Persevering Through Trials

Charles F. Stanley - In Touch Ministries
For everything, a season, and in everything, prayer.
A FORK IN THE PATH

There is one thing we are all guaranteed in this life: trouble. It may creep up on us slowly, or blindsight us when we least expect it. But either way, when it reaches us, it causes pain and heartache. We have to make hard decisions, oftentimes without all the answers to our questions. Discouragement, fear, and the unknown all knock on our doors, wanting to come in and stay for a while. But we mustn’t let them.

Whatever the hardship, there is one overarching choice we have to make—to move toward God, or away from Him. There is no standing still. There is no neutral option. Adversity forces our path to split before us, and we will either walk with God or turn down a lonely road without Him.

Now, sticking with God doesn’t always have to look pretty. It may look like temporarily unleashing our anger and frustration on Him. We may cry, beg, and try to barter in desperation. Or, we may have no words to say at all. But we stay with Him. We acknowledge that the Lord gives and takes away—that He is still Lord above it all, and if anyone is to redeem the situation, it is Him.

But turning away from God is to deny Him what is rightfully His. It gives Him no credit for who He truly is. It only adds more hardship and pain, because we walk alone, without hope, without the One who can actually handle the challenge before us. And there is no one else who can make something good from a bad situation.

The greatest trials in our lives can make or break us. It’s imperative that we make the right choice. That’s why we’ve compiled this booklet full of Dr. Stanley’s teachings on adversity. We pray it will help you persevere through trials and encourage you to trust your heavenly Father in seasons of suffering.

From your friends at
In Touch Ministries
For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ROMANS 8:38-39

AN INTIMATE LOOK AT ADVERSITY

The world in which we live is characterized by adversity. Everywhere we look there are disasters, tragedies, trauma, misery, suffering, and loss. But what happens when our view of adversity becomes up close and personal? How does the Lord want us to respond when we come face-to-face with trials? And what is He trying to teach us through our difficulties?

In 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, the apostle Paul described the various forms of adversity he experienced in his service for Christ—imprisonments, beatings, shipwrecks, exposure, hunger, thirst, and other dangers. Why would the Lord allow Paul, the man who introduced the Roman world to Jesus Christ, to suffer like this and eventually be killed?

ALL ADVERSITY IS NOT BAD.
From a human perspective, Paul’s suffering may seem unfair, but God used his hardships and pain to accomplish His will. During his imprisonment in Rome, Paul wrote letters to the Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. His message to the Philippians was filled with joy because he understood that through adversity God accomplishes His divine purposes and works for our ultimate good.

7 CHARACTERISTICS OF ADVERSITY
1. ADVERSITY IS UNIVERSAL. It’s everywhere and can affect any area of our lives.
2. IT’S IMPARTIAL. Because we live in a fallen world, trouble comes to all of us—even believers—no matter who or where we are in life.
3. ADVERSITY IS PAINFUL. The pain can be physical, emotional, or relational, but whatever the source, it hurts.
4. ADVERSITY COMES SUDDENLY. Life could be going on as normal when an accident or an unfavorable report from the doctor leaves us devastated.
5. TIMES OF ADVERSITY MAY BE PROLONGED. Sometimes the emotional or physical pain continues for years.
6. IT MAY BE INTENSE. We may hurt so badly that even those who try to bring comfort feel our pain too.
7. ADVERSITY IS OFTEN BEYOND OUR CONTROL. We may feel helpless and have no answer for why God would allow us to go through it.

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THE QUESTIONS WE ASK
WHEN ADVERSITY LEAVES US CONFUSED, WE OFTEN ASK TWO PRIMARY QUESTIONS:

WHY? Even Jesus asked this question when He was hanging on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). The Lord is compassionate toward our pain and understands our limited perspective and confusion, but He also knows the good He intends to accomplish through our adversity because He sees the future. Sometimes He reveals His purpose to us, but often we won’t understand until we’re in heaven. However, in the meantime, we can choose to trust Him, even in adversity, knowing He always works in our best interest.

WHO? We usually want to know the source of our trouble or pain, and there are five possibilities.

- **OFTEN THE “WHO” IS ME.** God has established the principle of sowing and reaping. If we sin against the Lord or others, adversity may be the consequence of our choices. The decisions we made in the past have led us to where we are today.

- **OTHER PEOPLE.** Sometimes the struggles we face can be the direct or indirect consequences of other people’s sins.

