

Effective Christian 4: Tackle Tough Times with Confidence

by Pastor Kurt Hoover

Litany adapted from Romans 11

Pastor: who has known the mind of the Lord

All: or who has been his counselor?

Pastor: Or who has given a gift to him

All: that he might be repaid?

Pastor: For from him and through him and to him are all things

All: To him be glory forever.

Pastor: We worship You Lord in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen

Jeremiah 17:5-8

“Cursed is the one who trusts in man,
who draws strength from mere flesh
and whose heart turns away from the LORD.

⁶ That person will be like a bush in the wastelands;
they will not see prosperity when it comes.
They will dwell in the parched places of the desert,
in a salt land where no one lives.

⁷ “But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD,
whose **confidence** is in him.

⁸ They will be like a tree planted by the water
that sends out its roots by the stream.

It does not fear when heat comes;
its leaves are always green.

It has no worries in a year of drought
and never fails to bear fruit.”

Romans 12:9-13 ⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² **Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.** ¹³ Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Luke 6:17-26 ¹⁷ He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, ¹⁸ who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by impure spirits were cured, ¹⁹ and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.

²⁰ Looking at his disciples, he said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹ Blessed are you who hunger now,
for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

²² Blessed are you when people hate you,
when they exclude you and insult you
and reject your name as evil,
because of the Son of Man.

²³ “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

²⁴ “But woe to you who are rich,
for you have already received your comfort.

²⁵ Woe to you who are well fed now,
for you will go hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now,
for you will mourn and weep.

²⁶ Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you,
for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

When Molly and I walk the dog around the little duck pond that wraps around part of our neighborhood there are a couple of trees that stand out to me. It is a really shallow pond with the white rock riff raff along the side. But it gets plenty of little crappies from the egret sanctuary at the old Plainfield quarry on route 30. ...A couple of fountains, a nice black top path along one side.

There are 3-4 strategically placed oak trees at each bend in the path along that water. I often wonder what those oak trees will look like 100 years from now. A constant connection to that source of water and no real competition for their growth. I wonder if in 40 years, if I am still alive, will I be able to even get a glimpse of what they will someday become.

*“Cursed is the one who trusts in man,
who draws strength from mere flesh
and whose heart turns away from the LORD. ... desert weed*

*“But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD,
whose **confidence** is in him. (Jeremiah 17:5 & 8) ... for they
will be like an oak planted along a stream.*

And please notice that the analogy is clear. It is not the strength or identity of the plant that will make it strong, but that it is attached to an endless supply of living water.

Blessed are you when you are robed of the flat, dusty ground idols in your life ... because yours is the Kingdom of God! You are attached to the source of life, and laughter, and joy that makes you leap. (That is C.S. Lewis – definition of Joy. Happiness you can manufacture on your own, but only God can surprise you with Joy!)

Blessed are those that have been stripped of worldly addictions, because their center of gravity is switching back to that which gives life. And yes, this process does feel like hunger, deep searching hunger. It does feel like mourning... the anguish of loss. It does feel like the world is against you, you have lost your popularity and influence... Losing your idols of security, a full

table, health and success is true poverty... This (The beatitudes Jesus speaks into our lives) is no analogy... this is Jesus here for you right now putting to death your idols and attaching you once again to His Kingdom.

This is ancient wisdom and promise. Jeremiah inspired by the Holy Spirit, speaking on behalf of God. And 600 years later The Holy Spirit in bodily form saying the same thing through Jesus.

Tell me this is not relevant 2,000 years later! ...

Have you done this. I left my cell phone at work. Evening meeting, not worth turning around for. Or maybe it is sitting in a bag of rice... we wont go into why... :)

I went through all the stages of loss that evening... poverty, dread, fear, loneliness, isolation... :) I kept turning to the end table expecting it to be there. And I can't really tell you what on that phone was so important. A video game, the news, was there a text message or a group chat I was missing out on. It is the distraction really, right. God forbid I be alone with my thoughts. God forbid I be idle. (I am being ironic)

It was a disaster. I did actually miss an important text. Another important reminder. I went to bed thinking I had an alarm. Thankfully Eli got up on his own for E-learning. :)

But, do you know what happened? I sat and talked with my wife. I went to bed reading a book. I the midst of real and actually angst... I also found peace. I plugged back into a deeper more personal reality that has been available to me the whole time.

*Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God. (Luke 6:20)*

I mean this is the appeal of a snow day right? Yeah it is inconvenient, you have to shovel and you may have had important plans at work or school, but who doesn't appreciate being forced to stop and rest. Stop and enjoy family. Stop and reconnect with the source of life. We don't want Sabbath rest and reconnection with God, but when it happens. When it is forced upon us ... we get a little excited...

The same is true of our relationship with God... We look to other things, that cannot give us life – they are simply escapes and distractions. In our exhaustion we must be severed from the usual distractions to once again get excited about the presence of God.

We don't want Sabbath rest and reconnection with God, but when it happens. When it is forced upon us ... we get a little excited...

This is more than the warm fuzzy of feeling connected to God. This is about the day-to-day connection with God as He uses us for his purposes in the lives of others. It is not always fun to be a living offering for the sake of others, but after the fact it is often the most life-giving connection of the day.

Tell me this is not relevant for our lives today in this modern era. If anything we have more idols and distractions disconnecting us from the source of life.

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This painful process of being made aware of and removed from our idols is what actually makes us highly effective as Christians. This is relevant. This is something a lost and distracted world desperately needs. Not just the life-giving water that comes from being reconnected with the Kingdom and presence of God, but a word of hope and promise in the midst of the process. Because it is a real pruning of something we have come to depend on ... sometimes violently pruned out of our lives.

You are God’s promise to a lost and distracted world. You are that promise because you are right now attached to the source of life, and laughter, and joy that makes you leap.

But you are also that promise because you can speak hope into those whose idols are being torn down. You know the way of the cross that leads to new life. And you do not need to be an expert to give those words. You have all that you need right now to make this happen. The words you bring have nothing to do with what type of plant you are. A mighty oak or a reed of grass. The words you bring come from the source of living water that you depend on.

*“But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD,
whose **confidence** is in him.*

This is how Paul says it... because of your trust in the Lord you *honor people above yourself* (vs. 10)... what a beautiful picture. *You have spiritual fervor... a zeal* (vs. 11) that cannot be produced on its own. You are *joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.* (vs. 12)

You are a highly effective Christian. It is through you that God gives confidence ...not despite tough times. But, precisely through the tough times we are all destined to face as we are reconnected with the Kingdom again and again in our lives.

You are *like a tree planted by the water
that sends out its roots by the stream.*
[You do] *not fear when heat comes;*
[your] *leaves are always green.*
[You have] *no worries in a year of drought
and never fail to bear fruit.*