

## Adversity: Sooner or Later

Think about this, without warning, adversity strikes. Hours before, our world was a calm bay of stillness and tranquility; now it resembles a raging sea. Had we known of its coming, we would have braced ourselves for the siege; but adversity rarely announces its arrival. Instead, it attacks with fury through trials, heartaches, or an emotional setback.

Adversity for example, hands out pink slips at the office on a Friday night at closing time saying not to come in on Monday, delivers the untimely news of a loved one's death, underscores the crushing reality of a mate's betrayal, or drives the reality of terminal illness home to the fearful heart.

None of us know how or when adversity will come. Yet we all know at some point in life, each one of us will face its acid test. The question becomes not, when will adversity strike, but how do we handle its attention-grabbing reality?

There are two sides to adversity. One side is positive and stimulates spiritual and emotional growth; the other side carries the potential to defeat and destroy us. The Apostle Paul understood adversity very well. Listen to his account of just some of it II Corinthians 11:23-28 Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as if insane) I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches.

### I. Definition of adversity

Adversity is defined as: a condition of misfortune or difficulty, an adverse event or circumstance. Other similar words might consist of disaster, tragedy, calamity, catastrophe, or hardship.

But isn't it true, it is not just big things that get to us and cause us stress, it is often little things that get under our skin and we find ourselves in the midst of adverse circumstances. Someone once quipped: "Sometimes the littlest things in life are the hardest to take. You can sit on a mountain more comfortably than on a tack."

Luke 24:46 And he (Jesus) said, "Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah must suffer and die and rise again from the dead on the third day.

Jesus, in a nutshell, basically said, Like me you will suffer, Like me your suffering will be temporary. Like me, you too will rise in victory. So once we come to grips with the fact that there will be times of adversity in our lives, even if we don't like it, what can we do to make the best of a bad situation

Lets look at a story from Genesis. Genesis 26:1-34. In this chapter we, early on, have Isaac facing adversity, because of a famine in the land

David Roper writes: " The account begins with a famine similar to the one which persuaded Abraham to leave the land of Canaan and go to Egypt. Famine is frequently associated with faith. In fact, you cannot be a man or woman of faith and not have famines. They are part and parcel of our life with God. There are times when, for no particular reason (at least you know of nothing in your life which would cause the Lord distress), things begin to go wrong-you feel barren and fruitless, feel that God is not accessible, that he does not care. Everyone goes through these times. It was true in the life of Abraham, and true in the life of Isaac."

I once read where Country singer Paul Overstreet wrote a song about this story from Genesis 26, which contains an important lesson for us. In this song Isaac is renamed Ike. The lyrics go like this:

Ike had a blessing from the Lord up above,  
Gave him a beautiful woman to love,  
A place to live, some land to farm,  
Two good legs and two good arms.

The Devil came sneaking around one night,  
Decided he would do a little evil to Ike.  
Figured he hit ole Ike where it hurts so he  
Filled up all Ike's wells with dirt

Ike went out to get his morning drink,  
Got a dip full of dirt and his heart did sink  
He knew it was the Devil so he said with a grin  
God blessed me once, he can do it again

So when the rains don't fall, and the crops all fail,  
And the cow ain't putting any milk in the pail,  
Don't sit around waiting for a check in the mail,

Just pick up your shovel and dig another well,  
Pick up your shovel and dig another well.

Believers respond to opposition and adversity in several ways. Some Christians respond very successfully to adversity in that, despite the adversity in their life, their faith is strengthened, their walk with God progresses, and they continue to draw close to him and receive his blessings and provision for their life. They say, "God blessed me once and he can do it again." Because they believe this, they "pick up their shovel and dig another well."

**Unfortunately** not every Christian responds to adversity successfully. Some people are defeated rather than victorious as they face the various problems of life. Instead of praising God and walking in faith and perseverance, they develop a "woe is me" attitude. The adversity or opposition has little positive consequences because of how they respond to it.

## II. General goals for adversity

Question: What do you think God has in mind when He allows adversity?

