

From the valley to the mountain top – how to overcome problems, challenges, suffering and adversity

There are thousands of Christian books out there.

Why should you read this book?

Well, what's written in this book literally saved my life.

I've been a Christian since I was 13 but suffered from negative thinking which made me a slave to anxiety and depression. I experienced great periods of darkness, the worst of which came when I was laid off from my job when I was 30. During that time, I was so stricken with fear of not being able to get another job that I remember once, I just collapsed on the floor and started writhing uncontrollably with anxiety. I was deeply depressed and saw no hope in my future. I couldn't see how my life could get any better, I couldn't imagine being happy again.

I was in the deepest bottom of the valley.

Well, God was good and despite my negativity and fears, He provided me with a job. However, I still struggled with anxiety and depression. I was trapped in the valley.

All that changed when my sister gave me a book by Joel Osteen in 2007. Its message of positive thinking and hope changed the way I thought.

I radically changed the way my mind thought and my life changed dramatically. Today, I still face many challenges in my job and my relationships, but I now I experience God's peace in a way that I never thought was possible. I still face storms, but God's peace is with me, comforting and guiding me.

The way to this delicious peace is a path that's laid out in the principles that I've compiled in this book. These principles have literally saved my life. Without the wisdom that I learnt from the Bible and good Christian authors, I probably would have killed myself, so great was my abyss of fear and depression.

If you struggle from anxiety and unhappiness, this book will help you rise from the valley to the mountain top. It'll teach you how to overcome challenges, problems and suffering in your life.

One thing I've learnt is that you can be a Christian, you can be saved, but still suffer from anxiety and depression. This is because even though you've accepted Jesus as your Saviour and Lord, you still have wrong thinking in your mind and possess a negative attitude. That was certainly true in my case. I became a Christian when I was 13 but continued to suffer from anxiety and depression. It wasn't until I turned 35 and started reading Christian books that taught me how to live with a positive mindset that I managed to move from darkness to light.

One of the reasons why I decided to write this book is to help others cope with problems. Every human being faces trials and difficulties, in this fallen world it is impossible to avoid suffering. Thus this book has universal appeal, as it deals with the issue of how to overcome obstacles, something which everyone has to grapple with.

One of the central teachings of the book is about the power of the mind. The key thesis of this book is that the problem with problems is not the problem in itself, but in how we react to the challenges we face. If we react negatively, we will suffer and experience bad things. But if we learn how to react positively, if through wisdom we learn how to process our thoughts and reactions to the problems correctly, we can triumph over any difficulty and come out better than before. How we think and react to problems will affect how high we can rise in life – our attitude determines our altitude.

This book contains the principles that will give you the wisdom to process your problems in the way that helps you turn your set-backs into stepping-stones. The book instructs you on how to adopt a positive attitude so you can overcome anxiety and depression and use the power of the mind to overcome any problem. As you read this book, I hope you'll grant me the privilege of being your loving guide, helping you climb from the valley of shadows to the peak of the celestial mountain. I pray that this book will bring healing to your wounded soul, turning your scars into stars.

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God works all things for our good

There's a verse in the Bible that I always go back to, which encourages me every time I'm down and has given me wisdom, strength and victory every time I turn to it.

What's this special verse? It's Romans 8:28 - "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him".

When something bad happens to us, we have to be patient and trust that God will bring something good out of it. We have to wait for the big picture to unfold. One day, if we are patient enough to trust God and see His total vision for our life, we will see how both the good and bad things actually mix up beautifully into a wonderful story with a happy ending. The setbacks make your comeback that more amazing and turn your test into a testimony. Sometimes the darkest time comes just before the brightest light you'll ever experience.

Bad things will happen to us, we can't avoid trouble in this fallen world. However, we make things worse if we focus on the negative. Maybe you went through a difficult divorce or had a bad childhood, but it's dangerous to isolate the bad parts of your life. Though you've been through a tough time, if you trust God, He can give you beauty for ashes and you'll come out stronger, better than before.

