Handling Life's Difficult Experiences

Mike Connell



CONNELL MINISTRIES 2012 Sermon

Handling Life's Difficult Experiences Sermon Transcript for Sunday, 12 August 2012 pm

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Smashwords Edition

Summary: Life is a mixture of experiences - some sweet and some bitter. The Bible abounds in examples and stories of people, and it tells us that without faith we can never please God. We must learn how to trust Him, and trust is developed in private, but it's always shown up in difficult experiences we have in life. So difficulties are an opportunity for us to grow because they reveal our heart condition.



I want you to open your Bible with me. I want to share with you just briefly just a simple message that can be of great help to someone here tonight and if you open up your Bible in the Book of Exodus. I want you to open with me Exodus, Chapter 15 and this is about handling life's difficult experiences. Now it looks like it could be quite appropriate for tonight aye and let's just have a look at Exodus, Chapter 15, handling life's difficult experiences.

How many thought as a Christian you thought that things would all work out easy and go well for you aye? [Laughs] How many found it didn't work out like that at all? Quite disappointing at times, so let's have a read and I want us to read in Exodus, Chapter 15 in Verse 22, so Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea and they went out to the Wilderness of Shur and they had three days in the desert without any water. That's pretty tough isn't it aye?

The Bible abounds in examples and stories of people and it tells us that without faith we can never please God. We must learn how to trust Him and trust is developed in private, but it's always shown up in difficult experiences we have in life. He says they came to the waters of Marah, in other words they found some water and they could not drink the waters of Marah for they were bitter. That's why they called the name of it Marah which means bitter. And the people complained against Moses saying what do we drink? And he cried out to the Lord and the Lord showed him a tree. When He cast it into the waters the waters were made sweet and there He made a statute and an ordinance and there He tested them. So this was a test. This was something God was using to grow and develop them.

He said if you diligently head to the voice of the Lord, your God and do what is right in His sight and give air to His commandments and keep His statutes, I'll put none of the diseases on you which I put on the Egyptians for I am the Lord which heals you.

So the first thing to see, life is a mixture of experiences - some sweet and some bitter. These people had just seen one of the most amazing miracles of God. They were being pursued by an army and they saw as Moses lifted his rod up, they saw a wind come up that parted the waters and then as they crossed over those waters, the waters collapsed and all the soldiers who had held their life in slavery for hundreds of years were destroyed. So they saw this tremendous - isn't that a great experience of God - and they tasted freedom and it was sweet. Then

three days later they're burned out and drying out in the desert, there's no water, no supply, tongues sticking to the roof of their mouths.

So it's like on one hand they had this tremendous experience and you would think hey, God has done this for me. I expect Him to treat me real well and next thing you know they're in this very, very difficult situation. It's true in our life we can have great experiences with God in a meeting or great breakthrough with God in our life, but then it's followed by an unexpected disappointment, setback or difficulty and this is pretty challenging. You ever been without anything to drink for a day? Imagine being in the sun, the blazing sun for three days and you've got no water and then finally the water you get, it tastes bitter. You can see that water. They probably broke into a run. They all ran to the water. They get in the water, start slopping it up and aarrgh! spitting it out like that.

So what they had was a bitter experience, a disappointing experience. I wonder how many of you tonight have faced an experience which was quite disappointing, that was quite a bitter experience, something that happened that actually was like a setback in your life. You never expected something like that would happen. Often we find that we have these experiences, they just come into our life unexpectedly but here's the second thing. Difficulties are always an opportunity for you to grow, so currently some of you may be facing a difficult experience, a difficult season or experience. You may be in a relationship, maybe a financial issue, it may be a personal issue, or it may be just a season you're going through a lot of difficulty in your life. You pray and it doesn't seem like God comes through for you. It's what's called a bitter experience.

But these kinds of experiences are an opportunity to grow. God is committed to your growth or your character, not your comfort. Now it's a help to realise that, that we may think that God is going to come through on every need that I have and He'll supply on time. I've observed that He doesn't always come through on time and He definitely doesn't come through like you expect. He often comes through in a way that you don't expect at all, so when you are going through a difficult time or difficult season in your life it is an opportunity for you to grow. The Bible says He tested them or gave them an opportunity to grow and to shift. If you're going to come into the things God has for you you have to grow. You have to grow. You have to grow. God has planned many things for you, but it's like a father having a motorbike he wants to give to the child but the child's only about six. He's not going to get the motorbike, not 'til they're grown up.

You've actually got to cooperate with God in His preparation process or you can't experience the things He's planned for you, so the best things that God has for you are yet ahead for you. I don't know how many, but I guess when we get to heaven we'll have a look and God will show us these are all the things that I intended for you, but when the going got tough oh my, why did you respond that way? Why did you sulk? Why did you quit? Why did you give up? Why did you draw back? I had so much I was planning for you and you quit on me right at the key point when I was trying to prepare you so you'd know what to do and have the courage to handle it.