I would suggest there are several goals that God wants to accomplish by allowing suffering and heartache. In God's plan I would suggest that adversity.

Gets our attention  
Delivers us from pride  
Reveals our weaknesses and strengths  
It should increase our hatred of sin  
  
Demonstrates the faithfulness of God  
Strengthens our faith  
Removes pride and self-centeredness  
Prepares us for future service  
Enables us to comfort others facing adversity

And because we all struggle with it, I want to think next about some principles that might help us have that, " Lets dig another well mentality."

## III. Helpful things to consider:

A. Christians should expect adversity.

II Timothy 2:3 says what, Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. The key for overcoming adversity is to realize that it is a basic fact of the Christian life. This does not mean that believers should desire adversity or trouble. This does not mean that we should consider every little problem we face as an attack from Satan. It just means we

should realize that as God's, blessed and deeply loved children, that we will undergo real adversity.

As a Christian, we basically become a target for Satan directly and indirectly. He will oppose us and cause trouble through various means including: other people, government opposition, health problems, financial adversity, family struggles, etc... Because this is true, none of us should be surprised by adversity, but rather we should learn to expect it. Jesus himself said, in John 16:33 I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."

- Of this verse David Guzik writes: " Peace is offered to us, but tribulation is promised!"

Acts 14:22 reminds us, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." One of Satan's most effective tools that he uses to cripple new believers is to send trials. The Apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 4:12 Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you.

Warren Wiersbe writes "God has never promised that we would miss the storm, But He has promised that we would make the harbor. When God puts His own people into the furnace, He keeps His eye on the clock and His hand on the thermostat. He knows how long and how much."

James even said in James 1:2 to "Consider its pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds To most of us we would think James is nuts. He wants us to count it joy, pure joy, when adversity comes to visit us. But every believer, no matter how spiritual or faithful, will face troubles and trials. We should expect adversity and actually, expecting it will help us overcome adversity successfully because success in part depends on our expectations.

B. Christians should persevere during adversity.

Sometimes when the going gets tough it is natural to want to quit. But where would we be, in the church, if this next lady quit because she faced hard times. Many years ago there was a little girl who was totally blind. She was blinded as an infant as the result of an accident.

This special girl lived to be over 90 years old and she became well-known in the American church. She wrote many popular Christian songs and choruses. Her name was Fanny Crosby. As a matter of fact she wrote over 9,000 hymns. When Fanny Crosby was only eight years old, she wrote:

"Oh, what a happy child I am, although I cannot see. I am resolved that in this world, contented I will be. How many blessings I enjoy that other people don't. To weep and sigh because I'm blind--I cannot and I won't".

It's true, life can be very unfair. People and circumstances can hurt us and steal from us, what is not rightfully theirs. At that point we will have a choice, we can look back at what has been lost or we can look ahead in faith for God to provide again.

When he was seven years old, his family was forced out of their home on a legal technicality, and he had to work to help support them. At age nine, his mother died. At 22, he lost his job as a store clerk. He wanted to go to law school, but his education wasn't good enough. At 23, he went into debt to become a partner in a small store. At 26, his business partner died, leaving him a huge debt that took years to repay. At 28, after courting a girl for four years, he asked her to marry him. She said no. At 37, on his third try he was elected to Congress, but two years later, he failed to be reelected. At 41, his four-year-old son died. At 45, he ran for the Senate and lost. At 47, he failed as the vice-presidential candidate. At 49, he ran for the Senate again, and lost. At 51, he was elected president of the United States. His name was Abraham Lincoln, a man many consider the greatest leader the country ever had. Some people get all the breaks don't they?

C. Christians should believe God will bless them despite adversity.

In the second principle I said that Christians need to persevere to be successful over adversity. This does not mean that we should believe in human ability to overcome any obstacle and ultimately achieve success. I don't think that believers should persevere because they believe in the power of perseverance itself, but rather, because they believe in the power of God. The believer is able to endure and persevere because they know that God can bless them despite the adversity.

Here's the main point: We're only going to be able to overcome and endure adversity, if we believe God can bless us anyways. We need to be able to say, "God blessed me once and he can do it again."

