

The Six Phases of Faith to Reach Your Dream

Phase 4 – How to deal with difficulties

In John 16.33 Jesus said: **In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.** We shouldn't be surprised when we have difficulties in our lives because Christ said that this would happen. Maybe you are facing a difficulty right now, but if it is not the case, it will happen eventually because difficulties are part of life.

In 2 Corinthians 6.4 the apostle Paul wrote: **In everything we do we show that we are God's servants, by enduring troubles, hardships and difficulties with great patience.** He was one of the men that God used the most and yet he was confronted with many problems without ever giving up the dream that God gave him. Now, if we're going to have to face difficulties in life then we need to learn to deal with them and for that we must:

A. Determine their source. And there 4 basic sources

- We are the number one source. Our actions, words, decisions create lots of problems.
- The second source is other people. Their actions, words, decisions many times impact our lives negatively.
- The third source is the devil, our worst enemy and he wants to do 3 things: to steal, to kill and destroy.
- Finally, as we saw last week, God is the fourth source of our difficulties. He uses them to get your attention, test your faith, and mold your character. He will allow and cause difficulties in your life particularly when we are in a place of disobedience to His will which was what happened in today's story.

In Acts 27 Paul was a prisoner and was being carried on a ship to Rome to testify before Caesar. At one point he tells the captain that they shouldn't leave the port where they were because God had told him that a big storm was approaching. However, they ignored him and because of that they lost everything and almost died. Their actions and decisions were motivated by the same mistakes that we all make when we do not listen and obey what God asks of us. We make mistakes when

Mistake # 1: We feel discomfort

Acts 27.12 **and since Fair Havens was an exposed harbor, a poor place to spend the winter...**they decided to leave. They weren't willing to stay 3 months in a harbor that wasn't ideal, so they left.

Many times we do the same, we find ourselves in situations and circumstances that are uncomfortable, non ideal or inconvenient so we decide to leave. Maybe it's a job, a marriage, a church, etc. But just because a situation is not ideal that doesn't mean that God is telling you to leave. Unfortunately, in these situations, we tend to make emotional decisions walking ahead of God and creating even more difficulties because we are not willing to stay for a while in a situation that is uncomfortable.

Some might even say that they feel peace by leaving, but you'll always feel peace when you step out of uncomfortable situations! The question you have to ask is: **God, what do you want me to do in this situation?** Many times God might ask of us to stay for a while in uncomfortable circumstances until either He changes us or He changes the circumstances.

Mistake # 2: We become impatient

Acts 27.9 **We had lost a lot of time...** so they left. They thought they couldn't lose more time. They were in a hurry to reach their destination. Impatience was one of the things that rendered their decision.

Did this ever happen to you? You made a decision because you felt you couldn't wait any longer and then discovered that it was a mistake? You realized that after all you could have waited and you should have waited. Impatience makes us rush and sail in the direction of storms and difficulties. Impatience clouds our thinking.

Could it be that right now you're heading in the direction of storms because of your impatience? There are folks that shipwrecked their lives because they were impatient to find a wife or husband, to find another job, etc. Impatience led them to make emotional decisions and walk ahead of the will of God. The result was devastating.

I know it's not easy to stay in uncomfortable situations but do not let impatience determine your actions and decisions. Ask God what He wants you to do in your situation. Follow the steps we gave last Sunday for good decision making and don't rush in your decisions.

Mistake # 3: We listen to bad advice

We read in Acts 27.11 that **the centurion followed the advice of the pilot and the owner of the ship**. The centurion trusted the wrong people and made the mistake of listening to the "experts" instead of God.

This is one of the reasons why we face many storms. There are many "experts" out there that can say what you want to hear but that aren't necessarily the things you need to hear. They have answers for your problems but not for theirs, their financial life is a mess, their marriages the same, many don't even have a relationship with God, etc. and we still listen to them and accept their bad advice.

When you start listening and following the advice of "experts" rather than listening and obeying what God is saying, you are about to wreck your life. God always tells you what you need to hear. If people tell you to do something that is contrary to what God expects of you, do not listen or follow their advice.

Mistake # 4: We follow the majority

Acts 27.12 **since the harbor was a poor place to spend the winter the majority decided that we should sail on...** There are too many people saying: *But everybody is doing it!* Yes it's true, but that doesn't mean they can't be wrong. When the Israelites left Egypt the impatience and discomfort made them want to go back to slavery. They were the majority but were totally wrong. If you allow your decisions and actions to be determined by what others say and do, you'll face and cause many problems.

Mistake # 5: We let the circumstances guide us

Acts 27.13 **When a gentle south wind began to blow, they thought they had obtained what they wanted.** Because the circumstances were favorable to leave they did it, even if God told them to stay and the result was disastrous.

The circumstances aren't always what they seem; therefore you shouldn't enter every open door you see. You shouldn't embrace every opportunity presented to you. You shouldn't say yes to every job offer nor accept every proposal you receive. You need to ask: *Is this what God wants me to do?* Maybe these things seem to be good ideas, or that person looks good but if God commands you to wait, it is better do it because the devil can also arrange favorable circumstances for you to leave the will of God and wreck your life.

