

Overcoming Adversity:

Trusting God's Plan Through Tough Times

I'm reading Psalm 61, verses one and two. This scripture is a fitting way to end our series on prayer. I've truly enjoyed this series because, you know, nothing is more important in our lives than having a strong prayer life with God. It's our lifeline to Him. So, let's look at Psalm 61, verses one and two. The Bible says, *"Hear my cry, O God; attend to my prayer. From the end of the earth I will cry to You, when my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the rock that is higher than I."*

Charles Stanley, who is in heaven now, said something so profound. He said, "Adversity removes the cloak of what we pretend to be and reveals the truth of who we are." It's especially true when our hearts are overwhelmed. Have you ever been there?

Facing Overwhelming Circumstances

We all face the everyday pressures of life, and most of the time, we manage to cope. But sometimes, something hits us so hard that it overwhelms us completely. It could be an illness, a loss, financial struggles, family crises, or an inner battle. Whatever it is, it catches us off guard and just floors us.

The initial shock of it knocks us off our feet. Can you think of a time when something like that happened to you? Maybe recently? It's like a sucker punch you never saw coming. We've all had those moments.

David was no stranger to such experiences. But he learned how to weather those storms, and he reveals his secret in verse two: *"From the end of the earth, I will cry to You."* He felt like he was at the very edge, yet he cried out to God. His plea had a clear direction. It was aimed straight at the heart and ears of God. The essence of his prayer was simple: "Lead me to the rock!" He knew he couldn't reach it by himself. It was beyond him, so he asked God to take him there.

The Need for Divine Assistance

We often say, "When you come to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on." But here's the real question: how long can you hang on in your own strength? I'm convinced that getting to God and abiding in Christ is no accident—it takes divine assistance. Thank God for the Holy Spirit! Jesus said the Holy Spirit would lead and guide us. He will lead us, especially in those stormy seasons when our souls are overwhelmed. And that's guaranteed in Scripture. In those moments, we can have marvelous encounters with the living God. In His presence, we find a safe harbor, a resting place.

Remember that old hymn, "*There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God*"? At the Lord's right hand, we find pleasure forever. I do not doubt that the "rock" David wrote about was Jesus Christ, the Messiah who was to come. Aren't you glad Jesus came? Aren't you glad He's with us today? He said, "*Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there.*" So, He's here. David lived as a fugitive for years, running from King Saul, even though Samuel anointed him the next king. He was God's chosen man, but he was on the run for over ten years.

God as Our Rock and Refuge

Often, when David's enemies pursued him, he found refuge in the rocky hills of his homeland. Can't you imagine him reflecting on those times as he wrote verse three? "*For You have been a shelter for me, a strong tower from the enemy.*" He said, "Lord, just as I used to hide in the rocks when my enemies were after me, now I hide in You." How fitting it is to think of God as a mighty rock where we can find safety and security from the enemies and elements of this world. Thank God the Rock, Christ Jesus, is higher than our grief, sorrow, troubles, and trials—all the things that touch every person's life.

Misplaced Trust vs Faith in God

The Bible says, "*It rains on the just and the unjust,*" which means everyone will face challenges. But listen to what Isaiah 31:1 says: "*Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses and trust in chariots because they are many, and in horsemen because they are strong, but who do not look to the Holy One of Israel.*" When we are overwhelmed and turn to the world for help,

relying on our own ingenuity or abilities, we're going down. But when we look to God, we are lifted above the circumstances of life. Don't go down—look up. Peter lost his focus on Jesus during the storm and began to sink. But immediately, Jesus reached out and caught him. Aren't you thankful that the same God who grabbed Peter can grab you?

Let me tell you something else: things won't start looking up until you do. Instead of asking God to change your circumstances, ask Him to change your heart and attitude toward those circumstances. Keep your eyes locked on the Lord.

God's Refuge in Tight Places

Sometimes, it feels like life is pressing you like a tube of toothpaste. But listen, God wants you to learn that He is your refuge. And where do you learn that lesson? Let me tell you—it's in those tight places, when you're being squeezed, when you're being crushed--it's a message of hope. It may not feel comfortable, but it's where you discover God's strength.

There are three ways we can come to know something or even someone. First, there's observation. You look. You observe. The heavens declare the glory of God; it's there for us to see. Look at a beautiful baby like Lainey—how can you not see God's handiwork there? So yes, observation is the first step to knowing God.

Second, there's education. The Bible says to study to show yourself approved. Open the Word of God because it's His heart on paper. It's a way to learn more about Him. But it's important to realize that while many may study the Bible, they may still not truly know God.

The third way to know God is through participation. Isaiah 43:2 says, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you." That's personal. That's intimate. You'll go through the trials, but God will be right there with you. Like the disciples in the storm, Jesus didn't leave them to drown. He walked on the very waters that threatened them—the thing that terrified them was the same path Jesus used to reach them. God often uses adversity as a tool to bring us closer to Him. The level of spiritual growth you desire is linked to your ability to handle adversity well.

Adversity as a Tool for Spiritual Growth

Now, my mother repeatedly repeated one verse: "All things work together for good to those who love God." She said it a million times if she said it once. But for those who don't love God, adversity doesn't necessarily bring good because it's often in the lessons learned and the character built that God reveals His goodness.

God is trying to mature you, to help you grow. Sometimes, yes, it's painful. However, Christians who only have a marginal interest in spiritual growth will struggle when adversity comes. Instead of seeing it as something God is doing for them, they'll see it as something happening to them. They may even grow bitter or blame God.

