

Flourishing in the Midst of Trials (Part 4)

by Bayless Conley

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Thank you for joining me today. We are on a bit of a series, talking about how to navigate difficult times. We all face difficult times. We all go through stormy seas. You may be in the mother of all storms right now in your life and you feel like, “Hey, if something doesn’t happen quick, I’m going down for the last time.” I think God has something for you today. We’re going to look into His Word and find answers, how to navigate difficult times, how to flourish in the midst of trials.

Hello, my friend. If I could come to your home and sit down with you and enjoy a cup of tea. Here in the States, I know this is not a proper cup of tea, this is like a giant mug of tea—if I was in your house, I’d have a proper cup of tea. I’d sit down with you at your kitchen table, talk to you, find out what’s going on, pray a little bit, maybe worship God. But I want to know everybody’s story. Everybody’s important to God and people are so amazing. If I could do that I would do that. This is the next best thing.

I just believe that by the Holy Spirit, as we spend a little bit of time together, talking about God’s Word that divine help is going to come to you. I believe that God sees you. He knows what you’re facing. He knows the difficulties that surround you. He has a pathway for you to walk. He has not forsaken you. He loves you and He wants to help you. And listen, I’m not just blowing smoke. I’m not just preaching. I believe this with all of my heart and soul.

I have walked with Jesus for about 47 years, and I have found Him to be utterly faithful. I have found His Word to be true. It is true. 6,000 years of history have taught us that it is true. Men of old found His Word to be true. Millions of believers today have found His Word to be true. Heaven and earth will pass away, but God’s Word will not pass away. He’s not a man that He should lie or the son of man that He should repent or change His mind. His Word can be utterly trusted.

My friend, He sent the Holy Spirit to indwell us, to comfort us, to guide us, to lead us, to instruct us and to have fellowship with us. In one of the places in Scripture, Paul said, “May the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you,” the friendship, the interaction of the Holy Spirit. Thank God for His living Word and thank God for the living Spirit who indwells us, who instruct us, who I believe is going to talk to you and talk to me, as we look at God’s Word together right now.

Once again, we’re dealing with flourishing in the midst of trials, navigating difficult, and problematic times. I’m just sharing some different thoughts. Here’s one, it’s an important one. Remember that God knows what it’s like to be a human being. He can identify with you. I know a lot of people, they’re going through stuff. It’s like, “God, how can You care? What do You know? You don’t know what it’s like to be me. You don’t know what it’s like to be tempted. You don’t know what it’s like to be overcome with these things.” No, my friend, He does know.

The story’s told of a father and son. They’re actually standing over this anthill, watching these little ants scurry around and bring things into the anthill, disappear down the hole and others are doing this and that. The little boy says, “Daddy, what do you reckon those ants are thinking?”

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What are they feeling?" His dad said, "Son, I don't rightly know. I guess the only way we could really know what the ants are thinking or what they're feeling is to become one of them." You know what, God became one of us. Let me read to you from the Scriptures, if I might. Philippians 2, speaking about Jesus, verses 6–7. Though He was God, and this is the NLT translation. (Philippians 2:6–7 NLT)

⁶ Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.

⁷ Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form.

Jesus gave up, He emptied himself of His divine privilege. Did you think about that? He left the glory world and He wasn't born in a king's palace among the high and the mighty. Even with earthly privileges, He was born in a stable and laid in a feeding trough to a poor couple, Joseph, His stepdad, and Mary, His mother. The Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary. She became pregnant before Joseph ever knew her.

Jesus was raised in a poor carpenter's home in an obscure village. No, He wasn't among the movers and the shakers of this world, wasn't even accustomed to earthly privilege. No, He emptied Himself of His divine privileges. He gave those up and became a man. Scripture says in John 1:14,

¹⁴ So the Word became human and made his home among us.

Talking about Jesus. "The Word became human, made His home among us." My friend, He does understand. He does know what it is like to suffer. He does know what it's like to be fatigued. He does know personally what it's like to suffer betrayal, and humiliation, and abandonment, and anger, and to be maligned, and to be lied about, and to be accused falsely, and ultimately, to be cruelly murdered. He knows what it's like to agonize. Even as He prayed there in the Garden of Gethsemane which was the beginning of His passion of His suffering, and His sweat became like great drops of blood.

He was under such stress realizing what it is going to entail to become the sacrifice for humanity, to bear our sins. The One who knew no sin, to be made sin for us that we might be made right with God. And for Him to be separated from the bright presence of the Father, for Him to be cast out, so we could be welcomed in to the family. The Lord knows what it's like. He knows what it's like to go through the things that you're going through. It's important to understand that because God does know and because He does know, He can sympathize with us in our weaknesses.

