



Helping people encounter God in His Word



For use on Sunday September 14, 2003

Introduction

Reality Check - When Life Requires a Balance ***Pass or Fail: When Life Gives a Test***

When Melanie Bahn arrived at General Hospital with her ex-husband Curtis, they were led to the doctors treating the victims in the emergency room. Since all the survivors of the crash had been unconscious and had no identification in their clothing when they arrived at the hospital, the physicians were uncertain who the victims were. Dr. Katia Miller asked Melanie if she could recognize any clothing from any of the victims.

“Ms. Bahn, do you recognize any of these clothes?” asked Dr. Miller.

“When Jamie left the house for his youth group he had on those camouflage pants and B.U.M. T-shirt,” said Melanie. “I had just gotten him those clothes for the new school year,” she said as she began to cry.

Dr. Miller then said, “We would like to take you to identify Jamie, but it will need to be quick. The young man that the paramedics brought in with this clothing suffered severe injuries. He currently is stable, but has internal injuries that threaten his life. He needs immediate surgery and we need to have your signature to operate.”

As Curtis Colton, Jamie’s dad, took the clipboard and signed it he asked Dr. Miller grimly, “What are his chances of survival?”

“At this point we don’t know the full extent of his internal injuries. But being that he is currently stable gives us great hope. We’ll give you updates as quickly as we can. Let’s go to Jamie now so he can get to surgery,” said an insistent Dr. Miller directing Melanie and Curtis to the room.

Melanie was crying. Curtis was in a daze. They both looked through the window at the blonde young man lying on the table. There was blood on the floor and on the boy’s face. He was covered with surgical sheets, IV tubes were hanging above him, and tubes were coming out of his mouth. Monitors blinked about him and beeps could be heard as his heart was beating. Melanie looked and blurted out, “Jamie!” Curtis just stared without saying anything and then quickly turned away.

Dr. Miller then said, “I’m sorry you won’t be able to stay much longer with him. We need to rush him into surgery. You have about a minute.”

Both Curtis and Melanie quickly went to his side, grabbed his hands and told Jamie they loved him. Melanie told Jamie they’d be praying for him and told him to fight for his life. Then as quickly as they had come in they were escorted out so the orderlies could take Jamie to surgery. Dr. Miller said that they’d get updates on Jamie’s progress, but they would need to wait in the surgery waiting area on the sixth floor.

On the way to the sixth floor, Curtis, who had been eerily quiet blurted out angrily to Melanie, “Why did you let him go to that stupid church group! If he had stayed home, we wouldn’t be in this mess! Some God you have! Where was He when this whole thing happened? Why didn’t He stop it? You just couldn’t keep your faith from screwing up our kid! I left you because of this God crap and now it is taking my son’s life!”

Melanie looked down and calmly said, “You know, Curtis, I am just as scared as you are for Jamie, but God is not responsible for this accident. Jamie’s faith is not to blame either. You’ll just have to believe me when I say God will see us through. I know He will.”

Curtis glared at Melanie and said, “Just shut up! I don’t want to hear that junk.”

Observation

What do you see?

James 1:5-12

⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. ⁶But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does. ⁹The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. ¹⁰But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. ¹¹For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business. ¹²Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

1 Peter 4:16-19

¹⁶However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. ¹⁷For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" ¹⁹So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

✦ **Record your first impressions from what you read.**

! Interact with the passages

- In James, circle "ask" and "wisdom," then draw an arrow from "ask" to "wisdom."
- Put a square around "but." Draw an arrow to "must believe and not doubt."
- Highlight "doubt" in v. 6 and draw a picture next to the passage of a wave tossed by the wind this way and that. From "doubt" draw an arrow to your picture.
- Draw an arrow from your picture of the wave to v. 7 "should not think he will receive anything." Draw an arrow from "anything" to "wisdom."
- In v. 12 underline "perseveres," "stood the test," and "receive the crown."
- From "stood the test" draw an arrow to the chart you drew to the finances the rich and poor man both have. Then draw an arrow from "receive the crown," to the position on your chart the rich and poor man have on earth.
- In 1 Peter, highlight "suffer" and underline "do not be ashamed," "praise," "commit," and "continue." Draw arrows from "suffer" to the words underlined.

Interpretation

What does it mean?

