

Series: Seven Simple Truths about Life
Title: Surviving the Setbacks and Storms
Text: **Philippians 4:6, 7**; I Peter 1:3-9; Hebrews 10:19-25; Acts 27:13-44 cf;
Key Word: Promises
Proposition: Everyone will survive the setbacks and storms because of these biblical promises.

Good Morning everyone. We're delighted that you have chosen to worship with us today. We're continuing our series on Seven Simple Truths about Life.

We're familiar with these simple truths, but we also know how challenging they are to live by. We often fail to remember them, and often fail to put them into practice. If we know and remember them, life goes much better. If we forget them, then life seems not to go that well. It's like the rules to the game of life. If we know the rules and the aim of the game of life it is fun to play. But if we don't know them; if we're confused about how to finish well in the game, then it is not enjoyable.

That's how it is about these simple truths of life. They all derive from the Scriptures. For many of us, they are truths we know, yet so frequently we fail to follow them. Today, we will focus on one simple truth about life.

In the board game, "Life" there is many setbacks, losses, and hardships that come along the journey. For example: one may suffer a ski or auto accident, the house floods or burns down; the car is stolen, stock market crashes, and then there are taxes due. Yet, the game of life is not all bad. Players enjoy making the dean's list, winning a marathon or the sweepstakes. They get married and have kids. Win a beautiful baby contest. The stock market booms and sometimes we receive a big tax refund. There are good moments along the way.

The real game of life has its setbacks and storms as well. Adversity is a part of life. Life is not fair. People get laid off. Illness strikes. Floods come. But with God in our lives, we can be more than conquerors. We can overcome life's obstacles, survive the setbacks and storms. In addition, just like in the game of life we also celebrate good moments: a summer sunrise, falling in love for first time, a 100 birthday party, rich friendships, fulfilling jobs, and those moments when all seems right, those peaceful, easy feelings. Often times, as we name our blessing, we see that there are more good moments and seasons than there is bad.

Today we will see that God has provided some life-changing promises which give us hope in the setbacks and storms. These promises reveal a God-given strategy for surviving adversity in life. You probably already know these hope-filled strategies. But maybe you've forgotten them. It's good to remember them. They are drawn not only from the Scriptures, but also from the life experiences of those who have survived the setbacks and storms.

I invite you to take out your sermon handout. I believe that there will be some things you may want to remember because they will be helpful to you later on. I also want you to know that setbacks and storms are going to be out there. You know up front that there will be moments when life is hard. But you can overcome.

Have you thought about how God intersects with life's setbacks and storms? There are many perspectives on God's role in suffering. Some well-meaning

Christians believe something like this: Bumps in the road happen for a reason. So everything must be the will of God. That sounds true?

Let's think about this for a moment to see if this perspective is really helpful. If everything, the good, the bad, and the ugly happened for some Godly reason, then it must have been intended by God. God wished for it to happen. So, everything is then controlled by God.

That works OK when everything is going well in life. Like when the Ohio State football surprised the world when they beat the University of Miami for the 2002 National Championship. It's clear that God must be a Buckeye fan. The pundits said that it would never happen. It was a miracle. But the problem is that there is another side of the coin, which raises a point. If you happen to be a Hurricane fan, God must not care because he refused to answer your prayers.

But can everything be controlled by God. What if I woke up at 4:00 AM with a serious sore throat on a Saturday night? I could think: God, what have I done to deserve this? Why did you bring this sickness on me when you know I have to preach tomorrow morning? God what are you trying to teach me at 4:00 AM? All these questions make it so confusing?

If God controls everything, then He must rig board games? He manipulates everything that happens during the game: the spin of the wheel and the decisions that are made. If God controls everything then, he must have rigged the OSU- Miami game. The players had nothing to with it, nor the coaches, the referees, the fans, the

field. It was all God, right. What that means then, is that every human being is a puppet in the hands of cruel God. You may see it that way. But for me, it really breaks down.

I have found myself asking such questions: Was the holocaust God's intended purpose? What about the destruction of a whole neighborhood by tornado or flood? What about genocide in Bosnia or Rwanda? What about incest or rape? Was the death of a baby by SIDS controlled by God?

I will never forget a funeral I attended. Most funerals give me a sense of peace and comfort. But this funeral was different. I sat in the back, supporting a young, grieving family in our Kentucky community. This young couple lost their child to SIDS. The well-meaning pastor tried his best to explain the unexplainable by saying to this grieving, bewildered, confused family and close-knit community that God must have wanted a rose so he uprooted this young rose and planted it in his rose garden. My heart sank. It was all I could do and sit there in silent, simmering anger. How could he say that a "loving God" would do such a thing? What kind of God would punish this family like that?

I have learned that this perspective simply does not work? It is not consistent with what God has revealed to us in Scripture. God is not some kind of monster. The God and Father of Jesus Christ is not that kind of god. He is the living God who people can turn too in a time of crisis for comfort, strength, hope, and perspective.

The Scriptures teach us that God is just, loving, tender, merciful, and holy. Whatever God does in this world is always consistent with his nature.

So if this is not what God does, if this is not how God interacts with us, then how does He when the setbacks and storms arrive? Here are four promises that reveal God's strategies for overcoming setbacks and storms.

First, God plays a role in the Midst of the storm. Storms and setbacks exist through out life. It rains on the righteous and the unrighteous. God watches over His creation and has given human beings the responsibility of dominion over this creation. He gives us the ability to make choices which determines the kind of life we live. Those choices in turn not only affect one's personal life, but also other human beings and even the rest of creation. We see this in the Garden of Eden where God placed Adam and Eve to care for it. He specifically told them that they can choose to eat any fruit within the garden, except one, the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of Good and evil. God gave them the choice. He didn't want them to eat the forbidden fruit because He knew it would bring them much pain, but they ate it anyway. Since then all of creation has been afflicted with suffering and death.

