

Hard Times

I am confident we can all relate to experiencing hard times at some point in our lives. It may have been a financial situation, a family matter/divorce, or perhaps even a health issue. Maybe we lost our jobs or are having a hard time in finding one. Been there, done that and have the t-shirts to prove it. All four mentioned. They say that hindsight is always 20/20, although I am not sure just who “they” are but it is an accurate supposition.

When we reflect back on these various types of storms we endured, how many of them were really brought about by our own conduct? Granted, when and if we went through some of these, we may not have been walking in God’s Truth as of yet. Perhaps some of us faced these things after we were baptized but the same question holds true, how many of them were due to our own disobedience to God and His Commandments and His ways? This is in no way to point any fingers at anyone but it will provide thoughts on the ready answers we are to have (**1 Peter 3:15**).

Before I hit on the subject of “pity parties” and wallowing in one’s own misery, I would like to share a couple of things I witnessed that cured me of ever feeling sorry for myself.

First, when I was a Detective working in Homicide in Immokalee, we had a call to a dead infant. Upon arriving at the scene, somber as you can imagine, we met with the parents. They were poor illegal immigrants, hard working and they had five little children. They all lived in a 2-bedroom trailer and all five little kids slept in the same bed. The tragedy occurred when one of the toddlers rolled over on the 9-month-old infant little girl during sleep and smothered her. She was laying on the bed, still in her little dress she slept in, still appearing to be asleep. Gut wrenching and heartbreak took on a new meaning. But not just yet.

About a week later, the Crime Scene Detective called me over to his office. The parents were there and wanted to know if they could have one of the crime scene photos of their little girl as they did not have any. The only photo they would have of their child would be the one we took during the death investigation. Now, it was gut wrenching and heartbreaking. The Crime Scene Detective was a big biker guy with tattoos and not what anyone would call a sissy. He stood in his office and bawled like a baby as did I with him. We think we have problems? Not hardly.

Another scenario I saw was on a post from Linked-In where someone posted a video of a little boy about five or six with Leukemia in St. Jude's Hospital. He was pulling a wagon with his friend in it and also his own IV tree as his little friend could not walk because he was too weak. Yep, that one got me too. Any problem I faced after that seemed so insignificant.

My Dad always had a saying, "I cried because I had no shoes until I saw a man with no feet."

So please forgive me if I seem a bit harsh or lacking in the sympathy category as I have witnessed true "hard times" (as Chauncey has too) over my 30 years in the "arena." I certainly do not have any objections to helping anyone who is truly in need and cannot help themselves. But I now draw the line on the lazy, the sluggards and the moochers, who seem to desire to be spoon fed and do nothing but exhale carbon dioxide for plants.

It seems that the nation we now live in is one of entitlement. So many people believe the world owes them something. The welfare mindset has poisoned so many and racial prejudices have rocketed to absurdity. The movement to have people who have never owned slaves pay reparations to minorities who have never been slaves is as mindless as you can get. I actually stooped to making a comment

on a blog sight that the Tribes of Israel should ask for the same reparations from Egypt for being enslaved nearly 3000 years ago. It is as laughable as the other.

2 Thessalonians 3:10- “For indeed, when we were with you, this is what we commanded you: that if anyone is not willing to work, he should not be allowed to eat.”

It would seem that God has it properly identified. It is pretty simple. Get off your backside and work. We can earn a living, a home, “stuff” and food but we can never “earn” salvation and the forgiveness of our sins. That is through the sacrifice of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the grace and gift of Almighty God.

Ephesians 2:7-8- “So that in the ages that *are* coming He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this *especially* is not of your own selves; *it is* the gift of God,”

Titus 2:11-14- “For the grace of God, which brings salvation for all men, has appeared; Teaching us that, having denied ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live moderately and righteously and godly in this present world, Looking for the blessed hope and *the* appearing of the glory of our Savior and great God,

Jesus Christ; Who gave Himself for us, so that He might redeem us from all lawlessness, and might purify for Himself a unique people, zealous of good works.”

