



DEVOTIONS FOR THOSE WHO ARE BEING TESTED BY LIFE

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RECOVERY: Not a Game for the Timid

2 Timothy 1:7

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

Recovering from a stroke (or any other major health challenge) is not a game for the timid. It is exhausting work. It requires a constant desire to continue on, to strive to make new gains through grueling effort. It is the ultimate contest, the **ultimate endurance challenge**.

The **hard work** can take many different forms in the recovery process. At first, **hard work** might simply be taking a step, washing a dish, or washing yourself. Then as time goes by, the **hard work** might mean straining to make the treadmill move for a half hour, or to add five more pounds to the weight you want to lift. Recovery means just that, recovering the ability to do things that were easy once upon a time. Recovery means **pushing past frustration**, in order to achieve your goals.

Christians are in the best possible position to make gains back toward what once was normal, because we know that God is with us every step of the way though life and we trust that **"with God all things are possible."**

In the Scripture for this devotion, we find the veteran apostle named Paul reminding the young pastor named Timothy of the bold spirit Christians can draw upon when challenged. Paul says, **God didn't give us faith to make us weak, but rather to fill us with his power, his strength.** He further reminded Timothy, this faith demonstrates itself in love. And lastly, Paul states, the faith with which God equips us makes us disciplined, **able to rise to meet any problem** that confronts us - be it physical or spiritual.

Because of our faith, we don't have to lead timid lives. We can draw upon God's power to help us overcome our challenges. Instead of moping over what *"used to be,"* we find strength in the Lord to strive to regain what used to be. In fact, the **strength of character that faith provides can be applied to every difficult situation** we face in life. We can live **boldly** because God is with us, **there is nothing timid about being a Christian.**

Prayer

Dear Lord, fill my life with boldness. Give me the strength to strive to recover. Give me the strength to live for you, in all that I do. Help me to demonstrate my faith through love and self-discipline. Amen.

"I AM NOT WORTHY" (Count Your Blessings Daily)

Genesis 32:10

I am not worthy of the least of all your mercies, and of all the kindnesses, which you have showed to me, your servant.

These words were uttered by Jacob on the occasion of his return to his homeland after being absent for twenty years. Jacob remembered what life had been like on that long-past day when he had left his father's home - he was poor. All he could lay claim to on the day he had left was his shepherd's staff and the clothes that he wore.

God had blessed him greatly across the twenty years that he lived with his Uncle Laban. He was returning home with so much wealth that he was able to divide his family, servants, and animals into two very large groups. **Jacob had a chance to stop and count his blessings** as he prepared for his homecoming. As he did so, he came to realize that he didn't deserve any of the blessings, and he candidly said so as he spoke to God in prayer.

We, also, can say, "I am not worthy." God has so richly blessed us, and we don't deserve any of it. He crafted this beautiful planet for us to call home. Everyday he provides for his creatures here on planet earth, us included. We enjoy the warmth of his sunshine, the singing of his birds, the beauty of his flowers, the bounty of the crops and plants he puts around us, the refreshment of his rain/water. He gives us days of health, the strength and wisdom that allows us to work and play - to live. He has given us our family and friends. Far above all the other manifold gifts, stands the **greatest Gift - the Savior Jesus** - the forgiveness he has won and given us, the eternal life he has opened to us.

Truly, we must confess (like Jacob) as we look at the many missteps and mistakes that follow us, *"I am not worthy"* of any of these blessings. I am a sinful human being. But like Jacob, we also realize the sweetness of our God's forgiveness. And, **we thank Him for the blessings that we enjoy daily** because of his love and goodness.

Prayer

Dear Lord, we thank you for your mercies toward us. Even though we deserve nothing, we pray that you would continue to bless us, and to give us hearts that recognize your goodness with gratitude. We ask this for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Stop Using a "Shovel"

Jeremiah 29:12,13

Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Imagine that you were given the task of erecting a new fence. You were supplied with everything you needed to do the job: fencing materials and a shovel for excavating areas for the main supports. For hours you labored, toiling under the hot sun, to dig the required holes. All the while, a power auger sat nearby unused as you opted to use the manual tool. Seems rather foolish, doesn't it? **Why expend all that energy** when the same task could have been easily accomplished with a tool that was at hand? Why?

