

## Being Thankful Despite Pain and Disappointment



*Benjamin Franklin wrote that there is nothing more certain in life than death and taxes, but we would like to add another certainty today, which is that, in life, you will suffer. There are many ways for this to happen, but one very painful way is when people let you down. Whether this is done by rejecting you, lying about you, cheating on you, stealing from you or in some other way altogether, you'll hurt, sometimes more than you feel you can bear and at times, more than you ever thought possible. This is especially true when those hurting you are the very ones to whom you've given of yourself in love, time or support and from whom you just naturally expected better. From some situations, there may be no way back, but there is always a way forward. and this week's sweet surprise is designed to highlight that path. If you're already in such a season, whether your pain has come through a loved one, acquaintance or circumstance, if you choose to let it, this sweet surprise can help you right here and now. Read, take action and be blessed.*

*Once again, we thank Steve & Cindy Wright for their words of wisdom and contribution to TLC World.*

In this season of Thanksgiving, it's sometimes difficult to "give thanks" as we're told to do in the Bible. That's what we're finding, anyway. When you're facing pain and disappointments, you don't really feel like saying, "Thanks Lord, I needed that." And yet it's scriptural that we do. We're told to be thankful despite and in the midst of our circumstances. That doesn't exclude difficult ones.

We're told in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, to "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." Really? Sometimes that seems a bit much when we're hurting so badly. It's the "all" part that can be difficult for us to swallow sometimes. Even so, our all-knowing God tells us:

**“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”** (*Philippians 4:6*) Also, we are to **“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”** (*Colossians 4:2*)

### **Being Thankful Despite...**

We've gone through some pretty difficult times in our 46+ years of marriage. And we've witnessed a lot of horrible circumstances that others have had to endure. In all of this we've seen God work miracles. Sometimes they are big miracles and sometimes He works in very subtle ways. But in all of these circumstances God redeems our pain in some way for the benefit of His Kingdom work.

We don't know what you are going through right now that causes you to hesitate to be thankful despite your pain and disappointments. I know what we're going through and we sure don't like it. But God is able to redeem this pain. And for that we give thanks.

We want to share with you a few life lessons that we have learned through. We hope they will minister to you in some way. The first is:

- **Focus on the blessings you do have rather than what you don't.**

It's a matter of embracing the blessings that are visible, rather than the ones that aren't quite there yet. Do you have a foot that is hurting? Focus on thanking God that the other one doesn't. Perhaps your spouse is causing problems in your relationship. Thank God that you can pray, you have supportive family and/or friends, and you can depend upon God to get you through this difficult time. There is always something you can find to thank God for, if you look hard enough.

We had a friend (who is now deceased) who had a Thank You God Notebook handy at all times. She was (is) a great influence in our lives. Everyday she added to that notebook. She focused on the good. And she thanked God for the “apparent” good, and thanked Him for even the tough stuff. She knew that God would redeem it in some way. And He certainly did.

If it's a marital situation you find it hard to be thankful for, here's something April Motl wrote:

“In our marriages, we don't have control over our spouse's shortcomings (no matter how much nagging or cajoling we might invest). But we do have control over what we focus on. There's always some good quality tucked in our spouse. After all, he (she) was fashioned in the very image of our Lord. So there's something in there that reflects the Lord. And that quality is good.”

### **Additionally:**

Ngina Otiende wrote:

“Sometimes we spend so much time praying about our marriage ‘pain points’ that we forget to spend as much time, if not more, on the ‘praise points.’ Remember to thank God for the good and beautiful in your marriage even as you pursue the greater.”

- **Keep your eyes off of others who “appear” to have it better than you.**

Appearances can be deceiving. We know the back door story to a lot of homes that appear to have it great. But their reality is entirely different. And even if their appearances are true to life, what good does it do to put your energy into focusing on their good so you feel worse? Don’t “comparison shop.”

“Every marriage is different so we have to keep a good perspective of what God has brought us through in our own marriage situation. Comparing our marriage to other marriages is an enormous undue pressure on us. But when we think about what God has brought us through, we regain a perspective filled with thanksgiving.” (*Edward C. Lee*)

As it pertains to your spouse:

“Just like you can’t simultaneously be looking forward and backward, you can’t be looking out for what other people do better than your spouse and look for ways to encourage and motivate him (or her) at the same time. By deliberately choosing to look at your spouse in respect, you’ll be moving your relationship forward, but most importantly, you’ll stop spoiling your marriage by comparing apples to diamonds.” (*Stacy Voss*)

**Another thing Stacy Voss said that is good to keep mind:**

“The greatest remedy to the comparison game is gratitude. The change in perspective is so minor we might not even realize its importance, but its effects can be life-long (and life-giving). Instead of judging who can wipe down counters better, we can train ourselves to get in the habit of simply thanking our spouses for what they do and who they are.” (*From the article, “Apples to Diamonds”*)

It’s good to, “Thank your spouse for something specific you appreciate that he/she did. ‘Thanks for being a great provider’ or ‘Thanks for washing the dishes.’” (*Gary Smalley*) Don’t fall into the trap of taking your spouse for granted. Be generous—be an encourager, even in little things. And don’t forget to give God thanks. Again:

**“Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”**  
(*1 Thessalonians 5:18*) **“Do not grow weary in doing good...”** (*Galatians 6:9*)

- **Focus on what you can learn in the circumstance.**

At this point in my (Steve’s) life I can say that I’m thankful despite my diabetes and because of it. It may be hard to imagine that I could thank God for having Type-1 diabetes. But I’m deeply grateful because of all God has taught me and Cindy because of it. When I was first diagnosed in 1974 I was bitter and

rebellious. In large part it's what led to Cindy and I separating and almost ending our marriage.

