

Getting Through the Hard Times, Part 2

Walking in the Strength of the Lord

There is always a choice. Regardless of what you go through, regardless of what you are facing, always remember that **while you did not choose the trial you are facing, you do have a choice in how you react to it.** You can go through troubled times in weakness or strength. You have a choice.

Paul makes it clear that we have two natures at war within us, the new person we have become in Christ, 2 Corinthians 5:17, and our old man, the flesh, Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9-10. I am reminded of a story a Native American told a missionary. This man had become a Christian, but he found himself battling his old nature. He told his pastor that he felt like he had two dogs fighting inside of him, a good dog and an evil dog. His pastor asked him, "Which one's winning?" The man replied, "The one I feed."

We get what we feed. If we feed the beautiful man or woman of God within us, then that person gets stronger. On the other hand, if we feed the flesh, then the flesh gets stronger. I've found that it helps to recognize what my flesh wants—and then purposefully act against it. Here is a chart of reactions I or others have had in adversity.

What does our flesh want?	How can we prevent this?
1--To not forgive	1--Forgive.
2--To stay offended	2--Challenge every wounded thought.
3--To become bitter	3--Don't allow offense to become bitterness.
4--To get revenge	4--Remember that revenge is not our job.
5--To hope that bad things happen to those who have hurt us	5--Instead of hoping for evil, pray for good things for that person. Luke 6:27-28
6--To talk about what happened with everyone who will listen	6--Talk is dangerous, because it can feed the flesh. Be careful who you talk to!
7--To keep thinking about it. Keep talking about it.	7--There comes a time when it is far better to stop thinking and talking about it.
8--To condemn the person who hurt us	8--Condemnation is NEVER from God.
9--To say horrible things about them	9--Cursing that person will NOT help!
10--To think that God doesn't care	10--Remember that God ALWAYS cares.
11--To think that God is against us	11--God is always for us. He loves us.
12--To wallow in self-pity	12--Self pity is a slippery slope to despair.
13--To despair	13--Despair is loss of hope. Never lose hope!
14--To become depressed	14--Depression can freeze you. Fight it!
15--To give up	15--Never, never, never, never give up!
16--To withdraw from everything.	16--There are things you can do. Do them.
17--To withdraw from everyone and not ask for help.	17--Seek out Christians, ask for prayer, draw on their strength. Find a godly mentor.
18--To stop reading the Bible	18--Read the Word of God even more.
19--To stop praying.	19--Spend even more time in prayer.

I've also found it helpful to think about what the enemy would like to accomplish during a difficult time in my life. Ask: What does the enemy want? How I prevent it?

What does the enemy want?	How can we prevent this?
<p>1--The enemy wants to trap you in sin so that your prayer life becomes ineffective.</p> <p>2--The enemy wants to cut you off from God in every way he can.</p> <p>3--If sin doesn't cut you off, the enemy will use curses against you to cut you off.</p> <p>4--In his effort to cut you off from God, the enemy does not want you to pray! He wants you to be weak and prayerless!</p> <p>5--The enemy wants you to "curse God and die!" Job 2:9.</p> <p>6--If the enemy would like to isolate you from God, and from people who could help you.</p> <p>7--The enemy would like nothing better than to use you against other Christians. He wants you to be offended and angry. He wants to use you for evil!</p> <p>8--The enemy does not want you to <u>build your faith and trust God</u>.</p> <p>9--The enemy does not want you to read, meditate or memorize the Word of God, because then it will build your faith. He does not want you to encourage yourself with the Word, because then you'll get stronger and trust God more. He does not want you to rebuke him, or fight him with the Word, because he'll have to flee! He wants to make you feel weak, powerless and without hope.</p>	<p>1--Recognize the enemy's strategy to trap you, Ps. 66:18. Confess your sin and repent.</p> <p>2--Sin makes you feel cut off from God. Offense is a sin. Choose to forgive.</p> <p>3--Recognize what curses are, and break them in Jesus' name. Do this every day.</p> <p>4--Fight prayerlessness, for now you need God more than ever. Pray everyday, make it a habit. Stay close to the Shepherd!</p> <p>5--Get closer to God than ever. Praise Him. Thank Him for His help. Worship Him.</p> <p>6--Do not allow yourself to be isolated. Go to church, be part of the body, even if you have to force yourself. Hebrews 10:25.</p> <p>7--Forgive. Let go of offense. Pray blessings on others, especially those who hurt you. Choose to overcome evil by praying blessings and doing good, Rom. 12:21.</p> <p>8-- Faith comes by the Word of God, Rom 10:17. Read everyday. <u>Meditate</u> everyday.</p> <p>9--The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit, Eph. 6:17. Now more than ever, read the Word of God. Make it a habit every day. Find Scripture that pertains to your situation. Memorize it. Declare it out loud. Encourage yourself with it. Also, use Scripture to rebuke the enemy and tell him to flee, James 4:7-8. You will get stronger every time you use the Word of God, either to build yourself up, or to rebuke the enemy!</p>

