



*"But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." (2 Corinthians 6:4-11)*

## **Introduction**

No one is immune to pain or insulated from suffering while he lives his life on earth... Life is a series of problems. Every time we tend to solve one, another is waiting to take its place. Not all of them are big, yet not all are small. St. Peter assures us that problems are normal, saying, *"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try*

*you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:12,13).*

When hardships and pain hit us what do we do? Do we allow ourselves to sink in anguish and a pit of despair? Or do we find a victorious way out? Here is a systematic way of dealing with difficulties:

### **1. Diagnosis:**

In order to victoriously conquer our difficulties, we need to identify, understand and boldly confront them. The best way to do so is to:

- Write down clearly and specifically what the difficulty is without vagueness. In doing so, you will be able to see clearly what you are facing; and start to think logically about consequences of problems and decisions to solve them.
- Determine the severity of this hardship based on the consequences and impact of the hardships on your life. This is because the severity will affect the decision you take in order to overcome the hardship. For example, failing an exam in school or having

a fight with the manager of the company you work at will affect your future; whereas your parents refusal to let you go to a concert or failing to buy the house you like will not.

## **2. Reasons behind the hardship:**

- *My own sin / weaknesses*

The people of Sodom and Gomorrah are examples of people punished because of their personal sins. They were all, with the exception of Lot and his two daughters, living the sinful life of homosexuality. So much so, that although God was ready to pardon them for the sake of the least number of righteous people; yet He could not find not even ten to fulfill His promise to Abraham. God had no choice but to carry out His justice and so burned down their city. The sin nature is the source of temptation when it controls the soul; because of human freedom of choice "*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). God has testified in the Old Testament that "*the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth*" (Genesis 8:21) and "*for this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep*" (1

Corinthians 11:30). We alone convert temptation into sin when we succumb to the solicitations of the sin nature and give in to temptation and sin. Sin starts in the mind. It is a mindset that opposes the Word of God and His commandments. St. Paul gives an array of what mans sinful nature can come up with (Galatians 5:19). If the cause of hardship is our own sins, the solution is in repentance. We need to repent and confess our sins to our confession father, change our way of thinking, and as Christians be faithful in every area in our life. We should constantly ask for Gods help and get spiritual guidance. Without Gods help the sinful nature in man can bring about his destruction. The Holy Bible commands us; "*do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*" (Romans 12:2). Our Lord Jesus Christ paid the penalty for sin on the cross. Forget you failures and move on in confidence that the blood of Jesus Christ "*cleanses us from all sin*" (1 John 1:7).

- *The corrupt world that we live in*  
Because of Adams sin, corruption got hold of

the world; and as a result, diseases, natural disasters, congenital anomalies, and other abnormalities presided. Such disasters can easily cause us to focus on ourselves and our problems to the exclusion of objective reality. Under any hard circumstances, the believer must retain his personal sense of destiny and make good decisions from a position of strength in God; while exercising faith, hope and love. The only way to neutralize the shock of crisis is through endurance and perseverance, claiming Gods biblical promises of His faithfulness, power and His concise plan for our life. "*But he who endures to the end shall be saved*" (Matthew 24:13). If, on the other hand, we get trapped into self pity, fear, and worry; we alienate ourselves from sound judgment, and obscure reality and common sense. An example of natural hardship from the Old Testament is the famine during the time of Isaac and Abraham. This incident teaches us how disasters never hinder God from blessing His people.

- *Test of faith*  
Our faith will inevitably face tests as a

necessary part of life; obstacles lie astride the path of every believers growth. God, in His own perfect time, either permits testing or directly sends it. Testing is not an exception to Gods love and grace; rather it is an expression of both. *"For You, O God, have tested us; You have refined us as silver is refined. You brought us into the net; You laid affliction on our backs. You have caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; But You brought us out to rich fulfillment"* (Psalm 66:10-12). The champion of faith, Abraham, faced the greatest test of faith one could ever encounter when God had asked him to offer his only, long awaited son as a sacrifice. God can test our faith in various ways varying from mildly to severely. Obedience and submission to His will while claiming promises He has given in His Holy Book is the only correct response that will help us emerge victorious and strong.

- *Discipline from God to make us better people fit for inheriting His Kingdom*  
*"Every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit"* (John 15:2).

