

How to Respond to Great Trouble ***Are You Up Against It?***

Because of my videos on YouTube, I get lots of prayer requests from around the world. One woman told me her husband is a serial cheater, that despite her desire to stay married to him for the sake of her children, he has affair after affair. A father has a son who can't stay focused in school and is afraid he will never graduate. Another man had a stroke, and he feels trapped in a broken body that won't do what he tells it to do. A father lives in a violent and lawless community and is praying for an escape from there. A mom has a son with cerebral palsy and her body can no longer stand the strain of carrying him everywhere. A mother has a son in prison and the corrupt legal system where she lives has falsely put him in jail. A mother's daughter is schizophrenic and always on the edge of doing something violent to her or others. I have received thousands of these kinds of prayer requests from people desperately discouraged by what they face. Perhaps you have seen the classic animated film, "Finding Nemo". A clownfish named Marlin, has a son, Nemo who swims too close to the surface and ends up being captured by a diver. Distraught, he loses all hope of ever seeing his son again. His friend Dory, a blue tang with short-term memory loss encourages Marlin to not give up on finding Nemo. "Just keep swimming", she sings to him and her enthusiasm spurs Marlin on to continue the search for his son Nemo.

There are times when you or someone you love is in a bad place and feels like quitting. You may need a Dory or your friend may need a Dory to sing, "Just keep swimming". Perhaps you have been there and lost hope. The Bible has a term which has the same idea as, "Just keep swimming." It is faith. Faith is famously defined in Scripture this way. **Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.** (Hebrews 11: 1 NIV) Faith does not mean you have it together. It is not what it is like when you have a revelation of what to do to solve an impossible problem. It is not even the light at the end of the tunnel. Faith is what Dory possessed when neither she nor Marlin had a clue how to find Nemo. Here is where faith in the Bible is different from faith in the movies. Faith in Hollywood is just faith in faith, it is deciding something good will come of what I do. Faith in Scripture is faith in God. It is a confidence that God will show you the way, that He will see you through what you face, that no matter what, God is with you. Let me share a few examples of how this "keep on swimming" mindset impacted events just before and after the first Christmas.

Consider the horrifying dilemma Joseph encountered when he discovered that Mary, his betrothed was pregnant, but he was not the father. We don't know when he was told this, most likely after the three months Mary spent with Elizabeth her close relative. Joseph clearly was not ok with Mary being pregnant and it seems did not believe it was the Holy Spirit who conceived Him. **Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.** (Matthew 1: 19 NIV) Joseph showed an incredible degree of restraint. Rather than flying into a fit of rage at being betrayed (or so he must have thought), he quietly pondered what his next step would be. He "just kept swimming". There are times when you don't have answers for what has come to you and it is quite trying, maybe even crushing. Rather than let your dark instincts take over, pause like Joseph did and cling to the faith you have in God. It may seem in the moment like the God you trusted has let you down but as Joseph discovered, the worst you fear may in fact be the good way of the Lord being uncovered.

Mary of course had a similar story. She too faced a great crisis but not like Joseph did. She knew she was pregnant with the Lord's anointed Messiah. The angel Gabriel had come to her and shared with Mary God's plan. The angel of course was quite a frightening sight. **But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.** (Luke 1: 30-31 NIV) If the appearance of the angel was frightening, this news must have been ten times more so to Mary. **"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High**

will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. (Luke 1: 34-35 NIV) So now you have the teenage girl Mary, perhaps even a young teen, finding out from a scary looking angel that she was going to be pregnant, and the father of her child would be the Holy Spirit. Remember, she was about to be married to her equally virgin fiancé Joseph. Consider what would have gone through her head. Yes. That is precisely it. "How will Joseph react to this?" What will he do when he discovers I am pregnant?" It had to be a very troubling concern for her, as troubling as Marlin losing his son, as mind warping as Joseph discovering Mary was pregnant. If you don't believe me, notice the first thing Mary did after the angel left. She hurriedly packed up some things and rushed off to spend three months with her pregnant relative Elizabeth. These are the moments you can't prepare yourself to face. They have no floor upon which to stand. You are left drowning in confusion and desperation. Those are the times when faith in God is needed and if you can just keep swimming while that faith in Christ begins to carry you, you will be blessed.

Let's take a close look at a woman Jesus Himself said had "great faith". This woman, whose name we are never told, had the floor knocked out from under her. She had nowhere else to turn but to Jesus. **A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession."** (Matthew 15: 22 NIV) This was the first great trial she faced. It was her lost Nemo moment and as you can see, she kept swimming. She went to Jesus for help. It seems like this should be the grand climax of the account. Jesus kindly heals her daughter, and the Canaanite woman goes home happily. It wasn't. **Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."** (Matthew 15: 23 NIV) Remember the poor woman was right there and heard the disciples wanting her driven off. Here was her second great trial. The threat of Jesus agreeing with His disciples. But she just kept swimming. Jesus responded but certainly not how she or you would have guessed. **He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."** (Matthew 15: 24 NIV) This is the Canaanite woman's third great trial. She just kept swimming. **The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.** (Matthew 15: 25 NIV) Do YOU see her faith? You would expect this to end here but it didn't. Next comes the woman's fourth great trial. Jesus' response to her begging was seemingly a cold rejection of her prayer request. **He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."** (Matthew 15: 26 NIV) Once more, despite this terrible outlook she faced, the woman kept swimming. Her response is forever remembered as one of the great comebacks of all time. And a reflection of unconquerable faith. **"Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."** (Matthew 15: 27 NIV)

What a great soul! What a tremendous model for you to emulate! Don't take my word for it that this Canaanite woman is an extraordinary example for you to follow. Notice Jesus' final reply to her appeal. **Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.** (Matthew 15: 28 NIV) There are times when you will have no logical reason to hold onto your faith in Christ. Everything appears to have gone against you and He even seems to not care what happens with you. Just keep swimming! Grab your faith in God tightly and don't let go of it. Faith in Christ will see you through anything you are facing. You can have the same sort of faith the Canaanite woman had! Why couldn't you? I dream of being that sort of Christian and perhaps you do also. Wouldn't it be something if what the Apostle Paul said of the church in Rome he was saying of you? **First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.** (Romans 1: 8 NIV) When troubles come and it seems like there is no way out for you, that is when your true colors will show and the sort of faith that excites the people of God and brings the standing ovation in heaven is ready for you to put out there. Never lose your faith in God! He is with you all the way regardless of what you face.