Discussion—

It is dangerous to be offended and continue in unforgiveness. Satan wants you to be wounded, angry, offended and unforgiving, because then he has you in a trap, the trap of offense. Jesus warned us to not carry an offense. He told us to forgive, and warned us that if we do not forgive, then we will not be forgiven, either,

Matthew 6:14-15 [Jesus speaking] *"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*

What will happen if you continue to be offended? The anger within you will take a toll. Gradually it will become bitterness, and affect others around you,

Hebrews 12:14-15 *Pursue peace with all people and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord, looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God: lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled...*

Offense will hurt your health, because caustic thoughts are poisonous—mostly to you. Bitterness can manifest in awful sicknesses and diseases. Furthermore, offense will harass you and cause you to lose sleep,

Matthew 18:34 *And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers...*

In this story in Matthew 18:21-35, Peter comes to Jesus and asks Him how many times he has to forgive someone. Peter thinks he's generous when he says, seven times, right? (v. 21) But Jesus answers, more like 70 times 7. In other words, forgive until there is no more anger left. Then Jesus tells a story of a person who owed his master about \$2 million dollars and was forgiven that debt—but then threw his fellow servant into prison for a debt of about \$20. When the master heard how unforgiving his servant had been, he had him delivered to the torturers, v. 34, above. This angry, unforgiving man was delivered to the torturers. So are we, when we don't forgive. Angry people are tortured at night. Far better to forgive!

The penalty of unforgiveness is long. Here is another penalty: Staying offended will make your prayers ineffective, because of the sin of unforgiveness in your heart,

Psalms 66:18 *If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.*

Here is another horrible penalty. The bitterness inside you will pour out and sicken your relationships with the people around you. There will be no peace. Offense has a way of trying to replicate itself. The enemy will use you to offend others—and you, the offended one, will become an instrument in the enemy's hands to hurt many others, including your family. Again, look at Hebrews 12:15, quoted above.

It is far, far better to forgive! Make it a rule in your life to NEVER allow offense to take root! Here are five steps for forgiving which I have found helped me.

Five Steps for Forgiving.

1. **Forgive.** Forgiveness is a choice. Say out loud, "I choose to forgive!" Then say, "In the name of Jesus Christ, I forgive _____. Amen. I call it done!" Say this whenever you start to get angry again. Keep saying it. Eventually you will win! Anger cannot stay when you keep on choosing to forgive!
2. **Give the situation to the Lord.** Tell the Lord that you are handing the whole situation to Him, for Him to handle in any way He chooses. Then stay out of His way! Tell Him that you are staying out of His way!

3. **Bless the person who hurt you.** Jesus told us to bless them,

Luke 6:27-28 [Jesus speaking] “*But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.*”

Here is a blessing I have found that I can pray on even my worst enemy:

Acts 3:26 [Peter speaking to the 5,000 who got saved that day] “*To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities.*”

What is the greatest blessing that you have? Isn't it knowing Christ? Then pray that same blessing for the person who hurt you, that God would turn them away from their sins, and turn them to Him.

