

Pinch Hitter Paul Message

10/12/25

When Ryan asked me to pinch hit, he thought it would be good for me to give my testimony. I would be glad to, but I don't feel like I have one yet. A testimony usually involves a circumstance or situation God has gotten you through or out of. Psalm 34:19 – "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all."

In my case, tribulations haven't come and gone. They moved in, took over the spare bedroom, and had their mail forwarded to my house. A short list of the things we have dealt with for over 20 years:

- Financial challenges
- Legal issues
- Severe lack of sleep and all that results from it
- In jeopardy of getting fired on numerous occasions
- Relational challenges in the home
- Sickness and disease
- So many hospital visits they recognize you when you walk in the door
- Spirited disagreements with insurance companies

I can tell you with all certainty if it hadn't been for Jesus, I would have been dead a long time ago. There are many days I feel like I'm Job 2.0.

Trials and tribulations are something that's common to all of us (see John 16:33, Acts 14:22, and Romans 5:3). Instead of focusing on the tribulations, what I'd like to do is share the things that have kept me going through all of this. We're going to start from 10,000 feet up and work our way down to street level.

One of the most important things to remember is that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12). We have a common foe, who is the great dragon, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan; the accuser of the brethren who accuses us before God night and day (Revelation 12:9-10). Jesus left this world. They are still here and they are still doing what they've always been doing – deceiving, stealing, killing, and destroying. While I don't believe there's a devil lurking behind every bush, around every corner, and under every rock, I do believe the activities of the kingdom of darkness are more than what we think.

Since the Adversary is entrenched as the god of this age and the ruler of this world (2 Cor. 4:4, John 12:31, John 14:30, John 16:11), he is in control of the world's governments and everyone who is not born again. Since we are no longer of this world, we are all targets for his wrath (Revelation 12:17).

Not only do we have to contend with the enemies on the outside, we have to contend with an enemy much closer to home. While we're born again on the inside, we are clothed in sin-contaminated flesh and it has a mind of its own (Romans 7 aka the schizophrenic chapter). Our soul is caught in the middle of this tug of war.

This next part is probably a bit unorthodox, but it is one of the things that has kept me going through all I've been going through. We have been taught that the opposite of winning is losing. That is not entirely correct. The true opposite of winning is quitting. Jesus makes a statement in Matthew 10:22 and 24:13 – he who endures to the end shall be saved. In its immediate context, it is specifically addressed toward persecution, but persecution is tribulation. The words of Christ are of grave importance. Let's take the most extreme situation: you have a gun pointed to your head and are told to renounce Christ or die. One response sends you to glory. What does the other response do? Assuming it spares your earthly life; what happens when you finally expire?

This life is an endurance race. It will push you to the limit and you will want to quit because it hurts so much and you're exhausted and you wish you could just stop for a moment to catch a breath. Every time you turn around, there's another obstacle to navigate. The voices in your head will tell you that God has abandoned you or has passed you by. That the promises of God don't apply to you. You should just turn your back on God since He turned His back on you. Just quit and walk away. It's not worth it. Hear the words of Jesus again – he who endures to the end shall be saved. That little word shall, means shall. There is not one iota of doubt there – no room for maybe. Shall means shall and you can hang your hat on it. That check is good at God's bank. Peter urges us to make our call and election sure (2 Peter 1:10). You have got to get it rock solid on the inside that you are saved and you know so, not guess so or hope so, but know so. Because if you don't quit, you automatically win.

When you're up to your eyeballs in circumstances, it's hard to see which way to go. It is easy to let your emotions dictate your actions. The Bible says we walk by faith not sight (2 Cor. 5:7). I wish Paul added we walk by faith not feelings. If I had to judge the quality of my relationship with God by how I was feeling at any particular time, my salvation experience would look like a Slinky or a Duncan yo-yo – up and down, going in circles, end over end. I'd be so dizzy, I couldn't stand up let alone try to walk. Faith has to be a part of everything we do. 1 John 5:4 – “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith.” Romans 14:23 – “for whatever is not from faith is sin.” All the cool stuff in Hebrews 11 which flows over into Hebrews 12. Hebrews 11:6 – “But without faith, it is impossible to please Him (God), for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently (put in the work) seek Him.” Habakkuk 2:4 – “But the just shall live by his faith.”

