

“It’s Always Darkest Before the Dawn”

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James 1: 2-4

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“Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired and success achieved.”

Helen Keller

Very early in the morning, the dawn cracks the horizon, breaking through the inky black expanse of the night sky, proclaiming the breaking of a new day, and proclaiming to all: “This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!”

The phrase “It’s always darkest before the dawn” is accredited to Thomas Fuller, an English theologian and historian in the 1600’s. Scientifically this statement is not true, as it is darkest when the sun is on the opposite side of the earth, which is midpoint between dusk and dawn – closer to midnight.

However, this statement has a life application that each and every one of us can relate to. The tough times; the seasons in our lives where we’re leveled by circumstances beyond our control; trapped by pain; or powerless. It could be health issues, finances, loss, relations, lockdowns, the list goes on and on. The phrase is meant to offer hope. Hope that though things have been rough and dark, just hang on — because very soon the light will start to crack through and very shortly things will turn around.

Though this saying is not scriptural, there are a lot of scriptures to support it. Whole stories in fact. God tells us that when we reach the end of our endurance, there is help to be found – not in our own strength, but in God’s power and provision.

One obvious story is about Job. Job lost everything – his kids dead, houses burned, livestock dead, his money gone and his health deteriorated so badly, he just wanted to die. This is trial of extreme proportions. A super-sized trial. Job was real and he did complain to God. He cursed his own birth, but he never walked away from God.

He recognized that *every single thing he had*, God had given to him. Though his wife and friends told him to give up on God, to “curse God and die”, Job continued to maintain his trust in the faithfulness of God. When finally the dawn broke in Job’s life, all that was lost was restored and even doubled.

Our reading from James 1:2-4: “*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete*”.

This scripture does not make me happy. I don't usually consider it pure joy when I'm in the middle of a mess. The word 'Joy' doesn't even come to mind for me. Who really enjoys going through trials? To be crushed, stretched, pruned, planted, feeling pressure and tension? These are words that describe the growing process and what we feel like when we're going through it.

Growing things is messy and dirty. It takes time, patience, and dedication to see it through. Jesus said in John 12:24 – “Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies it produces many seeds.”

One of the key realities of the Kingdom of God is that life springs from death. Jesus died to bring us life.

When a seed is planted it is hard and dry, virtually dead, and it looks nothing like the plant it came from. The seed is pressed into the soil covered with dirt, watered, warmed by the sun, and the growth process begins.

There is much tension and pressure as the roots begin to take hold so that they can bring water and nourishment to the plant. The plant itself is pushing and struggling its way toward the sunlight. Then comes the fertilizing to give extra nourishment. Messy, but helpful.

In an article I read they said that fully developed seeds contain an embryo and that the seed coat is what feeds it until it matures. So it seems to me that seeds are predestined to grow.

Well, here we are, it's dark and dirty and we're covered in crap, each of us going through our own process of growing. We're putting down deep roots to anchor us to our firm foundation and we're reaching for the promise of the light.

Transformation requires sacrifice. You may feel like you're condemned to the grave when in fact God is planting you in richer, more fertile soil so that you can produce more fruit.

We like to be comfortable, with everything going smoothly in our lives, but our convenience causes atrophy of what needs to grow. One definition of 'atrophy' is “a wasting or decrease in size of a body organ, tissue or part owing to disease, injury or *lack of use*.”

We've all heard 'no pain no gain'. That means we have to use what we have, maintain it, build it up or lose it.

As with our physical bodies so it is with our spiritual bodies. We are built up in our strength for endurance.

It's the trials that Proverbs tells us that cause us to lean into God and trust him with all our heart, and not to rely on our own understanding. "In all your ways acknowledge him and he shall direct your paths". When we're in the midst of the storm — acknowledge God. Praise him, thank him for what he's done and what he's doing in our lives. But always offer that sacrifice of praise. It cuts right through the middle of what's going on. Yes, it's hard. It is a sacrifice because we sure don't feel like praising when things aren't going well. In Old Testament battles, the band went out first! Praise was used as a weapon of warfare. It still applies today.

I know personally that some of the things I've gone through have felt like near death experiences. Some have caused trauma. I am here before you today without candles, stuffed toys or catchy songs. I'm here being raw and real. I had the message title/theme come into my head weeks ago, although I had no idea as to what I would be going through and how it applied.

As I struggled this week to put this message together, it came directly from the middle of a dark night. It was a situation I had no control over, though it affected me and my family as to whether we would be staying in our home or having to sell and move. I felt pressure and tension, the stretching and the crushing. Yet all the while I let my praises rise to God. I told God that whatever way things go I will always praise you.

I am pleased to say we are staying put; we are not moving. It has been a battle-weary week for me, but I was determined to write and give this message as it so directly relates to what has just happened in my life. It's been a rough season, but we've broken through. The dawn's light is illuminating the darkness in our lives once again.

Yes, there are hard seasons. We always want to know why? Why me? Why is this happening to me? Why are you God allowing these things to happen? I truly believe that if God really told us why he'd have to kill us and take us home. Either that or our brains would explode because the big picture is just too much for us to comprehend. So, if not 'why' then what? We need to ask different questions. "What's going on?"

"What am I learning from this?" "What should I do?"

Armed with these questions, we've gone from victim to Victor. From whining and crying and asking 'why me'? To offering praise to God, standing in our authority – on the promises of God.

And we know that all things work for the good of those who love him who have been called according to his purpose. Rom 8:28

These are just some things I've learned since I began my walk with Jesus. It's not always warm and fuzzy. There's a battle raging around us and at times we're caught up in the middle of it. In this life there will always be something. My cousin often says, 'I thought life was supposed to get easier as you get older'. This is not always the case.

In Jeremiah we hear God –“*For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.*”
Jeremiah 29:11

God has plans for us. Good plans. Hopeful plans. We are being prepared for those plans.

So, in the many seasons of our lives when the trials come and our faith is tested and we are in the dark, dirty, stinky, places being crushed, stretched and pruned, know it won't last forever. The dawn is coming.

Keep praising God through it all.

Ask 'what', not 'why'.

Stand in your authority on the promises of God.

It is always darkest before the dawn. But... the dawn is on the horizon.

Praise be to God!