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Some Benefits of Adversity

COVID-19 has changed our lives. Millions have been affected by this virus; hundreds of thousands have died. It is highly contagious. Its effects has jeopardized both the health and financial security of millions, and we have no idea what will be its far-reaching consequences. Add to that, the demonstrations and riots, initially prompted by the criminal actions of a policeman on a black citizen, and you have the perfect recipe for global unrest. We began with a global pandemic (which is still with us with no signs of going away), and then digressed into a global state of fear, anger, hatred, and hostility. All of this, and we have said nothing about the usual adversities brought on by ill health, natural disasters, wars, murders, accidents, and the every day hardships of life.

However, *“there is nothing new under the sun,”* Eccl. 1:9, and adversities we face have been the common lot of humanity every since sin reared its ugly head in the lives of the first couple (Genesis 3). Every person who lives for any length of time experiences adversity in one form or another. Adversity by its very nature is unpleasant, but it is a part of life. But unpleasant as it is, adversity can be beneficial. In this article, we want to note a few benefits which often come with adversity, but first we shall illustrate this fact with what goes on in the natural world.

It is a fact that the hottest fire produces the strongest steel. Many people are enamored with beautiful pearls. But how are pearls produced? Pearls come from oysters and mussels. The process of their formation begins when a particle, or an “irritant” gets inside the mullusk, at which time “nature” begins its work, and within two to four years a beautiful pearl is formed. But it began as an “irritant!”

To better illustrate some of the benefits of adversity, let us consider a few Bible characters. The imprisonment of **Joseph** ultimately, and indirectly, led to his family being preserved during a great famine (Gen. 39-46). During **Paul’s** first imprisonment in Rome, he wrote four New Testament epistles which have blessed countless lives for the last 2,000 years, those book being Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. The apostle **John** was exiled on the island of Patmos when he wrote the book of Revelation. For that matter, were it not for the cruel, painful death of **Jesus Christ** upon that horrible cross, not one of us could be redeemed and forgiven of our many, many sins, everyone of which is an insult to the infinite holiness of God! Cf. Rom. 3:23-26; 5:8-9; Eph. 1:7; Heb. 2:9; I Peter 1:18-19. So what are the benefits of adversity? There are too many for me to count, and too overwhelming for me to comprehend. But we shall mention a few benefits which we can realize through adversity and suffering.

1. Adversity tends to make things seem less important. Deep within our hearts we know that *“we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out”* (I Tim. 6:7). However, we often get so caught up in the pursuit of mere things that we lose sight of those more important heavenly treasures. And then adversity smacks us right between the eyes, and we begin to realize the greater importance of seeking *“first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,”* Matt. 6:33.

2. Adversity makes us more prone to spend time in prayer. The apostle Paul suffered because of that unidentified *“thorn in the flesh,”* prompting him to pray to *“the Lord.”*

Admittedly, the “*thorn*” was not removed, but God informed him that “*his grace is sufficient for you,*” resulting in Paul saying, “*therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake, for when I am weak then I am strong*” (2 Cor. 12:7-11). David, who was so greatly persecuted, said “*I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears*” (Psalm 34:4).

2. Adversity assists spiritual learning. David said “*It is good for me that I have been afflicted that I might learn your statutes*” (Ps. 119:71). A bit earlier David also confessed, saying, “*Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word,*” Ps. 119:67.

3. Adversity enhances our ability to serve others. Jesus Christ, having been “*in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin,*” is truly able to “*sympathize with our weaknesses,*” and this emboldens us to “*come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*” (Heb. 4:15-16). Writing to the saints at Corinth, the apostle Paul said “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God*” (2 Cor. 1:3-4). When it comes to encouraging bereaved widows or widowers, those who have “*been there*” by reason of having experienced the same (or a similar) loss are best able to show genuine empathy and speak words that can motivate grieving souls to press onward and upward.

4. Adversity helps build character. Albert Einstein was so correct when he said that “*adversity introduces a man to himself.*” The inspired apostle Paul said “*we also glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance character, and character hope*” (Rom. 5:4-5). Think for a moment about what Job suffered! In one day, he lost all his flocks and herds, plus the death of his seven sons and three daughters (Job 1:13-19)! A short time later he was “*struck with painful boils from the sole of his feet to the crown of his head*” (Job 2:7). Then he had to listen to his friends, who turned out to be “*miserable comforters*” (Job 16:2), in that they incorrectly concluded that Job’s adversities were the result of grievous sins he had committed. Basically, they blamed Job, when they should have blamed Satan! But Job’s attitude was that “*when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold*” (Job 23:10).

5. Adversity enhances future glory. That peerless apostle to the Gentiles said, “*I consider the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*” (Rom. 8:18). When we remember that “*present*” adversity increases our longing for future “*glory,*” then present suffering has great value!

Conclusion:

We do not know the “*why*” for much of the adversity which must be borne by nearly everyone who lives a normal life span. But we, by faith, do know that faithful Christians live “*in hope of eternal life*” (Tit. 1:2) that God’s “*grace is sufficient,*” and that strength is often “*made perfect in weakness*” (2 Cor. 12:9). The awareness of these facts is what enabled Paul to say “*therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong*” (2 Cor. 12:10). When adversity comes our way, instead of woefully mourning “*why me,*” we should thank God that He has made it possible for us to better appreciate the riches of heaven.

—B. Witherington