Maybe we are working and we are stuck somewhere we do not want to be. We just went through Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In the months prior, we were reading and studying about the self -reflection to prepare for both of the spring Holy Days. If you find yourself in a situation where you feel trapped or stuck, it may behoove you to take ***another hard look at yourself*** and see how you stack up against God’s standards in His Word and how do you compare in the likeness of Jesus Christ?

Another thing I remember about my 30 years in dealing with people, most of them were in crisis (as that is how I came into contact with them). I often called their situations “victim precipitated crime.” They were engaged in doing something they should not have been or in the wrong place by choice at the wrong time. The only truly innocent victims I encountered were the elderly or small children. Granted there were victims of theft and such but even they were careless most of the time in failing to secure property and valuables.

There were always those crying “poor mouth” and “woe is me” with financial issues but they always found money for booze, cigarettes, and drugs.

Proverbs 6:9- “How long will you sleep, O sluggard? When will you arise out of your sleep?”

Proverbs 13:4- “The soul of the sluggard desires and has nothing, but the soul of the diligent shall be abundantly gratified.”

Proverbs 20:3-5- “*It is* an honor for a man to cease from strife, but every fool will rail on. The lazy one will not plow by reason of the cold; *therefore* he shall beg in harvest and *have* nothing. A plan in the heart of man *is like* deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out.”

Ephesians 4:28- “Let the one who stole, steal no more; rather, let him labor with *his* hands, working *at what is* good, so that he may impart *something* to the one who has need.”

If we labor as God designed, we can bless others in our giving.

You need not be in law enforcement to have contact with those in crisis. How many of us have relatives or friends who always seem to be in dire straits or constantly seeking a loan? There is a major difference from giving a hand up and a

hand out. Too many hand-outs lead will identify the moochers in the midst. Those who continually borrow from friends and never seem to have enough money to pay them back.

A “moocher” is defined in the Oxford dictionary as: a person who lives off others without giving anything in return. I am sure we have all known someone like that in our lives at one time or another. A friend and a moocher are two radically different things. A friend is somebody who honestly cares about you. A moocher is someone who takes advantage of the generosity of others. It is perfectly okay to say **NO** to them when they stick out their hand. Being kind does not make you an ATM. Indulging and justifications enables the behavior to continue without the hope of positive change. One cannot learn to become independent sitting on their duff waiting for a hand out. Moochers are friends in need...always. Please understand that spiritual and emotional support and guidance are just as critical as handing out money. If it is a member of God’s family, “not” tithing is usually a place to start looking as a cause of financial woes.

I am in no way saying we are not to give to those in need. Certainly not.

Acts 20:35- “In all things, I have showed you that you are obligated to so labor to support those who are weak, remembering the words that the Lord Jesus Himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” We give to those who are truly in need and cannot help themselves.

Sometimes a brother or sister can be in these situations and we will readily assist but we will not enable a pattern of disobedience to continue. Failing to walk as God instructs us brings consequences and we must not interfere with any Divine lesson in progress. As cold as that sounds, enabling wrong behavior will never yield a positive change. It can be family members as well.

“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”

We are to give and do so with a cheerful heart.

2 Corinthians 9:7-10- “Each one as he purposes in his heart, *so let him give*, but not grudgingly or by compulsion; for **God loves a cheerful giver**. For God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you so that in every *way* you may always have sufficiency in all *things*, *and* may abound unto every good work, According as it is written: “He has scattered abroad, *and* he has given to the poor; his righteousness remains forever.” Now may He Who supplies seed to the sower, and bread to eat, supply *your seed* and multiply your sowing; and may He increase the fruits of your righteousness,”

If you are tithing on a regular basis and do so grumbling, God will not bless your offering. God has guidelines for our giving.

Exodus 22:25-26- “If you lend money to one of My people who *is* poor among you, you shall not be to him as a money-lender, neither shall you lay upon him interest. If you at all take your neighbor’s clothing as a pledge, you shall deliver it to him by the time the sun goes down;”

We are to provide for our own families but we do not have to permit ourselves to be taken advantage of.

