



SURVIVING TOUGH TIMES

When I was in 6th grade, our science teacher showed us an interesting experience: we took an empty metal can of one gallon, and heated it up on a burner. When air gets hot, it expands, and while it was hot, we put a cap on it and made it air-tight. The can cooled off when we took it out of the burner and the air inside began to compress because it was cooling off. Cool air occupies less volume than hot air. And as the can and the air cooled, a partial vacuum formed inside of that can, and the normal air pressure of the outside just crushed it. The reason that can

was crushed was because the pressure outside was greater than the pressure inside.

And that's an illustration of what I want to talk about: everybody goes through pressures. Since it is likely that you are in one, or just came out of one or will be heading into one at some point in the future, here are several keys to surviving tough times:

Tough times are... **INESCAPABLE**. Every one of us will experience periods when life is hard. Financial pressure, family trouble, health issues, business difficulties, opposition within our community--the list of potential problems that we could face is endless. It is, therefore, essential that we learn to respond in the way God desires.

Tough times have the potential to either ... **DESTROY OR DEVELOP US**. Have you ever noticed how people respond differently to the same difficult situations? Some grow stronger while others fall apart or are even destroyed by the trial. Some become better and others defeated and bitter. It is our choice. If we raise the pressure inside of us to match the pressure coming against us from the outside, we will not be crushed regardless of what happens. Living close to God and keeping our minds stayed on Him will do that.

Tough times are...**SURVIVABLE**. The key is to learn how to walk in continual awareness of God's presence. The apostle Paul demonstrated this as he went through more pressures than any of us could claim to have gone through: he was thrown in prison quite often, was flogged severely, beaten with rods, exposed to death again and again, once pelted with stones, three times shipwrecked, and yet he calls these horrible times "light afflictions". Why? Because the pressure inside him was greater than the pressure outside. Through his walking close to God and praising Him, he had built up spiritual pressure on the inside.

It can be the same with you. If you keep your mind stayed on God, in the midst of tough times, the Lord will keep you in perfect peace, no matter what pressure is assailing you. Remember how God always took care of you in the past, how He helped you get out of difficult situations, thank Him for all that is good in your life right now, and praise will keep you from being crushed under those outside pressures.

You may think I just don't understand the gravity of your situation. But let's look at the book of Habakuk, in the Old Testament, a book filled with sad news and doom as the prophet announces the judgements of God on the Jews because of their rejection of God. And yet, at the very end of that book, after the devastating messages God had given him, this prophet came up with one of the most powerful statements of praise amid negative circumstances:

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. (Habakuk 3:17-18)

Even though nothing is working for me, yet I will rejoice in the Lord. Rejoicing is a decision we make, something we can choose to do. We don't have to let feelings of discouragement dominate us. How we respond to these pressures depends on our perspective: are we God centered or trouble centered?