

# Adversity – Is it Good or Bad?

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“Ouch. Here it comes. Adversity. How I hate it. Will there be sleepless nights? Will it prevent us from taking the vacation we’ve been planning? Will I be able to make my house payments? Or will it only be a minor short-term inconvenience? And just when things were going so well.”

Sound familiar? Of course it does. Adversity is a part of life. We all contend with it. Sometimes it happens as a direct consequence of our decisions, and other times it just happens. Regardless, it is largely responsible for the emotional ups and downs we experience. Occasionally we see it coming, but often we don’t. It sneaks up on us like a summer afternoon thunderstorm in the

Rocky Mountains. It can be a financial storm from a job loss or a sudden drop in your retirement nest egg. It can be a social storm from a dispute with a friend. It can be a family storm due to issues with your parents, disobedience from your children, or an argument with your spouse. It can be a physical storm from a health issue or an accident. Storms in life roll through in many ways and forms.

While few people ever look forward to the storms of life, are they always something to avoid? Should we always fear them? Are they always bad for us?

In my own life, I give adversity credit for much of what I have that is good. My family, faith, skills, friends, attitude and livelihood are all better because of past adversities. If it weren’t for some tough periods with my wife early on in our marriage that we worked through, my marriage could easily be non-existent. If it weren’t for losing my job, I might still be working for a company and in a role that I didn’t enjoy. If it weren’t for struggles with my faith, I wouldn’t have worked so hard to figure out what I truly believed in. Had I not experienced financial hardship, I would not appreciate the conveniences and comforts I currently enjoy. Had I not overcome other problems in my profession, I would not have grown in my skills or knowledge.

I’ll admit that there have been bouts with adversity that I didn’t understand for a long time, but through reflection and deeper understanding, it became clear that I needed them. In every storm of life I’ve been through, I now look back and see the lessons learned and benefits accrued. I can see how my faith, family, friends, competence, and finances were better for it. I can see how they made me face the truth instead of retreating back into my self-deception and comfort zone.

In Romans 5:3, Apostle Paul said, “Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; [4] perseverance, character; and character, hope. [5] And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” Suffering is the start of a very necessary and beneficial process that develops us, strengthens us, and draws us closer to God.

In God’s divine intelligence, He knows that while in our fleshly state-of-mind that we long for comfort and convenience, but that we will not develop there. He knows that we need adversity and because He knows us so well, He knows just what and how much we need. Thankfully, in his faithfulness to us, he knows and respects our limits. As Paul told the Corinthians, in 1Corinthians 10:13, “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.” God will not put us in circumstances beyond which we can bear.

Consider adversity as Jesus’ brother James did when he said in James 1:2, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, [3] because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. [4] Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. .... [9] The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. [10] But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. [11] For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business. [12] Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.”



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To persevere and benefit from the storms in your life, consider these principles:

- 1. Trust in God** – As King Solomon wrote in Proverbs 3:5, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding” and as Paul wrote in 2Corinthians 1:3, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, [4] who comforts us in all our troubles ...” Be close to God. Pray for and seek His will. Be confident knowing that you are a child of God. Enjoy the intimacy with your Father. Put your faith in God. Depend on Him. He is in control and knows what is best. Trust that you are where you are intended to be.
- 2. Replace worry with action** – As James said in James 2:17, “In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead..... [24] You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.” If you are doing everything reasonably possible, you are doing enough. No more is expected of you. Do what you can and give your worries over to God. Studies have shown that 92% of what people worry about either never happens, already happened, or is simply futile. It is also estimated that unnecessary worrying and its resulting stress accounts for 9 in 10 doctor visits. Take the advice of Jesus as recorded in the gospel of Matthew, 6:25, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? [26] Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? [27] Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?”
- 3. Be patient and self-controlled** – Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 12:12, “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.” Be patient. Getting through certain situations and learning takes time. While you may wish that the adversity would quickly subside, it may require more time for its work to be done. Remember that God doesn’t push you beyond what you can bear. In the ultimate case of enduring adversity as told in the story of Job, “the adversary” challenged Job’s righteousness creating significant agony for him for “many months” (Job 7:3). The Israelites spent 40 years in the desert before reaching the Promised Land - Deuteronomy 8:2 “Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.” And as stated in Proverbs 16:32, “Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.” Practice self control. It reinforces your self-esteem, optimism, and confidence which you especially need when in tough times.
- 4. Consider the bigger picture** – Paul said in Romans 12:10, “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. .... [13] Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” It might be an unwanted rain that ruins your parade, but it could be that the same rain was an answered prayer for a farmer who had been suffering a drought. Many of our formative experiences are not only for the purpose of our development, but provided for the benefit of others. It may require your misfortune to enable someone else’s good fortune. Or it may be that you needed your misfortune so that you could use it in some way to benefit others. Many people have turned their tragedies into great deeds of service to others. For some, if it weren’t for their adversity, they would not have found their meaning in life, nor helped others.
- 5. Choose your attitude** – Paul said in Romans 12:9, “Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. .... [11] Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. [12] Be joyful in hope ...” Focus on what is good. Realize that you and/or others will be better for the experience you are going through. It is only by experiencing the bad that you appreciate what is good. Learn from the bad, but don’t dwell on it. Keep it in its rightful place, as part of the crucible of learning. Focus on what you have to be grateful for. Feel the satisfaction and confidence that comes with maintaining your positive attitude, self-control, integrity, character, and values.
- 6. Learn from it** – The prophet Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 35:13, “This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Go and tell the men of Judah and the people of Jerusalem, ‘Will you not learn a lesson and obey my words?’” Our Lord expects us to learn. Find the lesson to be learned. Face the truth. Turn on the mirror of self observation. Reflect on what it is that YOU are doing or thinking that might be the root cause. The longer you resist the lesson to be learned, the longer you will remain in your suffering. The Hebrew writer made the same point in Hebrews 5:11, “We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. [12] In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!”



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And when in good times, practice these principles:

7. **Stay humble** – Solomon said in Proverbs 16:18, “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. [19] Better to be lowly in spirit and among the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud.” Don’t let arrogance creep into your good fortunes. Don’t let egotism masquerade as confidence. Remain humble and thankful. Don’t take for granted that which you have. God despises the proud. Pride separates us from God. We are warned of its danger 63 times in the Bible. Examples include Psalm 10:4 “In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God”, Job 35: 12, “He does not answer when men cry out because of the arrogance of the wicked.”; in Obadiah 1:3, “The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, ‘Who can bring me down to the ground?’ [4] Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down.”; in Daniel 5:20 when God spoke through Daniel regarding King Nebuchadnezzar, “But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory.”
8. **Don’t get too comfortable** – Solomon said in Proverbs 20:4, “A sluggard does not plow in season; so at harvest time he looks but finds nothing.” When times are good, people tend to get lazy. They stop depending on God. The reason many people fail is because they become selfish and self-reliant. When people have abundance, they lack need and take what they have for granted. Be careful about retreating into your own world of material conveniences and mental comforts. Stay on guard. Don’t let laziness masquerade as your entitlement to life’s comforts. Solomon warns 13 times in Proverbs the sinfulness of being a “sluggard”. Proverbs 6:6, “Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! [7] It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, [8] yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. [9] How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? [10] A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—[11] and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.”
9. **Make good decisions** – James said in James 1:5, “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”; Solomon said in Proverbs 1:5, “Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance.”; and in Psalm 119:105, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” Pray, seek the wise counsel of others, and read scripture before making important decisions. Buying something you can’t afford, getting into a relationship with someone without strong values, eating a high-fat diet, having an affair, playing when you should be working, and so on all have consequences. Use good judgment. Be discerning. Be watchful for the influences of evil as the apostle Peter warned in 1 Peter 5:8 “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. [9] Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”

Follow these nine principles and you’ll spend a lot more time in the ups and less time in the downs. And when you at a low point, you’ll handle it much better ... not to mention be better from it. A good life is full of happiness and joy, but also contains adversity. When the inevitable storm in life comes through, realize that it can truly be a blessing. It takes lemons to make lemonade.

Mike Hawkins is president of Alpine Link Corporation, a consulting firm specializing in helping individuals and organizations reach their peak potential. For this and other articles on faith, visit: <http://www.alpinelink.com/Faith.aspx>.