

A Way of Escape

Jack Elder

January 23, 2016

Being the human beings that we are, I think all of us would like to have a stress free, trouble free, trial free life, with no problems, no issues; sunshine and 72 degrees every day with blue skies and all of that. We would like smooth sailing all the time. (That is a naval metaphor.) However, we know that is not reality. We mature and after a while, we are called by God and come into a greater understanding. We realize that life isn't that way. As Forrest Gump would say, "It's not a box of chocolates or a bed of roses."

Let's begin in Psalm 34. I like the New Living Translation.

Psalm 34:17. *The LORD hears his people when they call to him for help. He rescues them from all their troubles.*

18) The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.

19) The righteous person faces many troubles [KJV: many afflictions], but the Lord comes to the rescue each time [KJV: delivers each time]. (NLT)

That scripture should describe what our spiritual lives and our conversion is all about. We've accepted Jesus Christ's sacrifice, we've been baptized, we have God's holy spirit, and we do embark on a righteous life from that point forward. You are a righteous person when that process begins. However, as it says here, we have afflictions and trouble from time to time. I don't know about you, but I think sometimes we are naïve when we come into God's truth; we think we are going to be greatly blessed and that we're going to have an easy life, but that's not true. We realize that after a while, we not only mature as we get older, but as we mature spiritually. Then we understand that's not really the case. God doesn't put us in a protective bubble.

For a while though, in our history, we had a health and wealth gospel that was promoted, sometimes subtly and sometimes not so subtly. Everything will be fine if you do this and that. However, scripture doesn't support that.

Oftentimes when we tell someone that's newly baptized, "Don't be surprised if you have problems that come from any quarter. We never know, but you're going to experience some of those things."

Please turn to 1 Corinthians 10. I heard someone say once that whenever you're having troubles and trials, this is probably one of the most important scriptures in the Bible that we can turn to. In some ways, this scripture also shows us that whenever we experience this, what Paul is telling the Corinthians should be foundational to all of our beliefs. Just looking at the context here, this church had all kinds of problems. Like in chapters 2 and 3, they were polarizing around men. They had their guy, they had their beliefs, they had been baptized and they thought they kind of had it made. They

thought they were pretty much a shoo-in to God's kingdom. It's not unlike some today who have the same idea. Paul even gave them the example of ancient Israel, because they thought the same thing. They had been baptized in the Red Sea, they had their guy, Moses. They thought all the blessings were coming their way. However, they had some things wrong, and that's why Paul uses this example for them. Remember, in verse 12, he just said, "Let him who stands take heed lest he fall." He was warning them that they didn't have it made.

1 Corinthians 10:13. *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man... (NKJV)*

There are translations that give us kind of a different meaning that we would normally associate with a word like "temptation." Thayer's definition for "temptation" from the Greek just means *adversity, affliction, trouble sent by God*. In other words, God allows it to test or prove one's character, faith and holiness. That's what the Greek implies with that word. That's what we are tempted to do.

I like the first part of that verse from the New Living Translation.

1 Corinthians 10:13. *The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience ... (NLT)*

In other words, what Paul is saying is that God made all humans. We all have similar trials whether we have God's holy spirit or not. We are not immune from that. We have different challenges as we go through life. We have different challenges as we age and we have different challenges whether we are male or female. It's all the same. No matter who we are or what we are, the human issues are similar.

Paul goes on to say:

13b) ... but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation [troubles, trials, afflictions] will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. (NKJV)

Again, I like the New Living Translation.

13b) And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure. (NLT)

Again, that should be a vital part of our faith, in believing what God says. God inspired Paul to repeat those words to the Corinthians.

It clearly says here that God won't allow us to be tempted or tried more than we can handle. Along with that, He will provide a way of escape --- a way out of it. He will

provide you with some way to ride it out so you will survive spiritually. That's what it's saying there.