God whispers comforting words of hope in Jeremiah 29:11 –

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Believe that God has good things lined up in your future, that you'll meet the right people at the right place at the right time. When you face a set-back, instead of getting discouraged, re-ignite your passion, turn your eyes away from your failures and start moving forward. As you power on with fire in your heart, God will grant you the victory.

When something bad happens to you, initially it's natural to find it hard to see how good can come from that situation. But be patient, wait for your life to unfold and you'll see how God can work

good out of bad if you continue to have faith in Him. Also realize that God protects you from things you cannot see. When you face a closed door, realize that God is working good by protecting you from the harm that might have come about if you entered that door.

In your life, there will be both good and bad things. Wait for God to work with both the good and the bad, wait for the big picture to unfold. When you see the fullness of what He's doing and the victory that He will bring to you, you'll forget all about the pain of your problems and praise Him for your blessings. You'll say to Him – "God you're amazing, you had it all figured out, your plan was better than my plan!" When something bad happens to you, you may not understand why but one day, if you don't lose your faith and move on with life, you will see His perfect plan.

So don't lose heart. It's not over until God says it's over. And God always ends with good.

Sometimes it takes a long time before you see how God works things for your good. In those times, be patient. Wait for God to work things to your favour.

There's a story about how this man was shipwrecked on a deserted island. He was terribly depressed – all alone, away from his loved ones. He had no idea how he could get someone to rescue him. He prayed to God for help but weeks passed and nothing happened. He lost all hope that he would ever be rescued. Then something terrible happened. One day, when he went out to gather some fruits for lunch, he returned to find that the hut he built was on fire. As he watched his hut burn to the ground, he cried out to God – "Why are you doing this to me? I prayed for you to help me and things only go from bad to worse. I give up!" He was utterly devastated. But then an hour later, a boat turns up at his island. It was the Coast Guard – they had come to rescue him. The man was overjoyed. "How did you know I was here?" the man asked the captain. "We saw the signal from the fire you built on the island," the captain said.

Like the shipwrecked man on the island, God can turn the fire that threatens to destroy us into a beacon of hope. We just have to be patient and wait to see how God can turn things around and transform the negative into the positive. As Psalms 30:5 says, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning".

So no matter how bad things get, keep your hope in God and watch Him bring you the victory!

God promises to bring us victory no matter how great our challenges might be. However, we have to let go of our picture of what that victory might look like. God's version of victory is often different from ours and is sure to surprise us when He brings it to pass. For example, I used to suffer a lot from intense loneliness. If I didn't meet with someone for a social chat at least once a day, I would suffer from a panic attack. I was always praying for God to bring more friends into my life. Well, God did answer my prayer and has brought good friends into my life, but He also changed me. He taught me to develop hobbies that I could enjoy doing by myself, like reading, watching movies and taking walks in the park. I found that when I was immersed in doing something which I enjoyed, I didn't feel lonely. As a result, I became less dependent on people to ease my loneliness. I stopped suffering from panic attacks at the thought of not being able to meet up with a friend. I knew that if I felt lonely, I could call a friend, but if that friend was not available, I wouldn't panic, I could simply watch an entertaining TV programme or go for a walk in a garden. This victory from God was different from what I expected from Him – I had expected Him to grant me many friends if I was to overcome

loneliness. Instead of providing me with abundant friends, God taught me how to be happy by myself.

One good thing that can come from suffering is that it makes us turn to God. Without suffering, we might forget God. So suffering can be redeemed if we use it to drive us to God, to make us depend on Him and cling to His hand. When we focus on the good that can come from our trials, it enables us to rejoice in suffering.

We also need patience. Sometimes the good from suffering doesn't appear until much later in your life, but when the good comes, you will praise God for it. So hang in there - good is coming.

In Romans 8:35-39, Paul writes:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul tells us that no trouble, no difficulty, no obstacle, no suffering will be able to separate us from the love of God. Even in our darkest hour, the light of God's love will be there to guide and comfort us. So we need not dread or fear problems, no matter how bad it gets, there will always be good, there will always be God's love making us more than conquerors, guiding us to victory.

