Bringing God into the Negative

By Ney Bailey

Has anything negative happen to you in the last 24 hours, or in the last week? Well if it hasn't, it will! Because the Lord Himself said, "In this world you will have troubles." But He said, "Be of good cheer for I have overcome the world."[1] And the apostle John writes, "This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith."[2] As negative circumstances enter our lives, it's important to know that we can trust God who is faithful in the midst of our challenges.

The Lord said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My Word will not pass away."[3] That means His Word is truer than anything we feel and truer than any circumstance that will ever be in our lives. What is faith? Taking God at His Word.

We especially need to know that His Word is truer than how we feel when the negative hits. How much faith does the Lord say it takes to deal with situations? What's the smallest denomination of faith? Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed..."[4] A mustard seed is a tiny round seed. I think it is by His grace that He says we only need a mustard seed. I'm grateful He doesn't say we need faith the size of an orange or an apple.

If we just "feel" something and that's all we do, we spiral downward. But if we take that mustard seed of faith and we choose with our wills to take God at His Word a little bit, even if our feelings are screaming 180 degrees in the other direction, then God has something to work with. He asks us to trust Him, "to live by faith, and not by sight."[5] The Scripture states in Romans 1:17 that we go "from faith to faith." We take God at His Word a little bit, then a little bit more and a little bit more.

Many times I have had people say to me, "A good Christian shouldn't feel this way." Or I hear other people say, "If I were you I wouldn't feel that way." The fact is you do feel that way, so what are you going to do about it?

Have you ever seen this train diagram? The engine represents God's Word, the Bible, which is truth: "Fact." The coal car represents our faith in God's Word. And last of all, the caboose represents our feelings. It is the engine that pulls the train, not the caboose. It's okay to have feelings. You were created in God's image as an emotional being and you do have feelings. But our feelings can be unreliable. We need to put our faith in God and His Word.

I think our best example, as always, is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. If you look at Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, right before He was to go to the cross, Jesus wasn't saying, "The Son of God shouldn't feel this way." He wasn't saying, "If I were trusting God I wouldn't feel this way." If you look at those passages you will see He was feeling everything there was to feel. It says, "He began to be sorrowful and troubled...'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.'"[6] Look at the words in Scripture that describe Him during that time. He was deeply grieved, troubled, distressed, in agony—all feelings. But He was trusting the Father in the midst of His feelings, saying to the Father, "...not as I will, but as you will."[7]

You don't need to stuff your feelings or just gut it out. You can have deep feelings and trust God in the midst of those feelings. If you get that, it will set you free.

With this as a backdrop, how then do we bring God into the negative? Let's look at three ways.

1. We Bring God into the Negative by Praising and Thanking Him

The first way we bring God into the negative is by praising Him and thanking Him. Ephesians 5:18-20 says, "And do not get drunk with wine for that is dissipation but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord always giving thanks in all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God even the Father."

And I Thessalonians 5:18: "In everything, give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." I think the toughest word in this verse is "In." The toughest time for me to give thanks is when I'm in a negative situation and I don't feel like giving thanks.

I heard a story years ago that helped bring this home to me and make it very practical. A woman and her husband had heard a speaker talk about the fact that they needed to praise God and thank God for everything in their lives, especially for the most difficult. As they were going home, they said, "Well you know what the most difficult thing in our lives is? It's our son."

They had a seventeen-year-old son who had never given them anything but trouble. He had been difficult to the mother, to the father, to his brothers and sisters. They had done everything they knew to do with him and it just simply did not work. So on the way home, for the very first time, they thanked God for their son, and they praised God for their son.

Their son had been home alone that night and as they drove into the driveway of their home, every light in the house was on. They said, "Father we thank you and praise you for our son. We even praise you and thank you that the lights are on."

Then they went into the kitchen and there was the biggest mess you've ever seen. Out on the counter were ice trays and Coke cans, bread and mayonnaise, mustard, lunch meat and cookies and potato chips. They stopped and said, "Lord we praise you and we thank you for our son. We even praise you and thank you for this mess."

Then they went into the family room. The television was on and there were papers strewn all over, left over Coke cans and cookies and sandwiches. They stopped and they said, "We praise you and thank you for our son, we praise you and thank you for this mess."

They continued to praise God and thank God for their son, all that day, the next day and the next day. Sunday afternoon, there was a knock on the bedroom door. And the son said, "Mom and Dad, can I come in and talk to you?" He continued, "Mom, Dad, I've been doing a lot of thinking, especially lately. You know, I've been miserable, unhappy and frustrated as long as I can remember. You know, I can't take it out on my friends, because I need my friends. I've gotta be nice to my friends. I can't take my hostility out on my teachers because I want to make at least halfway decent grades. The thing I realize, Mom and Dad, is that I've been taking it out on the family. I just want to tell you, I'm not going to do that anymore."