The title of the sermon is:

A Way of Escape

Some translations say: *The way of escape*. I think this is a very important topic because a lot of people base their faith on their view of what God promises. They might think that all the things that happen to the rest of mankind, "God will never let that happen to me. I'm in the right church; I have my right guy." Whatever it might be. They think those things happen to other people, especially other people that don't have our beliefs. "God will never let it happen to me because I have faith." They assume that their idea of faith will somehow insulate them from the things that Paul just said befalls all of mankind. God never promises that. He never says that. They may be very zealous in that idea, but it's a false confidence. They're not looking where they should be looking. They're not seeing this scripture clearly regarding what it says. In fact, if something does happen to someone with that mode of thinking, they may think they have sinned. Cause and effect has happened to them. It could be sin, but scripture tells us that sometimes it's not sin or anything like that when trouble befalls us. Ecclesiastes 9:11 says that *time and chance happens to us all*. I thought that was interesting that it's a 9:11 verse. Something could happen, something could befall us that is not our fault at all, but it's for God's glory. We see that in John, chapter 9. It's a familiar scripture.

John 9:1. *Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth.
2) And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned ... (NKJV)*

They automatically thought that sin or cause and effect was taking place, because that's what their culture taught them. That's what the Pharisees taught.

*2b) ... this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"
3) Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. (NKJV)*

The point there is that sometimes there are situations that just happen that cannot be traced to sin or some kind of evil or bad behavior.

So if anyone thinks that God will never let this happen to them, they lack understanding. God might just let things happen to us, and when it does, we have to deal with it. We can't think, "Well, why did you let this happen to me?" That's why I think it's critical that we have a correct understanding of this verse. If we don't believe what this says, our faith is very shaky.

When we look at this, we have to believe that God is faithful and that He means what He says, even though He might allow things to happen to us, He won't let anything

happen to us that we cannot handle. We have to ask ourselves: Do we really hear and understand what that says?

Again, if we think that God will never allow anything to happen to us, any circumstance, that's just wishful thinking. That is not what scripture tells us. The fact is that our faith should be that God will not allow anything (like the scripture says) that we are not able to bear. If it does happen to us, He will give us a way to escape it. The point there is, God is going to be with us no matter what happens, no matter what the outcome.

The best example of that is Christ when He was crucified. Look what He had to bear. He had to be beaten, tortured, have nails driven through His hands and feet. He didn't say to the Father: "Why did you let this happen to me? I thought I was your Son in whom you are well pleased. Why did you do that? Why did you allow these people to do all these horrible things to me?"

So we must believe that God is faithful and won't allow anything to happen to us that we are not able to bear and that He will provide an escape out of it.

There are people that are not religious. They will say that it's just an emotional crutch that we use, whenever we are going through bad times. They say that because they don't know God or Jesus Christ. They don't understand that scripture talks about real trials and talks about a real God with real promises, a real Jesus Christ. God tells us that we are going to have the same problems that the rest of mankind has. He says, "I'm going to let bad things happen to you, but in the end, it will be for your good." Hopefully I can show that as we go along.

Remember Job. God said that he was very righteous. His life was pretty much in order. He could have been the most righteous person on earth at that point. However, God had to take him to the next level. That's what the whole story is about. Of course, we can always ask God, "Please don't let these things happen to me." God understands that type of prayer. He knows that we don't want to go through those things. But again, we can look at the example of Job, Jesus Christ, Stephen, and Paul with all the things they went through. Even down to today, we see all the things that have happened to the brethren. Bad things have happened to God's people and they have had to deal with that.

We have to hang onto scriptures like this, and it doesn't just stop with the temptations, troubles and trials. God says that He will make a way of escape for us that we will be able to bear it. We must count on that. We must believe that. God is going to show us that way of escape in one form or another. He will give us the ability to bear up under those things. The point again is that we must believe and trust God. We must put our faith there that when we are tempted, God is going to make a way of escape for us.

