

## Flourishing in the Midst of Trials (Part 2)

by Bayless Conley

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Hello, my friend. I tell you what, if you got a Bible, grab it, sit down with me for the next 30 minutes, and let's get into God's Word together. Together, we're going to find some answers. We're going to be talking about navigating difficult times, flourishing in the midst of trials, and God has some answers. Friend, I want you to know, you are not alone. God loves you, and He has a way of escape for you. He has a pathway for you to walk. Let's find it.

Well, as I said, we're going to be talking about flourishing in the midst of trials. We all go through difficult seasons. We all face trials. Whether they're financial, whether it has to do with family, whether it's a trial dealing with our health, whether it's something going on at work, whether it's just some unexpected thing that has come up, and we're a bit bewildered. And not sure which way to go, or how we should react or respond. Tests and trials are common to everyone.

In fact, if you were with us last time, we found out there's no test, no trial that you go through, that I go through, except such as is common to man. Our brethren throughout the world face the same kind of problems. It's not unique to you; it's not unique to me. Others have gone through the same things before us, and they have found God to be faithful. What I'm doing is just sharing some thoughts to help you navigate those difficult seasons. Those times when you don't know what to do when you're facing difficulties that seem like there is no answer to them.

What I'd like to share with you, to begin with today, is this, that in the midst of your trouble, when you don't know what to do, when you don't know what steps you should take, you don't know how to respond. It's interesting, I was with some friends just yesterday. And one of them was sharing with me that he was absolutely distraught over a family situation. He said, "Bayless, truth is, I don't know what to do. I can't stop thinking about it. It's all I can think about. I just don't know what to do." We've all been there, and here's the point.

When you don't know what to do, you can ask God for wisdom because even if you don't know what to do, He does know what to do. I can still remember, I was a little boy, I'm going to say, fourth grade or something like that, maybe fifth grade. I remember sitting in the classroom and the teacher giving us this math problem up on the board. She said, "Okay, solve it."

I'm sitting there at my desk, and I look around the room, and all the other kids, every other kid in that room, seemed to be busily working on this problem. The truth was, I didn't have a clue where to start. I didn't even know how to begin. I was so completely lost. I still remember, it was a poignant moment for me as a little kid, looking around the room, and I even looked over on the girl's paper; maybe going to cheat a little bit over next to me, and she's just busily writing. I could have asked the teacher for help, and she would have helped me. You know what, in my mind, I thought, "No, if I ask her, she's going to chide me. She's going to give me a hard time because I'm supposed to know this."

I sat there, nothing on my paper, pencil on the desk. I didn't do anything because I didn't know what to do, and I wouldn't ask for help. I thought the teacher would be mad. Some people look

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at God that way. That when we're in the midst of a test, in the midst of a trial, that He's this cruel schoolmaster. That He's going to rebuke us and be rough with us because we should know this.

The Book of James actually deals with that very thing, James 1:5. The context of this verse is when you're in the midst of a trial, when you're in the midst of a test, and you can't see the forest for the trees. When you don't know what to do, when you're facing trouble, James 1:5 says this,

<sup>5</sup> If any of you. (That's you, that's me.) If any of you lacks wisdom. (When you're in the trial, when you're in the trouble.) If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally. ("All." That's you, that's me.) Gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (To her, to you, to me.)

When we don't know what to do, when we lack wisdom, we can ask God, and He will give us wisdom. He'll show us what to do, and He actually sends the answer liberally, abundantly, and He does it without reproach. In other words, He's not going to say, "I can't believe you don't know this. How long have you been a Christian? Do you even listen when you go to church? Do you not remember your pastor covered this very thing two weeks ago? What's wrong with you? Why don't you know this?"

No, God is not going to be mad. He'll give us the wisdom that we seek. He'll give it to us abundantly. He'll give it to us liberally, and He won't find fault with us when we ask. Now, if you ask God for wisdom and He doesn't give you any new steps to take, I'm of the belief that you just need to keep doing faithfully the last thing that God told you to do. The last orders you received from headquarters, stay steady on that until you receive new orders. If you get new marching orders that you're supposed to change direction, well, do that.

There have been times in my life unforeseen things have arisen, and I haven't known how to respond. I get before God, earnestly wait on Him, search His Word, and I don't get any new direction at all. I just keep doing the last thing that I know that God told me to do, and I do my best to stay faithful at that.

