

# Rule 13

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I'll jump right in with the title today. My title is really simple.

## Rule 13

I know that sounds odd and maybe a little strange, but people that know me might not think it is that strange. But bear with me. I have used this Rule 13 before and this could probably be called Rule 13 redux. I came across this a number of years ago. We were having a Feast in Kellogg and I gave a sermon where I happened to mention that I was an avid golfer. I always qualify that by saying I am not a really good golfer, but I enjoy the game. It's good to get out there, get some sunshine, some Vitamin D and green grass—you just rip up your scorecard when you are done and don't think about it anymore. I didn't start playing golf until I was about sixty years old. I just wasn't at a place in my life where I could indulge in a hobby like golf—it takes time to practice, you go out and play and it's for four or five hours. What I'm getting at is, the first time I heard this topic, being a golfer, I knew what Rule 13 meant as it comes from golf. But I had never heard it applied metaphorically like this gentleman did.

After I gave this sermon, a gentleman came up to me afterwards and he told me that he too was a golfer—he liked doing that, the only trouble was, he was a double amputee; both legs just below the knees. As I recall it was due to diabetes complications. He missed being able to play anymore but surprisingly he had a very good attitude. At least that's how it seemed to me. He was very cheerful and I had several talks with him during the Feast. His approach to life was very interesting because he had adopted and applied Rule 13—that's the way he explained it to me. The USGA (the United States Golfing Association)—all sports have a governing body and this is the one for golf. Rule 13 actually has two parts. This is a simplified version of Rule 13.

Part 1 states the ball must be played as it lies, unless the rules for a particular situation say otherwise. It is very rare that there is an exception to that.

Part 2 says the player cannot improve his or her lie by changing the ball position, the area of his or her stance or swing, his or her line of play, the area where he or she is standing, etc.

If a player violates this rule, they can be penalized severely, especially in a tournament and match play. I will tell a golf story later on. (I might throw in a few golf stories as I go along but they have a point). But in a professional game, if you violate that rule you pick up extra points. Golf is one of those games that the winner has the fewest points—that's the way it works. That can amount to thousands of dollars, maybe up to a million or more in a game.

In a nut shell, here's how it works. A player hits the ball—he tees off—and gravity says that ball has to come down somewhere. The rule says that the player must play that ball exactly where it lands. In very rare exceptions can you move that ball and prove that lie at all. Maybe if it lands on a sprinkler head or car path you have some relief from the Rule, but that's the only exception. It must be played where it lies. You can't cheat by improving the lie. That's what Rule 13 says.

There is a joke in golfing that says the difference between golf and government is, in government you can improve your lie. That's probably only funny to golfers. Here's the point—remember as I explained, the gentleman I was talking to was a double amputee. Life is like that Rule 13 and that's the way he conducted his life. That was his approach to it, no matter what happens to you, you have to continue on; no matter what life throws at you. I am going to use that metaphor as a theme throughout. You just have to play it where it lies in life; you don't have any choice. You can't change things. Just think of how many things are out of our control. We would like to say we can control everything. We want to do that, but it hardly ever works that way. It is really a simple principle to apply in your life.

For our purpose, how do we apply that? You know that I'm referring to things that befall us as Christians—things we can't control. Maybe things we don't even deserve or think we don't deserve (more on that later). Looking back in our church history, unfortunately we kind of promoted a health and wealth gospel. Maybe that wasn't the intention but that's what happened. The idea was, if you did everything right according to the church and especially if you gave large amounts of money to the church and you supported the glorious leader, you were guaranteed smooth sailing in your life. Sunshine, every day blue skies; you were going to have abundant blessings if you do that. The reality is, it doesn't work that way. We all know that by now, but when we were new and naive, we believed all that. We really did not know how to react when something bad did happen to us. We just didn't know how to do that. Stuff in life happens whether we like it or not and whether we agree with it or not. Sometimes it just does and we have to deal with it. Look at these last five months and what we have been through with this COVID pandemic. Looking at this approach to life, I've often thought of Rule 13 during this. We can really apply it as we cope and navigate our way through this thing. Hopefully we will be on the other side of this at some point, we really hope so.

