

Coping with An Impossible Situation?

Titus 1:1-5, 12-16

Many people today are trying to cope with impossible situations—

A serious predicament which is resisting all attempted solutions over some period of time.

Many impossible situations are chronic. They seem to have no end.

Some spring up suddenly as a bad surprise and paralyze us.

Endless variations of impossible situations plague us each and every day.

We have impossible situations in personal life.

We face impossible situations together as communities and larger realities as cities, states, nation, world.

The most frustrating example of an impossible situation is what's called a Catch 22.

A great writer, Joseph Heller, identified the phrase as he reflected on and wrote on impossible situations in the midst of war.

Doc Daneeka, an army psychiatrist, is explaining to a pilot why any pilot requesting mental evaluation for insanity—thinking he might be found not sane enough to fly—and thus escape dangerous missions—**demonstrates his own sanity** in making the request—and thus cannot be declared insane.

"You mean there's a catch?" the pilot asks.

"Sure there's a catch," Doc Daneeka replied. "Catch-22. Anyone who wants to get out of combat duty isn't really crazy."

In a Catch 22, there is no escape from a certain dilemma because of contradictory rules or limitations.

A common example: How can I get any experience until I get a job that *gives* me experience.

Another familiar one: You have to prove that you don't really need the money in order to qualify for a bank loan.

Another example—illustrated in the current contradiction of ten years of a rising stock market and widespread economic insecurity—is:

But you have to have money to make money through investing.

Or consider the job a single parent **wants**—and the employer **wants** to hire them—but the job doesn't pay enough to afford today's high cost child care.

Or the undocumented worker who has lived in the U.S. for 25 years, raised a family, worked hard, never gotten in trouble, but because of outdated laws which should have been reformed years ago, must leave and go back to his homeland for a year or longer to have any chance at all of receiving a green card.

Are you in the midst of some impossible situation, large or small, maybe more than one?

The first attitude you must acquire—and even acquire quickly—is—**I may not be able to do a lot about this impossible situation right away, but I will not allow it to undo me.**

I may not be able to conquer this impossible situation—yet—, but in the meantime, I refuse to let it conquer me.

This may be a hard situation, but it needs me to become stronger than my impossible situation.

In other words, you must refuse to despair!

Panic!

Or slip into a persistent mood of self pity.

Granted, this may be easier said than done!

But if you keep saying it to yourself—and praying it to the Higher Power of God—

God! Remove my despair!

God! Hold me til my panic subsides!

Lift me from my self pity!—

Let me do whatever I can—whatever bite I can take today, even this hour— to get my impossible situation and my impossibly distraught self—off my own hands

Now you are beginning to become immunized against despair and desperation.

And you buy time!— to add strength and serenity that you will need to transform your prayers into decisions and deeds.

One of the first Jesus followers who managed to turn an impossible situation into interior action and spiritual power was Titus.

Titus had been assigned by the apostle to work on the island of Crete, in the Mediterranean.

It was hard work, and from the letter Paul wrote to Titus, we can hear that Titus has serious complaints about impossible conditions on Crete.

He said *“Crete isn’t a fit place to live.”*

And—*“All Cretans are untrustworthy liars, brutes and lazy gluttons”*

An impossible situation for Titus!

What is surprising is Paul’s response: *“Say what you will, Titus! These are nothing more than excuses....and the fact that this place is so hard for you—and the people so difficult to work with—is NOT a reason to leave.*

To the contrary—they are reasons to STAY!

What a bad surprise it must have been for Titus to hear that!

God save me from my Crete!

But then Paul goes on to explain to Titus in detail that a Jesus’ follower’s effect on people—and the world— was meant to be redemptive—that is—create value where there was no value.

Redeem means to *re-create value* where there is none.

So, Titus kept an open mind to Paul’s thought.

Titus stayed on Crete, worked to spread and live Jesus’ message of redemption and many years later, long beyond his lifetime, archaeologists on Crete discovered an inscription on a chapel “Dedicated to our beloved Saint Titus”.

So in impossible Crete, Titus did his part.

He made his contribution.

He left the place better than he found it, and no doubt became better himself for having coped with what seemed to be an impossible situation.

Sound familiar? I hope so.

Another secret to engaging impossible situations is revealed in a comment made *by* Thomas Merton, the great writer/monk as he consoled a colleague who was facing an impossible task:

We don't need specific outcomes.

We need each other.

Concentrate not on the results—but on the value, the rightness, the truth of the work itself—and the people who are with you doing the work.

Yesterday, I was reading a long story on CNN that illustrated this idea. If you have driven up I-29 into Iowa in the last year, you have passed by Hamburg, Iowa which continues to live through the worst disaster of a flooding in its history—still threatening this town and others to this very day—after a March, 2019 synergy of extreme rains, previous winter snowpack, a bomb cyclone and the emergency release of water from a Missouri River dam, sent a roller coaster of water across the Great Plains.

In totally under water Hamburg, The CNN reporter uncovered people in Hamburg saying in unison, “Living through the flood is without a doubt one of the most traumatic experiences I have ever known, (*and many talked about a Catch 22 in federal laws that made it nearly impossible to*

rebuild the 12 foot high levee and build it even higher—to protect Hamburg in the future.)

However—Despite— the trauma and impossible tasks facing them persistently day after day, week after week, month after month, nearly all the 1000 Hamburg residents reported feeling an overwhelming sense of wonder during these days—"when all the normal rules are suspended and everyone just does whatever needs to be done, whatever is right for each other."

Sound familiar?

I suspect most of us have faced this kind of challenge—whether in work—church—community—even in some of your seemingly personal endeavors.

We think we need specific outcomes.

But what we really need is:

Love! Companionship! Meaning! God!

Those are never impossible needs to fulfill—if we will only open our hearts and our minds to their possibilities within the realm of our daily affairs and contacts.

How often each of us needs this kind of self-talking prayer and meditation when coping with impossible situations:

What seems impossible for us—God!— is possible for you!

My extremity is Your opportunity!

Out of my hands, God! Into Your hands!

When one door closes on us—God opens another door!

When I am at my wits' end—God has just begun!

Beyond our finite frustrations—God's infinite providence.

Jesus said, "My Father is always at work to this very day, and I too am working."

To this very day!

In **your** impossible situation!

In **our** collective impossible situations!

Freedom is a constant struggle!

Toward a Higher Human Consciousness!

We each must strive to attain! (begin walking away)

"If I do my part, God, I trust—without knowing precisely how—You will do yours!

Amen.

Rev. Scott Myers, Westport Presbyterian Church, Feb. 1, 2020