



ISSUE

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Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN OF
THE OL-
SEN PARK
CHURCH OF
CHRIST

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

9:30 AM

10:30 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Patrick Ledbetter

Brady McAlister

Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Ben Hight

Blake McAlister

Walker McAnear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Justin Smiley

Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope

The Crossroads of Adversity

By Kyle Pope

Chris Peltz is a preacher friend of mine who works in Springfield Missouri with the Southside Church of Christ. Chris and I don't know each other extremely well but we've eaten together and visited together at different times when I've gone to see family in Springfield. Chris is totally blind. He wasn't born blind, but when he was young, while out hunting with his family, the shock blast from a nearby shotgun damaged something in his eyes that, at first, caused him to lose most of his vision, then eventually made him go completely blind.

In spite of what most of us would consider to be such an insurmountable obstacle, Chris is amazing! He has adapted to this challenging condition in ways that would seem impossible to many of us. His wife helps him in many ways, but he writes his own sermons, designs the church's website, and teaches and preaches with an aptitude that surpasses many of us who don't have this type of impairment.

Chris illustrates something to me that I think all of us must confront in one way or another at some point in our own lives that I want to call *the crossroads of adversity*. Some time, some how, something will happen to each of us that we did not expect and for which we had not prepared. It will be something unpleasant. It will be something that changes how we view our life, our self image, and how we understand our place in this world. When it happens, whether we realize it or not, we stand at a crossroads. We will either accept it and adapt to the new and different role life calls upon us to fill or we will spend the rest of our lives following a path of regret, disappointment, and resentment in a hopeless desire to

go back to some point in the past we feel has been lost.

How can we prepare for this crossroads? How can we avoid choosing the wrong path? Scripture offers us guidance.

1. Don't Imagine Adversity Won't Come. Long ago Job said, “**man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble**” (Job 14:1, NKJV). Yet, when Job faced such trouble it took his wife by surprise. She thought all was lost and urged him to throw away his integrity and “**curse God and die!**” (Job 2:9). Job was standing at a crossroads and the one who should have encouraged him just made things worse. Job didn't have any superhuman abilities, he just made the right choice. He asked her, “**Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?**” (Job 2:10b). We shouldn't let the inevitability of hardships rob us of life's joys, but neither should we allow it to take us by surprise.

2. Adversity Doesn't Have to Win. What makes adversity so bad? It changes things. It makes things harder

or even impossible. Adversity is frightening. It takes us places we've never been before and like a child scared of the dark we imagine the worst kinds of monsters and dangerous creatures lurking in the shadows. Jesus would have us to take hold of a faith that brings us through such frightful times. In talking about the reality of persecution, Paul wrote:

Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:37-39).

The Christian is on the winning side. We know Him who conquered it all (see 1 Cor. 15:24). In fact, the Christian is a conqueror. Yes, “**more than**” a conqueror! But only if we fight. Adversity only wins if we allow it to. It doesn't have to win!

3. Don't Think of Life as Something Fixed. David prayed:

LORD, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am. Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths, and my age is as nothing before You; certainly every man at his best state is but vapor. Surely every man walks about like a shadow; surely they busy themselves in vain; he heaps up riches, and does not know who will gather them. And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in you (Ps. 39:4-7).

What is the shape of vapor? That's a hard question to answer. It is always changing. David said at our “**best state**” that's what our life is like. Think about David. He was a young shepherd. He was a courageous warrior. He was a gifted psalmist. He was a mighty king. He was father of rebellious children. He was the man who planned the building of the temple. He was an old man who could no longer keep himself warm. He was all these things, but ultimately, he was, “**a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away**” (Jas. 4:14).

Far too often we imagine our life as something that is fixed and stable. As children, we don't want that. We want to grow up. Yet, when we grow old, we long to be young again. The child can't enjoy the joys adulthood offers. The young adult can't view life with the wisdom old age brings. Wouldn't it be better to simply cling to the

joys of the present (whatever they may be) than to allow the hardships of adversity to blind us to those joys? We can only do that if we let go of the illusion that life is some constant and unchanging ideal.

