

LIFE IS DIFFICULT – LIFE IS GOOD**By Jim Mathis**

Life is difficult. This is a basic, universal fact. As soon as we come to accept and appreciate this reality, the better off and happier we will be as we proceed through this journey called life. Let me explain.

If we know and understand that life is difficult, that it is inevitable that we will face all kinds of trials and challenging situations, we begin to view life as a series of problems to be solved. We can face each day knowing we will have the opportunity to solve problems, work through thorny issues, and deal with difficult circumstances. Each time we solve one of these problems, we can feel victorious. The more victories we chalk up, the happier we are. Happiness is almost always related to victory.

If, on the other hand, we presume life is supposed to be a leisurely cruise, with no icebergs along the way, each problem we encounter becomes an unwelcome interruption to our "happy" life. As these interruptions build up, we become bitter and discontent with situations we must face in our lives.

The wonderful writer and humorist, the late Erma Bombeck, had two book titles that described these different attitudes: *The Grass is Always Greener Over The Septic Tank*, and *If Life is A Bowl of Cherries, Why Am I Always in the Pits?* In her entertaining way, she was saying we should never feel surprised by life's difficulties – we should embrace them and seek to turn them into some form of positive benefit. Some time ago I saw a sign with a simple message that speaks to this: "Life is not about waiting for the storm to pass – it is about learning to dance in the rain."

One of the reasons I have always been an entrepreneur is because I enjoy solving problems. When you have your own business, life becomes a series of problems to be solved. We can resent this, or address difficulties head-on and experience the joy and satisfaction of being able to resolve them.

In my photography business, each new day presents a new set of difficulties and challenges. This is the case especially as I engage in the process of restoring old or damaged photographs. Rather than feeling annoyed or frustrated, I choose to embrace the hurdles that must be overcome.

Many workers find their days filled with the tedium of repetitive tasks, doing the same things day after day. Thankfully, that is never my experience. Each day brings something different, a new set of issues for me to work through. For this reason, I can state without hesitation: Life is good! Here are examples of what the Bible says about the difficulties we confront every day where we work and where we live:

Finding joy and hope in the struggle. Difficulties teach us the value of perseverance – determining to work through the challenges, not just enduring the circumstances until they subside. *"...we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope"* (Romans 5:3-4).

Growing through the process. Like a butterfly that gains strength by breaking out of its cocoon, our struggles can serve to strengthen us for the present and the future. *"...the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything"* (James 1:3-4).

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. The title of this Monday Manna is "Life is Difficult – Life is Good." When reading that, do you agree, or does it seem to be more of a contradiction in terms?
2. What difference do you think it would make for you – or others – not only to accept the fact that life is difficult, but also to embrace that reality? Explain your answer.
3. Do you enjoy solving problems and overcoming challenges? Why or why not?
4. The Bible talks about the benefits of confronting the difficulties and challenges of everyday life. How do you respond to that perspective?

If you would like to look at or discuss other portions of the Bible that relate to this topic, consider the following brief sampling of passages:

Proverbs 14:4, 16:26, 27:18; Ecclesiastes 2:17-26, 11:6; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Galatians 6:9