

Overcoming Ordeals

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Whether you have endured the loss of a loved one, been taken ill by disease, or struggled with marital problems--any ordeal-- these words can hopefully give you peace and comfort.

It's okay to feel the emotions. We're human--you and I—it's how God designed us, for we are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14), and Christ knows what it is to face animosity, suffering, and affliction. As Hebrews 4:15 affirms, "We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things just as we are, yet without sin." Furthermore, Jesus welcomes the heavy laden, "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Nick Vujicic, an Australian minister, motivational and inspirational speaker who travels the world, has inspired me through life's adversities. He was born with Tetra-Amelia syndrome, or born without all four of his limbs. Yet, he put his faith in God, leaving behind a past of doubt, fear, and suicide attempts— believing his life had a purpose. He happened upon John 9:1-3, "As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth, and his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him." Nick realized that if the Lord had a purpose for the blind man, then God can use a limbless man for His glory as well, empowering Nick to put his faith in action.

Some of his quotes may uplift you: "We may have absolutely no control over what happens to us, but we can control how we respond. If we choose the right attitude, we can rise above whatever challenges we face." He also affirms, "Often people ask how I manage to be happy despite having no arms and no legs. The quick answer is that I have a choice. I can be angry about not having limbs, or I can be thankful that I have a purpose. I choose gratitude." Your life has purpose no matter what you are enduring.

We are also instructed to comfort one another through difficulty and hardship just as Our Creator does in 2 Corinthians 1:3-5. "Praise be to God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort also abounds through Christ." When we endure trials we can comfort one another in even the simplest of ways, be it a hug, a word of encouragement, or a card. I've noticed that this church does a wonderful job of caring for one another.

Sometimes it is easy to mistreat those facing ordeals, never taking into consideration the difficulties they are experiencing in their life. We should choose kindness and patience, in lieu of bullying, discrimination, and ostracism. When times are trying, and people are cruel, we can strive to emulate Christ's example. "But, I tell you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in Heaven" (Matthew 5:43-48).

Viewing trials and afflictions as times to strengthen you and empower you is important because it serves to improve our perspective. When Paul was shipwrecked, beaten, and in chains, when Daniel slept with the lions, when Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were thrown in the fiery furnace, they placed their faith in God through adversity and He pulled them through it. No matter the trial you face, the Lord will help you, giving you the strength to endure it. Nothing is impossible for God. Ephesians 3:23 reassures us that, "Now to Him who is able to do abundantly, exceedingly more than we ask or think, according to His power that works within us."

We take comfort that in this life, with its sting, we can remain steadfast in Jesus and our hope of Heaven. "He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever" (Revelation 21:4). Amidst our suffering and trials, we are reminded that it's about keeping perspective, and most importantly, this world is not our home. As brother Dee Bowman admonishes, "If you miss Heaven, you've just missed all there is." Where is your hope?

What a day it will be to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter into the joy of our Lord!"