

# Living Above Our Circumstances

by Richard Siple

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*We must learn to react to our circumstances with humility and patience, looking unto Jesus for strength and guidance, in order to live above our circumstances and experience victory over them.*

**Duration:** 40:45

**Scripture:** Hebrews 12:1, Hebrews 12:4, 1 Peter 2:19, 1 Peter 2:21-23

**Topics:** "Circumstances"

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## Description

In this sermon, the pastor emphasizes the importance of our reactions to the circumstances of life rather than the circumstances themselves. He uses the example of a Christian family with multiple children who are raised in the same environment but turn out differently due to their reactions. The pastor encourages the congregation to react with patience, using Jesus as an example of enduring and reacting patiently to his circumstances. He references Hebrews 12:1, urging believers to lay aside unnecessary weights and sin and run with patience the race set before them.

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## Transcript

If you received a packet in the Suteric Crusade, in that packet you found a small tract entitled Living Above Our Circumstances, is the way it appeared. And I'm sure that in reading the contents of the packet, many of you have already read this particular tract. And it is very helpful as we begin to face the walk with God.

I'm convinced that God would have us to consider this subject more at length this morning. And so we are turning to God's Word to see what He would have to say to our hearts along this line. We're living in a day when we are bombarded with many false philosophies.

And because Christians are so open to all kinds of communication media, the television, the radio, the newspapers, literature of all kinds, and because so many Christians are people who read or who listen to these kind of things, we always face the possibility that we shall be influenced with false philosophies. And that they may really be a detriment to our Christian life. I believe one of the biggest lies of the last hundred years, and I want to repeat that parenthesis, one of the biggest lies of the last hundred years, is the theory that circumstances make people what they are.

Now when I make a statement like that and call that a lie, I put myself in a position of great antagonism to many of the leading thinkers of our day. But since I feel I'm on the side of Scripture and that I'm just merely parroting God, then I'm not much concerned. And I believe what I have to say is very important along this

line.

Unless we can see this as false, it isn't likely that as Christians we will ever come to really live above our circumstances. And many Christians have been convinced that it is normal for them to live a life completely influenced by the things that surround them. Now I believe that to be victorious over our circumstances, we must have God's perspective.

Wouldn't it be great if we could see our lives just as God sees them? And especially if we could see what God is doing. Now so often all we see are the circumstances in which we live. The home in which we live, or the family that surrounds us, or the job, the place where we work, our neighbors, our physical problems, our financial problems, or whatever the circumstances of our life may be.

And those things loom so large to us, we are not able to see what God is doing in our lives. And though we give lip service to that great Scripture that says, for we know, and of course we know it in our heads but not in our hearts, for we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the call according to His purpose. We say we believe that, but many times in our reactions to life, we live as if we did not believe it.

But if we could see as God sees, it would be quite different. Now it is true that God is at work in our circumstances. Yes, that's true.

But really that's just incidental, because the principle work that God is doing is not in our circumstances. The principle work that God is doing is where? In us. Absolutely.

That is the thing God is concerned about. I do not mean that God does not have His hands in the things that happen to us. I don't think anything can happen to me that God doesn't have His hand in it.

Do you feel the same way about you? Surely. But that isn't principally what God is doing. The main thing God is interested in is not my circumstances, but me.

God is not making circumstances, really. He is making people. He is making saints, if you will.

God is remaking people into saints. And He's preparing us for eternity. He's getting us ready for that something we can never understand, that forever and ever.

When we're going to sit with Him and rule over this universe. Now, it's also true that people are influenced by their circumstances. Some will say, well, Pastor, are you saying that circumstances do not influence our lives? No, I'm not saying that.

It's true that people are influenced by the circumstances of their lives. But listen, it is only our reactions to those circumstances that shape our lives, and not the circumstances themselves. Can I say that again? It is only our reactions to the circumstances of life that shape our lives, and not the circumstances themselves.

Now, I watch this so often. You have seen what I have seen. A family.

And within this family, there will be a Christian father and a Christian mother. And they will bring up three, four, five, six children. They'll take them all to Sunday school and to church, and they'll all be present in family devotions.

They'll have the same discipline, the same love, the same teaching, the same home surroundings, the same financial situation. You know, it's all the same. Did you ever notice how differently they turn out? Isn't that strange? That runs completely contrary to the theories of our day.