So difficulties are an opportunity for us to grow because they reveal our heart condition. So you notice here that when they came to Marah it says they couldn't drink and it says they complained. They complained. Now one of the things to understand is that people that have been in bondage and people that have been in a life of slavery, often they have what's called a victim mentality. A victim mentality is I'm powerless, life's not fair and someone's to blame. So whenever you face a difficult situation in life, whatever's in your heart will come out through your mouth and what they did was they began to complain. They began to speak and we always when people complain they're trying to find someone to blame, someone to put responsibility for the situation on.

So they complained against Moses. They complained against God's visible representative. They complained against God Himself. Basically they were blaming them for the situation, saying it's your fault. You brought us here, you got us here. How come you put us in such a situation?

I wonder when you face difficult situations how much you complain, how much you become negative and sour because what's in your heart is sour. This week I encourage you just to have a listen around the community wherever you are, wherever it's at school or work, wherever it is. Listen to how often and how frequently you find people complaining. You will be amazed and when people are complaining it tells us they have bitterness in their heart, the bitterness of being defeated, of being hurt, of injustice, of some kind of problem in their life they've never resolved. So when they face a challenge which is difficult up comes the bitterness, out comes the flow and out comes this complaining and negativity and all kinds of things.

Now listen. God wants you to be free of that, wants to get it out of your heart, so He allows you to go into some difficult situations and you notice they had just

had amazing deliverance, they're out of Egypt, but they forgot yesterday's blessings. They're caught up in the problems of today. I wonder how many of us have forgotten what God did in the past, forgotten the way He's helped you, forgotten the things He's done for you. You're just caught up in the injustice and unfairness of what's there right now - very easy to do that.

So the next thing that we see here is that God is aware of your needs. God actually knows exactly what your needs are. You don't actually have to tell Him what your needs are. He already knows. He's completely aware of your needs and He's planned the journey. Interesting thing was God knew exactly after three days they're going to be dried out. He knew after three days when they're right at their driest and they got to the water the water would be bitter. God knew all about that. He could foresee. It's like He looked at the book of your life and He can see what you're going to face tomorrow. He can see what you're going to face next week. He can see what you're going to face in six months time. He knows exactly what you're going to face - He's planned your journey. He's planned your journey.

Now if there's faith in your heart you can actually have confidence God has planned my journey. I can rest on the promise in Romans 8 which talks about the love of God; I can rest on this promise. All things work together for my good because I'm called by God and I'm walking with Him. Everything works together for my good. Even the bad things will develop some good thing in your life. No matter what you're going through, no matter what situation you find, faith tells me that whatever it is God can turn it for good. It can turn around and actually I'm going to benefit from this thing. So let's have a look at this story here.

So we see there that God knew exactly what they were going to face. He knew exactly the problem they'd have and here's the thing: there was already a solution. God had already prepared a solution for it see, because they didn't know] what to do. Now right now I can tell you now whatever problem you're facing God is aware of the problem, aware of what you're walking through and He's already got a solution for you. It's not like here you are one day and you find your life in a bit of a mess and you cry out God and God looks down and thinks what on earth have you done? Whoa! I don't know what am I - I'll have to think up a plan to get you out of that mess. It's like God doesn't have to stop and figure out a plan to get you out of the mess. He already knows your path. He knows what'll happen when you find yourself in certain situations, you'll begin to respond in a certain way. He already has the solution. The challenge is

whether you'll do what the people did, complain and let your bitterness come out, or whether you'll do what Moses did. Moses had the solution and he found the solution, he didn't really know what to do. I mean some problems are like that. The Bible says if you don't know what to do ask God and ask in faith believing He'll show you what to do. Ask God.

So what happens here it says they cried out to the Lord and they complained. The reason they complained was they were angry. They were bitter and there was a lot of grief in their heart and it all came out. I don't know whether you imagine what it would be like for Moses trying to deal with people like that. Imagine what some of your parents, what it's like to deal when you get negative and complaining. It's a miserable thing when you've got a lot of people complaining. This is what Moses did. Moses cried out to the Lord, so number one, how do you respond when things are difficult or there's a bitter experience you face. Number one, cry out to God. Cry out to God. God has an answer for you. The Bible says He's able to do more exceedingly abundant things. He said He'll supply your every need according to His riches in Christ. God has promised over and over in His word He won't leave you, He's with you, He will help you but the first thing is to come to Him and cry out and start to begin to spend time in prayer; God, I don't know what to do. God help me with this situation. It's beyond my ability to deal with it.

