

Lesson 4 - "Reasons Why God Allows Adversity"

Sunday, February 7, 2010

Lesson Scripture: Acts 9:1-22; Psalm 25; Lamentations 3:40-41;
Psalm 1:1-2; Romans 13:12-14; Psalm 139:23-24

When adversity strikes, if we are willing to acknowledge that God is at work in our life and His desire is that we become more like His Son Jesus Christ; then we must ask ourselves the following question: What reasons may the Lord have for this adversity in my life? God allows trials and heartaches to come into our life as a form of training so that we may learn and be able to function. As we gain new insight and understanding, we also obtain new perspectives concerning the world we live in and the God we serve. By utilizing this new information our behavior changes to what the Lord would have it to be. Since the Lord is the teacher in this training, we must look to Him for the meaning of any lesson He gives us through adversity. There are three reasons why God uses adversity along with a summary in today's lesson.

"Reason 1 - God uses adversity to get my attention." - If you have ever been in the position of teaching a class or even just giving instructions to a child, you know that until you get their attention, you can not teach them a single thing. That same principle applies to us as Christians. Before God can proceed with the instruction He has for us, He has to get our attention. Otherwise, the things of this world will draw our attention away from Him. Our example for this is Saul of Tarsus found in Acts 9:1-22. Saul, who became Paul after his conversion, admits in his own words in 1st Timothy 1:12-14 that he was *"...formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man"*. Saul was named after the first king of Israel who was very aggressive. He was born a Jew, studied in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, and became a Pharisee. He was a Roman citizen, a right that he inherited from his father. Saul had gone to the high priest and had obtained letters of authorization to the synagogues in Damascus. His mission was to bring back anyone *"...who were of the Way"* (the term "Way" is a description of Christianity, derived from Jesus' description of Himself - See John 14:6). He intended to bring great persecution on the Christians in the city of Damascus. Until God got his attention, Saul could not be used by God. After God obtained his un-divided attention by temporarily blinding him and humiliating him (no one could see who he was talking to); Saul became Paul the apostle, he planted churches, and preached the gospel to the Roman world. When God allows adversity to enter your life, a good passage of Scripture to turn to is Psalm 25. Read it today and make it your personal prayer. When the Lord sends adversity your way to get your attention, do not delay. Respond immediately and humbly ask Him what He wants you to do.

How did God use blindness to give Paul sight? How do you think Saul's companions might have reacted?

The second point in the lesson is...

"Reason 2 - Experiencing adversity leads to examination." - In addition to getting our attention, God sometimes allows adversity to enter our lives in order that we might be able to perform a self-examination. After God - who knows us better than we do? No one! Sometimes our lives become cluttered with issues that cover up the real problems that we need to deal with. God sometimes has to help us to be able to see for ourselves that there are things in our life that need examination and correction. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper as an ordinance for us to observe continually, one of the things He tells us to do in 1st Corinthians 11:28 is *"...let a man examine himself"*. We should be doing this on a regular basis. We need to take a good look at those things that impact our lives. What drives us, what motivates us, is there anything in our life that entices and draws us away from God? When we allow negative factors from our past to linger, we end up allowing them to deteriorate in our lives.

If our body is to be a temple for the Holy Spirit, it should always be clean and usable by Him. God wants us to be free from bondage. Old memories of past sins and unresolved hurts cause us to be enslaved. We are in bondage mentally, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. When we become complacent, we can not pursue who we ought to be in Christ Jesus. God has to allow adversity to come into our lives in order to wake us up. The longer we wait, the greater the negative impact when it comes to digging ourselves out. That is one of the reasons why God continues to apply pressure in our lives in order to help us not return to our old ways. Lamentations 3:40-41 gives us good advice where it says, "Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord; Let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven."

How does a person "search out and examine his ways"?
What does it mean to "lift our hearts and hands" to God?

The third point in the lesson is...

"Reason 3 - Effective lessons changes our behavior." - It isn't enough for the Lord to get your attention and for you to do some self examination. Something else needs to happen. You may have heard or even used the comment "Well, I hope you have learned your lesson!" What does it mean to "learn your lesson"? It means that you have identified what is wrong and have taken the necessary steps to correct the behavior that prompted the lesson in the first place. When God allows a "lesson" (adversity) to come our way, He does so intending that we change the incorrect belief and behavior that is at fault. We will never benefit from the "lesson" unless we make the changes needed. We will never grow spiritually unless those necessary changes are made. We will stay in the same rut for the rest of our lives. While self-examination may be painful, we can always rely on the fact that Jesus came to help us carry that burden to the cross and leave it there. He knows that pain is sometimes required to help with the healing and restoration. In order to draw closer to Christ, you must be willing to allow God to surface the rubbish in your life and for you to change what needs to be changed. By doing so, you will have a far greater potential to reflect the love of God to the world around you. Read Psalms 1:1-2; it will give you excellent advice on how to change the bad behaviors in your life and improve the good behaviors.

In Psalms 1:1-2, what do the actions "walk, stand, and sit" suggest about the process of sinful habits?
What is involved in meditating on God's Word "day and night"?

The fourth point in the lesson is...

"Summary - Our continual growth is the Lord's desire." - You will not find any reference in the Bible where the Lord tells us that we are to stop growing like Jesus Christ at a certain point. It is pretty obvious that He is perfect and we are imperfect. We will never be perfect like Him in our lifetime. So therefore, we are to continue to grow like Him until He calls us home. Character building and spiritual maturity are both lifelong processes. When we become complacent, we stop growing. It is sort of like a watch that stops. You either have to wind it up (or put a fresh battery in it) to get it going again. God has to send a little adversity our way in order to jostle us out of our complacency and back into our spiritual growth and walk with Him. God wants the full attention of those that love Him. Things that clutter up our lives cause us to lose our focus on Jesus Christ.

We need to engage in periodic self-examination in order to detect the sin that needs to be confessed and to change those things that need to be changed. Obviously, if we do the self-examination more frequently, it is more likely that the correction process will not be as painful. Everyone has probably seen a bumper sticker or neck lanyard that has the letters "WWJD" which means What Would Jesus Do". This can be good advice to us if we continually ask ourselves that question. We need to be thinking of what Jesus would want us to do in every situation we encounter. Romans 13:12-14 gives us our marching orders.

"...let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts."

We need to continue to move forward. We need to continue to grow. We must always be looking upward to Jesus.

What does it mean to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ"?
 What is the "armor of light" and why does Paul speak of armor rather than normal clothing?

If we are truly serious about God and desire to serve Him, then our prayer should be that of Psalm 139:23-24 where it says *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting."*

Dr. Charles Stanley in his book gives us some thoughts and encouragements for today and tomorrow in each lesson. Below are the ones for us to consider with today's lesson.

Today and Tomorrow	
Today:	God uses adversity to get my attention and to lead me to examine myself and change.
Tomorrow:	I will prayerfully examine my life, asking God what needs to change.