Foolish! That's what we are at times. We are confronted with tasks and challenges by life, and foolishly endeavor to accomplish them by ourselves. Our abilities alone are puny, sometimes laughably so. We opt to use our **"shovels"** to deal with life's troubles, while the **"tool"** that would help to easily best any chore, any burden, is always right at hand - **prayer**.

As believing children of the heavenly Father we have the right to pray and the expectation to be heard. **Our Father promises not only to listen, but also to help**. It doesn't matter how mundane something may seem to us, God is never too busy for us. When we turn to him, he is always there.

A heart-to-heart talk with God, that is what prayer is. In the busy-ness of our daily lives we often forget to slow things down to have that talk. Foster a better prayer life. Make talking with God a priority in your life. Set aside regular times for prayer. Begin your tasks with prayer for God's blessing. Stop, when confronted by stinging situations, and ask for God's guidance and help. In short, **put down the "shovels" and pick up something much more powerful**. No matter the task, with God nothing is impossible!

Prayer

Dear Lord, help me to depend more and more upon you and not upon myself. Teach me to call upon you in any and all circumstances. Remind me that you are always near. Foster in my heart, love that calls out to you with my joys and sorrows. When I pray, hear and help me for Jesus' sake. Amen.

A Word of Advice about "STUFF"

Proverbs 17:1

Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife.

You have probably heard it said, "**Watch out or you might get what you are praying for!!**" That is good advice at times. For example, when it comes to the material things of this world, we're advised regularly that more is better. "*Careful,*" says Solomon. That view of life, while popular in every era of history, is not necessarily true. **Money does not bring happiness**, for happiness and contentment have no price tag. **Peace of soul is not for sale.**

Solomon sadly came to understand the truth of his own words. He was blessed with the best of everything, in quantities that surely made the rich and famous people of his day envious. Yet, **his home-life was filled with strife.** He married women who worshipped false gods and he tolerated this blasphemy against the true God in his home.

Solomon's problems became internal as well, his heart became so jaded by this life, that his faith was lost. A wise man became an utter fool, losing his grasp on what was truly important in life.

The lessons of the past have been recorded so that we might steer clear of devil's traps that others have stepped into. The trap of earthly things is still set in our day. **How easy it is for us to worry about keeping up with the neighbors.** How tempting it is to get caught up in the chase for stuff and to measure our worth by our stuff. **How foolish it is** to spend one's life chasing things that lose their meaning and luster on the day we close our eyes in death. Yes, it is foolish to be consumed by a desire for things that last a few years, if in the process of chasing we lose sight of that which is of eternal worth.

We need to shake ourselves and say, "**Everything I have has been measured out in just the right quantity for me by my loving Lord. I am content.**" We need to see that our stuff, is just stuff. What is truly of value is our faith, which guarantees us a place in God's family and in his heaven. **Faith is priceless.** Better to have crumbs in peace and keep hold of our faith, that to have a mansion and to die spiritually poor.

Prayer

Jesus, remind me of how fleeting the things of this world really are. They last but years in comparison to the crown of eternal life you have given me. Teach me to value my faith as the most precious possession I have. Guide me in my life's choices to put my love for you always at the front of life. Guard my heart from failing to be content. Give me peace. Amen.

Where is Your Soul Anchored?

Hebrew 6:19

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.

As I sit and write this devotion today, I am preparing to leave for a cemetery to **conduct the graveside service for a friend**. Death is a part of life. The scene that will be played out shortly - the hearse and casket, the prepared grave, the weeping relatives - will be a scene featured in all our lives. **It isn't easy to think about, but we will all face death**. If it were your funeral I was conducting today, what would I be able to say? **Would the graveside be a place of hope or hopelessness?**

The writer of Hebrews declares that as a Christian I have hope that is sure because of whom that hope is placed in. The Lord that I worship is King over heaven and earth. There is nothing beyond the scope of his power. He even cheated death - an enemy that seems so powerful - and promises that he will use his power to allow me to cheat the grave, too. **My life does not end with some mumbled platitudes and a box lowered into the ground. Through Christ I am able to see that death is really a doorway which leads to life eternal.**

On the other hand, if my future depended upon me - my abilities, my goodness - it would not be certain at all. In fact, **because of my many failings, it would be downright frightening to face God at life's end**. But, as the letter of Hebrews reminds us, **we have sure hope** because we are never alone. Jesus is with us. And Jesus makes our hope sure, certain. Our lease to a heavenly home was signed with his blood. Nothing can ever challenge or change that - not even death.