The Bible is full of stories of how God worked good from bad situations. One prime example is the Apostle Paul. He was often thrown into prison, but God used this to help spread the gospel. As Paul writes in Philippians 1:12-13:

Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

Another example of God working good out of the negative is seen in the story of Jesus healing the man who was born blind. When the disciples encountered the blind man, they asked Jesus – “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.” Jesus then healed the blind man and so God worked good from the man's blindness as the miracle brought praise and glory to the Divine Healer.

The story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead also shows how sometimes God allows us to go through painful situations so that He can work good out of it. Lazarus, and his sisters Mary and Martha, were good friends of Jesus. Lazarus fell sick and his sisters sent word to Jesus, hoping that the Lord would come to their home to heal Lazarus. But Jesus stayed away. Lazarus died from his

illness, and this tragic event filled his sisters with grief. Jesus could have easily gone to Lazarus and healed him, preventing him from dying and saving the sisters from sadness, but Jesus chose to stay away because He knew God had a better plan in store. Jesus waited until Lazarus had died for four days before going to Bethany, where Lazarus lived. When Jesus arrived at Lazarus' tomb, he commanded his friends to roll away the stone from the tomb and ordered Lazarus to come out in a loud voice. Lazarus rose from the dead and everyone was stunned in amazement. Jesus said - "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" The story of Lazarus rising from the dead shows how God works good from situations that grieve us, as he can turn our mourning to dancing as his miraculous deliverance brings Him glory.

We know from Romans 8:28 that God promises that he will work good out of everything in our lives. However, we have to be careful as to what we view as "good". Our idea of good might be quite different from God's idea of good. Sometimes what is good for us might not necessarily be pleasurable or enjoyable. Sometimes what is good for us is what is good for developing our character. For example, developing patience is good for us. However, most times patience can only be developed in unpleasant situations. Maybe you have to deal with someone who is rude to you, maybe you have to wait in a long traffic jam or maybe you have to endure loneliness while you wait for God to send you new friends. During these times, the good that God sends you isn't enjoyable, but it moulds your character, refines you, turning your black carbon of a soul into a sparkling diamond. In order to enjoy the good that God sends us, we have to learn to value what God values. God values good character more than health and wealth, more than pleasant circumstances, so we have to learn to appreciate the good that comes from a soul that is pleasing to God. We have to be aware of what God's ultimate goal in life is for us. This goal is not an easy life, full of comforts and pleasures. God's ultimate purpose for us is to become like Jesus, the Saviour who suffered hardships with great patience.

When faced with difficulties, we should focus on how these troubles can help us mature as Christians. If you're not interested in becoming a better Christian, then you'll have a tough time coping with difficulties. You might even start blaming God and feel bitter. If your goal is to sail through life only enjoying pleasant circumstances, then you won't be able to tolerate trouble. You'll see problems as an obstacle rather than part of God's plan. But as you can see from James 1:2-4, trials are a vital part of God's plan for us, as God uses it to purify our sinful nature. So we can welcome suffering because it gives us positive character qualities of lasting, eternal value.

One encouraging truth about Romans 8:28 – that God works all things for good – is the fact that your life is divinely orchestrated. God has a good plan for your life, and he uses both positive and negative events to guide you to your divine destiny. God will open doors that will lead you to success, but He will also use closed doors to protect you from things that will harm you. Our role is to stay in peace and trust God – when something bad happens, remember that it's not a surprise to God, He allowed it to happen and He'll use it to guide you to a place of victory.

The hard part about believing in Romans 8:28 is that in order to experience the truth of this verse, you'll have to be afflicted with problems. When the problems come and you stay in faith, clinging on to the hope that the problems will work for your good and you see that God actually does deliver you, only then will you be able to fully know that Romans 8:28 is true. So one of the reasons that God permits trouble is to prove that Romans 8:28 is true, that He *will* turn the negative into a

positive. God permits problems so that you can experience His deliverance and praise Him for His faithfulness. As Phillip Yancey once wrote, “Faith means believing in advance what will only make sense in reverse.”

