

## 7 Reasons For Adversity

Os Hillman • Adversity

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*I have suffered too much in this world not to hope for another.*

*-- Jean Jacques Rousseau*

There are a number of reasons why you or I will experience adversity during our lifetimes. Some segments of the church today have been wrongly taught that adversity is a sign that God has removed His blessing. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Scriptures clearly teach us that trials are a part of a walk with God. No man or woman who has achieved much in the kingdom has been spared some form of trial or adversity. God gives specific reasons for some of our trials. Other times the purpose is to identify with the cross of Christ. We must view adversity as God does-- as a means to conform us to the image of His Son. Making us more Christlike is the ultimate goal of all of our experiences with God.

During this time I came across a verse of Scripture I had never noticed before. Did you know that Christ had to learn obedience? Frankly, I never thought Christ had to learn anything, much less obedience. Do you know how He learned obedience? Hebrews 5:8 says, "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered" [emphasis mine]. Christ had to learn obedience through suffering, and He uses suffering in our lives to teach us obedience.

Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God (1 Peter 4:1-2).

C.S. Lewis, in his book *The Problem With Pain*, wrote, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world." A friend described suffering as God's manure for spiritual growth. No matter what God does in our lives, we know that nothing happens without His foreknowledge and His planning. Sometimes we fall into the trap of thinking that God is not aware of our circumstances.

O LORD, you have searched me  
and you know me.  
You know when I sit and when I rise;  
you perceive my thoughts from afar.  
You discern my going out and my lying down;  
you are familiar with all my ways (Psalm 139:1-3).

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,  
To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for

obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance" (1 Peter 1:1-2).

Certain calamities simply cannot be explained adequately to allow rational defense of the events. These are better left unresolved until we come before God and He can quiet our hearts.

However, some adversity can be attributed to God's working in our lives in one of seven areas: (1) Sin, (2) Sonship, (3) To Comfort Others, (4) Identification with others who will go through similar experiences, (5) Obedience/Testing, (6) Preparation, and (7) Experiencing God's faithfulness. He can be working in all of these areas at once or in just one or two. There are specific reasons for some of these adverse circumstances. Some of the reasons are external--events we don't cause but which deeply affect our lives. Others can be attributed to actions we take that result in pain or suffering.

### **1. Sin**

We can bring adversity on ourselves through our own sin. There are countless examples of this throughout the Bible. If we have committed our lives to Jesus Christ, He is committed to loving us as a father loves his own child. When we steer away from His guiding hand, we must be brought back to obedience. Our waywardness separates us from God. God, being faithful to His character, has a responsibility to bring us back to a right relationship with Him. He must take action, for He cannot tolerate sin. He is a Holy God. When the people of Israel left the promised land they continually fell into sin. If they weren't grumbling against His provision, they were worshipping idols or some iniquity. God had to judge the people for their sin, but He never lost His love for them.

Since they hated knowledge  
and did not choose to fear the LORD,  
since they would not accept my advice  
and spurned my rebuke,  
they will eat the fruit of their ways  
and be filled with the fruit of their schemes.  
For the waywardness of the simple will kill them,  
and the complacency of fools will destroy them (Proverbs 1:29-32).

Again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go and take a census of Israel and Judah" (2 Samuel 24:1).

David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O LORD, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing" (2 Samuel 24:10).

So the LORD sent a plague on Israel from that morning until the end of the time designated, and seventy thousand of the people from Dan to Beersheba died (2 Samuel 24:15).

But Samuel replied:  
"Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices

as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD?  
To obey is better than sacrifice,  
and to heed is better than the fat of rams.  
For rebellion is like the sin of divination,  
and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.  
Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,  
he has rejected you as king" (1 Samuel 15:22-23).

But your iniquities have separated  
you from your God;  
your sins have hidden his face from you,  
so that he will not hear (Isaiah 59:2).

You rebuke and discipline men for their sin;  
you consume their wealth like a moth--  
each man is but a breath (Psalm 39:11).

