



Adversity!

by Mark Brunner

Life's Potholes! (Psalm 10:16-18)

I was watching my grandson the other day. He's two and has a whole different perspective on life than this old 55 year- old. It had rained and the driveway had pools of cool water standing around, just waiting to drain away but their time hadn't yet come. As I walked him down the driveway I stepped carefully to avoid getting my feet wet. James, on the other hand, couldn't really see the point to that. When I stepped around he saw it his job to step right in and watch the water splash up around his little ankles. I saw the pools as danger and he saw them as anything but. I guess it's all in your perspective and mine and his are pretty far apart.

But, what about life and its many pitfalls; should we be avoiding these or faithfully walking through them like James?

Here's a story: Since the Portuguese withdrew from Angola over twenty years ago, the country's roads, bridges and transportation systems have fallen into disrepair while the country engaged in civil war. Bridges have collapsed and the roads are full of potholes. On a recent trip to Angola, a missionary was being driven through this impoverished, war torn country to assess the needs, when he noticed that his driver made no attempt to avoid the deep potholes and ruts characteristic of that nation's highways. In fact, his driver seemed to be avoiding those places where it some repair work had been carried out—those

few holes that had been filled in. Curious, he asked his driver why he avoided those few relatively smooth patches of road. “Because,” came his reply, “That’s where the land mines are.”

God sends adversity into our lives not with the aim of getting us into trouble. Rather, he send adversity so that we might witness his willingness to defend and protect us despite the pitfalls. In that sense, James was right. Life’s puddles are- meant to be stepped in. In fact, like those Angolan potholes, if we see one it’s probably a good idea to aim for it. Often we feel that the path of least resistance is the better path. But, it’s not the path that Jesus walked here on earth and it not the path God has put in front of you and I either. See an adversity puddle today? Try stepping in it and find out how will- ing our God is to protect and how safe you really are when driving through life’s potholes.

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Bouncing Back! (2 Corinthians 4:8-9)

Hoses. They’re one of those necessary evils you need around the yard this time of the year. Evil not because of what they do, but because of the fact that you need to rewind them once your watering job is finished. Rewinding hose on a carrier is one of those yard duties I really detest. It’s so tedious and the hose is seldom cooperative about it. As you wind it around and around the carrier, there’s just something about a hose that isn’t very cooperative; almost as if they weren’t meant to be put into that position in the first place. One thing that I’ve noticed, though--Not all hoses are the same. Because of what they’re made of, some hoses are more resilient; better able to hold a wind and stay in place.

It’s often that way with Christians adversity. Some just seem to be made of more resilient materials than others.

Here’s a story: Cork is the bark from a tree that grows in southwestern Europe. A member of the oak tree family, the Cork tree produces a very unique bark which is honeycombed with small pockets of air, trapped by the bark inside of itself. After six to eight years, the bark of the tree is harvested in such a way as

to allow the tree to replenish itself. Because the bark is honeycombed in this unique fashion, one of the most interesting characteristics of cork is that it is extremely porous yet able to maintain its buoyancy. It can be dropped into water and held under, and when released, it will immediately bounce up to the surface. Yet, when shaped in such a way as to stop a wine bottle, despite its porosity, the wine can't escape the bottle.

Similarly, as Christians, we can be held down and under by the waters of adversity, but when released, we surface immediately. And it's that very ability to bounce back, filled through and through by pockets of spirituality in our lives, that serves as a shining example to the world that no adversity is too deep to drown us. We experience the same difficulties as those who do not believe in the living Lord, but we accept these difficulties with a difference: we have the ability to bounce back with the help of our Savior, Redeemer, and Friend. It's the Spirit that gives us buoyancy and the Spirit that gives us the ability to hold back fear when life's adversities confront us. You just can't hold a good Christian down!

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An Attitude of Getting Altitude! (Deuteronomy 1:21)

Having flown many times I'm familiar with how different things are from a perspective on the ground than in the air at 20,000 feet or more. It can be cloudy, misty and foggy as that plane leaves the runway. And, for the minutes following that steep ascent into the clouds, there really isn't anything visible above or below. But, when you get high enough, inevitably you'll find sunshine above the clouds. It's just a matter of finding the right flight path above the weather. What an exhilarating feeling it is to break through that last layer of clouds and greet the blue sky and the brilliant sun. What had been a gloomy takeoff usually becomes a pretty cheerful flight after all. It's all a matter of looking beyond the clouds to what lies above them.

It's the same way when we decide to look beyond life's problems. It's a matter of getting an altitude on our attitude.

Here's a story: Guy, a church pastor, and his wife, Vickie, lived directly in the path of an on-coming tornado. They took refuge in a closet in the parsonage. Guy belongs to a denomination (United Methodist) which is known for moving its pastors frequently, and he was scheduled for a move to a new parish in June. Furthermore, as a church leader, he no doubt encountered any number of storms and conflicts among church members. But a tornado was something else entirely, and hiding in the closet seemed the best course of action for the couple. After the storm passed, they emerged from their hiding place and were astonished to discover that their closet was the only part of the house left standing! Though they lost everything, they had come through unscathed. As the couple stood in the middle of the debris that used to be their home, Vickie's first comment was: "Wow, Guy! This is wonderful! This will be the easiest move we've ever made!" (Sermoncentral.com)

Here's a person who knows something about handling difficulties. Sometimes we have to look beyond a problem before we can move through it. When we adopt an attitude of "getting over it", most often we will. The secret to doing that is pretty simple. Get some altitude on the problem. Look beyond it and put some altitude to your attitude.

