

When Life Overwhelms

Mark 10:46-52

There are days when life is just too much. Right? There are days when we are so overwhelmed by everything, that we just don't know what we are going to do. We can't even focus enough on one thing, much less accomplish all the things expected of us. And when even one more thing is thrown on top of the heap, it's just more than we can bear. Life is overwhelming. There are things in our lives that we cannot fix. What do we do?

In Psalm 55, David cries out

My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death assail me. Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me. I said, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest—I would flee far away and stay in the desert; I would hurry to my place of shelter, far from the tempest and storm.

Those are the words of a man who was feeling overwhelmed by the circumstances in his life. When David wrote this psalm, there was a conspiracy going on, in which the enemies of David were trying to unseat him as king. This was a situation that he could not fix. David was so weighed down with the confusion and worry that his solution was to get away: "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest." But since he could not do that, he chose instead to cast all his care on the Lord.

Now consider Bartimaeus. His circumstances were overwhelming because

- ✓ He was blind, with no hope of ever seeing again. There was no cure.
- ✓ He had to beg to make a living, and
- ✓ He wasn't getting much sympathy from the crowd.

When the opportunity presented itself, Bartimaeus took steps to change his overwhelming circumstances. What we learn from that example is that when life overwhelms us, there are some steps we can take to turn things around.

1 Call out to God, vv. 46-47

There was a large crowd following Jesus as He walked along. Passover was approaching and the road was jammed with pilgrims chanting on the way to the Holy City. Imagine yourself in the mall the day after Thanksgiving, and you get the idea of what the crowd must have been like—everyone trying to get Jesus' attention, pushing each other just to get a glimpse of Him as He passed by, calling out to each other to come and see!

In order to make himself heard, Bartimaeus cried out. The NIV says *he began to shout*. The word for “shout” means “to croak,” “to make a sound like a raven.” It is a cry of desperation. It was the word used when Peter tried to walk on the water with Jesus and began to sink. He **cried out**, “Lord, save me!” (Matthew 14:30). It is the word Matthew used to describe Jesus **crying out** on the cross just before He died (Matthew 27:50). It is the word Mark used to describe the man possessed by demons, who roamed among the tombs, cutting himself and **crying out** (Mark 5:5). And one more: in Acts 7:60, this is the word Luke used to describe Stephen **crying out** to God in prayer just before he was stoned to death. This is a cry of anguish, of desperation, of great emotion and urgency.

On top of that, the word Mark used here in the tenth chapter indicates that Bartimaeus cried out over and over and over. He wouldn’t give up. He had to be heard! This was his only opportunity, and he was desperate.

Psalm 61:1-2 reads, *Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint, lead me to the rock that is higher than I.* In that psalm David was acknowledging that the problems of his life were bigger than he was, and the only solution was to cry out to God.

2 Don’t allow others to discourage you, v. 48

The King James Version here in v. 48 reads, “*And many charged him that he should hold his peace.*” Take another look at that. The word “charged” in the KJV is the word “rebuked” in the NIV. The word comes from a root meaning, “to fix a value to.” These people standing around, who were trying perhaps to hear what Jesus was saying, perhaps trying to get His attention themselves, were being interrupted by the croakings of this blind beggar sitting by the side of the road! How dare he? Here was a visiting rabbi passing through their little town, and it was an embarrassment to them that this blind beggar should be making so much noise and calling attention to himself in such a way. They looked at him, prejudged him, assigned a value to him in their minds, and told him to be quiet.

Well, Bartimaeus was blind, but he wasn’t deaf. He heard these people telling him to be quiet, but he was probably used to their kind. The voices of the ones telling him to be quiet were added to the clamor of the crowd, so he did all he knew to do—cried out even louder! Nothing was going to stop him. He was desperate, and he was utterly determined to get the attention of the only One who could do anything about his situation.

He refused to allow others to discourage him. He refused to accept their prejudice — their “prejudging” — and refused to accept their estimation of his value to society. Bartimaeus knew that when it was time for Jesus to do something about his situation, it was also time to keep his faith focused on God — not on the discouragements of other people.

3 Put your confidence in God, v. 49

The fickle crowd now tells him “to cheer up,” or as the KJV puts it, “Be of good cheer.” But the way they used it meant something far different from the way we might tell someone who is sad to “cheer up.” The word Mark used to describe what the people told Bartimaeus means “to have confidence.” There are many things we would do if we only had the confidence sufficient enough to do them.

Knowing that, when we read John 16:33, where Jesus told His disciples just before His arrest, *These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world* — all of a sudden it carries greater weight, doesn’t it? Jesus didn’t just tell them “Cheer up, boys!” He told them that they could have confidence in the troubles ahead of them built on their faith and trust in God.

That is what the crowd now tells Bartimaeus. “Have confidence, Bartimaeus! Jesus is calling for you, Himself!” That made all the difference in this scene. As long as Jesus is merely passing by, the crowd tells Bartimaeus to hush, be quiet! But now that Jesus has stopped, and called for Bartimaeus, that changes everything! Now they tell him to have confidence — you’ve got His attention now — He wants to see you!