When life confronts you with hardship look to Jesus and find the anchor which stands unmovable in any and all life-storms. **Jesus changes a hopeless end into endless hope!**

Prayer

Dearest Jesus, thank you for being the One who guards my life. Because of you, I have sure hope that is unshaken even in the face of death. Be with me, and when my time comes, take me by the hand and lead me into your heaven. May that confidence of faith always serve to anchor my soul. Amen

Lord, Make Me Humble!

1 Peter 5:6,7

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's almighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

There is an old prayer that goes something like this: **"Dear Lord, I ask you for patience. Lord, give me this gift NOW!"** Our human nature is like that. When we want something, we want it now. When we feel we need relief from something uncomfortable, sooner is better than later in our estimation.

No wonder Peter reminds us to *"humble"* ourselves, to push back this propensity of our nature in order to let God be God. **Humbling ourselves means** to be aware and accepting of the fact that God's timing is not always in accord with our wants. Humbling ourselves before the Lord also means that we will be aware, no matter what our simple brains might think, that in all the scenes of life through which we pass - easy and hard - God "cares" for us. Nothing happens to us that is not attached to this promise. **Both good and bad are used to shape and mold our faith.** God doesn't always remove hardship, rather through the time of testing in our life he sharpens and strengthens our faith just as a craftsman uses fire to forge a piece of steel.

We also have the promise that at just the right time God will lift us up. That means when the timing is right God will answer our prayer by saying **NOW**. Because of Jesus, we have the confidence that when life here on this earth is done, **God will say "now" and lift us up to live forever in heaven** - where all the burdens that challenge us now will be no more.

Humble yourselves, cast all your worries and problems on God. He cares. He hears. He helps, in just the right way at just the right time. Trust. Believe. Live with that certainty.

Prayer

Dearest Jesus, I know that at times the weakness of my nature causes me to doubt and not trust as I should. Teach me to depend upon your help in my life. You know what is best for me. Let me humbly accept whatever you deem best. Help me see that in due time you will lift me up, taking away my burdens - whether that be here in time or in eternity. I thank you for your loving care. Amen.

Stopping a Pity Party

1 Kings 19:4,5

He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep.

These words from 1 Kings describe God's prophet **Elijah** at a very **low-point** in his life. Only days before, things had seemed so positive. A great contest had taken place at Mount Carmel, where **Elijah had emerged victorious** and the followers of the false god named Baal had been defeated. Shortly thereafter, the queen named **Jezebel** (a follower of Baal) boldly asserted that she was going to put all the power of the throne behind her desire to end Elijah's life. **Elijah**, the formerly bold prophet, **ran like a scared rabbit** because of the threat. We meet up with him when, tired from all the running, he not only fell beneath a broom tree but also fell into the **trap of self-pity**.

It is an easy trap to fall into, isn't it? When things don't go as planned (our plan), we despair and in so doing we really shake our fists defiantly against God. In effect, **our brooding belies hearts that are angry with God for not bending to our wants**, for choosing a path for our lives that we wouldn't have chosen.

God didn't leave Elijah alone to die like the prophet requested. **God still had things for Elijah to do**. If you read all of **1 Kings 19**, you discover how the Lord helped Elijah to get past his despair, picked him up from his **pity party**, and sent him on to do the work he had in mind for him to do.

Sometimes life's troubles seem so severe that we are tempted to just *"hang it up."* This is a common occurrence in the lives of stroke victims. ***I want to die! I don't want to be a burden to my family!*** How do you deal with self-pity, either as a victim or a caregiver? The advice to *"dig down deep and find it in yourself to go on,"* is poor advice. **Turn your heart instead to the Lord.**

Since you are still here, **the Lord has things for you to do**. Search for those special things. Even if it is just hugging a child or being hugged, that is something so special and wondrous. You have an opportunity in a special way to witness to others about God's love. Turn to the Lord, **the Lord will pick you up and send you on your way. He will help you overcome self-pity.**

Prayer

Dear Lord, sometimes life is so hard that I despair. Forgive me, for I know despair is really my heart not being willing to accept my life's path without complaint. Lift me up. Allow me to see the blessings that are part of my everyday. Take away my grumbling, replacing it with praise for your goodness to me. Set me on the way that leads me to serve you with my life. Amen.

"What Do I Do When My Life Gets Hard"

Psalm 119:71

It is good for me that I have been afflicted.