Imagine you are like an arrow. When you shoot an arrow, you have to pull it backwards first. So if life is dragging you back with problems, believe that it will shoot you forward towards your victory.

Romans 8:28 says God will make good out of your bad situations, but you can also actively work with God by looking at your problems and see how you can turn negative circumstances into a positive one. For example, if you get laid off, you might use it as an opportunity to work on a passion project, maybe write that book you’ve always had on your heart. Or someone walked out on you, instead of wallowing in self-pity, you use it as an opportunity to meet new people and to find someone who is even better than the person who left you.

When you believe that God works all things for our good, you’ll see that every cloud has a silver lining. Every negative situation has a positive aspect, we just have to look for it, focus on the good and exploit the positive opportunity. When we know that God can work good from bad, it gives us courage, we have no fear of trouble, because we know that even when we suffer, good will come out of it. We are also confident that we will have the final victory, as Isaiah tells us that no weapon formed against you will prosper (Isaiah 54:17). The verse doesn’t say that no weapon will ever form, you will face opposition, but there is the promise that the weapon won’t defeat you and you will enjoy victory in the end.

One thing that will change your life is the belief that whatever is happening to you is God’s best for you. No matter how bad things get, no matter how much you don’t understand why something negative is happening to you, you should believe that it is the best thing that could happen to you, because God loves you and He only sends the best to you, the highly beloved child of God. So when you face a negative situation, don’t get upset and all bent out of shape. Don’t grumble, don’t complain, don’t indulge in self-pity, don’t envy by comparing yourself with others who seem better off than you. Don’t fall prey to useless fantasies, filling your mind with “what-ifs”, imaginary situations which will never materialize into reality and that only fill you with anxiety. Stay grounded in reality and not wishful thinking, taking comfort that what happens to you in reality is God’s best for you. Accept God’s plan for your life and surrender yourself to him rather than to your own plans. God’s plan is always going to be better than us because God is omniscient – all-knowing and all-wise. God knows what is best for us, what will bring us the greatest joy and we should accept both the good and the bad in our lives with peace and trust in God.

Learn to make the best of what you have, instead of yearning for what you do not have. Maybe you’re unhappy with your job. You find the work boring and your boss is unreasonable. Instead of getting upset, be grateful that at least you’re getting money to pay your bills and commit yourself to excelling at your job, dedicating your efforts to God.

Learn to make lemonade out of lemons.

When you’re faced with challenges, ask yourself – how can I turn this to my good, how can I enjoy this, what opportunity does this set-back offer me?

You should believe that God can turn your bad situation into a good one, but that doesn't mean that you should be passive, just fatalistically accepting all the bad things that are happening to you. No, believing that God can work good from bad should make you want to partner with God, and spur you to make the best with what you have. Romans 8:28 should ignite your soul, encouraging you to work with God to turn your negative situation into a positive one.

One good thing that we know will always come from our trials is the promise that we will receive a reward in heaven for patiently enduring our difficulties. In James 1:12, it is written, "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him." Likewise, Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:17 that "our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." As Christians, we know that our life story always ends with good because our life story always ends with us enjoying eternal bliss in heaven. Whenever we feel discouraged by the troubles we face on this earth, realize that the troubles are only temporary and are minor compared to the overwhelming joy that we will experience in heaven if we will stay faithful to God. Revelations paints a wonderful picture of heaven, saying that God will "wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Philip Yancey writes about how we can rejoice even when we feel pain. "We rejoice not in the fact that we are suffering, but in our confidence that pain can be transformed. The value lies not in the pain itself, but in what we can make of it. The pain need not be meaningless, and therefore we rejoice in the object of our faith, a God who can effect that transformation."

God does not need suffering to do good, rather God is able to use suffering for good. As Catherine Marshall wrote, "Of course you'll encounter trouble. But behold a God of power who can take any evil and turn it into a door of hope."