A dear friend of mine, she was a newlywed and her husband was killed in a freak accident. They were still newlyweds. I remember, I went to the funeral. I went to the funeral, and all I could do was, give her a hug and just look at her. I didn't have a word to say to her because I didn't honestly understand what she was going through. I watched other people come up and like, "Oh, we know what you're going through. We're so sorry."

No, they didn't know. She knew they didn't know. To be a young bride and to lose your husband in a freak accident, they really had no idea what that was like.

My friend, God does know what it's like because Jesus became one of us. He suffered throughout His earthly life. Once He went into ministry, He suffered persecution, He suffered all of those things that I mentioned and then ultimately, He died in our place. We'll never truly

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plumb the depths of what Jesus suffered to redeem us. The Book of Isaiah 53 says “His very soul was made an offering for sin.” I don’t completely understand that but I believe it because the Scripture declares it. He understands suffering. He understands problems. He understands difficulties. There’s no doubt about that. Listen to this, Hebrews 4:15,

¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin, so He can sympathize with us and our weaknesses. Listen, He knows the fears that grip your mind and the depression that tries to come upon you. He knows. He sympathizes with you and your weakness. He knows what you’re going through. The next verse is just so brilliant. It’s so rich. It’s so full of power. The next verse, verse 16 says,

¹⁶ Let us therefore.

What’s the “therefore” there for? It’s there because He can sympathize with our weaknesses. It’s because He was tempted at all points like we are.

¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

My friend, God has mercy for you. He has the grace to help you in your time of need, and if you’re in a time of need right now, let your heart, even as I’m speaking, let your heart begin to reach up to God. He has grace for you. He has mercy. You can come boldly to the throne of grace, not to some god that’s aloof, distant, uncaring, that occasionally glances at the world through some cold clinical eye. You’re not some endless number on a list to Him. You’re not some faceless person in a crowd. He knows you and He loves you. He realizes by experience what you are going through. It is so good to know that. Let me move on to another thought. This is an important one.

Remember this, just because you’re going through a trial, just because you are suffering hardship, just because you’ve got unexpected storms that have rolled into your life, it does not mean that you’re doing something wrong or that you are out of the will of God. God’s not punishing you, my friend. Daniel got thrown into a lion’s den for praying to God. The apostles, Paul and Silas, got beaten and thrown into prison because they followed a vision that God gave Paul.

Peter brought healing to a man and was incarcerated because of it. Let me read something to you. You’re probably quite familiar with this, it’s from the Book of Exodus. God has sent Moses. He’s had the whole burning bush and the staff turned into a serpent thing go on. He and Aaron, they marched boldly into Pharaoh’s presence and they said, “God says to let my people go.” This is what happened. This is how Pharaoh responded when Moses obeyed God. Pharaoh said—this is Exodus 5:17–23,

¹⁷ But he said, “You are idle! Idle! Therefore you say, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.’” ¹⁸ Therefore go now and work; for no straw shall be given you, yet you shall deliver the quota of bricks.” ¹⁹ And the officers of the children of Israel saw that they were in trouble after it was said, “You shall not reduce any bricks from your daily quota.” ²⁰ Then, as they came out from Pharaoh, they met Moses and Aaron who stood there to meet them.

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This is the delegation of the leaders of the Israelites who had gone after Moses has made his proclamation to Pharaoh. They came out and they found Aaron and Moses.

²¹ And they said to them, “Let the Lord look on you and judge, because you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us.” ²² So Moses returned to the Lord and said, “Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it You have sent me? ²³ For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all.”

“God, things are worse. I did what You said, and the bottom has fallen out of this thing. What is going on? You haven’t fulfilled Your promise, and the devil has made things worse for us and everybody’s complaining against us now. Not only do we have Pharaoh and the Egyptians that are trying to stomp us out. Everybody in Israel is angry with me now. Things have gotten worse.” Well, friend, sometimes when you do obey God, things do get worse. Just because you’re going through a trial doesn’t mean you are out of the will of God. Of course, we know the story. It goes on.

