

RISE Part 2 – Week 2

How to Understand Adversity

(Male Edition)



By Pastor Jane Evans – March 2022

None of us likes pain or any situation that causes us to feel pressure. The Bible sometimes calls this adversity. Our first response to adversity shouldn't be to try to remove it, but to allow it to reveal our true weaknesses.



DISCUSS

Think about some of the adversity you've faced.

Can you see a pattern in your responses to it? What does this indicate or reveal?

WHAT ARE GOD'S PURPOSES FOR ALLOWING ADVERSITY?

Adversity can be our greatest motivation for spiritual growth or our deadliest means of discouragement. ***The difference depends on our understanding of God's purposes in adversity.***

1. Adversity is used by God to get our attention.

The "cares of this world" are God's stiffest competition for our time, attention, and affections. They choke out the Word of God and drown out the voice of His Holy Spirit.

"Now listen to the explanation of the parable about the farmer planting seeds: The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message about the Kingdom and don't understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts. The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. But since they don't have deep roots, they don't last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God's word. The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who hear God's word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is produced. The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God's word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!" (Matthew 13:18-23, NLT)

When adversity comes, we are suddenly faced with problems and pressures that are too big for us to resolve. Our inward response should be:

"O Lord, I give my life to you. I trust in you, my God! Do not let me be disgraced, or let my enemies rejoice in my defeat." (Psalm 25:1-2, NLT)

As adversity continues and our human strength is drained, Christ's invitation becomes more and more attractive.

"Then Jesus said, 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.'" (Matthew 11:28, NIV)

God's ultimate purpose in getting our attention is to conform us to the image of Christ. On the basis of this purpose, all adversity works together for our good. (See Romans 8:28-29.) Through it, we learn of Christ, who is meek and lowly, and Whose burden is light.

2. Adversity is our assurance that God loves us.

"...because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?" (Hebrews 12:6-7, NIV)

"For our earthly fathers disciplines us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way." (Hebrews 12:10–11, NLT)

When we recognize God's love in adversity, we are able to

"... take a new grip with (our) tired hands and strengthen (our) weak knees. Mark out a straight path for (our) feet so that those who are weak and lame will not fall but become strong." (Hebrews 12:12–13, NLT)

3. Adversity is God's call for self-examination.

"But if we would examine ourselves, we would not be judged by God in this way. Yet when we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned along with the world." (I Corinthians 11:31–32, NLT)

"I correct and discipline everyone I love. So be diligent and turn from your indifference." (Revelation 3:19, NLT)

God requires that we search out, confess, and forsake every sin.

"People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy." (Proverbs 28:13, NLT)

Self-examination must take place in God's Word. For example, if things aren't going well for us, the reason may be that we dishonored our parents.

"Honor your father and mother... that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." (Ephesians 6:2-3, NIV).

4. Adversity is used by God as a way of helping us conquer our pride.

The adversity of contention reveals pride: *"Where there is strife, there is pride..."* (Proverbs 13:10, NIV)

Sometimes adversity can be the consequence of pride: *"Pride goes before destruction, and haughtiness before a fall."* (Proverbs 16:18, NLT)

"Pride ends in humiliation, while humility brings honor." (Proverbs 29:23, NLT)

"For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." (Luke 14:11, NIV)

"... 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James 4:6-7, NLT)

The ultimate event of history will be when every knee shall bow before the Holy God of the universe. (See Philippians 2:10.) The recurring scene in Heaven will be of all the redeemed on their faces before the throne of God. (See Revelation 4:10–11.) God wants us to have that attitude of heart now.

5. Adversity is a reminder of our weaknesses.

Only as we learn how to glory in our unchangeable features will we be able to experience the power of Christ resting upon us.

"... I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud. Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, 'My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.' So now I am glad to boast about my weakness, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12:7-10, NLT)

"The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust." (Psalm 103:13-14, NLT)

6. Adversity is our motivation to cry out to God.

God responds to the cry of His children when they are in adversity.

"The Lord hears his people when they call to him for help. He rescues them from all their troubles." (Psalm 34:17, NLT)

Adversity should motivate us to cry out in the right ways:

- We are to cry out to God **with our voice**. *"I cried out to the Lord, and he answered me from His holy mountain." (Psalm 3:4, NLT)*
- We are to cry out to God **daily during adversity**. *"Have mercy on me, Lord, for I call to you all day long." (Psalm 86:3, NIV)*

- We are to cry out to God **in humility**. *"...He does not forget the cry of the humble."* (Psalm 9:12, NKJV)
- We are to cry out to God **with a pure heart**. *"If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened."* (Psalm 66:18, NLT)

Our response to adversity should not be to focus on outward circumstances, but to realize that we are dealing with unseen spiritual powers.