The parable about the vine and the branches reveals clearly that no one, including the righteous and fruitful believer, is exempted from pain and hardship. We all unexceptionally undergo pruning. Discipline from God, though may cause us to grieve, yet it needs to be accepted with a sense of responsibility; and later on it will bring forth the fruit of righteousness. We should never resent discipline. It is a resource in itself and a good spiritual exercise. *"And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He*

*for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:5-11).*

- *Satans attack either directly or indirectly*  
Satan has many clever systems for controlling the human soul; with the aim of making it a battlefield. Because of his envy, Satan likes to make us suffer. His attacks could be direct as he did with Job targeting his health, family and belongings; or indirect as in the case of Joseph when he had moved his brothers to envy him. Such hatred exhibited by Joseph's brothers cannot be identified as coming from God; because our God is a God of love. When Satan attacks we are in the midst of a spiritual warfare that requires the armor of God (Ephesians 6:11-18). We cannot go to war unprepared or else we will be defeated. At the same time we must not allow such tests to lure us into behaving as the unbelievers by falling into bitterness, vindictiveness, worry or self pity.



If we do so, we miss the opportunity to advance spiritually. No testing is accidental. God has a purpose in every mistreatment we get. One of His objectives could be to accelerate our growth and increase our learning; since we rarely learn from our successes or favorable conditions.

It is very important to know the reasons behind our hardships because it is the reason that will determine the remedy; remembering that hardships are our challenge and not destruction. They are for us to derive stability from our relation with God and fellowship with Him.

### **3. Resources by which to overcome hardships:**

***Two types of resources we can call upon:***

- External Resources:**

1. *The Holy Word of God:* The Word of God is the source of all wisdom, discernment and help. Revealing the essence of God to us, the Bible remains the absolute authority and most sure weapon with which we win every fight against bad thoughts, habits and

strongholds. David the King knew very well about that sure weapon, "*Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You!*" (Psalm 119:11). "*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path*" (Psalm 119:105). Our Lord Himself faced Satan in the wilderness with "*It is written*" (Matthew 4:4,7,10).

2. *Spiritual direction*: The spiritual dimension of you needs spiritual care which cannot be given except by a spiritual person. Your spiritual father is the one who through confession, will get to know your needs and address them. It is very dangerous to stand spiritually alone. The Holy Bible confirms that "*Two are better than one*" (Ecclesiastes 4:9). Also it says "*He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy*" (Proverbs 28:13). There is no one you can fully trust with your spiritual weaknesses except your spiritual father who not only will absolve you from them, but also show you how to

overcome them. Above all, he will pray for you because God has entrusted him with the task of taking care of you, and therefore, it is his duty to do so.

3. *Prayer*: Prayer is the key to all locked doors. It is the extraordinary privilege God has granted us for expressing gratitude and desires, presenting petitions and needs, and praying for friends and enemies. David had tried it and when he had found out that it worked, he increased it until his whole life became a prayer "*but I give myself to prayer*" (Psalm 109:4). Remember that through prayer, the very power of God is available to us "*call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know*" (Jeremiah 33:3).

4. *Reading spiritual books*: When we fill our minds with good reading, it will influence what we think, say, and do. The same is true when we read ungodly magazines or books. Our minds will be

filled with trash which will affect our thinking, doing, and saying.

5. *Divine Liturgy and Holy*

*Communion:* Have you ever wondered how lucky St. John, the Apostle had been in having experienced what he had recorded in the Holy Book of Revelation? **By faith** you can undergo the same experience when you attend the Divine Liturgy and receive Holy Communion. The Divine Liturgy is a trip to Heaven where you can be with the Holy Trinity, blessed Virgin Mary, angels, archangels, martyrs and saints and above all have the privilege of eating of the heavenly banquet, our Lord's body and blood; for "*He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him*" (John 6:56). It is health to our body and spirit and soul. Do you realize now how much you miss when you skip the Divine Liturgy?

6. *Parents / family:* This is the major factor in our support system. Our

parents always want our good even when they are harsh or intolerant with us. "*Listen to your father who begot you, and do not despise your mother when she is old*" (Proverbs 23:22).

Loving and obeying our parents, is one of the very first commandments God has given us, "*Honor your father and your mother*" (Exodus 20:12). It is a command with a promise "*that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you*" (Exodus 20:12).

#### 7. *Church fellowship and*

*conventions:* When we meet with our spiritual fathers and friends at church conventions, we position ourselves to many benefits. We allow the Holy Spirit to bind us, believers, with the bond of love. Furthermore, we open our hearts and minds to learn new things, get our questions answered, grow socially, make new friends and refresh old relations.

