

I Understand. I've been There!

Bill Brinkworth

"Blessed be God ... 4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God... 6 And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation..."

II Corinthians 1:3-7

Going through difficult times is not usually any fun. The occasions are often intended to allow us to see God's hand of deliverance, get us closer to Him, or perhaps change the direction He wants us to go. Those trials can spiritually strengthen us as we trust Him more.

The Scripture in II Corinthians 1:3-7 gives us another possible purpose for our hardship. We may have been in the valley of despair so that others, in similar situations, can be comforted that they too can get through the trial as we had.

We listen to people having difficult times and nod our heads that it is indeed a tough trial. Unless we have been down the same dark road, they will not usually be consoled.

After I first got saved, I faithfully went out on church-wide soul-winning every Thursday night. The pastor had set it up that no one would go alone, and that

we had a partner. Before we left, he often had packets for each pair to take that had addresses of people that he felt needed a visit. Without looking at the names, my partner or myself would randomly pick up a packet and head out to visit those people.

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Why?

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Everyone has difficulties and tribulations one time or the other. There is no promise from God that even those that are believers are exempt from having hardships. Ordeals still rain on "the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45).

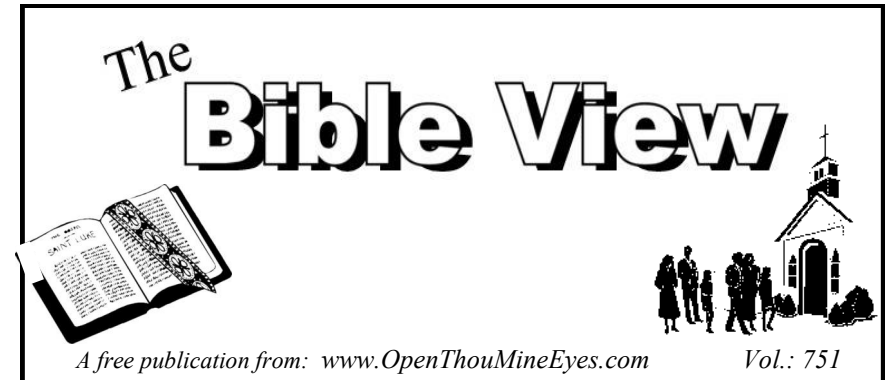
It does not necessarily mean that a person facing some misery is out of the will of God. Jesus healed a man of blindness in John 9. Jesus' disciples asked him if the reason for the man's blindness was because of some sin he or his parents had committed. Christ responded that there was another reason for the man's infirmity. It was so God could get the glory in healing the man. God indeed was honored when the man was able to see.

"Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him."

John 9:3

There can be many other reasons why a person may be going through hard times. According to God's Word, they can include:

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God Has Plans for You

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"A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps." Proverbs 16:9

Proverbs 16:9 gives some explanation as to why some of what is happening in our lives occur. The reason, especially for the child of God, may be God is directing one's path in the direction He knows is best for them.

We often have our plans and goals, but too often; they do not coincide with God's will for our lives. Many times, we dream of being a doctor, nurse, pilot, police officer, or what we are interested in doing, but never even consider what God has for us to do.

No one knows us better than God, and he may know that the direction we desire for ourselves may hurt us and keep us far away from what is best for us. Each of us has unique abilities, and only God knows what they are and where they should be exercised in this needy world.

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Ouch!

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Many natural things are "prickly." Thorns are the natural defense for many roses, orange trees, and weeds. Grabbing hold of a prickly stem results in one letting it go and coming up with another plan. God uses the pricks of uncomfortable instances in our lives to change our direction. He did this in Saul's (later to be renamed Paul) life, as the unsaved but religious man traveled on the Damascus road.

"And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." Acts 9:5

Saul spent much of his life trying to serve God his way. Unfortunately, he did not detect, nor heed, the pricks God sent in His life to put him in the right direction.

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God Has Plans for You

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As a visually handicapped person may need more guidance than a seeing-eye dog or a prodding, white cane, so do we. We think we know best, but we are too often blind to what is best for us. We are just unknowingly stumbling through the darkness of our future.

When we are about to make wrong steps in harmful directions, it is then that the Lord may intervene and redirect us. Often, we may not like where we are going, but that is when trusting faith should reason with us that Father knows best. His way will be better for us than we could ever have imagined.

Ouch!

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Pricks that Saul ignored:
Pricked ears – When Saul heard the preachers of the Gospel, he did all he could to stifle their preaching. Instead of pricking his conscience so he could change his wrong path, it angered him and encouraged him to do more to silence Christians. He even held the coats of those that stoned the preacher, Stephen. While he was standing there he probably heard the Word of God as at other times when he was around Christians. Still, he held

to his religion, even when the people of God preached and warned against it.

Pricked eyes – Undoubtedly, he saw Christianity in action. He saw families split; people die, and heartache inflicted. In all the trouble he instigated against Christians, he saw they had a peace that he surely did not understand. He was like his namesake, King Saul, who persecuted righteous David.

Pricks that others ignore.
Pricked by circumstances: Hard times, sickness, failures, testing, aggravating situations, disasters. are many times meant to draw us closer to God and trust him more. Instead, folks often grow farther from the source of strength they need.

Pricked ears: Perhaps, God sent a godly mother, grandmother, neighbor, friend, Sunday school teacher, or let us hear a preacher on TV, but still His invitation was ignored.

Pricked eyes: Most have seen bits of the Word of God in tracts and good Christian testimonies, yet ignore the message that was read and seen. Many do not heed God's pricks to their hearts and will face the consequences in this life and the next eternal one.

I Understand. I've ...

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Without fail, every week, for at least two years, one of those addresses would be a person in a similar trial that I was going through. I would patiently listen to them tell their story and how hard it was for them. After listening carefully, I would interrupt them and tell them I knew exactly what they were going through.

Often they would blankly gaze back, and I knew they were probably thinking something like, "Yeah. Yeah. You're just saying that. You don't have any idea what I'm going through."

I would continue, "Yes, I understand because I'm going through the same thing." Their eyes would bulge, and they were ready to hear what another survivor in a similar "boat" had to say. I would tell them the Lord was helping me through the difficulty. I would give God His due glory and give the person examples of how the Lord was helping me get through the hard time and was allowing me to see His hand in many parts of my life.

They were more ready to listen. I got to witness to many people because of my difficulty, and God always got the glory. They were able to get some hope that they too could get through the trial, and God was the one that could help and possibly change the situation.

Over the years of a lot of visiting, I saw how so many of my experiences, bad and good, could

give others hope. They certainly learned from my trials that there was another way of handling difficulties than they thought and that there was a God, and He was willing to help.

Christian, you never know the full intent of God's allowing you to go through hard times. It may be for your edification and growth, but it may also be to show others what He did for you. People are looking for help and hope. If you are going through trials and tribulations, do not be discouraged. Either way God chooses, it will benefit you, and possibly others!

Why?

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- To move a person to where God wants him, or to change that person for future use, as in the story of Joseph.
- To strengthen a person, as in the story of Job.
- To separate a person from things God wants him separated from, as in the story of Noah.
- To teach a person a lesson he needs to learn, as in the stories of Jonah and David.
- To get that person close to and reliant on God, as in the story of Lazarus.

Not all trials are God's wrath on a person. Much of the time, it is a loving God's intervention in a person's life for their best!

*"The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD:
and he delighteth in his way." Psalm 37:23*