

Adversity

Key Text: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 - "⁷ And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. ⁸ Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. ⁹ And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Adversity touches everyone sooner or later.

Many people face adversity today. It may be financial difficulties, job loss, health concerns, family problems, personal betrayal by others, or shattered goals and plans. Some people crumble under the pressure of difficult times. They become so bitter and resentful towards God that they walk away from His purpose for their lives. They might even resort to unusual behaviors in an attempt to escape the pain. Others though face similar challenges but they have a totally different reaction. Instead of weakening them, trials make them stronger because they learn to depend more fully on the power of the Holy Spirit. Adversity can be either an overwhelming burden or a bridge to a deeper relationship with God.

Is your adversity a burden or a bridge?

We can see tough times either way - as a burden or a bridge.

1. A burden, spiritually speaking, is a heaviness that weighs us down and depresses us. We may feel weary or discouraged when we allow it to steal our joy and peace.
2. A bridge, in contrast, is a way to rise above the difficulty and develop a deeper, more intimate relationship with God.

Two verses are the foundation of this bridge to greater closeness with the Lord.

They can become the bridge to help us overcome adversities.

1. **Psalm 103:19** - "The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all." This means that God is in control of everything.
2. **Romans 8:28** - "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

The apostle Paul used adversity as a bridge.

The life of Paul is one of the best examples of how adversity can act as a bridge to a deeper relationship with God. His closeness to the Father came only as the result of severe personal loss and hardship.

Philippians 3:8-10 - "⁸ Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the

righteousness which is from God by faith; ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,"

Through difficulty, Paul learned several valuable lessons that can help us deal with our adversities.

1. The Father values service more than our desires.

Instead of satisfying Paul's natural inclination toward comfort and ease, God sent adversity to prepare him for greater service.

2 Corinthians 12:7 - "And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure."

The Lord prioritizes our character development over our comfort.

2. God has a specific purpose for allowing adversity.

Paul's thorn was designed to keep him humble and dependent on God, despite the astounding spiritual revelations he had been given.

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Like Paul, our trials are designed by God to help us become the people He desires.

3. We can treat everything as if it has a purpose.

The Lord uses all we experience, even the wrongs of others, for His purposes in our lives. If we can embrace the circumstances that come our way as an opportunity to grow, it prevents our trials from making us resentful.

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4. God provides supernatural strength in our weakness.

Paul's limitations allowed the Holy Spirit's power to work through his life.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 - "⁹ And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

5. We learn more about the Lord through trials.

Suffering often is the stimulus to greater closeness with God. We draw near to Him for relief from pain and in the process discover more about how He works.

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6. We can trust in the Lord's faithfulness.

Paul learned to depend on the Lord to carry him through any trial.

1 Corinthians 10:13 - "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."

7. Adversity prepares us to comfort others more effectively.

From God's viewpoint, suffering prepares us to minister to others. We are best equipped to comfort people if we have been through something similar.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 - "³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

8. In difficult times, God will give us strength to proclaim the truth.

Because Paul was imprisoned, the entire Praetorian guard heard the gospel.

Philippians 1:13-14 - "¹³so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; ¹⁴and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear."

The more adversity we face, the more effective our message will be to others. We have our greatest impact when people watch us go through pain and suffering with strong faith in God.

9. We are to know joy in the midst of adversity.

Philippians 4:4 - "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"

Knowing the Lord is always in control of our circumstances gives us a reason to celebrate.

10. Contentment and peace are possible in the midst of adversity.

The apostle explained in **Philippians 4:11-13** - "¹¹Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: ¹²I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. ¹³I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

11. The Lord is the source for all our needs.

When we fully rely on the Father, we can count on Him to provide for us.

Philippians 4:19 - "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

You must make the choice.

Most likely, many of you are experiencing some degree of adversity today. You can try to handle it using your own resources like turning to your friends for advice, doing the best you can, or escaping into hobbies or addictions. But I guarantee you that when it comes to life-changing hardships, these coping mechanisms alone will ultimately fail. Your adversity will become an overwhelming burden.

I pray that you will choose to see adversity as a bridge to a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. If you are a believer, the power of the Holy Spirit is available to equip, transform, and carry you through any suffering. The bridge of adversity can take you to a place of surprising closeness with the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

If you are not a Christian, I urge you to turn your life over to God and let Him help you deal with the adversities in your life. You can begin by becoming a Christian if you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and are willing to repent of your sins. Your sins will be forgiven when they are washed away by the blood of Christ when you are baptized into Christ. That is something that you can do right now.