4. Focus Out, Not In. The darker path at these crossroads of adversity calls upon us draw all our attention inward. How does this set back make us feel? How were we mistreated? How unfair is this circumstance to us? The alternative is not to ignore how adversity makes us feel but it refuses to allow our own feelings to become all that matters. Paul wrote, **“Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others”** (Phil. 2:4). Some of the most selfless souls in this life are often those faced with the deepest hardships. They have learned that an inward focus is often destructive while concern with others and other things helps the heart through difficulties. The Preacher of Ecclesiastes explained that work and industry in life are a gift given by God so that man **“will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart”** (Eccl. 5:20). Keep your hands busy, your heart open, and your eyes looking to others, not just on your own problems.

5. Focus Up, Not Down. Paul urged the Colossians, **“Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God”** (Col. 3:2-3). Adversity can easily draw our focus downward. We see all the things that are not as they should be. Our thoughts grew dark and gloomy and all hope of anything ever being better is lost. Just before these verses, Paul wrote, **“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God”** (Col. 3:1). The Christian’s spiritual resurrection as a child of God should lead us to focus on Christ above all other things. The circumstances, afflictions, and hardships of this life are only temporary for the disciple of Christ. We must avoid any path that would divert our attention away from Him.

6. The Christian Is Never Truly Alone. One of the most devastating aspects of the modern religious mindset is that it

has led many to dismiss the role of the local church in the lives of Christians. This leads us to imagine that we don’t need anyone else, we can be Christians on our own, and that faith is purely personal with no collective responsibilities. This creates an almost Buddhist perspective of Christian faith, but that’s not what the Bible teaches.

As God intends it, Christians in a local church are to, **“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another”** (Rom.12:10). We are not to forsake **“the assembling of ourselves together”** but to be diligent in **“exhorting one another”** (Heb. 10:25). But, what if it is other Christians that are the source of our adversity? That’s sometimes what happens in families, but that doesn’t mean we stop being family. The wise man taught, **“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity”** (Prov. 17:17). As brothers and sisters, we must, **“warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all”** (1 Thess. 5:14). We are not alone. Jesus promised, **“I am with you always, even to the end of the age”** (Matt. 28:20b). We can walk that better path through

the difficulties of adversity because as Christians we can know the Lord goes with us.

7. Don't Let Adversity Define Who You Are.

It is a strange tendency we often have—when adversity comes as unpleasant and hard as it is it becomes the focus of our thoughts. If people are the source, they become all we think about. If circumstances are the source, they become all we can see. If it's health, we only think about what hurts, no longer functions, or causes problems. When we do this, we allow these things to determine who we are. Certainly, some trials will demand a large measure of our attention, but we don't have to give them every part of us. Paul told the Corinthians, **"We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed"** (2 Cor. 4:8-9). How could he feel

that way? In the verses before this he explained that the **"the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"** (4:6) in the heart of the Christian, is a **"treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us"** (4:7). We should let faith define us, not adversity.

Undoubtedly, the greatest source of adversity in our lives will come from our adversary, the devil. Peter warns, **"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour"** (1 Pet. 5:8). While to some extent, Scripture teaches that now, under Christ's reign, Satan's direct power is restricted (see Zech. 13:1-3; Rev. 20:1-3), that doesn't mean he is no longer on the prowl. When adversity leads us to discouragement; when adversity leads us into sin; when adversity leads us to give up; when adversity leads us to resentment; when adversity leads us to separation from other Christians; Satan has won.

Peter goes on to encourage, **"Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world"** (1 Pet. 5:9). When we reach that crossroads in our own life, although it will be something very different for each one of us, may we each be **"steadfast in the faith"** to **"resist him."** Adversity (and the adversary) don't have to win. For the Christian there are yet unknown joys, new opportunities, and countless ways to glorify our God and spread the light of His gospel in this life. In the life to come there awaits, **"glory, honor, and immortality"** (Rom. 2:7). Although adversity will come to all of us it doesn't have to define us, if when faced with that crossroads we choose to walk the path of joy, hope, and faith in Christ. May we each seek and take that path.

