

How to deal with disappointment

Facing setbacks, unanswered prayers, and affliction

Introduction

God wants his flock to be a theological people. That is a people that knows God, that understands his ways, that knows his teaching, that celebrates his attributes and knows his will for them.

Sadly, most Christians today are not theological people at all but are psychological people; that is, people dominated by their soul (*psyche*).¹

Thus, when soulish people are affected by external circumstances they react like the world. Vicissitudes of life are perceived as a threat to their happiness. Every problem is about me; every difficulty is seen through the lens of how it affects me; every affliction is only remedied by relieving the pain and suffering caused to me.

The goal of many supposed Christians appears to be the continued happiness, balance, security, prosperity, health and welfare of themselves.

This was not the goal of many glorious saints in history who gladly courted persecution, torture, imprisonment and a brutal death in order to safeguard the claims of God and witness to Christ. Great saints took no consideration for their life and comforts at all. Duty to God overrode earthly comforts and personal ambition.

Apart from the hordes of saints that gave their lives in martyrdom (and their stories ought to be read more), even in more modern times we see folk like David Brainerd [1718-1747] who, despite his consumption, slept in the rain under trees in order to bring the Gospel to the Native American Indians. It brought on an early death, but it also brought a genuine revival at Crossweeksung (Pennsylvania).

Thus when faced with disappointments and unanswered prayers, modern Christians feel assaulted and even cheated. How can the all-powerful God, who says that he is their Father, not change their circumstances for the better? Why do we not get a miracle every time we need one?

Thus many feel that the times that they live in are frivolous and random. There seems to be no plan, nor any undergirding theme in their lives. This leads to frustration, disappointment and many questions. In some, it leads to apostasy.

This paper attempts to deal with some of this and show that the real issue is not how we react to strife but what our theological predisposition about life is.

¹ The NT Greek word for ‘soul’ is *psuche*, from which we get the word psychology (the Greek ‘u’ becomes ‘y’ in transliteration).

The facts of the matter

Lets start by admitting some plain facts.

The Christian life is not a bed of roses.² It is not full of earthly pleasures and is not centred upon me being happy. It is challenging and full of tribulations. Jesus even warned those hearing his Gospel message to count the costs before enrolling.³ Over and over again we are warned that there are many tribulations in the Christian life and we must complete the sufferings of Christ (Jn 16:33; Acts 14:22; 2 Cor 1:4; Col 1:24; 1 Thess 3:4). Since this is plain, I will not expound it further.

Now what does this mean in practice?

It means that I will fall sick and not get healed. I may sometimes get healed by doctors, by time or even by divine grace, but often I will not. It is a terrible wickedness to say to sick people in conventions that they did not get healed because they had no faith. By all means pray for healing and get treated in the best way, but healing is not automatically guaranteed because you are a Christian.⁴

It means that I will face persecution. Exactly what this means differs with every person. Some will face violence and death. Sadly, brethren in certain foreign countries are facing this every day. Others will merely face ridicule or mocking at work or being ostracised by family. All Christians will face something between these two extremes at some point.

It means that our prayers will often not get answered in the way we would like because our understanding of God's will is faulty. Prayers are petitions to God and often these petitions are rejected in favour of something better according to God's will. To us this appears to be an unanswered prayer but to God the answer is 'No'.⁵

It means that I will be rejected, betrayed and slandered at some point, even by those I love. This seems impossible to us when we are first converted yet it is all too true. Sadly, the worst betrayals come from those within the church; often those in the world treat us better. Why is this? It is because we have a common enemy that will do everything he can to put a wedge between believers. Sadly, too many do not see this temptation and merely react because their feelings are hurt.

It means that I will suffer in all sorts of ways. These include the above but also deeper pain. There will be times when I will feel isolated and alone, when I am tempted to despair and

² What about Matt 11:29-30, 'Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light'. This is about taking up the yoke of Christ – becoming a Christian. It is not arduous to become a Christian since God does all the work, giving us faith and repentance. This is not talking about service to Christ as a Christian which entails suffering.

