

There are times when we go through difficult times that are hard to explain. We can find it hard knowing how we should deal with such trials. I think it can be very helpful to take stock of our situation and see if there is sin in the camp, or whether God is just putting us through a refining process that is so necessary to developing healthy growth in our Christian walk.

In Psalm 34 David is going through difficulty of his own, but as he shares his struggles he gives us some very good advice to follow

**1. Bless the Lord verses 1-3.** Over the years I have seen Challenge go through some very difficult times which are hard to explain and even harder to understand. Often we may find that we become so discouraged that we despair of our salvation. So David's advice *to bless* the Lord at all times comes like a stab in the eye with a sharp stick. How can one bless the Lord when your business is going to the wall or when your husband or wife has just walked out on you unexpectedly or a dear friend or loved one has just received news that they have cancer and it is terminal?

What I have discovered in my walk with God during these times is that God is vitally interested in helping us to keep our focus on Him, because if we don't we end up like Asaph did in Psalm 73 when he declared in verses 1-3; "Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled: My steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."

You can see what happens when we take our eyes off the Lord and onto something that stirs our emotions but doesn't satisfy our deep spiritual needs at the time. David goes even further when he declares that he will *praise the Lord* continually. As I contemplate the scriptures the only way that you and I can come to this position is to have a confidence that God has our absolute at best at heart.

The problem is that humanly speaking it does not appear that this is the case, especially when you have outstanding bills that need to be paid or a family member that is desperately ill.

David is building to a peak of praise and thanks when he not only wants to bless and praise the Lord, but to *boast in the Lord* despite his dilemma. To boast in the Lord takes time to remember what it is that you want to boast about so by implication this requires us to take time to remember the Lord's past blessings. Again focus is the issue because if God could bless and deliver then why can't He do it now? Good question. The only reason God cannot do what He did in the past is because we are not willing to trust Him for it. Put another way; God is always silent to unbelief.

These times of testing can be a great time of witness for us. It is easy to be a witness when the going is easy, but what are we like when in difficult times? Because this is how we can wonderfully magnify and exalt the amazing grace of God at work in our lives.

**2. Seek the Lord verses 4-8.** It seems strange to say this but often when we feel that we are between a rock and a hard place, the last thing we do is seek God. We are beautifully reminded of what happens when we do seek God in these verses. David proclaims with a sense of relief that God *heard* his cry for help. Friends we need to see that seeking the Lord should be our first response to difficult times. It helps us to keep our focus on God and stops us becoming bitter and bent.

Then David declares that as a result of seeking the Lord he experienced *God's deliverance*. This is not rocket science when it comes to working out what we need to do when in trouble, but for some of us you would think it is because we don't seek God the way we should. One preacher said it well when he noted that so many church members are filing into the pastors office for counselling when in fact they should be on their knees talking to God.

Then as we experience *God's deliverance* from all his fears he was given a promise of the *Lord's protection*, and *all his needs were satisfied*. All of this was founded on the basis that he was willing to *trust God* despite the circumstances he was in.

**3. Fear the Lord verses 9-16.** One of the things that I observe when in the various churches I visit each year is the lack of understanding of who it is that we know and worship. We treat God, at times, in a very frivolous way and so we read David's heart desire for Christians that they *fear the Lord*. This means to stand in a reverential awe of God as we are taken up with who he is and what He has done in our lives. When we view God in this manner there is *no lack in our lives* as Psalm 23 declares in verse one; "The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want."

One writer has described the fear of the Lord as; "as a wholesome dread of offending God." Such a person then is marked by a desire to *keep their tongue from evil*, from speaking evil such as gossip and or slander. Sadly for some of us when we are going through tough times we have a tendency to shoot from the mouth without giving much consideration as to the effect of the words being spoken. We need to *keep away from evil* and not put ourselves in the way of temptation. We need to *pursue peace* and allow God to deal with the

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troubles that are around us. Where we have been beset by someone who has evil designs against us leave them to the Lord, because He knows what is best to do.

**4.** Then key to dealing with our struggles is that we **keep trusting in the Lord verses 17-22.** When we cry out to the Lord we must do so in *trust*. That is difficult if the Lord does not respond quickly. Of course most of us want an immediate answer and that can cause all sorts of frustrations. However, despite this we must cry out to God in trust and *expect Him to answer*. We must *come humbly to the Lord* not with arrogance, not demanding our own agenda. As we wait on the Lord we must strive to *maintain a right walk* before God and not allow discouragement to cause us to succumb to temptation.

We must understand that as Christians that we going to have difficult times and critical to making the most of these times is having the right attitude towards them. Often our desire when we are praying is that God would get us out of the situation, rather than seeing what we can get from the situation. As we come with the right attitude to God we can have confidence that *He will keep us* and *protect us* physically emotionally and spiritually.

— Carl Carmody, Editor of Challenge



## Prayer:

1. Challenge has been going through some very difficult times financially for a variety of reasons. We would value your prayer for the Lord's much needed provision not only for the Australian office, but also for our African work. Thank you for doing that.
2. Pray for Carl Carmody and his family as he heads to Argentina and the US for some further promotion of the paper. It is hoped that in March of next year to put out our first language edition of Challenge in Spanish for Argentina. We are trying to establish a good support base out of the US for both offices as we are keen to not only sustain our present print run in Australia and Africa, but expand it. Pray this happens.
3. Pray for a successful pilot print run of the paper in Kenya. We are printing 20,000 papers with the goal of building it to 100,000 to get into the nations surrounding Kenya.
4. Continue to pray for the distribution of the paper in Botswana. At the moment we are using 20,000 of our standard African edition and 10,000 of our prison edition for distribution into all 32 prisons in that country. Pray for Andrew and Sandra Freeman who oversee this distribution in Gaborone and do an excellent job.
5. Remember to pray for our vital partner ministry in Multi Ministries and for their directors, Harold Peasley and Errol Wesson and their wives. Pray for their staff as they do a vast amount of different tasks in preparations for outreach events, training and equipping of pastors and encouraging the local church. Like our own ministry finance is always a challenge.
6. Continue to pray for the Challenge families and for the Lord's provision for them. Pray also for the protection of the Challenge building and it's equipment.
7. Pray for our Australian distribution as we would love to see it expand to 70 or 80,000 papers a month. This is proving to be a big goal to achieve and we would greatly value your prayer for our representatives in South Australia and Victoria, and how else we can achieve this goal.
8. Pray for the finalisation of our accounts problems as they have dragged on for some time, causing us some considerable difficulties.

## Praise:

1. Praise God for the excellent Impact Africa mission trip and for all that God did and continues to do in the lives of those who came.
2. Praise God for all the folk who give on a regular basis to the work of Challenge. Praise God for our faithful volunteers who do a fantastic job particularly with the wrapping of Challenge each month.
3. We are so grateful to God for all that He does each day for us. We are so mindful that each day is a special gift from God and we are privileged to have Him as our heavenly Father. We do praise God for His daily provision of His care, food, clothing, and finances.
4. Praise God for the trickle of commitments that we see coming into Challenge each month. We see Challenge as being a very helpful tool in the process of bringing people into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Challenge Literature Fellowship

PO Box 978, Cloverdale 6985

Phone (08) 9453 3311 Fax (08) 9453 3006

Email: challenge@clf.org.au