

“Then God Prepared”

The account of the partisan prophet Jonah demonstrates how God desires to use both blessings and trials to challenge and change us for the better. Five times in the book of Jonah it says that the Lord prepared circumstances for him—both good and bad.

In Jonah 1:4, the Lord sent a storm to hinder Jonah. It states that He “sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea.” After the mariners discovered that Jonah was the reason for this storm, they threw him overboard (1:15). Then God “prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah” to save him from drowning (1:17).

Later in the book, “the Lord God prepared a plant” to shade Jonah (4:6). Then God prepared a worm to kill the vine as well as a scorching wind and sun to beat down on him (4:7-9). These circumstances were used to reveal Jonah’s rebellious attitude. Only after the revelation could God directly confront Jonah’s heart problem.

As Christians face different situations, they should remember that God is sovereign over both the blessings and the troubles that come our way. He desires to use everything to build their character (James 1:1-5). He uses both good and bad to transform and guide His children on their journey. “The Lord gives and takes away. Blessed be the Lord” (Job 1:21).

Next Generation Believers

Even at the end of his life, C. S. Lewis showed an interest in the spiritual nurture of younger believers. Although in ill health, he took time to respond to the letter of a child named Philip, possibly the last letter he ever wrote. Complimenting the boy’s fine written expression, Lewis said he was delighted that Philip understood that in the Narnia Chronicles the lion Aslan represented the self sacrificing spirit manifested by Jesus Christ. The next day, Lewis died at his home in Kilns, Oxford, England, one week before his 65th birthday.

The apostle John in his later years sent a letter to his children in the faith. In it we see the joy of a mature believer encouraging his spiritually younger disciples to keep walking in the truth and following Christ. He wrote, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3John 1:4). Short by New Testament standards, John’s letter demonstrates the joy that comes in nurturing and watching the next generation’s spiritual growth.

Encouraging spiritual understanding in the next generation should be the goal of all mature believers. Sending a note of appreciation, giving a word of encouragement, praying, or offering sound advice can all be ways of helping others on their spiritual journey with God. The journey is better with someone who already knows the way.

Why Unbelievers are Unbelievers

Believers often assume that unbelievers are unwilling to believe that God exists, when in reality, unwillingness to believe is not the first, second, or third reason why they don’t believe. The first reason, isn’t an unwillingness to believe that God exists; instead many doubt that they’re important enough for God’s attention. Second, some believe they are unworthy of His forgiveness. People are often their own harshest judges. The third hurdle to faith? They wonder why God is not communicating with them if He really exists.

First, God doesn’t perform on cue for skeptics. He promises that if one reads His Word with an open heart and mind, it will accomplish His purpose and generate faith (Isa. 55:11; Rom. 10:17). In other words, if one reads it he will discover that God is communicating with him. Learning of the grace and mercy of God will move him to realize that God will hear him when he comes to Him. Honestly hearing God’s word can take one from misguided skepticism to a strong faith.

Costumes vs. Uniforms

Eunice McGarrahan said, "A costume is something you put on and pretend that you are what you are wearing. A uniform, on the other hand, reminds you that you are, in fact, what you wear."

In US Army basic training, recruits are given a box and ordered to put all of their civilian clothes in it. The box is mailed to their home addresses. Every day after that, the uniform they put on reminds them that they had entered a period of disciplined training designed to change their attitudes and actions.

"Cast off the works of darkness," the apostle Paul told the followers of Jesus living in Rome, "and put on the armor of light" (Rom. 13:12). He followed this with the command to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts" (v.14). The goal of this "casting off" and "putting on" was a new identity and transformed living (v.13). Following Christ is not a matter of pretending to be what we aren't, but of becoming more and more what we are in Him (Eph. 4:22-24). Salvation is free, but discipleship will cost you your whole life.

It Seems Backwards

The Chicago River is unusual because it flows backward. Engineers reversed its direction over a century ago because city-dwellers were using it as a dump. Dishwater, sewage, and industrial waste all funneled into the river, which emptied into Lake Michigan. Since the lake supplied drinking water for the city, thousands grew sick and died before 1900 when city authorities decided to redirect the river to flow backward into the Mississippi watershed, away from the lake.

When we examine the life of Jesus, it may seem backward from what we would expect. As the King of Glory, He came to earth as a vulnerable infant. As God in the flesh, He endured accusations of blasphemy. As the only sinless man, He was crucified as a criminal. But Jesus lived on earth according to God's will (John 6:38).

As followers of Christ, to clothe ourselves with Jesus' attitudes and actions may appear "backward." Blessing our enemies (Rom. 12:14), valuing godliness over wealth (1 Tim. 6:6-9), and taking joy in hardship (James 1:2) seem to oppose worldly wisdom. Yet, Jesus said, "Whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matt. 16:25). Don't worry if living your life sometimes means operating in reverse.

A Moments Wisdom

- Silence does not always mark wisdom.
- Many can argue; not many converse.
- Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.
- Nothing is permanent in this wicked world, not even our troubles.
- If you don't have time to do it right, when will you have time to do it over?
- True friendship is like sound health; the value of it is seldom known until it be lost.
- Success is dependent upon the glands -- the sweat glands.
- A habit cannot be tossed out the window; it must be coaxed down the stairs a step at a time.
- Facts are facts and will not disappear on account of your likes or dislikes.