

Sermon Notes

Practical Lessons for Understanding the Word of God



Adversity—Burden or Bridge?

KEY PASSAGE: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 | **SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES:** Psalm 37:4; 103:19 | Romans 8:28
1 Corinthians 10:13 | 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, 8; 11:28 | Philippians 1:13-15; 3:8-10; 4:4, 10-13, 19

SUMMARY

Many people are facing adversity today.

They may be dealing with financial difficulties or suffering because of rebellious children. Perhaps they are hurting emotionally because of personal betrayal, or physically due to health issues. Adversity comes in a variety of different forms, but one thing is certain—it will come to each one of our lives sooner or later.

Some people crumble under the pressure of adversity. They become so bitter and resentful toward the Lord that they walk away from His calling on their lives. They might even resort to addictive behaviors to try to escape the pain. Others face similar challenges but have a totally different reaction. Instead of weakening them, difficulties make them stronger because these believers learn to depend more fully on the power of the Holy Spirit. Adversity can either be an overwhelming burden or a bridge to a deeper relationship with God.

SERMON POINTS

A burden or a bridge?

No one wants to experience tough times. But when they come our way, we have a choice about how to view them: as a burden or a bridge. A burden, spiritually speaking, is a heaviness or weight that depresses us. We may feel weary or discouraged, without joy and peace. A bridge, by contrast, is a way to rise above difficulties and develop a more intimate relationship with our heavenly Father.

Two verses represent the foundation of this bridge to greater intimacy with the Lord. Psalm 103:19 says,

“The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all.” In other words, God is in control of everything. The second verse is Romans 8:28, which says, “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” When these two verses are correctly interpreted, they become a bridge that helps us overcome adversities.

Adversity was a bridge in Paul’s life.

Paul’s life is one of the best biblical examples of how adversity can be a bridge to a deeper relationship with God. This apostle wrote the majority of the New Testament. Without the revelations the Lord gave him, we would have far less insight into how to live the Christian life. But his closeness to the Father came as the result of loss and hardship. He wrote, “I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord . . . that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Phil. 3:8, 10). Through tribulation and difficulty, Paul learned:

- **He could know peace even in adversity.** Paul said, “I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:11-13).
- **God would give him supernatural strength in his weakness.** He explained that his weakness allowed the Holy Spirit’s power to work through his life: “I

will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

■ **The Lord was the source for all his needs.**

Philippians 4:19 says, "My God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." When we fully rely on the Father, He will provide for us.

■ **He could trust in the Lord's faithfulness.** "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13). Paul had learned to depend on the Lord to carry him through any trial.

■ **The Father valued his service more than his desires.** Although Scripture promises that the Lord delights in giving us the desires of our hearts (Ps. 37:4), He will prioritize our character development over our comfort. Instead of satisfying Paul's inclination toward comfort and ease, God sent adversity to prepare him for greater service (2 Cor. 12:7).

■ **Even in his adversity, God would strengthen his message.** Because Paul was imprisoned, the entire Roman guard heard the gospel (Phil. 1:13-15). 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 our faith intact.

■ **It's important to see everything as coming from God.** One of the most important lessons the Lord has taught me is that He uses everything, even the wrongs of others, for His purposes in my life. (See 2 Corinthians 12:7.)

■ **God's ways are not our ways.** Suffering is often the stimulus to greater closeness with God. We draw near to Him for relief from pain and suffering and, in the process, discover more about how He works. (See 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.)

■ **Adversity prepared him to comfort others more effectively.** God uses our suffering to prepare us to minister to others (2 Cor. 1:3-4). We are best equipped to comfort people if we have been through something similar.

■ **God had a specific purpose for adversity.** Paul's thorn had a particular function; it was designed to keep him humble and dependent on God, despite the astounding spiritual revelations he had been given (2 Cor. 12:7). Like him, our trials are designed by God to help us become the people He desires.

■ **We can rejoice in the midst of adversity.** In Philippians 4:4, the apostle wrote, "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.

RESPONSE

■ It is likely you are experiencing some type of adversity today. You can try to handle it using your own resources—turning to your friends for advice, doing the best you can, or escaping into hobbies or addictions. But I guarantee that when it comes to life-changing hardship, such coping mechanisms will ultimately fail. Your adversity will become an overwhelming burden.

I pray you will choose to see adversity as a bridge to a deeper relationship with your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. If you are a believer, the awesome power of the Holy Spirit is able to equip and transform you and to carry you through suffering. Through pain and hardship, He demonstrates how much we need His help. The bridge of adversity can take you to a place of indescribable intimacy with Jesus Christ.

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