

Negative circumstances occasionally surface in our life that can be devastating to us both physically and emotionally. Maybe you have experienced a tragedy that has caused you deep hurt. Perhaps you have lost a job or suffered a financial setback. An injury may have occurred to you or someone you love which has greatly limited your ability to function in a normal way. It could be that you've experienced the untimely death of a friend or family member. This session, and the one after it, are designed to help you get through these difficult situations. To bring you hope and joy in the midst of sorrow and grief.

I was once wrongly taught from a Christian ministry that I would never need to experience tragedy or loss if I would simply learn to trust God. That is not true. The Bible clearly teaches that we **will** experience trouble and hardships even when we are standing strong in our faith towards God.

John 16:33

I have told you these things so that, in union with me, you have peace. In the world you will have hardships, but have courage; I have overcome the world."

The word hardships is a translation from the Greek word *thlipsis* (thll-leep-sis). It means adversity in the form of tribulation, affliction, distress or oppression. You and I live in the world and, because of that, we will need to deal with hardships. They cannot be avoided.

1 Thessalonians 3:4

For even when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction, just as it came to pass, and you know.

These Christian believers were told ahead of time that they were going to suffer affliction. And sure enough, the affliction did happen. I would love to tell you that you and I can live our entire life without having to suffer any affliction. But that is not what the Bible teaches.

1 Peter 4:12

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is occurring among you to tempt you, as if a strange thing was happening to you.

This verse tells us not to be surprised when fiery ordeals come our way. A fiery ordeal is a calamity. With no pun intended, the recent bushfires

throughout Australia are an example of such a calamity. In other words, we should expect or anticipate that we will experience calamities from time to time.

Some Christians think that we should not talk about these things. That we should only speak positively. Those of you who know me are aware that it is mostly positive, uplifting promises of God that come out of my mouth. But there is also reality that we have to deal with concerning negative situations that happen to us, and to those we love. These situations are not going to disappear just because we decide not to talk about it.

I have been to churches where everyone comes to church and they pretend like their life is all wonderful and great. They hide all of the problems and challenges they are going through from their pastors, elders and the other people they are acquainted with in the church. Maybe they think that by sharing their misfortunes they will be judged as a sinner.

Mark 2:15-17

15 And it came to pass that he was reclining to eat in his house, and many tax collectors and sinners reclined with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many, and they were following him.

16 And the experts in the law who were Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, "Why is he eating with tax collectors and sinners?"

17 And when Jesus heard it, he says to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick do. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

A real church should be a place for sinners to go, to receive help. Not a place for the perfect to flaunt their righteousness. Let the seasoned believers in your church know about the problems you are going through so they can pray for you and minister to those needs with the love of God and the Word of God. If you share your issues and they choose to judge you rather than help you, I recommend that you find a new church.

Now I would like to address the origin of stress, affliction, tribulation, tragedies and calamities. First, I will point out where they are **not** coming from. The true God is not responsible for any of this.

1 John 1:5

And this is the message that we have heard from him and declare to you, that God is light and there is no darkness in him at all.

This is the nature of the true God. He is light. He doesn't just bring light. He is light. The introduction of light ends darkness. The absence of light results in darkness. Light and darkness cannot exist together. God has absolutely no darkness in him. How do we know that? Because he is light.

1 John 4:16

And we have known and have believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him.

God is not only light. He is also love. What does that mean? It means that He has absolutely no hate in Him. No desire for revenge, to punish or hurt someone in any way. These are two key attributes of God. He is light. And he is love. Therefore, everything that comes from him has to come in the form of light and in the form of love.

Tribulation and calamities fit into the category of darkness. They do not originate from someone who loves you. So, where do they come from?

1 Corinthians 15:26

The last enemy that will be brought to an end is death.

The Word of God calls death an enemy. It is an enemy to us, and it is an enemy to God. I have heard pastors teach that when someone we love dies, it is a good thing. That is not what the Bible says. It calls death an enemy.