³ Lk 14:26-33, 'If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has *enough* to finish *it* -- lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see *it* begin to mock him, saying, "This man began to build and was not able to finish". Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple'.

⁴ Physical healing is not in the atonement. The healing spoken of in passages connected to atonement are mostly speaking about the healing of sin (e.g. Isa 53:5).

⁵ There are many answers to prayer: 'no, not yet, yes, not in this way, no – but here is grace to cope', but we are only interested in 'yes',

give up, when I am tempted to grievously sin and occasionally when I feel that God has deserted me.

It makes no sense to pretend that these are not facts. Experience of life shows us that the pretences of Charismatic dominionists, triumphalists and Word-Faith enthusiasts are heresies that have no substance.

The real issue is – how do we deal with this?

The theological process to prepare for disappointment

Introduction

The key issue is to prepare yourself by learning about God and his decree well in advance of trying to face hard disappointments.

Good churches will teach young converts in all issues of the faith, often by using a sane catechism. Sadly such training is now out of fashion with almost every church and this is a big mistake. As soon as we are converted we should begin to start our journey of deeper and deeper understanding of the grace of God in salvation. This will be accompanied by an understanding of God himself. It is this understanding that will be of the most use in your later life in facing problems because it make us wise.

In life it is wisdom that we need most (as Solomon realised) and this wisdom is developed by a growing understanding of the nature, character, purpose (decree) and ways of God. Part of this wisdom is understanding how to deal with specific obstacles in life because there is Biblical teaching on it (such as fleeing temptation to fornication). However, other types of wisdom arise from deduction of necessary truth based upon our understanding of God's word coupled with an understanding of God's character. Sometimes we know how to deal with a situation because we know how God would deal with it.

So, the crucial issue is preparedness. Be prepared in understanding theology and grow in the knowledge of God. Be wise before the event.

The sovereignty of God

This is an absolutely fundamental issue that undergirds almost everything in doctrine and life.

Develop a good understanding of God's total and absolute sovereignty. This does not just regard salvation (God is sovereign in a man's conversion and man can do nothing; Rm 9:11-16). It is not just in regard of angelic beings; who are subservient to him in every respect (Heb 1:7). It is not just in regard of history and providence; God rules nations to his benefit and glory (Exod 19:5; Ps 24:1; Dan 4:35). It is about every tiny detail of your life.

My times *are* in Your hand. Ps 31:15

Once you truly understand and accept this, your life will change to being more faithful.

Everything that happens to you is not only under God's sovereign control, it has been predestined from eternity.

Sometimes I am frustrated when people think that they are being pious when they speak through gritted teeth and say, 'I believe that God knows all about this'. They don't accept the situation, often believing that the devil is in control, but just believe that God knows

their suffering. Wrong. The devil is not in control; it is God that is allowing this circumstance according to his good pleasure and for your benefit and training.

I cannot affirm strongly enough how important this matter is. Strangely many that accept the sovereignty of God in grace and conversion utterly fail to appreciate the sovereignty of God in the details of their own life.

Let us look at some Biblical support for this.

My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, *and* skilfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when *as yet there were* none of them.
Ps 139:15-16 [Every day of our lives has been fashioned by God; everything that happens to us is according to his predetermined plan.]

All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. **Rm 8:28** [Even the 'bad' things work for our good.]

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. **Eph 2:10** [Even the good things that we do in life were pre-ordained by God in eternity.]

In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. **1 Thess 5:18** [Everything is God's will and our attitude ought to be thankfulness not complaining and doubt.]

The first point is to understand that everything that happens in our life is not only under God's complete and full control, but he has predestined this from eternity. God is far greater than many Christians even imagine.

Submission to the divine will

Many Christians are happy to concede that God is in charge of the good things in life but cannot accept that he controls the bad things. Thus all sorts of false doctrines are developed by church leaders, such as that it is the devil that is in charge of the bad things that happen to us.

