

WHAT TO DO WHEN LIFE STINKS

INTRODUCTION

Want to share something that will be useful for some of you right now today – but if not now, then definitely at some point in the future – guaranteed!

Sometimes life stinks! Bad things happen to good people, and we find ourselves asking “Why me? What did I do to deserve this?”

The answer is “Why not you?” As Christians we aren’t immune from what happens to everyone else – we too are human beings living in this world, subject to the same problems and trials – though we have additional resources to deal with things.

T-shirt : “ * * * * HAPPENS” – does this mean LIFE HAPPENS?!

Another key question we often ask is “Where is God when things go wrong?” Is he trying to teach me something? Is there a point to this situation?

God is looking for **character** – to make plain what is hidden inside us.

Character is what we are inside, so how to find out?

It comes out under pressure – squeeze the sponge, kick the barrel

There are many examples in the Bible of characters who went through very difficult times (ask for suggestions)

E.g. Job, Moses, Jacob, Joseph, Daniel, Elijah, Peter, Paul ...

No exemptions for God’s friends

How should we respond to hard times, difficult circumstances, sorrow, suffering, injustice ... ?

1. *Acknowledge* – identify the reality of the situation, be honest not super-spiritual (“I’m fine”) – honest with yourself, your friends, God
2. *Ask* – investigate possible reasons for the situation. Is it the result of your actions or the actions of others? Or God’s discipline? Enemy attack? Or “just life”?
3. *Act* – involve God in what’s happening, share your feelings and fears with him. And consider involving others too, for support, prayer, advice, encouragement, correction etc.

CASE STUDY – JEREMIAH

Lived 2600 years ago in Judah, born into a family of priests. Called to be a prophet when he was about 20, in 626BC.

A successful prophet? What he said happened (the test of a true prophet – see Deuteronomy 18:21-22) – e.g. capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, 70-year exile of Jews to Babylon, then return.

But not too happy about being a prophet (e.g. see chapter 15) – rejected, ridiculed, abused ...

He reveals his feelings in Lamentations chapter 3 – read verses 1-18.

How did he feel? Awful – he even blames God for it all and thinks God is against him. This may not have been accurate, but it was honest.

V 19-20 : constantly thinking about his problems left him depressed

But he didn't stay depressed – v 21 suggests he found something to take his mind of his problems, and which gave him hope in the middle of it all.

What did he find?

REASONS TO HOPE

V 22-23, four things to focus on, which produce hope :

1. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases
2. His mercy never comes to an end
3. They are new every morning
4. Great is your faithfulness

1 and 2 seem like theological principles, maybe grace & mercy.

But the Hebrew words are very different :

Steadfast love = rachimim = cuddles, hugs (plural and repeated)

Mercies = chesed = kindness (constant attitude)

Every day Father God wants to hug us, hold us close, be kind to us ...

Like daddy every morning wanting to hug his kids before they go to school

He is faithful, unchanging, always like this – because it is his nature :

He will never let you down, not moody, always dependable

If this is true, then it produces HOPE.

WHAT IS HOPE?

One of the three great things that remain : I Corinthians 13:13

“These three remain – faith, hope and love, and the most misunderstood is hope”

Not just wishful thinking (I hope so), but something much more positive.

Hebrews 6:19 – a strong anchor to hold us fast in the storms of life

Hebrews 11:1 – closely related to faith “the assurance of things hoped for”

HOW TO FIND HOPE

Three keys :

1. Talk to yourself! Psalms 42-43 (one psalm) have a constant chorus – “Why are you cast down o my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.” Self-encouragement is vital.
2. Allow God himself to work in you. Romans 15:13 – “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” Let the Holy Spirit minister to you.
3. Look for a transforming miracle. Hosea 2:14-15 – “I will make the Valley of Achor into a door of hope.” Achor was a place of shame and judgement in Israel’s history, but God promised to transform it. He can transform our circumstances too.

CONCLUSION

If your life stinks (or when it does at some point in future) :

- Seek intimacy with God every day, look for his cuddles and kindness, allow him to love you and comfort you
- Remember his faithfulness, he never changes his opinion of you or his attitude towards you, he always loves you intensely
- Concentrate on these things, not on the problem. Remind yourself often that God cares for you, he is involved with you, he’s on your side ...
- Allow hope to grow in you – you have a future

Follow the good example of Jeremiah – call these things to mind and have hope.

PRAYER AND MINISTRY...