They turn out so differently because they react so differently to the circumstances of life. For instance, here are two children in a home where the father is an alcoholic. And both of these children see that father come home day after day with the smell of alcoholic beverages on his breath and on his clothes, and he comes in and he's maybe belligerent with the family, and maybe both of those children see that father slap their mother and curse her, and maybe knock her down on the floor.

And they see these things day after day. And one of those children, just as soon as somebody will serve it to him or can get his hands on it, he'll go and start to drink and to follow his father into alcoholism. He'll be influenced in that direction.

But the other child will turn around and he will look at that situation and say, I don't want any part of that. And he'll react exactly opposite to that situation and never touch it. Isn't that true? So what I'm saying this morning, not only is taught in the Scriptures, but it is borne out by honest experience of life that our circumstances do not need to shape our lives.

Especially we who are Christians. God has a hold of my life and yours. Our lives are in his hands.

And my friends, it is how we react to our lives that will make the difference. And God can give us such a victory that we can live above our circumstances. Now, how do we do it? How do we react to our circumstances in the will of God so that we may have victory in our Christian lives? I think the first thing is that we are to react to our circumstances with humility.

With humility. Now, Jesus is our example, isn't he? But how did Jesus react to the circumstances of his life? With extreme humility. Will you turn with me to Philippians chapter 2, please? Philippians chapter 2. Let us read the reaction of Jesus to the circumstances of his life.

Philippians 2, beginning with verse 5. Let this mind be in you. Who is you? Would everybody say me? Let this mind be in you. That's you and me.

Which was also in Christ Jesus. Now we're going to look at our example, Christ. Not only our example, but our very life, the one who lives in us.

Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he did what? He humbled himself. Now he didn't wait for God to humble him, but he humbled himself.

He humbled himself and became obedient unto death. Even the death of the cross. Now let me paraphrase it.

He who had always been God by nature, he who had dwelt in the glories of heaven at the Father's right hand, and who knew what it was to wear the crown, and to have all the glorious princes of heaven fall down before him and cast their crowns at his feet, and cry, Holy, Holy, Holy. The one whose every wish was an absolute command throughout the universe. The one who made all worlds and upholds them by his power.

That one knew what it meant to have a great change in his circumstances. For he stepped down off that throne and stripped away his glory, and did not consider his equality with God something to be clutched. But he came away down to earth and was born as one of his creatures, and being found in fashion and shape as a man, he humbled himself.

How did he react to the change in his circumstances from the glories of heaven to the lowliness of humanity on earth? He humbled himself. You see, that's how God wants us to react to our circumstances. He humbled himself and became obedient to God.

The Bible says he learned obedience by the things which he suffered. He became obedient unto death. And how we need to become obedient to the death of the self-life, don't we? How our life needs to go to the cross and die.

Or when we react wrongly to our circumstances, it's because we're not dead. It's because that self-life hasn't really been crucified, hasn't really been given over to the cross of Christ. When we're asking continually, where am I in this situation? I have my rights.

Well, Jesus had his rights, didn't he? Did anyone ever have the rights that he had? Lord of all that is. And yet he became a humble man, a carpenter, a peasant, and died on a cross. Not only death, but the death of the cross.

For you and me. He humbled himself. That's how he reacted to the circumstances of his life.

It's by humility. Now, so often we react to the circumstances of our life completely different. And that's why we are not victorious over our circumstances.

We're thinking about ourselves. And what is right for us. We say, well, I have been mistreated.

I have not been considered in this situation. And as long as we're wondering, where am I in this picture? Our circumstances will defeat us. If God could only give us a picture of ourselves as having been crucified with Christ.

And as being really nothing. Except what we are in our resurrection life, in our relationship to God alone. If we could see that as God sees us, how differently we would react to the circumstances of our lives.

How much more victorious we would be over those things. You see, then we would be able to say, Well, I don't deserve anything better than this. Do you really feel that way? So many times we say, but I deserve a better situation than this.

Do you? But when you're dead, you don't. You know, if someone is dead, you can kick them. And they won't kick you back.

Isn't that so? If someone is dead, you can slap them and they won't slap you back. You can curse them and they won't curse back. You can talk about them and they won't retaliate.

You can steal from them and they won't even report you. Because they're dead. Jesus Christ reacted to his circumstances with a kind of humility that took him all the way to the cross of Calvary and he died.

And God wants to give us victory over the circumstances of our lives, but we can never do it until we follow him all the way to Calvary and give up that self-centered, old nature within us that wants what it wants, that

wants to be loved and honored and glorified and exalted and treated with fairness, that wants to demand its rights and have everything just so. And when we take that old selfish man to the cross and reckon it to be dead and we really separate ourselves from it by faith and give it up to God and say, Lord, I am alive unto Christ and whatever you give me in life is all right. It's fine.

