

from Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.

2 CHRONICLES 20:21–22

[JOB, RESPONDING TO HORRIFIC LOSS:] *The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.*” JOB 1:21B ESV

Rejoice in God amidst trouble

[HABAKKUK:] Even though the fig tree does not blossom, and there are no grapes on the vines; even if the olive harvest fails, and the fields produce nothing edible; even if the flock is snatched from the sheepfold, and there is no herd in the stalls—¹⁸*as for me, I will rejoice in the LORD. I will find my joy in the God of my deliverance.*

HABAKKUK 3:17–18 ISV

Epilogue: God Does Respond to Suffering

God is near us in hard times

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted, and he saves those whose spirits have been crushed. PSALMS 34:18 NCV™

God comforts his people in hard times

[DAVID, TO GOD:] *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.* PSALMS 23:4 ESV

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,* ⁴*who comforts us in all our troubles* so that we may be able to comfort those experiencing any trouble with *the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.* 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4

Testimony to God answering prayers in suffering and trouble

[DAVID:] *I sought the LORD’s help and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. ...⁶This oppressed man cried out and the LORD heard; he saved him from all his troubles.* PSALMS 34:4, 6

39. Hard Times

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I. General

Hard times are experienced by all Christians. This reality is reflected in the Bible, notably in Job and Psalms. But the Bible also shows that there are a number of practical and effective things that we can do when undergoing hard times.

Note that the following chapter looks at experiencing persecution because of one's faith. This current chapter deals with undergoing hard times in general – particularly when one is hurting or “down” – irrespective of whether such times are a result of one's faith or not. As such the responses discussed in this chapter, supplement or reinforce the responses to persecution that are given in the following chapter.

Prologue: God's People Still Have Hard Times

See also: *God Disciplines His People*, p. 162; *I. The Persecution of God's People*, p. 346

Trouble is characteristic of human life

[ELIPHAZ:] But a person is born for trouble as surely as sparks fly up from a fire. *JOB 5:7 GW*

Examples of God's people undergoing hard times . . .

Elijah was afraid, so he got up and fled for his life to Beer Sheba in Judah. He left his servant there, ⁴while he went a day's journey into the desert. He went and sat down under a shrub and asked the LORD to take his life: "I've had enough! Now, O LORD, take my life. After all, I'm no better than my ancestors." *1 KINGS 19:3-4*

[JOB:] *I have no ease, I have no quietness; I cannot rest; turmoil has come upon me.* *JOB 3:26*

. . . and an example of hard times even being attributed to God

[NAOMI:] Call me Mara, because *God has made my life bitter.* ²¹*I had everything when I left, but the LORD has brought me back with nothing. How can you still call me Naomi, when God has turned against me and made my life so hard?* *RUTH 1:20B-21 CEV*

Ask God for Help

See also: *Making Requests*, p. 217; and *Have Faith in God and Pray*, p. 350

Cry out to God for help

[DAVID:] In my distress I called to the LORD; *I cried out to my God. From his heavenly temple he heard my voice; he listened to my cry for help.* *PSALMS 18:6*

In particular, ask God for strength . . .

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] My soul melts away for sorrow; *strengthen me according to your word!* *PSALMS 119:28 ESV*

. . . and ask God to guide you

[DAVID, TO GOD:] May I hear about your loyal love in the morning, for I trust in you. *Show me the way I should go, because I long for you.* *PSALMS 143:8*

Also ask God for deliverance

[DAVID:] O God, because of your great loyal love, *answer me with your faithful deliverance!* ¹⁴*Rescue me from the mud! Don't let me sink! Deliver me from those who hate me, from the deep water!* *PSALMS 69:13B-14*

Persist in prayer to God

LORD, you are the God who saves me. *I cry out to you day and night.* *PSALMS 88:1 NCV™*

Praise and Rejoice in God

Praise and thank God amidst trouble

He [Jehoshaphat] met with the people and *appointed musicians to play before the LORD and praise his majestic splendor. As they marched ahead of the warriors they said: "Give thanks to the LORD, for his loyal love endures."* ²²*When they began to shout and praise, the LORD suddenly attacked the Ammonites, Moabites, and men*

II. Praying in Hard Times

Prayer is probably the most prominent positive response to hard times. The Bible shows us a great deal about praying to God in such times. The psalms in particular contain a number of prayers of people faced with great difficulties and suffering, from which we can learn much.

Tell God about Your Problems

When facing trouble, pray to God

[GOD:] *Pray to me when you are in trouble!* I will deliver you, and you will honor me! [PSALMS 50:15](#)

Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone in good spirits? He should sing praises. [JAMES 5:13](#)

Tell God of your plight and how you feel

[DAVID, TO GOD:] Do not remain far away from me, for *trouble is near and I have no one to help me. ...* ¹⁴*My strength drains away like water; all my bones are dislocated; my heart is like wax; it melts away inside me.* [PSALMS 22:11, 14](#)

[DAVID, TO GOD:] Turn to me and have mercy on me, because *I am lonely and hurting.* ¹⁷*My troubles have grown larger; free me from my problems.* ¹⁸*Look at my suffering and troubles, and take away all my sins.* ¹⁹*Look at how many enemies I have! See how much they hate me!* [PSALMS 25:16–19](#) NCV™

Pour out your heart to God

Trust in him at all times, you people! *Pour out your hearts before him!* God is our shelter! (Selah) [PSALMS 62:8](#)

[HANNAH:] *I have poured out my soul to the LORD.* ¹⁶*... I have spoken from my deep pain and anguish.* [1 SAMUEL 1:15B, 16B](#)

To pour out your heart to God involves telling God about all your concerns and feelings. In a sense it is to empty your heart of all its troubles, laying them out before God.