God knows how to speak to me. God knows how to speak to you. I try not to keep my life so cluttered and so busy that I can't hear Him speak. I expect Him to communicate with me. I'm expecting to discern the inward witness of the Holy Spirit and the promptings of the Holy Spirit to guide me if I need to change direction. But, I do think that sometimes our lives can be so busy, and so noisy, and so cluttered that we don't hear from God.

I remember, many, many years ago, that I would wake up in the middle of the night, and I would hear this weird beeping sound. I'd get up, and what's that? I'd be all groggy, and it would stop. Almost every night, it was like 3.00 in the morning or something, I'd wake up and go, "Did I really hear that," and I go back to sleep, then, next night, there's that stupid noise, and I get up, and I started to search, but it would stop before I could really get a handle on where it was coming from.

One night, I took it by surprise. I was ready for it. When that little beeping started, I went, and it was in the kitchen. I recognized it before it stopped, it was coming from a kitchen drawer. It was a drawer we called the junk drawer. The one we just threw all sorts of stuff, and "Oh yes, I might need this piece of string someday. Here's some extra paper clips. I might need those. I don't know what this key goes to, but I'm going to put it in this little box in the drawer." You probably

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have one of those drawers as well, unless you're the ultra-organized minimalist and you get rid of everything that doesn't have an immediate purpose.

We had a junk drawer, and I realized the beeping was coming from that. I went in there, and I'm taking stuff, and "Okay, here's, I don't know what that is. Why do we save that here? Okay, there's this." And I got down there, and there was an old watch that I had. It was a cheap little old watch, and the alarm was set for 3:00 AM.

Well, I couldn't really discern where it was coming from. It was just this faint little beeping because it was under so much clutter. There was so much junk, all these other things on top of it. I would have found it much earlier had it not been covered over with these things. It was just indistinct prior to that.

I think sometimes we can have so much going on in our lives. So much busyness, so much this rattling, and this moving and I'm watching this, and I'm on my phone, social media, and I'm just constantly busy, busy, busy. I'm spending hours on my phone watching this feed and that feed and stuff that really I don't need to watch at all. It's not going to help me in any way, shape, or form. I've got this going on, and my music is always playing, and there's always noise. It's not that the Holy Spirit is not speaking to us.

Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and they follow Me." He does speak. He said, "When the Spirit comes, He will guide you into all truth. He'll not speak of Himself, but whatever He hears, that's what He will speak. He'll show you things to come." The Holy Spirit does speak to God's children. He does speak to me. He does speak to you. I think sometimes our lives need to be de-cluttered a bit. Some of these busy things we're doing, some of these noisy things we're engaged in, we need to get quiet before God.

Hence, back to my point. When you don't know what to do, God does. He said, "Ask Me, and I will give you wisdom." My friend, God is not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that He should repent. It is impossible for God to lie. You ask Him for wisdom. He will give it to you. He'll tell you what to do, but you need to be willing to listen. Which means you need to maybe turn your mobile device off, turn the television off, turn the music off, and spend some quiet time. Just settle your spirit down before God and get quiet.

The Bible says, "Be still and know that I am God." His voice is known in stillness. When Elijah was in the crisis of his life, and he didn't know what to do next. It said, "There was a wind, but God wasn't in the wind, and there was an earthquake." But it says, "God wasn't in the earthquake. There was a fire, but God wasn't in the fire. Then, there was a still small voice, and God was in the still small voice." I want to encourage you take the time to listen. God will make His will known to you.

All right, let me move on to another thought if I might. When you're in the midst of a trial, of a troubling time, and this might seem almost unnecessary to say, but I think it's important, you need to remember that God sees you. God knows where you are. It may seem at times like God has lost our address, but He has not lost our address. The computers in heaven didn't crash and somehow erase all of your information. God knows where you are, He knows where you have been, and He knows where you will be.

Listen to these verses from the Book of Psalms. This is Psalm 139, beginning in verses 5–8. It's from the NLT translation. The Psalmist said of God,

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<sup>5</sup> You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head.

<sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand! <sup>7</sup> I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! <sup>8</sup> If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there.

The older translations say, “If I make my bed in Hell, You’re there.” I’m going to keep reading, but it makes me think of this saying. And I know you may be in another region of the world, and this may be translated into another language, but we have a saying here in the US. “If you make your bed, you need to lie in it.” You made your bed; now lie in it. The point is, you made these choices, and that’s what landed you in this predicament. So deal with it. You’re there. You made this choice. You married this person against everyone else’s counsel, and now you’re there in a hard place in the marriage. Well, deal with it.

