

83. HOW TO UNDERSTAND ADVERSITY

Bible Reading: Hebrews 12:1-15.

Aim: To understand God's purposes for adversity.

Key 1: Our first response to adversity should not be to try to remove it, but to allow adversity to **reveal** our **true weakness**.

Introduction: Adversity can be our greatest motivation for spiritual growth or our deadliest means of discouragement. The difference depends on us understanding God's purposes in adversity.

What does adversity do for us? What does God achieve through adversity?

1. Adversity is God's Way of Getting Our Attention.

The cares of the world can choke out the Word of God and drown out the voice of the Holy Spirit. While we are busy with our plans, goals, projects and friendships, God patiently reminds us in Jeremiah 35:14, "I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye hearkened not unto us."

When **adversity comes**, we are suddenly faced with problems and pressures that are **too big** for us to resolve. Our inward response should be, "Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in thee: let me not be ashamed, let not my enemies triumph over me." Psalm 25:1,2.

As **adversity continues** and our human strength is drained, Christ's invitation becomes more attractive, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28. God's ultimate purpose in getting our attention is to conform us to the **image of Christ**. Because of this, all adversity works together for **our good** (Romans 8:28,29).

Through it we learn of Christ, who is meek and lowly. His burden is light.

2. Adversity is our Assurance that God Loves Us.

"For whom the Lord **loveth** he **chasteneth**" Hebrews 12:6,7,10,11.

Three results of chastening: 1. We give God **reverence**. 12:9.

2. Our **profit**, to be partakers of God's holiness. 12:10.

3. It yields the peaceable fruit of **righteousness**. 12:11.

When we recognise God's love in adversity, we can:

- i) **Lift up the hands** which hang down and the feeble knees. v.12.
This means to get back serving God with our hands and legs.
- ii) **Make straight paths** for your feet. v.13.
This means to get back on the path of righteousness. "He leadeth me." Psalm 23:3.
- iii) Follow **peace** and holiness with all men. v.14.
This means that right relationships are restored with men and God.
- iv) Avoid failing of the **grace** of God or bitterness will follow. v.15.
Failing of the grace of God means that one can not respond with the grace of God, but with envy, bitterness, nervousness, then carnality.

3. Adversity is God's Call for Self Examination.

"If we would **judge ourselves**, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord." 1 Corinthians 11:31,32.

God requires that we **search out**, **confess** and **forsake** every sin.

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper." Proverbs 28:13.

God established the Lord's Table as the time and place for self-examination. If this is neglected, God may give **physical adversity** as a further motivation for self examination. 1 Cor. 11:28-30.

-If things are not going well for us, the reason may be that we **dishonoured our parents** "Honour thy father and mother....that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth." Ephesians 6:2,5.

-If it seems that evil will not depart from our household, it may be because we have rewarded evil to those who did good to us, "Whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house." Proverbs 17:13.

4. Adversity is God's Way of Conquering Our Pride.

-The adversity of **contention** reveals pride. "**Only** by **pride** cometh **contention**." Proverbs 13:10.

-The adversity of **destruction** is the result of pride in a person.

"Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." Proverbs 16:18.

-The adversity of **shame** is God's means of **humbling us**.

"When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom." Proverbs 11:2.

"A man's pride shall bring him low." Proverbs 29:23.

"Whoso exalteth himself shall be abased & he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" Luke 14:11

"God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." James 4:6,7.

5. Adversity is a Reminder of Our Weakness. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

When all is going well, we are tempted to think that we don't need God. If we have a **thorn** in the flesh (v.7), Christ's **grace is sufficient** (v.9) and we learn to **glory** in our unchangeable features (v.9). We then experience the **power** of Christ upon us (v.9). When I am **weak**, then am I **strong** (v.10). I **take pleasure** in **infirmities** (weaknesses), reproaches and necessities (v.10).

6. Adversity Motivates us to Cry Out To God.

God responds to the cry of His children when we are in adversity.

"The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivers them out of all their troubles."

Psalm 34:17.

We should cry out in the right ways:

1. Cry out to God with our **voice**.
"I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill." Psalm 3:4.
2. Cry out to God in **humility**. "He forgetteth not the cry of the humble." Psalm 9:12

Key 2: Our second response to adversity should be: Not to focus on outward circumstances, but to realise that we are dealing with unseen spiritual powers.

7. Adversity is Evidence of Spiritual Warfare.

Note: If we do not recognise when adversity is spiritual warfare, we will be **overwhelmed** and **tempted to give up**. When adversity takes the form of **confusion**, **suspicion**, **division**, and **anger**, then spiritual warfare is on. Paul encouraged Christians to be **strong**, **courageous**, and **prepared** to be **good soldiers**.

