. If you think about that, sometimes call upon that aid and sometimes give that aid.

Brethren, we are God's children. We are. All of us. We are God's children. And just as we know that part of the responsibility of a good father in a physical family is to teach his children, we know that God is about the business of teaching us. He is our Heavenly Father, our spiritual Father and He is teaching us.

Hebrews 13:5 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

6 So we may boldly say: "The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

...The Lord is my helper.

God Almighty has a plan for all of humanity, not just for us. For all of humanity. We review that plan every year through the Holy Days and we'll be doing that again shortly at the Feast of

Tabernacles; the Day of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and the Feast. And let me say this again very, very clearly: God has a plan for each and every one of us as individuals. He has a plan for us. He has called us out to be a part of His Church right now. We have the opportunity to begin learning what the real solutions to the woes of the world are. We can learn that now, through God's Church. We are part of the family of God and we will help to bring about real change in the not too distant future; according to God's will and according to His plan. Brethren, we can be certain that the trials that we face in this life will serve, in the long run, to make us better and more profitable members of that royal family. ♦