

OPEN BIBLE CHURCH

Phil O. Waldo
Lead Pastor



1224 Hancock Drive
Boone, Iowa 50036

Phone: 515 432-3329

Website: www.booneopenbible.com
E-mail: office@booneopenbible.com
pastor@booneopenbible.com

SERMON TITLE Down but not Out

SERIES

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KEY SCRIPTURE 2 Corinthians 4:7-10;16-18

SYNOPSIS Troubles sometimes seem overwhelming, but we can still trust God to carry us through.

HIGHLIGHTS



☞ Down but Not Out

2 Corinthians 4:7-10; 16-18

7 We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. 8 **We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair.** 9 **We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed.** 10 Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies.

☞ 16 **...we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.** 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 **So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.**

These words sound familiar... pressure, perplexity, persecution... These are getting close to home. We have faced a lot of pressures the past several months and there are a lot of questions without easy answers. This passage of Scripture seems very fitting for us today.

☞ **Problems are Probable.** Paul said that we are “troubled on every side.” This sounds a lot like the situation we have been facing. We’ve had a continuing Covid-19 pandemic, the danger of life-threatening infection, which is now includes some of our own people. There are so many questions and it’s hard to know what the truth really is. But Peter warned us long ago, “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you” 1 Peter 4:12.

We should not be surprised at all the trouble in our world today. Believers are not exempt. In fact, Jesus, himself tells us to expect troubles in this world. **John 16:33.** And Paul and Barnabas said, “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.” Acts 14:22. These problems, pressures and perplexities are to be expected and they even contribute to our ability to enter the kingdom.

☞ **Problems can be Productive.** Troubles are not only inevitable, they can be beneficial. Biologists have discovered “the adversity principle” – the idea that “habitual well-being is not advantageous to a species.” Adversity actually gives us greater vitality.

Dr. James Dobson... As strange as it seems, easy living and a stress-free existence can be disadvantageous for animals and for us humans. Think about the big male lion lying in a cage at the zoo. All his needs are met, and his hunting skills are useless. His muscles turn flabby, and he yawns his way through the day. Meanwhile, the lion that's roaming free on the plains of Africa, stalking and competing for his next meal, remains fit and strong because of the challenges and dangers he faces.

Within limits, adversity is beneficial to you and your children, too. Troubles that require comforting leave you better able to comfort others (2 Corinthians 1:3–4). Physical suffering,



when endured in the name of Christ, makes it easier for you to say no to sin (1 Peter 4:1). Hardships due to your faith lead to restoration and strength (1 Peter 5:9–10). Trials also produce ☞ perseverance, character, and hope (Romans 5:3). There are many other examples of this "adversity principle" at work in Scripture.

Human beings who have survived hard times are tougher, more resilient, and more compassionate than those who have never faced difficulty or pain. You might remember that the next time your family is battling adversity in the jungle of life.

It has been said, "there is no triumph without a trial, no testimony without a test, and no crown without a cross!" We'd rather have nothing but mountaintop experiences, but no growth ever occurs on the mountaintops. It always happens in the valleys -- the places of trials, troubles, setbacks, defeats -- that's where the growth occurs in our lives.

In a boxing match, men often get knocked down, but not out. Knocking them down still registers points on the score card. But if that man can get up and knock out his opponent, he can still win the match. Victory is getting up every time you get knocked down. And God helps us through all of this.

There's an old chorus that says, "He did not bring us out this far to take us back again; He brought us out to take us in to the Promised Land." It's based on Deuteronomy 6:23. God has no intention that you be unsuccessful; He didn't save you to let you falter and flounder, He saved you to bring you into Heaven victoriously!

Philippians 1:6... he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

You may say, "Pastor, I can't even perceive God in my battle!" I get it. I've felt the same many times, especially recently. There may be times you don't know where God is, but there will never be a time God doesn't know where you are! The times when you feel like He's the farthest away are actually the times He's the closest to you! He's not going to leave you or forsake you. You're in the center of His hands.