When we praise God for what we don't like, we bring God into the negative and release His power to work. The alternative is that we keep the lid on and we don't let Him into our negative situation. I believe that we become bitter to the degree we don't give thanks. I don't want to become a bitter person in life, so I know that I need to praise God and thank Him now.

We bring God into the negative by giving thanks and praising Him.

2. We Bring God into the Negative by Blessing and not Cursing

The second way we bring God into the negative is by blessing and not cursing. I wish I had learned this many years ago. I could have saved myself a lot of trouble.

James 3:8-10 says, "But no one can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father and with it we curse men who have been made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not be this way."

The word "curse" is not referring to four-letter words. It means to speak evil of, or to not speak well of. And the word "bless" means just the opposite, to speak well of. I heard a true story that helped me understand what is meant by cursing and blessing someone.

In Portland, Oregon, a pastor and his wife had enormous trouble with a son. At the height of it, he left home and they had not heard a word from him for three or four years. This pastor went to a Christian counselor whom he knew very well and after pouring out his heart, the counselor looked at him and he said, "How long have you been cursing your son?"

Shocked by the strong words, he said, "What do you mean how long have I been cursing my son?" The counselor responded, "Well the word curse means to speak evil of, or to not speak well of. And everything you've just told me is some way you are not speaking well of your son. How long have you been doing that?" The pastor hung his head and said, "Well I guess I've been cursing him all of his life. I've never, never had a good thing to say about him, ever." And the counselor said, "It hasn't worked, has it?" He said, "No."

The counselor said, "I want to challenge you and your wife that for the next two months, when your son comes to mind I want you to bless him. I want you to pray God's blessings on him. When you speak of your son in your home, I want you to try to remember something good about him. I want you to speak well of him."

The pastor said, "I guess I've got everything to gain and nothing to lose so I'll take you up on it." He went home and told his wife, who agreed, and they began. When they prayed for their son, they prayed God's blessing on him. When they spoke of their son, they tried to remember some good things about him. They continued to do that day after day.

On about the 10th day the pastor was in his study and the telephone rang. You guessed it. On the other end of the phone was the son. And the son said, "Dad, I'm not really sure why I'm calling but I've just had you and Mom and the family on my heart and my mind for the last week or so and I just thought I'd call and check in with you." And the father said, "Son, I'm so glad you are calling." He had to contain himself to not come right through the phone. They chatted for a few minutes and the father said to the son, "I don't know if you can find it in your heart or not, but how about meeting me on Saturday for lunch?" He said, "Sure Dad, I'll meet you."

The day came. They met for lunch. The son came in his old ragged clothes. His hair was long and he was kind of disheveled. Whereas before the father would have been very critical and judgmental, this time he went in with an attitude of accepting his son, blessing him in his heart. He asked his son questions and he listened to his answers. He affirmed him where appropriate. At the end of that lunch the son looked across the table and he said, "Dad, I don't know what's going on here, but I've kind of enjoyed being with you." And the father said, "Well I've enjoyed being with you too, son." The son said, "Well Dad, do you think maybe just for tonight I can come home and spend the night in my old bed and see Mom and the family. Just for tonight." He said, "Sure son, we'd love to have you."

As the father walked through the rest of that day, he was stricken in his heart to realize what a difference it had made to stop cursing his son and start blessing him. That night when the son was in his bed in his bedroom, the father went slowly in there and sat down. He said, "Son will you forgive me for all the ways I've treated you through the years." And the son said, "Sure Dad, I'll forgive you." And he put his arms around his father's neck. That was the beginning of the restoration of that relationship. But when was the real beginning? The real beginning was when that father and mother began to bless their son in their hearts.

I don't understand it, but in some unique way God honors it when we bless others and when we don't curse them. We reap what we sow. If we sow cursing we are going to reap cursing. If we sow blessing, we reap blessing. And I would rather reap blessing, wouldn't you?

We bring God into the negative by blessing and not cursing.

3. We Bring God into the Negative by Forgiving

The last way we bring God into the negative is by forgiving. Look at Colossians 3:12,13: "And so as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, bearing with one

another and forgiving each other who ever has a complaint against anyone, just as the Lord forgave you so also should you."

I like that because the Lord acknowledges that we have complaints against each other. But he says whoever has a complaint, just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. All of us have been hurt. I think the deepest hurts that we ever have come from within our own families or come from the people who are closest to us.

One of the deepest hurts that I ever had was from my father. My father grew up without loving, attentive parents and he never learned how to express love and warmth to others. I concluded that my father probably didn't love me. To complicate matters, my father had a drinking problem. As I grew up in that household, I grew more bitter and more resentful as the days went by. I didn't like the way my father talked to my mother. I didn't like the way he talked to me. On a couple of occasions he got violent, but most of the time we just pretty much ignored each other. I remember talking to my mother and she would say, "I just can't talk to your father." Well if she couldn't talk to him then I sure couldn't talk to him. Have you ever had those situations? It was tough. If you had known me in high school or college, I would not have had one nice thing to say about my father. It is safe to say that I hated him.

