

# Coping In The Middle Of A Trial

A few years ago, a very serious auto accident occurred on Route 78 between Allentown and Harrisburg. It just happened that the same day, I was returning to York from a Bible Conference in Connecticut. I had no way of knowing that such an accident had occurred and obstructed my path. Following my normal route, I traveled south on 209 through the Poconos, then down 33 to 22 west. A few miles past the point where 22 and 78 converge, I came to a huge traffic back up caused by the accident. Traffic remained at a stand still for a considerable period of time. I could not go forward. I could not turn around and go back because I was on a limited access highway. I did not want to be stuck in this traffic jam, but there was nothing I could do about it. I was in the middle of it and that was it.

Sometimes in life we find ourselves in the middle of a trial. We are not sure how we got into the situation. We have no idea how or when it will end. We are simply in the midst of circumstances that are unwelcome, unpleasant, and uncertain. They were not necessarily set in motion because of anything we had done wrong. Nevertheless, there we are. How do we cope in the middle of an ongoing trial?

Genesis Chapter 43 suggests some principles which are appropriate to this scenario. This chapter is in the middle of the story concerning Joseph in Egypt, the great famine, and Joseph's ten brothers attempting to buy food for survival. Chapter 43 is incomplete alone. It begins as a continuation of events in preceding chapters. It ends without a conclusion to the events that occur within it. It may seem puzzling why the chapter division was made in this place, yet it provides an excellent illustration of our subject. On the brothers' second visit to Egypt to buy food, they found themselves in the middle of some circumstances that were very confusing. They had no idea how they got where they were. They were just simple shepherds from Canaan brought into the palace of this strange Egyptian ruler. They had no idea what the conclusion of this trial was going to be, though they could imagine the worst. The observations we can make from this chapter will give us some hints about coping in the middle of a trial.

## 1. Do What Needs To Be Done.

Chapter 42 records the brothers' first trip to Egypt. The famine predicted by Pharaoh's dreams became such a harsh reality that even in Canaan, survival became dependent upon the food available in Egypt. During that first visit, the disguised Joseph accused his brothers of being spies, required them to bring their youngest brother, Benjamin, along with them if they came again to buy food, and imprisoned Simeon as insurance.

As Chapter 43 opens, the food purchased on that first trip was running low and the famine was continuing in full force. Jacob told his sons to go back to Egypt to buy more food (verses 1-2).

Judah explained to his father that Benjamin must go along on a return trip. It was clear to them that the man in Egypt would not sell them any more food if their youngest brother did not accompany them. Without Benjamin, there was no sense in making a trip to Egypt (verses 3-5).

Jacob's reaction does not fit the discussion. He questioned his sons' past judgement in telling the man in Egypt that they had a younger brother. *Wherefore dealt ye so ill with me*, he said, *as to tell the man whether ye had yet a brother?* (Verse 6). It is often the case that people try to cope with present trials by casting "why did you do that" accusations against things that people have already done. Such questions might be helpful in learning what not to do in future situations, but for the present, what was done was done and casting blame was not going to change what was.

That day on route 78, the traffic had come to a complete stop. People had turned off their engines and were getting out of their cars to walk around and share their confusion about what was going on. I could have wondered how close to home I would have been if only I had gotten off the highway earlier and taken a different route home. But no matter how frustrated I would have allowed myself to become, such wonderings would never change the fact that I was sitting still in the middle of backed up traffic.

The brothers explained to their father why it was necessary for them to tell about their younger brother. But the bottom line was that Jacob needed to accept the reality of things as they were and focus on what had to be done as a result (verse 7).

Judah then insisted that their survival depended upon Benjamin accompanying them to Egypt. He made himself surety for Benjamin's safety and accepted full responsibility for his welfare. But time was wasting away as their food supplies were running low, and the severity of the famine required no more delays if they were going to survive. (verses 8-10).

Jacob finally resigned himself to what must be done. He said to his sons, *If it must be so now, do this....* (verse 11).

## **2. Accept The Inevitable, Or At Least The Possibility Of An Unwanted Outcome.**

Jacob proceeded to give his sons instructions for their second trip to Egypt. His words show that he had actually thought the whole thing through. He knew all along what had to be done; it was just a matter of accepting the inevitable. This is hard to do, but necessary for all of us at times.

