

I WILL HEAR

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Why do bad things happen to good people?

Because without them (bad things) you wouldn't know who the good people were.

Calamity is the test of integrity, revealing, more than pleasant circumstances could ever do, what is truly in the heart of a person. And calamity is the opportunity for people to do something really good.

Therefore, God faithfully trains us for the appropriate responses to difficult circumstances.

And today we're going to look again at the Bible's "Get Ready" verse.

We're going to review the need for our preparations.

We're going to double-check our Spiritual Calamity Kit to be sure we have the necessary elements and know how to use them.

And we're going to remind ourselves how much good can come out of difficult times when we apply our faith in God.

Today's story begins in ancient Israel. David, the king who reunited the tribes and ruled in peace for forty years had died. His son, Solomon, ascended to the throne and completed the task David had begun: to build a Temple (a permanent place) for the worship of Jehovah.

Now, open your Bible to 2 Chronicles 7:11, and read through verse 16 with me.

2 Chronicles 7:11 So Solomon finished the Temple of the Lord, as well as the royal palace. He completed everything he had planned to do in the construction of the Temple and the palace.

¹² Then one night the Lord appeared to Solomon and said, "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this Temple as the place for making sacrifices (a house of worship).

¹³ At times I might shut up the heavens so that no rain falls, or command grasshoppers to devour your crops, or send plagues among you. ¹⁴ Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land.

¹⁵ My eyes will be open and my ears attentive to every prayer made in this place. ¹⁶ For I have chosen this Temple and set it apart to be holy—a place where my name will be honored forever. I will always watch over it, for it is dear to my heart.

Out With The Old

Have you visited Jerusalem? Have you seen pictures of the City and its great golden dome? That dome is not the Temple. It is a mosque, the Dome of the Rock, one of the centerpieces of Islam,

which sits on the very site of the ancient Temple. But, if God said He would always watch over the Temple, what happened to it?

I have to insert another story, a day when Jesus and His disciples were leaving the Temple, and the disciples paused to remark, “Look at these fantastic buildings! Have you ever seen anything so magnificent!”

The Temple was built of gorgeous white stones and adorned with a great deal of gold and silver and precious fabrics. The closest we could come to such a sight would be to enter a grand cathedral, with gilded woodwork and magnificent paintings, amid towering walls and ornate architecture. Such buildings, in some parts of the world altogether empty of the Spirit, can still take your breath away.

But Jesus replied, “There will not be one stone left on top of another. All this magnificence will be utterly destroyed. Then, in three days, I will raise it up again.”

They couldn’t imagine how He could possibly rebuild it in three days if it was completely destroyed, but perhaps they remembered that God said He would watch over it. Only later did they realize that Jesus was talking about a divine exchange: something old and fading was about to be replaced with something new and brilliant!

It was only after the resurrection of Jesus from the dead that they understood that the old Temple — that gorgeous stone building — representing the laws and customs of Moses, had been replaced with a new Temple, representing the ways and teachings of Jesus: the body of Christ (the Church).

1 Corinthians 3:16 *Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?*

2 Corinthians 6:16 *We are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."*

With this New Testament revelation in mind, let’s review the ancient promise of God concerning the Temple and His people.

Divine Initiative

Verse 13 introduces what I call God’s Initiatives: drought, famine, and diseases. He said He might sometimes initiate these things “among us” (His people). Two questions spring immediately to mind: Why would He do that to us, whom He loves? And then, Why do we imagine we should have total immunity when the world at large suffers these things continually?

The answer to the second question seems obvious. While we live in this world we will taste of what this world offers. God does protect us from many things, but not from all. If we should never experience heartache or difficulty, the rest of the world could not relate to us. Even Jesus, God’s own Son, experienced pain and loss. How could it be less for us? Are we so convinced of our own righteousness that we imagine it should exempt us from all grief?

The answer to the first question is found, in part, in this very passage. It is also expressed in a vignette from Jesus encounter with a man who was blind from birth.

John 9:2 *His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"*
³ "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."

Such events are the staging ground for God to act and show His power.

Our Responses

Verse 14 suggests four appropriate responses to calamity from the people of God. Instead of panicking or feeling sorry for ourselves or becoming bitter, try these:

1) Humble yourself

Humble *yourself*. Don't wait for it to be forced upon you. Humiliation is not the same thing. You, take the initiative.

Calamity is the perfect mirror in which we truly see and know ourselves. How you want to appear and how you appear when everything is going your way are not accurate images.

To humble yourself means to cease from cockiness and the notion that you can manage everything. Instead, pay attention to your weaknesses, too, and the perspectives of others. Trouble can help you gain an accurate self-image.

Humility also means bowing down to acknowledge God. There is a God and you are not Him. Admit that. Just because you are not in control doesn't mean no one is.

Humbling yourself also means fulfilling your vows. Remember those things you promised God you would change and do? Do them. Don't neglect them any longer.

If you want God to change your circumstances, you must begin by humbling yourself.