So what are some of the ways of escape that God may provide? What are some of the ways that God may show us as we are faced with the same things that are common to man? I have a handful of them that I've heard over the years. I'll try to cover as many as I can. Most of these are going to be rather obvious as we go along. As I'm going

through these, if you have a good imagination, you can think of other ways that God might give us a method, a way or form of escape. We can never tell what form of trouble or trial will come along. We don't know. It could change tomorrow. Like Rick said recently, you could have a doctor's appointment Monday and receive a diagnosis that will change your whole life. It changes everything. As we go through some of these examples that God may provide a way of escape, just remember to lock into what God's word tells us.

1. Miraculous intervention

The first way of escape, that I hope we all have, would be through a miraculous intervention by God. There are times that God will provide a miracle for us. That would be our escape. It could be very dramatic or very subtle. It could happen quite suddenly, like a sudden healing or intervention in our life. We could be going down a freeway and another car comes into our lane and we're looking at a head-on collision, when suddenly the car is gone. We've heard stories like that. That could happen. God suddenly intervenes. Most of the time, this is what we want. We want a miraculous intervention by God, no matter what the case may be. We want to get out of it that way. Usually this is the way we pray:

- God, I'd like a job right now. Help me to have a really good interview Monday morning.
- God, I've been a terrible money manager. Please make me prosperous.
- Another one, not humorous: God, I want you to take this lump off my breast.
- God please make people stop persecuting me.

These are common requests and are very normal. There's nothing wrong with them. God can intervene. He can stop those things. He can open doors for us. He can heal us. He can make us prosperous. He can bless us in that way.

If we look in the Bible, we can see that all kinds of miracles happened. We've been going through a Bible study in Prosser about the miracles of Jesus. We aren't through them yet. I think we're on our third or fourth Bible study on that subject. We could go through that and look at all those things, but that's a whole other sermon in itself. Let's just look at a couple of Old Testament lessons for us about miraculous interventions.

Please turn to 2 Kings, chapter 6. The context here is that the king of Assyria is making war against Israel. He's asking his servants where he can set up camp. He knew he could do it wherever he wanted to.

2 Kings 6:8. *Now the king of Syria was making war against Israel; and he consulted with his servants, saying, "My camp will be in such and such a place." 9) And the man of God sent to the king of Israel, saying, "Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Syrians are coming down there." (NKJV)*

The whole story is that this king thinks he has a mole inside his forces that is giving information to the Israelites, because everywhere he goes, they're not there. But he

finally figures this out. Elisha is the one doing it. God is talking to Elisha and warning the king of Israel to avoid this place because this guy has his army there. He's getting pretty frustrated. So in verse 14, he's going after Elisha. He's going to kill him and shut off the source of this information for the Israelites.

14) Therefore he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city [Dothan]. (NKJV)

Here's where the miracle took place.

15) And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" (NKJV)

Maybe he came out of the tent and looked up and all he saw was wall-to-wall soldiers and all the forces there. You have to imagine; this poor guy is terrified. His breath probably seized in his chest. He probably felt like a cold vapor came down and wrapped around his heart, his legs turned to rubber. He was terrified. He said, "This is it. This is where I die, right here." Maybe his whole life passed in front of him; I don't know. In any case, fear just enveloped him. Elisha felt sorry for him. Maybe he was a young man.

16) So he [Elisha] answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." (NKJV)

The servant probably thought, "I don't think so! Look at all that army out there. We're going to die, Elisha!"

17) And Elisha prayed, and said, "LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. (NKJV)

God showed that young man. God opened his eyes so he could see the spirit world. He could see the army of God, the angels or whatever that were there in support of Elisha, in support of God and God's plan. He showed that miracle to let the young man understand that with God, the majority was on their side. It wasn't by the numbers (the army) that he saw on the surrounding hills.

In fact, someone once said, "You and God make the majority." The lesson is that we can look and always remember who is on our side when things look bad; when things look tough. We think, "God, I'm looking for a miracle. I'm looking for deliverance. I want that kind of escape. I want that kind of help."