As I sat in that stalled traffic on route 78, I could have huffed and puffed and fumed about sitting still in the middle of a highway, about being delayed in getting home, and about getting hungry while supper time passed by without access to food, but my rantings would not have changed anything. I had to accept my circumstances as they were and resign myself to the delay.

Jacob told his sons what they should take with them to Egypt. He said they should take some presents to the man in Egypt, take double money, enough to pay for this time and for the last time when their money was returned in their sacks, and take their brother Benjamin (verses 11-13).

He then stated his resignation to what he thought would be the inevitable outcome of this tragedy. *If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved* (verse 14).

It is interesting that God often waits for us to accept the worst as a possibility before he brings a positive solution into our lives. Had he not resigned himself to what had to be done and accepted the potential consequences, Jacob might have held onto Benjamin for a short time, but ended up losing his whole family to the famine. By accepting things as they were, doing what needed to be done, and resigning himself to an unwanted outcome if that was what had to be, Jacob would not only have Benjamin restored to him, but Joseph as well.

When my sister graduated from nursing school, she faced adult life as a single woman. This was not what she wanted, but there were no prospective husbands in sight. A career opportunity came her way and she struggled with what to do. Should she pursue this opportunity and commit herself to being single? Could she resign herself to never getting married? It was a difficult thing to do because it seemed so contrary to the desire of her heart, yet she gave herself to the Lord for His will in her life, and if that meant being single, she was willing to accept it. Very soon after she sincerely resigned herself to the possibility of never getting married, she received a phone call from a single young man who wondered if she would be willing to go out with him. You guessed it. She ended up marrying this man – who also happened to be a pastor of a church. Not only did she get to marry, but she also was able to serve the

Lord with her husband. Her willingness to do without the desire of her heart made God's graciousness to her that much sweeter.

### 3. Endure Confusion.

The brothers traveled to Egypt and presented themselves to the disguised Joseph to buy food. Joseph instructed his steward to take these eleven men to his personal residence where he intended to dine with them for the noon meal (verses 15-17).

This caused a great deal of apprehension among the brothers. They were afraid that the money they carried back with them in their sacks after the first trip was going to cause them serious problems and they let their imagination run wild. They feared that their doom was sealed and they were all destined to become slaves (verse 18). All through the trials of the first trip and this second one, the brothers were convinced that their difficulties were directly related to what they had done to Joseph. On the first trip when they were accused of being spies and faced the prospect of imprisonment, they lamented concerning the punishment which was catching up with them. They said, *We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us, and we would not hear: therefore is this distress come upon us* (Genesis 42:21). So it is no surprise on this second trip that they foresaw themselves as slaves in a just retribution for their evil deeds.

This is a fault many of us make in the middle of trials when we cannot see when or how they will be resolved. We let our imagination run wild and we get ourselves unnecessarily worked up about things that probably will never happen. Have you ever had the experience of anticipating tense conversations? You expect to be talking to someone with whom you have a conflict or disagreement. Your mind imagines what the other person will say, and then imagines what you will say in response. You work your way through whole conversations like this and at the end, if your thoughts do not satisfy the dread of your soul, your mind starts all over again and imagines an even more stressful conversation. It is a silly exercise, but our imaginations seem to enjoy working overtime suggesting all the really bad things that can possibly happen. This is different from the idea of accepting the inevitable or the possibility of an unwanted outcome. Acceptance brings peace which is a good thing. An unchecked imagination takes away peace which is not a good thing.

The brothers tried to explain to Joseph's steward that they were not thieves and could not explain why their money was in their sacks when they arrived home. They assured him that they had brought that money with them this time and were prepared to pay in full for all the food they had received (verses 19-22).

This is where their confusion begins to take an interesting turn. Joseph's steward said that the money from their previous trip was a nonissue and they should not concern themselves about it. He said, *Peace be to you, fear not: your God, and the God of your father, hath given you treasure in your sacks: I had your money* (verse 23). He then invites the men to refresh themselves and prepare for lunch (verses 24-25).

When Joseph came home to eat, the brothers offered their presents to him and bowed before him. He continued his charade and politely inquired about their father (verses 26-28). Then when he came face to face with his beloved brother Benjamin, he broke down and had to excuse himself to regain his composure (verses 29-31). When he returned, he ordered lunch to be served. He had already designated the seats for each of his brothers who were placed at their table in the order of their birth. The brothers were totally confused about how this man in Egypt could know this. Then Benjamin was given five times as much food as all the others. They all had a wonderful time. Scripture says they were merry with Joseph (verses 31-34).