Faith has to have a target. The first target is the Lord Jesus Himself. Hebrews 12:2 – “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.” The second target is the Word of God (which, technically, is still Jesus as He is the Word of God made flesh). In God's Word we find spiritual truths and promises. You'll never know the whole counsel of God unless you know the whole counsel of God. This is neither a command nor a plug for PBA – you should regularly be reading through the entire Bible, over and over again. Your flesh will rebel at this task, trying to find all kinds of excuses to keep you from it. The Adversary will fill your life up with stuff to keep you distracted. Once you have determined you're going to do it, prepare to fight for it. You might be able to get through only one chapter in a day – that's OK; get through it. You might have to play it while you're driving. You might have to read it on your phone or tablet instead of holding the book in your hands. You mean even the begats? Yes, even the begats. Every word in the Word is there for a purpose. I have read the entire Bible through well over a dozen times and I can testify that every time through, God highlights something I didn't see before. Psalm 119:130 – “The entrance of Your words brings light.” Psalm 119:105 – “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” John 6:68 – “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

God's Word is our map and compass. It's our True North and the star we sail by. It is a gold mine full of precious treasure that will only enrich our lives if we will take the time to dig it out.

Another tool in the toolbox is the power of 'No'. The Bible is a bit more refined and uses the word resist, but the idea is the same. (1 Peter 5:8-9 and James 4:7). 2 Corinthians 10:5 talks about casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. We would usually name off things like secular humanism, evolution, etc. But this actually hits a little closer to home too. Anything that we give more importance to or make 'bigger' than God is an idol. I submit to you for consideration that when we make the things we think or feel greater than God, more important than God, or things that God just can't help us with, we have made them into an idol and we have fallen into idolatry. Beyond that, when we latch onto thoughts that God can't or won't help us or He doesn't care or He's abandoned us, we have now taken on the role of God and are judging God.

Eons ago, we taught Kid's Church. One of the lessons that still sticks with me today is: know where powerful thoughts come from. Thoughts, feelings, urges, and ideas can originate from a number of sources. What's important is when these things pop in our minds, we recognize where they came from and deal with them appropriately. Many times I will actually say out loud things like, "No, we're not doing that." Or "No, we're not thinking about that. We're thinking about this." Many times my 'no' is followed by God's Word – either a spiritual truth or a command or a promise. Think back to when Jesus was tempted by Satan. He did the same thing. If it's good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for us.

Prayer should be a no-brainer, but, just like getting into God's word, the Adversary doesn't want us talking to the Father. The Bible says we are to pray without ceasing. Growing up, I always heard that means we should maintain a posture of prayer. Sounds really spiritual, but it's just horse hockey. The Bible says we are to pray without ceasing, which really means continuous communication with the Almighty throughout our day, not walking around bent over. Folks might think you are in digestive distress or you need deliverance. Maybe waking up and saying, 'Praise the Lord' or 'Thank you Jesus for the new day.' By the way, that's how I start my day and, in my crazy life, that makes a difference. Talking to God while driving to work or the store. I have found the best time to pray in tongues is when I'm shopping. We went to an Asian supermarket a few weeks ago and I really let loose. With all the different languages going on in there, the other shoppers had no clue.

I would love to mention fasting, but that's a subject for its own message.

Finally, have a sense of humor. To paraphrase Proverbs 17:22 – laughter does the heart good like medicine. Sometimes, all you can do is laugh. Laughter actually provides some health benefits. Many times when things happen, my wife and I will look at each other and say 'life more abundantly.'

I will close with these two passages written hundreds of years apart. Jonah 4:2 – "I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm." James 5: 11 – "the Lord is very compassionate and merciful." We're celebrating Communion today and what a visible example of His lovingkindness, grace, compassion, and mercy. The body of Christ broken for us. The blood of Christ shed for the remission of sins and inaugurating the New Covenant.

