

Break Free...

*A Thought for the Week From Patrick Kemper at
No Strongholds Ministries*

Week 17

Coaching

Psalm 139:3-7 (CEV)

3 You notice everything I do and everywhere I go. 4 Before I even speak a word, you know what I will say, 5 and with your powerful arm you protect me from every side. 6 I can't understand all of this! Such wonderful knowledge is far above me. 7 Where could I go to escape from your Spirit or from your sight?

In the last few months, I have gained a new perspective on God's interaction in my daily struggles... and it has revolutionized my life.

I used to believe that here we sit and, well, there is God up in the clouds somewhere. We go through life attempting to manage our responsibilities and trying to please God with the choices we make. We volunteer at the food pantry, teach the 8-year-olds at church on Sundays and do our best to get some personal time with God a couple times a week. Does that sound about right?

Then, just when we think things are going fairly smoothly, out of the blue we get hit with an unexpected situation. The roof starts to leak, the kids start acting like it's Mardi Gras at the zoo or, all of the sudden, weird politics causes new tension at the office making things extremely uncomfortable.

"I must have really pissed off the enemy! They really don't like it when I'm gettin' it right." Isn't that what we say? I know I have felt that way and I used to offer some comment pretty close to that.

I want you to know, though, this is **not** how it works.

It is true, at some point in everyone's life, we have all questioned if God is concerned about the things going on in our lives because of what appears to be unsolicited attacks from the enemy. Have you ever found yourself wondering if He even knows what is going on? Any idea why that happens?

We think this way because we choose to adopt a victim mentality. That's right, I said

it.

A victim mentality. What do I mean?

Here's the deal.

Life is good as long as there are manageable bumps, but when the waters get rough and helmets are required, we automatically attribute it to the dastardly deeds of the enemy. In this perspective, we go through life putting God off to one side, playing the "pleasing game" (but only as often as our schedule allows), and then we have stupid on the other side... leaving us in the middle.¹

Not far into the scenario, we feel like we're supposed to get God involved, and we begin with the cries for deliverance from the evil one. If the response doesn't come fast enough, we get frustrated and wonder why God is not rescuing us. After all, haven't we been serving others and trying to do the right thing?

More time goes by and we move from frustrated to angry. We question His attention and concern for our lives. We might even accuse Him of not caring.

Ever been here? I have.

We convince ourselves that we are innocent victims needing to be rescued. It doesn't take long before we turn on the only One we can really trust as soon as He doesn't answer us within the time frame (or in the way) that we think He should.

I hate to admit how long I lived this concept, but not any longer. The truth has set me free.

See, I believe God coaches us through every minute of every day. He allows the stupidity and pride of the enemy to become potential influences in our lives. He allows this in an effort to get us to see one of two things through the trials of life. We are either in a *revelation*, or a *graduation*, phase. I'll come back to this in a minute.

Allow me to insert a little perspective here. Stupid (as intimidating as he would *love* for us to believe him to be), is nothing more than a rabid dog on a leash. Jesus made it extremely clear, when He rose from the dead, that death wasn't the only thing over which He was maintaining dominance. He made a fool of stupid (and the minions that were thrown from heaven with him). Stupid is as...

Stupid stays chained until God decides it's time to get our attention.

It tells us in the Bible (Phil. 1:6), as we march through the days assigned to us, God is *committed* to developing us into the individual He designed (and intended) us to be. Unfortunately, we don't arrive without some... guidance.

In His sovereign wisdom, God let's out a few links of the chain, rolls up the Sunday Morning edition of the Son Times, and swats the stupid dog on his narcissistic behind. Off he goes, barking and snarling – completely convinced he has finally gotten the opportunity he wanted to make us crash and burn. He still hasn't caught onto the fact that his intentions and efforts to destroy us are, instead, being used in a subversive effort to refine us.

However.

If we live with a victim mentality, we immediately cry out for deliverance as the big, bad enemy tosses monkey wrenches in our machinery and attempts to get us to run for cover in fear. He barks and barks... but he has no bite. His only weapon is deception (which creates insecurity) and as "victims," we take the bait diving head first off Panic

¹ Yeah, you know who I'm talking about – I just can't bring myself to waste a perfectly good capital letter.

Point... voluntarily.

He *is* the father of lies. Mission accomplished.

Let me get back to something I mentioned a minute ago – *revelation or graduation*. I believe that God’s promise to never leave us or forsake us is true.² I also believe that He did not give up all He did so He could reserve the right to torture us, to destroy our future and eliminate our potential... like a bug under the devastating effects of a magnifying glass in the sun.

What He did do (coming to earth, enduring all He did and paying the price we could never pay) was to bridge the gap that sin had caused, and to reveal (magnify) our gifts and purpose with a magnifying glass, in the Son.

Do you see the difference in motivation? One perspective is an entitlement of maliciousness (intent on destroying us) and the other is an obligation motivated by love for our improvement.

The trials of our days are meant to either uncover-and-highlight the next areas where we need work (revelation), or provide the opportunity to demonstrate competency in those areas where we have already been working (graduation). Every minute of every day, our Father is investing in our future, seeking to draw us closer to Himself and make us into what He created us to be. It’s either revelation, or graduation. God is constantly exercising His earned right to improve us... and fulfilling His promise to complete us.

A good metaphor for all of this is learning to play football.

If you have never worn a set of pads or a helmet, the first experience... is a learning experience. It takes some time to get used to running (and seeing) before you try to catch the ball when it’s thrown.