This is where the chapter ends. The chapter divisions were not included when Scripture was originally written. They were added much later, apparently during the 13<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. But over the years I have developed a great respect for the person or persons who carefully decided where to make the chapters begin and end. Some object to many of these divisions, claiming that connected verses were unnecessarily separated by them. But I have tried to reason with the person who made these division and figure out why they put them where they are. I have always been able to find some reasonable explanation which helps in understanding the intent of God's Word.

We might wonder why Genesis Chapter 43 ends in the middle of the second trip to Egypt, leaving the brothers enjoying a wonderful meal in the midst of some very confusing circumstances. But dwelling in the middle of trials is a typical experience of human beings. And in the middle of such circumstances there is often considerable confusion, both about what is actually happening and about what is going to come out of it. It is well for us in the middle of trials to pause for a moment and put our experience into perspective.

The brothers had no idea why things were happening the way they were. They went from fear and trepidation about all of them becoming slaves to sitting in a palace and enjoying a wonderful meal. They had no idea what was going to happen when the meal was over. Would they be allowed to purchase food and return home in safety, or would some other strange thing happen to cause fear to return to their hearts?

We need to recognize that it is okay for us to be confused. I am not sure the brothers were thinking this way, but their predicament allows us to do so. Even though the brothers did not understand what was happening and did not know what was coming next, Someone did. God did. And if He knows what is happening, then He has everything under control. Who ever said we have to understand everything in life. As long as God understands, isn't that sufficient?

In that traffic jam I was in, it would have been easy to imagine some terrible things about what was up ahead, or how long it was going to take to get home. But there were people at the scene of the accident where the traffic back up started who knew all about the situation and were taking care of it. I could not see that. But there was absolutely nothing I could do where I was but trust that someone was up ahead taking care of things and resolving whatever the problem was.

In the middle of our trials, when we cannot understand why we have to be where we are, when we are totally confused about how such things could happen to us, and when we are even more confused about how they are ever going to be resolved, we can successfully endure our confusion by pausing to remember that God knows everything and He is already walking ahead of us taking care of things for us.

## **Conclusion**

Proverbs 3:5-6

*Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.*

Acknowledging God in all our ways is one of the basic exercises of life every believer needs to learn. To acknowledge God means that we turn our thoughts to Him and tell Him we know He is present in our lives and able to help us in our present circumstances. It is easy to be so distracted by the stress of difficult events that we forget about God for a moment and fail to acknowledge Him. In the middle of trials, we often fret, and worry, and imagine all kinds of terrible things, and get frustrated, and panic, and add to our stress by our own despair. But if in the middle of trials we will pause long enough to acknowledge God, our trial-in-progress will take on a whole different perspective.

After acknowledging God, then we must wait for him to act. This is not easy because God usually works on an entirely different timetable than we do. When we are in the middle of a trial, we want it to be over as soon as possible. But God may have some perfectly divine reasons why the trial should be extended for a considerable period of time. We must trust that God knows what He is doing and wait for Him to act when He decides it is time to do so. There are many verses of Scripture that admonish us to wait on the Lord.

Psalm 123:2

*...so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us.*

Psalm 37:7

*Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him....*

Isaiah 30:18

*And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him.*

As I sat still in the middle of a highway, it helped me to think that someone was up ahead at the source of the problem, taking care of the circumstances that had created an obstacle to my path. The whole matter was completely out of my hands. There was not one thing I could do myself to clear up the traffic jam. But someone was taking care of the matter. So I waited. Eventually we started to move. At first it was very slow, and sometimes we had to stop again for a while. In all, it took two and one half hours to go five miles. And then it was over and I was on my way home.

We will be able to cope in the middle of trials if we stop to realize that God is dealing with the source of the problem. Deuteronomy 31:8 says, *And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.* He goes before us. He is always ahead of us, directing our paths, removing our obstacles, preparing the help we are going to need as we move through the circumstances of our lives.

Are there some trying circumstances in progress right now in your life? Take a deep breath. Turn your heart to God and acknowledge Him. Do what needs to be done. Accept the inevitable, or at least the possibility of an unwanted outcome. Tell yourself it is okay to be confused because God is not confused about what is going on and He has everything under control. And then wait. Wait for as long as it takes for God to act to resolve the situation. And while you wait, trust that God knows exactly what He is doing. If you follow this plan, you will be amazed at how reduced your stress level will be. 📖