4. **Ask God to cover everything that happened, and every hurtful word with the blood of Jesus Christ. Ask Him to heal your heart and take the pain away.** Repeat this prayer to heal your heart as you need it. There can be layers of hurt, and sometimes it takes time to heal. Be patient, God will heal every part.
5. **Finally, choose to die to self.** There comes a point where if you continue to think about what happened, and especially if you continue to talk about it, you will only feed it. Die to self. Decide that you are no longer going to talk about what happened, or even think about it. Remember that you have given this situation to God. It's up to Him to move in it, if He desires. Tell Him that it is His.

Colossians 3:1-4 *If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth, for you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.*

How do you die to self? Declare out loud that you are choosing to crucify your flesh with all its passions and desires, Galatians 5:24, and in particular, you are dying to this situation. Give it to the Lord, and then declare that it belongs to the Lord, and you are not going to talk about it or even think about it. Then, every time the thoughts come back, resist the thoughts—and every demon behind them—out loud in Jesus' name. You can say something like, “In the name of Jesus, I resist every demon spirit of offense, and every ungodly thought that has come from them, and I command them to flee! Scripture says, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you,” James 4:7. I am resisting you now. Go!” Then continue to pray blessings on the situation. Remind yourself, this is God's. Thank Him that He is handling it.

The only exception to dying to self is **if you were deeply wounded.** There are some wounds that need to be recognized and faced before they can heal. If this

is the case, find a trusted mentor to help you recognize what happened and talk it through. Anger in these cases is actually part of the healing process, but remember that the Word of God says, "Be angry but do not sin," Psalm 4:4. Ultimately, the goal is the same, forgive so that you can heal. Then put your case into the Lord's hands and let Him handle it, and choose to die to self. You will know that you have forgiven when you can think about what happened without getting angry.

Remember that revenge is not your job. Never, never, never, never take revenge! Never return evil for evil, for it will only escalate the evil. Also, it will keep God's hand from moving. For help with this, study Romans 12:9-21, especially this verse,

Romans 12:21 *Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Also, study this passage, 2 Cor. 10:3-6 (below). Notice that it says that God will move when your obedience is complete. That is, when you forgive completely, God can start moving!

2 Corinthians 10:3-6 *For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war in the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.*

When talk becomes dangerous. Continuing to talk about the situation beyond a certain point only gives opportunity for the enemy to stir up your spirit and get you offended all over again. Cast down the arguments by choosing to forgive. Forgive, and keep on forgiving, even if it takes you 70 x 7 times. Then die to self!

Judgment, condemnation and curses. Another reason why it is dangerous to continue talking about the situation is that we have a propensity to curse others, or judge them. A **curse** is any negative word that is spoken about another person. An **ungodly judgment** is any curse spoken about a person that adds the element of permanence, usually with the words, "always," or "never."

For example,

"He is so clumsy!" or "He is always so clumsy!"

"Bless her heart, she will never do that right!"

Words have power. Proverbs 18:21 tells us that death and life are in the power of the tongue. Christians especially have the power to bless or curse. Be careful what you say about others!

Curses and judgments are associated with a spirit of oppression, which can make the person you are talking about feel like they are cut off from God.

Isaiah 58:9(b) [God speaking] "...If you do away with oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk." [NIV]

The "pointing finger and malicious talk" are curses and judgments. They release oppression, a demonic darkness that does not further God's kingdom! For further study on this, see also Psalm 10:7-8; 12:3-5; 17:8-12; 55:3, 9-13.

How to break curses and judgments. Curses and ungodly judgments can be broken by speaking against them in Jesus' name. For example, say something like this, "In the name of Jesus, I break every curse and ungodly judgment against me and my family. And in Jesus' name, I declare that no weapon formed against us shall prosper and nothing by any means shall harm us. Amen."

For a study on this, see Proverbs 11:9; 12:6 and 14:3. Notice that although the wicked seek to destroy the righteous with wicked words, those curses and judgments are broken by knowing about them and speaking against them. We have the authority of Jesus' name, Philippians 2:9 to break every curse against us!