Some became fools through their rebellious ways  
and suffered affliction because of their iniquities (Psalm 107:17).

There are other Scriptures (too numerous to include here) that deal with God's judgment of sin. Causes and effects of sin are described throughout Scripture.

My father died in an airplane crash when I was 14, and our family had to make major adjustments in its standard of living. Whenever my mother complained about finances, I subconsciously registered a message in my brain that I would never experience financial need again. Later, symptoms of a stronghold of fear showed up in the ways I related to my wife and to the people at the office. My focus was a life message that said I must succeed and make money.

We all have life messages. For some the message is that they are never good enough. These people often seek to prove to their parents they are successful. Others may feel they are not attractive, so they focus on achieving worldly beauty to gain acceptance. "I'm not pretty enough to be acceptable" becomes their life message. These people undergo plastic surgery to insure their beauty. We can spend our adult lives living out these and other life messages until we realize the negative fruit that these habits ultimately bear. In most cases we are believing lies. But until someone can help us recognize these lies, we will continue to live out our particular life messages.

My anxiety-based need for financial security forced me to make decisions out of fear. It led me to accumulate, invest, and hoard. I thought I was simply being a good steward of the resources God had provided, but I discovered the truth when I saw a pattern of control impact my relationships when my finances were affected negatively. Even though this happened on a subconscious level, it was still sin--idolatry and greed stimulated by insecurity and fear. God removed my wealth in an effort to bring me back to a loving relationship with Him that would not be fear-based. I am grateful for His loving reproof that led me to discover that my security is in His care for me. One of the books that was instrumental in my coming to this understanding was a workbook by Mike and Sue Dowgiewicz called *Demolishing*

*Strongholds.* This practical tool helped me identify these influences and their spiritual origins.

It is natural to ask, "Why does God allow us to stay in a painful situation for an extended period?" I have thought about this question often. My divorce circumstances were so painful I felt like dying at times. After almost two and a half years I was still separated. Part of my pain was self-inflicted, since I refused to file for divorce. It was a cost of obedience. The Lord showed me through this period that the errors I made in my marriage were lasting memories of these mistakes. Some of the consequences from those mistakes remained with me. Although He doesn't want us to live in the past once we've been forgiven, the emotional pain was a reminder of the situation. God wants us to desire His best and places us in situations that will encourage us to never return to what got us into that condition in the first place. Few people who make major financial errors get out of them quickly. It seems God lets us experience the fruit of our decisions before He changes the circumstances. This is part of our spiritual growth and His reproof in our lives. Those years were also a time of learning long-suffering and patience.

1. Can you identify a current sin for which God may be reproving you? Does your suffering relate specifically to the area of sin; i.e., financial sin leading to a financial problem, sexual sin manifesting sexual problems, attitudinal sin opening a door to family problems with a child or spouse, or rebellion of a child which could relate to a problem with authority at work? Often a sin will have a direct correlation to the adversity we face.

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life (Galatians 6:7-8).

If this is the case, confess your sin and seek to walk in freedom from that sin: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

2. Seek out another individual to stand with you as you confess your sins before God: "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (James 5:16).
3. Is there any underlying bitterness toward God or toward other individuals that may be hindering you from becoming emotionally free and receiving the fullness of God's love? "See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many" (Hebrews 12:15).

## **2. Sonship**

*Strength is born in the deep silence of long-suffering hearts; not amid joy.  
--Felicia Hemans*

Suffering and adversity are parts of our heritage as sons and daughters of God. They come with the territory as parts of God's refining process for every believer.

Consider every major character in the Bible, and you will see that their lives had adversity. For example, Paul's life was filled with shipwrecks, beatings, ridicule, and even a personal malady. John the Baptist, who lived only a few short years, had his head cut off. All the disciples died martyr deaths for their faith. God never said we would not suffer as Christians. Throughout Scripture God encourages us not to put too much emphasis on the here-and-now life, but to emphasize our future life in heaven. Whatever trials we will encounter here will not compare to the glory He will reveal when we get to heaven. Earth is a mere watering hole on the way to eternity.