1 Timothy 5:8- “But if anyone does not provide for his own *needy* relatives—and especially *members of his* household—he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” The key word is “*needy*” and not needy because they are lazy.

If you still believe you are trapped in hard times, check your Sabbath keeping and Holy Day observances. Are you in alignment with God’s way of keeping them or are you “hit or miss?” How many Holy Days have you missed since being baptized? One? Several? That may be a clue.

Isaiah 58:13-14- “If you turn your foot away from the Sabbath, *from* doing your own desires on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honorable; and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor pursuing *your own* desires, nor speaking *your own* words, Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed you

with the inheritance of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken it.”

God makes it quite clear that His Sabbaths and Holy Days are His. We are told how and when we are to keep them. It is not a multiple choice or like Burger King, you cannot have it your way.

Exodus 16:28- “And the LORD said to Moses, “How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?”

Punishment follows disobedience. There are at least 428 verses in the Bible with consequences and or disobey in them. Just one verse should be sufficient when God says anything. Over 400, you had better be paying attention.

Leviticus 26:13-18- “*I am* the LORD your God Who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt from being their bondmen. And I have broken the bonds of your yoke, and made you go upright. But if you will not hearken to Me and will not do all these commandments, And if you shall despise My statutes, or if your soul hates My judgments, so that you will not do all My commandments, so that you break My covenant; I will also do this to you: I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and burning fever, consuming the eyes and causing sorrow of heart. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. And I will set My face against you, and you shall be slain before your enemies. They that hate

you shall reign over you. And you shall flee when none pursues you. And if you will not yet for all this hearken to Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins.”

Sometimes we may not even be aware we are stepping outside of God’s guidelines. Rarely, as God’s Holy Spirit is quick to convict and correct, but it may be the flesh that temporarily blinds us. This still is no excuse. We are still held accountable.

Leviticus 5:17- “And if anyone sins, and he has done that which is forbidden to be done by the commandments of the LORD, and does not realize it, and he is guilty and shall bear his iniquity;” Consequences still follow. Our walk with God is that serious.

So, if we assume we are doing things God’s way, but really are not, God does care. Dressing up for Sabbath services, singing in a choir, typing up lessons, it will not cut it if we are out of alignment. God is not a respecter of persons.

Acts 10:34- “Then Peter opened his mouth and said, “Of a truth I perceive that God is not a respecter of persons,”

Romans 2:11- “Because there is no respect of persons with God.”

1 Peter 1:17- “And if you call upon the Father, Who judges according to each man’s work without respect of persons, pass the time of your *life’s* journey in *the fear of God;*”

God will not grant our reward if we perform marginally in our walk with Him.

When we have the reverent fear and respect for Him, we will walk in obedience.

Proverbs 19:23-24- “The fear of the LORD *tends* to life, and the one who has it shall dwell satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil. A lazy one puts his hand in a dish, and he will not raise it to his mouth again.”

Proverbs 1:29-33- “Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD, They would have none of my counsel; they despised all my correction. Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own devices. For the waywardness of the simple shall slay them, and the complacency of fools destroys them. But whoever hearkens to me shall dwell safely and shall be secure without fear of harm.”

1 John 2:4-6- “The one who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. On the other hand, *if* anyone is keeping His Word, truly in this one the love of God is being perfected. By this *means* we know that we are in Him. Anyone who claims to dwell in Him is obligating himself also to walk even as He Himself walked.”

Perhaps the hard times we are facing is because we are failing to receive correction? “I am doing my best, really.” If you are saying this, are you trying to convince yourself or God?

Proverbs 15:5- “A fool despises his father’s instruction, but he who listens to correction is prudent.”

Proverbs 19:16- “He who keeps the commandment keeps his own soul; he who is careless in his ways shall die.”

Proverbs 28:9- “He who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination.”