18) So when the Syrians came down to him [they attacked], Elisha prayed to the LORD, and said, "Strike this people, I pray, with blindness." And He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. (NKJV)

Suddenly it was a non-functioning army. They couldn't do anything. The attack stopped right there, right in their tracks.

The point there is, what a dramatic intervention that was from God. We may think, "Well, God hasn't intervened for me that way." However, who knows what might happen in the future. I think we do recognize how God has intervened many times in our lives, how He has opened doors for us, how He has changed things for us, provided deliverance. He has provided a way of escape many times. Sometimes, maybe we just don't recognize it or acknowledge it.

There's another famous example in 2 Kings, chapter 20. This is an example of a miraculous healing. People tend to say these days that God doesn't heal anymore. Perhaps we experienced it more ten, twenty or thirty years ago. I don't know. It seems like we did in earlier times. Maybe it says something about faith in the church. But God has healed many. We hear the stories. Sometimes it's a dramatic miracle and sometimes God allows the health condition to go on, but other times He intervenes very quickly as He did here in 2 Kings. It's the story of Hezekiah.

2 Kings 20:1. *In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live.'"*

2) *Then he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD, saying,*

3) *"Remember now, O LORD, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what was good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. (NKJV)*

We know he was one of the better, or more righteous kings of Israel. There were a whole bunch of them that weren't.

4) *And it happened, before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying, (NKJV)*

God stopped him. He said, "Go back. I've changed my mind."

5) *"Return and tell Hezekiah the leader of My people, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD.*

6) *And I will add to your days fifteen years. I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake, and for the sake of My servant David.'"* (NKJV)

Here's a double miracle. He added fifteen years to his life and no invasion.

When we pray to God, we pray not only for ourselves, we ask for a miracle and a miraculous escape, because that's what we all want.

2. Death

You probably won't like this one too much, because the second way is through death. We'd rather have the first one. We just talked about Hezekiah who was healed and given fifteen more years of life, but not everyone has a dramatic miracle like that. We're talking about a natural death. We're not talking about someone being very depressed and they may take that way out. That wouldn't be pleasing to God at all. However, sometimes death is the way that God provides a way of escape. Here's a familiar scripture in Isaiah 57.

Isaiah 57:1. *The righteous perishes, and no man takes it to heart; Merciful men are taken away, while no one considers that the righteous is taken away from evil [King James: the evil to come]. (NKJV)*

I like the New Living Translation of this verse:

Isaiah 57:1. *Good people pass away; the godly often die before their time... (NLT)*

They may not get the three score and ten.

1b) ... But no one seems to care or wonder why. No one seems to understand that God is protecting them from the evil to come. (NLT)

The whole point is that God may be actually protecting that person from the evil to come, and we know the evil is coming. It's more and more apparent every day. It's Satan's world and it's on a path of self-destruction. One very famous individual believes that that's the way most people may escape the tribulation. Many brethren have died. God allowed that to happen to them. This scripture says that these folks will miss the evil to come. Many have died, and that was their escape, because their next waking moment is going to be the resurrection. Some people may think that if someone dies, that they are under some kind of a curse, that maybe they've done something wrong. Well, these scriptures don't say that at all. It may actually be a blessing for them, depending upon their situation.

In Revelation 6, we know that some people are going to be slain for the word of God. It says this very clearly.

Revelation 6:9. *When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held [just for being a Christian].*

10) And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth [those that killed us]?"

11) Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed. (NKJV)

It's going to happen, and yes, some of us may be martyred for the word of God. We know the two witnesses will be. We have that very plainly in scripture.

We know that there are some that claim that if you're with them, if you're in the right place with the right person, you're going to go to the place of safety and you won't be martyred. We know people that believe that even today. There is no committee that will decide how that happens and who will be martyred.

Turn to John 19. No one knows how many will be slain for the word of God. That is a complete unknown to us. How many will die before their time? In John, chapter 19, Christ was martyred. He escaped through death.

John 19:28. *After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!"*

29) Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth.