Firstly, the devil is not in charge of anything, except the angels that chose to follow him and became demons. The devil does not own this world and nor does he own men.⁶

Secondly, Scripture is exceptionally clear that all 'evil' things are under God's sovereign control. I have written entire papers on this matter alone but these Scriptures will suffice for now:

Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity [*ra'* = 'evil']?
Job 2:10

I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity [*ra'* = 'evil']; I, the LORD, do all these things. **Isa 45:7**

Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that woe [*ra'* = 'evil'] and well-being proceed?
Lam 3:38

If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid? If there is calamity [*ra'* = 'evil'] in a city, will not the LORD have done *it*? **Amos 3:6**

⁶ Ps 24:1, 'The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein'.

Look for yourself and see that just as God controls the sunshine, he also controls storms, hurricanes, floods, hail and wind. Just as God provides food for mankind he also sends drought and famine. Just as God protects his people from enemies, he also allows them to be attacked, captured and exiled when necessary. Just as God heals his people, he also allows them to be sick and die.

The great example of triumph through adversity is Job whom God blessed with abundance and then allowed him to lose everything: lose his children, lose his herds and flocks, be chided by his wife, lose the respect of his neighbours, be blamed by his friends and become very sick and pitiful. It was the same God that blessed Job at the beginning, caused Job to suffer in the middle and again blessed Job at the end.

Job is the great example of submission to the divine will in extreme situations. As such he is a great model for Christian behaviour.

The key to submission to God's will, whether it is good or bad from our point of view, is to understand that God is sovereign in the control of our circumstances and he always allows events to be for our good.

So first we need a theological understanding of God's sovereignty; then we need to be submitted to that sovereignty.

Living by faith

Much rubbish is talked about today regarding living by faith. In fact it is nothing to do with performing miracles and healing everybody, or even believing to get rich. Neither is it having faith to suddenly become holy.⁷

Living by faith is living according to God's word, much of which tells us to behave exactly the opposite of how we would normally behave in the world. For instance:

SELF DEFENCE

The world tells you to defend yourself and repay those who attack you. God's word says,

I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. **Matt 5:39**

Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. ... Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. **Rm 12:17-21**

LOVING ENEMIES

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy!' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. **Matt 5:43-45**

⁷ There are various heresies that teach that sanctification is a sudden event based upon faith and a special experience of God (e.g. Wesleyan perfectionism, Pentecostal baptism in the Spirit or Higher Life victory). This is nonsense. There is legal, definitive sanctification, which is once only, a corollary of justification, that admits us to heavenly places. Then there is progressive sanctification, whereby we are being changed from one degree of glory to another. This is under the control, of the Holy Spirit and is conjoined by us in learning how to mortify the flesh and live by faith daily.

GIVE AND NOT TAKE

Freely you have received, freely give. **Matt 10:8**

Give, and it will be given to you. **Lk 6:38**

Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask *them* back. **Lk 6:30**

More than being the opposite of the world, living by faith is the way that we apply the truth of God to ourselves, practically.

TRUSTING THAT GOD IS YOUR FATHER

Since God deems it necessary to give us tribulation in this life (in fact it is vital to keep us humble and dependent), there is a great temptation to believe that God is either against us or doesn't care, or worse that the world is just a capricious place with no oversight. This takes real faith.

When problem after problem assaults you, then you need real faith to continue to believe that God is your Father who cares about you and gives you tribulation to make you patient.⁸

TRUSTING IN THE POWER OF THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

There is a continual challenge to believe in the efficacy of God's mercy towards his elect in the face of our sins. When we sin grievously, we may regret, grieve for it, confess it, repent of it, and pray – but it is very hard to actually believe that God will forgive us.

This is when we need real faith to overcome our natural distrust in mercy and affirm that God has forgiven me in the name of Jesus and that I am cleansed by the blood of Jesus. The affirmation, after confession etc., is very necessary in order to stand on the ground of forgiveness. This takes faith that I am again practically righteous in God's sight and that I always was righteous in heavenly places because of my union with Christ in the Spirit.

TRUSTING IN WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT MY NATURE

This is a very big topic, which I will only touch upon.