I thank you for it. I praise your name. I accept it with worship.

And if you strip away all that I have, my house and my possessions and my children and everything like you did with Job, I'm going to fall down on my face and worship. And say, naked came I into this world and naked I'll go out. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

And we'll never really have complete victory over the circumstances of our life until we come to that kind of a position of total humility. Job was the greatest man of the East, says the scriptures, but it was all just the circumstance of his life. And he sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.

Joseph was a man who learned this kind of a thing. You remember about Joseph? He was the darling son of his father and mother, the favorite child, and his father dressed him up in special clothing. I think it was a big mistake, but that's what he did.

And he just, he loved Joseph. Joseph was his favorite child. But the other brothers, of course, were jealous.

And Joseph had been used to this kind of privilege and this kind of special attention all of his young life. So much so that when he had a dream of the whole family falling down and on their faces before him in obeisance, why, he was foolish enough to mention it. You could tell he was really the center of that family because he never said a thing like that.

But he told about the dream and they all hated him that much the more except for his father. And so you know what happened to Joseph. And how that he went out on an errand from his father to his brethren and they said, here comes that dreamer, this is our chance.

And they stripped his beautiful clothes from him and tore them and dumped blood on them to take home to his dear father to show that he was killed by some wild animal. And then they took him and sold him as a slave down into Egypt. And this boy who had always lived in a home of wealth and refinement and culture and had everything that a young man could desire was suddenly a slave in a foreign land.

And his dear father thought he was dead. And he was cut off from home and from loved ones and from all the privilege and everything he'd ever had in life. His total circumstances were changed.

And if there's anyone who could have become bitter, it was Joseph. He should have been bitter over his circumstances, but he was not. He stayed true to God.

He humbled himself and instead of grumbling and being bitter about his condition as a slave and saying, I'm not going to be a slave, I wasn't born to be a slave, I was born to be a man of wealth and a house of refinement and culture and I won't accept this position, I have my rights and I'm going to run away, I'm going to kill somebody. Instead, Joseph said, if God has decided that I'm to be a slave, I'll be the best slave that there can be by God's grace. And he became such a marvelous slave in that house that his master promoted him and promoted him and promoted him and promoted him until finally he was the steward of the whole house and had everything in his hands so his master didn't even know how much

money he had in the bank.

And Joseph was lord of that house. He said, well, he finally made it. No.

No, God said, now you're sitting pretty, I'm going to change your circumstances again. And so the woman of that house tried to seduce Joseph, but he stood true to God and he would not touch her. He could have said, well, I'm just a slave and I have my rights, but he said, no, I'll be true to God and I will not, I will not fail God.

And he was framed and thrown into the king's prison to languish and to die there. And Joseph could have been really bitter. And he could have said, it doesn't pay to serve God.

I tried to be a good slave. I was true to God. I wouldn't commit adultery.

I've lived for the Lord. And look at me, here I am in prison. And God just doesn't care about me.

And I'm not going to serve him any longer. No, he said, I'm in jail. So I'll be the best prisoner that you can find.

And I'll live for God right here. And so he prayed and he lived the kind of a life for God that when the prisoners had problems, they came to Joseph with their problems. You see, a man who's victorious over his circumstances, it doesn't matter where God puts him.

He'll just attract people with troubles like a light attracts walls. It doesn't matter. And so they came to him with their troubles.

And you know the end of his story. How God highly exalted him and gave him a name that was above every name in the land of Egypt. And how God took him out of the dungeon and put him on the throne and made him so great that the Pharaoh of Egypt said, No man in all of Egypt will lift his hand or his foot without the word of Joseph.

And God brought all his brothers and his father, and he put them all down at his feet, just like he said. You see, there is a man who had circumstances that could have defeated him totally. But he was a man who was not to be influenced or shaped by his circumstances, but was to react to them by faith in God.

And it sounds exactly like what happened to Jesus, who became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue should confess that Christ is Lord. You see, we should react to our circumstances with humility. The humility of Christ, even the humility of the cross, and the death of the self-life, and the victory of the spear-filled life.

Another word that I think needs to be said to all of us about our reactions is that we should react with patience. Will you turn to Hebrews 12? Hebrews 12. Jesus, again, being our example of how to react to circumstances.

