



## **When Life Gets You Down, Look Up!**

What do you do when life gets you down? Many people run for cover. Some hope that the troubles they are facing will simply disappear. Others find themselves fighting against their circumstances in an effort to be free from suffering. However, none of this works apart from the loving plan of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God is in the process of “fitting” us for the battles of life. Sorrow, frustration and pain are often the tools He uses to shape and mold our lives so that we become reflections of God’s mercy and grace to others. While He is not the author of heartache and tragedy, He certainly knows exactly how to use these for our benefit and His glory.

### **Setting Your Focus on Christ**

One of the hardest lessons we will ever learn is how to take a negative situation and turn it into a positive one. In Psalm 23, King David reminds us that it is all a matter of faith and perspective. He writes, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me” (v.4).

David’s words are stepping stones to a great faith. In fact, if we practice the principle that he lived by, God will develop a conquering faith within our lives. Sounds far-fetched? Sounds like something from the movies? It is not. David lived with adversity and, from time to time, we will too. No one escapes difficulty. It is a part of life lived in a fallen world, but we do not have to live with feelings of defeat, discouragement, and criticism.

You may be thinking, “But you don’t know my circumstances. There is no way for you to understand the pressure I feel or the discouragement that plagues my heart.” While we can’t truly know or understand the hurt another person may be experiencing, we do know that there is one person who understands perfectly and that is Jesus Christ.

He was rejected, betrayed, criticized, and crucified. If you are looking for someone to identify with the pain that you are feeling, do what David did – look up and realize there is someone who is walking through the valley with you. No matter how dark life becomes, Christ will lead you on to victory.

Paul was another person who faced constant opposition. He was criticized for his work and ministry. Sadly, the criticism did not come from the Roman government or from enemy forces. It came from men and women who were from the same heritage as the apostle. It also came from within the early church.

### **Never Lose Heart**

Each time he entered a city, Paul immediately went to the synagogue to preach God’s message of saving grace to the Jews. Then he would turn his attention to the Gentiles. But many times, there was not a welcome mat waiting for the apostle.



At Iconium, Paul was met with great criticism. There were threats made against him. Therefore, he fled to Lystra where, after hearing him preach the gospel, many came to know Christ as their Savior. (Acts 14) However, Paul was stoned by the Jews, thrown out of the city, and left for dead. But even this could not break Paul's spirit, desire, or will to tell others about God's eternal love and forgiveness.

In Acts 14, we read that "after the disciples had gathered around him, [Paul] got up and went *back* into the city" (v.20, emphasis added). Paul did not lose heart. His faith never wavered, his love for the Lord never flagged, and he never turned away from what God had called him to do.

Are you faced with a difficult situation, and your ability to cope seems to be fading? God will provide the strength, wisdom and courage you need to continue. Paul did not get off the hook. False criticism and persecution followed him to Jerusalem.

In Acts 21, Luke writes, "The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul" (vv.30-32).

No matter how viciously the enemy attacked his character, Paul never stopped doing what God had given him to do. Satan's goal is to stir up enough trouble and heartache to cause us to quit. He knows God has sealed our lives with an assurance of our eternal salvation. However, he remains relentless in his discouraging pursuit.

Paul was a master at handling criticism and rejection. He refused to be pulled down by the circumstances of life, and you can do the same. When he faced opposition, he just kept doing what he knew God had given him to do. He stayed focused on his objective. When life turned dark and ugly, Paul kept the focus of his heart set on Christ and consequently lived a remarkably free and peaceful life. He used the trials of life to tell others about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Constant criticism – especially false criticism—is very oppressive. It is destructive and hurtful. It hinders the work of God. It shrouds the truth with falsehood and never glorifies the Lord. How we handle discouragement and criticism indicates the depth of our faith in Christ. Are we willing to take God's hand and walk through the valley of the shadow of death?

D.L. Moody wrote, "The valley of the shadow of death holds no darkness for the child of God. There must be light, else there could be no shadow. Jesus is our Light. He has overcome death and every evil."

### **Turning Oppression into an Opportunity**

Every heartache, every frustration, every disappointment, and every failure is used by God to draw us closer to Himself. We may not understand why we have to face opposition at home, on our jobs, or even in our service to Christ, but God knows and understands, and this is all that counts.



How do you turn an oppressive situation into an opportunity for God?

**Realize that the hand of God is with you at all times.** God never leaves you alone to face the frustrations of this world. If it seems that you cannot hear His voice, be patient, be still, and be committed to trusting Him before you make a single move. Faithfulness, obedience, and willingness to wait on the Lord's timing speak volumes to God.

**Keep a positive mindset.** Sometimes this can be difficult but it is absolutely necessary. Maintaining a positive mindset does not mean denying the seriousness of our circumstances or the hurt that we may be feeling. However, it does mean that we willingly keep our eyes of faith set on Christ, knowing that He will fulfill His purpose in our lives.

**See the hand of God in every circumstance you face.** Andrew Murray wrote that the storms of life are the advent of God's coming – “the evidence of His presence” surrounding us. We are His beloved children and when we hurt, He hurts with us. When we face heartache, He comes to our aid. When we are mistreated, He is grieved and goes to work on our behalf. Paul was not angry at his persecutors. He did not waste time seeking vengeance or retribution. Instead, he blessed those who sought to hurt him.

**Maintain an attitude of selfless love.** If anyone had an impressive resume, it was the apostle Paul. He was educated at the best schools, held some of the highest social positions, and achieved tremendous knowledge and status, but none of that was important to him. In Philippians he writes, “Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things” (Philippians 3:7-8).