7. Adversity is evidence of spiritual warfare.

When adversity takes the form of confusion, suspicion, and division, spiritual warfare is usually the cause. It reminds us that we are spiritual beings who have a spiritual adversary, the devil. If we don't recognize when adversity is spiritual warfare, we'll be overwhelmed and tempted to give up.

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you." (1 Peter 5:8-10, NKJV)

8. Adversity is used by God to purify our faith.

"And without faith it is impossible to please God..." (Hebrews 11:6, NIV)

Faith, however, may need to be tested in the fires of adversity. (Faith is only really tested when you are faced with circumstances that are beyond your control.)

*"... Even though you must endure many trials for a little while. **These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold.** So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world."* (1 Peter 1:6-7, NLT)

Faith is essential for living the Christian life because the ways of God are opposite to the natural inclinations of man. Because of this dichotomy, adversity may come from those who mock God's principles, or it may come because we violate God's principles. In either case, adversity will strengthen our faith.

Patience is another benefit of having our faith purified by the fire of adversity.

"Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience." (James 1:3, NKJV)

With this kind of faith and patience, we can obtain the promises of God.

"...imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised." (Hebrews 6:12, NIV)

9. Adversity is a signal to reevaluate priorities.

Wrong priorities may result in much painful adversity, not only for us but also for those who are affected by our lives.

10. Adversity is used by God to test our work.

Every spiritual house that is built must be tested in order to confirm that it is founded on truth.

"Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." (Matthew 7:24-27, NIV)

"...their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames." (1 Corinthians 3:13-15, NIV)

11. Adversity is used by God to test our friendships.

Adversity will always test friendships. It will reveal which friends are concerned about getting and which friends are concerned about giving.

A true friend loves at all times—especially during a time of adversity. (See Proverbs 17:17.) Jesus explained this kind of friendship in his parable of the good Samaritan. The Samaritan's commitment to his neighbor, who had fallen among thieves, continued until all of the neighbor's needs were met. (See Luke 10:30–37.)

In contrast to this parable is the account of the prodigal son. As long as he was spending his inheritance, the son had many friends. However, when the money ran out and the hardships came, the son found himself without friends. (See Luke 15:12–16.)

A true friendship is richly illustrated in the story of David and Jonathan. Their hearts were knit together in love, but then adversity came to David. Jonathan could have chosen many valid reasons for rejecting David, but instead he stood by him, right up to the end of his life. Jonathan warned and protected David. He encouraged and befriended him, risked his life for him, and accepted him as the one who would be king in his place.

12. Adversity is an invitation to identify with Christ.

One of the ultimate purposes of adversity is to cause us to desire more of Christ's power in our lives. Paul suffered the loss of all things in order that he might win more of Christ and experience the power of Christ's resurrection.

"I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death..." (Philippians 3:10. NLT)

This power is available to every Christian through *"... the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him [Christ]..."* (Ephesians 1:17, NKJV)

In Romans 8, we learn our source of power over sin: the indwelling Spirit of God based on our position in Christ. We see that as we walk in God's Spirit rather than in our own flesh, God is able to fulfill the righteousness of the law in us. (See Romans 8:2-4.)

13. Adversity is our preparation to comfort others.

*"All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. **He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others.** When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ."* (2 Corinthians 1:3-5, NLT)

"We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies." (2 Corinthians 4:8-10, NLT)

HOW GOD USES THE ADVERSITY OF IRRITATIONS

The unavoidable irritations which come from other people, our environment, or from our own selves are extremely significant. These irritations are God's way of increasing our sensitivity to the needs of other people, expanding our world of opportunity, and developing the inward qualities which are essential to successful living.



Sand in a person's eye causes an irritation, but the same sand in an oyster produces a pearl.

If we react wrongly to these irritations, we destroy their potential benefits. If we respond to them with insight and proper action, we allow God to achieve His highest purpose in us—to reshape our lives as closely as possible to the ideal He has given us in the life of His Son. (See Romans 8:29)

If we continually run away from these irritations, we force God to choose either to allow new irritations or to set aside His highest plan for our lives. Therefore, if some irritations seem to be rather permanent or irresolvable, we can be confident that they have a permanent benefit in our development and ministry.

Such was the case with the "thorn in the flesh" which Paul experienced. God explains the reasons that He gave such an irritation to Paul. To prevent Paul from becoming puffed up, he was given a "physical handicap"—which was a thorn in his flesh—a messenger from Satan to hurt and bother him and prick his pride.

When a specific purpose is achieved through a certain irritation, God is then free to remove that irritation from our lives.

