

# 1. CIRCUMSTANCES DON'T MATTER

A close-up photograph of a person's hand reaching out to touch tall, golden-brown grass in a field. The hand is positioned in the lower right quadrant, with fingers slightly spread. The person is wearing a light-colored, ribbed long-sleeved shirt. The background is a vast field of similar grass, extending to the horizon under a bright, warm light, likely from the sun being low in the sky. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

*You must not allow circumstances  
to master you, but you must  
master your circumstances.*

#NCSAMENTALHEALTHDEVOTIONS

## **CIRCUMSTANCES DON'T MATTER, BUT EVERYTHING ELSE DOES**

*Philippians 4:11-13: "Not that I was ever in need, for I have learnt to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live with almost nothing, or with everything. I have learnt the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or an empty stomach, with plenty or with little. For I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." (NLT)*

I bet that everyone has a story to tell. Something that you did not pick. You were born into a fight that you did not ask for. The world currently finds itself in circumstances that it didn't plan for or asked for. In our wildest dreams we did not expect facing COVID-19, which includes lockdown, isolation and all the difficulties and uncertainties that go with it.

The question in most of our minds is how we are going to survive. How do we keep our emotions and thoughts in check? How do we control our fear, our anxiety and our nervousness? How do we continue to live life as normal as possible since everything is changing?

I'd like to turn your attention to some biblical examples of people who were able to live life as normal as possible, despite their circumstances. I am reminded of the story of Jesus in the storm. The Bible tells us that while the storm raged on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus slept. I think of Daniel whose life was threatened by a new decree. Daniel was thrown into the lions' den, but yet he continued to pray three times a day. Peter, when thrown into prison, sang songs of praise to God. Paul, near the end of his life, was cast into one of the most horrible prisons.

**DESPITE YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES  
LIVE LIFE AS NORMAL AS  
POSSIBLE. LIKE JESUS, DANIEL,  
PETER & PAUL.**



Locked up in a deep, dark dungeon; wet, cold and without any windows. He had little food and no human contact. Still, he took the time to write the book of Timothy to encourage him to keep fast the fight of good faith. Read the passage that Paul wrote while he was in the dungeon:

*2 Timothy 4:5-8: "But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course; I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all who love His appearing."*

It is beautiful to think while Paul was in the severe circumstances of facing death, he could say: "I know that I am about to die. I know that I am ready to be offered up. I know my departure is at hand, but I have done what I needed to do. I have lived my life. I have fought the good fight, I have kept the faith and I am looking forward to the crown of righteousness with which Christ will reward me at His second coming."

He encouraged Timothy to endure affliction, while he himself was facing the most severe and harsh affliction. He did not use the time to complain about it, but he took the time to encourage someone else who might be going through a difficult time.

Do you perhaps find yourself in a storm today? Do you find yourself bound by the laws of man that may threaten your life? Do you feel locked away in darkness and possibly facing death like Paul? For some the COVID-19 pandemic is bringing financial storms. We all find ourselves bound by man-made laws that don't allow for public worship.

**ENDURE AFFLICTION AS A GOOD  
SOLDIER OF CHRIST.**

We are locked up in isolation, wondering if we or our family will be facing illness or death soon. With every cough or sneeze of a family member, we feel uneasy and unsure. How do we survive it? How do we remain unchanged by these circumstances?

Somebody once said: "Circumstances don't matter, it's everything else that matters." Everything else refers to the small things in life, like our daily duties and habits, our daily thoughts, our emotions, our actions and our reactions. Things that we should be concentrating on during tough times, are things like:

- Getting up early.
- Spending time with God.
- Doing the dishes.
- Making the bed.
- Performing a kind deed.
- Performing the tasks at hand faithfully.
- Sleeping enough.
- Eating well.
- Exercising.

This is the 'everything else, that matters'. We need to be faithful in the little things. This is what matters now. The small things are the things that build character. The small things of everyday tasks make you who you are. If you want to remain unchanged during the storms of life, you need to now practise who you are by executing the little things faithfully.

When you consider the biblical examples I've mentioned earlier, you will notice that the little things which helped the biblical characters to get through the storms of life, were things like sleeping, praying, singing and resting.