30) So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. (NKJV)

His ultimate escape was death. Here was the Son of God. Remember what He had gone through; He was tortured, whipped, beaten, and nailed to a cross. The next thing He knew, He had His escape. He died. He escaped because He was going through all those horrible things. That was part of God's plan, yes, but that was His escape. If someone ever says that death is the coward's way out, look at the example of Jesus Christ. There is no cowardice there. The same for Stephen. He wasn't a coward. He was an example. He was stoned to death. It says that in Acts 7. We know the story. Stephen was relating to them some of the horrible things that had been done with the illegal trial that they put Christ through. They basically conspired to have Him murdered.

Acts 7:54. *When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.*

55) But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God,

56) and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" (NKJV)

Do you remember that miracle back there in Kings? It's interesting; here we have a New Testament version of exactly the same thing. He saw the spirit world.

57) Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord;

58) and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

59) And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

60) Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (NKJV)

He died. This was his escape. Again, the point is that sometimes death is an escape. Many have died, brethren, sometimes a child. They're awaiting the resurrection and they are not facing the pain or the evil anymore. They're taken away.

3. Hiding

The next way of escape is through hiding. This might sound a bit strange, but we see it in scripture. There is a time to escape by hiding. We have some examples of that.

Turn to 1 Kings, chapter 17. This is about Elijah.

1 Kings 17:1. And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word." (NKJV)

He essentially told Ahab, one of Israel's most evil kings, "You're not going to have any agriculture. You're going to slowly starve.

2) Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, (NKJV)

Ahab wanted to kill him. Look at what God allowed. Here is his way of escape. In verse 3, God told Elijah:

3) "Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan.

4) And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there." (NKJV)

God took care of him. He provided a way.

Then we have Christ's example in John, chapter 8. Here is Christ's example of hiding. We know the context here. He's having a squabble with the Jews.

John 8:57. Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?"

That was their big argument. They were descendants of Abraham. They thought that made them righteous. Then Jesus straightened them out.

58) Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." (NKJV)

He's saying, "I was there."

59) Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by. (NKJV)

When we look at these Bible examples about hiding, it's a temporary measure. But it is a way of escape. I say that because people may say, "A Christian doesn't hide. That's a cowardly thing to do." However, scripture says that right here. Sometimes you just blend in. That's what you should do. That's the example that Christ taught here. He didn't have to prove anything. He was strong; He had Godly character. He had Godlier character than we'll ever know. He temporarily hid himself.

I think back in our history when the church broke up. We did some hiding, didn't we? We blended in. When all the heresy started coming in, what did we do? When we heard a sermon that was obvious heresy, we didn't stand up in the middle of the congregation and throw our Bibles at people or take our shoe off and throw it at a minister. We didn't do that. We didn't go home and get on the grape vine and tell everyone about the heresy. We didn't know what to do. We struggled for a while. I don't know about everyone else, but we struggled for quite some time. We just kind of blended in. We hid out in the congregation. We didn't know what to do. Then there came a point when we had to stand up and say, "We've had enough." We got up and we left. We went through that battle in our mind for a while; and in the future, that may happen to us again. Like the scripture says, we may have to flee from city to city to stay alive until God does what He has planned for us. So again, a way of escape may be hiding. It could be a temporary thing. God asked Elijah to do it, and Jesus Christ gave us the example. Remember this example.

4. Exiting the situation

I alluded to this when I was finishing the other one. Another way of escape that God might give us is through leaving, by simply exiting a situation. I think this one is relevant to us because again, looking back on church history, sometimes we felt trapped. We were told to just sit tight and God will work it all out. That's what happened to us. We sat there for a long time. People in our church culture can feel trapped. We were afraid to leave. But there comes a time when leaving is the thing to do. We have that in scripture too. Remember I'm talking about all kinds of trials that we might be faced with. We don't know what we may be faced with.

