

ADVERSITY

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PRACTICAL ASSIGNMENT

INTRODUCTION

If you understand what the Holy Spirit is doing in your life, it will be easier to make the right choice.

Now what is our normal natural first response when difficulties come into our lives? We very quickly react to it. One of our first reactions is to try to remove the problem, try to get rid of it. If the administrator is not nice to you and he presses you a little bit you say, "Okay, I will go out and work for another organization."

It is a natural reaction to say, "Just forget it. I am going to go on happily the way I want to!" The worldly people do the same thing with their marriages. "Well, if that is the way it is, okay, I am getting a divorce. I am getting out of here. Forget it!" Now YOUR first response should **not** be that way. Do not try to run away from these difficulties that come to you. Instead embrace them with open arms. They point out your true weaknesses.

We are going to look at what God's purposes are for allowing adversity or difficulties. You are a child of God. So it is God who is controlling your life, and God is allowing this to happen to you. Adversity can be our greatest motivation for spiritual growth. When everything is going good and happy and you are just singing spiritual songs, you are on a plateau—you are not usually growing deeper. If you do not grow from it, adversity will become the deadliest means of discouragement. Therefore it is absolutely necessary that you understand God's purposes for adversity. And it is absolutely necessary that you allow this process to happen in your life, that you do not push it away.

Let's look at God's purposes.

I. ADVERSITY IS GOD'S WAY OF GETTING OUR ATTENTION

The Bible talks about the cares of this world. The cares of the world are God's worst competitor for time, attention, and affections. Especially right now in this country. There are computers, smart phones, clothes-- and our salaries are not enough. Our eyes see and we want, but we have no money. So we begin to think and work, and then we have no time for God. Matthew 13:18-23 says, *These worldly cares choke out the voice of the Holy Spirit*. An example is the many spiritual workers who have left to go and work for someone who pays more money.



While we are busy with our goals, our plans, our projects, our friendships, God patiently reminds us. God says in Jeremiah 35:14, *"I have spoken to you again and again, yet you have not obeyed me."* Then when adversity comes, and we are suddenly faced with problems, with pressures that we cannot handle, we look to God. *"To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul; in you I trust, O my God. Do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me."* (Psalm 25:1-2). And then troubles continue. "Why now?" "Why another one?" And as troubles continue we find that we have no strength left.

Jesus says in Matthew 11:28, *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."* God has a purpose for giving us problems. His purpose is to get our attention so He can transform us into the image of Jesus. Because of that purpose, all adversity works for our good. It is not against us, it works for our good. Romans 8:28-29, *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son 'Jesus'..."* So we are to learn from Christ, who is meek and lowly, and whose burden is light.

II. ADVERSITY IS OUR ASSURANCE THAT GOD LOVES US

Hebrews 12:6 says, *"The Lord disciplines those he loves."* And further on we read that, *"God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."* (Hebrews 12:10-11). That is why we should not push it away, but we should allow ourselves to go through the process. If you go through the process, the Bible says you will become strong. "Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed." (Hebrews 12:12-13).

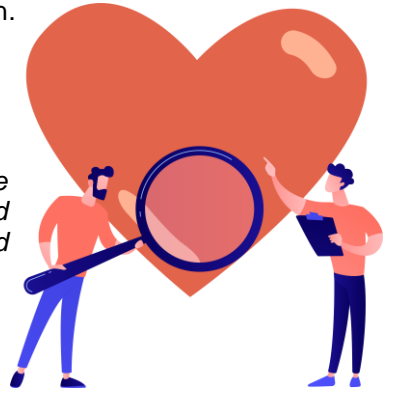
III. ADVERSITY IS GOD'S CALL FOR EXAMINATION

1 Corinthians 11:31-32 says, *"If we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world."* If you learn to deal with your shortcomings and sins, God will not have to chasten you. People will have no reason to point a finger at you and criticize you. God again says in Revelation 3:19, *"Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline."*

God requires that we search out every sin and confess and forsake every sin. Proverbs 28:13, *"He that covers his sin shall not prosper."* So many of us have things in our pockets that we do not want anybody to see. And we will not prosper. So we need to confess. This is one of the reasons we are to use the Lord's supper. It should be a time of self-examination.