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Jesus slept during the storm because it was His habit to pray early in the morning and late at night. That habit allowed Him to sleep, knowing that God was taking care of things. Jesus was also in the habit of taking care of his physical health.

Daniel was able to pray despite the laws, because it was his habit to pray three times a day. Peter was able to sing praises to God because it was his habit to do so.

Paul was able to write to Timothy during the darkest time of his life because it was his habit to write. You see, circumstances did not change who they were. Jesus was a man who was at rest. Daniel was a man who prayed. Peter was a man who sang and Paul was a man who wrote. Their circumstances did not dictate what they were going to do. They did what they were going to do because of who they were, because of the habits they have formed in life. Circumstances do not matter – everything else you do that builds your character, is what matters.

You should not be creatures of circumstances. You must master your circumstances and not allow your circumstances to master you. Do not compromise on circumstances. Circumstances that are negative may sometimes scare you into compromise, into neglect and into inactivity. You should be faithful in the small things every day, no matter the circumstances.

Psychology tells us when we are faced with traumatic circumstances, there are basic reactions we go through – the fight-or-flight reactions. There are four basic reactions: fight, flight, fright or freeze. Some people, when faced with difficult circumstances, freeze up and they can't do anything. Others run away. Others become very fearful. But then there are those who tend to fight.

**CIRCUMSTANCES SHOULD NOT  
CHANGE WHO YOU ARE AS A  
PERSON.**

With training you can overcome the natural responses and you can learn how to fight when difficult circumstances come up. You can learn not to freeze, not to fear, not to run away, but to fight.

I don't know about you, but I want to stand tall. I want to live my life despite the that may come my way. Things that I did not imagine would ever happen in my life. I believe that our training time is now. We train not only when things are going well, but also when things are not going well. What we should be doing, is to say, "I cannot control the circumstances, but I can claim the promises of God with confidence." I can exclaim and say: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Whether it is sunshine or rain, I will get up. Whether it is dry earth or wet lands, I will plant my seeds. Whether I am persecuted or safe, I will preach the gospel of Jesus. Whether I have lots of friends or lots of enemies, I will love them all. Whether I am poor or rich, I can make it through. Whether I am homeless, or I am safe, I can sleep peacefully.

You have to be like the man at the Johannesburg Airport who was cleaning the bathrooms. When someone walked into the bathrooms, he said: "Welcome to my office." When a person walks into a bathroom and somebody says: "Welcome to my office", it is clear that he did not allow the circumstances to dictate who he is or what he does.

Most circumstances do not last. You have to learn to outlast them, to survive them; to fight through them. You need to keep your focus to do the little things faithfully and to remain who you truly are in Christ.

Whatever you are going through, do not quit. Keep doing the small things faithfully. Do not run away from your circumstances. Live faithfully despite them.

**PRACTICE DOING THE SMALL THINGS FAITHFULLY.**



Circumstances don't matter. The same wind blows on all of us. Where you arrive is not determined by how the wind blows. And the winds are blowing. Things are changing. The walls are coming down. All kinds of things are happening around us in the world. Where you arrive, is determined by how you set your sails with the little tasks of life. Do not ask for better wind, ask for better sails, for better rowing skills and for a Master of the boat that teaches you how to sail in the storm - or in the calm - so that the things that are supposed to destroy you, will not destroy you, but will set you free.

Under the bludgeoning of circumstances, we may exclaim: "My head is bloodied, but I remain unbowed." Circumstances can mean that I may bleed, I may die, I may become ill, I may lose my house, I may lose my family, I may lose my job, my stability or my health or wealth, but I keep fighting, I keep being focused on my goals and how I want to achieve them. I, as a person in Christ, do not change. My thoughts do not change. My emotions do not change. My actions do not change. My praise and my relationship towards God do not change. If I take a golden crown and throw it in a dumpster, it does not stop being a golden crown. Do not allow the dumpster of life to change you or to define you. You are God's golden crown.

*Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:8-10: "We are often troubled, but not crushed; sometimes in doubt, but never in despair; there are many enemies, but we are never without a friend; and though badly hurt at times, we are not destroyed. At all times we carry in our mortal bodies the death of Jesus, so that His life may also be seen in our bodies."*

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