

Don't Let ~~Diff~~iculties Scare You



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DON'T LET DIFFICULTIES SCARE YOU

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:9

Never let difficulties scare you. There is really no reason at all why they should if you consider the enormous spiritual resources you possess. You need not be frightened if you will just remember the great fact that God is with you and will help you.

I heard some time ago a very fascinating story about Abraham Lincoln. On one occasion in his early life he was out on the court circuit and stayed overnight, as was his custom, with an old Illinois farmer who was a friend of his. During the night there occurred that awesome phenomenon known as "shooting stars." The farmer was not a very learned man. He wasn't well educated about the actions of heavenly bodies. And he had many of the superstitions characteristic of people living in the wilderness. For one thing, he had a great belief in the end of the world. The shooting stars alarmed him. He thought very likely they meant the end was at hand. And he got very scared.

Then he remembered Abe Lincoln was there with him, asleep upstairs. Lincoln even as a young man seemed to many folk a sort of Father Abraham because he was so calm and self-assured and seemed to know so much. The farmer dashed up the stairs crying at the top of his voice, "Abe, Abe, get up! The heavens are falling! The world is coming to an end!"

Lincoln opened his eyes, looked at the frightened face

and trembling form of his old friend, got his long, lanky frame out of bed and walked to the window. He stuck his head out, craned his neck around to get a good look at the heavens and saw the shooting stars. A big smile came over his countenance. He stepped back into the room, put his hand on the shoulder of his frightened friend and said to him (so this story goes): "Don't you be afraid, Bill. Even if there are some shooting stars, the great constellations are still there."

When difficulties in our lives rain down upon us, we sometimes become bewildered and frightened and in our fright we think that the end of everything has come. But if you look behind this rain of difficulties into the eternal verities and see that always, come what may, the great God is still there, then you realize you do not need to be afraid. Then you will know that because of His presence and His concern for you you have what it takes to face up to anything this world may bring along.

We find the secret stated many times in the book of wisdom known as the Holy Bible. I find it, for example, in 2nd Corinthians, 12th chapter, the 9th verse, "Going." wonderful words: "My grace is sufficient for thee." That is to say, nothing can ever happen to you that you can not meet with faith in Him, because His grace is sufficient. "For my strength," the text continues, "is made perfect in weakness." That is to say, if in your weakness you will turn to God, His strength will be manifested through that weakness. If you had only your own strength, life could be too much for you. But you also have the grace of God, which is "sufficient."

So never quail and quake or be afraid in the presence of difficulty. Actually, the greater the difficulties, the greater the power you have to meet them. Even in the most desperate circumstances you and I are so of these children is important.

It was evening. This young woman was alone with her two little children in the house where they then lived. She was reading to the children preparatory to their going to bed when suddenly, without any warning, there was a great rumbling in the earth. She didn't know it at the time, but what was happening was that the old Andean Fault in the earth's crust, running along the West Coast of North America, was acting up again. The 1964 Alaska earthquake was beginning. And Alaska was where this family was living, in a house on a cliff overlooking the sea.

Suddenly the house began to split apart. Mother and children hardly had time to get out of it before the earth beneath the house opened as though it had been parted by a giant knife and the house went tumbling down the cliff into the sea! My friend and her children found themselves flattened to the snowy ground by the suction accompanying this terrible upheaval. Great crevasses and fissures in the earth had opened up all around them. And there they were, the house in ruins far below and the earth still shaking and quaking beneath them. The children began to cry, "What shall we do? We're going to die! What shall we do?"

The mother knew in that moment that she must be calm. Then there came upon her the awesome realization that she was calm. She had breathed the name of Jesus. She remembered having read about how in great crises people who remembered God and prayed received unusual help and were able to draw from the depths of their faith the calm to do what needed to be done. So she prayed to Jesus, "Please help me and show me what to do." Then she said to the children, "I can't carry you. You're too heavy. I couldn't even carry one of you. But we've got to get back up away from the edge. We'll have to climb

over these big chunks of earth. And we mustn't slip into any of these deep holes. But I know what to do. We will just ask Jesus to help us. He knows you are here. He loves you. Just talk to Him."

The little boy complained about his feet being cold. He said he had no feeling in them. But his mother told him, "If you just keep going and keep thinking about Jesus your feet will be all right."

And so it was that this little mother - I should say this heroic mother - achieved one of the most dramatic rescues in the whole Alaskan calamity and got herself and her children back to safety. It was a powerful demonstration that real faith is tough, that it is equal to the most desperate difficulties through God's strength being made perfect in weakness. There are countless such instances of people who meet great peril with faith and in such crises outdo themselves. But what about the tribulations of ordinary living, the crueling difficulties that have nothing exciting about them, but go on and on, frustrating, tiring, weighing us down? Well, I hold in my hand a letter from a woman in St. Louis. I have never met this woman, but she says she has read several of my sermons and has been impressed by the personal accounts of how people's lives have been changed by faith, and she thought she would write and tell me how *her* life was changed by faith. Hers is a simple story that would have a familiar ring to the millions of Americans who at one time or another in their lives have had some long struggle with economic difficulties. It is also a story of difficulties mastered by bringing faith up against them.

"I am not a very forceful or articulate person," the woman writes, "but I have had a wonderful experience and I would like to tell it."

"Back in the thirties, during the depression, we had a terrible time. My husband lost his job and couldn't find work of any kind. Before our marriage I was a school teacher and I thought I could go back to teaching. But the St. Louis schools required a college degree, which I didn't have - I'd only had two years of college. And at that time they would not employ a married woman anyway."

"I stood in line for a job with the WPA only to be told that I could get nothing because I was married. They said my husband might be able to get something at five dollars a month. Well, he tried and tried, but nothing was available. We were really scraping bottom. We were several months behind on payments on our home. Only my married daughter's help - which she could ill afford - was keeping us alive."