Good things and bad things happen in our lives. Using our metaphor, we'll play it where it lies, so to speak. We won't let circumstances, no matter what, change us or redefine us as Christians, as God's people—we don't do that. If we are looking forward and we have this thought in mind, we can see a similar theme in some scriptures. We can see how some people dealt with adverse circumstances in their lives and in their walk with God.

In Philippians 4, Paul is addressing the Philippians. It's fascinating to me the way Paul addresses letters to various churches of his time. We all know them; we've studied those different Epistles through the years and the timeless lessons there. They are usually having to do with some kind of issues that are in the various churches. There

are fourteen Epistles that are accredited to Paul and I will take Paul as the author of Hebrews, no matter what the scholars say. Sometimes those guys just compete with one another. You have to wonder if they even know what they are talking about sometimes. Nine of those Epistles are addressed directly to churches. Usually over the issues that Paul had to deal with. He was the apostle to the Gentiles. You have to notice that his approach is different when he's talking to the folks at Philippi; it's more commending than correcting. Philippians 4:10 from the New Living Version.

**Philippians 4:10** *How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me but you didn't have the chance to help me. [The opportunity, I think King James says.]*

11) *Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with all that I have. (NLT)*

After all he had been through, all the things he suffered, he learned from that—no matter what life handed him. In a sense he played his life where it lay, whatever came to him. That word *content* in the Greek just means “satisfied with one’s lot in life”. That’s what it means. I have always gotten a chuckle whenever I hear—not so much now but in the past—someone stand up to the pulpit and compare themselves to the Apostle Paul. The fact is, they or myself, wouldn’t last a week in Paul’s shoes; maybe not even a day or two. You hear somebody say that then go out after services and get into their very modern automobile, drive to their modern home with the air conditioning, hot and cold running water, indoor toilets and then you think of Paul.

12) *I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living with every situation, [I believe the King James says, every state that he finds himself in] whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or with little.*

13) *For I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength. (NLT)*

That was his secret. He learned to rely not on himself and his own strength but on God’s.

14) *Even so, you have done well to share with me in my present difficulty. (NLT)*

Remember, Philippians is one of the so-called prison Epistle. He was actually in prison, under house arrest in Rome. There is something similar in 1 Timothy 6. Some more of what Paul says, what he is teaching, telling, instructing Timothy with. Again, from the New Living Translation and breaking into the context.

**1 Timothy 6:2** *If the masters are believers, that is no excuse for being disrespectful. Those slaves should work all the harder because their efforts are helping other believers who are well loved. [In other words, he is talking about giving a good example; their lives were to be a good example] Teach these things, Timothy, and encourage everyone to obey them.*

- 3) *Some people may contradict our teaching, but these are the wholesome teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. These teachings promote a godly life.*
- 4) *Anyone who teaches something different is arrogant and lacks understanding. Such a person has an unhealthy desire to quibble over the meaning of words. This stirs up arguments ending in jealousy, division, slander, and evil suspicions.*
- 5) *These people always cause trouble. Their minds are corrupt, and they have turned their backs on the truth. To them, a show of godliness is just a way to become wealthy.*
- 6) [He says something important to our subject] *Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth.*
- 7) *After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it.*
- 8) *So, if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content.*
- 9) *But people who long to be rich [this is part of the context here, talking about finances] fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction.*
- 10) *For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows. (NLT)*

They bought themselves a whole lot more trouble than they started with. That is just a couple of the places where we find a similar approach—just being content. Look at another aspect of this rule of gold and compare it to life in general. As Christians, I think we have all experienced this to some degree or another. We are called to a path when we are called, baptized and converted, but look how many things in our lives try to knock us off our path. They try to get us to go off course.

I remember seeing, not long ago, on a church reader board where it said:

*“Life is messy, Stuff just happens”.*

That is true. On my desk I have a Ziggy cartoon and sometimes I've shared this with people through the years. I found this and laminated it and put it on my desk. I have shared it with some folks who have left different groups because I kind of glommed onto it after our parent church broke up. Tom Wilson is the cartoonist—the Ziggy creator—it has Ziggy, this little character standing there. He's looking up at a poster on the wall and it says, “Things to do today” and there are three things to do and they have to do with the way life impacts us. It says:

Pick yourself up,  
Dust yourself off  
And start all over again.

