

Adversity: Opposition, Obstacle or Opportunity?

Introduction:

- ❑ Why do bad things happen to God's people?
- ❑ *Helmut Theilecke* (German Pastor and Theologian) was once asked, after he had returned from an extensive tour in the USA, "What is the greatest defect among American Christians? His reply was, "They have an inadequate view of suffering." This is not only true of American Christians. I believe most Christians have an inadequate view of suffering.
- ❑ "Pain is like a magnet that draws the soul closer to God." *Daily Bread* Nov, 17, 1981
- ❑ "However deep the pit, God's love is deeper still." *Corrie Ten Boom*
- ❑ The Book of Job is not so much an answer to the "WHY" of suffering, as much as it is to the "WHO", the "WHAT" and the "HOW" of it.
- ❑ "Bleeding hearts" have an inadequate view of God's love and wisdom. God is still in control of the affairs of this world, which includes the circumstances and situations in your life and mine. They often ask, how can a loving God permit so much suffering and pain in this world?
- ❑ We ask the wrong question. The answers are only important if we ask the right questions. We should be asking: Why would a God of love send His Only Begotten Son to, suffer and die the most inhuman and ignominious death possible? Cf. [John 3:16](#); [Phil 2:5-11](#).
- ❑ Is suffering one of God's goofs? Is it an after thought? Did it catch Him by surprise? Or is it a part of His divine design? Pain in a Fallen World, when properly understood may be seen as a "gift". It is often the gift no one wants.
- ❑ Pain is an essential part of a normal functioning life (*Where is God When it Hurts*, p. 27) Cf. the painless hell of lepers, diabetics, alcoholics and drug addicts. There is often a connection and a correlation between pain and pleasure, lunacy and genius.
- ❑ Adversity does not have to be an adversary. It can be an ally.
- ❑ God has two universities on earth to which He often sends His children: U of Suffering and U of Solitude. Sometimes He sends us separately, at other times simultaneously. (DJB Jan 28, 1982).
- ❑ The Chinese pictograph for "crisis" has two symbols: one depicting danger and the other opportunity. What is pain and adversity to you? Is it obstacles, opposition or opportunity?
- ❑ Our attitude is pain and adversity is much more important than the magnitude of our suffering.
- ❑ What we enjoy depends on *what we have*; what we endure determines *who we are*.

Exposition:

Some Reasons Why We Suffer as Christians

1. To equip us to be able to comfort and encourage others – increases empathy ([2Cor 1:4](#))
 - Cf. The advantage of walking a mile in a person's shoes or walk where they have trodden. One of the most valuable assets in ministry is not how much we know, but often it is how much we can identify with others. Often our effectiveness is proportionate to our ability to empathize with others.

- It's been said that God often wound deeply those He wishes to use greatly. Before He can use us, He must often break us, mold us and reshape us into vessels fit for His use.
2. To be reliant on God ([2Cor 1:9](#)) – increases faith
 - The real benefit of suffering is not how much I can bear (fortitude), but how much I can trust (faith).
 - Job said, “Even though He slays me, yet will I trust Him.” ([Job 13:15](#))
 - In adversity we need to trust in God’s mercy, grace, generosity, goodness, kindness and wisdom.
 - In adversity we can experience fulfillment and enjoyment of His promises, power, peace, provision and presence. The only way to have these is to implicitly trust Him. *Paul Tournier’s Analogy of the Christian Life:*
 - A Trapeze Act
 - Swinging on the bar builds muscles cf. exercising
 - You will never excel, until you let go (*Where is God When it Hurts*, p. 110)
 3. To be reliant on others ([2Cor 1:11](#))
 - Decreases self-reliance and a false sense of independence – cultivates interdependence. Many of us have duped ourselves into thinking that independence is a mark of maturity. Interdependence is a surer mark of it.
 - Self-reliance and self-pity are the worst enemies of the values in adversity
 4. To cultivate the attitude of thankfulness ([2Cor 1:11](#)) – increases the attitude of gratitude.
 - When we can thank God in and for the reversals in our lives, we are already on the road to victory and recovery.
 5. To produce patience, perseverance, endurance and forbearance in the saints. To develop positive character and humility ([2Cor 12:7](#); [2Cor 1:6](#); [Rom 5:3](#); [Jas 5:10-11](#))
 6. To discipline us ([Heb 12:5-11](#)). There are two types of discipline: external and internal. Where there is enough internal discipline, we do not need much external discipline.
 7. To refine and strengthen our faith ([1Pet 1:7](#); [Rom 5:3-4](#))
 8. Glory follows sufferings ([1Pet 1:11](#); [Rom 8:17](#); [2Tim 2:12](#)).
 - A heartache “here” is but a stepping stone towards “there”. There is a sickness that is not unto death ([Jn 11: 4](#)) and there is a suffering that that is not meant to discourage and defeat us, but to develop ([Rom 5:3-5](#))
 9. To bring glory to God ([1Pet 1:7, 4:16](#); [Jn 9:1-3](#))
 10. It is our calling ([1Pet 2:21](#); [1Thes 3:3](#); [Acts 9:116](#); [Matt 16:24](#); [Acts 14:22](#); [Phil 1:29](#))
 11. To teach us obedience ([Heb 5:8](#); [Lu 2:52](#)).
 - If the perfect, eternal Son of God had to learn obedience and one of the means was suffering, how much more do we as imperfect, erring children need it!
 12. It makes us mature ([Heb 2:10](#); [5:9](#); [Jas 1:2-4](#))
 - It is difficult for us in a comfort and consumer oriented culture to accept the fact that God is more concerned and committed to our growth and personal development than He is to our happiness, comfort and entertainment.
 13. To make us holy ([Heb 12:10](#); [Rom 8:28-29](#); [Job 23:10](#))
 14. To bring about good and growth for others ([Eph 3:13](#))