One example is that there is time to leave a marriage. We all know the scriptures; God sanctifies marriage. He hates putting away, and He hates divorce. He wants marriage to stay together whenever possible. We know that marriage pictures God's family. We all know those marriage foundational principles. However, there are times to leave a marriage. It's Biblically based and should never be abused. It may have been abused in the past. It depends on where you look. Anyone who has experienced that realizes that it's a very hard struggle to go through. There's a lot of guilt. Some of that guilt comes from the beliefs we have that marriage is sanctified. Often when people finally do, and it's sanctified by the church/ministry and done properly, there's still some guilt there. Often when that happens to someone in the church, someone outside the church like a marriage counselor perhaps would have told them that they should have done

that a long time ago. It can cause a lot of pain and problems. I could never quite understand how a minister was qualified to do effective marriage counseling. That's not to say that some ministers haven't educated themselves to do that. That's just my opinion from things I've seen.

Let's turn to 1 Corinthians 7. What I'm trying to say is that even though we know these principles, if this happens to someone in the church, we should never be judgmental towards them. We don't know the situation. We don't know the details. We cannot be judgmental and say, "Well, don't they know the scriptures, etc.?" Usually it's been done correctly by following these examples. Here's a marital example. Paul says:

1 Corinthians 7:12. *But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. 12) And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. 13) For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy [They're set apart and have the influence of God's spirit]. 15) But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. (NKJV)*

That's a key word. Sometimes it's not peaceable. Sometimes it's abusive, and sometimes it's downright dangerous to stay in a marital situation.

The point is that escape by leaving in some circumstances is a Biblical principle.

Sometimes it's best to leave a job and move on. It becomes untenable. The same thing could happen to a church or group. Sometimes there are challenges that cannot be worked out peaceably. It just can't; it doesn't work.

We don't have this problem today, but sometimes we have an opportunity to escape slavery. This is just a reference, but in 1 Corinthians 7, there's the same example (in the NLT)

1 Corinthians 7:20. *Yes, each of you should remain as you were when God called you. 21) Are you a slave? Don't let that worry you—but if you get a chance to be free, take it. (NLT)*

Leave the slavery. Take advantage of the situation.

We also have the record in scripture where Joseph and his family were told to leave and escape to Egypt. That was temporary. God sent an angel to direct him to do that. It's found in Matthew 2:12-15.

Matthew 2:12. *Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.*

13) Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him."

14) When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son." (NKJV)

Sometimes you leave. That's the escape at the hand of God. He provides that for us. Sometimes He has provided that very directly, in the past and perhaps in the future.

We have the example of Paul and Barnabas. They had a separation for a while. They left each other even though they were leaders in the church. They couldn't agree on how to do what God was asking them to do. They got together later on, but they had an issue at that time, so they left each other's company. That's found in Acts 15.

Sometimes we need to take a proactive approach to leaving. It gives an example of that in 2 Corinthians 6. It's a familiar principle in the context of what we're talking about.

2 Corinthians 6:14. *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?*

15) *And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?* (NKJV)

Other scriptures tell us that we're supposed to be lights to the world. We know we can't avoid all situations in the world. We can't avoid all sinners or all unrighteousness, but if you put these scriptures together, we get the principle and direction that there are times when the unrighteousness is so great, we have to leave the situation. We have to get out of there. I don't mean when a little unrighteousness comes along, because we'd be leaving everywhere. However, as God's people, we should want to be away from unrighteousness, from the lack of integrity. That could even happen within the church. There are individuals out there that have an agenda. I hate to say it, but just like politicians, they use lies and deceit to get what they want. God says we should be away from unrighteousness, no matter where that comes from.

1 Corinthians 6:16. *And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people."*

17) *Therefore, "come out from among them and be separate [get yourself out the door], says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you."* (NKJV)

There are several references in the scriptures. You can look them up. They all support this principle.