Sometimes that's just the way we have to do things.

Getting back to the golf story, if you're a non-golfer you might think it is very unfair that one player would have a better lie than another one. You would think there are some activists out there, but they don't get on the golf course. Golf is a lot like life, when you think about it. It is supposed to be fair. According to one of golf's legends, the answer is no, it's not supposed to be fair. I have a book by a golfer, he was born in 1904 and died in 1995, his name was Harvey Morrison Penick. I have his little green book. Some of the finest professionals in the world would come to this guy for golf lessons and lessons in life really. He was a very wise man. Here's one of the observations he made about the game that he loved and it has to do with Rule 13, play the ball where it lies.

*Golf is not about fairness. The ball is to be played where it sits. There are benefits to this approach. In golf, as in life, obstacles are placed in our path and in overcoming these road blocks, our greatest triumphs occur. There are no good or bad lies, only what is. When we see things without judgment or complaint, we provide ourselves with the greatest chance for success. It doesn't guarantee success but it does guarantee us the opportunity to give our best.*

That leaves us a question? Is it possible, that like golf, life is not about fairness? It's possible and I've seen people do this, they become angry and bitter over life's inequities, the injustices, and the things that happened to them. Think about what Harry said, we deprive ourselves of an opportunity to give our best, to improve and grow in character from that.

I have collected some of the realities in life, things that just don't seem fair if we are looking at it in a shallow way. In the world today, good people and good people in the church have found themselves on the wrong end of experiences. The experience seems totally absent of fairness I have a few examples. I'll start with a well-known national tragedy.

January 28, 1986, the space shuttle Challenger launched with seven astronauts on board. Seventy-three seconds after it launched, there was an explosion that occurred. As I remember from the news at the time, I believe it was an O ring on the solid fuel booster which caused a terrible explosion. Not many are aware that the astronauts' lives did not end at that point. A post flight investigation indicated that once the spacecraft was torn apart, the pieces continued up from their own momentum and reached an altitude of 65,000 feet. If you divide that by 5,280 feet, that's 12.31 miles, before it arched back down to the water. I remember from the news reel you could sort of see that plume and an object falling. Two minutes and forty-five seconds later, the cabin hit the water and all the follow up investigations conclude that the crew was still alive at impact. Where is the fairness in that?

I've known true Christians who have been violently murdered. Years ago I remember an article in the Worldwide News, a member in Africa (all the horrible things that have happened on that continent just boggles the mind) and this member, at the time, people were being killed, they would put a tire around the neck and bind it so they couldn't get it off and fill it with gasoline and light it—that happened to a church member. Where's the fairness in that?

March 2005, a gunman entered a Living Church of God congregation in Wisconsin during Sabbath service and opened fire and killed the Pastor's seventeen-year-old son, another fifteen-year-old and five other people aged fifty-five to seventy-four. Where is the fairness in that?

I've known many of God's people whose lives were cut short by a tragic accident. I remember an accident many years ago, when I was in the Spokane church in the early '70's, several children were lost in a car accident. I remember not long ago in the United Church of God; a gentleman was killed—crushed—by the lift gate on the delivery truck. Another family in Spokane lost four children in a house fire. Where is the fairness in all that, that is if you just look at it on the surface? Throughout life the human family has suffered all kinds of tragedies like these. Sometimes they just don't seem like they make any sense. It doesn't matter who you are or where your station in life is, the tears, grief, pain and suffering are all the same.

Then again, when you think about fairness, what about all the injustices in life? There are times when people suffer wrong. Despite everything that we might do, we have been lied to, slandered, cheated and wronged at every turn. That just happens. People, God's people, have lost jobs, family relationships and even marriages through no fault of their own. God's people have been falsely accused, falsely imprisoned and even falsely executed. All of this took place in plain sight of God Almighty. Unfortunately, our carnal instinct can kick in and we think, "Where is God in all this? Doesn't God care about my circumstances? Doesn't He care about what I'm suffering?"

In reality, nowhere in the Bible is there a guarantee that if you do everything right, God will make everything go right for you. It just isn't there. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that, in this life, the Almighty will make certain that all good people will be blessed and all bad people will be cursed; it's just not there. In truth that is just not the way God works. Simply put, things just don't always go the way we think they should—they just don't. The book of Ecclesiastes in Chapter 9 talks about the factor of the randomness that happens as far as the human condition goes.