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The Light of Our Darkness! (John 16:33)

Since I get up early in the mornings before the sun has risen, I am pretty used to walking in the semi-darkness of the early morning. Several times a week I travel back to the old burning barrel with a few days worth of non-recyclables to be burned. The barrel is at the far end of the property and, in the dark, you have to feel your way for the path. Yesterday morning, however, it was overcast and there was neither starlight nor moonlight. It was blackness as I toted the barrel toward the inky darkness of the back acres. I stood still and waited for my eyes to adjust. Slowly, over a period of a minute or so, they

began to pick up on objects ahead. As I hefted the barrel, I marveled at the subtle beauty of the deep darkness that shrouded everything around me. I was able to finish the path as my eyes slowly adjusted to the light.

The gloom of trouble and sorrow is often like that. Sometimes it takes the darkness to see the hidden beauty of the night.

Here's a story: Ludwig von Beethoven, one of the world's greatest musicians. One evening as he was out walking in Vienna, he passed a cobbler's house where he heard someone inside practicing one of his compositions. As he stopped to listen he overheard a girl say that she wished she could hear a real musician play it properly. Beethoven went into the house and, noticing the young lady at the piano was blind, offered to play the piece for her. He did so for her for more than an hour and while he did, darkness fell and the lone candle in the room had gone out. Outside in the night sky the moon shone brightly and sent its radiant beams glistening into the room where Beethoven sat playing beautiful music. He was so inspired by the appreciation of his music by the young lady and the beauty of the atmosphere in the room that he composed his famous "Moonlight Sonata."

Sometimes it takes the darkness of the night to bring out the light within us. Do you ever feel that your dreams have been shattered and you feel all alone in the darkness of despair? Adversity is God's tool for revealing the light that dwells within each of us. When our life is committed to Christ, it's in these "dark nights of the soul" when God is working in us to give us more understanding of life and compassion for others; and, in time, to magnify the music within us.

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The Sun Will Shine Again! (Luke 10:19)

Like most anyone, I live for the weekends; especially this time of the year. Weekends offer so much more than the week- days since I am able to sleep several extra hours, wear more comfortable clothes and keep a much more flexible schedule. During weekdays I am often in an office from sunrise until twilight. And, since my office doesn't have a window, just being able to bask in a bit of sunshine is a luxury during the week as opposed to the weekend. That's why Monday through Friday I have my eye firmly fixed on Saturday and Sunday. Those two days make Monday through Friday bearable, even full of promise. The promise is that, after the workdays are completed, I will enjoy some pleasant time away from the deadlines and tasks that crowd out my days, Monday through Friday. In that sense, it's Monday through Friday that really give value to Saturday and Sunday. Without them, I wouldn't know how great the weekend really is.

Similarly, its the dark and tedious times of life that offer promise of a brighter day, just around the corner.

Here's a story: Many years ago, a newsboy, thinly clad and drenched by the soaking rain, stood shivering in a doorway one cold day in November. First one bare foot and then the other was lifted for a moment and pressed against his leg to get a little warmth. Every few minutes his shrill cry could be heard, "Morning paper! Morning paper!" A man who was well protected by his coat and umbrella stopped to buy the early edition. Noting the boy's discomfort, he said, "This kind of weather is pretty hard on you, isn't it?" Looking up with a smile, the youngster replied, "I don't mind too much, Mister. The sun will shine again."

Chilling winds of adversity and grey skies of a sinful environment can easily discourage us. But we can always count on better days because we know God is working in our lives. Jesus tells us that "(he) has given us authority . . . to overcome all the power of the enemy" (Luke 10:19).

That means that however dark our days might be, they are only the darkness that shadows the dawn. Our lives have value and meaning despite the sorrow because of the sunshine that is sure to follow the rain. If its raining in your life today, take hope. God's weekend is just around the corner. The sun will shine again.

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No Free Lunch? (Psalm 12:11)

We received one of those promotions in the mail the other day. You know, “Make no investment now. Simply write for this free kit and we’ll show you how to make a fortune by simply doing nothing.” I believe the offer had something to do with buying and selling properties. Usually I throw these things away without even opening them. But, whether it was just a sense of curiosity or, deep down, I was really hoping it would be true, I slipped my finger under the seal and opened it. I read through the promotion and quickly discovered that my “free lunch” had a price tag. The “educational” materials that went with the “kit” were pricey. The odds of making money were slim or none. Lunch wouldn’t be free.

If we’re looking for happiness in this life, is it right to want things we don’t have?

Here’s a thought from Ivy Bozeman: “A whale had followed a delectable small fish called a Capelin into a nearby inlet. The lighthouse keeper told us that he was “beached” in shallow water for now. Our tour group stood watching the poor whale as he struggled in the shallow water, wondering what would happen if he didn’t find his way back out into the deeper waters of the Atlantic. The shallow water of the inlet wasn’t his natural home. Life was far from complete near the shore. In the deep waters of the Atlantic Ocean, the whale had been free, but the desire for the glittering and tasteful little fish had led him astray. The whale’s predicament reminded me of times in my life when I’d followed something that seemed extremely important at the time, and later, I found that I was trapped.” (Ivy Bozeman)

How many times do Christians follow personal desires that lead them into shallow places, and then feel that God has abandoned them? It's not intentional. Like the whale, we're caught up in the moment. Sometimes we follow the shining and tasty things of this world and lose sight of the real abundance God has promised us within the safe confines of his love. And, before we know it, we find ourselves floundering in the shallows of temporary pleasures. A good rule of thumb is if it seems too good, it probably is. Life in abundance is waiting for us if only we're willing to wait on God to deliver it in His time and within His purposes. There is a free lunch, but only God knows how and when to serve it.

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