8. **Adversity is God's Method of Purifying our Faith.** This leads to Patience. "But without faith it is impossible to please Him." Hebrews 11:6.
FAITH may need to be **tested** in the **fires of adversity**. "the trial of your faith." 1 Peter 1:6,7. Faith is essential for living the Christian life.
 Why? Because the ways of God are opposite to the natural inclinations of man.
 Adversity may come from: 1. Those who **mock** God's principles, or
 2. Because we violate God's principles.
 In either case, adversity will strengthen our faith. **PATIENCE** comes from adversity.
 "Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience." James 1:3.
 With this kind of **faith** and **patience**, we can obtain the promises of God.
 "Followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Hebrews 6:12.
9. **Adversity Increases our Hatred for Evil.**
 When God exposes secret sin, He allows others to see it's devastating consequences, such as:
 Islamic terrorist bombings, Saddam Hussein; Homosexuality, Aids; Fornication, Divorce; Childhood lying, President Nixon's Lies. In this way, the simple (ignorant) are warned not to be fooled by Satan focusing our eyes on "the pleasures of sin which last for a season." Hebrew 11:25
 God will **not be mocked** with our **sin**. Galatians 6:7,8.
 Our **hatred of evil** should **increase** as we realise how:
 1. Sin (as a thief) **robs us** of our potential for achieving & enjoying what God had planned for us;
 2. Our sins **damage** the lives of those whom we love. We don't hate evil because we don't realise its final cost. Sin brings death. Adam and Eve did not realise the cost of their sin to all mankind.
10. **Adversity reminds us to Pray for our Authorities.**
 God teaches us that a quiet and peaceable life is related to intercessory prayer for those in authority over us. 1 Timothy 2:1,2.
Note: Those who are in positions of responsibility **provide spiritual protection** for those under their care, such as parents, pastors. When there are failures in the life of a leader, the "umbrella of protection" develops "leaks". Satan is given greater freedom to defeat those who are under that authority. Therefore it is important in order to be a good leader to submit to authority yourself. Even a little leak in a roof can let in a great deal of water. Spiritual leaders are judged by a higher standard. James 3:1. When we experience temptations, so do church leaders. They need our prayers.
11. **Adversity is a Signal to Re-evaluate our Priorities.**
 Wrong priorities may result in much painful adversity, not only for us, but also for those who are affected by our lives.
Type 1: When we **fail to spend proper time with the Lord** in memorising His Word, meditating and praying, we rob others of spiritual encouragement and direction. Instead, we become vulnerable to **transgression**. Psalm 107:17,19.
 God saves us out of our distress with His Word. Psalm 107:20.
Type 2: When we try to **do more** than God intended us to do.
 "Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work." Exodus 20:9.
12. **Adversity is God's way of Testing Our Work.**
 Every **spiritual house** that is built must be **tested** to prove that it is **founded on truth**. "rain descended (to test the roof), the floods came (to test the foundation), the winds

blew (to test the structure), and beat upon that house, and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock." Matt 7:24-27

"The fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." 1 Corinthians 3:13-15.

13. **Adversity is God's way of Testing our Friendships.**
 It will reveal which friends are concerned about **getting**.
 It will reveal which friends are concerned about **giving**.
 "A true friend loveth at all times and a brother is born for adversity." Proverbs 17:17.
 For example, The Good Samaritan's commitment to his neighbour, who had fallen among thieves, continued until the man's needs were met. Luke 10:30-37.
 Contrasting example: The Prodigal Son while spending money, had many friends, but when his money ran out, and hardship came, all his friends then left. On the other hand, Jonathan was loyal to David in bad times.

Key 3: Our third response to adversity should be:
 Not to **live for Christ** in our own efforts, but to realise that **Christ must live in us** through the **power and filling of the Holy Spirit**.

14. **Adversity is God's Call to Identify with Christ.**
 Adversity causes us to **want more of Christ's power in our lives**. Galatians 2:20.
 Paul suffered the loss of all things to win more people to Christ and to experience the power of Christ's resurrection. God's power becomes a reality to us from Romans 6-8.
-Romans 6. We learn to **know** that we are crucified with Christ. We learn how to **reckon** ourselves dead to sin and alive to God. We learn how to **yield** ourselves to God and our members as instruments of righteousness to God. (Romans 6:6,11,13).
-Romans 7. We discover a new problem. We are still overcome by the demands of the Law. We try to live according to God's principles, but we can't do it. We learn that our death in Christ also caused us to die to the Law, so that we are free to be controlled by God's Spirit in order to bring forth spiritual fruit. (Romans 7:1-6).
-Romans 8. We learn our **source of power** over sin. This is the indwelling Holy Spirit of God based on our position in Christ. As we walk in **God's Spirit** rather than in our **own flesh**, God is able to fulfil the righteousness of the Law in us. (Romans 8:2-4).
15. **Adversity is Motivation for Open Accountability to God and Others.**
 Aim to be **blameless** as we will be **accountable** to God. God's key to life, peace, wisdom and achievement is a moment-by-moment awareness of our accountability for all our words, thoughts, actions, attitudes and motives. This awareness is the fear of the Lord. It is the beginning of wisdom. When we lose our continual awareness of God, we think and act as if God did not exist. God responds by allowing adversity into our life. Judges 2:20-22.
16. **Adversity Prepares us to Comfort Others.** 2 Corinthians 1:3-5; 2 Corinthians 4:8-10. Irritations are God's way of increasing our sensitivity to the needs of others, increasing our opportunities to serve God, and developing inward qualities. When God achieves His purposes through an irritation, He is then free to remove that irritation from our lives.
- CONCLUSION:** How do you respond to adversity? Will adversity make you better or bitter? If we continually retreat from adversity, we force God to raise up new irritations or to set aside His best plan for our lives. Permanent irritations have a permanent benefit in our development and ministry.