

Facing Family Challenges

THREE BIBLE STUDIES TO HELP IN TIMES OF DIFFICULTY

Families can be the source of our greatest joy—

and our deepest grief. As we journey alongside loved ones, we are given the tremendous gift of intimately sharing our lives with others. At the same time, we are confronted with life's many challenges—dealing with the consequences of our decisions, caring for those who are sick, facing relational conflicts, and many others. As we engage with Scripture, we can discover God in these daily challenges. We are given a powerful framework to care for others, to deepen ourselves, and to maintain hope.

Here are three Bible studies to help you engage God's Word during some of the challenges your family faces.

1. ILLNESS

Read *I am worn out, O LORD; have pity on me!
Give me strength; I am completely exhausted
and my whole being is deeply troubled.
How long, O LORD, will you wait to help me?
Come and save me, LORD;
in your mercy rescue me from death (Psalm 6:2-4).*

For this reason we never become discouraged. Even though our physical being is gradually decaying, yet our spiritual being is renewed day after day. And this small and temporary trouble we suffer will bring us a tremendous and eternal glory, much greater than the trouble. For we fix our attention, not on things that are seen, but on things that are unseen. What can be seen lasts only for a time, but what cannot be seen lasts forever (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

But to keep me from being puffed up with pride because of the many wonderful things I saw, I was given a painful physical ailment, which acts as Satan's messenger to beat me and keep me from being proud. Three times I prayed to the Lord about this and asked him to take it away. But his answer was: "My grace is all you need, for my power is greatest when you are weak." I am most happy, then, to be proud of my weaknesses, in order to feel the protection of Christ's power over me. I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

Reflect

- When one family member is seriously ill, it can affect the entire family—practically, emotionally, and spiritually. Psalm 6 describes the “exhausted” state of a sick person. Are others in your family also “worn out” and “deeply troubled”? In what way? Talk about this together.
- What words stand out to you in the three Scripture passages above? How can these descriptions help you understand your own pain, or the pain a family member is experiencing?
- Even though these Bible verses are full of suffering, we also find words of hope: save, rescue, renew, grace. How can God help a family find greater love, joy and peace even when one member is ailing?
- In 1 Corinthians, Paul describes his own suffering, mentioning a “painful physical ailment” (literally a “thorn” in his body) that he asked God to take away. God told him, “My grace is all you need, for my power is greatest when you are weak.” How can our weaknesses, and physical ailments, make us reliant on God? How can caring for family members with ailments make us reliant on God?
- God’s response caused Paul to not simply bear his suffering, but to be happy, proud, and content! Can you imagine how feeling “the protection of Christ’s power” could be more valuable than even physical health? How can we, as individuals and as families, embrace Christ’s grace and strength as the most important thing?

Respond

Here’s an exercise you can do by yourself, or with the whole family. Find a place to sit quietly by yourself. Slowly close your eyes and take a moment to relax all the muscles in your body. How does your body feel? Do you experience pain in certain areas? Tension? Fatigue? Rather than making a judgment, simply observe. Now begin to focus on your breathing. Take several long inhales and count to ten as you exhale. On your next inhale, recite to yourself, “My grace is all you need.” As you exhale recite, “for my power is greatest when you are weak.” Practice this until your breathing and the words flow naturally. Throughout your day, focus on your breath in moments of physical pain or discomfort. Recite these words from the Scriptures as a way of reminding yourself to receive God’s grace and relying on God’s strength.

Pray

Dear God, thank you for entering into the world and taking on a physical body through your son Jesus. Thank you for not being a God who is far off from my daily experiences, but a God who enters into them and draws near to me. You understand my illnesses, pains, and weaknesses. Your power protects my family members who are physically suffering or afflicted in mind or spirit. Help me rely on your strength for my own needs and the needs of my loved ones. Give us each the grace we need every day, and every moment. Set our eyes on what is unseen—the promise of eternal life with you. Renew us in our spiritual beings, so together we can proclaim, “When I am weak, then I am strong.” Amen.



2. MARITAL CONFLICT

Read *No more lying, then! Each of you must tell the truth to the other believer, because we are all members together in the body of Christ. If you become angry, do not let your anger lead you into sin, and do not stay angry all day. Don't give the Devil a chance (Ephesians 4:25-27).*

Get rid of all bitterness, passion, and anger. No more shouting or insults, no more hateful feelings of any sort. Instead, be kind and tender-hearted to one another, and forgive one another, as God has forgiven you through Christ (Ephesians 4:31-32).

Your life in Christ makes you strong, and his love comforts you. You have fellowship with the Spirit, and you have kindness and compassion for one another. I urge you, then, to make me completely happy by having the same thoughts, sharing the same love, and being one in soul and mind. Don't do anything from selfish ambition or from a cheap desire to boast, but be humble toward one another, always considering others better than yourselves. And look out for one another's interests, not just for your own. The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had (Philippians 2:1-4).

Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may be innocent and pure as God's perfect children, who live in a world of corrupt and sinful people. You must shine among them like stars lighting up the sky, as you offer them the message of life. If you do so, I shall have reason to be proud of you on the Day of Christ, because it will show that all my effort and work have not been wasted (Philippians 2:14-16).