You know what? Even if I make my bed in hell because of the stupid choices I’ve made. That I’ve brought myself to such a hard place and such a difficult place, and I know it’s because of my own stubbornness and because of my own willful rebellion. Even if I make my bed in hell, God, You’re there and His mercy is there. You may feel like you’re in hell on earth right now because of decisions you’ve made. My friend, God has not forsaken you. He will not leave you. It goes on in verses 9–10. He said,

<sup>9</sup> If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, <sup>10</sup> even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me.

We cannot get away from God’s presence. He sees us. He knows where we are. I think about Joseph. He had the dreams from God that all the different sheaves bowed down and gave obeisance to his sheaf. He told his brothers, they got mad. Because they knew the dream meant that they were going to bow down to Joseph, that they’re going to serve him.

Then he dreamt that the sun, moon, and the eleven stars bowed down in worship. Meaning that his own family, his parents included, are going to bow down to him, that he’s going to be greater than them. He, maybe foolishly, but he tells everybody the dreams, and they get upset. Even his dad got upset. “You mean you think even your mother and father are going to bow down to you?” But his father kept it in his heart.

You know what? His brothers, out of jealousy, threw Joseph into a pit, into a dry well. He had to be thinking, sitting down in that dry well, just a teenage boy, terrified, not knowing what his brothers are up to and realizing after he’s been down there for hours and hours, that they maybe got worse things in mind for him. He’s got to be thinking, “God, do You see me? Do You know where I am?”

Then he’s finally pulled up out of the well. He says, “Oh, thank God!” But then his brothers sell him to slave traders, and he’s being taken off by these Sabines to far off Egypt. He’s no doubt tied with ropes, maybe around his neck, around his wrists. They’re maybe beating him, yelling at him in a language he doesn’t understand. Joseph is thinking, “God, do You see me?” In Egypt, he’s put up on the auction block, sold in the slavers market. A man named Potiphar buys him, and Joseph has to be maybe thinking as he’s standing on the auction block, “God, do You even see me?”

Things turn around, start to go well in Potiphar’s house until Potiphar’s wife takes a liking to Joseph, tries to get him to commit adultery. He won’t do it, so she lies and said, “Hey, this Hebrew boy tried to rape me.” Potiphar is furious, has Joseph thrown into prison. Joseph had

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to be thinking in prison, “God, do You see me?” When he interpreted the butler’s and the baker’s dream and the butler was restored to his position with Pharaoh, he promised to remember Joseph before Pharaoh, but he forgot. Joseph spends about two years in that prison, maybe thinking, “God do You see me?”

In one moment, when Pharaoh had the dreams, and the butler remembered and said, “Hey, there’s somebody that can interpret dreams, and I know right where he is.” Joseph shaved, changed his garments, went and stood before Pharaoh; the dreams were told to him. Joseph not only interpreted the dreams, he gave counsel to Pharaoh about what needed to be done. Of course, we all know the story. In a moment, Pharaoh elevated Joseph to be second-in-command over all of the land of Egypt. Now, all of the Egyptians are bowing down to Joseph. His dream is coming to pass.

Eventually, his own family came, and they bowed down to him. Eventually, the whole world bowed down before Joseph when everyone came to buy grain in order to stay alive. Yes, God knew where he was. God knows where you are, my friend. He sees you, He knows you, and He will not forsake you. It’s just good to remember when you’re going through the midst of troubles that God knows where we are.

Let me move on in my remaining time, share another thought with you, and it’s this, remember to rejoice. Rejoice always when you’re in the middle of a trial. Listen to me. This is so, so important. The Bible says, Nehemiah 8:10,

<sup>10</sup> “. . .The joy of the Lord is your strength.”

Much joy, much strength. Little joy, little strength. We were reading there from James 1, and it actually says this in verse 2,

<sup>2</sup> My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials.

“Count it all joy when you fall into various trials.” It’s so important. First, because the joy of the Lord is our strength. But you know what? Joy is an attractant. Did you know that? Isaiah 64:5, it says of God,

<sup>5</sup> You meet him who rejoices.

God literally comes and meets with the one that rejoices. The Bible says in Psalm 22, “That God enthrones Himself upon the singing praises of His people.” I remember being in the grocery store many, many years ago. In fact, this particular grocery store no longer exists, at least in California. I’ve not seen one in many decades.

I’m in the grocery store, and I hear someone singing. They’re over in the meat department. I’m attracted to the singing. This woman is singing, and it’s a happy sound. I don’t need to buy any meat, but I find myself getting closer and closer to the meat counter. I’m just standing there with my arms crossed, and it’s the lady working behind the meat counter. She was busy doing something, but she’s singing this joyful song.

