



# HANDLING HARDSHIP

Someone once said, “God hasn’t promised us a smooth ride, but He has guaranteed a safe landing.” These words are a good introduction to our subject of handling hardship. God has not said that His children will have no difficulties. A wrecked car, the loss of a loved one, an illness, financial strain, or even worse – these are things that Christians and non-Christians share in common. It is there that the commonality ends, though. The Christian has resources to live through problems victoriously while the non-Christian struggles without direction or understanding. This lesson will help you answer the most common question people ask when suffering hardship: “Why?” It will also suggest some Biblical approaches for coping with hardship.

## I. HARDSHIP AMONG GOD’S PEOPLE

A careful consideration of the lives of some of God’s people described in the Bible quickly reveals that they faced hardship. Check the following passages and summarize each as it pertains to hardship:

ABRAHAM (Genesis 22:1-2)

SARAH (Genesis 11:30)

JACOB (Genesis 27:41-45)

JOSEPH (Genesis 39:7-20)

MOSES (Exodus 2:11-15)

PAUL (2 Corinthians 11:23-28)

OTHERS (Hebrews 11:35-38)

A widespread misconception today is this: “Becoming a Christian will take away all my problems.” While certainly a Christian will avoid some hardship by virtue of his or her new lifestyle, there will still be trials. Why does God allow this? Why doesn’t He just intervene and remove suffering for His people? We hope to find at least some of the answers in this lesson.

## **II. HANDLING HARDSHIP**

There are at least four explanations for hardship from a Christian perspective. A careful study of these can help us understand our struggles.

### **A. THE HARDSHIP OF THE TRANSGRESSOR**

What will it be like for the person who lives a life of willful transgression of God’s commands? (Proverbs 13:15)

Will the wicked person experience peace in this life? (Isaiah 48:22)

What will it be like for the person who walks in darkness? (John 12:35)

Hopefully, as a Christian, you understand that you are not to live the life of the transgressor. You should be putting the old life behind you. These verses warn us what life can be like if we turn away from God, or don’t take obedience seriously. A life of disobedience can be very hard. Sometimes we forget this. Satan would have us recall the good times of our old life and forget the bad. Watch out for the temptation to turn back because you are experiencing difficulties at the moment. It wasn’t really so great back then!

Compare Exodus 16:2-3 with Exodus 2:23 and Exodus 5:10-19. Isn't it true that we soon forget the difficulties of the past?

## **B. THE HARDSHIP OF REAPING**

What natural law is in effect today for all mankind? (Galatians 6:7-8)

Can you think of a contemporary example of this kind of hardship?

If God were not equitable with this law of sowing and reaping, mockers could level charges of "unfair" and "personal favoritism" at Him. Thus, this law is valid for everyone – including Christians. Some of us, because of the way we lived in the past, may now be in the unpleasant reaping stage. We're harvesting what we planted years ago. It would be unfair for us to blame God for our hardship. We must accept the difficult verdict that we brought it upon ourselves.

So, is the situation hopeless? (Galatians 6:9)

The above verse prescribes a three-part plan for persons who are facing the hardship of reaping:

1. Don't lose heart.
2. Realize that someday the reaping will be over (if not in this life, then certainly in the next).
3. Don't grow weary.

What should occupy our minds during a reaping period? (Galatians 6:10)

## **C. THE HARDSHIP OF DISCIPLINE**

God is our heavenly Father. Christians are His children. When a father loves his children he disciplines them so that they will grow up to live balanced and orderly lives. God, who loves us more than any earthly father, also disciplines us for our good.

Should a Christian expect to experience this discipline? (Hebrews 12:5-13)  
In what way did Paul suffer hardship that might have been discipline from God in his life? (2 Corinthians 12:7-10) Note: Some believe that Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was failing eyesight.

God disciplines us for whose good? (Hebrews 12:10)

Should we expect the discipline of God to be pleasant? (Hebrews 12:11)

What should be our response when we believe our hardship may be due to God's discipline?

Hebrews 12:12-15 reveals the proper response to God's discipline:

1. Strengthen yourself. (v. 12) You are weak and need to bolster your spiritual resources.
2. Straighten your path now so your situation doesn't become permanent. (v. 13)
3. Make both your horizontal and ("pursue peace with all men...") and your vertical ("and sanctification") relationships right. (v. 14)
4. Don't respond in bitterness. (v. 15)

#### **D. THE HARDSHIP OF TRIALS**

So far we have looked at hardship that we have in some way caused ourselves, either directly or indirectly. But what about those cases of hardship that do not result from our own actions?

Why does God allow some hardship to come upon us? (1 Peter 4:12-13)

How should we respond to this kind of hardship? (James 1:2)

What do trials produce in us? (James 1:3)

What is the ultimate result? (James 1:4)

What should a person do who is suffering trials according to the will of God? (1 Peter 4:19)

What do we look forward to when our trials are over? (1 Peter 1:6-9)

Will our trials ever be more than we can bear? (1 Corinthians 10:13) Note: The world “temptation” here in the context refers to the kinds of trials we are talking about.

### **III. GOD’S PROVIDENCE IN TRIALS**

What is providence? (Use an English dictionary)

Consider the life of Joseph. (Genesis 37-50) Joseph was a very godly man, yet in his youth his brothers hated him. As their hatred grew they took his favorite coat, threw him into a dry well, then sold him as a slave to some traders. In Egypt he was falsely accused by the wife of a king’s bodyguard and thrown in jail for two years. Things did finally get better, but it was a difficult time for him. He didn’t understand what was happening to him or why. Later in his life though, as he looked back, he could see at least part of the

reason. As he spoke to his brothers about how they had mistreated him, he stated God's reason for the suffering. Read Genesis 50:20. Write the reason below in your own words.

What promise does God give to all those who love Him and belong to Him? (Romans 8:28)

Write the meaning of this verse below in your own words.

How might a current situation in your life be a part of the providence of God?

Who will sustain us through our troubles if we continue to trust Him? (Psalm 37:35-40)