

# YOU CAN OVERCOME IN LIFE

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Life can be challenging! Occasionally, life brings catastrophic loss—the death of a loved one or a beloved pet, the loss of a career job, the loss of one’s home. Life is never the same after such a hit. You can only hope to discover and build a “new normal.”

But most of life’s stressors are smaller, by comparison, and far more frequent—having no change for the parking meter, people who never give but always take, flight delays, lane closures, people who are late, a dip in the stock market, a government worker to whom you are only a number, people who are lazy, being overlooked for a promotion, children who assure you they know better, people who want to tell you how to do it but won’t lift a finger to help.

Have you experienced such things? Do you expect to experience them again? What are the chances? Pretty good, I’d say.

So, if we have such confidence in what lies ahead, what’s a person to do? And, what does faith have to do with it?

Americans tend to feel entitled to the good life—no need to prepare, no need to work hard, no need to save for the future. This consumer culture tells us to enjoy it all—right now! And if you simply can’t afford it—charge it!

*What do you think of this? Most Christians deny the God of promise His 10% (the tithe), but are willing to give VISA or MasterCard their 24.99%. Where is the wisdom in that?*

If you’re going to deal with stress well, so it doesn’t give you high blood pressure and leave you irritable and cranky, or kill you before your time, you must learn to prepare yourself.

I’ll speak to you today about three ways in which you *must* prepare, if you want to thoroughly enjoy your life: you must prepare to *receive*, prepare to *resist*, and prepare to *respond*.

## **PREPARE TO RECEIVE**

Prepare to receive the good with the bad.

After Job had lost his property, his children, and his livestock, he also lost his health to dreadful, itching skin sores. Though his wife loved him, she could not take the misery that had befallen him. Her heart ached in helpless pity.

<sup>8</sup> Job scraped his skin with a piece of broken pottery as he sat among the ashes. <sup>9</sup> His wife said to him, “Are you still trying to maintain your integrity? Curse God and die.”

<sup>10</sup> But Job replied, “You talk like a foolish woman. Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?” So in all this, Job said nothing wrong. (Job 2:8-10)

Peter, Christ’s apostle, knew something of the difficult turns in life’s road, and wrote to encourage other believers to remain steadfast.

<sup>12</sup> Dear friends, don’t be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. (1 Peter 4:12)

Far from strange, fiery trials are common to many, if not most. But for Christians, in particular, they seem unreasonable and undeserved. How are we to navigate them most effectively?

<sup>2</sup> Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. <sup>3</sup> For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. <sup>4</sup> So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. (James 1:2-4)

If, as we agreed, a few moments ago, that such challenges are common to all people and all time, and we expect to meet them again, we would be foolish not to prepare ourselves.

Jesus taught us a truth we may apply here: “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (John 13:17). You will be blessed *IF YOU DO* what you know to do. If you don’t do what you *know* you should do, you’re just inviting discomfort or disaster.

So, expect to experience both good and bad in life, and prepare yourself to receive them both.

Surprisingly, some people have to be taught how to receive good things! How? Gratefully! Be thankful. And if you are thankful, let your face know about it! Express your thanks—tell God and the people involved.

And we all need to be taught how to receive bad things. How? By faith (knowing what it leads to, spiritually). And, again, gratefully—for that is how you express your faith in God concerning difficulties: you thank Him that He is in charge, that He will never give you more than you can handle, and that He will always produce something good from it.

If you have prepared yourself to receive difficulties, you may counter the devil’s accusations by upholding the righteousness of the Lord and saying as Job did, “It is written, ‘Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?’”

Next, prepare yourself to resist falling into the devil’s trap.

## PREPARE TO RESIST

Make no mistake about this: Even though our God is sovereign and “He rules over everything,” the devil will take advantage of every opportunity to try to subvert your faith. If the faith that saves you is precious to you, guard it with all your heart, mind, and strength!

If you have prepared yourself to receive the bad with the good, you are halfway there! Because one of the devil’s basic lies is to assert to you that nothing bad should ever happen to a good person like you, especially to a child of God—what loving Father would do that? You are now prepared to counter such nonsense by saying, “It is written: ‘Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?’”

Failing that ruse, he will attempt to get you to cease depending on the Lord and, instead, depend on what *you* can do to manage the crisis. After all, the devil likes to say, “God helps those who help themselves.”

You must aim to maintain your dependent faith in Jesus Christ, no matter what. No matter what. This will require some preparation. Paul described this entire process as a battle, from which there is no reprieve, no furlough—a battle for which we must prepare and arm ourselves. Its outcome will depend on how we choose to arm ourselves, so Paul addresses it plainly in his final words to the elders of Ephesus—a church he founded and nurtured for two years.