God said, “Okay, I’m going to show you now what I’m going to do to Pharaoh and I’m going to bring you out with a mighty hand.” God certainly did. The plagues came into Egypt, all of the things happened. Finally, Pharaoh relented and the people came out with silver and gold. It says, there wasn’t one weak or feeble person among all their tribes. You think about that. Several million people that have been enslaved for 400 years and now they’re coming out and there’s not even a weak or feeble person among their tribes. I’m telling you, when they partook of that Passover lamb, it must have been the greatest mass healing in history that took place. God brought them out with wealth and with riches and they were on their way to the promised land. Listen to these verses. This is 2 Timothy 3:12. It says,

¹² Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

It’s guaranteed, there’s going to be trouble. Jesus said this, John 16:33,

³³ “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

Hallelujah! There is victory in the midst of our troubles. Don’t get into thinking, “Oh, God must be punishing me.” Just because you’re going through trouble doesn’t mean that you’re out of the will of God or you’ve done something wrong. It may mean that you’ve done something right. We are swimming upstream in a downstream world. As a young Christian, I remember attending a Bible study. They were having it in some people’s homes. I’m just getting to know these people. I’m probably the newest Christian in the bunch.

Honestly, a few minutes into that Bible study, I couldn’t wait to get out of there because those people were mean. They spent a big part of their time putting other folks down and gossiping about other people. I remember they were talking about a young Christian mother and I knew the gal. She’d just gotten saved. She was a single mother and they started talking about her. She was having financial difficulties. You can imagine, being a single mother, she’s on her own, and we were not living in the most affluent area to start with.

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Rather than taking up an offering for this baby Christian, this single mom that had just gotten saved—she wasn't there, but I tell you, they put her down and gossiped about her, rather than take up an offering, rather than do something to help her—they started inferring that it's probably because she's been up to some of the old ways of her past life and that's why she's having this financial difficulty. One of them that didn't know anything about her went so far as to say, "Yes, her child should probably be taken away from her because she's not a proper mother."

I mean, they were making stuff up and saying, she's probably doing this and probably doing that. I'd never been so glad to get out of a Bible study in all of my life. They should have been reaching out to help her instead of being critical of her. Listen, even if you have landed in a difficult situation because of your own choices, we know that happens. We do live in a fallen world. Everything doesn't operate the way God originally intended. One day He's going to make a new heaven, He's going to make a new earth. Thank God for that.

We know we have an adversary, the devil who walks about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. That he's the thief that only comes to steal, kill and destroy. We know that he's a source of problems. We know that sometimes just living in this fallen world, everything does not operate the way that it should. We know sometimes because of the choices of other sinful people, there's a knock-on effect, and it affects other people's lives.

You can think, we've got corrupt politicians and we've got plenty of them in our own country. And it's affecting all sorts of people, affecting the economy in a negative way. All of those things are going on and as well, sometimes we make sinful choices. And it lands us in a hard place and it's the direct result of the choices we've made. Maybe that's you right now.

You're saying, "Okay, Bayless, I get what you're saying. Just because I'm going through a hard time doesn't mean that I've done something wrong, but listen, I have done something wrong. I cheated, I was unfaithful and I did the same stupid thing again that I've done so many times and I deserve what I've gotten."

Maybe you did land yourself in this mess. Let's just say that's the case. I still want you to know that God loves you; And if you will repent—repent means an inward change of heart resulting in an outward change of direction—just make an about-face. You say, "God, I'm sorry, I'm guilty. I did this and I'm sorry. Wash me clean from my sin. I confess it. Show me what I need to do." God will give you a step that you need to take. And He will help you if you have a genuinely repentant heart, even if you are in a huge mess because of your own problem. I'm telling you, He is rich in mercy to all that call upon Him. He will help you if you will repent and if you will turn to Him.

Let me move on. I don't have too much more time. Let me just share another thought. That when we're in the midst of trials and struggles, it's so important that we take time to replenish our spiritual resources. We take time to feed on God's Word. Take time to pray to be full of the Holy Spirit. We get full of faith by hearing God's Word. Romans 10:17 says,

¹⁷ So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

We get full of the Holy Spirit by praying. Somebody says, "I'm full of the Holy Spirit. I spoke in tongues. I got full of the Spirit back in 1966." Okay, when did He leak out? You read the Book of Acts, they're filled with the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. It says in Acts 4, "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." The Bible says, "Then Peter being full of the Holy Spirit, Peter said..." It actually

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was a series of constant infillings of the Holy Spirit. You don't just get filled and then you're filled. You need to top it off. You need to pray. This says, "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, praying." When we pray, it fills up that spiritual tank. We spend time reading the Word, and we spend time in prayer, and it'll help us to stay fresh and strong because many times it's like we're making withdrawals.

I'm trusting God. I'm praying about this. I'm dealing with this problem here. I'm dealing with that, and I'm taking out energy. I'm expending faith. I'm expending physical energy. I'm expending emotional energy. If I'm not doing anything to replenish, if I'm not getting proper rest, just on a physical level, if I'm not eating properly, if I'm not resting properly, I'll never replenish my physical strength. I can't replenish my spiritual strength if I don't feed on the bread of God's Word regularly.