Now, let me ask—do you know any Christians who are bitter today? Perhaps they're blaming God for their struggles? It's easy to fall into that mindset if we're not careful. But remember, if you're a child of God, no matter how bad things seem, nothing will take you out of His hands. Jesus said, "I hold you in the palm of my hand, and no one will pluck you from me." You are secure in Him.

If you value happiness more than holiness or comfort more than character, then trials will drive you crazy. But if you value the spiritual more than the material, you can count it all joy when your faith is tested. God will test your faith; in those trials, we discover whether our faith is genuine or just an imitation.

God's Lessons in Adversity

Take Abraham, for example. When God asked him to sacrifice his son Isaac, God already knew Abraham would obey. But Abraham needed to learn something about his own faith. Through that trial, Abraham realized that there was nothing he wouldn't give to God. Sometimes, the trials aren't for God's sake but for ours. It's through these tests that we discover the strength of our faith.

The moment you accepted Jesus as your Savior, your Heavenly Father enrolled you in the school of the Holy Spirit. It's a private education, one-on-one, with courses tailored just for you. And like any school, some classes are more enjoyable than others. Think back to your school days—art class might have been fun, but algebra may not so much. And yet, there are required courses if you're going to graduate.

Let's be honest: none of us would intentionally sign up for "Adversity 101." But we must complete each course the Lord sets before us. The Father longs to see the image of Christ mirrored in us. Like Paul said, "I've run the race, I've fought the fight, I've finished the course." Spiritually, we can do more than scrape by. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can excel.

Contentment in Tight Places

Paul wrote to the Philippians from prison—a tight place if there ever was one. And yet, he said, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice." He also said, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." What a lesson! Contentment doesn't happen by accident; it's learned. It takes a good student to learn a great lesson.

If you find yourself in a tight place this morning, maybe God is trying to teach you contentment right where you are. Often, we ask God to remove us from our situation, but perhaps He wants to keep us there so we can learn that His grace is sufficient.

Victory Through God's Deliverance

Think about the Israelites facing the Red Sea. They had mountains on one side, the Egyptian army on the other, and the Red Sea in front of them. It looked like the end. But God made a way through. On the other side, they sang a new song and danced a new dance. God gave them victory. And He can do the same for you, no matter how tight your circumstances seem.

But here's the truth—they weren't singing or dancing until God brought them through. And here's the good news for you: there's a song waiting for you on the other side. There's a dance you will one day do, even if it doesn't feel like it right now. You know, weeping may last for the night, but the Bible promises that joy will come in the morning.

So don't hang your head in defeat. Don't give up on God, and don't give up on your faith. Because you're crossing over—you're coming through this on dry ground. And when you do, God will teach you how to sing and dance again.

Adversity as Part of God's Will

What is good, you ask? Let me tell you—what's good is God's will being accomplished in your life. That's what's good. In God's economy, adversity is a small price to pay for the spiritual growth that results from it. Now, it can be challenging for some believers to accept that God allows us to suffer for the sake of maturity in Christ. But welcome to Adversity 101. Pull up a chair, grab your pencil and paper, and get ready to take notes because God is about to teach you something profound.

Sometimes, yes, God's will is to let something die. Ouch. Why? Because He wants to demonstrate His resurrection power. Remember the story of Lazarus? The people came to Jesus and told Him, "Your friend Lazarus has died." And what does Jesus say? He says, shockingly, "I'm glad I wasn't there." Wait, what? Glad that Lazarus died? No, He was glad He wasn't there to stop it. Why? Because He had a greater plan.

When Jesus finally arrived, everyone thought it was too late. Lazarus had been dead for four days, and the stench was unbearable. But Jesus had something in mind that no one could have imagined. Sometimes, we don't understand God's timing, and it's frustrating. But His plan is always perfect. Had He arrived earlier, He could have healed Lazarus, which would have been impressive. But by waiting, He showed He has power, not just over sickness, but over life and death.

Adversity as a Path to Spiritual Growth

Maybe you're going through a tight place right now because God is teaching you to stop relying on yourself and to start trusting in Him—this same Jesus who can raise the dead. The proof of God's love, strange as it may seem, often comes through adversity. That adversity is meant to get your attention, to drive you toward Him. It's meant to lead you to the rock that is higher than you. Sometimes, God allows things to come into your life that grab you, crush you, break you down, and bring you to your knees. But then, He says, "Now, turn to me and watch what I can do."

God may allow you a season of pouting, complaining, and venting. But when you've poured out your heart, let His Spirit lead you to His heart. Don't rely on your own understanding, but acknowledge Him in everything, and He will direct your path. When your heart is overwhelmed, don't lash out at God. Don't strike

the rock, as Moses did. Speak to the rock. Pray. Let God show you His sufficiency and limitless ability to supply your every need.

First Corinthians 10:4 says, "They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ." Think about that! The Israelites may not have seen it in the wilderness, but there was a spiritual rock walking with them all the way. And Paul tells us that rock was Christ.

So, maybe you feel like you're in the wilderness right now—hungry, thirsty, overwhelmed. But God is with you and promised to provide for your needs. Some lessons are harder to learn than others, especially when things are going well. When everything is smooth, and the family is healthy, we rejoice. But how long does that last? We all face those unexpected seasons that jar, shake, and rattle us. But no matter what, God is still with you.

Conclusion: God as the Lifter of Our Heads

Are you in a tight place today? Look around—it doesn't take long to see someone who is. Is your heart overwhelmed? We've all been there—when you can't even pray or lift your head. But the Bible says God is the lifter of our heads. When you're too down to look up, He will lift you up. Don't run to Egypt for help. Don't trust in your own abilities. No amount of talent, no medicine cabinet full of pills, can heal you like God can. Don't just cover up the pain—let God use it to develop you, to make you better, stronger, and more effective for His kingdom.