**Ecclesiastes 9:11** *I returned and saw under the sun that— The race is not to the swift, Nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill; But time and chance happen to them all.* (NKJV)

The point is, God not only allows randomness in our lives, but at times he may actually orchestrate it; we don't know. You know that God allows things to happen and that He knows completely without any doubt, what's going on all the time. Christ points that out in Matthew 5—the sermon on the Mount—and what Christ is saying is that God is personally responsible for all the acts that may or may not happen, totally contrary to the way we look at things. Totally contrary to our understanding of fairness and all that. Notice His words and remember that in Matthew 5 He is talking about loving your enemies, a totally different outlook than how we would look at things.

**Matthew 5:45** ... *that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (NKJV)*

The point being, God is fully aware and in control at all times—He just is. If you have any doubts about that, just consider the suffering and the trials of God's people down through history. We have a whole chapter in Hebrews 11 on these. We have the accounts where many of the members of the early church—especially the leaders—suffered terrible things. We have Stephen's account in Acts 7 and many other stories like these. In Foxe's Book of Martyrs, they listed some of the traditional deaths that occurred to the apostles. I'll just run through some of the bullets.

- James, son of Zebedee, brother John was hacked to pieces—in Acts 12:1-2.
- Peter was actually imprisoned at that same time but God had an angel come and release him and get him out of the imprisonment.
- Philip was scourged, thrown into prison and afterwards crucified.
- Matthew was slain with a halberd, that's a battle axe with a pike on the end and about six feet long.
- James, the half-brother of Christ, at the age of ninety-four he was beaten and stoned by a Jewish mob and finally had his brains dashed out with a fuller's club.
- Matthias who was chosen to replace Judas was stoned in Jerusalem and then beheaded.
- Andrew, the brother of Peter was crucified.
- Thomas was impaled buy a spear.
- Luke, not an apostle, was hung.
- Mark was dragged to pieces in Alexandria in a festival honoring a pagan idol.
- Paul was killed by a sword—probably beheaded.
- Jude, half-brother of Christ was crucified.
- Bartholomew and Simon the Canaanite were crucified.

We all know the legend—the story—of Peter, Jerome says he was crucified upside down at his own request. We don't know if that is actually a true story or not, it happened in Rome. It fits the Catholic narrative. When you think about it, each of those

hideous deaths were experienced by men of faith. They came as a result of obedience to God and an uncompromising loyalty to their calling. When you think about those individuals compared to today, no 401K's no IRA's, no retirement plans. If they were lucky, they had a quick death. Strictly speaking though, there was nothing fair about this when you look at it that way.

When you think about this, we have these records in scripture and in other places, (and I'm not trying to leave everyone with a morbid outlook on being a Christian), there is no indication at all that these men saw God as being unfair. They just didn't. They accepted their fate as part of their calling. In other words, they didn't try to move their ball to another favorable position. They didn't resist their lot in life; they played it where it lay. They didn't compromise their beliefs because of what befell them. I'm not saying we should just have a grin and bear it response when anything bad happens to us, there are just some things we have control over and some we don't. The point is we don't change spiritually because of a bad circumstance—we just shouldn't do that.

In Hebrews 11 we can see a few things there. This chapter talks about some of the great stalwarts of faith in the Bible, and the records that we have of them. As we can readily see, these acts of faith that are recorded here didn't come without suffering. Not one of them did.

**Hebrews 11:32** *And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets:*

*33) who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, [Daniel]*

*34) quenched the violence of fire [Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego], escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.*

*35) Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.*

*36) Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.*

*37) They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—*

*38) of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. (NKJV)*

When you think about it, even though it might be different, our walk today is fraught with all kinds of trials. Many times, we have to cope with those adversities. That's our lot, but remember Romans 8 tells us that the difficulty in life's journey isn't worth the comparison of the price that awaits us at the end—it just isn't. In Romans 8, Paul speaks to that again.



**Romans 8:14** *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (NKJV)*

We are given that Spirit at baptism, which initiates the conversion process. As we all know that is just the beginning for us.

