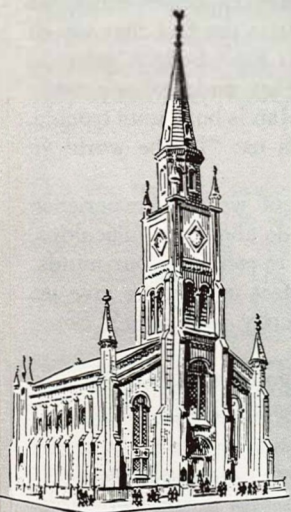


Make Difficulties Fade Away



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Scripture: Job 5:7; Matthew 19:26, 16:23

Are we going to exercise our faith? Are we going to weave it constructively and creatively into the fabric of our lives? Are we going to use it to grow into bigger people? Are we going to become victorious in our difficulty?

Learning to dominate difficulty isn't anything easy. It is a painful process. But, thanks be to God, we have a religion that gives us answers. There are many texts that can be brought up against difficulty at any time, but the greatest, I believe, is in the 19th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew: " ...with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26) Never forget that. It is a big affirmation, but it is the truth, and a truth to hang on to always. In any difficulty in this life, remember: "with God all things are possible."

As you work to make difficulties fade out of the center of your life into the secondary and controllable position where they belong, you discover certain procedures that make this possible. The first thing, I believe, is to have a proper philosophy of difficulty. We live in a day and age that seems to be bereft of the philosophical attitude. Our forefathers were philosophers. They were thinkers. They did not struggle to change the construction of the universe in which they lived. They accepted the universe as it was and learned to cope with it.

IAN LIVING: I nowadays try to blind themselves to it. They
 ivered the idea that there shouldn't be any difficulty in the
 world. There is a school of thought that would lead
 onth these people to believe that by acts of government all our diffi-
 culties will ultimately be removed. Well, now, if any poli-
 tician or anybody else ever tells you that there
 are not going to be any difficulties in the world any more,
 don't you believe him, because he can't deliver on it. Diffi-

This Christian work is dependent not upon voluntary contributions from a teacher or anybody else ever tells you that there as no specific charge laid upon those who are not going to be any difficulties in the world any more, sermons. Your gifts, together with others, will make possible the world-wide distribution of Dr. Peale's message of practical Christian living.

culties will be here as long as you live - and as long as your children live - and your children's children live. That is the way the universe is made.

But it is certainly not made so just in order to make life hard for us. I don't know why it is this way; I can only speculate, the same as you. But I wouldn't be surprised if the purpose is to make men of us. Isn't that the reason the Lord has us born in the first place? To make men of us? So that we shall grow to be bigger and stronger and finer people all the while? That is what He intends. And He has infinite patience.

So He has difficulties in the world for us to tussle with, for you never grow in character and personality unless you struggle with difficulty. That is why it's here. The idea is to take the difficulties of life and weave them into a pattern whereby you grow big in your soul. So the first thing is to get yourself a good sound philosophy of difficulty.

I've looked up some very good quotations on the subject. Here is one from the famous ancient Roman thinker Horace: "Difficulties elicit talents that in more fortunate circumstances would lie dormant." That is a very smart idea. When faced with difficulties you should stop and ask yourself, What talents and abilities of mine that have been asleep can now be awakened by these difficulties. Even on, you may be glad you had those difficulties, because they brought talents into action which otherwise you might not have known you had.

Here is Disraeli, onetime prime minister of Great Britain. He says: "Difficulties constitute the best education this life." When I was a boy people used to talk to me learning from the school of hard knocks. You don't learn that much any more, because in this generation everybody about hard knocks isn't too popular. Nobody could ever

get elected to office on a platform of hard knocks. Well I don't like them any better than anyone else. I like it soft and easy, with orchestras playing and perfume wafting in the breeze. That would suit me perfectly. But that isn't a philosophy of difficulty.

Here is H. G. Wells. He used to be quoted a lot. People don't talk much about him anymore, but he was a very wise man. He wrote, "What on earth would a man do with himself something did not stand in his way?" That is a good point. What would you do, what would I do, if we had no difficulties?

A LETTER came to my desk the other day from a woman who has found a philosophy of difficulty, and I cite the idea because she relates because it is so commonplace, an incident out of the ordinary experiences of daily life. She writes from Philadelphia. I don't know where I've met her, though. And she found that with a philosophy of difficulty you can be serene in very upsetting circumstances.

