

Biblical Counseling Center publishes eCounselor's Weekly guide, to encourage counselors and all believers in discipleship and daily growth.

Finding Hope Though Life is Hard

By Jeff Temple, M.A.

Life is hard and chronic problems make life harder, problems that last long or reoccur. Since we are sinners in a sin-cursed world, trouble confronts us continuously. Sometimes trouble is out of our control, such as having another person bully us or coping with a severe illness. Sometimes the trouble is within our control, as learning to discipline our wayward minds or bring habitual anger under the Spirit's control.

What Happens When Life Remains Hard?

We naturally desire as little trouble as possible. Most Christians know life is not a bed of roses, yet are astonished when we encounter trouble (1Pet 4:12). The longer problems persist the more disillusioned about being a Christian we may become. Why? Because our hopes and dreams for the "good life" fade as we realize the amount of effort it will take to change our circumstances. We often face hopelessness and blame God, or we may turn to sources other than God to make sense of life's difficulties.

In Psalm 13:1-2, David asks God four times "how long?" He's not seeking information about the duration of his trial, but is expressing his thoughts to God that he can't endure much longer. Do you sense the anguish in his plea for relief?

The harder our life, the easier "tunnel vision" sets in. Tunnel vision is the tendency to focus on a singular goal, as David did, to get assurance God would intervene on his behalf, to just get relief. Tunnel vision keeps us focused on our problems, giving us little hope of escape because we believe we know best how and when God should resolve our problems. We look inward to self or outward to others for solutions rather than upward to God for His timing and His solutions.

What should we do when life remains hard?

Escaping tunnel vision requires a new way of seeing. This starts with changing how you think about your situation, seeing it through God's eyes. Ask yourself, "Does Scripture describe life for the Christian as a hopeless problem or does Scripture describe the Christian life as a victorious fight?" Scripture indicates it is a battle, a violent struggle against an enemy who is trying to re-establish dominance and keep us helpless and hopeless (Eph 6:10-20), but who has already been defeated by the power of the Word and prayer, readily available to every believer!

Culture defines a problem as an unwelcome and possible harmful circumstance. Our therapeutic culture sees life as problematic, encouraging tunnel vision. Then our culture's solution to the one problem often produces many additional problems instead, with the cure worse than the original problem! God says life's trials are for our good, our maturity, to bring us the fruit of the spirit (Jas 1:2-4, Rom 8:28,29). We are to embrace our trials and grow! We are called to fight for the kingdom of heaven (1Tim 6:12) against the kingdom of this world. This new way of seeing distinguishes between a therapeutic culture and kingdom living (2Tim 4:2-8).

David came to understand this truth when he looked upward to God instead of inward to his problems. In Psalm 13:5,6, David's new vision of God's mercy and salvation caused him to sing to the Lord with a heart of gratitude even in the midst of his troubles. David's changed focus resulted in changed attitude and emotions.

Fight onward, for the King is coming!

How are we to live as citizens of God's eternal kingdom (2 Pet 3:8-18)? First, we must be confident of His promise of victory as we diligently endure the good fight of faith. Fighting can be intense at times, but it can also be sporadic. When it is sporadic we can be lulled into a false sense of security. Remember that the battle is not finally over until Christ returns in victory.

Second, we are to hasten the day of His return by living for His kingdom. As we share Christ with others, His wisdom sets people free from sinful lifestyles. We model and teach holy living, progressive sanctification. We see others coming to Christ and growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord.

Third, by helping others overcome a therapeutic mindset we impact our culture for Christ. As biblical counselors we point others to a victorious lifestyle based on Scriptural principles that is far superior to our culture's problematic solutions. This helps our counselees to think about their lives as a part the Kingdom of God and motivates them to persevere with hope.

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1Pet 5:10,11

Biblical Counseling Center

[Main Office](#) • 3233 N Arlington Heights Rd, Suite 302 Arlington Heights, IL 60004

[Scherverville Office](#) • 833 W Lincoln Hwy, Suite 115W Scherverville, Indiana 46375

[Fox Lake Office](#) • Fox Lake Community Church, 25 W Big Hollow Road Fox lake, Illinois 60020

Email info@biblicalcounselingcenter.org • Telephone (847) 398-7193

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