

4 Encouraging Truths for Your Overwhelming Difficulties

If you are married, you can probably remember the day you gave your vows to your spouse. Although you may have said, “For better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health,” you were probably thinking something different. Your mind was assuring the rest of yourself that your future would be full of “better, richer and healthy.” After all, you were in love. And love conquers all.

Right.

If you are a parent, you can probably remember the earliest days of your children’s lives. Sure, they were needy and messy and sometimes fussy, but you had great expectations that they would grow into perfect children. Other people have to deal with the terrible two’s and strong wills and teenagers with attitudes, but not you. Your kids were going to be a constant joy and a reflection of your superior parenting skills.

Sure.

Somewhere along the way, your family life got difficult.

At some point, you realized that your spouse can be irritating at times. Or that you have different priorities. Or maybe there was an offense that grew into bitterness that evolved into full-fledged emotional disconnect. Whatever the case, you realized that marriage is harder than you thought it would be. Sometimes you feel like giving up.

Maybe your kids haven’t turned out like you hoped. They’re not easy to raise, and you often feel overwhelmed. They drain you physically when they’re little and destroy you emotionally when they’re older. Their poor choices make you wonder what horrible person raised them. Parenting is harder than you

thought it would be.

What do you do when your family life is difficult?

It's easy to believe the lie that everyone else out there is knocking it out of the park while you are struggling. Social media certainly doesn't help. But the truth is that every family goes through seasons that are incredibly painful and hard. Some are brief, and some go on for years. Some you can easily resolve, but some you can't, no matter how hard you try. In the middle of your family struggles, there are at least four things you need to remember.

1. When things are difficult, you are experiencing exactly what Jesus promises.

Somewhere along the way, our American dream-infused Christianity has convinced us that following Jesus will result in a carefree life with no problems. Thanks a lot, Joel Osteen. It's easy to forget that Jesus said that following Him means we will have trouble in life. Our families are not immune to that.

2. When things are difficult, you grow.

In *Wild at Heart*, John Eldredge tells the story of coaching a man who was considering leaving his "difficult" wife for an "easier" woman. Eldredge asked him which of the two women most required him to be conformed to the image of Christ. The answer was easy. God isn't interested in our comfort as much as in our holiness. The reality is that you don't grow when things are easy. You grow when you face trials.

3. When things are difficult, you get desperate for God.

When life is easy, you tend to coast in your self-sufficiency. Nothing will put you on your face and crying out to God more than facing a trial. God wants us to realize our dependence on Him, and that rarely happens when things are running smoothly

in our homes. The psalms are full of honest and desperate cries to God for help. The great thing is that those who seek Him, find Him.

4. When you persevere through a difficult season, God is more able to use you.

God wants to use you for His purposes and to join Him in His redemptive work in the world. Nothing prepares you for that more than experiencing His redemption in your own life. When you have been comforted by God, you are able to comfort others. If you're in the middle of something very difficult in your marriage or with your kids, remember God never wastes a hurt. He can get you through it, and He will use it to encourage someone else.

So why does it have to be so hard?

Let's be clear: God doesn't make your life difficult as a punishment. If you sin and experience the natural consequences of it, then that's on you, not God. And God doesn't make your life difficult to make you run to Him. That would be like a father beating his child and then expecting her to like him for it. That's not His nature.

No, we encounter difficulties because we live in a sinful, fallen world. It's broken. And thus, there is some sort of pain in each of our families. God knows this. In the midst of the difficult and seemingly impossible challenges we face in our homes, God is there. He wants to walk through it with us. He wants to bring hope and redemption to even the most difficult parts of our family lives.

Your home life may not always be easy, but God does promise us abundance and joy. You can find that, even in the days that are hard.

So don't lose hope. Don't give up. If things are difficult in your home, welcome to the club. We all experience it. Ask God

to grow you, to draw close to you and to use you for something good in the lives of others. {eo}

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