

Dear Friends,

My apologies... for entirely missing the letter which I normally write to you each month. I underwent a couple of surgeries and hospitalization that kept me "out of commission" for several weeks. As a result, I totally missed the March newsletter!

Although still recuperating, I am so thankful the Lord protected me and is bringing healing and recovery to my body.

In fact, I have been getting plenty of first-hand experience putting into practice the advice which Sharon gives in the following article. In dark times of pain, discouragement, uncertainty and weariness, I find that the Lord is my **very best Helper**. When I was in the hospital, my kid sister (okay... she's in her 60's, I think, but she's my youngest sibling so I still get to call her my "kid sister") sent me the Scripture, *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light* (Matthew 11:28-30).

I can testify to the truth of this Scripture... Jesus is our only true Source of comfort and rest in the midst of difficulties. Throughout these recent weeks, Sharon and I have met many fellow believers... receptionists, nurses, phlebotomists, physical therapists, shuttle bus drivers. We have been reminded over and over that God has His children everywhere. He doesn't expect us to "go it alone."

How precious is the family of God! During this recovery, caring friends have prayed, offered words of encouragement, visited and brought meals...what a blessing! And the music of many Christian artists has ministered to my spirit and emotions... those musicians have no idea how the Lord has used them to bring peace and comfort to me.

In all of this, I cannot help but say, Thank You, Thank You Lord!

I don't know what you and your family might be dealing with today, but my prayer is that you will look to Jesus in the midst of hardship, and lean on Him. He is truly our only *Rock and Fortress, a very present Help in trouble!* May you rest in Him today!



When Hard Times Come

Question: It seems like our family has been bombarded with one problem situation after

another in recent months. It is hard to not feel overwhelmed. Does God care? How do we hold onto faith in the midst of so much difficulty?

Response: As long as we live on planet earth, we will encounter challenges: health problems, financial pressures, interpersonal conflicts, as well as many political and social changes in our world. But Christian families CAN weather whatever comes their way with the help of the Lord who promises to never leave them or forsake them! Consider some of the following suggestions for holding fast to faith when hard times come.

F Feed on God's Word. Just as people starve to death without adequate food, so spiritual life dies without spiritual nourishment. Sadly, in many Christian homes, parents and children are more savvy about football statistics, popular entertainers or political news than they are about the Bible. Why not begin a habit of memo-

rizing a verse of Scripture each week? Choose verses that encourage believers to walk in faith, not fear. Here are a few great ones for starters: Romans 8:15, 2 Timothy 1:7, Hebrews 13:5-6, Psalm 27:1, Psalm 56:3-4, Psalm 56:10-11, Matthew 10:28, Matthew 10:29-30, 1 John 4:18.

Act and *react* in love. God holds us responsible not only for our actions, but also our *reactions*. People often excuse their wrong feelings, attitudes, words and behaviors because someone first did wrong to them or because they find themselves in the midst of difficult circumstances. Such justification may seem normal and common, but it is not Jesus' way of responding. He teaches us to always counter mistreatment with love. That requires dependence on Him for help. When difficulties strike, discuss with the family, how Jesus would react and then plan together how to practically demonstrate that attitude.

Intercede. Yes, pray, pray, pray! Then, pray some more. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, *Pray continually*. It is time for North American Christians to start acting like they truly believe there is a God who cares for them and is able to help them. Join or start a prayer group. Attend your church's regular prayer meetings. Pray with your spouse and children at the start of the day. Pray with them at the close of the day. Pray for them when you are apart. But don't just pray for each other. Pray earnestly for your community, its leaders and all those holding authority and influence in your corner of the world. And when others wrong you, pray for God's blessing on them. As Scripture says, *The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective* (James 5:16).



Thank God no matter what happens. *Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus* (1 Thessalonians 5:18). This verse doesn't say we must thank God *for* everything, but rather, it urges believers to thank Him *in the midst of* whatever life brings. Granted, this is extremely difficult when heart-ache strikes... when a loved one dies, when pain and suffering are raging, when we experience a great loss. So it is important to cultivate an attitude of gratitude during the good times, when life seems sunny and easy, making it an already-well-ingrained habit when the hard times hit. At the supper table, or when riding in the car, make a family game of naming things for which you are thankful. Read biographies of Christians who praised God in the midst of persecution and suffering. When problems do come, work together to find reasons for thanksgiving, in spite of the situation. Memorize verses that talk about the benefits of bearing up under hardship... 2 Corinthians 1:8-9, Romans 8:18, James 1:12, 1 Peter 1:7-8, Psalm 27:5-6, Acts 16:25, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. And remember that, for the believer, even in death there is great cause for gratitude... because a problem-free eternity with Jesus is just beginning!

Harness support of others. God's design is for His family, the church, to pull together, supporting each other, encouraging each other. *As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers* (Galatians 6:10). *Carry each other's burdens* (Galatians 6:2). It is God's desire for believers to come alongside those who are suffering and help lighten their load. Why not adopt an individual or family from your church that is going through a rough season? Pray for that family. Help them in practical ways... doing household jobs, taking groceries or meals, running errands, etc. Write notes of encouragement, keep in touch via virtual chats, phone calls, e-mails, texts and visits. One day, YOU may be on the *receiving* end!

Life happens. Hardships hit. No one is exempt from suffering. But it doesn't have to destroy us when it comes. Hard times make many people bitter. The good news is that with the Lord's help, hard times can actually make us better and stronger. That is reason to face any day with joy, peace, and confidence... and *unshakable faith!*

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