

INTRODUCTION

When I was finishing high school way back in the 1970s, there was a rock band from Canada called the Five Man Electrical Band. They were one-hit wonders with the song "Signs." The lead singer, Les Emmerson wrote the song after driving along Route 66 in California and seeing all the different signs. The chorus said, "Signs, signs, everywhere there's signs. Blocking up the scenery, breaking my mind. Do this, don't do that, can't you read the signs?" After a couple of verses about bad signs he finished with this chorus, "And the sign says, 'Everybody welcome. Come in, kneel down and pray.' But when they passed around a plate at the end of it all, I didn't have a penny to pay. So I got me a pen and paper and made up my own little sign. I said, 'Thank you, Lord, for thinking about me, I'm alive and doing fine.'"

He was right, there are signs, signs, everywhere there's signs. As you drive around, road signs give you directions, but sometimes they can be pretty confusing. Sometimes the signs in front of churches can be a little confusing. There's one that says, "Don't let worry kill you. Let the church help." A sign on a plumber's truck said, "We repair what your husband fixed." A sign in the waiting room of a veterinarian said: "Be back in five minutes. SIT! STAY!" There is a sign on an Episcopal nursing home in New York that reads: "For the sick and tired of the Episcopal Church" Some door signs say either "push" or "pull." In a hospital in Minneapolis, there's a sign on the door going into Labor and Delivery that says: "PUSH! PUSH! PUSH!" When you think about it, some signs are useless because they state the obvious. In Tennessee, a highway sign says: "When this sign is under water, this road is impassable." Other signs reveal the creative humor of people. I read about a sign on a fencepost somewhere in Texas that says: "The farmer allows walkers to cross the field free, but the bull charges."

English has become the international language of business, so you can find signs in English all around the world. However, these English signs may be funny because of the literal translations. For instance, there's an English sign on a clothing store in China that reads, "Women may have a fit upstairs." In a hotel in Bucharest, guests found this sign on the elevator: "The lift is being repaired. During this time we regret that you will be unbearable." This sign can be found on a hotel restaurant in Japan: "A sports jacket may be worn for dinner, but no trousers." In a certain Egyptian hotel, every room has a sign in English that says: "If you require room service, please open door and yell, 'ROOM SERVICE!'" In Hong Kong there is a sign on a dentist's office that reads, "Teeth extracted using latest methodists." But my favorite is the sign that appears beside the swimming pool of a French Hotel. It says: "Swimming is forbidden without the savior." Even though they're referring to a lifeguard, I like the way it's stated there!

Studies conducted by sociologists have found many signs are ignored. Speed limit signs, no parking signs, and even stop signs may be ignored. But research has determined the one sign almost always noticed and followed is "Out of order."

Of course, we don't like to see that sign. Have you ever been dying of thirst and when you find a soft drink machine, there's an out of order sign on it? You aren't going to put your money in it. But the worst, of course, is when you're on a trip and you need to take a restroom break, but on the door of the restroom are those three terrible words: Out of order.

The point I'm trying to make is that sometimes it seems our life becomes out of order. Have you ever found your life to be so full of dysfunction and pain that you felt like you should walk around with an out of order sign around your neck?

We expect machines to function properly. You put a quarter into the newspaper machine and you get a newspaper. But when things are out of order, frustration occurs. In the same way, we expect life to function in order. When you do what's right you expect to get a good result. But sometimes you can do right, and still suffer. As a husband or wife, you tried to do everything right in that marriage—and still he or she walked out. Out of order. As a parent, you raised your kids to know the Lord and to do right, and yet they still have made bad choices. Out of order. At work, you worked hard at being a good employee—yet you got laid off. Out of order. You ate right, exercised faithfully, and took vitamins, but still you got that bad diagnosis. What's going on?