A couple of years out of college, I heard a speaker quote 1 John 4:8 "God is love." And then the speaker used 1 Corinthians 13 to describe God's love toward us. When it says, "Love is patient, love is kind..." the speaker suggested reading it as "God is patient, God is kind, etc." What he was saying was that God's love toward me was patient. God's love toward me was kind. God's love toward me would hope all things, endure all things and bear all things. I never thought of the fact that God had a 1 Corinthian 13 type of love for me.

Then I began to think about my father as I left that meeting. I thought all these years I had been waiting for my father to shape up and stop drinking and then I was going to love him. But it was as though God said to me. "Ney, you have more light, you have more grace. My love toward your father is kind. My love toward your father is patient. My love toward your father hopes all things, endures all things and bears all things. Ney, I want you to take the first step toward him."

Tears began to stream down my face as I realized I did not have God's love for my very own father. It seemed like the Lord had done something new in my life but I knew I wasn't going to know until I was home again and I was with him.

A few months later I went home with an attitude of acceptance and love. As I went in the house with this new attitude towards him of acceptance, love and forgiveness, guess what? My father sensed my spirit. And as I was nice to him, he was nice in return. My father didn't know much about how to love, but he knew how to respond a little bit to love. I thought if I had known it was going to make this much difference I might have been nice a lot sooner. While I was home on that trip, my father went over to the dress shop of one of his clients and brought home 3 dresses on approval for me to try on. He had never done that before.

When I left home that time, I began to think about how the Lord says to honor your father and mother that it may go well with you and you may live long on the earth. I said to the Lord, "You are the one who thought up this thing about honoring, now

will you show me how to do that." And the Lord began to give me ways that I could demonstrate love to them.

For the first time in my life, I thanked the Lord for my father and for my mother. More time passed and this is going to sound a little melodramatic, but this actually did happen. I was sitting one day and just kind of staring into space. I began to think about my father. I thought if my father were to die and I were to go to his funeral, and I would look out and see his casket, would I have any regrets? I thought, yes I would regret that I had never asked him to forgive me for some of my ugly ways in my growing up years.

So I purposed in my heart to go home and ask his forgiveness. He described himself as a bull-headed lawyer. So to think about talking to him was very scary for me. When I imagined that scenario, I could see myself lying prostrate on the floor sobbing my heart out unable to utter a word.

The next time I visited my parents, I waited until halftime during a football game on TV, and I said, "Daddy, you know I've been thinking about my growing up years, how ungrateful and unloving, unkind I was." And then I said, "Will you forgive me?" There was this pause and he turned and looked at me with this twinkle in his eye and he said, "No." He said, "I don't remember all those things." And then he named one. I knew it was important to get a response from him so I said, "Will you forgive me for the things you can remember?" And he said, "Yes." Right after that he said, "Now where are you going on your next trip?" He had never asked me that before. On the way out the door he asked, "When will you be home next?" And I said, "December 21 or 22." And he said, "I'll see you on the 21st."

One day my mother called me and she said, "Honey, your dad found something in a catalog and it reminded him of you and he bought it and had it wrapped and sent it UPS all by himself. He is sending you a surprise." I could not wait for that package to come. He had never done that before. When it finally came, inside was a little Melita two-cup coffee maker in a brown travel case, because he knew I liked coffee and I was traveling a lot. As I held that in my hands I thought, "O Lord this represents a lot more than a Melita two-cup coffee maker. This represents a relationship that you have restored."

I remembered that when I didn't feel like it, I chose with my will to put my mustard seed of faith over on the Lord's side and choose with my will to forgive my father. I believe when we are hurt we need to ask ourselves the question, is my God bigger than my hurt or is my hurt bigger than my God? We are the ones that get to choose.

There are so many things that are absolutely inexcusable. But there is nothing that is unforgivable. Someone has said, "To forgive is to set the prisoner free, only to discover the prisoner was you." My dad never asked me to forgive him. But God asked that of me and it made all the difference.

Maybe you are thinking, "Well Ney, what if the person I need to forgive has already died?" I have good news for you. God is not limited by time. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. I believe you can tell the Lord what you would have said and He will honor that.

In summary, is there a negative in your life? I encourage you to praise God and thank Him.

Are you cursing someone? May God give you the grace to begin to bless them instead.

Is there a deep, deep hurt? May God give you the grace to forgive and by so doing you will bring God into the negative and release His power to work.

[1]John 16:33
[2]1 John 5:4
[3]Matthew 24:35
[4]Matthew 17:20
[5]2 Corinthians 5:7
[6]Matthew 26:37,38
[7]Matthew 26:39

- -

Excerpted from a forthcoming book with WaterBrook Press. Copyright © 2004 by Ney Bailey. All rights reserved. No portion of this material may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission. The sharing of this article with another individual is permitted, if accompanied by this copyright notice.

Ney Bailey is the author of *Faith Is Not a Feeling*. WaterBrook Press.
If you would like to purchase a copy of this book, you may do so here:
www.campuscrusade.com/books