The Lord disciplines His children in order to make them more like Himself. I do not totally understand why human nature is such that adversity spurs us on to seek God more. But it surely is true in the lives of believers. If we do not share in the sufferings and discipline of Christ as His children, then we do not share in His glory:

Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory (Romans 8:17).

My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline  
and do not resent his rebuke,  
because the LORD disciplines those he loves,  
as a father the son he delights in (Proverbs 3:11-12).

Blessed is the man you discipline, O LORD,  
the man you teach from your law (Psalm 94:12).

A fool spurns his father's discipline,  
but whoever heeds correction shows prudence (Proverbs 15:5).

And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons:  
"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline,  
and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,  
because the Lord disciplines those he loves,  
and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees (Hebrews 12:5-12).

The above verses clearly describe God's role as a father who disciplines His children.

However, this discipline is not just to make us suffer; it is to produce things in us that

only this correction will produce--righteousness and peace. He tells us that if we are removed from this discipline, then we are really not true sons of the most holy God.

Others went out on the sea in ships;  
they were merchants on the mighty waters.  
They saw the works of the LORD,  
his wonderful deeds in the deep.  
For he spoke and stirred up a tempest  
that lifted high the waves.  
They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths;  
in their peril their courage melted away.  
They reeled and staggered like drunken men;  
they were at their wits' end.  
Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble,  
and he brought them out of their distress.  
He stilled the storm to a whisper;  
the waves of the sea were hushed.  
They were glad when it grew calm,  
and he guided them to their desired haven (Psalm 107:23-30).

Psalm 107:23-30 provides one of the best descriptions we have of God's activity in a believer's life. God describes the mighty waters we encounter at different times in our lives. The Lord Himself stirs up the tempest that lifts high the waves, but it is during these times that we see the works of God. We experience the difficult human emotions that take us to the depths of despair. The pain and suffering can make us feel drunk at times. They drive us to our wits' end; but if we cry out to the Lord, He will hear our cries and respond to us in these times. He will still the storms in His time. He will bring us through the storms and guide us to our desired havens. He allows these experiences so that we can learn that His strength is sufficient and available to us. He doesn't always deliver us from them.

### **R.G. LeTourneau**

R.G. LeTourneau was a businessman who used business as a platform for serving God. Adversity was a major reason for his steadfast commitment to Christ. Born in 1888, LeTourneau is credited for inventing many modern-day, earth-moving machines. He was an extraordinary engineer who designed many different kinds of equipment, but it was not until after much tragedy and suffering that LeTourneau became successful. (He was not well-educated for someone who accomplished such feats.)

The following is from *More Than Conquerors*, the biography of LeTourneau:

His relationship with Christ made an immediate difference in the way in which he approached life's challenges. Rather than fighting nose to nose with the obstacles and hardships he encountered, he instead began to look for divine purpose in each suffering or setback--and there were plenty. Shortly after his conversion, for example, the foundry where he worked burned to the ground throwing him out of work and threatening his apprenticeship.

When he moved to San Francisco to seek work there, he found himself awakened in the middle of the famous 1906 earthquake. After he finished his

apprenticeship, he moved on to Stockton, California, where he began honing his skills as a mechanic and subsequently built a successful automobile dealership.

Even that period of his life was not without suffering. From having endured a broken neck in a stock-car crash, he had survived a gasoline-doused flash fire in his repair shop, he had alienated his father-in-law for seven years by marrying young seventeen year old Evelyn, he nearly died of Spanish influenza, lost his firstborn son at less than four months of age, and was sent into bankruptcy as a result of an inept business partner.

These hardships, more than any other factor in his development as a Christian, forged LeTourneau's spiritual priorities and submission to God. When the death of his son in 1919 brought him to the lowest point of his life, LeTourneau did not try to blame God for his misfortunes. Instead, he opened his heart, asking candidly, "Where have I gone wrong?"