Hebrews 12, verse 1. Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, that is, those witnesses from Hebrews 11, which we don't have time to read about this morning, those great champions of faith, let us lay aside every weight, and I think those are the weights of the unnecessary things of the world that hinder our lives, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with what? With what? Yes. And let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Looking where?

Looking unto Jesus.

There's our example again of how to live in our circumstances. Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, that's going to tell how he managed his circumstances. Who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross.

He endured the cross. Now, endurance takes patience. We're talking about patience.

He endured the cross, despising the shame, and it wasn't going to affect him, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him, now stop and think about him, about Jesus. Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

You ever get weary? Ever get weary with the circumstances? And get faint hearted? Say, Lord, I can't stand it? The Lord secured me that one. He says, you don't know what you can stand, so don't tell me that. I know what you can stand.

Unless you become weary and faint in your minds. Then verse 4, Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. Jesus resisted to blood.

You see? How did he react to his circumstances? He reacted with patience. He endured. You say, but pastor, the circumstances that if my life, they just won't quit.

You know, I could take it for just a little while. I could take it for a few days or a few weeks, or you know, even for a year maybe, but I can't keep on and on. But how God wants to teach us to react with patience to our lives and to endure as seeing him who is invisible.

To look unto Jesus who endured the cross. You say, if this dying, I wouldn't mind dying if I could just die and get it over with. Well, you know, when Jesus was crucified, it only took a few moments to crucify him, but it took a long time for him to die.

The scriptures say, and they crucified him there. But that wasn't the end of it because he was still alive. He was crucified, but hour after hour, moment after moment, pain after pain, drop of blood after drop of blood, grown after grown, he had to experience the dying.

As long as it took. And God knows how long it will take to do in this life what he wants to do, and he knows how long it will take to do it in your life. He knows how long it will take for him to deal with the selfishness and the pride, you know, and the covetousness and the lust and all the things he has to deal with and put to death on the cross.

And they that are Christ have crucified the flesh with all that it loved and lusted for. You see, we bring ourselves to the cross and it's a momentary thing and we do it, but then we must die daily, and God will take us through every painful step of it, and we must react to it with patience, because Jesus endured the cross and he despised the shame, oh the shame, the shame, of Jesus hanging there naked and bleeding, and those people screaming at him and mocking him and making fun of him and laughing at his pain. You see, we haven't suffered that.

Have you? I haven't, you see. I don't say that we won't suffer it. And Christian, we better learn.

We better learn now. We better learn now how to live above our circumstances. By the grace of God and by the death of the self-life and the fullness of the Holy Spirit, we better learn now.

So God wants to teach us that, this matter of patience in the way we react to our circumstances. Well, I wanted to talk about Paul, you know, and his patience, and I don't have time, but my, what a man, and how his circumstances were changed, and how he had always known what it meant to be honored and looked up to and was a leader of his people. But when he gave his heart to Christ, and you remember what God said to Ananias? For I am going to show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

And God really showed him that. And what patience this man had. He said, I have fought a good fight.

I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. And therefore there is laid up for me a crown of life which the Lord shall give me in that day.

And not to me only, but also unto all them that love his appearing. And this man endured as seeing him who was invisible and walked with Christ. But there is one more thing I want to come to.

How we should react to our circumstances. And that is with commitment. Will you turn with me to 1 Peter? A most interesting passage.

1 Peter chapter 2. Let us look at our Lord again as our example of how he reacted to circumstances. 1 Peter chapter 2 and verse 19. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.

For what glory is it if when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if when ye do well and suffer for it, ye take it patiently. This is acceptable with God. There is that patience again.

Reacting to our circumstances with patience. And with humility. For even hereunto were ye called because Christ also suffered for us.

Leaving us an example. Now watch, he is going to give the example. That ye should follow his steps.

Who did no sin. Can you say that? Can you say that you have done no sin? Can you? No. No, I can't either.

But Jesus could say he did no sin. Neither was guile found in his mouth. And I can't say that either.

But he could. Who when he was reviled, reviled not again. See how he is reacting to his circumstances.

He was reviled, but he reviled not again. When he suffered, he threatened not. But what did he do? But committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.

He reacted to the circumstances of his life with commitment to God. Commitment. He committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.

You and I have the master's privilege of committing our life and our circumstances to God. To coming to the place where we put our lives completely in God's hands so that we say, Lord, I am in your hands. 24 hours a day, body, soul and spirit, house, possessions, wife, children, everything.

Oh God, I commit it into your hands totally. And whatever you do with it is alright. You see, that's commitment.