"A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep." (1 Cor 11:28,30)

Self-examination must take place in God's Word. So it is through the Bible that we discover why things are not going good for us. It may be that we are not honoring our parents, or that we are not being respectful to our elders in our churches, and that is why God is not blessing us. Maybe we have certain problems in our lives because we have rewarded evil for good to somebody. Proverbs 17:13 says, *"If a man pays back evil for good, evil will never leave his house."*



IV. ADVERSITY IS GOD'S WAY OF CONQUERING PRIDE

There are several kinds of adversities. I will just mention a few of them.

A. Adversity of contention reveals pride.

- Proverbs 13: 10, "Pride only breeds quarrels".

B. Adversity of destruction is the consequence of pride.

- Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goes before destruction."

C. Adversity of shame is God's means of humbling us.

- Proverbs 11:2 "When pride comes, then comes disgrace."
- Proverbs 29:23 "A man's pride brings him low."
- Luke 14:11 "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled."
- James 4:6-7 "God opposes the proud."

At the end of history when the whole world is finished the Bible tells us, *"Every knee shall bow."* *"Every knee shall bow."* (Philippians 2:10). There shall be no pride for me for teaching a good lesson, no pride for someone else for a good translation, no pride for you because you have listened well. *"Every knee shall bow."* **Everybody** will bow **before** the Holy God.

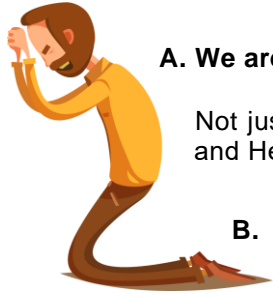
V. ADVERSITY IS A REMINDER OF OUR WEAKNESS

Only when we learn how to glory in unchangeable features, will we be able to feel the power of Christ resting upon us. As long as you say, "Oh, give it to me. I will take care of that. I know how to do that." God says, "Okay, you do not need me." He still needs to deal with you through adversity. In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 Paul said, *"To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me."* Psalm 103:13-14 says, *"As a father has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust."*

VI. ADVERSITY IS OUR MOTIVATION TO CRY OUT TO GOD

It is our motivation to cry out to God. God wants you to talk to Him. God wants you to do things together with him. The stories of Gideon, the stories of Jonathan defeating the Philistines, and many other stories, show that God wanted to work together with the people. The Bible tells us that God responds to the cry of His children when they are in distress. Psalm 34:17 says, *“The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.”*

Here are four ways to cry out to God correctly:



A. We are to cry out to God with our voice.

Not just with our heart, but audibly with our voice. David did that. He said, “To the Lord I cry aloud, and He answers me from his holy hill.” (Psalm 3:4). So cry audibly.

B. We are to cry out to God daily during adversity.

Psalm 86:3, *“Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I call to you all day long.”* Every day David did these things. Maybe you have heard that David was a man after God’s own heart. Maybe you have thought, “Why is David so special? What made David so special?” Well, David did all these things.

C. We are to cry out to God in humility.

Psalm 9:12, “He does not forget the cry of the humble.” (KJV)

D. We are to cry out to God with a pure heart.

Psalm 66:18, “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.”

No you should not avoid adversity in your life. Our first inclination is to avoid it.

VII. ADVERSITY IS EVIDENCE OF SPIRITUAL WARFARE

If we do not recognize that adversity is spiritual warfare, we may become discouraged and be tempted to quit. Many people just quit. One of our helpers decided to just quit. They did not understand this point. When adversity takes the form of suspicion, confusion and division, spiritual warfare is on. These friends decided not to help us anymore, and they gave us subtle hints that maybe we were not faithful in some things. So they quit. But God has honored us and blessed our relationship with the Brothers and Sisters in Ukraine. So it is exactly as it is written here. Confusion, suspicion, division — that shows that there is spiritual warfare.

