

Sermon Notes

Practical Lessons for Understanding the Word of God



Growing in Our Adversity

KEY PASSAGES: Ephesians 4:15 | 2 Peter 3:18 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Psalm 32:8
Romans 5:3-5; 6:23; 8:28 | 2 Corinthians 1:3-7; 12:7-10 | 1 Peter 1:6-7

SUMMARY

When a child is born, we naturally expect him to grow, and if he doesn't, there's a problem.

This same principle applies to the Christian life as well. Salvation is the beginning of our relationship with Christ, but God doesn't want us to stay immature. After being born again through faith in Jesus, we should continually grow in the grace and knowledge of Him (2 Pet. 3:18). By reading the Bible, praying, and observing how the Lord works, we will increase in Christlikeness and obedience. But the Lord also uses a surprising means to bring us to maturity. Adversity is part of the universal experience of all believers, and it can either hinder or accelerate our spiritual growth—it all depends on how we respond.

SERMON POINTS

Adversity is a condition of suffering and hardship involving anguish, pressure, trials, heartaches, or disappointments.

It may be physical or emotional in nature, and either long or short in duration, but it always causes pain. Although none of us want hurt or trouble, if it comes, we have two options. We can waste our sorrows or grow in our relationship with the Lord.

Spiritual growth in adversity depends on two factors.

- **Our understanding of God's purpose for it.** He allows adversity in our lives for specific reasons.
 - **To get our attention.** When life is running smoothly, it's easy to ignore the Lord; but in adversity, He suddenly has our undivided attention.

- **To conquer pride.** If we're doing well, we might be tempted to look down on those who are struggling, but adversity humbles us. The apostle Paul was given awesome privileges and insights, but along with them came a "thorn in the flesh" to keep him from exalting himself (2 Cor. 12:7-10). God allows humbling pain because He knows that pride prevents us from being used by Him.
- **To remind us of our weakness.** A sense of personal strength and adequacy keep us self-sufficient, but the Lord knows how to weaken us with affliction so we'll turn to Him for direction and strength.
- **To increase our hatred of sin.** The suffering that comes with disobedience reminds us of the awful impact of sin. God sometimes disciplines us with adversity so we will learn to hate sin and practice righteousness.
- **To demonstrate His faithfulness.** Only in our greatest need will we understand how dependable and trustworthy the Lord is. Pain and hardship drive us to seek Him for help, and in the midst of our suffering, we discover that He is always faithful.
- **To equip us to comfort others.** When God comforts us in our affliction, we become a spring of comfort to others (2 Cor. 1:3-7). Having gone through pain, we are better able to empathize with those who are going through a similar situation.
- **To prepare us for service.** Experiencing hardship and suffering equips us to serve the Lord in various ways and meet the needs of others.
- **To express His love for us.** Because God loves us so much, He sends adversity to rescue us from dangers we don't see and to draw us into the safety of a life fully surrendered to Him.

- **To change our direction.** God uses adversity to stop us from going astray and to redirect our path into His will.
- **Our response to adversity.** To grow spiritually from the trials in our lives, we must respond as the Lord desires. He has promised to teach us the way we should go (Ps. 32:8).
- **See it as coming from God.** Our first response should be to read God's Word in order to view our situation from His perspective. According to Romans 8:28, He "causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." If He's allowed suffering, He has something good to achieve through it.
- **Ask the Lord to reveal His goal for the adversity.** The painful situations in our lives are not random events but learning opportunities. If we glean as much as we can from our suffering, the truths we learn will be worth the pain.
- **Surrender to God's will.** Even if we don't fully understand why we're suffering, the right response is to yield ourselves to whatever the Lord is doing, knowing that He only works for the best in His children's lives.
- **Rest by trusting in His faithfulness.** The Lord always does what He's promised and is trustworthy in every situation. Even in our pain, we can rest in His faithfulness to bring us through our adversity in a way that pleases and honors Him.

Biblical truths affirm that God's goal for our adversity is our spiritual growth.

- **Adversity is the Lord's most effective way of deepening our faith and commitment to Him.** After He has brought us through it, the foundation of our trust in Him is strengthened (1 Pet. 1:6-7). And with each trial, our confidence in Him increases as we look back and see how He has been faithful.
- **The area of adversity in our lives is where God is working to bring us to spiritual maturity.** The Lord has a goal in mind and knows exactly how to achieve it. He is in the process of maturing us from the inside (Rom. 5:3-5). This cannot be

accomplished academically, but must be taught through the experience of suffering.

Our responses to adversity reveal something about ourselves.

- **Our view of God.** Do we think He's trustworthy?
- **Our view of ourselves.** Do we see ourselves as God's beloved children?
- **The importance of things in our lives.** If the Lord removes something we want to keep, our response reveals its priority in our hearts.
- **Our strengths and weaknesses.** It's in the difficulties that we discover how strong or weak we truly are.
- **Our capacity for endurance.** Do we have a firm foundation of faith that enables us to endure, or do we quickly give up?
- **Our faith in God.** How much do we trust the Lord and believe that He uses adversity for our good?

Our spiritual growth is determined by the way we view adversity.

We either see it as an obstacle in our lives or as an opportunity to grow in our relationship with the Lord. In every trial, His goal is that we increase in our knowledge and understanding of His ways, and trust in His faithfulness.

RESPONSE

- Do you view adversity as an obstacle or an opportunity for spiritual growth? Why do you see it this way?
- What keeps you from surrendering to God's will in the midst of pain, disappointment, or loss?
- How has God worked in your life through adversities? What sins has He revealed? What lessons has He taught you? How has He trained you for service?

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