*15) For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, Abba, Father.” (NKJV)*

It is our heavenly Father Who looks out for us and knows everything that happens to us; He knows our situation no matter what it is.

*16) The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God ... (NKJV)*

When you think about that, it is only with God’s Holy Spirit that we can even realize that we can have a part in God’s family and that is what we have been called to.

*17) and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.*

*18) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (NKJV)*

If you look at the Greek word for *suffering* it means “hardship and pain”— and that’s exactly what it means. Paul knew all about that. He had no illusions about suffering. Is there a way for us to deal effectively with adversity? With all the unfairness, the injustice that we not only see in the world, but also the things that have happened to us. There are four keys to managing a life. They are simple keys but don’t confuse them with being easy keys.

### **1. Accept the fact that things will not always go your way.**

Scott Peck, M.D. was a prominent psychiatrist and bestselling author. One of his books you may have read. I’m sure every has heard of it, it’s called The Road Less Traveled. He makes an extraordinary observation about adversity in the human experience. Under the sub-heading of Problems and Pain, Dr. Peck states:

*Life is difficult. This is the great truth; one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult, once we truly understand and accept that, then life is no longer difficult because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters. [If we can get there.] Most do not fully see this truth, that life is difficult. Instead they moan more or less incessantly, noisy or subtly about the enormity of their problems. [Woe is me.] Their burdens and their difficulties as if life were generally easy, as if life should be easy. They voice their belief noisily or subtly that their difficulties represent a unique kind of affliction that should not be, and*

*that has somehow especially been visited upon them or upon their families, their tribe, their class, their nation, their race or even their species and not on others. [It's all about me.]*

Then he goes on to say something very important for all of us.

*I know about this moaning because I've done my share.*

Haven't we all. Most of the time we don't like it when we have a really difficult time in life.

Looking at it from God's perspective, the Bible tells us, if nothing else it teaches us that bad and sometimes horrible things can happen through no fault of our own. It just does. We have a couple of examples in Scripture. One of them ended with God's intervention and deliverance and the other one, God allowed it to play out in a way that resulted in a violent death. The first example is John the Baptist. Christ once characterized him this way.

**Matthew 11:11** *Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (NKJV)*

But how did life reward John for his righteousness? Did he live in comfort and safety? Smooth sailing, blue skies, sunshine? As a result of what he told Herod—he indicted Herod for having his brother's wife—he was thrown into prison, ultimately to be beheaded at the request of a child who had just performed a rather lewd dance—this was no little girl that did that. Mark 6 is the account of this.

**Mark 6:17** *For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her. 18) Because John had said to Herod, It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." (NKJV)*

(He's quoting Leviticus 18:16 and 20-21, where it says that.)

19) *Therefore, Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not;*

20) *for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just and holy man, and he protected him. And when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly. [He was on John's side.]*

21) *Then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief men of Galilee.*

22) *And when Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you."*

23) *He also swore to her, Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom."*

24) *So, she went out and said to her mother, What shall I ask?"*

We know from verse 25, that she came immediately, in haste because her mother had asked for the head of John the Baptist—John's head on a platter.

27) *Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought. And he went and beheaded him in prison,*

28) *brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother.*

29) *When his disciples heard of it, they came and took away his corpse and laid it in a tomb. (NKJV)*

Doesn't seem like a very fair end for a man of John's caliber, does it? The Bible doesn't say how he reacted when he was being dragged out of his cell and executed. But I suspect it wasn't cursing God because of his circumstance.

This brings us to the second example which we find in Daniel. It involves those three young men and the account of their trust and faith in God and their confrontation with the most powerful man in the world at that point. During that, they actually acknowledged they were perfectly aware that God knew their situation and that God may or may not intervene in their rescue. They knew that. In other words, they were willing to accept their fate regardless of how it played out. Their story is in Daniel 3, and we are all familiar with it. King Nebuchadnezzar had had a ninety-foot image made of himself, and whenever there was an anthem played or whatever it was, all of his subjects were to bow down to it. The transgressors who failed to comply with that decree would be burned alive. In Daniel :6 we break into that account.

**Daniel 3:6** *... and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace."*

8) *Therefore, at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and accused the Jews. [And they reminded Nebuchadnezzar of his decree]*

11) *and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.*

12) *There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego; these men, O king, have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up." (NKJV)*

They sound like politicians.

