

Opening scripture:

Lamentations 3:19-24

- 19 *Remember my affliction and my wanderings,
the wormwood and the gall!*
- 20 *My soul continually remembers it
and is bowed down within me.*
- 21 *But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:*
- 22 *The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;*
- 23 *they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.*
- 24 *“The LORD is my portion,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope in him.”*

Life is what happens to us when we're making other plans.

Have you ever noticed that things don't always go the way we want them to? No matter how hard we plan, things tend to just go other directions. It's not really a problem, just an observation of the way that life seems to work.

The problem is when we allow the changing of our plans to affect us. Sometimes the effect of the changes on us is minor, but sometimes it can throw us into a major tail spin.

What we need to remember is that God is in control, and, like it says in Romans 8:28, God works all things for the good of those who love him. But that's not easy to remember when you're spinning out of control in a difficult situation.

When things get really bad, it's like we're in a totally foreign environment, unable to control what's going on around us, or make any changes to make things better. It's like the classic bad dream, or horror movie scene, where, no matter how fast you run you can't get away from the bad guy. You trip on everything (or nothing); you think you're running as fast as you can, but it's like you're running in mud.

It's like jumping into a lake and not realizing how deep the water really is – suddenly you're up to your neck in water, and you can't touch bottom, and the water is so cold, you can't get enough control to start swimming or treading water. That's when I start to panic.

I've never been a strong swimmer; at least, not on top of the water. I can swim UNDER water just fine. Give me a pair of goggles and flippers and I'm great. But if you want me to swim on top of the water, like a normal person, forget it. It's not going to happen; at least not with any grace or style at all. I'll thrash around until I get where I need to go, but it really isn't pretty.

I never had swimming lessons, and never really got comfortable in the water. Swimming ON the water never was something I enjoyed doing, so I was always the weird kid who went diving with goggles and flippers looking for things on the bottom of the swimming hole. So, the problem with that, is that I don't react well when I get dropped into the water without warning, especially if I don't have the equipment that I'm able to swim well with.

So how do you react to being suddenly dropped into a situation you have no control over? There's a few examples in the Bible of people dealing with situations like that. Remember, we can learn from both positive and negative examples, so we'll look at a few examples and see what we can learn.

First, let's take a look at Psalm 69. Psalm 69 is about a time when David was in a really hard situation. He was running from Saul, and then ended up being chased by the men from Goliath's home town (who I'm sure weren't too happy for David to be around). He was between a rock and a hard place. Let's take a look at Psalm 69.

Psalm 69

- 1 Save me, O God!
For the waters have come up to my neck.*
- 2 I sink in deep mire,
where there is no foothold;
I have come into deep waters,
and the flood sweeps over me.*
- 3 I am weary with my crying out;
my throat is parched.
My eyes grow dim
with waiting for my God.*
- 4 More in number than the hairs of my head
are those who hate me without cause;
mighty are those who would destroy me,*

- those who attack me with lies.
What I did not steal
must I now restore?*
- ⁵ *O God, you know my folly;
the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you.*
- ⁶ *Let not those who hope in you be put to shame through me,
O Lord GOD of hosts;
let not those who seek you be brought to dishonor through me,
O God of Israel.*
- ⁷ *For it is for your sake that I have borne reproach,
that dishonor has covered my face.*
- ⁸ *I have become a stranger to my brothers,
an alien to my mother's sons.*
- ⁹ *For zeal for your house has consumed me,
and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.*
- ¹⁰ *When I wept and humbled my soul with fasting,
it became my reproach.*
- ¹¹ *When I made sackcloth my clothing,
I became a byword to them.*
- ¹² *I am the talk of those who sit in the gate,
and the drunkards make songs about me.*
- ¹³ *But as for me, my prayer is to you, O LORD.
At an acceptable time, O God,
in the abundance of your steadfast love answer me in your saving
faithfulness.*
- ¹⁴ *Deliver me
from sinking in the mire;
let me be delivered from my enemies
and from the deep waters.*
- ¹⁵ *Let not the flood sweep over me,
or the deep swallow me up,
or the pit close its mouth over me.*
- ¹⁶ *Answer me, O LORD, for your steadfast love is good;*

- according to your abundant mercy, turn to me.*
- 17 *Hide not your face from your servant;
for I am in distress; make haste to answer me.*
- 18 *Draw near to my soul, redeem me;
ransom me because of my enemies!*
- 19 *You know my reproach,
and my shame and my dishonor;
my foes are all known to you.*
- 20 *Reproaches have broken my heart,
so that I am in despair.
I looked for pity, but there was none,
and for comforters, but I found none.*
- 21 *They gave me poison for food,
and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.*
- 22 *Let their own table before them become a snare;
and when they are at peace, let it become a trap.*
- 23 *Let their eyes be darkened, so that they cannot see,
and make their loins tremble continually.*
- 24 *Pour out your indignation upon them,
and let your burning anger overtake them.*
- 25 *May their camp be a desolation;
let no one dwell in their tents.*
- 26 *For they persecute him whom you have struck down,
and they recount the pain of those you have wounded.*
- 27 *Add to them punishment upon punishment;
may they have no acquittal from you.*
- 28 *Let them be blotted out of the book of the living;
let them not be enrolled among the righteous.*
- 29 *But I am afflicted and in pain;
let your salvation, O God, set me on high!*
- 30 *I will praise the name of God with a song;
I will magnify him with thanksgiving.*
- 31 *This will please the LORD more than an ox*