*<sup>10</sup> A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on all of God’s armor so that you will be able to **stand firm** against all strategies of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.*

*<sup>13</sup> Therefore, put on every piece of God’s armor so you will be able to **resist** the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be **standing firm**. <sup>14</sup> **Stand your ground**, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God’s righteousness. <sup>15</sup> For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. <sup>16</sup> In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. <sup>17</sup> Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

*<sup>18</sup> Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. **Stay alert** and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.*

*<sup>19</sup> And pray for me, too. Ask God to give me the right words so I can boldly explain God’s mysterious plan that the Good News is for Jews and Gentiles alike. <sup>20</sup> I am in chains now, still preaching this message as God’s ambassador. So pray that I will keep on speaking boldly for him, as I should. (Ephesians 6:10-20)*

We can all recognize the circumstances Paul was describing: people create our problems, but people are not the cause. Therefore, arguing with people, fighting against people is fruitless at solving our dilemmas. We need to trust in the “mighty power” of the Lord.

You only need to stand. See how many times Paul asserted this in the passage above. Jesus has already done the heavy fighting for you. He has stripped the devil of his power and authority. We just need to trust in that and take our stand. Don't surrender what the Lord has given you, for when He gives something to you He also gives you authority to protect and retain it.

<sup>18</sup> “Yes,” [Jesus] told them, “I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning! <sup>19</sup> Look, I have given you **authority over** all the power of the enemy, and you can **walk among** snakes and scorpions and **crush** them. Nothing will injure you. <sup>20</sup> But don't rejoice because evil spirits obey you; rejoice because your names are registered in heaven.” (Luke 10:18-20)

To walk in the Spirit is to walk in the authority of Jesus Christ. You may walk among snakes and scorpions, but when you do, you may crush them, without suffering harm. Isn't that great!?

But that's not the *best* part. The best part is that Jesus Christ has secured your salvation, for time and eternity! Nothing and no one can ever separate you from God's love.

<sup>35</sup> *Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death?* <sup>37</sup> *No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.*

<sup>38</sup> *And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love.* <sup>39</sup> *No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 8:35-39)

If you have prepared yourself to keep the faith, you may counter the devil's lies by saying, “It is written: ‘Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.’”

Now that we have prepared ourselves to receive difficulties, and prepared ourselves to resist the enemy's designs, we must also prepare ourselves to respond in the Spirit, which is what is meant by “resting in His mighty power.”

## **PREPARE TO RESPOND**

The first thing faith tells us to do in response to a challenge is to love. Faith works by love. Follow the love and you'll be walking in faith. But how do you love people who are so annoying?

You bring forth the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)—love (them as they are), (count it all) joy, (within yourself, have) peace, (show) patience, (demonstrate unwarranted) kindness, (display thoughtful) goodness, faithfulness (to the Savior), gentleness (to the weak), self-control (self-restraint).

A problem arises, though, when you find yourself fruitless in the moment of need! Life's delay demands patience, but when I dip my ladle into the well, I find it is dry (I have no patience to offer). It may be the Spirit's fruit, but if I haven't been keeping in step with the Spirit—tuned in and responsive to Him—He won't be able to produce what I need.

And the hard truth is that many times we will simply shrug off the fact that we were unprepared, and act like life has thrown us a curve ball that no one could be expected to hit. Nevertheless, the truth remains: I failed to prepare. I wasn't walking in step with God's Spirit.

So, how can I change that for the future? What does it mean to walk "in step" with the Spirit?

*<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-25; NIV)*

We do this in two ways (as Paul expressed it): crucifying the flesh, and keeping in step with the Holy Spirit.

1. Crucify your sinful nature (your fleshly impulses).

The last fruit on Paul's list is the one we need first, and most often: self-control. This not control of yourself by your self; rather, it is control of your self by the Holy Spirit. If you let self have its way, you won't depend on the Holy Spirit, and you won't respond in *His* ways. It's time to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus.

2. Attend carefully to the Spirit's leading.

Paul taught, "*Since we are living by the Spirit, let us **follow the Spirit's leading** in every part of our lives.*" (Galatians 5:25; NLT)

Take a lesson from childhood: Stop, look, and listen.

If you don't *stop*, you will react according to the flesh, and that will defeat you.

You must *look* to the Lord in prayer, and if you have time, in the Bible. Look for guidance. Ask Him, "What should I do?"

You must *listen* to His counsel and do it. Hearing without obeying is nonsense; it is stubbornness.

Are you prepared? Can you see how easily and often you have been defeated because you were unprepared? Are you willing now to prepare?

Prepare to receive from the hand of God the bad with the good.

Prepare to resist the evil one's lies by standing in God's truth.

Prepare to respond in the power of the Sovereign Lord by leaning on His Spirit.

Where do you need His help today? Ask Him through prayer for His help and guidance.

Begin to get ready today.