2 Timothy 1:10

but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the good news,

Death is an enemy and it has been abolished through Christ Jesus. God doesn't cause death. He delivers us from it. This makes sense because God is all light and he is all love. So, if God is not the author of death, who is responsible? Who is responsible for the death of a loved one?

Hebrews 2:14

Now since the children participate fully in blood and flesh, in a similar way he also himself shared the same so that through death he could make ineffective the one who holds the power of death, that is, the Devil,

The Bible clearly tells us that it is the Devil who holds the power of death.

Matthew 4:8-9

*8 Again, the Devil took him to an exceedingly lofty mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them,
9 and he said to him, "All these things I will give you if you will fall down and worship me."*

The Devil offered to hand over to Jesus the authority over the kingdoms of this world. This is because the Devil owns that authority right now. God originally gave this authority to Adam. When Adam sinned, that authority was transferred from him over to Satan.

2 Corinthians 4:4

in whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of those who do not believe, to keep them from seeing and shining forth the light of the good news of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.)

In this verse the Devil is called "the god of this age." He has free reign on this planet to wreak havoc. And that's what he likes to do. This is why we have hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, famines, droughts and bush fires in Australia. When we listen to our local and worldwide news, mostly what we hear are negative situations. Why is this? Because the Devil is negative, and he exploits his influence throughout the entire earth.

John 10:10

The thief does not come, except to steal, and kill, and destroy. I (Jesus Christ) came so they can have life, and have it abundantly.

Here we see the ministry of Jesus Christ, which is to bring joy and abundant life to mankind. In opposition, the Devil desires to steal from you, kill you and destroy you. Such a nice guy, isn't he?

Hebrews, chapter 11 contains a list of what is popularly referred to as 'heroes of the faith.' These men believed God in great and powerful ways. But if you study their lives from the scriptures, you will also see where they

were brutally attacked and suffered through many hardships because of it. Being a strong believer does not exempt us from persecution. The reason they were heroes of the faith had a lot to do with how they responded to adversity. That is the challenge for you and I. We cannot prevent hardship and misfortune from crossing our path. However, we can determine how we choose to deal with it.

The Apostle Paul was a very spiritual man. His wonderful ministry is mentioned throughout the book of Acts. And yet he suffered greatly. This is recorded in blatant detail in 2 Corinthians chapter 11. Here is one highlight.

2 Corinthians 11:24-25

24 Five times I received from the Jews forty lashes minus one.

25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent adrift at sea;

Some Christians teach that we go through these things because we have sinned and now God is correcting us. The true God is light. He is not going to whip his servant Paul who has been loyal to teach God's Word to his people. Are you kidding me? This persecution is coming from the evil one, the Devil.

In 2 Corinthians 12:8 it says that Paul pleaded with the Lord three times concerning this persecution. Here was God's response.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

9 And he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power reaches its fulfillment in weakness." Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ will rest on me.

10 Therefore, on behalf of Christ, I am content in weaknesses, in being mistreated, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties; for when I am weak, then I am powerful.

When our weakness is exposed due to trials and tribulations we are going through, the power of God becomes even more accessible to us. This is the love of the true God. He sees our hardships and gives us strength to get through them.

When they witness a positive outcome from a hardship, some Christians think that God was responsible for bringing the negative situation to us; that he deliberately allowed or caused the bad thing to happen in order to initiate a positive result. That is not the case. God is light and therefore he cannot and will not cause these hardships to occur in our life.

A number of years ago a Christian family lived right down the road from my house. The Barrick family were faithful churchgoers; their father was a leader in the church. They were driving home from church in their van one Sunday evening when, headed in the opposite direction, was a policeman on a high-speed chase of a drunk driver. The drunk driver was traveling 70 mph, nearly double the posted speed limit, when it crashed head on with the van the Barrick's were in. The father and mother in the front seat received severe injuries. But the worst of it came to the young teenage daughter in the back seat. Poor Jen took a huge hit to her brain and immediately fell into a coma. She was quickly airlifted by helicopter to the hospital.

