

A Lesson from God's Bumper Sticker

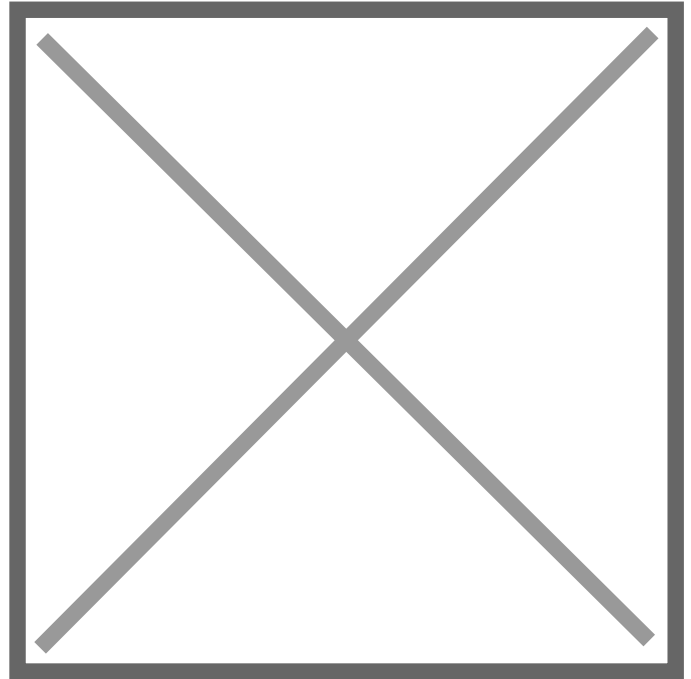
By Major James Bradley –

You've seen the bumper sticker, "When the going gets tough, the tough....go shopping!" In this bit of humor we see our desire to escape the reality of God's bumper sticker, "When the going gets tough, the tough keep going." Well, he may not have said it just like that. But he did say, "Blessed is the person who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him" (James 1:12).

We are all faced with trials, worry, anxiety, and disappointment. In fact, I have discovered a promise in the Bible, found in John 16:33, "...in this world you will have trouble." We are all faced with trials and troubles; the trials of death of loved ones, illness, financial loss, disappointments of family, friends, and fellow workers; the trials of being misunderstood, misinterpreted, and misled. We also suffer the trials of faded dreams, despair, loneliness, and failure. What kind of trial are you facing? It has been said, "God grants success to few, but failure to everyone." How do we handle these trials? I have found that bumper sticker theology becomes practical theology when faced with the realities of life changing trials.

First, "Blessed is the person who perseveres under trial..." Blessed or happy is the person who perseveres under trial. This is the same word used in the Beatitudes some nine times and throughout the New Testament some 50 times. Yet, this is probably one of the hardest things for us to do when faced with trials. To be happy! To rejoice! Fear and worry often keep us from seeing what God has for us. It is so easy to slip into self-pity and to question God.

As many of you know, I have been faced with seemingly insurmountable trials this past year. All my hopes and dreams for family, and vision for ministry seemed to have been taken from me with the diagnosis of leukemia. This has required countless days in the hospital, chemotherapy, radiation therapy and a stem-cell transplant. The doctors have done all they can do for me. This is not the kind of trial that I would have chosen for myself, but this is the one that I, and my family, must face. Satan would try to defeat us through self-pity and questioning. But, I have decided to claim God's sovereignty, power, compassion, and joy in these trials. I have not been disappointed! I have found



that my joy through these circumstances has brought hope and inspiration to others who are facing trials of their own. A ministry I did not seek, but one God has provided.

Secondly, "Blessed is the person who perseveres under trial..." The Barcelona Olympics of 1992 provided one of track and field's most incredible moments. Britain's Derek Redmond dreamed of winning a gold medal in the 400-meter race, and it was in sight as the gun sounded at the semifinals. He was running the race of his life and could see the final turn as he ran down the backstretch. Suddenly he felt a sharp pain go up the back of his leg. He stumbled and fell to the track with a torn hamstring. *Sports Illustrated* recorded the dramatic events: As the medical attendants approached, Redmond fought to his feet. "It was animal instinct," he would later say. He set out hopping, in a crazed attempt to finish the race. When he reached the stretch, a large man in a T-shirt came out of the stands, hurled aside a security guard and ran to Redmond, embracing him.

It was Jim Redmond, Derek's father. "You don't have to do this," he told his weeping son. "Yes, I do," said Derek. "Well, then," said Jim, "we're going to finish this together." And they did. Fighting off security men, the son's head sometimes buried in his father's shoulder they stayed in Derek's lane all the way to the finish line. The crowd rose to their feet, stared in amazement, and cheered the father and son to the end.

Derek didn't walk away with the gold medal, but he walked away with a memory of a father who, when he saw his son in pain, left his seat in the stands to help him finish the race. In the race called life my heavenly father stepped out of the cosmos to share my pain and is helping me finish the race. Life's race may be tough but Jesus assures "I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matt. 28:20) If we believe God and his word we must persevere, "keep on keeping on," and finish the race! The trials and tests of life become opportunities to rely on God's supernatural helping hand to reach into our lives in our time of greatest need or greatest test.

Third and finally this verse says: "...when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him." (James 1:12) We are to be happy, joyful when we have trials and persevere to finish the race and for that we receive a crown of life! In ancient times a crown of flowers was worn during times of joy and celebration. A crown is a symbol of royalty. Crowns of laurel leaves would be given to the victors in early Olympic games. It is a symbol of achievement given to those have endured much.

God's bumper sticker concerning trials and tests is clear "When the going gets the tough, the tough keep going." How long? Revelation 2:10 challenges us ... "Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you a crown of life."

I look forward to the crown of life my heavenly father has for me. I may not like his timing, but his plan is perfect and his sovereignty assured.