- or a bull with horns and hoofs.*
- 32 When the humble see it they will be glad;
you who seek God, let your hearts revive.*
- 33 For the LORD hears the needy
and does not despise his own people who are prisoners.*
- 34 Let heaven and earth praise him,
the seas and everything that moves in them.*
- 35 For God will save Zion
and build up the cities of Judah,
and people shall dwell there and possess it;*
- 36 the offspring of his servants shall inherit it,
and those who love his name shall dwell in it.*

David compares his situation to being neck-deep in water, not able to get a foothold. He starts the Psalm by explaining his problem to God; he tells God exactly how he feels, and doesn't hold back. He takes the first 21 verses of the Psalm to explain to God how he feels. In verses 22-29 he tells God what he would like to happen; basically he says he wants God to take care of the people that want him dead, and to lift him up. But then in the last 7 verses, he praises God, saying no matter what happens, You're in charge; I'll let you decide what's best for me.

There's another example of being in a situation that was totally unexpected that comes to mind for me, and that's Jonah.

God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and tell them to repent. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian empire, on the eastern bank of the Tigris River, in what is now northern Iraq, near the city of Mosul. The Assyrians were not nice people, and Jonah would rather have seen them dead than have them repent and believe in God. So, rather than do what God told him to do, he tried to get as far away from Nineveh as possible; he decided to take a ship to Tarshish. While we don't know for sure where Tarshish was, we know you had to take a ship to get there,

and it was either on or in the Mediterranean, the exact opposite direction God told Jonah to go.

We know the story about Jonah and the big fish. While Jonah was on the ship trying to get away from God, there was a terrible storm, and once everyone on the ship figured out the storm was because Jonah was trying to run away from God, they threw Jonah into the sea.

But since God had a plan for Jonah, He sent the big fish to “rescue” Jonah from the sea. Jonah realized the good in his bad situation, and chapter 2 of the book of Jonah is his prayer to God while he was inside the fish.

Jonah 2:1-10

¹ Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, ² saying,

*“I called out to the LORD, out of my distress,
and he answered me;
out of the belly of Sheol I cried,
and you heard my voice.*

*³ For you cast me into the deep,
into the heart of the seas,
and the flood surrounded me;
all your waves and your billows
passed over me.*

*⁴ Then I said, ‘I am driven away
from your sight;
yet I shall again look
upon your holy temple.’*

*⁵ The waters closed in over me to take my life;
the deep surrounded me;
weeds were wrapped about my head*

*⁶ at the roots of the mountains.
I went down to the land*

*whose bars closed upon me forever;
yet you brought up my life from the pit,
O LORD my God.*

*7 When my life was fainting away,
I remembered the LORD,
and my prayer came to you,
into your holy temple.*

*8 Those who pay regard to vain idols
forsake their hope of steadfast love.*

*9 But I with the voice of thanksgiving
will sacrifice to you;
what I have vowed I will pay.
Salvation belongs to the LORD!"*

10 And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

God has a way of using difficult situations to humble us so that we'll actually submit to His will. Once Jonah submitted to God's will, God allowed the fish to "deliver" Jonah onto dry land. Definitely not my idea of a great mode of transportation, but God used it for good.

I've got one more example of being in a situation that you're totally not in control of, and it has to do with water again, as well.

In Matthew 14, Jesus just finished feeding 5000 men, as well as women and children. After being around that many people, Jesus went up into the mountains to be alone with His Father for a while, but he'd sent his disciples ahead of him in the boat to the other side of the lake. Let's look at Matthew 14, starting in verse 22.

Matthew 14:22-33

22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. 23 And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to

pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. ²⁵ And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."

²⁸ And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me."

³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³² And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

I love Peter. He has this way of acting first and then thinking. Sure stepping out of the boat took a lot of faith, but as soon as there was a sign of a problem, that faith was gone and replaced with doubt.

I think a lot of times we're like Peter. We step out on faith into uncertain situations, and then suddenly when things get hard, we're up to our necks in trouble. Peter did the right thing in his difficult and unexpected situation; he called out to Jesus for help.

In fact, all three of our examples today, David, Jonah, and Peter, were at least neck deep if not in over their heads in a rough situation, and they called out to God for help. God provided their help in their time of need; God's grace that saves us from our un-savable situations. God will do that for us, too; if we're in trouble, He will help us out of our problem, but he will do it in the way that's best for us.

Closing scripture:

Romans 5:6-11

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Questions:

1. In Psalm 69, David talks about being up to his neck in water and surrounded by his enemies. Have you ever found yourself in a similar situation, and if so, how did God help you out of that situation?
2. Sometimes it's easier to see God working in our past than in our present. Looking back, can you see times when God helped you out of situations you'd gotten yourself into, even though you deserved to be left there?
3. Have you ever tried to run away from what God wanted you to do?
4. Have you ever "stepped out of the boat", only to find out that you were in over your head, and needed more help than you thought? How did God's grace help you out of that situation?