Sometimes God sends you trouble to improve you. For David, when he was a lowly shepherd boy, God sent him lions that he had to kill in order to protect his sheep. His victory over the lions gave him the confidence and strength to defeat the giant Goliath. As it is written in 1 Samuel 17:34-36, David said to King Saul before taking on Goliath:

"Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God."

Our view of suffering can be radically transformed when we realize that suffering actually has many benefits. Instead of dreading suffering, we welcome it as a positive aspect of our lives. In Romans 5:3-5, Paul writes:

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Suffering births in us perseverance, character, hope and love and thus we should not reject suffering but peacefully let it reside in our lives.

Knowing that God works good in our suffering should change our view of difficulties. As Oscar Wilde once said, "What seems to us as bitter trials are often blessings in disguise."

We should see suffering as a blessing rather than as a curse. Change your negative view of suffering to a positive one. Let go of your fear of suffering and your desire to avoid problems.

As Winston Churchill once said, "A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty." Whenever you face an obstacle, ask how you can get good out of it, don't stare at what seems to be a dead end but look for the opportunity.

God allows problems to come into your life, not to drown you but to cleanse you. As Saint Basil once said, "Many a man curses the rain that falls upon his head, and knows not that it brings abundance to drive away hunger."

Knowing that there is a purpose behind your suffering also can help you endure trouble. In 2 Corinthians 1:8-11, Paul writes:

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favour granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

Paul reveals in the above passage that one of the purposes behind suffering is that we are compelled to pray when we are suffering and God will answer those prayers. When God delivers us, we give Him thanks and praise. Thus our suffering leads to the glorification of God, it leads to something good.

We can be confident that God will work everything for our good because God also promises that our lives will end in victory. We will encounter difficulties, but God will give us the wisdom and strength to overcome our problems. In John 16:33, Jesus tells his disciples – "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

In Romans 8, Paul writes, "If God is for us, who can be against us?... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

Paul tells us that since God is for us, no enemy can triumph over us. The power of God's love enables us to be conquerors over any difficulty. Even death cannot have victory over us, as we are promised eternal life in Christ Jesus, life everlasting in a resurrected body in heaven.

Peter also has encouraging words about how God will give us the victory. In 1 Peter 5:10, he writes, "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."

According to Peter, suffering is not permanent, it will only happen for a little while and our restoration is promised, we can look forward to victory. Good will come from our suffering as God will change our character, making our souls as tough as iron, making us strong, firm and steadfast, able to withstand the storms of life.

The Psalms also tells us that though we have many troubles, God will rescue us from all our difficulties. In Psalm 34:19 it is written, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all."

When we face temptation, we need not be fearful or discouraged, because God promises that we can be victorious over any trial. In 1 Corinthians 10:13, Paul writes:

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

The Bible warns us that we will face trouble in life, but God's Word also encourages us with many promises telling us that God will save us. God is our Saviour, he will deliver us from our problems, help us and rescue us from danger.

The Psalms in particular has many verses promising God's deliverance. Many of the prayers in the Psalms come from a speaker who is enduring suffering. For example, in Psalm 10:17, the Psalmist says, "You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry." The Psalms tells us that when we face trials, we should pray because God hears our prayers for deliverance. God's deliverance leads us to praise Him, as seen in Psalm 31:7, where the Psalmist sings, "I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul." The needy will be delivered by God, as seen in Psalm 72:12, "For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help."

In the Psalms, we see God as the God of Restoration, the God who turns situations around, changing sadness to joy. In Psalms 30:11, the Psalmist celebrates, singing, "You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy."

Isaiah 41:11-16 is a wonderful passage full of God's promise to help and deliver us:

So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

"All who rage against you
will surely be ashamed and disgraced;
those who oppose you
will be as nothing and perish.

Though you search for your enemies,
you will not find them.

Those who wage war against you
will be as nothing at all.

For I am the LORD your God
who takes hold of your right hand
and says to you, Do not fear;
I will help you.

Do not be afraid, you worm Jacob,
little Israel, do not fear,
for I myself will help you," declares the LORD,
your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.