But it was during that separation that Cindy surrendered her life to Christ. She then came back home, and shortly afterward I gave my heart to Christ as well.

I am convinced that God used my diabetes to get us to a place where we were desperate for help. In our desperation God drew us to Himself to save us and help us. We've been on a big learning curve ever since.

The other BIG ongoing lesson I learned is just how much I have to depend on God every day due to my disease. I have to continually cling to his promise in 2 Corinthians 12:9: **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."** I'm a living example of Christ's power resting on me. That's why I can be thankful for my affliction. We both are.

### **In your marriage remember:**

"A Christian marriage does not merely exist for the benefit of the two people in the marriage. It is for the benefit of the world, that God would be glorified in it. The main purpose of marriage is not the enjoyment of the two people who are married. The main purpose of marriage is to glorify Christ as we participate in the mission of God." *(Tim Suttle)*

And if you have children, keep in mind:

"Displayed love will help your children see the value of marriage. Having a positive attitude toward marriage will change a million little decisions along the way as they grow. It'll impact who they date, how they date, and what they look for in the people they date. It will impact how they live out their marriage. Our children will set a higher standard because they've seen what to aspire to in your marriage." *(Tricia Goyer)*

We realize that you don't control all of the circumstances involved in your marriage. But you can do your part—looking to Jesus to help you. If you're having a difficult time doing this for your spouse, then do what you should "as unto the Lord."

#### **• Look for laughter.**

We're told in the Bible that it is **"good medicine."** And it is. It can also bond you together. Last night when we were faced with some difficulties, we put a humorous program on TV, and played a card game together. It wasn't much, but it definitely lifted our sour mood. And together, we felt all the more closer. So, look for laughter and then infuse your life with it.

#### **• Make the best of the circumstances you've been handed.**

Every week on our web site people post comments who have been handed devastating circumstances in their marriage. They didn't choose them. Sometimes their family is fractured and they're left financially and emotionally bankrupt. Commonly we see three groups of people emerge who experience this.

The first group composes of those who focus on the pain they're going through and surrender their despair. They see no possibility of ever being able to experience joy again in their lives. (Many give up on God altogether.) The second group acknowledges their pain. But they are able to put it into the context of leaning on God for the help they need to overcome what's been handed to them. They then find themselves thankful despite the pain.

An example of this came recently from a woman who found an article on our web site that God used to change her perspective on her circumstances:

"I am grateful to the Holy Spirit who led me here and to you for such insightful information. I have been married for 20 years but had decided divorce was the answer to my issues. Well, now I know better. It's also about the glory God gets out of the circumstances in my marriage and the decision I make regarding my marriage. Thank you so much."

### **The Thankful Despite... Journey**

The third group in is the process of getting to that place of being thankful despite... We hope that in your disappointing and painful circumstances you can eventually get to the place of being in the second or third group. It's a journey. But hang in there. It's worth it. If you find yourself in an overwhelming, seemingly hopeless situation, hold onto this promise:

**"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them [i.e. your circumstances], for the LORD your God goes with you. He will never leave you nor forsake you."** (Deuteronomy 31:6)

#### **• Try to be a blessing rather than drag others down with you.**

Remember when we referred to the scripture about laughter being the best medicine? Another version of that same scripture verse says, **"A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones."** (Proverbs 17:22) When it comes to our marriages, remember:

"Each day we give a piece of our heart to our spouses. The question is, "Are you providing your spouse with good medicine, or drying their bones by your negative mood?" (Demarquis Johnson)

And what about your bones? What does it do to yours when you continually focus on that, which hurts?

Also work to be kind despite your sour feelings. If you're struggling in this:

"Ask the Lord to put a 'governor' on your tongue today, to enable you to speak only words that reflect the heart of Christ. If you feel the need to 'vent' tell the

Lord what's on your mind, rather than blurting it out to your spouse." (Nancy Leigh DeMoss)

You may also need to (politely) ask your spouse to give you a bit of space so you don't inflict your bad mood on him or her. And then go out for a walk or a drive, or even sit still in a quiet place. Pray, listen to praise music, read your Bible or something else that is positive. Do whatever you can to turn your frown into a smile. I've found that by just making a concerted effort to smile changes my mood. At first, I don't feel much when I plaster a smile on my face. But eventually, as I give it a chance, it really does work.

And lastly:

- **Look for ways to minister to the needs of others.**

Look for someone who needs help, and see if you can help them. In doing so, you take your eyes off of your pain and help to lift someone else out of their pain. It can be a blessing to both of you.

I remember a number of years ago when speaker and writer, Barbara Johnson (of the Women of Faith ministry) was speaking at an event in our town. I was asked to introduce her and be with her throughout the day. In the back room after one of her talks I asked her how she could do what she was doing. I had inside information that she was going through an extremely trying time in her life. I asked her how she was able to laugh and make so many other women laugh when I knew she was crying inside. She pointed out the scripture in Proverbs 11:25. In it we're told,

**"Whoever brings blessing will be enriched. And one who waters will himself be watered."**

Barbara pointed out that most of the women who were there were probably in a lot of pain in one way or another. She said that God has shown her that laughter is the best medicine that she can give them. And in doing so, she forgets her own pain for a while and is refreshed as well! She was so right. We all forgot our pain for a while, and it was healing.

**In closing, above all:**

**"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Colossians 3:15-17)**

© Cindy and Steve Wright (2018)

Permission to republish this material must be sought from [email@marriageemissions.com](mailto:email@marriageemissions.com)

For more Sweet Surprises visit <https://tlcwhk.com/barbaras-sweet-surprises/>