Paul's Gospel, explained in his letters, involves statements about truths regarding the changes that occurred in our regeneration and conversion. Living by faith is walking according to the truth of these statements and not ignoring or denying them. For example:

- Understanding that I was dead in sins and dead towards God before regeneration. Understanding that I have been made alive in Christ.⁹
- Understanding that I have been legally justified before God and stand in the righteousness of Christ.¹⁰
- Understanding that regeneration has given me eternal life and a new nature. Understanding that I have died in Christ and have been raised in Christ.¹¹

⁸ Rm 5:3-4, 'we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope'. Jm 1:2-3, 'count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience'.

⁹ Eph 2:1 'And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins'.

¹⁰ Rm 5:1, 'having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ'. Rm 5:17, 'those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ'.

¹¹ Rm 6:5-8, 'For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin

- Understanding that, therefore, I now have two natures in my personality: an old nature that sins and grows in corruption¹² plus a new nature which is in the likeness of Christ.¹³
- Understanding that the progress of sanctification is learning how to put off the old nature and put on the new nature.

We could continue, but this is enough for now. All of these issues require faith; we must believe that they have actually occurred. When I talk to Christians I find that many of the above items are completely misunderstood by them, or that they know nothing of these issues at all. Others that teach the churches have grave errors regarding them, such as denying the two natures.¹⁴ Such folk cannot understand sanctification and cannot live by faith.¹⁵

Living by faith is very grounded; it involves many of the fundamental aspects of living an ordinary Christian life. It is not about supernatural power.

You have to choose which of two ways to live: choosing to live according to God's word, which requires faith to believe it is true and worth following, or not.

All these are but a few aspects of learning the will of God; yet even so, even these are not practised by many longstanding Christians.

Example of trusting in God's sovereignty

Understanding the breadth of the sovereignty of God in our lives requires faith. You must start with believing that God is sovereign in your life; sovereign over everything.

For example, someone married young and later becomes a Christian. The wife does not convert and this leads to years of frustration and discord. Some are then tempted to say, 'since I was married before I was converted, it is clearly wrong to be married to a non-Christian, therefore I will divorce her so that I can marry a Christian woman'.

This is wrong on many counts (e.g. there is no Biblical ground for divorce in this case), but the overriding factor is that God was just as sovereign over this person's life before he was married as when he was saved. God is God. The true starting point is to go to God's sovereignty first. Since God is in control of this man's life, he must accept that it is God's will for him to be married to this woman and to see what God's plan is for them both. He must honour, love and cherish her because that is his duty. But he must also seek to save her and be patient in the meantime.

In short, he must have faith that God was in control of his life when he got married and that it is God's plan for him to be in this situation.

The eternal plan and purpose of God

It is vital to understand the eternal plan and purpose of God. In theological terms, this is the doctrine of the decree of God or the counsel of God.

might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him'.

¹² Eph 4:22, 'put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts'.

¹³ Eph 4:24, 'put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness'. Col 3:10, 'put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him'.

¹⁴ Even Martyn Lloyd-Jones failed to understand this or expound Romans 6 properly.

¹⁵ They have enough knowledge to know not to sin in practice (what is wrong is wrong), but cannot understand the spiritual basis of sanctification.

Now, for example, it is vital to understand God's decree in order to understand the Gospel. So many people have no clue whatsoever about the decree and thus make mistake after mistake about the theology of the Gospel.

Any supposed Christian that denies election (and there are many) is an example of a person that does not understand God's decree or the order of salvation. Arminians don't understand the decree because they fail to appreciate the eternal sovereignty of God in the decree of salvation (denying predestination).¹⁶ Many supposed New Calvinists don't understand the decree because they tend to affirm a desire of God to love everyone and affirm a corresponding universality in the atonement.¹⁷ In fact, this is Amyraldism.

But the decree goes much further than this and affects everyone in the church. Every Christian has a part to play in this decree of God.

We must understand our part in the eternal plan of God and submit to it. This is where we need faith and submission. For example, it may mean accepting a part that you do not like and react against. This must be dealt with.

God deals with every individual differently and sometimes his plan makes no sense to us; but it is perfect to him.