Now, it is harder to deal with difficulties caused by others. When I'm the source of my problems I can't complain because they are my fault, but in the case of Paul, he warned them but they didn't listen to him. Paul is in trouble and ends up shipwrecked because of the decisions and actions of others. When this happens, you must remember that the Lord knows it and He will protect and act in your favor as He did with Paul.

To clarify, first of all you have to determine the reason for your difficulties. Were you the cause or was another person? Was it the devil or was God trying to get your attention? Answering these questions will help you know how to respond. Next ask yourself:

B. Ask: What can I learn from my difficulties

God doesn't waste our difficulties and that's why Paul wrote in Romans 5.3-4 **we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.** Every difficulty is used by God to help you grow and to teach you something. **Every storm is a school. Every trial is a teacher. Every experience is an education. Every difficulty is for your development.**

Perhaps you are facing difficulties and even sinking, but God loves you so much that He wants to tell you today: **DON'T GIVE UP!** He wants you look at Him because the more you seek God the smaller your problems become. He wants you to grow through it so that you become the person He wants you to be. When you face difficulties seek to discover what you can learn from the problem and then:

C. Work on your attitude

Our attitude can improve or worsen our difficulties. The difficulties that you have to face either make you a better person or a bitter person. Or you will become what God wants you to be or you'll turn away from Him and harden your heart. The way you react is your decision. Ask yourself: *How should I react to this difficulty?*

Paul's response to this storm not only teaches us **what to do** but also **what not to do**. Let us begin by looking at the **wrong response to difficulties**

1. Don't drift— Acts 27.15 **The ship was caught up by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along.** Many times we do the same, we drift and we surrender because we think there is nothing we can do or say to change things. All we want is to stay afloat but when we do that we always go downstream. Be careful because when you start to drift you will end up quitting your dreams, your goals, and your ambitions. Do not drift, do not give up.

2. Don't discard important things – Acts 27.18 **We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard.** First they throw the cargo, but because it didn't work they threw the ship's gear, then the food and they even wanted to throw the prisoners overboard.

The struggle made them discard things that they needed, and under pressure we do the same thing and let go of what we shouldn't. Our values, our friends, the church and God, things that we would not let go of in better times. The problem is that when you do this you'll also be giving up your dreams and your future.

In Acts 27.31-32 we read that **Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved." So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it fall away.** For the first time they listen and let go of the lifeboats. By doing this they force themselves to stay on the boat, and this is what we often don't do. Instead of staying where God wants us, we seek ways to escape, to flee, whether is from a marriage or other relationship, whether is a job or a church, especially if the situation becomes difficult or uncomfortable.

But if God commands you to stay, let go of the lifeboats and do what God commands. It seems easier to leave than to stay and face the problems but you have to believe that God can change people, circumstances and even you, but if you are always running out the back door He won't do it. Perhaps you are here today because God is telling you to stay in your boat while you want to leave. Stay and do not throw out the things you need the most.

3. Don't Despair - Acts 27.20 **When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.** It's hard to lose hope. They lost hope because of their disobedience and because they forgot that God is in control and He is with us in the storms. It doesn't matter if you see or feel Him, He promised to be with you and help you through the difficulties. He wants you to trust Him.

Let's look quickly at what to do when we face difficulties

a. Do face the difficulties. Do not try to dodge it or ignore it. When you are in the midst of a storm if you try to turn around your boat it will flip over, you have to face it. God says: *face the storm, fear not, and move forward*. He doesn't say that it will be easy, but he says that He will be with you and that you'll achieve it.

b. Do acknowledge your part. If you created the problem you need to admit it. Deal with it. You need to stop making excuses and blaming others. The Bible says in Proverbs 28.13 that: *A man who refuses to admit his mistakes can never be successful. But if he confesses and forsakes them, he gets another chance.* You have to confess your part and accept your responsibility for God to extend you His favor.

c. Do claim His promises. In this story, amid chaos, and although everything is being destroyed Paul is confident. Why? Because he trusted that God would fulfill the promise he made earlier in Acts 27.23-25. *Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me.* Paul believed that God would keep His promises. God didn't say that the boat wouldn't be destroyed, but promised that the men would be saved, and it happened.

God keeps His promises and there are over seven thousand of them in the Bible that you can claim during difficult times. Maybe in your storm your ship won't be saved, whatever that means to you, but you are still going to make it. Maybe you'll have to swim to shore on a broken piece of the ship, like they did, but you will be saved because God says I am with you! Don't give up!

Maybe in your storm you haven't seen the light in 14 days, or 14 weeks, or 14 years. Maybe you are falling apart and the delays and difficulties are discouraging. Do not give up, do not give up your dream, do not discard from your life what you know to be important, especially those who love you, your faith, the church and your relationship with God. After the winter there is always a spring, after the difficulties comes blessing and the realization of your dreams. Look to God and don't lose hope.

Conclusion

When you go through this phase of difficulties in your life you must

A. Determine their source. Is it your fault, is it because of other people, the devil or God?

Are you allowing discomfort, Impatience, bad advice, what everyone else is doing or misleading circumstances to lead you to difficulties? If so, can you do something about it? Think about these things before making decisions.

B. What can you learn from your current difficulties? God doesn't waste our storms. He uses them for our good.

C. Work on your attitude. Don't drift. Don't discard important things, don't despair. Acknowledge your responsibility, deal with it, face the storm and claim His promises.