Here is what Paul says to Timothy, “Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 2:3).

Ephesians 6:11-13 says,

“Be strong, in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.”

You can study the next four verses (14-18) at home. Some of these things you just have to study at home because you just cannot remember all these things. You need to meditate on it. We are talking about very deep spiritual things today.

Do not just focus on outward circumstances. Maybe your car broke down, or maybe there are other problems. Do not focus on those things. They are not the real problem. They are the result of spiritual power struggles. You need to realize that we are dealing with unseen spiritual powers. We must not focus on just what is seen, just the outward things.



VIII. ADVERSITY IS GOD'S METHOD OF PURIFYING OUR FAITH

Listen to Hebrews 11:6, *"Without faith it is impossible to please God."* As long as you trust your own strength, as long as you say, "Okay I will do that. No problem." It is not of God. Faith needs to be tested. It is easy to say, "Yes, I believe."

The trial of your faith is more precious than gold. Let us study 1 Peter 1:7, *"These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed"*. The trial is more precious than gold. Faith is essential to the Christian life because God's ways are just the opposite from the world's ways. By faith, we need to constantly re-choose God's way.

Patience is another benefit of having your faith purified. James 1:3 talks about that. *"The testing of your faith develops perseverance."* It results in perseverance, or patience. Hebrews 6:12, tells us that this kind of faith and patience results in obtaining the promises of God. Let us read it. *"We do not want to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised."* (Hebrews 6:12)

IX. ADVERSITY INCREASES OUR *HATRED* FOR EVIL

God wants ...

A. us to be more like Him.

So you are going to become more like God. So you are becoming more ready for heaven. Eventually you will hate this life so much that God will say, "Well, you can no longer be here in this dirty world. You need to die and join me in this beautiful heaven."

B. to warn us.

What happens when God exposes secret sins? All of us have secret sins. Something that we are not very aware of, or something that only once in a while happens and we just leave it. Now when God reveals secret sin, He shows it to everybody. He allows others to see its devastating consequences. By showing this to people, many people who are not so intelligent, who are not so spiritual, will see and be warned not to be fooled by Satan.

Our hatred for evil should increase when we see other people suffering because of our sin--people that we love, our family and friends. Perhaps one of the biggest reasons we fail to hate evil is that we do not comprehend the final cost, the ultimate cost. Just imagine if Eve had known all the sickness, all the wars, all the suffering. Do you think she would have taken the fruit and said, "Oh, so what?" She did not realize the final cost. Do you think the people would have laughed at Noah if they had realized that Noah, on this stinking boat with stinking animals, was going to survive and all of them were going to die?



When God reveals your secret sins, other people will know that the pleasures of sin last only for a season. They are not worthwhile.

C. to show us that He will not be mocked by our sin.

He will not be ridiculed by our sin. Listen to Galatians 6:7,8, *"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."* You will reap corruption.

D. for us to flee sin.

Hebrews 11:25 tells us that Moses was not enticed by the temporary pleasures of sin. Instead, *"He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time."*

Our hatred of evil should increase, as we realize how sin robs us of our potential for achieving and enjoying what God has planned for us. God has planned a much more beautiful lifestyle for each one of us than what we are receiving, because our sins hold us back.

CONCLUSION

In closing this lecture it is my hope that all of us will see that adversity can be a beautiful instrument for holiness. May God open your eyes to all the benefits of adversity. May you learn to welcome adversity. God bless you.

Blessings to you, our dear friends!

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Practical assignment

Completed

➤ From the student questionnaire, copy your answer to the following question:

1. What steps can you take to help the correct response become your normal, habitual response?

☐

2. Apply these steps this month.

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