After examining Jen's condition, the doctors told her parents that she had suffered a global injury to her brain and would be fortunate to live through the night. If Jen somehow survived, the outcome they anticipated was that she would remain a vegetable for the rest of her life. They did not expect her to ever walk or talk again.

The parents of Jen refused to accept this prognosis. They rallied as many people as they could to pray for Jen on a continuous basis. They were not just praying that she would survive, but for her complete recovery. Their focus was on the promises of God rather than the life-threatening coma their daughter was in.

Two weeks later, Jen miraculously snapped out of her coma. Over time she began to recover her ability to think. Eventually, she was able to return to a life where she could think, talk and walk again. I met Jen last year at a local church where she gave her testimony.

Jen's recovery was not just physical and mental. It was also spiritual. Her relationship with God grew to a new height that she had never reached prior to the accident. As part of her recovery, she now has a deep burning desire to dedicate herself in full service to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Her recovery had been an absolute miracle. God healed her. She has since written a book about her story, along with doing speaking engagements and appearing on talk shows throughout the country to let people know that the God she loves and serves can heal any wound.

When we look at this story, we are tempted to say, “God caused the accident so it would change this teenager’s life. And so other people’s lives could be changed by her story.” It is true that her story has changed many people’s lives. But it is not true that God orchestrated the accident for that purpose. The true God, who is all love, would never smash the brain of one of his children in order to help them grow in their faith towards him. This accident was caused by a drunk driver who was running away from a policeman. The Barrick’s had no control over what happened. They suffered a hardship due to a circumstance outside of themselves.

1 John 4:4

You are from God, little children, and have overcome them, because greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world.

God is able to take a bad situation like the one described with the Barrick family and cause something great and glorious to result from it. This doesn’t mean that God caused the negative event to happen. It simply means that the true God is much more powerful than the Devil. Our God is much bigger and stronger than the forces of evil. He has the awesome ability to produce wonderfully, positive things from the negative situations orchestrated by the Devil.

In 2 Corinthians 12:1-4, Paul mentions a great vision he had where he was caught up into paradise. This vision was so real to him that, at the moment he received it, he didn’t know whether it was just a vision or if it was really happening.

Why do you think Paul was given such an awesome vision? Paul was enduring so much torture, punishment, and other trials at this time. To give Paul the strength to go on, the Lord gave him this vision. It helped Paul to see that these trials would not last forever. One day in the future, all of his problems would go away. One day in the future, the hardships would end. And everything he had endured would all be worth it.

God has promised us eternal rewards for our faithful service to him in this lifetime. And when it is necessary for us to endure hardships, he is there with us. Not only to comfort us, but to help us grow in our faith in him.

Romans 5:3-5

3 And not only that, but let us also boast in our hardships, knowing that hardship produces endurance;

4 and endurance, character; and character, hope;

5 and hope does not disappoint us, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy spirit that was given to us.

Do you want to grow in your relationship with God? To better understand his love so you can be more effective in sharing it with others? When hardships come our way, and we endure those hardships, spiritual growth results from it. The true God, who is all light and all love, refuses to allow us to be defeated by the darkness of the Devil.

Jen Barrick is an example of someone who learned how to turn darkness into light. To this day, her brain has not fully recovered. She has to fight through many limitations due to that accident. But this has not stopped her and her parents from forming a ministry called “Hope Out Loud” where they travel throughout the country to do speaking engagements at schools, churches, women’s conferences and other special events. Through these venues, Jen continues to minister to the hearts and lives of many people.

God bless Jen Barrick. And God bless all of you who, although you are suffering great hardships, have the courage and the strength to stand for the true God and not allow yourself to become defeated by the sufferings, tribulations and calamities orchestrated by the God of this world, the Devil.

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