

Strategy For Living on Purpose

Thriving IN ADVERSITY



'Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters—that you may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace.' Jeremiah 29:5-7

After King Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem the Israelites found themselves in exile as they were taken as captives to Babylon. It seemed inconceivable to them that the Lord wouldn't get them out of that situation as soon as possible so they could go back home. But God said something interesting to the Israelites in exile through prophet Jeremiah which must have seemed shocking to them. According to the word of the Lord Israel would be in Babylon for a good number of years. As if that was not enough, while there they were to focus on building their lives in Babylon rather than going back to Jerusalem.

There are situations we go through in life that may cause us to question if God is really with us. The external circumstances may seem so contrary to our expectations that our constant prayer is for God to either change the circumstance or get us out of that situation as quickly as possible. However, as we mature in God we see that there are times when He doesn't change things around us, rather His objective is for us to change within those circumstances.

This series as we look at how to thrive in adverse circumstances, we pray that the Holy Spirit will guide our thoughts and actions so we see adversity from the right perspective and respond accurately.

Day 1 Winds and Storms

“And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling.” Mark 4:37

The disciples were headed to the other side of the sea after Jesus had taught during the day and all was well until a great windstorm arose. The Bible is fairly economical with words, so we know the storm must have been quite great. Picture people on a sea that was relatively calm in the beginning and all of a sudden turmoil shows up, to the extent that the waters were already filling the boat so there was a very real risk of the boat going under. But to the shock of the disciples, Jesus was fast asleep.

“But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?”” Mark 4:38

“For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.” I Corinthians 16:9

We can imagine how the disciples must have felt: didn't Jesus know what was going on, didn't He understand the implications or didn't He even care? Sometimes we feel the same way the disciples did, that Jesus is asleep on the boat. We expected Him to have ensured that the storm didn't even come up at all and may even feel disappointed or offended. Let's note one critical thing: the storm began after they began the journey. If the weather had looked bad initially, they probably wouldn't have left the safety of their location. The storm began because they were going to the other side. They'd begun a journey of moving to another location where the ministry would continue and resistance came in the form of a fierce storm. It helps to understand that the size of the storm we face is often indicative of the level of opposition against the opportunity we're engaging. The larger the opportunity the bigger the resistance.

Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace, be still!” And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.” Mark 4:39

Jesus perceived the root cause of the storm so He took two specific actions. First He rebuked the wind behind the storm which was the force causing the waters to rage. Then He spoke peace to the sea. If we don't address the root cause and only speak peace to a situation nothing will change. It's after the wind ceases that calm will be restored. Wherever there are adverse circumstances, first deal with the root cause and then speak God's peace.

Prayer: Father in the name of Jesus I rebuke every wind of adversity raging in my life and I say to everything that concerns me, “peace be still”.

Day 2

Fixing the Mindset

'I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.'" John 16:33

Adversity presents itself differently to people. To one it could be a difficult boss, others a tough business environment, others a challenging period in life. Whatever it may look like, our goal is to thrive in spite of those circumstances and many times the first thing that needs to change in an adverse situation isn't external but internal.

'No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.'
Romans 8:37

'You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world ' I John 4:4

There's a mentality that a victorious person has – that person knows that regardless of whatever they may be going through at the moment, they will win. This kind of mentality can only come when we know who our Father is and who we are in Him. When adversity comes, the default response is to focus on the issue rather than focus on the One who is greater than the issue. However, when we keep focusing on God and His power, it helps us to gain the right perspective. Our questions to God would change from "Why are You letting this happen?", to "What do You want to me to achieve through this?"

'Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.' Colossians 3:2

This mindset isn't automatic, so there must be deliberate action on our part to spend time in fellowship with the Holy Spirit in prayer and the Word of God – not complaining but receiving grace to focus on things above. As we do so, we gain perspective on what is going on, and receive wisdom for what we need to do in the middle of the circumstances. So even if things around us don't change immediately, we would have changed even within the situation.

Prayer: Lord help me to fix my mind on You so I don't get overwhelmed by what's going on around me.

Day 3 Conviction of God

'The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made. One day he asked the woman, "Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?"' Genesis 3:1

One of the things that adversity attempts to shake in a believer is our belief in God's character and His love for us. When faced with a situation that seems contrary, the question that situation is asking us is, "did God really say..." And our response to this question will be based on who we know God to be.

[I always pray] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may grant you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation [that gives you a deep and personal and intimate insight] into the true knowledge of Him [for we know the Father through the Son] Ephesians 1:17 (AMP)

The Bible tells us that we need to have a personal revelation of God in order to truly know Him, with Paul giving us the insight that this is meant to be a constant prayer for us. This prayer helps us so we don't settle for superficial insight and think that is all there is to know about God. It also helps us not to function based on the perspectives of others which may be faulty or inadequate to sustain us in the middle of a tough period. Even as we get to know Him for ourselves, there are depths and dimensions we need grace to constantly pursue.

'But the Lord stands beside me like a great warrior. Before him my persecutors will stumble. They cannot defeat me. They will fail and be thoroughly humiliated. Their dishonor will never be forgotten.' Jeremiah 20:11

'What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?' Romans 8:31

When we start to know Him for ourselves, we know for certain that God doesn't set His children up to fail. He is by our side through the tough times because He's promised to never leave or forsake us and because He is on our side He wants us to win and will give us all the encouragement and equipping needed as we turn to Him. Remember, our victory is in Him.