It was then he believes God said to him, "My child, you have been working hard, but for the wrong things. You have been working for material things when you should have been working for spiritual things."

In LeTourneau's own account of that time in his life, he recalls: "The words were few, but the meaning ran deep. All that long night I reviewed my past, and saw where I had been paying only token tribute to God, going through the motions of acting like a Christian, but really serving myself and my conscience instead of serving Him. Instead of being a humble servant, I was taking pride in the way I was working to pay my material debts at the garage, while doing scarcely a thing to pay my spiritual debt to God.

"For my lesson that night I can now say that when a man realizes that spiritual things are worth more--and certainly they will last when material things are gone--he will work harder for spiritual things. I discovered then that God loves us so much that He wants us to love Him in return. He wants us to cooperate with His program." Alluding to Matthew 6:33 regarding seeking the kingdom of God first, he added, "That I had not been doing. I had been seeking first my own way of life, and I firmly believe God had to send those difficulties into our lives to get us to look up into His face and call upon Him for His help and guidance." (excerpted *More Than Conquerors*, John Woodbridge, Moody, p. 349)

It was the adversity that molded the apostle Paul into the greatest warrior for Christ the world has ever known. Don't you think Paul must have thought, "Here I am doing all this for you, God; and this is how you treat me?" Paul could see the heavenly perspective to his life. Circumstances didn't matter to Paul, because he only looked through eternal lenses.

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body (2 Corinthians 4:7-10).

Paul understood that life can beat us down. We can be hard pressed on every side of life, but it won't crush us. We can be confused and perplexed, but we don't have to despair. We can be persecuted, but God will not abandon us. We'll be struck down by events in life, but the events won't destroy us. We are in a continual process of dying so that Christ's life will be revealed in us.

When I was going through my adversity, there were times I wanted to leave this earth. But something inside said, "There is meaning to the trials that you are going through. I am not taking you through these just to watch you suffer." Two and a half years later I began to see some of the purposes for the trials I was experiencing. Sometimes we are not privileged to know these.

God allows us to experience pain in situations to help us identify with God's own pain. Until I was rejected by my daughter during my marriage separation, I had never felt such pain. I had thought I had a good relationship with her, but her response to me was one of indifference. Part of this was her preteen age, part was her developing other interests and part was due to the situation. In any case, the pain was very difficult for me. What God showed me in this was that He desires my fellowship and companionship as I desire fellowship and companionship with my daughter. When I reject that because I become too busy, or indifferent, I actually hurt the heart of God. When you become a father, you understand from a father's viewpoint. This experience helped me realize the pain our heavenly Father must feel when we reject or ignore Him.

1. Have you been able to see your adversity as simply a part of being a child of God?

2. Have your adversities produced qualities that have made you more Christ-like?

And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us (Romans 5:3-5).

3. What adjustments do you need to make in order to receive the grace that God has provided as a result of the adversity He has allowed you to experience?

4. Are you compensating for any pain or suffering by indulging in activities that reduce your level of pain but ultimately prolong the lesson that God is accomplishing in your life?

5. If you are fighting anger and bitterness toward God for your adversity, have you had a wrong view of God? Explain.

### **3. To Comfort Others**

Adversity will be used to frame our lives for the callings He has for us. These callings may be in areas that require us to experience the pain of those to whom we are called to minister. No one can identify with others as much as those who have experienced the same pain.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can

comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer (2 Corinthians 1:6).

During my separation and early stages of I experienced levels of rejection, pain, and suffering that I had never felt before. You may think that you can empathize with someone else's pain; but until you actually go through it yourself, you really can't fully understand. When I began to sit down with men who were experiencing difficulties in their marriages, I could identify with their pain as no happily married man could. When I encouraged men to stay in their marriages and resist divorce, I could say it with conviction; because I had stayed separated for over two years without pursuing divorce. I knew the cost of remaining in that status.