Stephen was perhaps the greatest of all the NT saints bar Paul. He was full of the Spirit (only three people were said to be FULL of the Spirit). His final sermon shows what an amazing insight he had into God's plan; in fact he reveals things to us in Acts 7 that we did not know from Genesis. Then we see the amazing courage of the man in the face of certain death. What preaching to his accusers; what a Gospel presentation, what courage to admonish sinners. Stephen was a truly great man. Yet God allows him to be killed very early on in the development of the church. Surely he would have become another Timothy or Silas? Why remove a man who could have given so much service to God?

The apostle James was trained by Jesus with the twelve in order to be his representative after the resurrection. His brother John lived to be the last of the apostles, still active around 95AD, even when banished to Patmos. Yet James was allowed by God to be beheaded by Herod Agrippa very early in church history in 44AD (Acts 12:1-2). How does that make any sense to men? Yet God's plan is perfect.

We see things like this in the church all the time. Someone seeks to be a leader and cannot accept being something else. People become church leaders when far more gifted people do not. All of this is confusing – but God's sovereignty must be accepted and submitted to.

God's plan always works itself out, but it requires submission. When men take their life and ministry into their own hands, and force something, it always works out badly. I have seen men that were disappointed to be passed over in a church, leave and force their own church ministry elsewhere. They became leaders or missionaries and gained quite a following, but it was all flesh. I have seen some men that started out like this being orthodox and Reformed but then fall into error upon error and end up engaged in extreme Pentecostalism.

We must submit to God's eternal plan and spend time trying to understand what it is, even when it involves disappointment and sorrow.

¹⁶ In fact Arminians deny all the doctrines of grace.

¹⁷ I.e. affirming that Jesus died for everyone.

The Fatherhood of God

Over everything, God is our Father. Whether we understand the theology of sovereignty properly, or understand the nuances of God's decree, we all know that God is our Father. This is the reality.

Thus when we are faced with grief, sorrow, sadness, disappointment, affliction or persecution, we must fall back on the fact that God is our Father and he is allowing this for a reason.

Thus we must prepare ourselves by really understanding the Fatherhood of God.

There are those who say that God, as our Father, would not allow us to suffer, or be sick, or be broke, or be attacked. This is a failure to understand God's word. God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and affirmed this with actual words from heaven. Yet God allowed Jesus to be tormented, vilified, attacked, arrested, tortured, imprisoned and finally crucified.

Our sonship is not a guarantee of protection for adversity. Our sonship is a guarantee of our parenthood. We are to represent the God who is our Father. Since the world treated God's only-begotten Son with contempt, scorn, hate and brutality, it will treat us in a similar manner (Matt 10:25; Jn 15:20). Sonship is a guarantee to tribulation not protection from evil.

However, whatever we are called to go through, whether good or bad, we are certain that God our Father is with us and aiding us in every possible way according to his will. We are always in God's hands and must not fear what men can do to us.

Pray with wisdom

So often, when Christians face hardship, their faith is rattled and they feel that their prayers are unanswered. Then they doubt. If not checked this can lead to a shipwreck of their faith.

We must not look at our circumstances with the natural eyes of the old nature or the world. God sees things from a heavenly perspective and that is how we must try to see things, 'Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God' (Col 3:2-3).

Very often a negative thing, when viewed from the earth, is a positive thing, when viewed from above.

The greatest example of this is the cross of Christ. From a human perspective this was a terrible tragedy and a waste. From God's perspective it was the victory over sin and Satan and the emancipation of the elect, bringing reconciliation for men. God's ways are not man's ways and his ways are frequently mysterious (Job 9:10; Ps 92:5-6; Rm 11:33).

When Paul was imprisoned for two years in Herod's Praetorium at Caesarea, then house arrest in Rome (in chains) for another two years, his disciples must have been shocked and saddened. How many prayers were offered for his speedy release? None of them were answered and Paul spent the first two years contemplating but not writing. He then spent the next two years evangelising from his hired house and writing the best letters the world has ever seen (Ephesians, Colossians and Philippians). Without the imprisonment these would never have been written, which have edified millions of believers over two millennia.

