

STOP WHINING AND START PRAYING

By Maureen D. Eha, features editor of Charisma magazine

Sometimes I think God wishes He could hold up a "No Whining" sign like the one I have seen on a friend's desk. Then maybe HIS people would get the idea. Reading the biblical account of the Israelites' trek through the wilderness - an 11-day journey that took them 40 years - ought to be enough to show us how God feels about complaining. He really let those whiners have it! (See examples throughout Exodus; also, Moses' recap in Deut. 1:27-37.)

But even though the historical record is clear, apparently it isn't enough to deter us. Think about it: How many Christians do you know who are living through difficult circumstances right now? How many are praising God in the midst of them? Doesn't it sometimes seem that the minute something happens to us we don't like, we jump right out of praise mode and join the ranks of the whiners-or the worriers?

The Bible tells us that we WILL experience trials. In fact, Jesus Himself warned us, "In the world you will have tribulation" (John 16:33, NKJV). And Peter, in his first epistle, writes, "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you." So it is normal for us to face hard things. What is important is HOW we face them-and in that, we have a choice.

The Bible gives us three courses of action: to pray, to praise and to trust God. Philippians 4:6 says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." We are NEVER to be anxious, no matter what comes our way. This refers to the big things as well as the small ones! And we are ALWAYS to pray, asking God to intervene in every situation that comes along.

We are also to praise Him, as Hebrews 13:15 encourages us: "Therefore by Him let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name." It would hardly be a sacrifice to continually praise Him if everything always went well!

Finally, we are to trust God. When Jesus told us we would have tribulation, He immediately consoled us by adding, "But be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). We have to rest assured that He is in control, no matter how bad things seem, and that, as Romans 8:28 reminds us, "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

Oddly enough, God always has a plan for taking what the enemy means for evil and turning it around for our good, as He did in Joseph's case, when his brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt. One Welsh evangelist I know goes a step further: He believes it's not always the devil who has a hand in what we experience. He says, "Don't ask God to change your CIRCUMSTANCES; He sent your circumstances to change YOU."

Whatever the source, it is true that in turning them for our good, God always uses them to build our character and transform us more fully into the image of Christ. Isn't that a tremendous promise? It makes you realize how the apostle Paul could say that the suffering we endure here on earth is paltry compared to the reward we will receive for persevering.

I'm not trying to minimize the reality of the pain some circumstances can bring, whether that pain is physical, emotional or psychological. But I want to encourage you today to bring God into that pain, not by complaining about it, but by talking to Him about your need, praising Him for His ability to intervene and trusting Him to turn it for your good.

Let's all take Philippians 2:14-15 as our motto today and every day: "Do ALL things without grumbling and faultfinding and complaining [against God] and questioning and doubting" so that we "may show [ourselves] to be blameless and guileless, innocent and uncontaminated, children of God without blemish (faultless, unrebukable) in the midst of a crooked and wicked generation [spiritually perverted and perverse], among whom [we] are seen as bright lights (stars or beacons shining out clearly) in the [dark] world" ("The Message," emphasis added). If we do, God will step in to every situation we find ourselves in and use it to fulfill His plan for our lives.