Prayer: Lord grant me the spirit of wisdom and revelation so I know You deeply, intimately and personally because I recognize my victory is in my knowledge of You.



Day 4

Occupy in the New Normal

“Build homes, and plan to stay. Plant gardens, and eat the food they produce.” Jeremiah 29:5 NLT

When the Israelites were in exile the word of the Lord came to them through the prophet Jeremiah: build, plant, produce. This was very different from what they expected to hear and may not have been received warmly. They expected the Lord to turn the situation around and get them back home. However the Lord wanted them to prepare to thrive in a new normal which was very different from what they were accustomed to.

“From the tribe of Issachar, there were 200 leaders of the tribe with their relatives. All these men understood the signs of the times and knew the best course for Israel to take.” 1 Chronicles 12:32 NLT

Much as we may desire things to go back to the way they were before we experience an adverse situation, there will be times when that may not be an option. Rather than live in the past, God wants us to build a new future. Building requires wisdom, direction, planning and execution, so we need to ask for the grace to build effectively in the new circumstances. The first thing we need is the understanding of the new: what does this potentially mean for us in terms of family, career, etc. What shifts are required in our thinking and sometimes even skill set? Do we need to build capacity in new areas, take on new assignments, connect with a different network? Change can be hard and probably more so when it is forced upon us by circumstances. We need the grace to function as the Issacharites who understood the times and knew the best course to take.

'Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.' Isaiah 43:18-19

It's worth noting that the scripture above was meant to have been written while the Israelites were in exile in Babylon which means that it was addressing people who were familiar with adversity. So there is some similarity in what was shared by Jeremiah which can be summarized: don't focus on the past, look forward in anticipation of what God can still do. This is comforting to the extent that we know we are dealing with a Father who understands our pain and isn't making light of it, but doesn't want us to dwell in it. He knows that focusing on yesterday can rob us of a more powerful tomorrow, so he wants us to stay focused on the possibilities ahead of us. And there are many.

Prayer: Lord help me to take the learnings necessary from the past, but keep my sights on what You are doing now.

Day 5

Principles for Building

“Through wisdom a house is built, And by understanding it is established; By knowledge the rooms are filled With all precious and pleasant riches.” Proverbs 24:3-4

There are foundational principles for building and times of adversity are no different. In such situations three key questions we need to ask for are: the wisdom that is required to build, the understanding to establish (stabilise) what we’re building and the knowledge to make it valuable and pleasant.

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“The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.” Isaiah 11:2

One of the most frustrating things that can happen is to build something that we expect to last (career, ministry, marriage, etc) and things just don’t seem to be working out for whatever reason. To avoid this frustration, the type of building we’re looking at isn’t the one that’s solely dependent on our capacity alone. Rather it’s what comes as a result of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit such that we’re building with precision on the right foundation, using the right materials.

In practical terms what this involves is a lot of humility on our part and a willingness to be led by the Holy Spirit. To be led by the Holy Spirit we have to be in communication with Him, through prayer, time in the word and a consciousness of His presence. What this does for us is sharpen our discernment and ability to be sensitive to His prompts: where and when to go, who to talk to, what to invest in, what to exit and so much more.

“Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, The Holy One of Israel: “I am the LORD your God, Who teaches you to profit, Who leads you by the way you should go.” Isaiah 48:17

He also teaches us to plant (invest our time, energy, resources) what’s applicable in the season we’re in so we can reap the right harvest. As we allow Him to work with, in and through us, our steps come into alignment and we start seeing results not only in personal transformation, but also in our external circumstances.

Prayer: Lord teach me how to build and plant so I get the right results.

Day 6

Enlargement in adverse circumstances

'Marry and have children. Then find spouses for them so that you may have many grandchildren. Multiply! Do not dwindle away!' Jeremiah 29:6

When the Israelites were in Babylon the Lord told them this was a season for increase rather than being diminished. As with the Israelites, increase and multiplication may be the last thing on our mind when we are going through adversity, but this is God's desire for us. Nothing that we go through should ever cause us to diminish in the areas that have eternal impact, rather the tests should produce an increase of an inner quality that makes us look more like Jesus. This is why the Bible says we should rejoice – not because of the trial, but because of who we become afterwards.

'My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.' James 1:2-4

Recall we said earlier that many times adversity comes as a response to a new season we are about to enter? As we come through adversity, we increase in the character of Jesus and also receive the capacity to step into a new season so we can be entrusted with more things that have kingdom impact and eternal value.

'(Jabez prayed)...“Oh, that you would bless me and expand my territory! Please be with me in all that I do, and keep me from all trouble and pain!” And God granted him his request.' 1 Chronicles 4:10

Not only was Jabez born through difficulty, but his name was also a daily reminder of this negative circumstance. Yet he asked among other things that God would bless him and expand his territory and God granted him his request. How much more will God answer the prayer of those who have been bought by the blood of Jesus and have the Holy Spirit resident in them? We don't have to wallow in the wounds of adversity. Instead we can and should ask the Lord to expand us so the situation we have experienced or are experiencing becomes a launchpad for greater heights.

Prayer: Lord be my guide so that whatever adverse situation I encounter leads to an increase in my capacity, expanding my influence and impact both now and in eternity.

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