Mourn Loss

Mourn and weep over loss – particularly deaths

Now when Mary came to the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, *my brother would not have died.*” ³³*When Jesus saw her weeping, and the people who had come with her weeping, he was intensely moved in spirit and greatly distressed.* ³⁴He asked, “Where have you laid him?” They replied, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵*Jesus wept.* [JOHN 11:32–35](#)
Some devout men buried Stephen, mourning for him with loud cries.

[ACTS 8:2](#) GNT

Mourn before God

The men of Ai killed about thirty–six of them [Israelites] and chased them from in front of the city gate all the way to the fissures and defeated them on the steep slope. The people’s courage melted away like water. ⁶*Joshua tore his clothes; he and the leaders of Israel lay face down on the ground before the ark of the LORD until evening and threw dirt on their heads.* [JOSHUA 7:5–6](#)

The actions of Joshua and the leaders (v. 6) signified mourning. Particularly as the ark signified God’s presence amongst the Israelites, this is an example of people mourning before God.

Keep in Mind God and His Word

In hard times, remember God

[NEHEMIAH, SPEAKING TO HIS PEOPLE ABOUT ENEMY THREATS:] “*Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the great and awesome Lord, and fight on behalf of your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your families!*” [NEHEMIAH 4:14B](#)

Keep meditating on God’s word and obeying it

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] Though rulers plot and slander me, *your servant meditates on your statutes. ...* ⁵*Arrogant people do nothing but scoff at me. Yet I do not turn aside from your law. ...* ¹⁶⁶*I hope for your deliverance, O LORD, and I obey your commands.* [PSALMS 119:23, 51, 166](#)

Take comfort in God's word

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life. ...* ⁵²*When I think of your rules from of old, I take comfort, O LORD.* PSALMS 119:50, 52 ESV

In v. 50 the psalmist says that his comfort in suffering is God's promise which preserves or "revives" (NET) his life, through the hope that it gives.

Trust in God

See also: [In persecution:] *Have Faith in God and Pray*, 350

Trust in God

[DAVID, TO GOD:] It is like terror all around me, as they conspire together and plot to take my life. ¹⁴*But I trust in you, O LORD. I say, "You are my God."* ¹⁵*My times are in your hands.* Deliver me from the hands of my enemies and from those who pursue me. PSALMS 31:13B–15 ISV

The statement: "You are my God" (v. 14), implies that the LORD is the one David trusts in as sovereign over his life, the one who held his present and future circumstances in his hands (v. 15a).

Take refuge in God, for God saves and protects those who do

The one who lives in the shelter of the Most High and who abides in the shadow of the Almighty ²*will say to the LORD, "You are my refuge, my fortress, and my God in whom I trust!"* ³*He will surely deliver you from the hunter's snare and from the destructive plague.* ⁴*With his feathers he will cover you, and under his wings you will find safety. His truth is your shield and armor.* ⁵*You need not fear terror that stalks in the night, the arrow that flies in the day;* ⁶*plague that strikes in the darkness, or calamity that destroys at noon.* ⁷*If a thousand fall at your side or ten thousand at your right hand, it will not overcome you. ...* ⁹*"O LORD, you are my refuge!"* *Because you chose the Most High as your dwelling place,* ¹⁰*no evil will fall upon you, and no affliction will approach your tent,* ¹¹*for he will command his angels to protect you in all your ways.* ¹²*With their hands they will lift you up so you will not trip over a stone.* PSALMS 91:1–7, 9–12 ISV

Hope in God and Wait for Him

Put your hope in God . . .

[A PSALMIST:] *Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation* ⁶*and my God.* PSALMS 42:5–6A ESV

[JEREMIAH:] Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! ²⁰*My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me.* ²¹*But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope.* ²²*The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;* ²³*they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.* LAMENTATIONS 3:19–23 ESV

. . . Look resolutely and expectantly to God

[DAVID:] *I continually look to the LORD for help, for he will free my feet from the enemy's net.* PSALMS 25:15

[JEHOSHAPHAT, AS JUDAH FACED INVASION:] O our God, will you not execute judgment on them? For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. *We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.* 2 CHRONICLES 20:12 ESV

Wait for God, with confidence that he will act

[DAVID:] *I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living!* ¹⁴*Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!* PSALMS 27:13–14 ESV

Note that God's action on behalf of his troubled people is not always simply the removal of the cause of their trouble. It may instead involve strengthening his people to cope with the trouble, with inner joy and peace.

Wait quietly and patiently

Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! PSALMS 37:7 ESV