We usually think of any trouble, be it illness or sorrow, as something bad in our lives. **How amazing** it is then, when the Psalmist says that **it is good he experienced trouble** in life. What did the writer of these words mean?

God may send us troubles of various types, but He always has a reason in doing so. He tells us in his Word that *"we know that all things are always working together towards some good purpose for those people who love God"* (**Romans 8:28**). **All things** also include the trying times we face in this life.

Why is it good for us to experience such things? Often we become **too sure of ourselves** and forget where God fits into our lives. We forget to depend upon Him all of the time, in everything we do. But when heartaches come our way, **we remember to come back to God** and pray for His help. When we face troubles, we also are reminded how other people feel when they are facing problems. Such knowledge equips us to be **more empathetic and caring** as we look at the people around us.

Consider also that if we had no problems in this life, we would most likely face **the terrible temptation of clinging to this life** and its pleasures, to the point of forgetting the wonderful home and life God has prepared for us in heaven. **Sorrows are to make us long** for that place where we will shed no tears.

Truly, along with the Psalmist we can say, ***It is good for me that I have been afflicted.*** Let us always accept the difficulties that come into our lives in that spirit. Let's see **the silver lining in any and all troubles**. God is using these experiences to **help our faith grow** stronger.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, help me always to recognize, even when times are hard, your love towards me... Help me to say with a believing heart, "Your will be done" and to trust with absolute confidence that your will is always best for me. Help me to pass through the sorrows of this life so that I will safely enter my eternal home in heaven. Amen.

Drink from the Well of Salvation!

John 4:13,14

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again, but the person who drinks the water I will give him will never get thirsty -- never!"

Jesus and his disciples were on the move again, heading for the area known as Galilee. On the way to their destination they passed through Samaria. **Jesus sat down beside a well-known well** (a type of wayside rest area of the ancient world) and his disciples went on into a nearby village to purchase needed supplies for the group.

As Jesus sat there, **a woman came to get water from the well**. Jesus spoke to her and asked her to give him a drink of the water she had drawn. The woman, a Samaritan, was surprised that Jesus would offer conversation. The Jews and Samaritans were at odds. She said, **"I am surprised that you, a Jew, would ask me, a Samaritan, for a drink of water!"** Jesus said to her, **"If only you knew what a wonderful gift God is ready to give you, and if you knew who I am, you would ask me for water that gives life. The person who drinks the water I give will never get thirsty- never!"**

Jesus was not speaking to the woman (or to you and me) about **earthly water** that comes from a well. He was telling us about the way of eternal salvation which flows freely in the well of God's Word. **Whoever hears that Word of God and believes that Jesus is their Savior receives forgiveness of sins and the promise of life forever**. That person therefore receives something **far more refreshing** and satisfying than physical water.

God's powerful Word creates faith in hearts. **Every time we pause at the wayside of God's Word, our faith in Christ grows stronger**. May we be faithful hearers and learners of the Word, on days that are easy and on days that are difficult.

Prayer

Loving Father, we thank You for giving us Your precious Word. Bless us with strengthened faith as we hear Your promises. Fill us with the spiritual water that satisfies our souls. Amen.

Jesus Does All Things Perfectly!

Mark 7:37

"Now everything is perfect" they said. He's even making deaf people hear and dumb people talk!"

Jesus had healed a deaf-mute, a man who couldn't hear or speak. **People were astonished** at the magnitude of this miracle. They said, **"Now everything is perfect, he's even making deaf people hear and dumb people talk!"**

Has this Jesus also done things perfectly in our lives? Of course He has!! Sometimes the Lord allows suffering, problems, even sorrow, to touch us. These things are used to draw us closer to Him. These are the types of circumstances in life that causes our faith to grow. **Hard times are never pleasant, but they can and do serve to benefit us.**

Stop in your place in life today and realize that Jesus does many wonderful things for you. **He adds healing to your life** when you are ill. He is the one who blesses you with health and strength. **He protects you from harm** and danger. **He laid down his life to take away your sins and open heaven to you.**

Certainly, we all have reason to be totally astonished at the Lord's mighty acts in our day. When we consider how good God has been to us, we cannot help but exclaim like those of long ago, **"Now everything is perfect."**

Although we know and trust that truth, there are things that happen here in this life that we won't always fully understand. **God's ways are higher than our ability to figure out.** However, what we don't understand here on earth, we one day may understand in heaven. As the hymn writer said:

***There, some day we will understand
What now seems hard to tell;
There we shall say with firmer voice;
God hath done all things well!***

Prayer

We thank you, Savior, that You have done all things perfectly for us. Help us to trust you, wherever the path of life may take us. We know that Your Ways are always right and good. Amen.

