



Part 6 | Pivotal Circumstances

Life is full of surprises - some good, some not so good. But each unexpected event that comes our way is actually a divine opportunity. In this installment of Five Things God Uses To Grow Our Faith, we will discover the role that pivotal circumstances play in the development of our trust in God.

Bottom Line: My perspective determines the impact of the circumstances in my life.

Discussion Questions

1. Give a brief example of an event or set of circumstances in your life that led to feelings of helplessness or being out of control. The event can be positive or negative.
2. As you think back on this incident, what role did God play in your thoughts? Did you pray? Did you pray differently? Were you angry?
3. Would you say this event strengthened or weakened your confidence in God? Why?
4. In *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis writes: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world." In your opinion, why is it so easy to factor God out of our lives when things are good and so difficult to factor him out when things aren't? Why does God almost always become part of the conversation when bad things happen?
5. Read James 1:2-5. James says that trials test our faith, or confidence in God. How is a trial a test of our faith? James says the goal of these tests is "perseverance." The implication is that trials can create persevering faith in God. But why trials? Can you think of other ways God could create persevering faith in us?
6. Respond to this statement. "When it feels like God is allowing something to happen to us, it is easy to lose faith. But when we accept that he is doing something in us, we are candidates for the grace we need to endure."

7. If God uses pivotal circumstances to build our faith in him, what should our response be next time life takes us by surprise?
8. Consider how the various things God uses to grow your faith help you to develop a perspective that leads you toward Jesus through your circumstances, whether they are positive or negative circumstances.
 - a. How has application of the Scriptures changed your perspective on life?
 - b. How have key (or providential) relationships shaped your perspectives on your life events?
 - c. How has reading the Bible, prayer, and giving financial resources away helped develop your perspectives?
 - d. How has serving others through personal ministry informed your perspective on circumstances you experience?
9. What has been the most helpful or encouraging thought/idea from the message this week? How has that thought/idea helped you?

Further Study Questions:

1. Read John 11:1-6. How does it make you feel when you read that Jesus loved Lazarus but didn't go to him in his time of need? Is the idea of God using human pain for his glory disturbing to you? Is this a new concept for you?
2. Read John 11:11-15. According to these verses, what is the relationship between Lazarus' death and the disciples' faith?
3. Read John 11:21-27. Listen carefully for, or even circle in your Bible, the terms "believe", "believing", and "believes."
4. What difference does it make if an individual really believes that Jesus is the resurrection and the life rather than simply one for whom God does an occasional favor (see verse 22)?
5. Read John 11:38-45. As Jesus prays (verse 41-42), he cites the reason for pausing to pray before performing the miracle. What is that reason? According to verse 45, what was the outcome of this miracle?

Your Time with God

Week 6 - Day 1

James 1:2-4

Trials are “tests” that challenge faith. When trials occur, one should count it all joy—not meaning mere worldly, temporal happiness, but rather spiritual, enduring, “complete joy” in the Lord who is sovereign over all things, including trials. The testing of your faith defines the meaning of a trial for the Christian: as Jesus was “tested” in the wilderness, so believers are tested. The Greek word for “testing” denotes a positive test intended to make one’s faith “genuine”. The result is steadfastness, a life of faithful endurance amid troubles and afflictions.

Prayer: Father, show me how to “count it all joy” during times of testing.

Week 6 - Day 2

1 Peter 1:6-7

Peter realizes that joy is mingled with grief as Christians in Asia Minor suffer various trials. These sufferings are God’s will for his people, so that their faith might be purified and shown to be genuine. Such faith has a great reward, for at the revelation (that is, the return) of Jesus Christ, honor and praise will belong both to Christians and to Christ. Our faith in the midst of trials and testing is strengthened when we set our minds and hearts on what is eternal instead of what is temporal.

Prayer: Father, I choose to fix my eyes on you and what is eternal.

Week 6 - Day 3

John 11:1-6

Jesus could say that Lazarus’s illness does not lead to death in the sense that it did not lead ultimately to death, but it did lead through death to being raised from the dead a few days later. Jesus knew what was going to happen. The word “So” (or “therefore”) shows the reason why Jesus stayed two days longer: he allowed his friends to go through the sorrow and hardship of the death and mourning of Lazarus because he loved them and wanted them to witness an amazing demonstration of his power over death, thus seeing his glory. The Lord does not always answer prayers as expected.

Prayer: Father, help me to trust you are working all things for your glory and my good.

Week 6 - Day 4

John 11:7-15

The phrase in verse 15 “so that you may believe” indicates that Jesus knows raising Lazarus from the dead will lead to deeper faith on the part of the disciples who witness this miracle. Obviously, Jesus’ priority is neither the comfort of his dear friend nor his own personal safety since the raising of Lazarus serves as a final event triggering the Jewish leaders’ resolve to have him arrested and tried for blasphemy. His priority is the faith of his followers.

Prayer: Father, help me to cooperate with you in growing my faith.

Week 6 - Day 5

John 11:17-45

Jesus was moved with profound sorrow at the death of his friend and at the grief that his other friends had suffered. When Jesus wept, he joined his friends’ sadness with heartfelt sorrow, yet underlying it is the knowledge that resurrection and joy will soon follow. Jesus’ example shows that heartfelt mourning in the face of death does not indicate lack of faith but honest sorrow at the reality of suffering and death. And yet, his goal remained to increase the faith of his followers. Thankfully we have a Savior who understands our emotions even during our deepest sorrows.

Prayer: Father, thank you that you gave us a Savior who understands.