

Sermon Notes

Practical Lessons for Understanding the Word of God



An Intimate Look at Adversity

KEY PASSAGE: 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Matthew 27:46 | Mark 15:34
2 Corinthians 12:7-10 | Galatians 6:7 | Hebrews 13:5

SUMMARY

The world in which we live is characterized by adversity.

Everywhere we look there are disasters, tragedies, trauma, misery, suffering, and loss. But what happens when our view of adversity becomes up close and personal? How does the Lord want us to respond when we come face-to-face with trials? And what is He trying to teach us through our difficulties?

SERMON POINTS

In 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, the apostle Paul described the various forms of adversity he experienced in his service for Christ—imprisonments, beatings, shipwrecks, exposure, hunger, thirst, and other dangers. Why would the Lord allow Paul, the man who introduced the Roman world to Jesus Christ, to suffer like this and be killed?

All adversity is not bad.

From a human perspective, Paul's suffering may seem unfair, but God used his hardships and pain to accomplish His will. During his imprisonment in Rome, Paul wrote Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. And his letter to the Philippians was filled with joy because he understood that through adversity God accomplishes His divine purposes and works for our ultimate good.

Characteristics of Adversity

- **Adversity is universal.** It's everywhere and can affect any area of our lives.
- **It's impartial.** Because we live in a fallen world, trouble comes to all of us—even believers—no matter what our financial or educational status.

- **Adversity is painful.** The pain can be physical, emotional, or relational, but whatever the source, it hurts.
- **Sometimes adversity comes suddenly.** Life could be going on as normal when an accident or a negative report from the doctor leaves us unexpectedly devastated.
- **Times of adversity may be prolonged.** Sometimes the emotional or physical pain continues for years.
- **It may be intense.** We may hurt so badly that even those who try to bring comfort feel the pain.
- **Adversity is often beyond our control.** We may feel helpless and have no answer for why God would allow us to go through it.

Questions Regarding Adversity

When adversity leaves us confused, we often ask two primary questions:

- **Why?** Even Jesus asked this question when He was hanging on the cross, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" (Matt. 27:46). The Lord is compassionate toward our pain and understands our limited perspective and confusion, but He also knows the good He intends to accomplish through our adversity because He sees the future. Sometimes He reveals His purpose to us, but often we won't understand until we're in heaven. However, in the meantime, we can trust Him, knowing He always works for our best.
- **Who?** We usually want to know who caused our trouble or pain, and there are three possibilities.
 - **Often the "who" is me.** God has established the principle of sowing and reaping. If we sin against the Lord or others, adversity may be the consequence of our choices. The decisions we made in the past have led us to where we are today.

- **Satan.** He hates God's people. The book of Job reveals that he could be causing our distress.
- **God.** The Lord is sovereign and He controls all adversity in our lives. That's why it's important to remember how much He loves us. If He allows us to go through pain, suffering, or loss, then He has something good He wants to accomplish in us. When the apostle Paul understood that his "thorn in the flesh" was designed to keep him humble and dependent on Christ, he was able to say, "Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me" (2 Cor. 12:9).

Responses to Adversity

Depending on our response, hardships and suffering will either drive us to the Lord or away from Him.

- **Blame.** We could respond by looking for someone to blame, but this approach only intensifies our anger until we become bitter.
- **Escape.** Another option is to try to avoid pain and problems by dulling our senses. Although drowning our sorrows with alcohol, taking drugs, or engaging in sexual affairs may seem like the answer, it only complicates our lives and leads to more problems.
- **Denial.** If we claim that all is well when it isn't, we will continue to suffer internal hurt and anger.
- **Self-pity.** A pity party never accomplishes anything positive. It simply displays an unwillingness to take responsibility for the situation and our response to it.
- **Seek the Lord.** We ought to come to God with our confusion and pain, asking Him to help us trust Him. He doesn't take delight in our suffering, but wants to use it to achieve what's best for us.

Principles to Help Us Through Adversity

If we're confident of the Lord's love for us and understand how He uses adversity in our lives, we will be able to trust Him and respond in a way that benefits us.

- **Adversity is one of God's most effective tools for strengthening our faith.** If we focus on the ways He is working within us and enabling us to endure

affliction, our trust in Him will grow even if our circumstances stay the same.

- **The Lord sends adversity to help us, not to hurt us.** God's purpose for allowing pain is to achieve something good. He may be trying to correct us or produce godly character in us. In the case of the apostle Paul, God protected him from pride and taught him to depend on Christ (2 Cor. 12:7-10).
- **God is always with us.** We may not feel His presence, but He has promised to never leave or forsake us (Heb. 13:5). As believers, we have been united with Christ, and His Spirit lives within us.
- **Adversity can be a precious gift from the Lord.** Pain and hardship are the instruments He often uses to correct our thinking, turn us around, and guide us onto His path.

The Guidebook for Adversity

The Word of God shows us how to walk through times of adversity. It reminds us of His love, tells us about His purposes for trials, encourages us to endure, and strengthens us in the process. One of the primary reasons we struggle in adversity and give in to despair and hopelessness is ignorance of the Scriptures. The Lord wants to help us through affliction, but we must open His Word to receive His guidance, comfort, and assurance.

RESPONSE

- As you look back at past adversity, what greater understanding have you gained about God's character, promises, and purposes?
- What principles have you learned from God's Word that will help you respond to your trials as He desires?

To purchase this message on CD or DVD, please visit store.intouch.org or call 1-800-789-1473. To download this Sermon Note, visit intouch.org/sermonnotes

