

The Blessings and Temptations of Adversity

Intro: In one sense, every event of life can be a test of faith; but no event in life brings greater challenges to our faith than adversity. All of us will go through times of adversity. We will experience pain; we will suffer personally; we will suffer through seeing others we love suffer. And when that happens it is important that we see that adversity has its own set of unique blessings and temptations.

The Temptations of Adversity

Murmuring

When life deals us hard times, it is easy to wallow in self-pity. Our proper view of ourselves changes by the conditions of suffering. Instead of giving God His proper place in our lives, we become ego-centric. We get too focused on ourselves.

When we read about the children of Israel in the wilderness, we marvel at a people whose trust in His protection and provision would not last far past their last meal and or their last drink of water.

But the apostle Paul warns us by appealing to the example of these unbelieving Israelites:

Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. (1 Cor. 10:9-10)

So also we must be careful in the face of adversity not to get too focused on our problems.

Cf. Don who has almost always noticed in his treatments others who were far worse.

Though it may not give us any consolation that others have it worse than we do, it does add some perspective to our problems and maybe keeps us from getting too focused on ourselves.

Low spiritual motivation

Why is it that so many people in the face of adversity give up on God? Is it the belief that God owes us an easier life because we serve him? I remember how Job's wife looked at his suffering and encouraged him to just give up his faith!

Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9)

Job's wife seems to be acting on the unstated assumption that a God who allows His people to suffer is not worthy of their praise or service. Job had the proper view:

But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips. (Job 2:10)

What do we do when problems come? Do we turn away from him or see our need for Him even more?

But if there are temptations in adversity, there are also great blessings also to be experienced:

The blessings of adversity

Greater sensitivity to the suffering of others

In suffering, we may place before ourselves either a mirror or a window. If a mirror, then we see only ourselves, our pain. But if a window, then we see through our own suffering how others feel and how we may help them!

Paul demonstrated this attitude when he said:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Cor. 1:3-4)

Paul found a blessing in adversity.

Greater dependence upon God

If I were to ask, when are we more likely to pray, when are we more likely to look to God for help—when we suffer or when life is without pain? The only time some people ever look up is when they knocked off their feet and laid on their back.

There is a blessing in adversity. We are never stronger than when we depend upon God for strength.

And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. (2 Cor. 12:9)

Perfection of our character

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4)

Our life of dependence upon God opens us up to His will and His power and that is an awesome combination in our lives.

Sometimes the best thing that ever happened to us to sober us and get us serious about life was to go through hard times.

Learning from the Psalmist

Before affliction

Straying and ignoring (vs. 67a)

Before I was afflicted I went astray, (Psalm 119:67)

In affliction

Learning and turning (vs. 71, cf. vs. 59)

It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes. (Psalm 119:71)

I considered my ways, and turned my feet to Thy testimonies. (Psalm 119:59)

When under affliction we need to do three things:

- (1) Determine causes if we can (Is it because of something I have done?)
- (2) Determine objectives (What is God wanting to do in my life or in others?)
- (3) Determine solutions (How does God want me to handle this?)

After affliction

Knowing and obeying (vss. 67b, 97-102)

“...But now I keep Thy word. (Psalm 119:67)

Resting and valuing (vss. 65, 72)

Thou hast dealt well with Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word. (Psalm 119:65)

The law of Thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces. (Ps. 119:72)

“Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my 75 years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my experience, has been through affliction and not through happiness.” (Malcolm Muggeridge)

Conclusion: Next time adversity comes keep your focus on God and be determined to serve Him. Look for how the experience will enable you to depend upon God and serve others and praise Him and serve Him....even in adversity.