13) *Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. So, they brought these men before the king. (NKJV)*

Remember in the account that he tried to give them a second chance.

Continuing in Verse 16.

16) *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.*

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)*

They were not deterred by their circumstance at all, which was dire at best. They were fully aware of what lay before them and they accepted it. They never lost sight of their God—their real hope—and they knew that their fate was assured, in the end. Also notice they never tried to use some diplomatic language where they could escape that fate—they never tried that. There was no equivocation in their answer to the king. It was resolute and unwavering. In other words, getting back to our golf metaphor, they didn't try to improve their position. They were fully prepared to play it as it lay.

Should it be any different for us?

As God's people we should never let our circumstances cause us to lose heart, compromise our beliefs and do things that we know we shouldn't do. We shouldn't become discouraged or bitter by what God allows to take place in our lives. God just does that. Sometimes God can engineer things, orchestrate things to test and to prove us. There are so many examples of this. It doesn't mean we should go out looking for trouble. We should be prepared and be able to face it when it does come.

Second key.

## **2. Learn to appreciate the value of trials and adversity.**

Learn to appreciate those things. Everyone's heard of the great golfer Ben Hogan. It's not really well known that there was actually a movie made. It's an older, black and white movie and it showed in it where they had a head on collision with a Greyhound bus. They were driving in the fog, going somewhere. Ben Hogan spent two months in the hospital and then many more months in rehab; he had had a terrible accident. It is a wonder they had even survived. In fact, people who came on the scene wondered how anyone had survived and how they got out of it at all. The whole golfing community and other people that followed golf thought he would never make a comeback. Those injuries and all that rehab, all that pain and suffering he went through never deterred him a bit. Four years later, in 1953 he came back and it was the greatest year of his career. After all that suffering and pain he had gone through, he won five of the six tournaments he played in and that's how he ended his career. The point is, those injuries, all that suffering, everything he went through, it was the end of his career and the end of his life as far as a golfer is concerned. Someone asked him how he did that; how did he make that comeback? He made a pretty remarkable statement, he said,

“I couldn’t imagine myself not playing golf.”

That was his whole approach. Imagine us, as God’s people, if we had that same approach and same determination. If we said, no matter the circumstances, I can’t imagine not being Christian; I just can’t. There are lots of inspiring stories like that. It doesn’t matter when we think that these are unconverted people. They have learned some lessons that we can learn too.

James tells us there is joy in adversity in James 1 from the Amplified.

**James 1:1**

*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered abroad [among the Gentiles in the dispersion]: Greetings (rejoice)!  
2) Consider it wholly joyful, my brethren, whenever you are enveloped in [that’s a reference to being buried in] or encounter trials of any sort or fall into various temptations.  
3) Be assured and understand that the trial and proving of your faith bring out endurance and steadfastness and patience.  
4) But let endurance and steadfastness and patience have full play and do a thorough work, so that you may be [people] perfectly and fully developed [with no defects], lacking in nothing. (Amp)*

It is a converted outlook that sees past the trials and circumstances that befall us from time to time. It also shows us that these trials and tests of faith have value for us, if you will look at it that way. They have the potential, in the end, to make us better people. It’s like when you push against weights you develop your muscles. It acts the same way, when you push spiritually against the weights of trials or tests, just like you develop your muscles, so spiritually we develop character. It just builds Godly character in us and gives us skill in overcoming too. Christ placed a lot of emphasis on overcoming, didn’t He? Just a reference scripture I thought of was Revelation 3:21.

**Revelation 3:21** *To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. (NKJV)*

Overcome just means “to prevail, get the victory”. Get the victory over what? Over all the circumstances, the unfairness, the injustices or otherwise that befall us and don’t stop us from being a Christian.

Another point, God is not looking for people who run from adversity; trying to escape every little problem. In a sense, maybe God is not looking for people who will try to improve their lie, improve their position. Not that we can’t do the things that we are able to do, I’m not saying that at all. It’s just reality that we are going to have things that seem very unfair to us. We can’t ever tell sometimes when there is an unseen trial that comes upon us, whether it’s a disease, an accident or something like that. Whatever the case, when we look at these scriptures take the approach to accept it and move on. Over in 1 Corinthians 6, there is an interesting scripture in this context. Here’s a case

where Paul is encouraging a church to be willing to suffer. To take it. The context here is brethren suing each other.

**1 Corinthians 6:7** *Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? (NKJV)*

Peter, using the example of Christ, took it even further in 1 Peter 2:19, the context here is Godly conduct.

**1 Peter 2:19** *For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully [no fault of anyone's].*

20) *For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer [you don't deserve it], if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.*

21) *For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: (NKJV)*

He is quoting Isaiah 53:9.

22) *Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth";*

23) *who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten ... (NKJV)*

He is pointing out that he had a choice in how he responded.

23 continued) *... but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; (NKJV)*

In everything, we know He did the will of the Father.

That brings us to the third key in dealing with adversity.

### **3. Understand that things are not always what they appear to be.**

We have a graphic example of that the Bible. It is the story of Joseph, son of Jacob. Beginning in Genesis 37 look at the whole series of injustices that happened to Joseph. If you look through those various injustices that he suffered, there are some lessons for us. All the things he was subjected him to. His own brothers plotted to murder him, that's in Genesis 37:20. They hated this younger brother and plotted to get rid of him even if it meant killing him in some way. Then he was sold into slavery, verse 27-28.

**Genesis 37:27** *Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh." And his brothers listened.*

28) *Then Midianite traders passed by; so, the brothers pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt. (NKJV)*

If that's not enough, it just keeps piling up. He is falsely accused of rape in Chapter 39:7.

**Genesis 39:7** *And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, Lie with me."*

8) *But he refused and said to his master's wife, Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house [he trusts him in other words], and he has committed all that he has to my hand.*

11) *But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was inside,*

12) *that she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside. (NKJV)*

He left whatever she grabbed and fled. Then what happened to him? He was thrown into prison for a crime he didn't even commit. That's in Genesis 39:16-20, the wife framed Joseph for a rape he didn't do.

19) *So it was, when his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him, saying, Your servant did to me after this manner," [she lied] that his anger was aroused.*

20) *Then Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were confined. And he was there in the prison. (NKJV)*

We know that this story has a good ending. He was released from prison and rose in power in Egypt and became only second to the king. Then his brothers came and let's pick that up in Genesis 45. Notice how he viewed all those injustices and all that unfairness that he suffered. He kept it in perspective. He understood that everything was being used by God for him and for his development.

**Genesis 45:3** *Then Joseph said to his brothers, I am Joseph; does my father still live?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence.*

5) *But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. (NKJV)*

He could have spent all those years, all that time he languished in the prison, all those false things that were done to him, whining about all that. But he didn't do that.

7) *And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.*

8) *So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; [would we realize that?] and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. (NKJV)*

Later on, in Chapter 50:20 for a reference.

**Genesis 50:20** *But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.*  
(NKJV)

Thereby we have the entire history of Israel. It's a testimony to God's Presence in Joseph's life, when things looked bleak for him and during all the things he went through. Turn to 2 Corinthians 4. Paul once wrote that the trials that we suffer in this life are preparing us for eternal positions in the world to come. Over in 2 Corinthians 4, New King James, the context here is Paul is talking about the ministry. They were hard pressed, persecuted, struck down, even to the point of death, but they put their trust and faith in God.

**2 Corinthians 4:14** *... knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you.*

15) *For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.*

16) *Therefore, we do not lose heart.* (NKJV)

How many times did they come close though? With all the things they suffered; the beatings, the shipwrecks, being harassed constantly by the authorities and people who just wanted to take them off the board.

16 continued) *... Even though our outward man is perishing [it looked like it was], yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.*

17) *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,*

18) *while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.* (NKJV)

That is one of the great facts of life we so easily overlook; it's all temporary, no matter how much it hurts at the time.

The fourth and final key.

#### **4. Be grateful for the blessings you have.**

I dare say that virtually everybody has experienced bad breaks, totally beyond their control—we've all been there. It's how we respond to these that declares who we are and who we want to be. Whether we believe it or not we do have a choice as to how we respond to things and that should never be self-pity. Although it's pretty hard not to feel bad for yourself when you are hurting and things are looking pretty grim.

I have another example—this is not a golfer. This is the story of Lou Gehrig. He's regarded as one of the most talented baseball players of all time. In 1938 he was



diagnosed with ALS (I won't try to pronounce that), commonly become known as Lou Gehrig's disease. It is an incurable disease that attacks the nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord. There is actually a news reel on this, I looked it up and it's pretty touching—pretty moving— On July 4, 1939, Lou Gehrig in the Yankee stadium said goodbye to 62,000 fans. He fought back tears; he was so emotional as he began to speak. Quoting what he said:

*Fans, for the past two weeks you've been reading about the bad break I got. Yet today I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of this earth. I have been in ball parks for seventeen years and have never received anything but kindness and encouragement from you.*

Then he says:

*Look at all these grand men (he was talking about the people there in Yankee Stadium). When everybody, down to the groundskeepers and those boys in white coats remember you with trophies, that's something. When you have a wonderful mother-in-law, who takes sides with you in squabbles with her own daughter, that's something. When you have a father and a mother who work all their lives so you can have an education and build your body, it's a blessing. When you have a wife, who has been a tower of strength and showed more courage than you dreamed existed, that's the finest I know. So, I close in saying that I may have had a tough break but I have had an awful lot to live for.*

On June 2, 1941 Lou Gehrig died, in the prime of his life. What can be learned from things like this? Virtually everyone's been on the wrong end of circumstances. It kind of boggles our instincts as well as our understanding of fairness. We've experienced things many times that simply do not make sense. Some have lost careers, some have been afflicted with disease—we have had that in the announcements—because of genetics, things that can't be helped. Some have experienced the death of a child due to disease or crime or something. We've lost a daughter. Despite all of those terrible things that can and do happen, it does not give us any right to curse our lot in life—it doesn't. If we believe the scriptures that say it doesn't. Here's how the Apostle Peter put it; I know we've read this before but it bears repeating. 1 Peter 2:18.

**1 Peter 2:18** *Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. (NKJV)*

Most likely there was slavery going on there, obviously. Being submissive to your masters—these were slaves. It just doesn't seem fair; how would we feel about slavery today?

19) *For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.*

Being how God and Jesus Christ look at it and they are looking after us and looking to see how we respond to the circumstances that we find ourselves in—they just are.

*20) For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. (NKJV)*

To me, it sounds like we are doing what God wants, no matter what. Playing your ball where you find it. Don't try to reposition things. You are actually letting God work in your life through that particular thing or circumstance that comes upon you.

Let's have one last golf story. Not too many people have heard of Bobby Jones. This guy was a golf legend in the 1920's and there was actually a movie made with him too. I watch all the golf movies and I watch the golf channel. Watching a tournament of golf is probably one of the most exciting sports you can watch. If you know what's going on. The movie about Bobby Jones was a stroke of genius. You talk about Rule 13, he was playing in a tournament and when you ground your club—again you can't move your ball, you can't improve it in any way—and that means whenever you put your club down behind the ball and get ready to strike, it can't move and his did. He turned himself in—he suffered a one stroke penalty which cost him the tournament. Look at the integrity of someone like that—just one stroke.

The really interesting story about Bobby Jones is one that a friend of his tells and I'll quote here:

*Bobby Jones had a sense of peace, dignity and grace about him that was almost eerie. He was one of the most self-composed men I've ever met. Even when his formally athletic body was ravaged by an awful, degenerative disease of the spinal cord. He was a model of strength, fortitude and dignity. In 1971, the year he died, Bobby was in his cabin at the Augusta National Golf club. At that time, he was visited by a friend who became very distraught by Jones' condition. The man began to cry and complained how unfair it was for Jones to suffer in such a way. Jones quickly chastised his friend, saying*

*“Now, now, we won't have any of that; you know the rules, we're supposed to play out ball as we find it.”*

Our calling is not a game. It is deadly serious and we have to play our ball in where we find it in life. Our lives, no matter what is in store for us, is never about turning from God. The purpose of my message is really quite simple and embodies three absolute truths, in closing.

1. God never promised our life would be easy.
2. He never promised life would be fair.
3. He did promise in the end, the future life He has called us to, would be worth it.