



Faith and Circumstances

Part of being optimistic is keeping one's head pointed toward the sun, one's feet moving forward. There were many dark moments when my faith in humanity was sorely tested, but I would not and could not give myself up to despair. That way lays defeat and death.—*Nelson Mandela*

You have set yourselves a difficult task, but you will succeed if you persevere; and you will find a joy in overcoming obstacles. Remember, no effort that we make to attain something

beautiful is ever lost.—*Helen Keller*

Optimism is a strategy for making a better future. Because unless you believe that the future can be better, you are unlikely to step up and take responsibility for making it so.—*Noam Chomsky*

The Lord Is Greater than Our Circumstances

Everybody has something in their life that could seriously hinder and even cripple them if they allowed it to get them down and didn't rise above it. But the wonderful thing about it is that the Lord has made a way for us to overcome those things, and in fact, He intends for us to! Because His help is available to us, circumstances—past or present—do not have to dictate our lives.

Look at all the men in history who rose above seemingly insurmountable odds to become great—overcoming poverty, physical handicaps, poor family backgrounds, etc. I'm sure we could each name a few examples of great men and women who had experiences or events in their lives that they could have easily become bitter about or allowed to overwhelm them, but they didn't! They just fought harder to overcome those obstacles, and in so doing they became strengthened. Instead of complaining that life had given them a “lemon” or a bad deal, they made lemonade out of their lemons.

Because of their handicaps, these people rose higher than they might have otherwise risen. George Bernard Shaw, for example, was terribly shy, but because he was determined to overcome his timidity, he forced himself to speak publicly, joining debate societies and speaking at public meetings—in an effort to overcome the difficulty he had in speaking publicly. His weakness eventually became his strength as he became a brilliant and witty speaker and prominent writer.

Some people were born into great poverty, but fought to overcome it and to be able to do something in life in spite of it. Often because they'd had these problems, they turned around and were able to have sympathy and compassion on others who were poor, and worked toward making life better for them. For example, Booker T. Washington was born a poor slave, but after working hard in coal mines and salt mines, he became an educator and spokesman for African Americans, establishing a school so others could improve their lives.

Often people who have experienced difficulties in life and have overcome them are in turn able to be a great influence in helping others to have the courage and faith to overcome their difficulties. Their example is a

proof to those who see and hear of their struggles and victories that it is possible to overcome great difficulties in life, and rise above seemingly impossible situations to triumph in the face of despair. Their victories are a testimony to us all that difficult circumstances do not have to overcome us, but we can rise above them if our heart and our attitude is right.

Jerome K. Jerome was a British writer whose father died when he was 12, and at 14 he had to go to work to support his mother and sister. His life got even harder when his mother died, but after many different jobs, the end result was that he became a writer—not of sad stories, but a famous humorist, writing humorous stories to encourage others. After such a hard beginning in life, he said, “It is from the struggle, not the victory, that we gain strength.”

We who walk by faith certainly do not have to be confined or limited emotionally, mentally, or spiritually by the weights of our circumstances or our past. In fact, the Lord often allows those things so we will fight to get the victory over them, and the Lord intends for the difficulties we face in life to make us stronger. Instead of looking at obstacles or mishaps or bad experiences as terrible and drawbacks or handicaps, we can use those things to make our life better. We can see them as stepping stones for climbing upward. Then they don't hold us back and pull us down, but we can actually use them to improve our lives and the lives of others.

Through this process, we can learn to fight with the Lord's help and become stronger because of the struggle. If we didn't have any problems to fight, we could be tempted to become complacent and meander along, which doesn't generally build the strength of character that comes from fighting to overcome problems. We could miss out on seeing the beauty blossom in our lives that suffering often results in, or finding true friends in those who come to our side to help in our time of need. We wouldn't experience the same compassion for others who have gone through the same thing or be able to “comfort them with the same comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God,”³ and understand what they are going through and be able to help them to overcome.

God uses our trials and difficulties to teach us patience, trust, and faith in the Lord, and to help us to be more merciful on others.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.—*Hebrews 12:1–3 NIV*

¹ Mark 9:23.

³ 2 Corinthians 1:4.