2) Pray to God

A cardinal doctrine of modern liberalism is that the world's evil may be overcome by the world's good; no help is thought to be needed from outside the world. This simply is not so.

A distinguishing mark of God's people is that we call upon the name of the Lord. We ask God for wisdom and direction, which He promised He would then give us generously.

Praying is not only asking, though. We must also wait for God's reply. Waiting for God is not our "cup of tea," but it is necessary. God works all things together for our good *in His own time*. His timing is perfect, but it is not according to our clocks. Patience achieves its own work in our lives. We must learn to wait.

And praying means listening to God's words. His words (the Scriptures) inform us of His thoughts and His ways. If we are ever to recognize the whispering voice of the Holy Spirit, we must become well-acquainted with the things God has already spoken in His written word, the Bible. Listening without also reading the Bible is just daydreaming.

If we hope for God to change our circumstances, we must pray.

3) Seek God's face (presence)

God is so powerful that He can direct any evil to a good end, and that is exactly what He has promised to do. We need to invite His powerful presence into our every circumstance.

Seeking His face means to build up our relationship with Him, drawing closer more often. This means aiming to please Him, instead of ourselves. Living with Him in mind.

It also means learning to enjoy His presence — to welcome and entertain His presence. We are like Him in many respects (made in His image), but He is not like us in some significant ways (He is God). This sometimes makes us feel uncomfortable to just “hang out” with Him, but the more often you do it, the more meaningful it becomes.

Seeking His favorable presence involves giving Him thanks for the multitude of ways He has blessed and protected and provided for us. Gratitude is an attitude to foster, that paves the way into God’s presence.

Psalm 100:4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and praise his name.

And seeking God’s face means worship, from your heart as well as your head. With passion. Some people believe that passion either comes to you or it does not. I believe it *may* be inspired from outside of you, but if it has *ever* been inspired before, it can be generated later by applying your *will* to the task. After all, heart-passion and love are closely related, and godly love is an act of the will not an emotional event. So, when you worship God, don’t only involve your mouth in singing, but intentionally engage your thoughts and imagination and fervor. Just do it.

Mark 12:30 You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.

4) Turn from your wicked ways

Afflictions are a fan in God’s hand to separate between good and evil people. Also, to separate between good and evil motives.

Do not infer from “wicked ways” that God thinks of you as a bucket of filth in need of a good cleansing. God loves you; he does not despise you. You may have put major wickedness to rest, or you may never have taken it up to begin with. But just because you may be generally a “good person,” God does not overlook the little wickednesses that frequently pop up in your life — like when you are cut off by another driver, or someone tries to take advantage of you, or treats you like an ignoramus, or arrogantly walks right over you — and neither should you.

Whatever you think your “goodness quotient” may be, every one of us has the potential for every wickedness known to man.

*Mark 7:21 From within, out of a person’s heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you.*²³

If you can think it or visualize it, you could say it or do it, given the right opportunity and pressure.

Admit it. You need to repent. If not for your own sins, then for the sins of others that you did not actively oppose or object to. Your complicity is a shared guilt. Repentance is a change of mind, a turn-about in your thinking that acknowledges that God was right all along — what He has called sin is sin, and there are not two ways to look at it. Repent of your excuses. Repent of your rationalizations. Repent of your euphemisms. Just call it sin.

Turning from sin also includes confession.

James 5:16 Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.

If you want your prayers to have “great power and produce wonderful results,” you must first make confession, so that God may forgive you and make you righteous again.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins to him (God), he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.

And turning to God involves making amends. You cannot just turn your back on what you have done or the impact your deeds may have made on others. To make amends includes apologizing when appropriate and making restitution when possible.

At times, God initiates troubles to get our attention and test our responses. As we learn to respond appropriately (as God has instructed us), He will bring closure to the situation.

God’s Closure

God promises that he will hear us — our cry of humility, our earnest prayer, our worship, and our repentance. He is listening for your voice right now. What you have to say is as important to Him as it is to you.

Psalms 116:1 I love the Lord because he hears my voice and my prayer for mercy. ² Because he bends down to listen, I will pray as long as I have breath!

As long as you have breath! There is no better way to use it. God is bending in your direction to hear you.

God also promises that He will forgive us. He is “faithful and just” to do so. It is just as He has promised. Jesus has paid the debt for us and God now may freely forgive all who turn to Him.

Psalms 145:8 The Lord is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.

Furthermore, God promises to restore. That means to “make up the difference” and to “replenish what has been used or lost.” In each of us, there are places of the heart that have been bruised and broken, and all but destroyed. Our merciful Father wants to heal us, to rebuild us, to fill us.

1 Peter 5:10 In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation. ¹¹ All power to him forever! Amen.

If you respond to difficulty and tragedy as God has asked, you will have His attention! Your prayers will gain power with God.

Don’t try to escape your troubles some other way; bring them to God. He is waiting to help you — on His terms.

So, people, get ready!