

Coping With Adversity

Introduction. Job said, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble" (Job 14:1). How true this is. Trouble and tragedy are not limited to those that are in the national consciousness, whose names and faces are in the news. Many names are unknown; their story is untold and their cry is unheard. But their pain is just as real.

How many have lost a loved one in the past few weeks? Who has received a call that their child has died in an accident? Or learned that a loved one is dying of cancer? Somewhere a mother has suddenly died leaving a grief-stricken mate and hurting children. Someone has lost their life savings. A fire has destroyed the family home, or worse yet, taken the lives of children.

How do I know? Because life is filled with pain, suffering, sickness, and death. Every day relationships are ruptured, and souls are disquieted. So how do we cope? Where do we turn when adversity strikes? We will examine four suggestions based on biblical teaching.

I. ***Live In God's Presence***

- A. When we suffer adversity, we can know, because of the wonderful spiritual blessings in Christ (Ephesians 1:3; Galatians 3:27), that we are in the presence of God (James 4:8).
- B. One man said, "Where was God when my son died?" The answer is: The same place He was when His Son died. God is not a mere spectator of our pain; we are in His presence (Matthew 10:30-31; 28:20). If you feel forsaken, even Jesus knows how you feel (Mark 14:27; Hebrews 4:15).

II. ***Learn From God's Promises***

- A. God is "our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1; 71:3; 84:1-5). He says, "I care, and I will care for you" (1 Peter 5:7; Revelation 12:6, 14).
- B. He promises help and comfort. He feels our pain and will abundantly supply our every need (Ephesians 3:20). This establishes our trust in Him (Job 13:15; Psalm 25:2).

III. ***Lean On God's Power***

- A. When Sennacherib, king of Assyria invaded Judah, Hezekiah stood up and rallied the people to the side of God (2 Chronicles 32:1-8).
- B. Finite strength is undependable and expendable, but God's infinite power is sufficient for every need (cf. Matthew 3:9; 1 Corinthians 6:14). Indeed we are "kept by the power of God" (1 Peter 1:5; 2 Peter 1:3).

IV. **Look For God's Purpose**

- A. God's purpose is not to make you miserable. Paul said to "rejoice in the Lord" (Philippians 4:4). God does not send pain, problems, and pressures. God is the giver of good gifts (James 1:17).
- B. Why does adversity strike?
 - 1. Ultimately it strikes because of living in a world filled with sin, suffering, and separation (Genesis 3:16-19). The devil is always trying to trap us (2 Corinthians 2:11; 4:4; 1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:10).
 - 2. Specifically it strikes because of the evil of other people (2 Samuel 11:16-17) or because of our own poor choices (Galatians 6:7-8).
- C. What is God's purpose for you in adversity?
 - 1. To teach you to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).
 - 2. To refine your strength (Job 23:10; Isaiah 48:10; James 1:2-3).
 - 3. To focus you on the eternal plan in Jesus (Ephesians 3:11).
 - 4. To claim your victory through His love, grace, and mercy (Romans 8:30-31).
- D. For two years, scientists sequestered themselves in an artificial environment called Biosphere 2. Inside their self-sustaining community, they created a number of mini-environments, including a desert, rain forest, and ocean. Nearly every weather condition could be simulated except one: wind. Over time, the effects of their windless environment became apparent. A number of acacia trees bent over and snapped. Without the stress of wind to strengthen the wood, the trunks grew weak and could not hold up their own weight. Though our culture shuns hardship, we would do well to remember that God uses hardship "for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness" (Hebrews 12:10).

Conclusion. No one is immune to adversity. Sometimes extreme tragedy will befall us. Yet, whatever the trial or trouble, there is help and hope. Most importantly, there is God.

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