See naturally they would die if they got no water, but here's the thing. Why would God bring them out into the desert, go all to that effort to do all the miracles and get them saved, just so they could die here because they had no water? Clearly He had a plan. Now the dilemma is God doesn't tell you the plan, not 'til you cry to Him and you'll find in the Bible many situations - there's another one where the disciples, Jesus told them to get in the boat. Now they resist to get in the boat. The Bible says He constrained them or forced them or pressured them to get in the boat. Why'd they not want to get in the boat? They're fishermen. They can tell there's a storm coming. No one wants to be in a little boat on the sea when there's a storm coming.

They get in the little boat. Next thing it's in the middle of the storm and now they're in a place of stress. Now Jesus knew all about it and this was an opportunity for them to grow in faith, which they flunked.

I don't know how many ones I've flunked. I've flunked a few over my life, a few little things have got me. But here's the first thing: Number one, you need to cry

out to God. Number two, you need to listen for God's direction. It says God showed him something. Do you realise that God can speak to you and show you things in the middle of your trouble? I remember being in the midst of one of the greatest challenges I had in my life in ministry and right in the middle of it God showed me something about myself that needed healing, something about myself that needed changing, something about my heart attitude that He'd exposed in the middle of the situation and He wanted me to change.

So the first thing then is cry out to God and then give a bit of space for Him to speak to you. How would He reveal things to you? He could easily reveal it as you're just spending time in the word, could reveal it to you as you're talking to someone. You could be sitting in a meeting and then suddenly God speaks to you. Just this last week we had Pastor Anwar Fazel here and one of the meetings I felt like God just spoke to me so clearly, just like it was a directive from heaven, just like that. So we've got to tune in our heart to the spontaneous flow of God and then, so God showed him a tree. In the Bible when the Bible's talking about the word tree it's a picture of the cross, the cross of Jesus Christ. It's a picture of Jesus Christ. God showed Him a bush. Now here's the thing; the bush was always there. He just didn't see its significance in solving the problem. He came there and he's got two million people plus and they're all complaining and groaning and they're all going to die in a couple of days, they're going to start dying off and the water they've got is a mess and he's got nowhere to go. He cries out to God and God's opened his eyes and points out to him something that was always there which he didn't see.

Now here's the thing. At the cross of Christ, at the cross Jesus has broken the power of sin, broken curses, made it possible for every person to be blessed. It's just sometimes in the middle of your problem you just don't see it. At the cross Jesus demonstrated He loves you, He's so committed to you no matter what you've done and what you've been in and no matter how bad your life has been. He's willing to give of Himself to help you, but when you're in a fix you just don't seem to see it and so what happened in the midst of his time of praying, God showed him something he hadn't seen before. He gave him revelation, gave him insight to the work of the cross, the power of God to heal and transform any situation.

Now here's the most amazing thing about this thing. If they had not come to bitter waters they would never have discovered God's power to heal. It was only in a crisis that they actually had an insight and a revelation of what God is like.

It's only when you're in a fix and you're in a tight place and you start to cry to God that you get revelation about what God is really like and that revelation will change you - said he cried unto the Lord. Number one, he cried out. Number two, he heard God speak to him. God showed him something. Here's the thing he had to do; he had to take this bush and he had to throw this bush into the water and the tree, when it got in the water, then changed the water. Now here's the application: think about this. You can cry out to God and God can speak to you, but you have to act on what God shows you. Now notice what he had to do. He had to take the tree, he had to go to the solution and he had to bring the tree to the water. What that pictures or means for you is this; when you're facing a tough spot, when there are setbacks in your life, come to the Lord and begin to cry out to Him. Ask Him for insight what to do, wisdom what to do. As He begins to show you you then have to apply that to the situation. You have to act on what God shows you. If you fail to act you can know all about the tree that heals, but if you don't actually take the tree and put it into the situation - what does that mean for you?

Well if you've faced a very painful difficult situation, been betrayed in a relationship, you can choose to be angry and bitter and complain or you can come to the cross and say God, you have forgiven me. Now I bring this whole situation and I bring your forgiveness into this difficult situation and I'll turn it from being sour to being sweet. Here's the amazing thing that what God - God has got a lot of ways to change our situations. He's not limited. Sometimes He does something totally different to what you expect and the situation changes. Sometimes He just does something out of the ordinary.

When Paul and Silas had been beaten up for preaching the gospel, they'd done something good, they were thrown in prison - interesting, they're right down and their feet are in the stocks. They're in the lowest part of the prison. It's late at night and instead of complaining and whinging they begin to praise God and honour God and suddenly there's an earthquake, the doors open, the chains break off. They can run away if the want to - now that is just unusual. That is incredibly unusual. God can do something unusual to change your circumstance and the result of it was that a whole jailer and his family got saved.