How to fight self-pity and depression. It is incredibly important when going through a hard time to forgive and control your thoughts and words! I have found this to be true: **If you can control the thoughts, you can control the emotions.** Now is the time to take authority over your own spirit by choosing to control your thoughts and words. David told his soul, "Return to your rest, oh my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with me," Psalm 116:7. You can do the same. Take authority over your mind, will and emotions. Choose to die to self. Choose what you will or will not think about and talk about. Here's a good rule of thumb: **When dealing with the flesh, get to the point where you decide that it's time to die to self!**

How to build your faith. Paul tells us how to build our faith:

Romans 10:17 *So then, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

The best and easiest way to build your faith is to make regular Bible reading a habit. Here are some suggestions:

1. Get yourself a Bible that makes sense to you, and is easy for you to read. Some suggestions are The New King James, quoted here, New International Version and the New American Standard. If you are a Spanish speaker, then get a Spanish Bible.
2. Establish a Bible study habit. Try to read at about the same time everyday. I have found it helps to have a regular reading place as well.
3. If you haven't been reading the Word regularly, may I suggest? Start with the book of John. After you finish John, then read Matthew, Mark and Luke. Then read the rest of the New Testament, from Acts to Revelation. Then read Psalms and Proverbs. Finally read the rest of the Old Testament. You may eventually come to the point where you read in more than one place every day.
4. Read long enough every day to make a difference in your spirit. Find something that is meaningful to you, something to meditate on and think about.

5. Consider memorizing Scripture. Choose verses that you want to think about. Write them on 3 x 5 cards. Carry them with you, or put them somewhere where you can look through them on a regular basis. Look at the address. Say the verse out loud. Say it several times out loud while looking at the card. Then see how much you still remember when not looking at the card. The Hebrew word for “meditate” means “to mutter.” I have found that by muttering Scripture—saying it out loud from day to day—I eventually memorize it. Encourage yourself—memory is like a muscle, the more you use it, the better you will be at it.

How to use the Word of God to encourage yourself. It helps tremendously to have an arsenal of Bible verses to encourage yourself with! Make it a point to collect positive, uplifting verses. If you can, memorize them. Eventually you will have enough Word in your spirit to carry you through many bad situations with grace and faith.

There will come a point where you start memorizing Psalms or other longer passages, and they won't fit on a 3 x 5 card. When you start this, then memorize directly from your Bible. Just use a 3 x 5 card to cover the passage so that you can quiz yourself.

It is wealth, great, great wealth to have the Word of God in your spirit. Having the Word this close to your heart can carry you through bad times—and you can use it to help others also. Make it a goal to help yourself memorize Word, you will be blessed!

How to use the Word of God to fight the enemy. When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the Wilderness, Matthew 4:1-11, He used the Word of God to fight back. He said, “It is written...” three times, each time quoting part of the Word of God. This is our example, Jesus Himself taught us to fight!

It is good to have Word to fight with! James 4:7-8 says, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” This verse is true. Resist every demon by telling them to flee in Jesus' name. Do this out loud. Then also spend time in praise and worship.

Use other verses as well, that are relevant to your situation. Are you fighting some sickness? Then quote the Scripture that tells you that Jesus has healed you by the stripes He suffered, 1 Peter 2:24. Tell the enemy that “Jesus Christ is manifest to destroy the work of the devil,” 1 John 3:8, and that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior, so every work of the devil in your life and family is destroyed! Alleluia! Amen!

How to get even stronger in the Lord. Warriors in the military get stronger with practice. So do Christians. We get stronger the more time we spend with the Lord, and the more time we spend in the Word of God. Fight! You will get stronger.

Keep on growing. Grow by reading your Bible and spending time with the Lord in prayer and worship. Also remember that the body of Christ, the Church, is here on earth to help you grow strong in the Lord, and in His Word. It is part of their job,

Hebrews 10:24- 25 *And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Someday the Lord will ask you to take your place in the Church to help others. Prepare yourself, because for every sincere Christian, that time will come.

Grow in prayer as well. Not all prayer is petition, that is, asking for something for yourself or another person. Try having a time of prayer where you just thank the Lord for everything He has done for you, for all His graciousness toward you and your family. Worship Him. Sing praises. Tell Him you love Him. He will bless you as you do.