"See, I will make you into a threshing sledge,
new and sharp, with many teeth.
You will thresh the mountains and crush them,
and reduce the hills to chaff.

You will winnow them, the wind will pick them up,
and a gale will blow them away.
But you will rejoice in the LORD
and glory in the Holy One of Israel.

Paul was a man who constantly encountered trouble, but God delivered him from all his difficulties. He was thrown in prison, flogged, exposed to death again and again. In 2 Corinthians, Paul tells us that he received forty lashes minus one five times, was beaten with rods three times, once was pelted with stones, was shipwrecked three times and once spent a night and a day in the open sea. Paul writes - "I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked." Paul shows that as a Christian, you might have to face severe hardships, yet God will enable you to endure and overcome it all.

Sometimes God waits until the last minute before he rescues you. God does this at times to prove that the power that saves you is from Him and not from man. Your role is to stay in peace while you wait for His salvation, and not lose faith in His ability to rescue you.

One of the benefits of suffering is that God can use our challenges to strengthen and stretch us. We all long for routine, familiarity, stability and comfort, but God is a God who likes to shake things up. God wants to see you grow, so He sends challenges to make sure you don't get complacent, to keep you on your toes. We know that a muscle that isn't challenged regularly will atrophy, and we can strengthen a muscle by putting a stress on it, by making it face resistance. In the same way, God will send resistance into our life so that our faith muscle will be strengthened and grow.

Adversity can be God's university, as God uses suffering to teach us valuable lessons. Nobody likes problems, but problems can spur us to improve ourselves. Adversity can make us stiffen our spine and force us to think outside the box. Adversity helps us develop our problem-solving skills and is a wonderful opportunity to seek and receive God's wisdom as to how to deal with problems.

There's a story about how a man once watched a butterfly trying to come out of his cocoon. The butterfly was straining away, pulling and pushing. The man took pity on the butterfly and tried to help it, so he slit the side of the cocoon. The butterfly flopped out of the cocoon, fell over, and beat its wings weakly. To the man's dismay, the butterfly died. What the man didn't realize was that the butterfly needed the struggle to emerge from its cocoon. All that pushing and wriggling was designed to help develop circulation in its wings. The struggle was what prepared the butterfly to transform from a caterpillar to a beautiful being that could fly.

So when you face trouble, entrust yourself to God and allow him to work good out of your suffering. Find gain in your pain, let God turn your set-back into a stepping stone, your adversity into an advantage, your battlefield into a place of blessing and your mess into a message!

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Rely on God to give you the victory

When you're trying to defeat difficulties, you have to remember to not trust in your abilities or look at your circumstances. Instead, have faith and trust in God's power to deliver you.

In your own strength, you'll never be able to cope with all the difficulties that life will send you. However, the good news is that our salvation from our problems doesn't depend on our abilities, but on God's power and mercy.

The Bible is full of accounts of how God used the weak, those with limited abilities, to achieve amazing things. David was only a shepherd boy with five stones when he defeated Goliath, a giant protected by armour and wielding a huge sword.

Gideon is another example of how God uses weakness to glorify himself. Gideon was preparing to attack the Midianites when God told him that his army was too big. God said to Gideon – "You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against me, 'My own strength has saved me.'" God told Gideon to announce to the army – "Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead." So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained. Yet even with ten thousand men, God still told Gideon that he had too many men. Eventually, God chose just 300 men to fight the Midianites. With the small army, God gave a mighty victory to the Israelites.

Abraham was a man of faith who did not look to his ability, but trusted in God's promise to overcome his weakness. In Genesis 15:4-6, God told Abraham, "A son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir...Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them. So shall your offspring be." Abraham was already 80 years old when God gave him this promise. Yet Abraham had faith, he did not focus on the oldness of his body, but trusted that God was powerful enough to perform a miracle and give him a son. This faith was stretched though, because Abraham had to wait a long time before his son was born – almost 20 years. Yet throughout this time of waiting, Abraham did not look at his advanced age, but trusted that God would be faithful and

eventually fulfil his promise. Abraham did not look at his inability, but relied on God's ability. Eventually, when he was 100, he welcomed his son Isaac into the world.

