

## God Helps Us Through Trials

✦ **With perseverance (vv.2-4)**

✦ **With wisdom (vv.5-8)**

✦ **With perspective (vv.9-12)**

In the name of Jesus, God's Wisdom from above, dearly redeemed:

Christianity has always been counter-culture and counter-intuitive. As we grow up in the Lord, we actually rejoice in trials. That may sound absurd. But the fact is, **God Helps Us Through Trials...**

✦ **With perseverance (vv.2-4)**

The Holy Spirit leads us from theory to experience. No soldier can get ready for battle watching movies. He needs to get into the action. We know from God's Word that Jesus already beat our worst enemies of sin, death and hell. Now God wants us to experience beating doubt, fear and depression.

First, He tests our faith to strengthen it. Urban cowboys in tall pickups can't know what their big rig will do if they never go off road. Working ranchers experience the power. Our heavenly Father is not trying to break us like a pencil, but temper the steel of our faith and purify the gold. As Job told his helpless friends, "***He knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.***" (Job 23:10 NIV84) God promises, "***No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.***" (1 Corinthians 10:13 NIV84) That's **perseverance**.

Secondly, **God Helps Us Through Trials** by teaching us **perseverance** in prayer. He is like a metal worker pounding out the bumps of pride and dips of depression by blows of his hammer. Sometimes it hurts! But the results are beautiful and practical. God's loving, skillful discipline produces "***a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.***" (Hebrews 12:11 NIV84).

Sometimes Christians give up too easily. We can be too quick to say, "It's not God's will," when really we should put into practice the sanctified stubborn persistence to do good. Finding a job, for instance, can take a lesson from Jay Leno's *Parade* (9/6/09, p.5) article, "Persistence Pays Off."

*"Years ago I lived in Boston, and when I saw a Mercedes/Rolls Royce dealer, I thought 'I'd like to work there.' I asked about a job, but the boss said, 'We're not hiring now.' Monday morning, I...went to the car-washing bay, said 'I'm the new guy,' and started washing cars. After three or four days, the boss saw me and asked, 'What's he doing here?' The car-wash guy goes, 'He's a hard worker.' I said, 'I figured I'd work here until you hired me.' And I got the job. That attitude has always worked for me."*

**Perseverance** under trial helped our mission start. After months of house calls, a fellow pastor told me that a large Lutheran synod wanted to start a church in the same area. "They can crush you," he said. I got down on my knees and prayed. You see, God does not find fault with us because He washed away all our sins in Jesus' blood. God wants to bless us. But I did not want this exploratory mission to fail for lack of effort on my part. I prayed for patient **Perseverance** so my family would not have to suffer from my fears. By God's grace I made as big a splash as possible hitting every neighborhood I could. Our fellow Christians noticed and kindly went elsewhere. **God Helps Us Through Trials...**

✦ **With wisdom (vv.5-8)**

See, knowledge has the facts; **Wisdom** knows how to use them. Example: Everyone knows dirt can bury you. Remember the parable about the farmer whose old mule fell in the well? He decided neither the well nor the mule were worth saving. Called his neighbors with their shovels to fill the well. Imagine the mule's terror as dirt started hitting his head. Then he realized that was his way out. He kept

telling himself, “Shake it off and step up....Shake it off and step up...” Can’t you see the owner’s eyes when the old mule – battered, dirty, exhausted – stepped triumphantly out of the well? <sup>1</sup> All the dirt the devil throws at us, Jesus turns to our advantage by baptism from death to life in His resurrection.

**Wisdom** teaches us when to stop. Remember *Forrest Gump* when his college football coach gave him the ball the first time? Forrest scored, saw the gate to the stadium and kept running right out into the fields. The next scene shows him scoring again, while coaches, fans and cheerleaders are shouting, “Stop, Forrest! Stop!” The Good News is that our sins are all forgiven for Jesus’ sake. God does not find fault with us because He took away all our sins. Christ already scored. **Wisdom** keeps calling, “Stop, sinner! Stop!” Stop trying to earn God’s favor by your own good works. Jesus says, “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest..., rest for your souls.*” (Matthew 11:28f NIV84)

Because God does not find fault, but gives **Wisdom** generously to all who ask, feeling small with God is good. God helps those who cannot help themselves – and admit it. Ancient kings like Jehoshaphat prayed, “*O our God,...we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.*” (2 Chronicles 20:12) “*In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.*” (Romans 8:26) When in doubt, shout the struggling father’s simple prayer: “*I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!*” (Mark 9:24 NIV84) **God Helps...**

#### ✠ **With perspective (vv.9-12)**

Old Chinese proverb: “No man should judge a painting when he can only see the back of the canvass.” God leads us around to the front for His **perspective** on life. He turns things upside down, bringing down the high and mighty from their conceit. “*The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business. Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.*”

Here’s a new **perspective** for you: Many people are on their happy way to hell. But to be “*blessed*” means tears because the LORD says, “*The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning.*” (Ecclesiastes 7:4) We grieve over our sins, yet enjoy the peace of God that surpasses all understanding. Our Chinese brother John Li says, “We journey through life with the hope of a bright future always before us.” God’s clear **perspective** on eternity helps us see God’s work in the world.

Introductory news clips showed this in the movie *Miracle* about our 1980 US Men’s Hockey Team under MN Coach Herb Brooks. Proud Soviet leaders determined to spread atheistic communism all over the world. Meanwhile, Christians prayed. Some credit President Ronald Reagan with ending the Cold War. But presidents like Reagan and Lincoln did not rely on themselves. They prayed too, blessed **With perspective** that they would someday answer to the Almighty Judge. A recent documentary showed God’s work behind the scenes. One angry KJB spy in Moscow delivered 200+ Russian spy scientists to the West. If you lose your spies, but the other guys can still spy on your technology, it’s hard to win a war. God lets us see Satan’s lies and spies, while we press on to victory in Christ our Lord.

He is our “*living hope.*” (1 Peter 1:3) By that same Gospel in Word and sacrament, **God Helps Us Through Trials**. By Jesus’ death and resurrection God brought down Satan’s evil empire. Now we don’t have to get blown all over life’s troubled seas by our doubts and fears. God turns our failures in triumphs. He uses our troubles to bless us **With perseverance, wisdom and perspective**. Even martyrs in what looked like defeat passed from death to life with God. Trials help our feelings to catch up with our faith. And faith always triumphs over doubt and fear. That “counter-intuitivity” I’ll take any day. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Author unknown. Quoted by Jeff Herring, Knight Ridder News Service. Received by M.C. 3/22/1999.