I found myself just standing there. It felt weird, but I just was attracted to it. Then I noticed the strangest thing. I began to look around. There’s all sorts of other people standing around the meat counter, nobody’s buying any meat. They were all attracted to this joyful woman. I looked,

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and they're smiling. It was a wonderful moment. I actually stayed there till she finished her song. There is a divine attraction to joyfulness.

As I just quoted you from Isaiah, "God meets the one that rejoices." I believe that it attracts the blessings of God to us. Listen to these verses if you would. This is from the Book of Habakkuk. It's written about people living in an agrarian society. All of their prosperity, all of their success, their sustenance, it's all measured in the crops that they grow, the flocks, and the herds that they have. I mean, that is their life, that is their livelihood, that is their present, that is their future. Take that away, they're done. It says this, Habakkuk 3:17–18, and it says this,

<sup>17</sup> Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls—<sup>18</sup> Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

Now, this is an absolute nightmare for this person. Everything has failed. The olive has failed. The grapes have failed. The stalls are empty. The herds are gone. Absolute devastation. It could not be worse for someone living in this particular society. Then he says, "Yet, I will rejoice in the Lord. I will joy in the God of my salvation." You see, joy is not dependent on our circumstances. It's not dependent on things going well for me. It's dependent upon what I believe and who I believe in, in the midst of that circumstance. Everything can go wrong, I can still have joy. It's a choice. He said, "I will rejoice in the Lord. I will joy in the God of my salvation." It's a choice of my will. James said, "Count it all joy." That's a choice that you make when you encounter various trials. You need to choose to rejoice.

Listen, you're not hypocritical if you do it when you don't feel like it. My wife was raised on a small dairy farm in the central part of the US. I remember the first time I went and visited her mom and dad on their farm. There was an old hand pump that went down to a well. I just thought, man, that is just classic. Well, some of you know those old pumps. You pump them; the water doesn't come up until you prime the pump. You got to pour some water down the pump and prime it, and then start working it. Then it brings the water up out of the well.

Now, you can stand there and say, "Well, hey, this thing's supposed to bring water to me. I'm not pouring water down in this pump. That would be hypocritical. No, it's supposed to work the other way around." No, it's not hypocritical; it's just something that we need to do.

Friends, sometimes you need to prime the pump of praise. You need to start praising God when you don't feel like it. It is not hypocritical to lift your hands and to lift your voice when you're in the middle of a trial and you do not feel like it; it's just priming the pump. You do that; the presence of God will come. When His presence comes, things change. The Bible says, "Mountains melt like wax at the presence of the Lord." His presence is all that we need. In fact, here's the result. The very next verse in Habakkuk 3:19, here's the result of choosing to rejoice when everything goes wrong.

<sup>19</sup> The Lord God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills.

And then it says,

To the Chief Musician. With my stringed instruments.

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Several things happen when we rejoice in the midst of our troubles. Number one, God's strength comes to us. He said, "The Lord is my strength." The second thing, God gives us wisdom to navigate difficult terrain. He said it this way, "He makes my feet like a deer's feet." Now, I have seen a lot of deer in my life. I spent a lot of time in the woods. I have a lot of friends that hunt. It's amazing the places that have deer—and I've been in places where there's been wild goats. It's amazing to watch them. They can navigate the most difficult terrain.

Well, when I worship God, and I rejoice in the midst of troubles, well, He makes my feet like hinds' feet. He enables me to navigate the difficult situations of life. He brings His strength. The third thing, God lifts us above the problems. Says, "He makes me walk on my high hills." We read it. Then finally, this is a song, this is a truth to embrace for everyone, not just for a special few. No, this isn't just for someone else. This isn't just for Bayless Conley. This isn't just for the preacher; this is for everyone.

He said, "This is for the chief musician." He's supposed to learn this and teach it to the congregation as a song. This is a song. This is a truth that everyone should embrace, that everyone should learn. I want to end just by quoting Proverbs 15:15. This is from the Amplified Bible, Classic Edition. It says,

<sup>15</sup> All the days of the desponding and afflicted are made evil [by anxious thoughts and forebodings], but he who has a glad heart has a continual feast [regardless of circumstances].

My friend, God sees you. He knows you. He desires to help you. Choose to rejoice in the midst of your troubles. Now, I hope you've been blessed by this, and I'm going to continue on. Listen, if you miss the next installment of this, you're just going to miss half your life. I've got some good things to share, and I hope you're going to be ready for it. Until then, I pray that God's richest and His very best would be yours always.

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