We do not know best – only God knows best.

Thus submission must undergird all our prayers. We must be completely dependent upon God and not pushing ourselves in any way at all.

Pray to understand the will of God, not to change it.

Here is my assessment of the types of issues we face in prayer.

- Something bad happens that is caused by satanic attack, but allowed by God. We pray to understand the situation and at first do not know the origin. When we discern the demonic origin, then we know to fight the problem, pray for it to be removed, resist the enemy and press onwards despite the problem. God's purpose in this is to train us to be better at spiritual warfare.
- Something bad happens that is caused by God that has no demonic involvement. We pray to understand the situation. If God does not remove the problem after praying three times (2 Cor 12:8) we understand that it is there for our spiritual benefit, even though it may cause us difficulties or pain. We thank God for the problem and continue to serve God.
- Something 'good' happens to us, which is a demonic temptation. We pray for wisdom and behave with caution. After God reveals the true origin of this matter, we flee the temptation. [This temptation could be the offer of a better job some distance away, the advances of a pretty girl / boy, the chance of some sort of celebrity status, the offer of a great deal of money in suspicious circumstances, and so on.]
- Nothing happens. Life is tedious, boring, lacklustre and with few rewards. We pray about the matter to seek the will of God and ask for change. If God gives us a change, we thank him and accept the change. If there is no change, we thank God and accept the lack of change and ask for patience.
- We have an open door that appears to be a great blessing to us. We do not go through the door. We pray and ask God for wisdom and learn more about this opportunity. When we gain more facts, we reassess the situation. If the door was opened by God, we move through and take the opportunity. If the door was a satanic or worldly temptation we do not move through and we resist the enemy.

In everything, the real issue is knowing the will of God; this is a theological resolution. Many Christians have messed up their lives by foolishly accepting seemingly good opportunities that were devilish temptations or worldly advancement. One of the most far reaching is marrying the wrong person. Falling in love can be a godly blessing or a demonic temptation; it must be tested.

Fellowship in the truth

There are some things we cannot do alone. This is why God ordained that we should be in the closest fellowship with fellow believers who think the same thing.

When faced with problems, afflictions and disappointments that are hard to handle alone, be open in sharing with fellow believers and seek their advice, edification, wisdom and comfort.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.

2 Cor 1:3-5

Now fellowship today is a difficult matter. The churches are so full of apostasy and error that many find themselves unable to attend a local church. In such circumstances there is now the benefit of seeking solace and advice from people we trust that we have not even met, through emails. So many people have been helped as a result of a teacher they have learned to trust through reading his teaching, counselling them from a distance by emails. Indeed, it is the privilege of a genuine teacher to be able to fellowship with others in counselling and prayer.

Likewise, there are genuine Bible teachers who are also isolated through no fault of their own, who also go through hard times. Again the benefit of emails is that such a teacher can ask for prayer support when he is being assaulted and get a number of people to pray for him.

The point is one-anothering – we help each other.

The world says that a problem shared is a problem halved. In fact, a problem shared with a brother who prays for you is more than halved. In fact, the problem can turn out to be for the edification of both parties; such is the wisdom of God.

Practical advice

Sometimes very simple, practical suggestions can help make a big difference to a problem that at first sight seems to be a huge mountain to climb, but then becomes a modest hill to hike.

Don't panic

No good decisions emerge from panic; stop panicking and calm down.

Do not fret¹⁸ because of evildoers, Ps 37:1

Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way. Ps 37:7

Do not fret -- *it only causes harm.* Ps 37:8

If you are panicking then you are already in the old nature and this must be stopped. You will not understand God's will in the old nature. First you must put this off and get in the new nature. Put on Christ and then consider the matter properly.

Don't be rash

Never rush at a problem. Always take time to chew the matter over and seek a rational answer. Never make a decision about a problem before seeking the will of God and praying fervently about it.

Whenever possible, sleep on the matter. Situations always seem different after a good night's sleep and sometimes the problem changes overnight, becoming more simple.