Total commitment. How do we react to our circumstances? With commitment. Committing both ourselves and our circumstances.

Entirely into the hands of God. That's what Jesus did. He didn't react with bitterness and anger and all the things of the flesh against his circumstances.

But he just committed himself to him that judgeth righteously. He said, that's alright, God will take care of it. God will take care of it.

It's all in his hands. And God did take care of it. And he went through the cross.

And he went right through the tomb. And he came right out the other side. And he's sitting on the right hand of God.

In glorious victory. That's what God wants to teach us. He wants to teach us to live above our circumstances.

By this kind of commitment. It would be worth your while sometime to make a careful study of the life of Isaac because he's a perfect picture of a man who reacted to his circumstances with commitment. When he was a young man, do you remember when Abraham took him up on the mountain? And they were going up there to offer the sacrifice.

And Isaac said to his father, my father. And he said, yes, my son. He said, here is the fire and the wood, but where is the sacrifice? But Abraham knew that Isaac was the sacrifice.

And he said, my son, God himself. God will provide himself a sacrifice. They went up on top of the mountain.

But the thing I want you to notice is that Isaac was a man who reacted to his circumstances with commitment. Because as near as I can gather, at that time Isaac was 30 years old. I was young in that day.

But he was in the full bloom of his manhood. And his father was an old man. And don't tell me that his father just overpowered him and tied him up and put him on that altar.

But Isaac was a man who was committed to God already. And he said in effect to his father, Father, if it's the will of God for you to offer me as a sacrifice on this mountain, I submit. And he lay down on that altar and was bound and was committed to God.

Committed to the death of that knife. But you see, God will never allow that kind of commitment to be defeated. And right as the knife was raised, the voice came from heaven.

And there was the ram and the thicket. And Isaac was loosed. And that's the story of Isaac's life completely.

A life of always of commitment in his circumstances. You see, when it came even to choosing his wife, he was willing for God to choose his wife. I wonder how many young people here are willing for God to choose your husband or wife.

You don't think he can do it as good as you do. As you can do, do you? But real commitment will believe that God can do it. And when it came time for Isaac to get married, Abraham sent his faithful servant to another land to find a wife, for Isaac can bring her back.

And Isaac lived the kind of life of commitment that he didn't rebel against that. He could have said, no, wait a minute. This is going too far, this business of Christianity.

I'm willing to go a long ways, but I'll have you know I'll choose my own wife. No. No, he was committed to God.

And he said, that's all right. Let the servant go in the power of the Holy Spirit. And God chose better for Isaac than he ever could have chosen and brought back a beautiful wife for him that he loved at first sight.

You see, a life of commitment in these kind of circumstances. A man of humility and patience and commitment to the will of God. A prosperous man, his servants went out to dig wells and some of his neighbors came over and they said, those are our wells.

And so Isaac rushed into court and got himself an attorney and began to fight over his wells. Now, Isaac was a man who understood commitment. And he said, well friends, if you say they're your wells, I guess they're your wells.

You can have them. And we'll just go and dig some more. That cost him money.

But he figured that God knew what was best and he was committed to God in his circumstances. And so his servants went and dug some more wells. You see, that was his attitude.

Even when he was an old man and it was time to bless the oldest son, you know, and turn everything over to him. And he was blind. And Jacob came in and deceived him and got the blessing.

And I'm sure that Isaac's old heart was broken because he had set his heart on Esau. He loved Esau. And he wanted to give everything to Esau and give him the blessing.

But it was God's will that Jacob should have the blessing. And even though Jacob took it wrongfully, it had been God's intention for him to have it. And Isaac bowed his heart and said, I have given him the blessing and he shall have it.

And he was committed to the will of God. We can never triumph over our circumstances until we are totally committed to the will of God and believe that God really knows best. And that he really can guide and will guide the circumstances of our lives as he wants them.

And he will make of us what he wants us to be. And if we believe that, we'll have victory over our circumstances. Let me read you a poem in closing.

Who walks with God must take his way across far distances and gray to goals that others do not see, where others do not care to be. Who walks with God must have no fear when danger and defeat appear, nor stop when every hope seems gone. He must endure and move straight on.

Who walks with God must press ahead when sun or cloud is overhead, when all the waiting thousands cheer, or when they only stop to sneer. Who walks with God must see God's face and trust in God's controlling grace, for he will someday hear, well done, and sit enthroned with God's own Son. And friends,

it will be worth it all when we see Jesus.

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