"Things got to a point where I even thought of suicide as a way out. But I realized that that would grieve my daughter terribly. Then I thought, 'If I can depend on my daughter's love, why can't I depend on God's?' I got down on my knees, telling God I would leave everything in His hands. Then I prayed for those whose actions I had resented because they had injured us. And I arose from that prayer with joy in my heart. A great load had been lifted from me. I sang, 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow.'"

"The next day my husband got temporary work. Then the regulation against married teachers was lifted. I went back to college to get my degree so I could teach. And it wasn't long before my husband had a permanent job. I became a regular teacher."

"We gradually paid off all our debts. We made improvements in our home. We built up a savings account. And when eventually my husband was incapacitated we were both able to retire on pension."

"My own strength was not enough, but when I admitted it to God and put myself in His care, His strength was made perfect in my weakness."

No matter what difficulties come into your life, if you are grounded and established in the faith you are more than equal to all of them taken together. When the going gets tough, let the good old tough Christian get going. It

often happens that a person will let some heavy loss or bitter defeat or grave disappointment throw him completely off balance and really get him down. Well, I've had a few defeats and disappointments myself. That is the way of life. Do you think you are going to win every time? Do you think things are always going to work out as you have hoped? No, life isn't made that way and it wouldn't be good for us if it were. What Almighty God

seeks to do is teach us what we can do with defeat. This is one of the greatest tests of manhood or womanhood: not whether you're defeated, but what you do with the defeat. This to me has always been a fascinating subject.

I happen to be pretty much of a sports fan. In fact, I read the sport pages every day before I read the front page news. When you have first read the sport pages, you're in better shape to stand the front page. And I always have an especially good time with the sport pages.

There are some great characters in baseball. I used to be quite a follower of the Brooklyn Dodgers until they left home and moved to California. Now I'm a follower of the Mets. You have to follow a long ways behind if you're following them! But

anyway I'm for them.

Well, about two years ago, I believe it was in 1962, a very unusual thing happened. The Los Angeles Dodgers were leading the league until the last ten days of the season and then, strangely, they lost every game and were passed in the last week of the season by the San Francisco Giants. And the Giants won the pennant. The papers came out with headlines jeering at the Dodgers' coach, Walter Alston - such headlines as these: "Alston is through." "How stupid can you Alston?" "Who's going to take Alston's place?" Such were the complimentary phrases in which the press referred to a great defeated baseball coach.

But you never heard a word out of Alston. What did he do? He simply staged a comeback the next year. Not only did the Dodgers win the pennant, the World Series they gave the New York Yankees a terrific beating, winning four games straight. And this is a superlative achievement for any team.

So our magazine GUIDEPAGES got interested in Alston and sent a reporter to see him at his home in the Midwest - not to ask him how he felt about taking four games straight from the Yankees, but to ask him how he feels in a defeat. The reporter (a woman) said to him, "Mr. Alston, you were badly defeated the year before. How did you feel about that defeat?"

"What defeat?" he asked.

"Why," she said, "when you were defeated so badly in the last ten days of the season."

"I don't remember that we were defeated." Then: "Oh, you mean that we didn't win the pennant? Young lady, let me tell you something. Baseball is a game of comebacks and over scores. You may look pretty bad in one game, but you have to average that game with two or three months

of games. And in that very game maybe the pitcher who lost the game improved his strikeout record and maybe some of the other players on the defeated team added to their batting and fielding averages. What do you mean a defeat? We never think of a lost game as a defeat. We think of it as a lesson learned and as something to be written into the over-all average.

"I know you're not a ballplayer," he went on to say, "because this is one game the women have not yet taken over. But you are in the game of life. And I can tell you this is a very wise rule to follow: Write your losses into the total average and see in each defeat the value of instruction. Ask of it: 'What do you want to teach me? What do you want to tell me about how I did it wrong?' Then you'll know better how to do it next time."

If you let defeat erode your spirit and get you down, then you become victimized by the difficulties of life. Ask, "What are you saying to me, Lord, through this defeat?" And remember that all through life runs a law of averages. Emerson once said something to the effect that a pendulum that goes to the right must inevitably swing back to the left, and the left-swung pendulum swings back to the right. There is an ebb and flow.

A teacher I had one time hung on the classroom wall a picture showing a dreary beach with the tide out and a boat stranded on the shore. There is nothing that looks more depressing than a boat left high and dry by receding water. How can it be moved?

Each time that picture was this inscription: "Remember, the tide always comes back." And it always does. And if in defeat you wait it out, fight it out, think it out, pray it out, life due time flows back in with new opportunity and God's strength is made perfect in your weakness.

So we must learn to be calm in the face of difficulties.

we must learn to remember that we have in us a maturity and a depth of wisdom and strength that is equal to any difficulty we must remember finally that when defeats come, as inevitably they will, we need not allow our spirit to be overwhelmed by them. We can watch and ask, "What is there in this for me to learn? How can I average this into my life pattern?" Too often do Christians fall into the notion that Christianity is mainly a matter of being gentle and this isn't true at all. Christians, the real kind, are also strong. They are calm, they are wise, they are indomitable, because they have spiritual resources. And the greatest resource is that God's grace is sufficient and His strength is made perfect in our weakness. So let us go out into the world and give the world what it needs: a demonstration that some people have laid hold of a philosophy of life that enables them to rise above all difficulties and all defeats.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we thank Thee that though we may by nature be weak, yet we are at the same time strong through Jesus Christ who gives us of His grace and makes perfect His strength in our weakness. Armed with knowledge of this great truth we know we need never be scared by our difficulties and for this we give Thee thanks through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.