8. *Sunday School*: Just as important as the educational school system, so is Sunday School. At Sunday School we learn the spiritual curriculum that teaches about our Creator who loved us so much that He gave His only begotten son to redeem us. We also learn about our church and the Saints. Sunday School introduces us to our future destiny, Heaven where God lives with the saints and where we are destined to go.

9. *Godly friends*: It is very important to have godly friends because if our friends are not godly, we are in a big danger of becoming ungodly ourselves "*Do not be deceived; evil company corrupts good habits*" (1 Corinthians 15:33).

- **Internal Resources:**  
***Spiritual:***

1. *Faith*. Faith is an important resource without which we cannot please God (Hebrews 11:6). It is only through faith that the ship of our life can sail

peacefully amidst all the troubles and tribulations of life. Faith cannot start to be operative in our life without knowledge of the Word of God; for *"faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Romans 10:17). There is a process of perfecting and activating our faith. We hear God's word, receive it in our hearts, choose to retain it, and then recall it. We know that God's plan for us is that of peace (Jeremiah 29:11), *"He chose us from the beginning of the world"* (Ephesians 1:4). Then we stand on God's promises *"If God is for us, who can be against us. He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"* (Romans 8:31,32). These promises are true and faithful for *"He is faithful and just"* (1 John 1:9). This is the faith technique for overcoming any difficulty, problem or disaster in life.

2. *The Holy Spirit.* The Holy Spirit is waiting upon us all the time to fulfill our needs. He is capable of renewing (John

3:1-8), empowering, (Acts 6:1-15), comforting (John 14:15-27), guiding (Acts 16:1-15), liberating (Romans 8:1-27), equipping (1 Corinthians 12), transforming (Galatians 5:13-26), influencing (Ephesians 5:15-21), and unifying us (Ephesians 4:1-16). These are just a few services that the Holy spirit is capable of offering to us.

3. *Conscience.* The conscience is where norms and standards reside. It is the faculty of the soul that separates right from wrong, establishes priorities, and guides and regulates life. God has put the conscience in us as a manifestation of our volition to choose. When our conscience is awake and alert, then the Holy Spirit will be invited to operate in us *"for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure"* (Philippians 2:13). The Holy Bible is full of examples of great people who because of their strong conscience made right decisions. Take for example Daniel who *"...purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the*



*kings delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself" (Daniel 1:8).* Another example is St. Paul who declares, "*This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men*" (Acts 24:16). A strong conscience has standards built upon the Word of God, while a weak conscience is acquired from worldly viewpoint.

4. *Belief system.* Our belief system is what we think and believe "*for as he thinks in his heart, so is he*" (Proverbs 23:7). It ties in strongly with conscience and determines both our life and character. That is why we have to be careful what we feed our belief system with. The Holy Bible commands us to have the mind of Christ. In becoming Christ like, our orientation to life will be based on the thinking, value system, and problem-solving ability of Christ. It was Joseph's grace oriented belief system that protected him against falling in sin with his masters wife. Likewise Jobs godly

belief system protected him against his wife's blasphemous insinuations to quit his faith in God. Nowadays, our society thrust in our face different belief systems. Therefore, we have to be very careful and stand firm and faithful to what we believe in order to be able to overcome external influences.

5. *Morals.* Our morals are the offspring of our belief system. Was it not because of his morals that sprang from his belief system, Joseph would have found his chance to retaliate and vindicate himself against what his brothers had done to him. Likewise, Job would have cursed God, fell into depression and eventually died. Contrary to human logic and viewpoint, both persisted in their morals and emerged victorious and glorious. Our morals are mental attitude which have nothing to do with our physical condition. Many people give up because of their defeatist mental attitude. Our mental attitude always makes the difference. You may be physically tired, or completely defeated as far as the odds

are concerned. You may be deprived of your freedom, but no one can stop you from thinking those things which eventually will overcome the pressures and adversity of your situation.

### ***Physical:***

1. *Gifts and talents.* God, in His love, has granted us gifts and talents with which we can enjoy life and glorify His name. He has granted us intellectual and manual creative abilities. Mans intellectual ability has caused him to be where he stands technologically in this age. All the works of art are the result of Gods gifts and talents to man. God adores a voice that sings praises to Him, a hand that writes, weaves, hammers, or bakes to make needs met and thus glorify Him. If we do not utilize those gifts and talents, we will be like the bad steward who went and hid his talent because of his laziness and short sightedness. As a result, he deserved to be punished.