So here's the thing; they had this problem of being whipped and put in jail, but the consequence was they met a jailer and his whole family got saved. So it wasn't the inconvenience and the pain. That was just a little thing compared to a whole family getting reached for Christ and this is how God works. He can

sometimes use your situation and change it dramatically as in the doors open, the chains fell off - or He can use it to bring about something you never expected, for example the family got saved.

Another one - Lazarus was sick and was dying. They called for Jesus to come and Jesus deliberately delayed coming. Now don't you hate that, when God deliberately delays and you need Him now! And He deliberately delays and then what is a sick situation becomes a deadly situation, becomes very, very bad. He said if you can believe you'll see the glory of God - so what He said is don't be overwhelmed with grief and disappointment. Keep trusting me. I haven't finished yet - and they saw instead of a sick man then healing, they saw a dead man raised. So would you be happy with a little miracle or the bigger one? Well any miracle would do ... [Laughter] ... but you see, the Bible abounds... so in some ways God solves the situation because He changes it in a way you don't expect. Sometimes He introduces something into it that you never thought of and the whole thing changes, and sometimes He just teaches you you have to live through that situation and trust Him. So God's got a lot of ways.

I wonder what you're facing right now and I wonder what response you're making in the middle of it. If you're complaining, if you're pouring out negativity, if you're overwhelmed with that, then there is definitely bitterness in your heart. This would be a great time tonight to say God, I don't want to be bitter. I want my spirit to be sweet.

I just love the story of Nelson Mandela who had all those years in prison, all those years in prison. When he came out and he had the power put in his hands, he could now pay back all his enemies and instead he brought a message of reconciliation. He brought sweetness where he had every reason to be bitter. God had done something in his heart. Joseph was the same. I wonder what happens out of you or what flows out of your life whenever you're in difficulty. Is it sweetness and confidence in God, or is there negativity and complaining, overflowing of bitterness and a sense of being a victim and blaming someone? What flows out of your heart?

You know what's flowing out of your heart. This would be a great chance to bring it to the Lord. Can we close our eyes right now? This is the way you handle those difficulties that you're in, you bring them to God. You come to Him and cry out to Him. You begin to listen to Him for His insight into how to solve it and you may take a little while to do that, then you have to apply what God

has shown you, whether it be forgiveness, whether it be patience, whether it be perseverance, whether it be just trusting Him to see this thing worked out.

Whatever it happens to be you have to actually apply what God shows you. So while our eyes are closed and heads are bowed I wonder tonight if there's anyone here - I believe there's several of you that are in a very difficult experience right now, in a very painful experience or a bitter experience or a time of disappointment, a time where things are going very hard for you. I wonder if you could say that's me tonight, I'm in that place. Would you just raise your hand right now, just raise your hand - God bless, a number of people here like that. I wonder just while our eyes are closed and heads are bowed, I wonder if those people that are going through difficulty if you recognise that complaining becomes very much a part of your life, that actually you do things with complaining and groaning and murmuring and your response has not been good. If you know that's true it means probably there's bitterness somewhere in your heart, you need to ask the Lord to heal it.

I want to do this tonight. I want to give you an opportunity for prayer, for God to come and touch you, for the prophetic word to encourage you. God is not finished with you. You are in a season where He's trying to change you and build you to be a better person because He has better things ahead for you. Father, I just thank you for each person here tonight that's responded. We ask Lord as we pray for them and minister to them that the grace of God will come upon them. There may be someone here tonight who doesn't know Jesus. If you're a person here tonight that doesn't know or haven't experienced Jesus Christ, haven't given your heart to Jesus, this would be a great night to respond to Him.

The Bible says that everyone who put their trust in Him received Him and gave their life to Him, became a follower of Jesus, to him He gives power to become a child of God. Tonight you could walk out with your sins forgiven, joined to heaven, joined in your heart to God, a child of God - or you could walk out empty. It's your choice. If you want to receive Jesus Christ tonight I encourage you to come up. Someone will stand with you and pray with you.

Let's just all stand together and just as the musicians just allow this gentle worship process to be just a flow of worship, let's just stand right now. If you put your hand up and responded tonight, you're in a difficult place, a hard place, a place of bitter waters, it's really quite sour and you're quite distressed over it, why don't you make your way to the front right now. Just come. Please come.

Just come quickly, don't waste time, don't muck around. God is here tonight to help you, just come tonight. Just come tonight. God has something for you tonight. Just come make a row in the front here, God wants to touch and help you. That's right, let's just stand together. Church, reach your hands out to them, we've got a number of people made a response tonight. Danny, won't you come up and help with the prayer. Brydon, come up and help with prayer as well. Amen. Just lift your hands to the Lord right now.

Father, I just thank you for each one that's come. I believe Lord you have something for them. We just ask for your spirit to come. There may be others here tonight but you need prayer for some other area of healing or whatever it is, feel free to come up. We'd just love to pray with you.