When life overwhelms us, finding something positive to focus our attention on can make a world of difference. In the case of Bartimaeus, as well as in ours, one very positive thing is that we can have confidence before God. Even when life overwhelms! Listen to the way David put it in Psalm 27:3 — *Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.* We read in Proverbs 3:25-26 that when life overwhelms us, we can be confident in the Lord: *Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being snared.*

Paul tells us in Ephesians that in Jesus *and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence* (3:12). As it was for David in the Psalms, as it was for Bartimaeus in Mark, so it is for us today. Our confidence in God comes from God. It does not come

from our own abilities or solutions. It is based in its entirety on the character and being of Almighty God Himself.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that this confidence makes a difference in the way we approach God. Like Bartimaeus, we are blind, sitting beside the road, begging for any scrap of mercy God will throw at us. There is nothing in ourselves that makes us worthy for Him to stop and pay attention to our plight. Yet listen to this treasure in Hebrews 4:16—*Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need*—in other words, God gives us confidence to approach Him for mercy and grace even when life is overwhelming.

4 Go to Jesus, v. 50

Life was still overwhelming for Bartimaeus. He was still blind. But now he had some hope! Jesus was asking for him! So the Bible says in verse 50, *Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus*. Bartimaeus literally went to Jesus with his blindness. But you and I have another option, one that is much better. Bartimaeus could only go to Jesus during that small window of time, that brief period when Jesus was passing through Jericho on His way to Jerusalem. When life overwhelms us, you and I can go to Jesus at any time, anywhere.

Let's take a closer look, though. Bartimaeus threw his cloak aside, perhaps so it would not trip him up as he hastened to Jesus. The word literally means "to throw away." But listen to this interesting tidbit. This word is used only one other time in the New Testament, in Hebrews 10:35—*So do not throw away your confidence....!!!* The clear warning to us is that when we feel that life is overwhelming us, and we are ridding our lives of things that seem to be holding us back, let us be absolutely certain that we are not throwing away our relationship with Christ.

Look at his eagerness! The KJV says that he "rose." But that does not convey the urgency and immediacy of the original language. Most modern translations agree that he "jumped" to his feet, indicating that he was excited about this opportunity to go to Jesus! The word was used to describe someone springing up, leaping up, from a sitting position.

When life overwhelms us, let us not waste any time in our haste to get alone with Christ, to seek His counsel, gaze into His face, nestle against His breast, and stay there until our hearts beat in rhythm with His. Let Him soothe and caress the worries away. Hear His words of comfort and encouragement. Feel His hands brush away our tears.

Go to Him. Life may overwhelm us sometimes, but it never overwhelms Him. “Come to Me,” He says, “all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28)

5 Be bold in what you ask God, v. 51

Look at what Bartimaeus asked Jesus: “*I want to see.*” On the face of it, and by all reasonable expectation, this was impossible. It was foolhardy and almost impudent. How dare he ask such a thing? How dare he be so bold?

Well, it is first because he had *permission!* Because Jesus had said, “What do you want me to do for you?” That sounds like a strange question to ask a blind man. But notice something—look in verse 36. Jesus had asked the same question of James and John! There, it was in anticipation of their *personal ambition*. Here it was in anticipation of the *bold faith* of the blind man.

So it is with us. We can be bold—even audacious!—in making our requests known to God because we have His *permission!* Have you ever considered the fact that the only reason we can even approach God is because He said we could? Jesus told us **You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it** (John 14:13). We are told in Hebrews 4:16, *So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it.*

Jesus said, **“Keep on asking, and you will be given what you ask for. Keep on looking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened. ^sFor everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And the door is opened to everyone who knocks.** (Matthew 7:7-8).

Secondly, Bartimaeus could be bold in what he was asking because of his *personal faith*. Twice the beggar has called Jesus “Son of David,” which was a national messianic title. Though he was blind, still he could see things the others could not see. Here Bartimaeus calls Jesus “Rabbi,” or *Rabboni* meaning “My Master.” Others might call Him *Rab*, meaning “Master,” but Bartimaeus goes to the next step. He made it personal. This was “My Master,” *Rabbi*.

The same thing is true for us today, as well. The things we can ask God, we can ask not only because He *says* we can, but because we have a personal relationship with Him. It makes a big difference when you know Him. Suppose you have a big need in your life, and you discover that you are going to have to ask for some help. There are two people you know of who could help you in your situation—one of them you’ve met once or twice, the other you know very well. That close friend has said to you, “Let me know if

I can ever help you.” First he has given you permission to ask, and secondly, you have a personal relationship with him. Those two things combine to give you — what is it? — confidence in making bold requests.

When life overwhelms, remember that that is not the time for wimpy praying—it is time for bold, audacious, relationship praying. He invites it, He promises to hear, He promises to answer. When life overwhelms, it is time to cry out to God with your whole being. It is time to focus on Him, and not allow the harsh, judgmental and misunderstanding words of others to discourage you.

When life overwhelms, it is time to put your confidence in God, not in yourself, your own experiences and talents, nor in those of others. When life overwhelms, it is time to go to Jesus, and spend time alone with Him. When life overwhelms, it is time to be bold in what you ask God.

As you sit by the side of the road today, Jesus is passing by. Will you call out to Him?