



# Adversity

## How we should respond to troubles in our life.

Note: The Scripture references in this Bible study are taken from the New King James Version.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.

9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

### What was Paul's problem that he pleaded with the Lord to remove three times?

He had a thorn in the flesh, some physical problem that Scripture does not reveal. Biblical scholars have speculated that Paul's thorn in the flesh may have been poor eyesight since he usually had to write with a scribe...

Gal 6:11 - See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!

I think this particular affliction is likely because it would have reminded Paul about his conversion experience when he was blinded for a period of time on the way to Damascus.

### Why did Paul call his affliction a thorn in the flesh?

It is a reference to thorns and thistles (see Genesis 3:17-19), a reminder of the fallen world we live in. This affliction was not as a result of Paul's personal sin but was a consequence of the fallen nature of mankind.

### Why didn't the Lord remove Paul's physical affliction?

It was to Paul's benefit that it remained because it kept him humble, looking to God for help rather than doing things with his own resources.

### What did God give as the reason why he would not remove this affliction from Paul?

Jesus told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

### What is God's grace?

God's grace is His favor toward us despite our not having done any thing to merit it.

### How does God's unmerited favor help us deal with afflictions?

If we have a true understanding of who God is, we know that He is in control of all things and has allowed us to have an affliction to serve a purpose.

### How do we know that God is in control of all things?

God's Word teaches that He is sovereign over all of creation... *"He is before all things, and in Him all things consist"* (Col 1:17) *"upholding all things by the word of His power"* (Heb 1:3).

### What purpose do afflictions serve in our life?

God is actively orchestrating developments in our life to mold us into the people He wants us to be. We may not always understand why something is happening to us but we should recognize that God has the bigger picture in mind and allows bad things to occur in our lives to serve a greater good...

Romans 8:28 - And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

God is always seeking to first establish a relationship, then to be closer to all of us. Sometimes what happens to us may help us to be better at identifying with someone who is going through the same thing and thus be in a good position to lead them to Christ.

### So what kind of attitude should we have when we face afflictions?

The Apostle James said we should rejoice...

James 1:2-4 - My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

### How do trials test your faith?

To make it through the time with minimum problems, it is necessary to trust in God. It is often necessary to either take a step of faith or wait on the Lord. Either way, the results will reinforce our faith.

### Should we worry about our future adversity?

Jesus counseled us not to worry in Matthew 6 because we often build up problems in our minds greater than they really are...

Matt 6:34 – “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

Trusting in God keeps us from worrying about things beyond our control. I have heard it said there are two rules for dealing with problems in life: (1) Don't sweat the small things and (2) they are all small things. When you think about it, this is what Jesus is saying in Matthew 6, what may look insurmountable to us is small in God's eyes...

Matt 19:26 – “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

### **How are afflictions often the catalyst for “character building?”**

Afflictions give us an opportunity to exercise perseverance...

Rom 5:3-4 - And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

### **What is perseverance?**

Perseverance is enduring through an affliction. It usually involves trusting in God for help once we realize that the problem is beyond our own capacity to save ourselves. Not only should we trust God for our eternal salvation, but we should trust Him in the daily conduct of our lives in this world as well.

### **How would you describe people with character?**

They are not anxious, not in a hurry, they are not quick to speak or act. And the person with character has hope.

### **What is hope?**

Websters says that hope is “to cherish a desire with expectation for fulfillment.”

### **What does the person of character hope in?**

The person of character has their hope in Christ, that He is who He claimed to be and that what He said is true that we who believe in Him will be resurrected to eternal life.

Titus 2:13 - looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ

We know that when Jesus appears in the air to call the church to Him, we will be resurrected.

### **How should thinking about our future resurrection help us deal with troubles in this world?**

We should recognize that in the context of eternity, our trials are insignificant...

1 Pet 1:6 - In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,

The attitude of, “this too shall pass” is a healthy one because it is biblical. The Bible helps us put our afflictions in the proper perspective...

2 Cor 4:17 - For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory

### **How do these “light afflictions” serve to provide us a “far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”?**

Out of these troubles come opportunities to be a testimony for Christ. Look at the life of Job, we are still using him as an example of perseverance. There are eternal rewards for the decisions we've made in this life that glorify God.

