

ADVERSITY: GOD’S UNWANTED BLESSING!

(Why bad things happen to good people like us ☺)

“Adversity” in the broad sense refers to negative things that happen to us (a.k.a. trials, suffering, tough times, etc.). The following biblical principles relate to adversity that happens to Christians (only some of the principles would apply to pre-Christians too).

Question: What are the causes for the adversity that Christians face?

Since God is sovereign (all powerful), He must either allow or sometimes cause any adversity that comes our way. There are several potential causes for the adversity in our life:

- 1) SOMETIMES adversity is a result of our own bad choices. Sometimes we “reap what we sow” (Galatians 6:7).**

Galatians 6:7 “Do not be deceived! God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows ”.
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- Sometimes adversity (but not always!) may be a consequence of our sins. In this case, God may be administering earthly discipline based on his love (Hebrews 12:5-11; example of David and Bathsheba).
 - Sometimes may be a consequence of a foolish decision by us (example: walk on icy sidewalk without proper shoes and sprain your ankle).
- 2) SOMETIMES adversity is a result of living in a temporarily fallen world.** Included is persecution for being a Christian (John 15:18-21; I Peter 4:12-19).
 - 3) SOMETIMES adversity is caused by supernatural powers other than God** (Job 1:12; Luke 22:31).

Keep in mind that God is far more powerful than Satan or any other fallen angel, God limits what Satan can do, and remember what Satan intends for evil, God can use for good (I John 4:4, Genesis 50:20; book of Job).

- 4) **SOMETIMES adversity is a test of our faith.** It is an opportunity to demonstrate that we are committed to God in not only the good times, but also the bad times. Allows us to send a message to people and the spiritual beings around us (book of Job; James 1:12).

- 5) **ALWAYS adversity is allowed or caused by God because He loves us and wants to provide special benefits (blessings) that only come through adversity!!** (Romans 8:28; book of Job, etc.).

Question: What are the potential benefits that adversity can bring?

- 1) **Intended to bring glory to God (John 9:1-11; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10).** People can see God work. Human weakness provides opportunity for God to display His power.

Read John 9:1-3

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 "... my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness..."

- 2) **Can benefit other people:**
 - a) Others can see God at work (John 9:1 – 11).

 - b) Others can see us model how to deal with adversity (Philippians 4:9)

 - c) People will eventually be better ministered to as we become better equipped (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

 - d) Gives other people the opportunity to minister to us (remember: "better to give than receive" Acts 20:35).

- 3) **Can result in many benefits to us:**
 - a) Enhances our eternal focus and perspective (2 Corinthians 4:17-18; I Peter 1:3-9; Romans 8:18-25).

2 Corinthians 4:17 “For our light and **momentary troubles** are achieving for us an eternal glory that **far** outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal”.

- b) Motivates us to rely on God, not ourselves (2 Corinthians 1:8-11; Psalms 33:16-18).
- c) Helps develop our character and helps us become more like Jesus (Romans 5:3-5, 8:28-39).
- d) Helps build our faith and our perseverance (I Peter 1:3-9; James 1:2-4).

Read: I Peter 1:3-7; James 1:2-4

- e) May be a pruning experience that helps us bear more fruit in the future (John 15: 1-2; Matthew 6:25-34; Philippians 3:13-14). Purpose of pruning is to make our primary priority to bear fruit for God.
- f) May be constructive and straighten out our path. God disciplines those that He loves and it’s always for our good (Hebrews 12:5-11; Psalms 94:12-13; Proverbs 3:11-12). Remember: there is no eternal punishment of any kind for Christians! (Romans 8:1; II Corinthians 5:18-21; Colossians 2:13-14).

Hebrews 12:5-11: ”...do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because **the Lord disciplines those He loves** ... God disciplines us for our **good** that we may share in His **holiness**. No discipline seems pleasant at the time ... Later it produces a **harvest of righteousness** and **peace** for those that have been **trained** by it”.

- g) Can better prepare us to minister to others that may have similar experiences (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).
- h) Can help us be more emphatic, sympathetic and compassionate (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).
- i) May build greater humility into our lives (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

- j) May helps us have greater appreciation for what God has given us; may build greater patience in our lives as we wait on Him (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

Question: How should we deal with adversity?

- 1) **If sin is a cause, confess and repent** (I John 1:9).
- 2) **Have faith that God is in control, and keep a positive attitude** (Hebrews 10:38, 11:1,6; book of Job; I Thessalonians 5:16-18).

I Thessalonians 5:16-18: “Be **joyful always**; pray continually; give **thanks** in **all** circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”.

- 3) **Remember: for Christians, all suffering and adversity is temporary!! It will either end while you are still on this earth, or it will end when you go to Heaven!**
- 4) **Keep an eternal perspective** (I Peter 1:3-9; Romans 8:18-25).
- 5) **Draw close to Jesus and partner with Him to make it through the adversity** (Philippians 4:13; Acts 7). Remember that God is the “Father of Compassion” and the “God of all comfort” (I Corinthians 1:3).

Philippians 4:13 “**I can do all things through Jesus** who strengthens me”

- 6) **Pray! Pray for God to be glorified, for His purposes in your lives and others to be accomplished, and pray for deliverance at His timing** (Philippians 4:4-8; I Peter 5:7; Hebrews 4:14-16; I Thess 5:18).

Hebrews 4:14-16: “...we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses ... let us **then approach the throne of grace with confidence**, so that we may receive **mercy** and find **grace** to help us in our time of need”.

- 7) **Spend time in the word, then put it into practice and think rightly** (Luke 6:46-49,11:28; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12; Joshua 1:4-8; Psalms 1).
- 8) **Seek and accept support, encouragement and prayers from others** (Romans 12:15; I Corinthians 12:25-26; 2 Corinthians 1:8-11; Galatians 6:2).
- 9) **If suffering for the Christ sake, take solace in the great reward you will someday receive** (Matthew 5:10-12; John 15:18-21; I Peter 4:12-19; Acts 5:41; 2 Timothy 1:8-9).

CASE STUDY: JOB
(refer to book of Job)

Note: If you don't have time to read all 42 chapters, at least read chapters 1, 2 and 42.

Key points:

- Cause of Job's adversity was NOT his sinning. He was "blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil" (1:1,8)

- God did not bring adversity to Job, but he allowed Satan to within prescribed limits (1:12, 2:6)

- Job endured two terrible tests:

First, he lost most of his material possessions (and he was wealthy); most his servants were killed; all 10 of his children (7 boys & 3 girls) were killed (1:13-20).

Second, had painful sores cover his entire body (2:3-10).

- But Job kept his focus on God, passed the tests and AFTER received great rewards:

First, he received back DOUBLE all his material possessions and gained back servants.

Second, he received 10 new children (7 boys & 3 girls), and he had the joy of knowing that he would enjoy all eternity with his first set of 10 children.

Third, he received an additional 140 great years on earth.

Fourth, he has and will receive ETERNAL rewards and blessings for his faithfulness while on earth.

We can be encouraged by some of Job's insights and responses to the adversity he faced. Here is Job's response after his first great test/trial:

Job 1:20-22 "... he fell to the ground in worship and said: Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The **Lord gave** and the **Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised**".

After his second test (the painful sores over all his body), his wife suggested that he curse God and die (motivated by her desire to see Job get out of misery). Here's Job response:

Job 2:10 "He replied, you are talking like a foolish woman. **Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?**".

SUMMARY: Adversity is a great blessing in disguise! Keep your focus on God, follow the advice from His word, and things will eventually turn out well!