Don't panic. God tells us that sometimes we can do everything right and we'll still suffer. Then He tells us how to live when that happens. I Peter 3:13-17:

Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

We expect life to be fair. We can't understand why good people suffer, and bad people seem to be getting all the breaks. We want to say: It just isn't fair! No, life isn't fair, but God is good. And when it seems like your life is out of order—when life malfunctions, here are four ways to respond:

1. REACT IN A WAY THAT WILL CAUSE OTHERS TO ASK YOU ABOUT YOUR HOPE! vs. 15: *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.*

We have something the world desperately needs: HOPE. Our English word "hope" isn't strong enough for the Bible word that is translated hope: *elpis*. The English word "hope" is related to the word "dreams." People talk about "their hopes and dreams." In other words, hope is something that you wish will happen, but you don't know for sure. For instance, I can say, "One day I hope I get to play golf at Augusta National Golf Club." It's the dream of every avid golfer. I doubt that it will ever happen for me, but I can dream anyway. But the Bible word hope (*elpis*) isn't anything like a dream; it's more related to the word truth. *Elpis* means having a positive anticipation you will receive something that has been promised. Using that Biblical meaning, when I say "I hope I go to heaven" it means something totally different than saying, "I hope I get to play golf at Augusta National." Nobody has promised me I'll play there, but Jesus has promised me I'll be with Him in heaven.

So when we face adversity, we can maintain hope. The Bible says in II Corinthians 1:10: "He has delivered us from such deadly perils, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us." (II Corinthians 1:10) Our hope is on Jesus, not on ourselves, or on others. How do I *know* I'm going to heaven? Because Jesus promised me that if I believed in Him I would not perish but have everlasting life!

There are two issues at stake here: (1) Having Hope—and Jesus supplies that, and (2) being ready to answer when someone asks you. You can be full of hope, and not be prepared to tell someone why you have hope. Too many Christians are like arctic rivers—frozen at the mouth. They don't know how to talk about their faith.

Nobody likes an obnoxious Christian who is constantly trying to force the truth down someone's throat. They have no tact and they offend people. I heard of an overzealous barber in a small town who talked about God with everyone who sat in his chair. One day a stranger was in his chair for a haircut and a shave. The barber was busy talking to another customer who was waiting and had forgotten to talk to this new man about God. Just as he had the man all lathered up for his shave, he remembered. With the straight razor poised in his hand the barber blurted out, "Are you prepared to meet God?" The man must have thought he meant right then because he jumped out of the chair and ran out the door with the lather still on his face!

Evangelism shouldn't be like a telemarketer trying to sell a product. Evangelism is simply one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread—except for us it's where to find hope. The best way to share your faith is when someone asks you why your life is different. When others see that you have hope when conditions seem hopeless, you won't have to tell them, they'll ask. Are you *prepared* to answer them? That's why we offer FAITH evangelism training. People who go through faith can explain how to become a Christian using the letters F.A.I.T.H. Forgiveness Available Impossible Turn Heaven. When life seems out of order—keep up your hope. Second, when life malfunctions:

2. RECOUNT YOUR BLESSINGS! *Vs. 14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed.*

After the 2000 Presidential Election, the word "recount" took on a whole new meaning. But if you are struggling and hurting, perhaps it's time for a blessing recount in your life. Regardless of the difficulties you may be facing, you can always find some blessings in your life. You may be familiar with the wonderful hymn written by Johnson Oatman Jr. that says: "When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed; when you are discouraged, thinking all is lost; count your many blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done."

Paul wrote these words in Ephesians 1:3: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." (Ephesians 1:3) Some blessings are in the physical realm, like good health. Other blessings are in the in relational or material realms. But the very best blessings are found in the heavenly realms, and the Bible says the followers of Jesus are blessed with every spiritual blessing—not some, or most—but with every one!

I don't like the word "luck." I never say, "Good Luck" to anyone. The only kind of luck I believe in is Living Under Christ's Knowledge. When I sink a 40-foot putt, my buddies may say, "You were lucky." I say, "Oh no, I was blessed!" If someone says, "You're lucky to have a wife like Cindy." I say, "It's not luck, I'm blessed." One way to recount your blessings is by substituting the word "blessed" for "lucky."

God says in black and white: You are blessed. You may think, "Well, I don't feel very blessed right now." *Feeling* has nothing to do with it. The infallible Word of God assures you are blessed. When the Apostle Paul wrote about being blessed with every spiritual blessing, he was a prisoner in jail. When he looked around himself in the earthly realm, there wasn't much to commend. But when he looked up into the heavenly realms, he said, "I'm Blessed! I'm blessed with every spiritual blessing!"