I lost my father in an airplane crash when I was fourteen. It was difficult growing up without the access to a father. When I meet another man who also lost his father at an early age, we immediately have a relationship that is different from others because of our common experience. I understand some of what that person has experienced. We are able to share at a level of understanding that others cannot.

If you lose a loved one to cancer, go through a painful operation, or experience any other suffering firsthand, you are automatically better prepared to relate to an individual who may be facing the same trial. God wants us to walk through such times in ways that we come out the other side stronger spiritually than when they began. Only then will we be able to bring real comfort and encouragement to others.

1. Has God ever used you to comfort an individual who has faced a similar trial?
2. Have you sought to help others after someone helped you walk through a difficult time in your life?
3. Are you aware that God may have allowed you to have an experience so that you can help others in the future and that such situations are part of God's training for future ministry?

#### **4. Testing**

*It is only from the belief of the goodness and wisdom of a supreme being, that our calamities can be borne in the manner which becomes a man.*

*--Henry Mackenzie*

God discovers the depth of our relationship with Him through testing. The Old Testament reveals countless examples of God testing His people to determine if they would follow Him or the world's system. We are tested on a regular basis to determine where our loyalty lies: "If you falter in times of trouble, / how small is your strength" (Proverbs 24:10)!

Israel was tested many times as they journeyed for 40 years through the wilderness. God showed His faithfulness often, but His testing of the people revealed failure after failure to trust Him.

Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions" (Exodus 16:4, emphasis mine).

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 (Exodus 16:4, emphasis mine).

I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the LORD and walk in it as their forefathers did (Judges 2:22, emphasis mine).

I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things have I given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you (Exodus 16:4, emphasis mine).

Hezekiah was a faithful, God-honouring king for much of his life; but toward the end he became proud. God wanted to find out if he would still honour Him and recognize His blessings in his life. He failed the test when an envoy was sent to his palace.

But when envoys were sent by the rulers of Babylon to ask him about the miraculous sign that had occurred in the land, God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart (2 Chronicles 32:31, emphasis mine).

God often spoke of His relationship to His people and of their rebellious hearts. He tested them to see what was in their hearts:

But they put God to the test  
and rebelled against the Most High;  
they did not keep his statutes (Psalm 78:56, emphasis mine).

Therefore this is what the LORD Almighty says:

"See, I will refine and test them,  
for what else can I do  
because of the sin of my people?"(Jeremiah 9:7).

Job was tested when God allowed Satan to send calamity upon his life. God said Job was a righteous man. Here we see a man being sent calamity not for having done wrong, but actually for being a righteous man. It appears with our limited understanding that God is playing a game with Satan, and Job is the gameboard.

One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?"

Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it."

Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."

"Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face."

The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger."

Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD (Job 1:6-12).

On another day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them to present himself before him. And the LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?"

Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it."

Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason."

"Skin for skin!" Satan replied. "A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face."

The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life" (Job 2:1-6).

Every Christian is tested, but testing is always designed to develop something within us. There is a blessing on the other side if we are faithful in that trial. Joseph was tested severely, as he spent years in prison and worked as a slave in Egypt. But God's testing of Joseph was important preparation for what God had in store for him. Joseph was to save an entire nation from starvation.

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 (James 1:12).

We are all tested in different ways. God allows each of us a different level of testing as we go through life to see if we will uphold His name and be obedient. I wrongly sued a client one time and was made aware of my error after the suit had been filed for several months. Through counsel I realized my primary issue should have been with a vendor, not with the client. Although the client was not totally clean in the situation, I had to make restitution for my contribution. Instead of forcing the client to own up to his role in the matter, I needed to accept full responsibility and allow God to convict him. The decision was made with great financial cost--over \$140,000. I had to pay \$40,000 of this for vendor costs. In this case I had to decide if I would make an outcome-based decision that might financially benefit me or an obedience-based decision that was right before God.