"This 'new' way of thinking," she writes, "helped me more than you will know. I returned from work one day to find my apartment had been ransacked. I live alone. Everything in the desk in the living room had been taken out of the drawers and strewn on the floor. The closets in the living room and bedroom had been thoroughly searched, and in general the apartment looked as if a cyclone had blown through it.

"While waiting for the police to inspect the damage, I opened my mail. The first piece of mail was from the manager of the apartment announcing a new lease and raise in rent. As I looked around at the 'mess' I realized I was feeling 'disheartened' to say the least.

"Then the next piece of mail was from your Foundation for Christian Living and contained three booklets. The first: *Never Let Anything Get You Down and You Can Have Confidence*. The second: *Peace and Quiet in a Noisy World*.

"I held the booklet *Never Let Anything Get You Down* in my hand and looked at it, then found myself laughing, not hysterically, but peacefully. Do you know what I did? I started counting my blessings. Number One: I had not been here when the robber came and so I had not been hurt. And then I discovered, Number Two, that the robber had not taken anything of real value. He had just rummaged and left a mess.

"I read the booklet and the prayer at the end of it: 'With God's help nothing can get me down.' I thanked God for taking care of me and realized that if the robber had taken the few valuables I have I would still have the ability to think and thank God for my many blessings. It taught me the lesson that the few material things I have mean nothing compared with the ability to take it in my stride."

Now I know this is a very simple, humble kind of experience, but it typifies attitudes. A person who had no philosophy could feel that something very terrible had happened, but a person with a philosophical attitude toward difficulty knows that there is always something to be thankful for. And of course part of a sound philosophy of difficulty is to remember that oftentimes things aren't really as difficult as they seem.

From reading the newspaper or listening to people talk, you could get the notion that the world is full of impossibles. But one thing we should always do is to examine very carefully anything that anybody says is impossible because 99 times out of 100 the thing isn't impossible at all. Whenever your mind reacts to anything with the

thought "impossible," you ought to take that thing and write it out on a piece of paper and subject it to scrutiny and analysis. Don't settle for the idea that things are impossible, because usually they are not. And anyway you can always fall back on the text: "with God all things are possible."

A LOT of literature of one kind or another crosses my desk, and the other day I was glancing through a stack of accumulated publications and came across a speech given by a member of an organization called The Newcomen Society in North America, paying tribute to a man named Prentiss M. Brown, who was at one time a United States Senator from Michigan. The reason for the tribute was that Mr. Brown was instrumental in bringing to pass the building of the great five-mile-long bridge which spans the Straits of Mackinac in Michigan, linking peninsulas separated by five miles of water.

As far back as 1880 Michigan business people started saying that there ought to be a bridge across the Straits of Mackinac. And they kept trying to promote the idea, but were told again and again, "It isn't possible." It would be impossible, people said, because of the high-velocity wind that roars through the straits of Mackinac. No one could build a bridge that would stand up against this wind. And a second reason why they said it wasn't possible was that the bottom under the straits consisted of weak shale going down very deep before the bedrock, and the shale would never support the footings for a bridge. And, finally, they said, still another reason it wasn't possible was the terrific ice pressure that develops in these straits during the winter. Too much wind, too much ice pressure, and no solid stone foundation underneath.

Well, according to the printed address which I read, Prentiss Brown got hold of the idea and he insisted it was possible. Finally in 1957 they got the bridge built. They had made a scientific analysis of the wind and found that never in history had there been a wind higher than 78 miles per hour through these straits. So they put up a bridge that would stand a wind two and a half times the velocity of a 78-miles-per-hour wind. They had tested the rock beneath the water and found it was four times as strong as needed to hold the weight of the footings for the bridge. And they had designed piers and foundations to withstand five times the maximum ice pressure ever measured. At about the time they were going to build, a bridge at Tacoma collapsed, and from that catastrophe they learned the importance of having gratings in the bridge roadway to provide outlet for upthrust wind and so protect the bridge against aerodynamic action. So they got the bridge built. And this speech stressed the significance of it as an example of something that "couldn't be built but was."

I wonder how many people this very day have been telling themselves telling their wives telling their husbands, "We can't do this because there are too many difficulties involved." The thing to do is to look your difficulties in the face and say that they aren't really difficulties at all. Oh, they are hard, they are problems, but that is what makes life interesting. What was it Horace said? "Difficulties elicit talents that in more fortunate circumstances would lie dormant." Get yourself a good philosophy of difficulty. And whenever you get up against a difficulty just say to yourself, "With God and with me (put yourself in there) all things are possible."