If you ever have to leave a situation, and I know that's tough, we all have our individual problems doing that, whether it's marriage, jobs, the church or a group. However, if we do it according to the scripture and follow these principles, God says that He will be with us, even though it's tough. We have to make that decision. God says He'll receive us if we leave and do things right. It says in verse 18:

18) "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty." (NKJV)

The point is, that's where our confidence should be. It should not be in physical situations with people that we have to leave. It must be because of that relationship and that belief and the faith we have in what God tells us in these scriptures.

5. Coping

The fifth and final way of escape is through coping. This is something different. There are no dramatic miracles, no hiding, no leaving. Now when you find things on your doorstep ... a trial or problem, you have to go through the coping phase. I think most of the time this is the one we have to deal with. Every time we have a problem, we'd love for God to give us a miracle and just have everything go away. Most of the time God says that we're going to have to cope.

We have a great example of that in Daniel. Putting these scriptures together is something to build your faith on. This is what we should be looking to, where our confidence should be. This account helps us to cope. This is where our belief in God should be. It's about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. We know the story. They're about to get thrown into the fiery furnace. Nebuchadnezzar has tried to convince them otherwise. He said, "These are good guys, and I want to keep them working in my government. But you're not following my decree. My word is everything. If you don't follow, you're going to be thrown into the furnace and die." This is how you cope.

***Daniel 3:17.** If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king.*

18) But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up." (NKJV)

Too often when people think of faith, they think that God will do this, but if you say God may do something, then they say you may lack faith. The word "will" is definite, but the word "may" implies a lack of faith.

Again, we have to read very closely what they said here. They said "if" that's the case. King James said, *if that's the case*. Notice that big "if." That's a very strong and powerful statement. In this case, God did indeed spare those men. They had faith, but their concept of faith included the word "if." If God doesn't do it, no matter what the outcome, they had absolute faith in God. That didn't change. They told King Nebuchadnezzar, "That's not going to change, no matter how this turns out."

At times people will say, "God will be with me." That in itself does not constitute faith. Sometimes we try to talk ourselves into it. If we mouth the word "faith" enough times, that somehow it's actually going to be there. That's not their reality. Just saying that God will be with me won't make it happen. That's not what scripture tells us at all. That won't make it happen. Just saying, "God, heal me" won't make it happen. Just saying, "God, give me that job" won't make it happen. We've seen many cases of that. It's not that we shouldn't be positive thinking that, but the world of reality is like these three men. They said, "If God will not deliver us from the furnace, nothing will change with us. We will continue to have faith and confidence in God." That is trusting God. That is how you cope.

Jesus Christ had the same situation. He said, "If it be possible, take this cup from me." He had a big "if" in there. We know it was part of God's plan. We understand that. No matter what, He was still going to look to God. It was the same with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. God can and is able, if He chooses to do that, but if not, we will handle the situation. We will take whatever hand is dealt to us. We will look to God for the faith and strength to come through that. That's called coping. It's coping in the right way. It can be done when we know who God is and know how God works, what His promises are. We know He will be with us no matter what. We have scriptures that tell us that. We have sermons on that from time to time.

What did God tell Joshua? He told him, "Be of good courage. I'll never leave you or forsake you." That is repeated a few times in scripture.

Let's look at Luke 22. Again, coping is understanding; we believe and trust God and we have tremendous confidence in Him. He won't give us more than we can bear. We believe that. If we do have something befall us, He will give us a way of escape when needed.

Luke 22:39. *Coming out, He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him.*

40) *When He came to the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation."*

41) *And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed,*

42) *saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; never the less not My will, but Yours, be done."*

43) *Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. (NKJV)*

That must have been an amazing thing. That, in itself is miraculous. We don't understand those things sometimes. We wish that would happen to us.

44) *And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (NKJV)*

The point there again is that we're all going to go through trials. We need that escape, and it may be in the form of God giving us the strength and the faith just to cope with the

situation. I think that, many times, that's what happens to us. Whatever the case, it's not going to be our human strength that gets us out of it. It will be total dependence on God. That's what gets us through.