1. Have you ever been misunderstood or wrongly accused in a situation over which you had no control? Describe your response. Did you respond the way Christ would have?
2. Can you see that God was allowing this to test you in your response to the situation?
3. Were you able to respond without blaming or making yourself the victim? Describe one situation where you failed to respond correctly and what you could have done differently.
4. How will you seek to respond in the future?
5. What situations are you in right now that could be tests from the Lord?

### **5. Obedience/Testing**

God uses adversity and even affliction to teach us to live obedient lives. He used them in Jesus' life to teach Him obedience. God tests our obedience to His ways. At what point will we disobey His commands and follow our own ways? He asks us to do things that go against logic at times in order to find out what is in our hearts. Will we trust Him completely?

Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered (Hebrews 5:8).

We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did (Hebrews 5:8)

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God (1 Peter 4:1-2).

Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word (1 Peter 4:1).

It was good for me to be afflicted  
so that I might learn your decrees (Psalm 119:71).

If you falter in times of trouble,  
how small is your strength! (Proverbs 24:10).

My wife and I separated. As the man, I took full responsibility for the condition of my marriage. Knowing that God hates divorce and that it would be wrong for me to encourage any actions that would lead to a termination of our marriage, I did everything within my power to reconcile. I knew I was still married and that God

required me to love my wife as Christ loved the church, sacrificially. Finally, my wife stated she wanted a divorce. Would I encourage getting the divorce over quickly and try to salvage my life materially? After more than two years I was still separated. At the same time my business was failing, and my cash reserves were dwindling. God was requiring me to learn to trust Him and to wait on Him no matter the outcome. God used this time to teach me to obey His commands and to wait on Him. I learned important lessons in perseverance, trust, and obedience that only these experiences could have taught me. Like the apostle Paul I felt "hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:9).

1. When difficult times come, does your obedience to God increase or decrease? Describe a recent situation that created adversity for you. How did your response align itself with Scripture?
2. Was your response based on getting rid of the problem or on doing what you knew was right? What course of action did you follow?
3. Did others help you make key decisions in the process?
4. If your decision involved personal suffering on your part, what were your temptations?

## **6. Preparation**

*I thank God for my handicaps, for through them, I have found myself, my work and my God.*

*--Helen Keller*

God uses the events and circumstances in our lives teach and prepare us for the missions He has for us. Do we grumble like the Israelites? God knows what He wants to do and who He can choose to carry out His plan. Can God use us, or will we live our lives solely for our own pleasures? Joseph, Mordecai, Esther and Lazarus are four people God took through the fire for His greater purposes.

Joseph spent 13 years imprisoned or enslaved for deeds not deserving such treatment. He was wrongly judged and imprisoned, but God used these things to fulfill His plan to save a nation: "But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. / So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt" (Genesis 45:7-8 emphasis mine).

Joseph learned early that his life was not normal. His brothers threw him in a pit, and he was later sold into slavery. If there were any Bible character that had the right to ask God why, it would be Joseph. But God's time of testing for Joseph was needed to prepare him for what he was going to do in the future. It was a time for refining his character. Joseph was a type of Christ whose life was used to save the lives of his people. He gave up his own life (through slavery) for the sake of his own people. It

wasn't voluntary; circumstances put Joseph into this position. God gave him a dream as a teen, but I am sure he had no idea what that dream really meant until he became second in command to Pharaoh.

Mordecai was the cousin of Esther, whose parents died and was brought into the court of King Xerxes. Through the favour of the king toward Esther, the Jews were saved from annihilation at the hand of Haman. God allowed Mordecai and Esther to save the king's life by informing the king through Mordecai. As a result, the king later honoured Mordecai for his good deed toward him. He became second in command in an ungodly kingdom, just as Joseph had. God's omnipotent plan allowed Mordecai to gain favour by placing him in the right place at the right time in order to save the Jewish people through Esther. Mordecai helped Esther realize the position God had placed her. But she had to be willing to risk her life on behalf of her people:

For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this? (Esther 4:14, emphasis mine).

Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Xerxes, preeminent among the Jews, and held in high esteem by his many fellow Jews, because he worked for the good of his people and spoke up for the welfare of all the Jews (Esther 10:3, emphasis mine).

Mordecai was a servant who worked for the good of the people. God knew He could use Mordecai and Esther at this time in history to save their people. Both Esther and Mordecai had to become willing to die for the cause before God would intervene in their situation.

Lazarus was allowed to die because God had a greater purpose and preparation He was accomplishing. Jesus' seeming lack of response to Mary and Martha's request to come quickly resulted in Mary and Martha feeling Jesus had let them down. But Jesus knew this delay was necessary. Their pain would be only for a little while. Jesus allowed Lazarus to remain in the grave for four days in order to demonstrate a miracle that would be a primary reason for the large turnout when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey.

When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus (John 11:4-5).

Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they had heard that he had given this miraculous sign, went out to meet him. So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!" (John 12:17-19).

For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose (Philippians 2:13).

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

In my own life I see how God has been preparing me to be more useful to others. I have made enough mistakes and have had enough life experiences for me to be useful in the lives of others. I can also see that God has used, and is still using, my trials to bring me to death in myself so that I will seek Christ alone and His sufficiency. My trials have helped me detach from the world and focus on what is important.

We all are having our lives framed by the events and experiences we are allowed to face in life. A mature man of God once said to me, "You are a blessed man. God does not allow a man to be tested as you have been unless He has a special purpose planned for you." (The man who spoke these words had gone through the fires of testing and purification himself.) We will all face different levels of testing depending on the calls God has for our lives. After two years of being in this fire, I began to see some of God's plans in my life and to understand why it was necessary for me to go through what I had as preparation for what He was calling me into. I am grateful for the glimpses He reveals from time to time. Some people never see them.

### **The Dessert Places**

"Therefore I am now going to allure her;  
I will lead her into the desert  
and speak tenderly to her.  
There I will give her back her vineyards,  
and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.  
There she will sing as in the days of her youth,  
as in the day she came up out of Egypt.  
"In that day," declares the LORD,  
"you will call me my husband";  
you will no longer call me 'my master.'  
I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips;  
no longer will their names be invoked" (Hosea 2:14-17).

God shows us in the story of Hosea that He purposely takes His people into the desert to prepare them and teach them. In verse 14 God talks about Gomer--a prostitute who represents the nation of Israel. He says He doesn't intend to destroy her. She will even get her vineyards back, and the Valley of Achor (which means "trouble") will actually be her door of hope. Would you ever consider trouble a door of hope? He goes on to explain that she will sing again as she had done as a child. For a person to be able to sing in the desert, some type of transformation has to take place. He explains that transformation in verse 16--he will no longer be a slave but a wife. What is the difference? The slave has been in bondage. When she becomes a bride, the Baals will no longer be in her life.

Sometimes God has to take us into the wilderness so that we will listen to Him and so that He can remove the Baals (idols) of our lives. Clearly this is what God did in my life. He pulled me aside for over two years into a dessert experience to remove

that which He did not want in my life. I had to make attitude adjustments along the way in order to experience His grace during those times in which I no longer wanted to remain in the desert. This time was to prepare me for a whole new calling He had planned. While I was on this journey, God brought many people into my life who had had similar desert experiences, especially in the business arena. This was the marketplace God was calling me to.

## 7. To Experience God's Faithfulness

*Affliction comes to us, not to make us sad but sober; not to make us sorry but wise.*  
--Henry Ward Beecher

If we cannot trust God in the tough times, when can we trust Him? Through adversity we learn that we can trust Him even in the most difficult times. Until we are tested, we really do not know how committed we are to what we believe. Difficulties disclose how we're doing and how we will respond to life's trials. When my wife and I had our most difficult times, I made a statement like the following: "If you hadn't done that, I never would have said that." I was saying that I could blame her for my behaviour. I love the following quote which says a lot about what difficulties reveal in us:

The circumstances of life,  
The events of life,  
And the people around me in life,  
Do not make me the way I am,  
But reveal the way I am.  
--Sam Peeples

We must all experience grace to know that it really exists, and the only way to experience it is to have to rely upon it. Trials are the best way to experience His grace to the level that it is not our own strength.