Rom 8:18 - For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

We also learn to depend more on God. I believe that the progress we make in this life depending on Him in the here and now will be significantly enhanced in eternity.

1 Cor 13:12 - For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

We will all be closer to God after our resurrection but not all of us will have the same degree of intimacy with Him...

Matt 13:12 - For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.

### **How is character as described in the Bible contrary to what the world esteems as being a good character?**

The world believes that character is that rugged individualist who pulls himself up by his bootstraps and saves himself. The rugged individualist does not need help from anyone and is himself a leader. I went through a lot of leadership training as part of ROTC and other Army officer training. So I can tell you what the Army expects leaders to be: above all, decisive. In the interest of maintaining the initiative, they teach that taking quick action, even the wrong action is better than no action at all. This teaching was reinforced in the movie Patton which played continuously in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Museum at Fort Hood, a quote from the General was: “a marginal plan executed today is many times better than perfect plan executed next week.” Now I'm not saying that people with good character shouldn't be decisive, they should be, but only after it is clear what God would have them do. Often times God does want us to wait on Him...

Isaiah 40:31 - But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

The difference that biblical decisiveness has with the world's view is that the world denies God any part of the process.

### **If you are not quick to take action, at what point do you become a procrastinator?**

A Christian can certainly take waiting on the Lord to an extreme where the path they should take is clear and they keep waiting for more revelation. God often does want His people to take quick action by helping us see the consequences for delay.

**What does Isaiah 10:31 say is the benefit of waiting on the Lord?**

They shall renew their strength.

**Have you experienced this?**

I have and do almost every day. Often time I am burdened by some task that is not urgent but nonetheless something I know I must face, but praying about it and waiting on the Lord often makes it go away by totally unexpected means that could only be from God.

**How is the imagery of the eagle a good analogy for the benefits of waiting on the Lord?**

The eagle's flight appears effortless soaring high above the earth. From this height the eagle has a "big picture" view yet it's vision is good enough to spot tiny ground dwellers far below. Likewise, we too may operate from a higher vantage point, far above the encumbrances of this world. Seeking the Lord's will in our actions and timing eases everything we do because things done according to His will may use His omnipotent power and are not limited by our own meager resources.

**How does God help us to grow closer to Him by allowing afflictions in our life?**

Sometimes our afflictions are a result of sin in our lives that we need to deal with...

Heb 12:6-7 - For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

We should recognize that God truly hates to have to discipline us more than we hate to be disciplined. We should remember that afflictions that are a direct consequence of sin in our lives is administered by God for our own interest because He loves us and wants us to repent before we suffer worse consequences.

**Back to 2 Corinthians 12:9, who's strength is made perfect?**

God's strength when it is applied to our lives. Perhaps a better translation would be "God's strength is made complete" since it is His plan for us to depend on Him and not do things in our own strength which will ultimately fail.

**How then is God's strength made perfect in weakness?**

God's strength is made perfect when we in our weakness draw on His strength for our salvation from the adversities of life.

**How does 2 Corinthians 12:9 clash with the world's view?**

- Weakness is strength if it drives you to the Lord for His unlimited strength. The world only respects strength, they don't recognize God's supernatural ability to aid His people in their weaknesses.
- Also, given our experience with God helping us in our weaknesses, we can even "take pleasure in" our afflictions because when we endure these things for Christ's sake, our strength comes from Him, not ourselves. Thus we can have, *"the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding"* (Phil 4:7)

**How may we learn God's will about the reason for the afflictions in our life?**

We may learn God's will by praying and studying His Word. This gives us an eternal "big picture" perspective as well as the ability to discern the truth in the subtlest of details. God has promised to answer our questions about His will if we only ask...

James 1:5 - If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

**What is the prerequisite for having God's perspective about a matter?**

The prerequisite for having godly vision is to have received Jesus Christ into your life... *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding"* (Proverbs 9:10). The proper response to fearing (respecting) the Lord is to *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved"* (Acts 16:31).