☞ **Problems have a Purpose.** Sometimes problems are a test. God has many reasons for allowing trials and losses to come our way.

☞ Sometimes problems are used by God to **teach us**. Psalm 119:71 says, "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees." Troubles can inform us of our weaknesses or of how the enemy operates. If we keep the faith, we go to the Word of God for comfort and while there, we learn and grow.

☞ Sometimes problems are used to **strengthen us**. Just as an athlete starts with small weights in a gym and slowly adds more weight and muscle until they get strong, so we start with small tests, as babes in Christ, and end up with the difficult, unfathomable tests like Job experienced when



our faith is strong. If we keep the faith, we gain endurance and our character is strengthened through the process.

☞ Problems can always **bring us closer to God**. When we reach the end of our own resources, we have no recourse but to turn to God, to depend upon Him more. Troubles can drive us to God for help in our time of need.

For several nights a 6-year-old girl threw one shoe under her bed before going to sleep. Her mother asked her why she did that. "My teacher (at the Catholic school), says that if we have to kneel by our beds to look for our shoes, we'll remember to keep kneeling and say our morning prayers!" That's what God does: He gets us on our knees by troubles so that He can keep us on our knees for relationship.

☞ Sometimes problems are used to **renew us**. What good can come out of your life being broken?

Jeremiah 18:1-6

1 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: 2 "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message." 3 So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. 4 But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. 5 Then the word of the LORD came to me. 6 He said, "Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel.

When you are broken, the Master Potter remolds your life to make a new vessel. Begin to look for your new life. It will not be the same – it will be better!

☞ **Problems can become Pearls**. Pearls are the result of irritation caused by a grain of sand inside the shell of an oyster. To keep from being irritated by the sharp sand, the oyster surrounds it with a milky secretion. This symbolizes grace for us. When you get poked by the world, you shouldn't respond with hate or revenge, but with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Galatians 5:22-23. When you do, you cover that irritation with something that becomes beautiful and valuable.

Now when the enemy brings you into trials, his purpose is to make you fail or become bitter. But if you turn every bad circumstance into a reason for honoring God you will have destroyed the purpose he's trying to reach. When problems come your way are you just getting irritated and frustrated or are you turning them into pearls? I know this is difficult and doesn't come naturally, but it's the fruit of the Spirit that works in us. Let him make something beautiful out of your troubles.

Have you ever thought how all the entrances to the heavenly city of New Jerusalem are gates of Pearls? Revelation 21:21. Remember – pearls are the result of irritations. In other words, **we** ☞ **enter the kingdom through hardships! Acts 14:22**. I admit, I don't like problems and troubles.



I struggle with finding it “pure joy” as James says we should. But, I want to enter the Kingdom, so I guess problems are part of the package.

Robert Clive was an adventurous young man of England who set out in a ship in 1744 to try to get a job in India. The ship was caught in a hurricane and was blown far off course, and severely damaged, until it finally limped into a South American port. Clive was stranded there for 9 months. The situation looked like his whole life had been sidetracked. While there he learned to speak Portuguese. At last he set off for India. On arriving he applied for a job with the East India Company. It was his ability to speak Portuguese which secured him a high position. He quickly moved up in the E.I.C., establishing its dominance in India. He was made a Governor in India, later a Baron of Ireland, and became a member of Parliament. All because of a storm that sidetracked him!

So, if some misfortune has come your way and your life seems to be off track, remember: Trust ☞ God! He is working all things for your good! **Romans 8:28.**

I am preaching to myself as much as anybody else today. These past few weeks have been a real trial. I have felt pressed on every side; I’ve been very perplexed, and I still don’t understand a number of things. I’ve been questioning God. But I haven’t given up. The message of today’s Scripture is still true. I need to remember these things and continue to trust God. Will you join me?