

Praise Him in the Meltdown

Learn how to fight discouragement in times of adversity.

☒ Last year was not an easy year. On the national front we endured a divisive presidential campaign, a mortgage crisis, soaring gas prices, low consumer confidence, renewed tensions with Russia, bank failures, layoffs, selloffs, buyouts, bailouts and meltdowns—plus a storm that almost wiped Galveston off the map.

It was also a tough year spiritually. Moral failures and divorces among Christian leaders have left many disillusioned. Politics has bitterly divided the church. Ministries have had to cut back because of the economic downturn. Some of my friends are joking about buying “I SURVIVED 2008” T-shirts.

All the uncertainty tends to drag us down. But trials are a blessing in disguise when we respond properly to them. In times of adversity, there are four sure ways we can fight discouragement:

1. Get your praise on. King David knew the key to spiritual survival. In tough times he ran to the secret place. Throughout his life, praise was the soundtrack playing in the background.

When difficulties closed in on David, he shut himself away and prayed, sang, shouted and danced. He said with confidence: “Though war arise against me, in spite of this I shall be confident” (Ps. 27:3, NASB). When your soul has been overwhelmed by bad news, you must counteract it by declaring your faith out loud.

If you are fighting discouragement, go in a room, shut the door and tell God how awesome He is. The heaviness will lift.

The book of Psalms is in the middle of the Bible because

praise is the core of the Christian life. If you praise God only once a week in church, you may survive but you won't thrive. Many Christians are defeated because personal time with God isn't a priority.

2. Soak in God's Word. The author of Psalm 119 found his encouragement in the Word of God, and it sustained him during the tough times. He wrote: "Though I have become like a wineskin in the smoke, I do not forget Your statutes" (v. 83).

Many Christians today think studying the Bible is optional. Yet when adversity comes, they experience personal crisis because they aren't building their lives on anything solid.

We charismatics think we can make it through difficult times just by having visions, dreams and Technicolor experiences with God. Of course, we need those special moments desperately. But manifestations of the Holy Spirit alone do not solidify our character or make us faithful. The Word is our foundation.

3. Practice giving encouragement. The book of Hebrews was written to believers who were actually considering going back to the Jewish faith. They had become so discouraged that they were planning to reject Christ. So the author of the epistle wrote: "But encourage one another day after day ... so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13).

People are backsliding today. I know Christians who have walked with the Lord for years but now are trading the truth for sexual immorality, harmful addictions or New Age deception. Others are turning away from God because they feel so overwhelmed by their temptations.

You could be sitting next to someone in church who is actually thinking of leaving God—or even committing suicide—because they've abandoned all hope. One word of encouragement from you could lift them out of the pit of depression.

4. Fight for your promises. Delays are disappointing. I'm vulnerable to discouragement when I think about God's promises that have not been fulfilled. As birthdays tick by, my expectant prayer sours into a whiny complaint: "How long, Lord?"

The apostle Paul urged his spiritual son Timothy to "fight the good fight" by using the prophecies that had been spoken over him (see 1 Tim. 1:18). When God gives us prophetic promises, we should use them as weapons.

Abraham warred against doubt to obtain his promised heir. The delay was painful, but in the end—after years of believing "hope against hope" (Rom. 4:18)—he held Isaac in his arms and became the father of many nations.

This is not a time to give up or let go. Don't let the shakings and the meltdowns discourage you. Praise God and keep believing. We'll have much more than a T-shirt when it's all over.