Eventually, with some repetition, we move beyond that awkward stage to running the plays and catching the ball. Soon after, the passes start coming from different directions, much faster, and with more intensity (a few extra links let out for the barking dog). All of this is necessary if you want to have any chance of being successful at the (much faster) pace of the real game.

Practice. Practice. Practice.

If we are not experiencing progress (because we are too focused on running from the barking dog), we are going to have to get busy, dig deeper and put in some serious reps during the next practice if we ever want to own our position (instead of getting owned by the enemy).

Application

God allows the enemy, stupid and predictable as they are, to impact your life. They are the ones growling at your feet while God is throwing footballs at your head. You better believe they won’t pass on the opportunity to trip you up and send you to the locker room. They are still convinced there is a possibility to actually prove Him wrong about you.

But they are the ones who are wrong.

² Hebrews 13:5, Deut. 31:6,8 & Joshua 1:5

Practice is held every day. God is coaching you every minute. There are no victims, just *potential* superstar members of the team – *IF* you are willing to run the plays and practice until you stop dropping the ball.

You need to stop seeing the trials of life as unsolicited attacks (which require you to get God involved and rescue you) and start seeing them as giant field lights that reveal where you need work. Then, your ability to cope, develop, thrive and move forward is no longer in question. The focus moves from circumstances to completion of the stage on your way to greater competency and responsibility. With this mentality you are no longer being battered, you are being “bettered.”

Of course, you always get to choose how you are going to respond. If you cry out for deliverance, God will be compassionate and, eventually, give you your wish. But this means you *will return* to the practice field for another opportunity to perfect the technique.

No thanks.

A Personal Example

About eight weeks ago, God began speaking to my heart about my responses to things. My temper and my language were not acceptable, and neither was the example I was modeling. What is so cool, now that I look back on all this, is that He convicted my heart and gave me the chance to suit up and start the practice, *voluntarily*. I didn't see this at the time, but I do now.

As soon as I nodded my head, the footballs started flying. The dogs started barking and snapping at my feet in hopes of distracting me. It started slowly at first, but the intensity grew and, every day for a while, I left practice disappointed with my performance. The kids were pushing the very limits of depravity, disrespect, and the clinical diagnosis of brain damage. I was eating more footballs than I was catching, but instead of throwing up my hands and asking God to deliver me, He helped me to see that I just needed to keep showing up, taking the reps, and working to get it right.

The enemy was doing all they could to make it as hard as they were able, but the leash was only letting them go so far.

At one point, I started to taunt them (thinking I had it wired).

God let out a few more links and swatted again.

Just about the time I figured it was time to perfect my end zone dance my wife sustained a traumatic brain injury and was seriously sidelined. The pace of the game had drastically changed, the footballs were coming from all sorts of unpredictable directions (and they had some mustard on 'em now!) and the snapping hound was closer than ever.

I found myself facing a potential reality nobody wants to face. There was a very real possibility she was not going to get through this and I was trying to figure out what moving on in life with 8 kids – *and without her* – looked like.

I dropped a few more footballs.

I have to say this, though. Through what I can say was one of the most difficult

times of my life, I was never afraid – not even once. Oh, I wrestled with a myriad of emotions – sadness, confusion, even exhaustion – but never once did I feel I had been abandoned, was hopeless, or felt afraid.

The peace of God's Perfect Holy Spirit quickly became the Holy Drum Major. He brought organization and resolve against the confusion the enemy was trying to create on my field. I may have felt spread thin at times, but I never felt like running off the field to go sit in the showers and rock back and forth. On the contrary, it was evident that what I needed to do was to work harder with every attack, to play my position and *choose to respond* the way my Father was expecting me (coaching me) to respond.

None of this would be possible if I, at any point, had felt like this was all because the enemy was attacking and God wasn't paying any attention or rescuing me.

My wife is not completely out of the woods yet. There are still unanswered questions and we are still straining to see, what we hope is, the horizon of her return to life as she knew it before. But I can say, with absolute certainty, my responses to trials have undergone major reconstruction.

Now when faced with the recurring, selective brain damage that seems to be so pervasive in our children, my responses are significantly different. The enemy has been outted. I have seen their playbook, and I know how they are coming.

Oh, I still eat an occasional football, but recovery time is much shorter. I don't struggle with blaming the dropped ball on defensive pass interference – it's all on me. *I choose how I respond*. Back to the line, run it again, and get it right this time - because it makes me better.

Your Father is investing in you every minute of every day. It is of the utmost importance that you understand and embrace this truth. It's the difference between success and failure.

It's the difference between being attacked... and being coached.

Homework for the Week...

1.) How does this concept differ from how you currently believe God gets involved with the trials of your life? Do you see truth in what I have proposed? What difficulties, currently in your life, could use a perspective change? What pass is God trying to get you to complete so He can use you to do something greater? What are the bright lights of your situation revealing on your field? Are you in a revelation or graduation phase? Identify the things you still need to work on in order to move past this set of drills to a new level of performance. Be specific. Ask God to help you clearly see your objective. Ask Him to help you pay less attention to the barking distraction and more to the steps He is asking you to complete.

2.) Mid-week check. List the opportunities you have had and how you responded (this is your obedience indicator). If you are still posting a doughnut, more than likely you weren't all that truthful when you asked God for chances to respond and improve. Check your heart; be authentic. Ask God to show you the way through what is blocking you from submitting in obedience.

3.) How are you doing compared to the way you started the week? If you still need improvement, refuse to move on to the next session. Stay here, submit, and choose to be obedient no matter what it takes. Explain how you have improved, or make a commitment to continue working. When you are operating in obedience in this area of your life... turn the page and move to the next session.