In the gospels, the feeding of the 5000 gives us an example of how we should not be discouraged by our limited resources but to entrust what we have to God, relying on him to multiply what we have. When Jesus faced a crowd of 5000, all of them hungry, he asked the disciples to feed them. The disciples only had five loaves of bread and two fish. Instead of being discouraged about their lack of food, the disciples went to Jesus in faith with what they had. Jesus took what the disciples gave him, thanked God and told the disciples to give out the food to the people. Then something amazing happened. The food miraculously multiplied, all 5000 people were fed and they even had twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. This shows us that we should never be worried about God's provision even when we are in lack, because God can multiply what we have and take care of us.

If you're feeling weak, don't let that discourage you! You're exactly the kind of person God would choose and call into His kingdom. Your weakness qualifies you for greatness. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:27, "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong."

Another important lesson regarding dealing with problems, is that when you're facing trouble, don't look at your circumstance, but look at your God. In the Bible, there are many examples of how God put His people into difficult situations, far beyond what they could cope. When they became fearful and intimidated by their circumstance, they were defeated. But when they focused on how much mightier God was than their circumstance, they rose on wings like eagles.

One example of this happening is the story of Peter walking on water. When Peter saw Jesus walking on water, he was inspired to follow Jesus' example. Peter asked Jesus to tell him to come on the water and Jesus said – "Come". Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" The account of Peter walking on water teaches us not to focus on our circumstance. The waters around Peter were stormy and once Peter took his eyes off Jesus and focused on the wind, he started to sink. You may be encountering troublesome storms in your life at the moment, but don't keep your eye on the storm, keep looking at Jesus instead.

In the Bible, storms provide a good metaphor regarding not looking at circumstances, but trusting in Jesus. There was once Jesus was on a boat with his disciples. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (Mark 4:35-40) This story teaches us that when things get stormy, we need not worry, since Jesus is still with us. He is in control of the storm and all we have to do is to stay in peace, trusting Him to protect us.

One inspiring account in the Bible is the story of how God rescued Israel by parting the Red Sea. Pharaoh's army was pursuing Israel, ready to annihilate them. The Israelites seemed to be trapped, because they faced the Red Sea in front of them and Pharaoh's army behind them. When the

Israelites looked at their circumstance, they were convinced that they were going to be killed. But in Exodus 14:13-14, Moses encouraged his people to look at the greatness of their God and not fear:

Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still."

God miraculously parted the Red Sea and the Israelites marched through the sea on dry ground. The Egyptians pursued the Israelites and God caused the water to come crashing down on Pharaoh's army, drowning Israel's enemies. When the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in Him.

One illustration about how our view of our circumstance will determine whether we succeed or fail comes in the story of Joshua, Caleb and the Promised Land. The Israelites were preparing to enter the Promised Land and Moses decided to send 12 spies to Canaan to scout out the land. Moses instructed the spies to explore the land and see what the land was like and whether the people who lived there were strong or weak, few or many. He also wanted to know the condition of the land, whether the soil was fertile or poor, and told the spies to bring back some of the fruit of the land. In other words, Moses wanted an extensive, detailed picture of the circumstances surrounding the state of the Promised Land.

When the spies returned from their exploration, there was a disagreement between the 10 spies and Joshua and Caleb. The 10 spies brought back a bad report regarding the circumstances of the Promised Land, saying that - "The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."

Caleb and Joshua had a different view of the circumstances surrounding the Promised Land. They were focused on the power of God and this made them see their enemies in a different light. Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it."

The spies who had a fearful view of their circumstance became condemned with the rest of Israel to wander in the desert for 40 years, never entering the Promised Land. Only Caleb and Joshua, because of their focus on God rather than their difficulties, managed to conquer the Promised Land.

So when you face difficult circumstances, remember not to focus on them, but turn your eyes on God, the mighty deliverer. If you continue to have faith and trust in God, He will lift you from the storms of your life and you will soar above the waves, victorious as an eagle!