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted  
and saves those who are crushed in spirit (Psalm 34:18).

He heals the brokenhearted  
and binds up their wounds (Psalm 147:3).

And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19).

He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us (2 Corinthians 1:10).

When all of the events listed in Chapter 1 occurred in my life in a short time span, I wondered if I was going to be able to make it through without having a nervous breakdown. When you've built your life around family, business and finances and

your world falls apart quickly, you find out what you're really made of. I could handle only so much before God allowed me to be totally broken. Then I experienced God's faithfulness to carry me through this time, as He led me into relationships with key people who would help me bear the load. At one point He gave me a Scripture regarding my situation. I knew He was speaking to me through these verses:

Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it." Then you will defile your idols overlaid with silver and your images covered with gold; you will throw them away like a menstrual cloth and say to them, "Away with you!"

He will also send you rain for the seed you sow in the ground, and the food that comes from the land will be rich and plentiful. In that day your cattle will graze in broad meadows (Isaiah 30:20-23).

This passage spoke directly to situations I was facing. If we cannot experience the faithfulness of God in the difficult times, chances are slim we will experience His faithfulness at all. I have read stories of many who have experienced pain and suffering.

Without exception, those who sought God in their storm experienced Him on a new level that they would not trade for anything else. In all cases they cited they would go through the pain again to experience this new level of relationship with God.

One time when the disciples were out on the sea, a storm arose. Jesus had not started the trip with them but came to them on the water in the midst of the storm. When the disciples looked out on the water, they screamed, "It's a ghost!" What they thought was a ghost was actually Jesus. So often what we think is something terrible when we first encounter it, turns out to be something altogether different. This situation turned out to be an opportunity for Peter to walk on water and to learn an important faith lesson--that every time we put our eyes on the circumstances, we will fail. Peter sank when he looked at the situation as he understood it. When he kept his eyes on Jesus, he succeeded. This was preparation for Peter and the rest of the disciples. I think Jesus would have been pleased if every one of the disciples had gotten out of the boat and come to him. Peter, the real winner here, was the only one who had the faith to step out of the boat. Someone once said to me, "Faith is spelled R-I-S-K." Are we willing to experience failure if our faith will grow as a result?

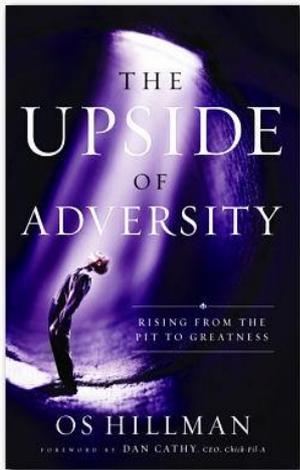
If you are facing a trial right now, realize that God is aware of the situation and that He has things in motion. Scripture teaches us that the negative events are being worked out for good if we love Him and are seeking to honor Him in spite of the circumstance. He will reveal His faithfulness through the situation if you will allow Him to do so.

For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (Philippians 2:13).

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

1. What would be an act of faith for you right now in your situation?
2. Are you seeking to love God so that He can make all things work for your good? If not, what things need to be changed?
3. Commit yourself to the purposes that God has in your adversity. His grace will be revealed as you trust Him.
4. Know that the pain you may be experiencing will not last forever. It is a season God is taking you through.

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Os Hillman has written an exhaustive book on the topic of adversity entitled, ***The Upside of Adversity: From the Pit to Greatness***. To learn more about this resource click on Faith and Work Resources.com link to the right of this page and enter the word Upside in title area to see information on this book.

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