

How to Handle Adversity Well

Written by Mike Mitchener

Sunday, 01 May 2011 00:00 - Last Updated Thursday, 08 March 2012 12:25

I want to talk with you about how to handle adversity well. Adversity and suffering are what kind of problems? Universal! But even when we know Who the God of adversity is, many of us don't handle adversity well.

When we look at the life of Christ and how He handled adversity we learn how to handle adversity well. The divorce rate is high because husbands and wives don't know how to handle adversity well. Obedience, respect and intimacy in a parent-child relationship is often lacking so when adversity comes there is a rift, a falling away in difficult times. We all know people who abandon their relationships when times get tough; even their relationship with the Lord! We all know Christians who claim the name of Christ, but often don't know how to handle difficult times. And it's not just the regular Joe Christians - pastors are in the same boat.

Studies show that:

50% of pastors quit within five years of leaving seminary.

Thirteen hundred pastors leave their church each month.

Twelve hundred pastors leave the ministry all together every month... because of stress, burn-out, family issues... adversity!

Ten churches a day close.

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Why.... Because we don't know how to handle adversity well. So we desperately need to look into the life of Christ and see how He handled adversity and mimic Him.

Philippians 2 is called the great "kenotic" passage, the word means "to empty." Jesus emptied Himself. He was in heaven and didn't think heaven was something to hang on to! Why, because Jesus was very "others oriented" and knew that the only way He could save us was by leaving heaven! The passage says, "have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Philippians 2:4 says, "let each of you look not only on his own interests but also to the interests of others."

So we need to be "others oriented" too!

So WWJD is not enough. It's not as simple as just doing what Jesus did. What did He think? How did He feel, and THEN, what did He do? And if you think the way Jesus thinks, then you will handle adversity well. Jesus humbled Himself, and I think many Christians struggle with humbling themselves. Jesus became obedient, and I think many Christians struggle with obedience. And because they struggle they don't handle adversity well.

Many of us would rather be self-centered than godly! And with that mindset, when we go through adversity and suffering we're going to look out for number one! We might not verbalize it, but our actions certainly indicate it. Obedience from a surrendered heart is what God is after. And even if it brings death, obedience is far better than anything else. Even the death on the cross! If you stop and think about it, Jesus left heaven so He could handle adversity. Jesus left heaven so that he could suffer. Jesus left heaven so that he could bleed and die for others. "Have this mind in you which was in Christ Jesus." (Romans 15:5)

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Can you honestly say in your heart right now that walking humbly and obediently with Jesus is more important than anything else to you?

The way you manage your time? The way you manage your money? The way you manage your decisions? The way you manage your emotions? Can you really say, "I count all this as loss for the sake of knowing Christ, so that I can gain him and be found in him." (Philippians 3:8)

Most Christians believe that they have no power to handle adversity well. But there is power in His resurrection. And the power of the resurrection usually shows up as we share with Him in His sufferings. How many of us have been through a hard time and in the midst of that hard time our relationship with Jesus was more real and vibrant than it had been in years? Hard times either run us away from Jesus (that's a whole other message), or they run us to Jesus. And some of the deepest fellowship with Jesus comes at the most intense suffering and adversity. God desires an intimate relationship with us and He knows that suffering drives genuine believers to Him.

When we face adversity, sin will grab us and try to choke the life out of us. Have you ever felt like life was choking the life out of you? But we have the power of the resurrection to blow that strangle-hold off.

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It's a perversion of the gospel to say, "Since Jesus suffered for me, I don't have to suffer."

Did Jesus become homeless so that I could have the finest of homes (and by what standard is "finest")?

Was Jesus was rejected by men so that I can be approved by men?

Did Jesus live in poverty so that I could live in luxury?

Did Jesus endure suffering so I could live on easy street?

That is an Americanized faith. Don't Americanize your faith. Biblicize your faith.

Think the way the Bible tells you to think. Not what Americans think the Bible should say.

Jesus did NOT teach, "I suffered so that you would not have to." Jesus DID tell His disciples, "If anyone would come after me let him die to himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." (Matthew 16:24) The cross was an instrument of what? Suffering. Adversity. Death. "Take up your suffering and adversity and your symbol of death and follow Me. For whoever will save his life will lose it. But, oh, if you lose your life for My sake, that's when you find what it means to really live." Romans 8:17 says that we are heirs of God, fellow-heirs with Christ provided we suffer with Him in order that we may be glorified with Him. In other words, the glorification process is tied to the suffering process.

Glorification: in the life to come

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Suffering: in the life that is.

Remember: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:5) Think the way Jesus thinks and you will suffer the way Jesus suffered, and you will handle adversity the way Jesus handled adversity.

How did Jesus suffer? He trusted His Father emphatically! When you are in adversity I want you to remember that God reigns over you AND your circumstances as you suffer, and then do what Jesus did: trust Him without hesitation.

Our God reigns, and when we suffer we have to remember everything that comes into our lives has been filtered through His hands. And God is engineering the circumstances, events and people of our lives and He's doing so out of love to conform us to the image of His Son. So instead of murmuring, complaining, or raging against God, repent. Repent: change the way you think. God wants into your heart. He wants you. Trust Him because He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

If you're suffering and going through adversity, surrender to Him!

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If you're not going through adversity and suffering, Praise Him!

If you're suffering look for hope in the midst of the suffering, look for the power of the resurrection, look for fellowship with Jesus in His suffering, become like Him in His death.