

Well, it was definitely Friday. Lots of businesses get slammed on Mondays—car repair shops, banks, etc. But for others it can be on Fridays, usually when you have a busy weekend in the making anyway. Plans change, pressures and tempers rise, etc. So easy to just give in to anger and either lash out or despair. Or both.

Cruising the online guides the other evening, I came across a docudrama called “Shackleton’s Captain” on tubi.com—a very engaging story about the South Pole expedition in the early 1900s. Sir Ernest Shackleton gathered a crew and sought to be the first expedition to reach the South Pole, and in a wooden-hulled ship (*Endurance*). One of the most intriguing aspects of the show is that they utilize actual film documenting the journey—one of the first such uses in those early days of “moving pictures.” Well, winter arrived early that year and the ship became locked in ice. Their hopes of the ice breaking up and the ship being freed were in vain, and they eventually abandoned their ship as it was being crushed—watching it disappear beneath the frozen surface as they themselves were stranded on the barren and frozen seascape. The penguins which were providing their food disappeared suddenly, and they were forced to eat their beloved companions, their sled dogs. Drifting on floes, they finally were able to enter the sea to sail in their lifeboats through frigid and stormy seas to a bare island of rock; but at least it was terra firma. After many more harrowing adventures and two years of fighting the harshest elements, most were eventually saved.

Watching the movie, I couldn’t help but think: “Man ... I’ll never complain again!” Those men went through some severest miseries with no apparent hope of rescue. Yet ... problems and frustrations are relative, and while certainly our own problems and difficulties are most often not nearly so horrific as that intrepid crew’s struggle for life, troubles can seem so to us in the moment. Yes, no doubt the crew was made up of particularly hardy souls, already well accustomed to hardship; after all, they were all volunteers for what they had to have known was a potentially dangerous and inevitably difficult expedition. But in many ways that same hardiness and seeds of determination are implanted within each of us. As Christians often say: “God would not allow us a cross that He does not also give the strength to carry.”

Now, if we focus on this mortal life alone, then we may well be led to despondency because of illness of ourselves or family, financial troubles, kids going bad, etc. But as we get a bit older, the wise realize that both sorrows and pleasures tend to come and go, and that we only harm ourselves and others when we dwell on the bad, or react negatively to it. The example from the book of Sirach come to mind:

*My child, let your tears fall for the dead,
and as one in great pain begin the lament.*

*Lay out the body with due ceremony,
and do not neglect the burial.*

*Let your weeping be bitter and your wailing fervent;
make your mourning worthy of the departed,
...then be comforted for your grief.*

*For grief may result in death,
and a sorrowful heart saps one’s strength.*

(Sirach 38:16-18)

And yet, realizing that time moves on and events pass can always give hope. As the escaped Andy wrote to Red in *The Shawshank Redemption*: “Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies.”

Now the Christian, while largely agreeing with ol’ Andy, will dispute just a bit, for he remembers St. Paul: “Faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13:13)—love of God, love of neighbor. When we find ourselves despairing, do we not seek remedy in basking in the warm glow of the love of friends and family, finding new life in knowing that we are cared for and valued. And when we see those for whom we care in sorrow, do we not cloak them in love to soothe that sorrow? And yet ... it is not only family and friends who care for and love you, but God Himself, for you are a child of His made in His image—not in the sense of bodily form and matter, but in the spiritual soul which you possess ... and which itself abides forever.

No doubt many a prayer was said out there on the ice by Shackleton’s crew, likely giving them that hope to keep struggling despite tremendous odds ... strengthening them in their refusal to give in. Likewise, let us all find example in the many persons who have relied on faith and hope to bring them through the hardest of times. In doing so, they enter into that greatest possible relief and joy of God’s inestimable love.