Have you noticed we can have 100 days of good health, and then we have a bad day of sickness, and we complain, "Why me, Lord?" Did you ever stop and say, "Thank you, Lord for my health!" You may drive a car for 10 years without a wreck, and then you have an accident. Immediately, you moan, "Oh, why me Lord?" Did you ever say, "thank you, Lord, for allowing me arrive safely at my destination on those other days?"

In the early part of the 20th century, a great Methodist Pastor in London named William Sangster started having some health problems, and after tests, he was told that he had ASL (often called Lou Gherig's disease). It's a painful disease in which paralysis gradually develops. Upon getting this devastating diagnosis, Pastor Sangster wrote down four resolutions to guide his life. He wrote: (1) I will never complain; (2) I will keep my home bright; (3) I will count my blessings; (4) I will try to turn it to gain.

Until the day he died he kept that powerful attitude. Many hundreds of people came to know Christ because of the way he reacted to his illness. On his last resurrection Sunday he wrote this note and passed it to his daughter: "How terrible to wake up on Easter and have no voice to shout, 'He is risen!' But far worse: To have a voice and not want to shout."

Third, when life malfunctions:

3. REFUSE TO PANIC! Vs. 14: "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened."

When it seems your life is out of order, it's easy to become afraid. The word Peter uses here can be translated "terror." It's the same word Jesus used in Luke 21:26 when He was talking about the conditions that will exist in the world before He returns. He said, "Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world." It literally means "hearts will fail because of terror." Five years ago, the word "terror" or "terrorist" didn't mean that much to us. But since 9/11 we know each of us is a potential target for terrorism. The radical Islamic terrorists who declared holy war on our culture have stated they want to make us live in fear. If we live under a cloud of fear, they have been partially successful. Sure, there are scary things in this world, but God tells us over and over "Do not fear." I haven't counted, but I've been told the phrase "Fear not" appears 365 times in the Bible. That's one for every day of the year. Just one would be good enough for me! For instance, Jesus said, "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill

the body and after that can do no more...the very hairs of your head are numbered. Don't be afraid." (Luke 12:4, 7)

It is a human tendency to "fear the worst." When we are going through a difficult time, the enemy tries to sabotage our minds to think things will never get any better. But we must realize sometimes the painful circumstances in our lives produce positive results.

A shipwreck survivor once washed up a deserted island. Everyday he cried out to God to be rescued and he searched the horizon for a ship, but no help arrived. He finally managed to collect some materials and built a hut to live in. Everyday he prayed for God to send someone to rescue him. One afternoon he returned from searching for food to find the worst had happened. His hut was in flames from a cook fire he had left burning. He sat down on the ground as his hut burned, complaining to God the whole time. "Why me, God? Why did you allow this to happen to me?"

The next morning he was surprised to see a sailing vessel anchored off his island. As he was rescued, he asked the crew, "How did you know I was here?" The captain said, "We saw your smoke signal yesterday afternoon." What he thought was the worst that could happen to him had turned out to be the best thing that happened to him.

Do you recall the things you feared the most 10 years ago? Chances are you can't. So whatever fearful experience you are facing now, just write Romans 8:28 over it: "For we know that in all things God is working for the good of those who love Him." So, when life malfunctions:

4. REAFFIRM JESUS AS YOUR LORD! Vs. 15: "But in your hearts SET APART Christ as Lord."

The key step to take when your life seems out of order is to "set apart" Jesus as your Lord. The word Lord literally means "Boss" or "Master." Some people want Jesus as Savior but they don't want Him as Lord. They want someone to save them from going to hell, but they don't want someone to control their lives. But the truth is you cannot accept Jesus as your Savior and willingly reject Him as your Lord.

In the King James Version, it says we are to "sanctify" Christ as Lord. The word "sanctify" means to cherish something so much, you set it aside because it is special. In the early 1960s I used to ride my bicycle to Medley's Superette to buy baseball cards. I can remember finding some Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris cards. But I didn't understand how valuable they would be some day, so I took clothes pins and attached those cards to the wheel of my bicycle to make a noise when the spokes brushed them. I never realized one day a single Mickey Mantle baseball card would be worth over \$5,000. If I had known its value, I would have cherished it and set it aside.

