

# "Life is Difficult, Therefore . . . ."

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**II Corinthians 1:1-11, Romans 5:1-5**

II Corinthians is Paul's most personal letter. He's quite open & eloquent about his struggles. We don't know exactly which struggles he was referring to. We do know that Paul endured great hardship in his life - beaten, stoned, imprisoned for preaching the Gospel. He was shipwrecked, knew famine & slander. So we don't know exactly which of these hardships he's referring to, but we can be sure it wasn't broken fingernail or a sprained ankle. Let's take a look.

**II Corinthians 1:1-11**

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God that is in Corinth, including all the saints throughout Achaia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering.*

*Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation. We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again, as you also join in*

*helping us by your prayers, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.*

### **Romans 5:1-5**

*Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.*

This message is entitled, "*Life is Difficult, Therefore . . .*" We'll see what we come up with after the "*Therefore.*" But let's start with "*Life is Difficult.*"

In Buddhism there are Four Noble Truths which are foundational for the entire religion. The first of these Noble Truths is: Life consists of suffering and pain. - Can I get an "Amen!"? Life is difficult. It's hard. It's arduous. It's an uphill struggle a lot of days. It's often 2 steps forward, 3 steps back. We forget that though. We have incredible amnesia when it comes to this noble truth.

I remember a project I worked on about 10 years ago. It was the largest, most expensive & complicated project I've ever worked on in my life. Because of the complexities of the project there was sometimes a clear consensus among the leadership team, and other times there wasn't. During one of those times when there wasn't consensus and we were struggling to find it and to find the best solution, I vividly remember one of the key players in the effort saying to us all, "This is starting to not be fun anymore." I said to myself: "Who said it always has to be fun?" What I said out loud was: "Nothing good comes without a struggle."

Life is difficult. Life is demanding. Life is one challenge after another. It's a

Climb.

A few years ago I heard this song on the radio, *"Life's a Climb."*

*"There's always gonna be another mountain.*

*"It's always gonna be an uphill climb.*

*"It's a climb."*

I told my sons I heard this really cool song and I've been quoting it to people, "Life's a Climb." They said, "That's great, Dad. It's a Miley Cyrus song, as in "Hannah Montana. Pretty cool, Dad." But life is a climb. (so is parenting!)

Jesus once said, *In this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world. In this world you will have tribulation.* - John 16:33. Other translations say, *"In this world you will have sorrow and trials."* and *"In this world you will have trouble and suffering."* You'll never see those words on a pretty poster or plaque, but perhaps they should be, so that we remember, "It's a Climb."

It can't always be easy. It won't always be fun.

St. Peter once wrote: *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.* - I Peter 4:12. I like the last part of that - *as though something strange were happening to you.* So, don't be shocked when life is extremely hard. That's how you know you're still living and breathing!

Listen to how St. Paul describes his hardships: *We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself.* He uses some pretty strong words - affliction, crushed, despaired.

Life is difficult, even for saints. Life is difficult, THEREFORE, we have to grow. We have to keep on growing. We have no other choice. We have to grow as individuals, as disciples, in order to meet the challenges we face.

Listen again to the spiritual maturity of the Apostle Paul: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and*

*the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God . . . Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation . . . We felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.*

Paul faced his challenges by growing. He couldn't change his circumstances, so he changed himself. He changed his outlook, his perspective. He started viewing life from God's perspective. He decided he had no choice but to grow. He grew in faith, in wisdom, in spiritual maturity.

Joni Eareckson (the Christian artist who's a quadriplegic) once said this: *"When life is rosy, we may slide by with knowing about Jesus, with imitating him and quoting him and speaking of him. But only in suffering will we KNOW Jesus."*

Abraham Lincoln once said: *"I have often been driven to my knees in prayer, because I had nowhere else to go."*

Hardship and suffering force us to grow. Suffering not only builds character, it can build faith if we let it.

William Barclay: *"The Christian is the athlete of God whose spiritual muscles become stronger from the discipline of difficulties."*

Paul wrote these words to the Romans: *"Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope."*

The challenges in life force us to grow in endurance, character and hope.

I read this week of a study done on folks who had lost their job. They studied the difference between those who had lost their job 3 times vs those who had just lost their job once. What the researchers found surprised them. Those who had lost their jobs 3 times were more optimistic and less discouraged than those who had just lost their job for the first time. Those who had lost their jobs previously were better

able to handle the adversity, because they had faced it before and were able to find a job at least two more times. They had clearly grown from their struggles. "Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope."

Mission Trip Porch project. I've done a lot of mission trips through the years, all with the same organization. So they tend to give me hard projects now. In recent years I've been building porches - 5'x7' porches on small houses or mobile homes.

The 1st year I got this project - couldn't do it, I froze, I was overwhelmed by it, I had to get help for every step

2nd time - couldn't do it alone, but needed less help

3rd time - did it with very little assistance, but got spoken to for taking too long on the project.

4th & 5th time - I now build great porches!

I've gotten so good that I built Maddie a swing set from scratch with no plans, just using what I had learned. I was basically forced to learn how to do harder projects. And it was a struggle for me to learn and remember how to do these things. But struggles have up a great upside - they produce growth.

I've talked with lots of folks through the years who have lost their spouse. One of the things I've heard most is: I never thought I could handle it. I never thought I could maintain the houses or manage the business, or handle the finances. I'm doing stuff I never knew I could. Necessity is not only the mother of invention. It's also the mother of growth.

So, in conclusion, Miley's right. There's always gonna be another mountain to climb. But as we keep climbing those mountains a funny thing happens - we become mountain climbers.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.