I saw a religious sign the other day. We don't always agree, but I don't have any argument with this one. It goes like this: "Faith is not about everything turning out okay. Faith is about being okay no matter how everything turns out."

Another example is Paul. Paul was kind of like Job. His life was right down the line. He was very zealous for the law. He had everything in place in his life. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He was right up there. But God said to him, "I've got to shape you a little more, Paul. I've got to mold the clay just a little bit." God used that for Paul's benefit. Let's see what it says in 2 Corinthians, chapter 12.

2 Corinthians 12:7. And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations ... (NKJV)

God did give him a lot. It could have gone to his head.

7b) ... a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

8) Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.

9) And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." ... (NKJV)

God was basically telling Paul, "I know you want a miracle, Paul, but I'm not going to give you that right now. You're going to have to live with this." We don't know if it was ever taken away from him. He was basically telling Paul, "You're going to have to handle this. You're going to have to cope with it." We don't know. God blinded him on the way to Damascus to knock him down in the first place. It could have been a vision thing. We don't know what it was. God was telling Paul that, "I'm going to be with you while you cope with this." That's the key thing there. Paul understood that and he trusted. It said in the last part of verse 9:

9b) ... Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (NKJV)

Then we'll read verse 10 in The New Living Translation. It brings it out more clearly.

10) That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses ... (NLT)

He didn't say it was fun. He understood it. That's what he is saying. Today we would probably say, "Well, it's tolerable."

10b) ... and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak [he's not depending on himself], then I am strong. (NLT)

His strength and confidence came from God, not in his own abilities to cope with this. So, in effect, what Paul is saying is, "If this is the way you're going to help me, why don't I just stop whining and begging about it and just get on with it and cope with it. I know you're working with me through all of this. I'm just going to go on with it." He trusted God. He knew that God would provide a way of escape that he could bear it. Paul understood that. He basically said, "I accept this way of escape. I accept having to cope with it." That's what he did, and he moved forward.

We can see that same attitude with Paul in Philippians, chapter 4. This directly supports what Paul understood and where his faith was.

Philippians 4:11. *Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned [the whole process of his conversion] in whatever state I am, to be content: 12) I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. (NKJV)*

He learned how to live the good life and the bad. He learned how to take it when the blessings came and when the bad things came. He had a lot of bad stuff happen to him.

In verse 13, this is how he coped:

13) I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (NKJV)

There's a positive mental attitude. He understood about the real Christ, and he understood that he would have God's help for him to cope with the rough times.

Turn to 2 Corinthians. Again, we'll read from the New Living.

2 Corinthians 1:6. *Even when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! ... (NLT)*

He was talking about himself and the people he was working with, apostles and those in the church.

6b) ... For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. 7) We are confident that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in the comfort God gives us. (NLT)

Remember, in other places Paul says, "Imitate and follow me as I imitate Christ." He and the others were leading by example. He goes on to say what he means in verse 8.

8) We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure [they were at their human limits], and we thought we would never live through it. (NLT)

They didn't see any way of escape.

9) In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead. (NLT)

You have to really wonder. There are folks out there that say if you trust them, believe them and follow them, you're going to be okay. You're not going to die; you'll go to the place of safety, etc. Why in the world would you put your faith and trust and confidence in someone who can't resurrect you? Why would anyone do that? However, it happens.

10) And he did rescue us from mortal danger, and he will rescue us again. We have placed our confidence in him, and he will continue to rescue us. (NLT)

God did it for them. He provided a way of escape the same way that He does for all of His people through time. He never changes; not in the past, present or future. These individuals left a powerful example for us to follow.

So we've discussed that sometimes we escape through a miracle. Escape may come through death, it may come through hiding, it may come through leaving a situation, and many times it will come through coping. God will give us what we need to cope.

I hope you'll remember these scriptures and understand what they are telling us here. When things happen, because God loves us, He tells us that He will never give us anything that we cannot bear, or cannot endure. Just like the rest of humanity, God will provide some form, some way of escape.