This pattern continues throughout history where human beings ignore God's voice and do their own thing. God sent Moses who provided humanity with some rules for living, hoping that would make life work. But that failed to. Then God sent the prophets, who also had the same results as Moses. Finally God sent his Son, who

lived in this mess humans have created, forgave the mess, paid the price for our sin, and gives us peace in the midst of the storm.

Luke, a doctor and follower of Jesus tells us the story of a time when Jesus sailed across the Sea of Galilee with the disciples. Jesus fell asleep while the disciples sailed the boat. A storm arrived with violent winds and rain, tossing the boat to and fro. In fear of capsizing, they quickly woke Jesus, who then rebuked the storm. All became calm. Jesus asked them, “Where is your faith?” (LK 8:22ff) The Risen Christ is with us in the midst of the storm. He speaks and calm comes to our turbulent souls. He calls for deep faith, for the Lord of the wind and waves is with us.

Secondly, God provides “Stretcher-Bearers. Luke tells the story of a time when Jesus is teaching in a house. Some religious leaders were also present listening to every word. Four men came carrying a paralytic on a stretcher. They couldn’t carry him through the front door and into the room because it was too crowded. So they took the man up a flight of stairs, and lowered him through the roof of this house in the middle of the crowd and right in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ Later this man stood up, picked up his mat, and walked out, praising God all the way home.

Yes, miracles happen. But primarily miracles happen not by some mysterious intervention of the Holy Spirit, but by the Holy Spirit through the faith of “Stretcher-bearers.” He uses everyday people, people filled with love and faith, faith that

perseveres through the obstacles, love that goes where one is not invited; faith that risks rejection, love brings the hurting to the feet of Jesus. God uses people to perform His healing work. We are his hands. We are His voice. We are His eyes. We are His heart. Paul says we are to share one another's burdens. God uses stretcher-bearers. So, *Who are your stretcher-bearers?* Who are the people you can call in the wee hours of the morning to help you in a time of crisis? Who are the people who visit you in the hospital? Who are those people who watch your kids while you care for an aging parent? Who are those people who give you leads on a job opportunity? *Whose stretcher-bearer are you?* Who will you visit in the hospital even when you are tired? Who will you pray with when they are in need? For whom will you give up a week's vacation to serve? For whom will you give you very best so they will know God's love? *Whose stretcher will you carry to Jesus?* One way to have a stretcher-bear is to be a stretcher bearer.

Third, God prompts a healthy outlook on adversity. Throughout my life I have known people who have overcome life's setbacks and storms. Time and time again they testify that the Lord gives them a different perspective on setbacks. They say that they found this new, fresher perspective by these **four things: look to what brings you joy.** They choose not to be a victim, but an over comer. They live life rejoicing in the now and refuse to worry about the future.

Next, look for the blessings and give thanks for them. Psychologist have found that thankful people live longer and better. They encourage folks to sit down at

the end of the day and write down three things you're thankful for, giving praise to God for the blessing. Paul advises us to give thanks in all circumstances.

Our scripture memory verse this week encourages this essential step: *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* Philippians 4:6,

7

Next, I want to combine the last two points. **Look for opportunities to grow.** **Look for opportunities to give.** When I was working as a summer chaplain in Methodist Hospital in Louisville, KY I met a Roman Catholic Jesuit priest who taught me the value of redemptive suffering. He was dying of gastro-intestinal cancer with tubes coming out of his nose, and IVs attached to his arms. There was also a strange odor in the room. But whenever I would visit him, he always had this twinkle in his eye and glow in his face. One day I asked him how was it with his soul and he said something like this, “My soul is filled with much peace. For I have come to a deeper understanding of the suffering my Savior had endured for me. I have discovered the nearness of Christ in my suffering.” I came to visit him that day hoping to give him some comfort. I left that day having received comfort and hope for I had met a man, a brother who brought me closer to Christ, the Christ who possessed a peace in spite of suffering and death. Even the nurses commented that they too were blessed in caring for this man of God. I strongly suspect that he went

to his Savior in prayer everyday, praying, “Lord Jesus, I offer to you my all, my pain and suffering, my love and my hope in you to make a difference in someone’s life this day.”

The Final promise God offers for overcoming setbacks and storms is that God points to deep faith as the anchor of hope. Paul, a follower of Jesus wrote a letter to a group of Christians in Corinth. He said, “*We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed...Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*” (2Cor. 4:8, 9; 16, 17) Paul was encountering several setbacks and storms, but he never lost faith. He was renewed through them for he knew he had nothing to fear. The Good Shepherd was with Him, leading him to an eternal glory.

When Kelsey was young she was terrified of thunderstorms that raged during the night. She often would wake up crying, terrified of what she did not understand. Hearing your cries for daddy, I walked down the hall to her room, knelt down beside her bed, and gently stroking her head with one hand and holding her hand with the other. I would listen to her fears. Then I would say, “It’s OK Kelsey, daddy is here, Jesus is here as an invisible friend. I love you. Jesus loves you. Everything will be OK. Then I would pray softly, asking the Risen Jesus to hold her and to release her from her fears with His assuring presence. Gradually her tears subsided and her

anxiety left her. The Spirit of Jesus filled her giving her peace as she fell asleep.

Faith became the anchor in the storm.

When the setbacks and storms arise we have an anchor. His name is Jesus. His promises to play a vital role in the storm; to provide stretcher-barriers, to prompt a healthy outlook, and to point to deep faith gives us grace to overcome adversity.

Let's pray. 2674