So far we've looked at three things to consider for responding to adversity successfully. Christians should expect adversity. Christians should persevere during adversity. Christians should believe God will bless them despite adversity.

D. Christians should recognize the good that can come from adversity.

We will face and respond to troubles and trials differently if only we recognize the good that God can bring out of them. Now you may be saying to yourself, "I can see that God can bless us despite adversity, but can anything really good come because of the adversity?" The answer is "yes."

One time a ship was wrecked, and the only survivor washed up on a small uninhabited island. He was exhausted. He cried out to God to save him. Every day he scanned the horizon, searching for help. Finally, he managed to build a rough hut and put his few articles in that hut. One day, coming home from hunting for food, he was stung with grief to see his little hut in flames and a cloud of smoke. The worst had happened. But early the next day, a ship drew in and rescued him. He asked the crew, "How did you know I was here?" They replied, "We saw your smoke signal." **Maybe the difficulty you have now is a smoke signal that will lead to great blessing.**

Our troubles can actually turn into blessings. In what way you may ask? First they can draw us close to God. When things are going well we are sometimes tempted to forget about the Lord a little bit aren't we?? The second good thing that results from adversity is that others could see the wonderful way the Lord is working through our adversity. Yes, the problems in our life are often an opportunity for others to see and glorify God!

#### IV. Some promises to help us on the journey

**Notice** that we are encouraged and actually expected to suffer but hear the promise in II Timothy 2:12 where it says If we endure, we shall also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us. We enjoy pleasure but we have to endure adversity, pain and suffering but the promise is, if we do, there is a better day ahead.

Another promise is found in I Cor. 10:13 where we find that there is nothing that comes into our lives, whether in the form of temptation, trial or any other adversity, that will be more than we are able to handle.

**Remember:** He who has no clouds - sees no rainbows. But don't forget, when God allows extraordinary trials, He provides extraordinary grace.

**Therefore,** keep I Corinthians 15:57,58 in mind. The NLT says it like this. How we thank God, who gives us victory over sin and death through Jesus Christ our Lord! So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and steady, always enthusiastic about the Lord's work, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless.

As we know from our opening scripture story, Isaac was a man who experienced setbacks, opposition, failures, and difficult situations, yet in God's strength he was successful at overcoming adversity.

The same can be true for you and for me if we apply these 4 helpful thoughts for responding to adversity successfully. Christians should expect adversity. Christians should persevere during adversity. Christians should believe God will bless them despite adversity. Christians should recognize the good that can come from adversity. So then when God uses adversity in our lives,

be assured of these facts, we will suffer, it will only be temporary, and we will ultimately be victorious.

But let's look at one final thought for us on this subject. It is found in Ps. 30, 4,5 It says Sing to the LORD, all you godly ones! Praise his holy name. His anger lasts for a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime! Weeping may go on all night, but joy comes with the morning.

Larry Richards writes in his Expository Dictionary of NT words "The mystery of why a particular individual suffers as he or she does remains shrouded and hidden. Let us remember that from God's perspective, time is fleeting. It is eternity that counts. And in eternity all mysteries will be known, and the bright glow of glory will wash out the last remaining stain of any despair. "

So no matter what comes our way, let's keep focused on the finished line. Be sure to remember that from God's viewpoint, adversity is His choice tool for building godly, spiritual character into our lives. You see, until we experience heartache, disappointment, and pain, we are not properly equipped for service.

Also don't forget to think about this, Adversity usually comes in the areas where we feel the most confident. But remember, God has a design. His ultimate design is to conform our lives to the likeness of Christ. He has something in mind. God allows adversity to mold and shape us. Gold is refined by fire. Iron is shaped, molded, and beaten only after being intensely heated.

The good side to adversity is that we begin to understand God's design for us personally. We see that He has chosen a particular area of our lives in which to work. Romans 8:28 is true whether we choose to believe it or not. We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him. That is the good news about adversity.

Don't forget as one writer said, "If you can find a path with no obstacles, it probably doesn't lead anywhere."