

Dealing With Tough Times

(Addendum No. 2 to a prophetic word titled "The Coming Perfect Storm" that was received by John Paul Jackson in August 2008)

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You and I are living in a turbulent time. The perfect storm continues to swirl and won't begin to dissipate for a few more years. By the time you receive this, the stock market will still be in full swing, with an emphasis upon that word "swing"; the next president of the United States will have been elected; and you will have made choices and taken steps toward your future.

What are the tough times all about?

Obviously, tough times are just that—and they can go far beyond that description as well. They are often disappointing, frustrating and filled with tension and anxiety. However, if you focus on what you have lost or might lose, how difficult your life has become or what might happen, you will miss the most important aspects of why God allows times like these to begin with.

What is one of the most noticeable things that sets you apart from your neighbors and co-workers who don't have a personal relationship with Jesus? Isn't it often how you handle these tough times? There are four things that must be etched onto your spirit in order for you to succeed in this turbulent time.

What you do with your circumstances. First, tough times are not about what happens to you— they're about what you do with what happens to you. God, in knowing all things, was not ignorant about this era of your life. In fact, He has spent your whole life preparing you for this moment and others that you are yet to face. Will you keep believing that He'll use everything you go through for His kingdom purposes? Or will

you sour along with so many others who base their relationship with God on their prosperity? Tough times prove our faith.

You: Influencing others. Second, tough times are about influence. How you handle these times will have great influence on two sets of individuals: those who watch how you handle your own adversity and those who will be changed by the counsel you give them. Now, I don't mean the answers you may or may not have for them—everyone has answers, usually of the negative kind. But here I mean counsel that gives them hope. Hope that helps them discover a God who knows their potential, a God who's taking them on a journey of discovering new adventures and possibilities they may never have thought about. Hope that aids them in making different choices than they may previously have made. Hope that allows their creativity to spring forward when others around them are in despair. Perhaps you need this kind of hope as well.

God allows tough times to happen so that massive, lovely, brilliant, you'll-want-this change is the result. And He will use you to deposit this hope in others. He birthed you, created you, shaped you for such a time as this. You won't only make it, but you will be an example for others, and as such you will have more influence than ever.

The stuff of champions. Third, it is the people who focus on others and guard their words—that is, people who order their conversation to reflect the provision and kindness of God, even in the midst of the storm—who will see His salvation.

There isn't a single generation that hasn't gone through tough times. Yes, some are tougher than others, but as the Lord once told me, "Little battles produce little victories and result in little champions. Great battles produce great victories and result in great champions. Which do you want to be?"

The justice of God and a faithful heart. Fourth, the first thought most Christians have when tough times hit is to diminish or even stop their giving. Wow—wrong move! It was the widow of Zarephath's faithful, sacrificial giving in the middle of a severe drought that threw open the door for her to

prosper. Paul exhorted the church in Philippi to give so that fruit would be added to their account. He urged the church in Corinth to be like the poorest church in Macedonia, which had given to the Lord's work even in the midst of deep poverty and affliction (see 2 Cor. 8:1-4). When Paul returned to the Macedonian church a few years later, he found them prospering.

It is the gift you willingly give that allows God's justice to be active on your behalf. In tough times especially, you really want God to act on your behalf! This is why Paul told the church in Philippi that, more than the financial gift he needed, he desired that heaven's fruit would abound in their lives. That fruit is what God gives to feed and bless and meet the needs of all who give to Him.