- Jesus died to make the Gospel available to others. Can we expect it to cost us nothing to take it to them? Someone has well said, “Ministry that costs us nothing will accomplish nothing.”
15. To reveal God to us ([Mark 4:35-41](#))
- He is Lord of the storms, but he also Lord of the situations and circumstances in our lives. Notice that Jesus promised the disciples a safe ride across the Sea of Galilee, not a smooth one.
 - After the sea was calm again they asked, “Who is this that even the winds and the waves obey Him.” The answer is obvious. He is the Creator and the Controller of the seas and the storms and everything else.
16. We suffer because of sin.
- Because we live in a fallen world or because of personal sin cf. [Acts 5:1-5](#). This husband and wife died because of deception.

Some Cause of Sufferings:

1. There is an Enemy of our soul - Satan. He is the Tempter and the Destroyer
2. We living in a fallen world ([Gen 2:17; 2 Sam 12:14](#))
3. Natural Disasters
4. Negligence of others
5. Presumptuousness of self or others

Pious Platitudes and Pat Answers that we often give the Sufferer:

1. “You must have stepped out of line.”
2. “Sickness is never God’s will, it is the Devil’s work.”
3. “Muster enough faith and you will be healed.”
4. “Praise God for everything.” (Pollyannaish)
5. “You are a chosen vessel to participate in the suffering of Christ.”

There is an element of truth in all of the above. However, we cannot categorically say any one of these is the cause of a person’s adversity. There are too many variables.

Reasons and Evidences to reject them:

1. Biblical
 - a. Internal – What the Bible itself says
 - b. External – What others interpret the bible as saying

Two things that intensify pain:

1. Fear – often fear of the unknown
2. Despair – helplessness and hopelessness

Some responses pain elicits in the Christian:

1. Submission and Humility
2. Sympathy
3. Soul-searching
4. Trust
5. Anger and lashing out at others

- The reason why wolves eat their legs is because they are numb in the cold of winter. Cf. Us devouring other Christians when we ostracizing and antagonizing the people who can help us most in our trials.

6. Embarrassment

- We don't know what to do or say. We are afraid and ashamed to face the situation and others. Because we have often told them about how great and good and generous our God is.

Conclusion:

- Where is God when His children are going through or standing in the “valley of the shadow of death”? Where is He when they are experiencing “the dark night of their souls”? He is never far away. He is always closer to us than breathing. He indwells us. Sometimes the intensity of the agony makes us feel that He has abandoned us. Many times because of the intensity of the pain and the demands of the situation, it is only His strength that is really sustaining us and carrying us through. Cf. The Poem, “*Footprints*”.
- Our attitude in adversity is much more important than the magnitude of our suffering. Failure and adversity oftentimes gives us a glimpse of our real self.
- Pain often lets us pause to consider other values. Pain reminds us that physically and spiritually, we are needy people. It tells us that there is more to life than comfort and pleasure. It tells us that life is more than physical.
- If God is in control of the affairs of this world, which include the details of my life; if He is loving and too good to do wrong and too wise to make a mistake, when He permits adversity in our lives, we need to ask, “What do you want to teach me Lord!”. With such an attitude and perspective, we would realize that we may not be able to change what has or is happening to us, but we certainly can re-interpret it.
- Failure does not have to necessarily spell “DEFEAT”. Adversity does not mean “REJECTION”.
- You never know how much you believe anything, until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life or death to you.
- “Pain is the megaphone of God.” CS. Lewis. He said, “God whispers to us in our pleasure but shouts to us in our pain.” If this is the case, the correct response to pain is not “WHY”? but “WHAT?” Our response should be like that of Samuel, “Speak Lord! Your servant is listening!” (1Sam 1:10)
- Suffering is sent/permitted by our Heavenly Father to build strength.
- God often send His children to the University of Adversity, sometimes to the School of Suffering.
- Adversity like riches (prosperity) is often neutral. It is how we respond to them that determine whether they will be a blessing or a burden. It is our heart's attitude and response that make the difference.
- Pain is often like giving someone a tangled ball of twine or yarn. We can work at untangling it and then use it to make something beautiful and useful, or give up in frustration and anger and end up in failure.
- The proper attitude in suffering can lead to higher altitude and awareness.
- Many noble spirits are squeezed and forged out of tragedy.

- ❑ Each person has a different pain threshold, and it often vary in the individual, depending on the situation and circumstances.
- ❑ We need to take time for reflection, realization and resignation in suffering
- ❑ Pain can cause us to turn inward, outward or upward. Each of these directions are not equally beneficial. We need to find what the appropriate direction is and then turn in that way.
- ❑ When we respond properly and positively to adversity, it builds, not erode character – patience, perseverance, humility, etc.
- ❑ Today’s trials and testing are training for tomorrow’s triumphs.
- ❑ Difficult times are not meant to destroy us but to develop us.
- ❑ You don't have to know WHY, if you know WHO and WHAT!
- ❑ God does not waste pain. Whenever He allows it, He has a higher purpose. If we fail to discover and learn to be better and not bitter people from adversity, we have wasted the pain.
- ❑ God does not forsake us when we suffer, cf. Christ on the Cross: *My God, my God, Why have you forsaken me?* Was the cross victory of Satan or God?
- ❑ In the light of the foregoing, how shall we then suffer?