

From Despair to Hope

* Romans 5:3-5 shows one possible outcome of tribulations. It says: “And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; (4) and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; (5) and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

Please notice the chain reaction of how tribulation becomes hope. *

When people in the tribulation trust in God, they hang in there and the perseverance proves their character, which allows them to hope.

Here’s another way to look at it *

The chain reaction is like climbing a set of stairs. *The person who trusts in God, perseveres and the trial builds character in them with results in hope—

In Luke 22:32, Jesus connects faith with perseverance but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

In Acts 14:22, Paul and Barnabas encouraged the believers to continue in the faith and told them, “It is necessary to pass through many troubles on our way into the kingdom of God.” (HCSB)

Again, there is a connection between trusting in God and surviving tribulations.

Then, what happens if we don’t trust in God and decide to throw a pity party for ourselves and blame God for our situation?

*Could it be that the opposite happens?

If we don’t trust in God ... we’ll give up.

In the Amplified Bible, Luke 18:1 says, “ALSO [Jesus] told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not to turn coward (faint, lose heart, and give up).”

* Those who trust are survivors, those who do not live their lives as victims.

* Please take a minute to discuss this question around your tables: “How do you trust in God, in hopeless situations?”

In the book, I wrote about three people who faced extremely hopeless situations and found God in their Suffering.

Job said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will leave this life. The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. Praise the name of the Lord.” Job 1:21 (HCSB)

Varner said, “My greatest accomplishment in life is my relationship with God, That’s what has real meaning.”

Maria says, “The ‘happy ending’ is not that I have other children and my husband lived. The ‘happy ending’ is that I have God.”

These people experienced the presence of God as they trusted in Him.

* Instead of letting your tribulation separate you from God, invite God into your sorrow. In Soul Shaping, I wrote: “As you invite God into your sorrow, you will experience His presence. God is a good God; His mercy endures forever. You will see that vivid truth when your tears blur your vision. Sorrow may last through the night, but hope follows the mourning.” (p. 112)

* Today we want to explore how you can move the slider from Despair to Hope.

* “In the crucible of suffering, it is easy to give up, and some people do. They give in to discouragement, blaming God for their predicament. Others respond by inviting God into their pain and thereby experience His presence in a deeper, more meaningful way than ever before.” p. 102

*In Soul Shaping, I discuss four disciplines that will help you develop your trust in God during difficult times.

First is lament, which I define as: “Inviting God into your sorrow and experiencing His presence in the depth of your pain.”

* Second is confession, which is “agreeing with God about your sin.”

* Third is Celebration, which is: “acknowledging God’s goodness and faithfulness through your sorrow.”

* And the last is praise, which is: “giving glory to God, regardless of your circumstances.”

* Lamenting includes naming your sorrow and then inviting God into it. Instead of blaming him, you lean into Him and trust in Him. A good example is in Lamentations 3:17-24

In the first part, Jeremiah names his sorrow:

Lamentations 3:17-18 (HCSB) (17) My soul has been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is. (18) Then I thought: My future is lost, as well as my hope from the Lord.

*In the second part, he acknowledges God's presence.

Lamentations 3:22-24 (HCSB) (22) [Because of] the Lord's faithful love we do not perish, for His mercies never end. (23) They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness! (24) I say: The Lord is my portion, therefore I will put my hope in Him.

* 1 John 1:9 (HCSB) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Confession is agreeing with God that we've sinned. The promise of scripture is that when we confess them, God will forgive us of our sins.

I would like to do an individual activity.

*I would like for you to write a progressive poem that has 9 lines.

The first line has one syllable

The second line two,

The third three,

The fourth 4

And the fifth 5 syllables.

Now subtract one syllable per line. The sixth syllable has 4 syllables

The seventh has 3,

The eighth has 2 and

The ninth has one.

I have written the first four lines for you, except for the last word of the fourth line.

God

Will you

Hear my cry

Know my deep _____

*You will need to fill it in with one either loss, pain or sin—your choice. Now this poem will become a lament or a prayer of confession.

After you've written out your prayer of lament/confession, take a moment to invite God into your sorrow.

* Let's spend some time praising God for his goodness. Share with someone sitting next to you about the things that you have to praise God for.

* "Instead of letting the tragedies of life break you, you can encounter God in your sorrow, pain, joy and even sin. God is there in all of life's circumstances, ready to receive you when you press into Him."

p. 115