2. *Health.* Our health is a God-given resource and a talent that we have to take care of and serve Him with. Without health, man would be miserable, debilitated, and crippled. Bad habits such as smoking, drugs, and overeating could lead to ruin or loss of health. Health is a talent God has entrusted us with and expects us to respect and take care of. *"Do you not know that you are the temple of God and [that] the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which [temple] you are"* (1 Corinthians 3:16,17).

The external and internal resources work interdependently and not exclusively and need to be zealously and not apathetically built, refreshed and replenished all the time. It is just like your savings in the bank. If you do not add to them, one day you will have nothing to draw from. Be honest with yourself. Your resources are there for you to constantly appeal to and make use of and not just whenever you feel like doing so. It is to your advantage to do so;

because when you train yourself to think and act divinely, according to the Holy Bible and the teachings of the Church "*for our citizenship is in heaven*" (Philippians 3:20), even in the midst of hardships, the result will always be inner peace, a relaxed mental attitude, stability and inner happiness. If you ignore developing those resources, you open yourself up to various kinds of sins such as pride, jealousy, bitterness, vindictiveness, and hatred, to mention a few, and the result will inevitably be self-induced misery, disorientation to grace, and agony of the soul.

### ***Practical Application***

In the light of what has been mentioned above, let us examine the hardships that some biblical characters went through and how they tackled trials and tribulations. A prominent example of amazing, yet perfect hardship endurance is Joseph. This man, the son of Jacob, had twelve siblings, eleven boys and one girl. Joseph faced two difficulties:

1. Jealousy from his brothers.

Joseph's father loved him, so this aroused his brothers' jealousy against him. (Genesis 37:4,11,18,27,28,19,27) It was not his fault

that his father favored him over his brothers. Nor was it his fault that he had a dream which he was excited about; and keen to share with his brothers. Counter to his expectations, his brothers were not impressed at all with him and sought to get rid of him. They contemplated killing him; but for fear of having to account for his blood, they decided to sell him to the Ishmaelites. Joseph suffered severely and intensely because of his righteousness, godly life, commitment, and devotion to the Lord. You too as a young youth may face the same type of hardship or pressure from family, siblings, or friends. However, do you suffer because of your righteousness or because you, in disobedience to your parents, want to conform to the world, ungodly friends, and wrong habits which might cause you to fail school and ruin your future. The question that you should always ask yourself: am I suffering because of my godliness or otherwise? What did I do to trigger this suffering?

2. Pressure against Temptation (Genesis 39)  
Tempted to abandon his purity, Joseph was

pressured by his masters wife to commit adultery with her. He resisted her, thus ending up in jail. Similarly you might get tempted to abandon your purity through a lot of temptations from different internal or external sources. Internal sources could very well be your desires as a growing young youth. External sources could be ungodly friends, mass media, society, ungodly tempting music, songs, lyrics, and idleness.

### **Why does God allow righteous people like Joseph to suffer?**

In Genesis 45, Joseph speaks to his brothers and we get to learn that he believes what has happened to him is for the sake of saving the whole world from famine.

In general, suffering is not from God because it is against the loving nature of our Creator who is compassionate and wants us to enjoy our life. He is always ready to turn around Satans inflictions on us and cause something good to come out of them. Although Josephs brothers have sold him, yet God uses that opportunity to save not only Joseph but the whole world. That is why it is necessary to accept sufferings with a grateful heart; believing that we are

in the hands of a faithful God Who can always derive good out of evil; and allow Him to do so through our submission and faith in His power. Joseph in his righteousness accepts his pain and hardships without complaint or resentment. The result is a great reward (Genesis 21:38). Pharaoh the king puts him in charge of all the land of Egypt except for the throne making him the second man in the country. This should encourage us to persevere in our persistence against pressures from the world, peers, or society; knowing that all endurance will turn into victory and joy, though at the beginning it may be bleak, painful, and unbearable. He, who endures hardships and suffering while adhering to godliness, will be rewarded on earth and in heaven in the life thereafter. St James expresses it, saying "*count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience*" (James 1:2,3). People do not succeed by chance but by choice. We need a strong heart and a tongue repeating Josephs words, "*but as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive*" (Genesis 50:20).

Keep on waiting upon the Lord for "*those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and*



*not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31).*

**Teach me Lord, how to wait upon You.**

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