Have a bath

I know this sounds odd, but sometimes having a relaxing bath, or shower, can help calm you down and assist in making more sane rational decisions. Problems caused by your own stupidity can be especially helped if you have a good wash and then revisit the problem later.

¹⁸ Hebrew *charah* meaning: to be hot, furious, burn, become angry, kindled.

Go for a walk

This can be especially helpful, especially if it takes you away from the scene of the problem. During the walk, pray and meditate on the matter in hand and seek to subject yourself to the will of God.

Worship God

When you are at a loss and are so confused that you cannot even pray, just worship God. Sit quietly by yourself in peace and forget the problem for a while and praise God, centring completely on him. I am not suggesting that this is some magical panacea, the problem won't disappear, but it will put you in the right place to consider the options.

Read

If you have time, read a relevant book that may have some bearing on the crisis you are in.

For example: say that you are in turmoil due to chaos in the church whereby you are being falsely attacked. Take the time to read the experience of Charles Spurgeon when he was vilified by his own church for protesting the downgrade that was going on. It won't give you any easy solutions but you will realise that you are not alone in facing such a problem.

It is always edifying to read of the sufferings of the great saints of the past, whether in persecution or afflictions in ministry. At the least it shows that historical people went through far worse than you are going through and they still honoured God through the problems. The biography of Ezekiel Rogers is a very good place to start; such perseverance through suffering.

In addition to reading biographies, it may be helpful to read a devotional book to set your mind upon God, or even a teaching work that may have some bearing upon your problems. Always seek the fellowship of great saints in the past who speak to us in their writings.

Music

Now musicians have the benefit of being able to make use of self-therapy through just playing their instrument. This is a God-given gift that can really help to still the soul and meditate on God.

Non-musicians can also benefit from music to help them calm down and be more reflective about their problem. Even the ravings of Saul were alleviated by the harp playing of David.

Nature

If you are fortunate to live near a countryside area or park, or can drive to one, I recommend spending some time walking and watching wildlife. There is no greater natural therapy because you are amongst creatures that simply obey God and do what they are told and be amongst the great designs of the Creator. Just walking through an old beech wood can stimulate the mind to meditate upon God. It is amazing how your problems can melt away in such circumstances.

See your family

Older folk can be greatly helped by spending time with their grandchildren. This takes their mind off the problems and helps them to come back later with a fresh viewpoint on the issues. Grandchildren are a great blessing.

Younger people can go to their parents and ask for their advice, or even to wise siblings and others in the family.

Cook a good meal

Worry about problems can lead to missing meals and malnourishment. Decide to cook a hearty meal to treat yourself before you face the issues at hand. If you are able, go for a meal with a loved one instead.

Drink

Again, worry can lead to dehydration. Make sure that you are drinking enough water during a time of crisis. I find that a good cup of tea can make a big difference to a depressed mood.

Conclusion

The objective of practical advice is to get your mind off being too devoted to the problem and enabling you to take a step back and see the problem from God's perspective. The advice aims to stop you worrying and fixating on potential bad things (that may never happen) and get to a calm state of mind to think rationally and Biblically through the issues. Any one of these bits of advice may do that; perhaps two or three together may be even better.

So, for example, when facing an imminent crisis, have a cup of tea while listening to good music, praise the Lord, go for a walk, especially in the country, come back and have a good meal then sleep on the issue. The problem won't go away but you will be better able to deal with it.

Conclusion

It is just a simple fact that problems await us. No one escapes from this world without facing a variety of difficulties in life, but Christians have an enemy and so the problems will be more profound. It is my belief that the greatest Christians (in virtue, steadfastness, knowledge, or zeal) are those that suffer the greatest difficulties.

It is of the greatest import that we determine to be a theological people; that we will seek to know more and more about God and understand his ways. This preparedness is of the greatest assistance in facing difficulties and disappointments.

After that, there are a number of disciplines and tactics that can help us face problems: prayer, fellowship and various practical matters. The important issue is that problems are not fixed by you trying to find a different way to be happy; they are to be entered into and passed through in seeking to understand what the will of God is and learn from the experience to be a better person.

Tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. **Acts 20:23-24**

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