In the same way, we must realize how precious and valuable Jesus is. In your heart, there's only room for one #1—and it must be Jesus.

When you are suffering, you must realize Jesus is Lord over your tough circumstances. The Lordship of Jesus involves so much more than merely saying, "Lord, Lord." In Matthew 7:21

Jesus said, Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." Then, He went on to say what will happen to those people on only called Him Lord but never truly set Him apart as Lord. I like the way Eugene Petersen paraphrases His words: "I can see it now—at the Final Judgement thousands strutting up to me and saying, 'Master, we preached the Message, we bashed the demons, our God-sponsored projects had everyone talking.' And do you know what I'm going to say? 'You missed the boat. All you did was use me to make yourselves important. I don't know you, and you don't impress me one bit. You're out of here.'" (Matthew 7:22-23 *The Message*)

CONCLUSION

Signs, signs, everywhere there's signs. Should you have an out of order sign around your neck? In England, there are some radicals violently opposed to Britain's involvement in the war in Iraq. Although they are relatively few in number, they have launched a devious campaign of civil disobedience designed to disrupt life in England. They have printed up small OUT OF ORDER signs and posted them on machines and doors everywhere. What a devious plan! Even though the vending machine or the public telephone is in perfect working condition, all it takes is an out of order sign to fool most people. However, their strategy has been publicized, so English citizens are not believing every out of order sign. They may risk a shilling or two in the vending machine or telephone because of the devious lies of these radicals.

There's a great parallel for us. It may seem like your life is out of order, but that's the lie of the Evil One—Satan himself. If you believe his lie, then you won't have hope, you won't have joy, and you won't have peace. Like Jesus we need to say, "Devil, *you* are the one who's out of order—get behind me Satan!" This old world may be out of order, but if you are in Christ, you are in perfect spiritual condition, so rip that out of order sign off your neck!

When there is chaos and pain in your life, people are watching. When you react with these attitudes, they'll want to ask you, "How can you have hope?" That's the greatest resource we have to offer a lost and dying world: hope.

In 1998, there was a popular movie called "Hope Floats." Sandra Bullock's character's husband left her for her best friend—and they revealed their affair to her on a television talk show. In the movie she returns home to Texas with her daughter. (The movie was actually filmed in Smithville, Texas.) I cried like a baby when the little girl, stood in the driveway begging her daddy to take her with him because I sensed the pain every child has over the breakup of their parents. Birdie's mother dies while she's there. It's a movie full of pain and suffering—pretty realistic in other words. At the end of the movie Birdie is walking along with a new friend holding one hand and Bernice holding her other hand. With the sound of a carnival beside them, and the sight of fireworks illuminating the Texas sky, she dares to risk that everything is going to be okay. The movie is named for her statement: "Momma used to say that beginnings are scary, endings are usually sad; but it's the middle that counts the most. You need to remember that when you find yourself at the beginning. Give hope a chance to float up and it will too."

Wow! Everybody needs hope. My hope was crucified and buried and then my hope floated right out of the grave! And today, our hope is a rock solid anchor. Like the hymn says: My hope is

built on nothing less; Than Jesus' blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame;
But wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ the solid rock I stand; All other ground is sinking
sand.

OUTLINE

1. REACT IN A WAY THAT WILL CAUSE OTHERS TO ASK YOU ABOUT YOUR HOPE!

"He has delivered us from such deadly perils, and he will deliver us. On him WE HAVE SET OUR HOPE that he will continue to deliver us." *II Corinthians 1:10*

2. RECOUNT YOUR BLESSINGS!

"Praise be to God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING in Christ." *Ephesians 1:3*

3. REFUSE TO PANIC!

Jesus said, "I tell you, my friends, DO NOT BE AFRAID of those who kill the body and after that can do no more...the very hairs of your head are numbered. DON'T BE AFRAID." *Luke 12:4, 7*

4. REAFFIRM JESUS AS YOUR LORD!

Jesus said, "Not everyone who SAYS to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who DOES the will of my Father who is in heaven." *Matthew 7:21*



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes