

Power to Cope

Series: Hanging On in an Upside-Down World

Acts 1:8

May 16, 2021

Welcome again to worship today.

One Sunday at the Baptist Church, the pastor was giving his sermon when he heard two teenage girls in the back giggling and making noise. It made him mad, and he interrupted his sermon and announced sternly, "There are two of you here who have not heard a word I've said." That quieted the girls down. When the service was over, the pastor went to greet people at the door. Three adults apologized for going to sleep in church, promising it would never happen again.

I hope you haven't been sleeping for the last few weeks.

We are nearing the end of our series "Hanging On in An Upside Down World." You might be getting tired of hearing me say that phrase "Hanging On." One of my worries has been that someone who watches solely online would have taken this series and made it a drinking game. You know, every time Gary has "Hanging On" you take a drink.

This series started out as a systematic look at the encounters Jesus had with His followers beginning Easter through Ascension and then Pentecost Sunday. Along the way, I came to realize that Jesus was healing people in their upside down worlds.

You see on page 5 of your bulletin the keys we have covered thus far:

1. Jesus Calls Your Name.
2. Stay Close.
3. You Don't Have the Whole Story.
4. Listen to the Witness of the Holy Spirit.
5. Peace.
6. Jesus is still Lord and Master.
7. Love is the right response.
8. Your Solution to Your Situation is Probably Not God's Solution.
9. You are a living testimony.

Today, we will look at the 10th key.

I want us to return to the passage we read last week, and that is Acts 1. This was just before Jesus ascended into heaven. He said this in verse 8:

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*¹

Now, you know me. I grew up with a father who had the spiritual gift of evangelism. So, when I was a teenager during our youth Bible studies, and we came across this passage, dad would really focus on the evangelism aspect, that we are to be the Lord's witnesses, telling people everywhere: in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. We kind of glossed over the part about receiving power when the Holy Spirit comes. That was a bit too Pentecostal.

¹ Acts 1:8 (NLT2)

Most of my college and seminary training fell into this same line of instruction: focus on the evangelism, not the power. Sure, you need God's power to do anything, but they loved to exegete the going into all the world stuff.

It really wasn't until my doctoral studies that I began to see the power part of this passage. "But you will receive power..."

The Greek word for "power" here is *doō'-nam-is*² from which we get our word "dynamite." Jesus said, "You will receive dynamite when the Holy Spirit comes." It's that kind of power we will receive when the Holy Spirit enters our lives.

The author Luke stresses the Holy Spirit's work and enabling power. Nineteen times in 28 chapters he does so in Acts.³

Of course, Jesus was referring to the Day of Pentecost, which we will talk about next week.

But I realized that when you are hanging on in an upside down world, after all the other things you need, you need our 10th key. The 10th key for Hanging On in An Upside Down World is this: **power to cope**.

Verse 8 reads, "But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power..."⁴ God wants to give you power to cope that comes from the Holy Spirit to accomplish God's solution.

God gives us the power to cope. But how does that come? How does it come when the doctors say you or a loved one has cancer? How does it come when you lose your job? How does it come when someone says that they don't love you anymore? How does it come when your world turns upside down?

Well, I think it comes to us in 4 ways.

Sometimes, God provides **a miracle** that intervenes in your situation.

The Bible is full of miracles that occurred to people who were in very difficult situations.

- The Hebrews were trapped up against the Red Sea with Pharaoh's army coming after them. God parted the sea for His people, then sent it collapsing on Pharaoh's soldiers.⁵
- The prophet Elijah was starving, and God sent ravens to feed him.⁶
- And how many individuals and families were changed when Jesus came to town? The Gospels list 37 specific miracles Jesus performed, not counting the times it says, "Jesus healed those that came to Him."

Sometimes God gives us a miracle for our situation.

This week, I got a call from my brother that he was in the hospital with all the signs of a heart attack. Yet, the next day, after much prayer, all the tests came back better than expected: no heart attack, no clogged arteries, none of it. As I walked behind his gurney out of the cath lab, I praised God for His miracle in Greg's life.

The prophet Jeremiah wrote:

² δύναμις

³ NIV Study Bible, Acts 1:2 (Acts 1:8; 2:4,17;4:8,31; 5:3; 6:3,5; 7:55; 8:16; 9:17,31; 10:44; 13:2,4; 15:28; 16:6; 19:2,6)

⁴ Acts 1:8 (NLT)

⁵ See Exodus 14

⁶ See 1 Kings 7:6

*O LORD, if you heal me, I will be truly healed; if you save me, I will be truly saved. My praises are for you alone!*⁷

Sometimes God gives us a miracle for our situation.

Other times, God provides **someone else** to intervene in your situation.

God will send a prophet, a man or woman of God, directly to you when you are in the midst of your situation. They come in the power of the Lord.

- The prophet Elijah was sent to the widow of Zarephath to feed her and her son.⁸
- Peter raised Dorcus from the dead.⁹
- One time, Paul spoke all night in a courtyard. A young man named Eutychus was sitting on the windowsill of an upstairs room. He fell asleep and dropped three stories to his death below. Paul raised him from the dead.¹⁰ Now, I warn you, if you fall asleep in church, there's no guarantee I will heal you.

In these situations, God sent someone to be part of the solution.

It is the same when your world is upside down. God will give you the power to cope through someone who crosses your path who brings you healing. It might be physical healing, but it also could be emotional healing or spiritual healing. Someone will come into your life and provide the power to cope with your situation so that you may accomplish God's solution through the Holy Spirit.

One day, Jesus said to a woman who had lived for 12 years in an upside down world:

*"Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."*¹¹

What wonderful words. "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."

Sometimes, God provides His **presence** while you are in your situation.

One day, a pastor and his wife were invited to dinner at one of the church member's house. They arrived at the appointed time and knocked on the door. The four-year-old daughter answered the door. "Mom!" she yelled toward the living room. "God's here, and he brought his girlfriend."

Sometimes, to accomplish His purposes in your life, God comes into your presence during your situation. He doesn't stop the situation; that's not in His plan. Instead, He comes into your situation.

If you are reading the one-chapter-a-day plan on the devotional page of our church's website, you read one of the greatest examples of this in the Bible. Let me remind you of Daniel 3 and the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the fiery furnace. The king wanted everyone to worship his idol, but Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused.

*If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."*¹²

⁷ Jeremiah 17:14 (NLT2)

⁸ See 1 Kings 17:9

⁹ Acts 9:40

¹⁰ Acts 20:7-12

¹¹ Luke 8:48 (NIV)

¹² Daniel 3:17-18 (NLT2)

So, what happened? The king commanded the furnace to be heated to 7 times normal, then, oh, just let me read it:

Then he ordered some of the strongest men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So they tied them up and threw them into the furnace, fully dressed in their pants, turbans, robes, and other garments. And because the king, in his anger, had demanded such a hot fire in the furnace, the flames killed the soldiers as they threw the three men in. So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, securely tied, fell into the roaring flames. But suddenly, Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in amazement and exclaimed to his advisers, "Didn't we tie up three men and throw them into the furnace?" "Yes, Your Majesty, we certainly did," they replied. "Look!" Nebuchadnezzar shouted. "I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire unharmed! And the fourth looks like a god!"¹³

God did not stop the situation. Instead, His presence was with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego **in** the situation.

Isaiah 43:2 reads:

When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you.¹⁴

Notice God doesn't remove the deep waters or the rivers or the fire; instead, He gives the power to cope through His presence to accomplish His purposes.

Finally, there are times when God provides His **grace** for you to endure during your situation.

There will be a time when your situation has no earthly resolution. The diagnosis is for the rest of your earthly life. The divorce papers are finalized. The loved one is gone. The company is no longer in business.

It is in these moments that God comes into your situation and provides His grace.

In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul talks about a situation in his life, a "thorn in the flesh" as he called it. We don't know what this thorn in the flesh was because Paul didn't tell us. Some have suggested that it was malaria, epilepsy, headaches, or a disease of the eyes.¹⁵ Whatever the case, it was a chronic and debilitating problem, which at times kept him from doing ministry. He prayed that God would remove this thorn. Instead, this is what God said:

"My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.¹⁶

When your world turns upside down, God will provide the power to cope. It might be that He provides a miracle. It might be that He provides a person. It might be that He provides His presence. It might be that He provides His grace. We may want it to always be a miracle, but God has greater plans than we could conceive.

Imagine what Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thinking when they were being tossed in the furnace. They had no idea how wonderful God's plan would be.

The story goes of a set of parents who had purchased a new cell phone, one of those smart ones. When they took it home, they tried to learn how to use it. There was

¹³ Daniel 3:20-25 (NLT2)

¹⁴ Isaiah 43:2 (NLT2)

¹⁵ See Galatians 4:13-15

¹⁶ 2 Corinthians 12:9 (NLT2)

one particular feature that neither one of them could grasp, though they tried to figure it out for a while. Their small son, who was watching all of this, boldly said that he could help them figure it out. They ignored his offer of help and kept grappling with the problem unsuccessfully on their own, even though he repeatedly kept offering his help. Eventually, maybe more out of irritation, they handed the phone to him. Lo and behold, he sorted it out within a few minutes! Relieved and quite surprised, the parents expressed their appreciation and admiration to him. His casual reply, said almost in despair was, "The problem with you two is that you never ask for my help!" He was just 7 years old!

What strikes me with this story is that we so many times are like the parents. We try to solve our problems in our own strength and ability and in every other possible way, many times to be disappointed, without first going to the Lord with it. The Lord is always willing to help us.

You know the hymn:

*O what peace we often forfeit
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.¹⁷*

Folks, there are many of you out there who are trying to go through your situation on your own power. It will not work.

You are like our son Marty's car. All of a sudden at a traffic light, it quit. Just quit. They cannot figure out why it will not fire.

When you try to work through your situation on your own, you will fail. When you give your situation to God, when you declare, "Satan, I don't care what you are trying to do to me, I will never serve you or worship you. I am the Lord's and I will serve and trust Him."

When your world turns upside down, remember God will provide the Power to Cope. So many try to go on their own strength, often finding themselves either stuck, spiraling down, or going off on a self-destructive tangent. Only through Christ can we cope within and through our tragedy.

¹⁷ "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." Text: Joseph M. Scriven; UM Hymnal #526.