The Israelites went out every morning and collected Manna. Jesus said, "Man doesn't live by bread alone, but by every word proceeding from the mouth of God." It's actually a continuous tense in the Greek language. We don't live by the words that *proceeded*, past tense, out of God's mouth. We live by the words that *proceed* out of His mouth right now. God wants to speak to you as you spend time in His Word. And as you feed upon it, He will make it alive. He will speak to you, and faith will come alive in your heart. Some of us, we just need to replenish.

I remember years ago, the church was fairly small, and I used to play basketball. We had, I think, a few morning services, two or three morning services then. I used to play basketball most afternoons with a group of men from the church. I would bring a change of clothes with me, and I'd throw a pair of shorts on, some tennis shoes, and a shirt and meet them over at this local school and we'd play basketball.

We're over there one day. I preached my heart out. I'm a little bit tired but, I'm used to that. We get to the school. We start playing basketball, and I'm playing hard. I'm fairly competitive, don't know how to do anything halfway. I'm running up and down the court. All of a sudden, about 20 minutes into this thing, I start to feel lightheaded. I literally saw little black dots dancing around in the atmosphere in front of my eyes, and I thought, "Man, I need to sit down."

Finally, composed myself, said, "Whoa, what is going on?" and then it dawned on me. And this might be hard for you to comprehend, but I'd been fasting, and I forgot all about it. I was on the third day of a fast. I hadn't had anything to eat in three days. Truth be told, it completely skipped my mind. I'd forgotten that I hadn't had anything to eat. Here I am, I'm expending all this physical energy; I've preached my heart out. And if you think preaching doesn't expend energy, you've never done it.

Most of the time, when I get done preaching, I feel like a dish rag that's been rung out. I preached hard, and I've been running hard, expending physical energy, and I thought, "Oh, duh, I need to get something to eat." It was because I'd expended my physical resources and hadn't replenished them; I was in a state of weakness. When you're going through stuff, I mean all the time, but especially when you're going through stuff, you need to double up on your Word, maybe double up on your prayer time, get full of the Spirit, and get full of the Word of God.

Just a final thought before we're done. When you're going through a trial, remember that you're not camping in the trial. It's not your permanent residence. You are going through it. The Psalms said, "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want." Hallelujah for that. "Makes me lie down, takes me through green pastures. I lie down besides still waters. Yea, though I go through the valley

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of the shadow of death, I'll fear no evil. Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me." All right, I may be going through the valley of the shadow of death, but I'm not staying there permanently. I may be going through a trial, but I'm not staying there permanently. Listen to this. This is 1 Peter 1:6 (KJV). This is the old King James version. I just love the way it puts it. It says,

⁶Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.

Or trials or troubles. "Though now for a season, if need be, you are in manifold, many-faceted, varied trials and troubles." Through a season—all seasons end. I've got some friends, they live in the northern part of our country, and the winters can be quite severe. I know from talking to them, sometimes they feel winter will never end. "Man, there's been snow on the ground for three months. When are we going to get a warm day?" But you know what? Spring always comes, Winter always ends. Summer always comes around, Fall always comes around.

I live in an area of the country, the changes in season here, they're fairly minimal. You can miss Spring. You can miss Fall. And it rains a little bit more during the wintertime. And our summers do get warm, but they're just mild, minimal changes in the region that I live. It's not true everywhere. The fact remains, all seasons end. If you're in the middle of a great trial right now, if you're in the middle of a very hard season, I've got good news for you. It's not forever. The season is going to end, and God has good things for you on the other side of the trial that you're in, of the things that you are facing. There's victory on the other side.

Again, back to a verse that we've looked at many times in this series, 1 Corinthians 10:13,

¹³No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man.

Everybody goes through the same times.

But God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

Again, the Passion Translation says, "That God will bring you through to victory." I just want to encourage you, friend. Just realize you're not in this tough place forever. God has plans for you. Put your trust in Him. He will guide you. In fact,

I pray right now that you would be strengthened in the name of Jesus, strengthened in the inner person with might from the Holy Spirit. Father, I ask that You would give my friend wisdom. That You would give them the next step that they need to take. That You would bring the right people, the right connections into their life to help them get to where You want them to be. And for that one that truly needs to repent, Lord, I thank You that Your mercy and grace and forgiveness will flow to them like a flood, when from their heart, they confess their sin and truly repent.

To all of you, I just want to say we love you. You may not hear that often, but I want to tell you, God loves you. We love you. Thank you to those of you that support what we do. We're taking these messages around the world in multiple languages, and it's because of people like you. God bless you. God bless you. We'll see you again.

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