**Keep Growing and Don’t Look Back**

**by Pastor Fee Soliven**

**Ephesians 4:11-15**

**Wednesday Evening**

**October 14, 2020**

**Ephesians 4:11-15**

11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head Christ…

**When a child is born, we naturally expect him to grow, and if he doesn’t, there’s a major problem.**

This same principle applies to the Christian life as well. Salvation is the beginning of our relationship with Christ, but God doesn’t want us to stay immature. After being born again through faith in Jesus, we should continually grow in the grace and knowledge of Him.

**2 Peter 3:18**

“but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.”

Saints, by reading the Bible, praying, and observing how the Lord works, we will increase in Christlikeness and obedience. But the Lord also uses a surprising means to bring us to maturity.

**Adversity**

Adversity is the universal experience of mankind, and it can either hinder or accelerate our spiritual growth—it all depends on how we respond.

Saints, adversity is a condition of suffering and hardship involving anguish, pressure, trials, heartaches, or disappointments. It may be physical or emotional in nature, and either long or short in duration, but it always causes pain. Although none of us want hurt or trouble, if it comes, we have two options. We can waste our sorrows or grow in our relationship with the Lord. Spiritual growth in adversity depends upon two factors.

**1. Our Understanding of God’s Purpose for it**

**2. Our Response to Adversity**

He allows adversity in our lives for specific reasons.

**To Get Our Attention**

When life is running smoothly, it’s easy to ignore the Lord; but in adversity, He suddenly has our undivided attention.

**To Conquer Pride**

Saints, if we’re doing well, we might be tempted to look down on those who are struggling, but adversity humbles us. The apostle

Paul was given awesome privileges and insights, but along with them came a “thorn in the flesh” to keep him from exalting himself (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

**2 Corinthians 12:7-10**

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.

9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 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.

God allows humbling pain because He knows that pride prevents us from being used by Him.

**To Remind us of our Weakness**

Saints, a sense of personal strength and adequacy keep us self-sufficient, but the Lord knows how to weaken us with affliction so we’ll turn to Him for direction and strength.

**To Increase our Hatred of Sin**

The suffering that comes with disobedience reminds us of the awful impact of sin. God sometimes disciplines us with adversity so we will learn to hate sin and practice righteousness.

**To Demonstrate His Faithfulness**

Saints, only in our greatest need will we understand how dependable and trustworthy the Lord is. Pain and hardship drive us to seek Him for help, and in the midst of our suffering, we discover that He is always faithful.

**To Equip us to Comfort Others**

When God comforts us in our affliction, we become a spring of comfort to others (2 Cor. 1:3-7).

**2 Corinthians 1:3-7**

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 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. 5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.

6 Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. 7 And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.

Having gone through pain, we are better able to sympathize with those who are going through a similar situation.

**To Prepare us for Service**

Saints, experiencing hardship and suffering equips us to serve the Lord in various ways and meet the needs of others.

**To Express His love for Us**

Saints, because God loves us so much, He sends adversity to rescue us from dangers we don’t see and to draw us into the safety of a life fully surrendered to Him

**To Change our Direction**

Saints, God uses adversity to stop us from going astray and to redirect our path into His will.

**Luke 22:39-43**

39 Coming out, He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him. 40 When He came to the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation."

41 And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, 42 saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done."

**2. Our Response to Adversity**

Saints, to grow spiritually from the trials in our lives, we must respond as the Lord desires, and He has promised to teach us the way we should go (Ps. 32:8).

**Psalm 32:8**

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye.

**See it as Coming from God**

Our first response should be to read God’s Word in order to view our situation from His perspective. According to:

**Romans 8:28**

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”

Saints, if He’s allowed suffering, He has something good to achieve through it.

**Ask the Lord to reveal His Goal for the Adversity**

Saints, the painful situations in our lives are not random events but learning opportunities. If we glean the most from our suffering, the truths we learn will be worth the pain we experienced.

**Surrender to God’s Will**

Saints, even if we don’t fully understand why we’re suffering, the right response is to yield ourselves to whatever the Lord is doing, knowing that He only works for the best in His children’s lives.

**Rest by Trusting in His faithfulness**

Saints, The Lord always does what He’s promised and is trustworthy in every situation. Even in our pain, we can rest in His faithfulness to bring us through our adversity in a way that pleases and honors Him.

**Biblical truths affirm that God’s goal for our adversity is our spiritual growth.**

**Adversity is the Lord’s most effective way of deepening our faith and commitment to Him.**

After He has brought us through it, the foundation of our trust in Him is strengthened (1 Pet. 1:6-7).

**1 Peter 1:6-7**

6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ…

And with each trial, our confidence in Him increases as we look back and see how He was faithful.

**The area of adversity in our lives is where God is working to bring us to spiritual maturity.**

Saints, The Lord has a goal in mind and knows exactly how to achieve it. He is in the process of maturing us from the inside (Rom. 5:3-5).

**Romans 5:3-5**

3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us…

This cannot be accomplished academically, but must be taught through the experience of suffering.

In Closing:

**Our responses to adversity reveal something about ourselves**

**Our View of God**

Do we think He’s trustworthy?

**Our View of Ourselves**

Do we see ourselves as God’s beloved children?

**The Importance of things in Our Lives**

Saints, if the Lord removes something we want to keep, our response reveals its priority in our hearts.

**Our Strengths and Weaknesses**

It’s in the difficulties that we discover how strong or weak we truly are.

**Our Capacity for Endurance**

Do we have a firm foundation of faith, which enables us to endure, or do we quickly give up?

**Our Faith in God**

How much do we trust the Lord and believe that He uses adversity for our good?

**Our Spiritual Growth is determined by the way we view Adversity**

Saints, we either see it as an obstacle in our lives or as an opportunity to grow in our relationship with the Lord. In every trial, His goal is that we increase in our knowledge and understanding of His ways, and trust in His faithfulness.

Saints, Soon and Very soon, Jesus is about to appear, we are almost out of here!

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

13 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

**The Little Video >**

**1 Corinthians 15:50-54**

50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed-- 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

**Short Movie Slide>**

**Acts 2:38-39**

38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

**Let's Pray!**

**Benediction**

**"May The LORD bless you and keep you, May The LORD make His face shine upon you, May The LORD be gracious to you, May The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you His (Shalom) peace." '**