- Reflect**
- Paul says to get rid of all anger and bitterness—to stop the shouting, insults, and hateful feelings. How does forgiveness help you be tender-hearted towards your spouse? How do you practice forgiveness? Do you speak words of forgiveness to one another? Do you choose forgiveness in your thoughts throughout the day?
 - Paul says, “Do not let your anger lead you into sin” and “do not stay angry all day.” Do you readily forgive your spouse or hold onto your anger? How can holding onto your anger lead you into sin?
 - Paul teaches us to do nothing from selfish ambition, but rather to be humble toward one another, always considering others better than yourself. What does this look like in a marriage? Is this difficult to do? Have you seen any marriages that do this well?
 - He also says, “Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may be innocent and pure as God's perfect children, who live in a world of corrupt and sinful people.” What is the pattern of conflict in your marriage? Does it lead to deeper intimacy and resolution, or is it divisive? Are there ways to engage conflict without complaining and arguing? What would that look like?
 - Paul goes on to say, “You must shine among them like stars lighting up the sky, as you offer them the message of life.” How do our marriages point beyond themselves, to God? How can they represent a different way of living that embodies God's life-giving message?

Respond Talk to your spouse about the role of anger and forgiveness in your marriage. Have you had a conflict recently? How did you deal with it? Then read Ephesians 4:25-27 together. Make a commitment to each other to offer forgiveness every night this week before you go to bed. Promise to not let a whole day pass staying angry. Pay attention to how this affects your relationship. Does anything change? Are you as quick to get angry with one another? At the end of the week review the process. Is this a habit you want to adopt moving forward?

Pray Dear God, thank you for giving us the gift of marriage. Help me humbly consider my spouse's interests before my own. Help us to not argue and complain, but let our disagreements foster deeper understanding and intimacy. Don't let a whole day pass staying angry at one another. Help us keep short accounts, and readily offer forgiveness. Let our marriage point beyond itself to you. Let it bring light to darkness—lighting up the sky, shining in the world like a star. Amen.



3. WAYWARD CHILD

Read “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them—what do you do? You leave the other ninety-nine sheep in the pasture and go looking for the one that got lost until you find it” (Luke 15:4; the full parable is verses 3–7).

“The older brother was so angry that he would not go into the house; so his father came out and begged him to come in. But he spoke back to his father, ‘Look, all these years I have worked for you like a slave, and I have never disobeyed your orders. What have you given me? Not even a goat for me to have a feast with my friends! But this son of yours wasted all your property on prostitutes, and when he comes back home, you kill the prize calf for him!’ ‘My son,’ the father answered, ‘you are always here with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be happy, because your brother was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found’” (Luke 15:28-32; the full parable begins at verse 11).

*The LORD is merciful and loving,
slow to become angry and full of constant love.
He does not keep on rebuking;
he is not angry forever.
He does not punish us as we deserve
or repay us according to our sins and wrongs.
As high as the sky is above the earth,
so great is his love for those who honor him.
As far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our sins from us.
As a father is kind to his children,
so the LORD is kind to those who honor him.
He knows what we are made of;
he remembers that we are dust (Psalm 103:8-14).*

Reflect

- In the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus says he would leave all ninety-nine sheep in order to find the one that has strayed. What does this tell you about God's heart towards you? What does it tell you about God's heart towards members of your family who have strayed from the fold?
- In the conclusion to the parable of the prodigal son, the older brother says he has faithfully worked for his father's household while the younger brother squandered his inheritance. Have you ever felt overlooked while being obedient, faithful, or hardworking? How did that make you feel?
- The father says they have reason to celebrate because his son was "dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found." What does it mean to be lost? While the younger son's decisions hurt his family members, how did his decisions ultimately hurt him?
- Psalm 103 says, "As a father is kind to his children, so the LORD is kind to those who honor him." What can God's attributes, as named in this Psalm, teach us about loving our family members?
- This Psalm also says God is merciful, does not keep rebuking, and removes our sin far from us. What would have happened if the father did not forgive his son? How would that impact the whole family?
- The Psalm ends saying, "He knows what we are made of, he remembers that we are dust." Can acknowledging your own vulnerability, weakness, and finitude help you have compassion for a wayward family member?

Respond

Take a moment to sit quietly before God in prayer. Name a wayward family member, then ask God to reveal his heart towards them. Begin by reading the parable of the lost sheep. Picture your family member as the one sheep the shepherd goes after. What was the shepherd feeling? How does it make you feel to imagine God leaving the fold to pursue this one person? Read the parable of the prodigal son. Identify your family member, or yourself, as either the older or younger brother. While this may be painful, picture God receiving your family member back home. Ask God to reveal God's thoughts and feelings towards them. Conclude with the following prayer.

Pray

Dear God, thank you that no matter how far we stray you go after us and are ready to receive us home. I pray for my family member who has strayed far from the fold. I ask that you would compassionately go after them, in ways that I cannot. I recognize my own limitations and need for a Savior. I also recognize that I cannot save my loved one. I am relying on you, God. Be the kind shepherd and joyful father. Don't give up on my family member. I am waiting for the day that I can say: she or he "was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found." Amen.