

Sermon Notes

Practical Lessons for Understanding the Word of God



In the Midst of Adversity

KEY PASSAGE: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Joshua 1:9 | John 14:2-3 | 1 Corinthians 1:2

SUMMARY

We make a multitude of decisions throughout our lives, but one thing we'd never choose is adversity.

However, it is something we all experience because we live in a fallen world filled with sin and its consequences. Adversity is a condition of suffering and hardship involving anguish, pressure, trials, heartaches, or disappointments. If we could, we'd probably try to avoid anything that causes us pain, but then we'd miss some of the best blessings in life.

SERMON POINTS

The Scriptures are filled with examples of people who faced adversity, and on the other side of the experience, discovered how God worked through their situations to bring about good. All these people would say that their suffering was worth the final result.

Scriptural Examples

- Joseph experienced betrayal, slavery, and imprisonment before becoming second in command to Pharaoh.
- Moses was a fugitive in the wilderness before God called him to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt.
- David spent many years running from King Saul before he became Israel's most notable king in the Old Testament.
- Esther was an exiled Jew until God elevated her to the position of queen of Persia and used her to save His people.
- Daniel was a captive in Babylon but was promoted to the highest level of government by the king.
- Jesus' disciples suffered persecution, but God

used them to spread Christianity throughout the entire Roman world.

- Mary and Martha mourned the loss of their brother before seeing Jesus raise him to life.

The Example of Paul

Adversity can be one of God's greatest blessings if we respond as Paul did in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. Because he'd been entrusted with great revelations from the Lord, he was also given a painful "thorn in the flesh" to keep him from becoming prideful. Paul implored the Lord three times to remove it but was told, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" (v. 9). Paul responded by saying, "Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me." (v. 9).

Two Responses to Adversity

In the midst of affliction, people respond in two opposite ways.

- **Walk away from God.** If the Lord doesn't meet their expectations, some people become disappointed and respond in the following ways:
 - **Doubt the reality of God.** Since the Lord let adversity happen, they question whether He is who the Bible says He is.
 - **Blame Him.** Because God didn't prevent the situation, they decide it's His fault.
 - **Turn their back on God permanently.** Some people cannot accept a hardship or loss in their lives and become so angry with the Lord that they never return to Him.
 - **Reject the Bible.** When people's partial knowledge of Scripture and God's ways lead to unmet expectations, they may close their Bibles thinking that He doesn't keep His promises. The problem

is not God's faithfulness but their interpretation of His promises in accordance with their own plans.

- **Nurture their hurt and anger.** The result of this response is deeper hurt and more intense anger that leads to bitterness. In turn, bitterness poisons every area of life and brings with it misery, both to the bitter person and those close to him.
- **Waste their lives.** When people walk away from God and His Word, they forfeit all the good plans He had for them. The adversity He designed to draw them to Himself has been wasted and so have their lives.

■ **Walk into a deeper relationship with God.**

Instead of turning away from the Lord, the better option is to draw close to Him in adversity. This approach results in the development of the following qualities:

- **Unshakeable faith.** In the midst of our pain, the Lord proves Himself trustworthy, not to do what we want, but to keep His promises and stay with us through the suffering.
- **Unwearing patience.** When we understand that God is with us and has a purpose for our adversity, He gives us the patience to wait for His perfect timing. We can trust Him because He will never prolong our suffering beyond what is necessary and will see us through till the end.
- **Unwavering Courage.** God told Joshua to be strong and courageous because He would be with Him wherever he went (Josh. 1:9). This same promise is ours today. Each time we trust the Lord in times of adversity, we gain courage to persevere and to face the next challenge with confident faith.
- **Increasing purity.** Adversity prompts us to examine our lives. As we turn to the Lord in our pain and difficulties, He reveals sin and wrong thinking so we can repent, be cleansed, and live a holy life. This is one of the ways He conforms us to the likeness of His Son and changes our desires so we don't want anything in our lives which does not fit our holy identity as His children. The Bible calls us saints and that is how we should act and see ourselves (1 Cor. 1:2). Having been trained

through adversity, holiness becomes more than a word, but an obedient lifestyle. It's not a sinless life but one which is fully committed to Christ and has no desire to sin against Him.

- **Love for God's Word.** Our first response to adversity should be to open the Scriptures, asking the Lord what He desires to say to us. The Bible is our most precious possession because it's God's voice speaking to us in written language, giving us encouragement, direction, comfort, and correction. When we approach life with a surrendered will, a determination to follow Christ, and firm faith in His Word, we'll accept God's dealings with us, even if they include pain and hardship, knowing that His goal is to make us holy and useful for His purposes. When we have this attitude toward adversity, our witness for Christ attracts other people to Him.

We may not have a choice regarding affliction, but when it comes, we must decide how to respond. We can either yield to it, knowing that the Lord has something good in mind, or we can turn away from Him, live in rebellion, and waste our lives.

RESPONSE

- Review the qualities that result from walking into a deeper relationship with God in times of adversity. What changes in your thinking, attitudes, behavior, and habits will you have to make for God to produce these in your life?
- Now look at the ways people walk away from God. Have you ever let disappointment draw you into any of these responses? What was the result?
- How has Scripture shaped your attitude toward adversity? What verses or biblical characters have given you guidance, encouragement, comfort, perspective, and faith in the midst of suffering or difficulty?

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