

# God's Purposes for Allowing Adversity in Our Lives

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**M**any of us have watched with interest, if not had first-hand experience with, the difficulties our nation is going through both as a whole and as individuals. We have seen the banking industry and auto manufacturers collapse and be bailed out by our government. The Denver Post recently reported that one in seven people in our nation is living below the poverty level. That means that a family of four is trying to live on an annual income of roughly \$22,000 or less. Foreclosures are up as is unemployment. Healthcare costs are rising, suggesting there are many more who are needing such care, as well as increased costs to insure us all. The nation is divided along ideological grounds on topics such as the size of government, immigration, taxation, sexual orientation, the definition of marriage, and so much more. We are constantly bombarded with the debate, and the acrimony between political parties is possibly at an all-time high.

While such issues create a certain amount of stress that we all experience, some issues hit us much more up close and personal. Often, when that happens, the generic issues mentioned above become specific for us. Our health is jeopardized. Our finances are depleted. Our homes are lost. Our job is looking for a job. Our child is pregnant or got someone pregnant out of wedlock. Our marriage is being impacted by divorce. Our children are rejecting their faith and deeply wounding us in the process. Our spouse is in prison. Our child or grandchild was still-born. These types of things and many more equally or more severe have all happened in our church during my tenure.

During such times, we may question God and His goodness, we may grumble and complain, we may seek release and personal comfort, or we may seek God's sovereign purposes in lovingly allowing us to go through these adversities or difficulties. It is precisely at such times that we need to remind ourselves of the propositional truths from God's Word that will renew our thinking and anchor our hearts and minds while we are in the raging sea of disappointment, hurt, and anger that would take us elsewhere.

I thought of at least six purposes found in God's Word. I have discovered that they help me to center my thoughts in His goodness, to be strengthened to face what He sends or allows to come my way, and to think outside of God's dealings with just me — to what He may be doing in the lives of others or for purposes on a much larger scale. So what does God's Word say about His purposes for allowing adversity into our lives?

## To Prepare Us for Future Ministry

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

*"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 affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." (2 Cor. 1:3-4, NASB95).*

What a marvelous gift we receive in the midst of hardship — God's comfort. Often, in the throes of our most difficult moment, we seek God the most, we pray more earnestly, and we listen intently to His Word and to other godly counselors for the insight we so desperately crave. We are introspective and examine our lives and our hearts and our motives, and using all of the above, God gives us insight — insight that is not only good for us (and it certainly is), but also insight that is beneficial to others traveling the same trying road. I once knew a family who lost a two-year-old daughter in a tragic swimming pool accident. God used their experience to help them become engaged in a ministry to other bereaved parents who benefitted from His comfort passed on through that family.

## To Increase Our Reliance upon God

Americans tend to be self-reliant. It is a virtue that is often espoused: the independent spirit. It is what enabled our great heroes to conquer the West, survive the Great Depression, and win world

wars. While a “can do” attitude has its place, it can also run counter to a mature faith. So God sometimes sees fit to remind us of our great need for Him. At one time, circumstances were so distressing for the Apostle Paul that he despaired even of living, and in describing this moment in his life, Paul wrote,

***“Indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.” (2 Cor. 1:9, NASB95).***

Even if our life is taken, at some point we have to come to rest in God’s good and sovereign purposes in our lives. The misleading alternative is to “trust in ourselves.” We do not know what He knows. We do not think as He thinks. At some point we must surrender to Him all of those things beyond our control and power to change or to influence.

## **To Move Others Along with Us to Prayer and Thanksgiving**

Paul did not die in those circumstances as he suspected he might. God delivered him! Yet Paul and God were not the only players in that moment in his life, and Paul’s optimism was revived, for he wrote of the God,

***“...who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us, you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many.” (2 Cor. 1:10-11, NASB95).***

How many of us have seen God respond to our prayers for the deliverance of others, and as a result we have offered thanks to Him? How many of us have been the recipients of such prayers and have thanked God for their support and encouragement and for His answers to prayer? Those who think God is not engaged at a personal level have not seen this truth revealed in His Word.

## **To Mature Us**

It seems counter-intuitive, but adversity can be our friend. That same self-examination and introspection described earlier in this article can help us to grow spiritually and as people. That is why Jesus’ half-brother James wrote in his Epistle, to “count it all joy” when we encounter various trials (James 1:2). Why should we do that? James continues,

***“...knowing that the testing of our faith [that’s what a trial does] produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” (James 1:3-4, NASB95).***

If we do not have the wisdom necessary to count it all joy and to see how we grow, God says to ask Him in faith, without any doubting, and that God gives it generously and does not rebuke us for it. Think about it for a minute. Where have you grown through the adversity in your life? Do you see God’s goodness to you in the process of growing spiritually?

## **To Move Us to Repentance through Discipline**

I hesitate to include this purpose, because for some it can contribute to the false notion that God has a hammer just waiting to nail us when we are wrong. Romans 8:1 tells us that there is no condemnation from God for those of us who are in Christ Jesus (meaning, having trusted in His death and resurrection to save us from our sin). We have been made righteous in Christ, and we have an Advocate, Jesus Christ, the Righteous, who pleads our case before the Father. That same Father is involved in a total transformation in which He is actively at work to increasingly shape us into the image of His Son while we live our sin-impacted lives on this planet. That fact requires God to discipline us — to train us — along the way. Comparing God’s training of us to that of our earthly fathers, the writer of Hebrews wrote,

*"For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness." (Hebrews 12:10-11, NASB95).*

Sometimes, when the offense is greater, the discipline is more severe, but when God does it, it is always done with loving, yet firm, restoration at heart, never with eternal condemnation. He never gives up on you!

## **To Give Us Opportunity to Express Community**

Lastly, believers are told to

*"rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep." (Romans 12:15, NASB95).*

A key word in that text is "with." We are to be in the company of those going through hard times to love and support them, to pray for them, and to encourage them. We feel their pain, and we celebrate with them when resolution comes. Some of my best memories are of when my closest friends stood by me in my greatest moments of pain. How good of our God to give us visible, present reminders of His love.

Whatever trial you are facing, know that God has good purposes in mind — good for you, good for those with you, good for those watching you, and good for His eternal purposes in you, in your family, in your church, and even in your country and globally. His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts. But one thing we can be assured of — that they are good and that they have a divinely-wrought purpose.