"That may be all right," you object but there are

some terrible difficulties in this world." And that is a fact. Who is going to gainsay that? Certainly not. After difficulties horrible difficulties. But no matter how terrible, how horrible they are, there is a way you can ride above them - and that is through the power of God, the power of faith, the power of the surrendered life.

These are easy phrases which I have thrown off. The power of God. Well, the power of God is nothing until you experience it, until you really find it. But I am persuaded there is no difficulty in this life that we cannot make to fade, or at least fade from the center of our experience, if we draw with all our hearts on the power of God.

I have a friend, a preacher, who has been blind for years, since he was 41. Everybody thought when he went blind that that would be the end of his career. But it wasn't at all. Actually it was the beginning of the best of his career. He is a very remarkable man, one of the best preachers I ever listened to. And he doesn't draw on sympathy, either. You forget he is blind. He has forgotten it; everybody else forgets it. Nobody treats him sympathetically because he is blind. That is just about how you like when you have something else wrong with you, but it doesn't enter into personality.

He once invited me to Savannah, Georgia, his city, to make a speech. He met me at the airport. He walked along briskly, seeming to know where he was going. He took of his arm at one point, but he shook my hand off. I didn't do it again! We went to a hotel and I checked in. He went up to my floor with me and when we got off the elevator he said, "Turn to the left."

"How do you know we turn left?" I asked.

"Because all the odd numbers are on the left and all

the even numbers are on the right," he replied.

"You know this hotel?"

"Sure. I come here to see people. I know the odd numbers are on the left. So go to the left. Didn't you hear them tell you downstairs what your number was?"

"No, I didn't," I admitted.

"Well, I did," he said. And we walked down the hall. Presently he said, "Here it is." And I stopped and there it was.

"How did you know where it was?" I asked.

"I counted the doors as I went by," he replied. "You could do that too if you'd think about it."

Then we went to a radio station to give a broadcast. My friend asked the doorman at the hotel where this station was located. I heard the directions and he heard the directions. We walked along the street and presently he said, "Here it is." I had started to walk by.

"How did you know it was there?" I asked.

"I listened to the directions," he said. "You see, but I can't see - so I have to use my other senses and I concentrate. You don't pay any attention. That's why you go around confused half the time. I know where I am." I was amazed at this man.

He is also the greatest storyteller you ever heard. And he is joyously happy. Well do I remember his own story. He was having trouble with his eyes. He went to a big clinic in New York, and there the eye specialist finally told him, "There is nothing we can do for you. We have had the best consultations available anywhere, and we will have to accept it. You are going to be blind."

Already his vision was hazy. He went back to his hotel and up to the 25th floor to his room. Opening the window, he looked down at the street. He saw the people down

there and thought, A lot of those people are having trouble, but none of them is blind. O God, I don't want to be blind! How can I ever stand to be blind?

Then it occurred to him that it would take only about half a minute, maybe less than that, to plunge from that window to the street. There would be a moment of terror and then it would be over and he wouldn't have to suffer blindness. But he was too much of a man for that, too much of a Christian. So he sank to his knees and started to pray.

In telling me of the experience he said, "I was a minister and all that, but I didn't have any feeling of power, and I must tell you I had a lot of doubt. I just didn't know whether I could get any strength. But," he said, "I prayed and I prayed and I prayed. I must have prayed for hours wrestling with God. And then of a sudden it came to me. It was like a big burst of light inside me. I got the victory. From that day to this, the blindness never licked me. It became just a part of my experience, and I wove it into the pattern of my life.

That was an understatement, because probably his blindness made his life greater than it would have been otherwise. People in difficulty, when they heard him speak, knew that he spoke with authority. He made the difficulty fade out of the main center of his life into the wings, so he could speak. He demonstrated that with God all things are possible.

Yes, there are deep, dark, grievous, almost overwhelming difficulties in this world. But there is also an invincible power - the power of God through Jesus Christ, by which you as a man or woman walking with Them, the Father and the Son, can make any difficulty fade to the sidelines. It may not go away, but you will have it under control.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we give Thee thanks

for Thy great power which can operate in human life, and we pray for all who today are suffering and feel defeated in the presence of great difficulty. Let them know, we pray, that with God all things really are possible. And for this we give Thee thanks through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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