How to Find Forgiveness

Luke 18:13,14

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven but beat his breast and said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Being a tax collector carried a far worse stigma in the ancient world than working for the IRS does today. **The tax collectors of Jesus' day** had gone to work for the enemy - Rome - and became wealthy by evil means, abusing their government sanctioned authority to extract taxes from the populace. As such, **they were loathed by their fellow Jews**. In fact, it was considered the highest shame to be related to a tax collector.

In the parable Jesus tells, the tax collector departs from the temple cleansed from his sin, while a very public *religious* man leaves with his sin still squarely on his shoulders. Why? As you listen to the tax collector speak with God, you hear the words of **a person who is truly penitent about sin**. He recognized that sin is so evil, so wrong, that it stood between him and God. **The sinner cried out for God's mercy... and received that mercy**, being justified (declared forgiven and right) by God. The other man, because his religion was outward and not of the heart, **asked for no mercy and received no mercy**.

When we inspect our own life, we find that we have much in common with the tax collector. No, we probably have not used our position in life to extort money from our neighbor. But what about the many other sins against God we commit with our mind, our mouth, our muscles? Every unkind word is a wrong done against our God. Every impure thought is a breaking of his will for our lives. Every misdeed, gross or small by our estimation, is an offense in God's sight. **We carry a mountain of sin in this life** - everyone of us.

When we see that clearly, then and only then will we be like the tax collector, **begging for God to be merciful in his dealings with us**. Then and only then will we grasp the magnitude of what transpired on a cross long ago, as God punished his Son for all our sins. That's right! Our sins! **The events at the cross become very personal** when we realize that our sins made Jesus' cross necessary. Then we see our sins, repent and look to God for forgiveness.

And, then because of Jesus **we receive forgiveness**. Like the tax collector, the weight of sin is taken off our shoulders and left at the foot of Jesus' cross. **May God grant you both the ability to humbly confess your sins to him, and then the confidence that all your sins, whatever they might be, are forgiven - totally, completely, forever.**

Prayer

Dear Jesus, help me to see myself honestly, so that I place my trust not in myself - but always in you. By faith, give me peace of mind and soul that is found only in your forgiveness! Amen.

How to Stave Off FEAR

Matthew 10:29,30

"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."

People have asked what it is like to *"have your health taken away so quickly?"* More than once, after listening to my story they have commented, ***"That must have been so hard. Were you afraid?"*** I have to be honest, I don't think a person could be human and not wrestle fear in such circumstances. So... **I was scared, and at the same time unafraid.** You might think, *"Wait a minute, that's double-speak. What do you mean?"*

I was scared of the earthly consequences of such an acute condition, **yet the peace of soul that I have as a child of God was never challenged or taken away.** Passages like the section of Matthew cited at the beginning of this devotion are so important as we pass through the tough spots in this life. Jesus reminds us of how even seemingly insignificant little creatures, creatures we often fail to notice, are still important to their Creator. **Not one of the sparrows** lives its life outside the loving knowledge of the one who gives the gift of life. So, if God is mindful of these little sparrows, **how much more important are the lives of those for whom he sent his Son to live and die and rise?**

What do we have to be afraid of? God has his eyes fixed upon us. He loves us. He knows the course of our days. He knows our joys. He knows our sorrows. He has promised, ***"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."*** So we can say with confidence, ***"The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid"*** (Hebrews 13:5,6).

That is **the confidence that staves off fear.** We have that confidence whether we are fighting the effects of a stroke, wrestling with the flu, battling problems on the job, or tackling troubles in our family life. **We sometimes must face things that cause our knees to shake,** but with God's help our knees won't buckle. Through any and all adversity our God stands beside us and helps us. So, **we really don't have anything to fear. God is bigger than any concern that we will ever face.**

Prayer

Dear Lord, drive fear from my heart when difficulties beset me. Allow me to look beyond the problems to see that you are with me. I know that your strength is mine, and with you all things are possible. Give me the joy that comes from knowing I am never alone. Remind me that I am worth more than many sparrows (especially when I forget). Thank you for loving me enough to sacrifice your Son for my sins. Because of that love, I know there is nothing I need fear. Amen.