

Living in Trying Times

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People today live in circumstances very different in some ways than previous generations. The constant bombardment of a news cycle that went from the day to day grind of the newspaper and eventually network news to the 24-hour cycle of CNN and then FoxNews to the minute by minute cycle of social media has taken its toll on the modern psyche. We have come to anticipate bad news, and in the process, it has desensitized our soul. The call for realism that now has extended even to fictional characters in television and movies based upon comic strips (consider *that* irony!) has produced the expectation that most of life requires superhuman strength just to handle the problems of the 21st century. However, the truth remains that we invite most of this negativity into our lives unnecessarily instead of proactively building a faith designed not only to survive but also to thrive regardless of the external environment. David lived in times just as trying as anything we face today, though removed from us by three millennia. He knew all too well the soulful challenge of facing outside adversity without allowing it to destroy the spirit within, and his emotional words of Psalm 140 provide a welcome guide for our own spiritual trial.

If we can learn nothing else from David, the value of turning to God in prayer would prove sufficient (Psa. 141:1-2). When overwhelmed by life's problems, prayer remains the best first action you can take. Through prayer we can channel all of your fear, all of our anxiety, and all of our anger into a humble request offered to the LORD of heaven and earth, knowing He will listen to the righteous as surely as welcoming the specific worship He has requested (John 4:24). However, prayer alone does not answer all tests of life, though it does bring them into perspective. We still must exhibit personal self-control lest we allow our problems to provoke a reaction in us just as wrong as the problem we face (Psa. 141:3-4). Regardless of the constant chatter that characterizes the society today, we must work at controlling our speech so that we do not resort to retorts, retaliation, or response in kind to handle attack but rise above such wickedness rather than finding ourselves comfortable among the world's folly. Moreover, instead of letting the tragedy of the moment rule our hearts, we can benefit greatly by learning from the experience (Psa. 141:5-7). The most negative of experiences can offer numerous learning opportunities. Through them we can learn to listen patiently to constructive criticism, to accept correction when necessary, and to oppose evil without letting it affect our character. With such determination, even in the harshest of circumstances, the faithful child of God can still grow in faith (Psa. 141:8-10). Spiritual growth can flourish in the midst of turmoil and trial if we use it properly. During such times, we should focus on God more and more, giving ourselves over to the spiritual as a refuge from the onslaught of evil offered up by a world addicted to sin. In response to the diet of excess provided by Satan, we should instead enrich our souls. The trying of our faith, properly considered, can hone our ability to overcome temptation (Jas. 1:2-4). Most of all, spiritual situations such as these grow our faith by reminding us to focus on controlling ourselves and letting God handle the rest.

The idea that this life should have no difficulties and that hardship somehow argues against God remains one of the persistent lies Satan repeats endlessly because the faithless hear it so eagerly.

Failing to learn from Job they also ignore the lesson of Jesus. By allowing Satan opportunity to influence creation once completed, evil and its children—sin, suffering, and adversity—have an impact on our lives. However, Satan does not get to determine the full extent of that impact; we do. While we necessarily suffer due to the poor decisions of others, of generations past, and of ourselves, and while that can impact our health and comfort, we have the power at our disposal to decide how to react to these things. We do live in trying times, because that is the nature of this world. Therefore, rather than feeling sorry for ourselves, we should respond with trust in God and with a life characterized by rising above Satan's challenges in imitation of our Savior. We can indeed live and prosper spiritually even in trying times when we do not allow those times to define us but instead define ourselves by the glory of eternity (2 Cor. 4:16-18).