When trials come it is natural to try to blame someone and play the victim, but a **Christian who faces trials must continually deny their right to blame others and play the victim and submit themselves to God's sovereign actions and seek His wisdom to be faithful and continue as their faith is matured by the test.**

Insights

- The “ask” in James 1:5 is a command.
- The “should not think” is a command and is used in a negative sense indicating wrong judgment or conceit.
- The “unstable” is a word that is used both for political disturbances and of individual characters who ‘do not know their own mind’ in all their activities and conduct.
- The “take pride” is a command and means boasting over a privilege or possession.
- “Humble circumstances,” means poor with no possessions and the “high position,” refers to the present spiritual status the Christian enjoys in his dependent relationship on Christ.
- In v. 11 the term “beauty” can imply the notion of stateliness or majesty.
- The “crown” was used in games as a wreath upon the winner’s head, but coupled with “of life” can indicate receiving an eternal crown of life in contrast to the temporal fading wreath of flowers given to the winner of a game.
- The commands in 1 Peter are “not be ashamed,” “praise,” “to begin,” and “should commit.”

Answering Questions of Interpretation

1. Why is wisdom coupled with trials and not answers or relief? What does this mean when we look at our natural tendencies to try to escape pain and suffering found in trials?
2. The term “unstable” gives an indication of a lifestyle of vacillation. Can doubting become an indication that someone’s spiritual life is underdeveloped? If so, how are they underdeveloped? Can this term “unstable” indicate only a temporary doubt or anxiety? Or does the term mean a continued doubt having lasting implications? Why or why not? What would the long-lasting implications be?
3. Is James implying that the poor are better than the rich? Why or why not? What does other passages in Scripture say about this issue? What applications do these passages bear on the Church and its people? How can we be balanced in our applications without being overly radical? Or do we really need to be radical in the applications? Why or why not?
4. How do people commit themselves to God through a trial as 1 Peter says? What does it look like? How does continually doing good affect us in a trial?

Application

What do I do?

Am I considered rich? What makes me rich, my possessions or my walk with God? Do I find I don’t seek God’s help as much because I feel secure with my checkbook balance? Why or why not? How do we humble ourselves if we have many possessions? How can I grow closer to God if I do not have to depend on Him through daily financial trials?

How have I handled the trials I have faced in the past? Have I had times when I was double-minded? When? How has God shown me His faithfulness in the past? What things make me doubt that God is able to take care of me? What comfort does it give me knowing that God is willing to give me wisdom to endure trials? How can I persevere in faithfulness or commit myself to God through trials? What steps do I sense I need to take?

Correlation

How do we work this into our Home Group, Family, youth group, ministry, class, small group?

Core Virtue: Faithfulness

Creed: I am faithful to fulfill God's will for my life.

Commentary: Trials will always come whether you believe in Christ or not. When facing trials, it is comforting for people to know that they do not have to stand alone. Christians always have someone who stands with them through the trials they face; a loving God who interacts and helps them. God is willing to give His children His wisdom and His Spirit's presence when facing trials. God is faithful to His children and has their best interests at heart even when they are tested by trials.

Many times the problems related to trials bring doubts into our minds; doubts that question whether God is able or willing to help us through. Focusing on these problems can lead our minds to think about God erroneously and add confusion. When we humble ourselves and commit ourselves to God's guidance, love, and overall faithfulness, we allow His Spirit to change our minds to help us continue to walk with God faithfully, even through the trial. Faithfulness in following God regardless of circumstances is spiritual fruit given by the Spirit.

Even when a trial does not turn out in our favor, the lessons we have learned and changes made in our hearts, being humble and more dependent upon God, gives us greater blessings and rewards not only now, but also in eternity. The present rewards appear as a more Christ-like character and maturing faith, and the eternal rewards are eternal life and God's praises.

Question: Describe a time when you had to depend on God through a trial. What doubts crept into your mind as to whether God would be there? How did you see God provide wisdom or guidance for you during the trial? How does seeing God be faithful make it easier for us to want to be faithful to Him? How can we keep in step with the Spirit to continue to be faithful?

Kid's Corner: - Learning about Faith

Say: I need one volunteer. Your name is Faith. All you other children get to play as well and are named Doubt. Faith will stand, alone in the middle. Now, Doubt, I want you to gently push Faith around the room. Faith you must let Doubt move you as they want. (*Let the kids move Faith around the room.*)

Say: Okay, now I need 3 adult volunteers. You are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I want Faith to stand in the middle and then Father, Son, and Holy Spirit I want you to interlock arms with each other around Faith. Now I want Doubt to try to get Faith to move from where he/she is the same way they did before. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will resist Doubt's attempts to move Faith. Faith, you will have Doubt touch you but you will not move because you are safe inside the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (*Let kids try to move Faith from inside the adults.*)

Say: Faith in Jesus can help keep us from changing values and thoughts or moving all about when trials and doubts come. The Father, Son and Spirit of God helps, anchors and protects you. **Read:** James 1:5, 6, 12



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