If your prayers are not being answered, here is another “gut check” to see if you are truly in alignment with the will of God.

Psalms 50:15-17- “And call upon Me in the day of trouble; and I will deliver you, and you shall honor Me.” But to the wicked God says, “What right have you to declare My statutes, and to take up My covenant in your mouth? Yea, you hate to be taught, and you cast My words behind you.”

Psalms 119:21- “You have rebuked the proud who are cursed, who go astray from Your commandments.”

Breaking out of the rut and pressing through hard times is never easy. But God has given us His word and the example of His Son Jesus Christ to follow. He will meet our needs *if* and when we are in *full obedience* to His way of life. There can be no compromise.

Philippians 4:19- “But my God will supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

Romans 8:27-28- “And the One Who searches the hearts comprehends what the strivings of the Spirit *are* because it makes intercession for *the* saints according to *the will of* God. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.”

1 John 5:14- “And this is the confidence that we have toward Him: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”

Would you reward your son if you told him to mow the lawn and instead, he washes the car? Probably not. He did good but he did not obey. We are way beyond any earthly comparisons as the price that was paid for our salvation was so costly.

Ezekiel 7:4- “And My eye shall not spare you, neither will I have pity. But I will repay your ways upon you, and your abominations shall be in your midst; and you shall know that I *am* the LORD.”

The best antidote for breaking through the hard times is true obedience to God’s Word. Pretending just will not suffice. If you want something you have never had, you must do something you have never done. For if you always do what you have always done, you will always get what you have always gotten. It is simple as that. Crying the poor mouth or woe is me is not going to move you forward in any circumstance. Besides, we read earlier there is always someone who is by far worse off than we are. The world may seem to be against us but we know God is for us.

Romans 8:31- “What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us?”

If we truly have a personal relationship with God, His peace will guard our hearts.

Philippians 4:6-7- “Do not be anxious about anything; but by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God in

everything; And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.”

Obedience, faith, fear (reverence), and His peace will bring us to a place of understanding and contentment.

Psalm 34:9-10- “O fear the LORD, all you saints, for there is nothing lacking to those who fear Him. The young lions do lack and suffer hunger, but those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing.

John 14:13-15- “And whatever you shall ask in My name, this will I do that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it. If you love Me, keep the commandments— namely, My commandments.”

Philippians 4:11-13- “I am not saying *this* in respect to being destitute; for I have learned *that* in whatever *circumstances* I am, to be content. For I have experienced being brought low, and I have experienced abounding. In everything and in all things I have been taught both to be full and to hunger, both to abound and to be without. I can do all things through Christ, Who empowers me.”

It is never easy when we face the trials and hard times life can bring. But did we honestly have a part in bringing them in the first place? Jesus has given us such a

priceless gift of His life to pay our sin debt. God gave us His only Son, and has given us His Holy Spirit to provide understanding and guidance in following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. When we focus on the hard times, we can become lost in the mire of despair and drop into self-pity. We can even become ungrateful for what we have been given at so great a cost. This is a slippery slope that could even lead to the loss of our salvation.

If we can remember to rejoice always, we can learn to look past the storms and seek God's lesson in them.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18- “Rejoice always! Pray unceasingly. Give thanks in everything, for this *is the* will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”

If we are busy rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks for the countless blessings God has given us, we lose our focus on the storm in our face. We will come to understand that whatever the hard times may be, all things work together for good if we truly love God. Loving God first is a foundation to build on (**Mark 12:30**).

Romans 8:27-28- “And the One Who searches the hearts comprehends what the strivings of the Spirit *are* because it makes intercession for *the* saints according to *the will of* God. And we know that all things work together for good to those who

love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose” We have been called and we have a purpose.

So, do we really have it so tough? Compared to most of the world, not at all. We have a ticket to the First Resurrection that was purchased for us by the blood of our Savior. So many do not. So just how hard do we have it? Nothing will ever compare to three nails and a cross. Amen.

BL-4/29/23