- **A FALLEN WORLD.** Sometimes it’s not so much of a “who” but a “what” that causes our problems. The whole earth is tainted with the effects of sin, and nature can be savage.

- **SATAN.** He hates God’s people. The book of Job reveals that he could be causing our distress.

- **GOD.** The Lord is sovereign and everything that comes into our lives comes through His hands. That’s why it’s important to remember how much He loves us. Even if He allows us to go through pain, suffering, or loss, we can be sure He will have a way to redeem the situation. When the apostle Paul understood that his “thorn in the flesh” was designed to keep him humble and dependent on Christ, he was able to say, “Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me” (2 Cor. 12:9).
HOW TO VIEW LIFE’S TRIALS

Although our pain and trouble may seem pointless to us, God has a divine purpose for everything He allows into our lives. Because He is absolutely omnipotent, He could stop any hardship that comes our way. But if He doesn’t, we can know with certainty that He wants to bring good out of our suffering and redeem our painful experiences. We don’t usually understand what He’s up to, though. From our perspective, it just doesn’t make sense, and the pain we’re experiencing drives us to simply want relief. But to grow spiritually from the trials in our lives, we must respond as the Lord desires. He has promised to teach us the way we should go (Ps. 32:8).
Therefore, we should:

• **SEE ADVERSITY 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, He “causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” If He’s allowed suffering, He can bring good from it.

• **ASK THE LORD TO REVEAL HIS PLANS TO REDEEM THE ADVERSITY.** The painful situations in our lives aren’t arbitrary. We can glean precious truths from our suffering.

• **SURRENDER TO GOD’S WILL.** Even if we don’t fully understand why we’re suffering, the right response is to remain faithful to the Lord, knowing that He only works for the best in His children’s lives.

• **REST BY TRUSTING IN HIS FAITHFULNESS.** 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.

THE LORD’S PRIMARY PURPOSE IS TO CONFORM US TO THE IMAGE OF HIS SON.

According to Romans 8:29, this is what He predestined—or predetermined—for His children. Therefore, He allows whatever’s necessary to make this a reality in our lives. His goal is not to punish but to transform. If we fight against the process, we’re in danger of suffering all the pain without receiving the benefits God wants to achieve in our lives. However, when we yield to His sifting, sanding, and shaping work, He’ll make us into a beautiful representation of His Son. The Lord isn’t looking for perfect people but those who are committed to a lifestyle of obedience, surrender, and purity.
God can use life’s trials to accomplish these other purposes as well:

**To surface whatever is detrimental in our lives.**

We may have beliefs, attitudes, or actions, which are not only hurting us but are also damaging our relationship with God and with others. Since we’re usually unaware of them, the Lord uses pain to get our attention so we’ll recognize and deal with them. God loves us too much to let us blindly continue down this destructive path. His goal is to cleanse us by revealing our sin and drawing us to confession and repentance.

**To test our faith.**

When we were saved, our faith was rather basic and childlike. We didn’t know much, but we knew Jesus had died for us. However, since our heavenly Father considers faith more precious than gold, He wants us to grow and trust Him for more than our salvation (1 Pet. 1:7). To understand how He tests our faith, let’s compare it to muscle strengthening. We begin by lifting small weights and gradually increase the difficulty by adding heavier ones. In the same way, God grows our faith through situations that increase the pressure and require greater trust. For instance, it’s fairly easy to trust Him to heal a cold, but what happens when we face a serious illness, a financial crisis, unemployment, or the loss of a loved one? When we walk through each trial depending on the Lord, our faith increases. Then when a harder challenge comes, we can remember how He led us previously and know He will lead us the rest of the way.

**To test our devotion to God.**

Commitment to the Lord is revealed by our willingness to obey Him. When He gives us a challenging situation that seems beyond our ability, we must choose whether to obey His will or go our own way. He’s given us His Spirit to enable and strengthen us to accomplish whatever He’s calling us to do. The apostle Paul was willing to endure his “thorn in the flesh” because the Lord promised to strengthen Him and use it to produce the humility he needed for continued ministry (2 Cor. 12:7-10). We don’t need to understand all God is doing; we just have to obey and watch Him work.

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**Responding to adversity**

In the midst of affliction, people respond in two opposite ways.

1. **Walk away from God.** If the Lord doesn’t meet their expectations, some people become disappointed. They nurture their hurt and anger, causing deeper hurt and more intense anger that leads to bitterness. In turn, that bitterness poisons every area of life and brings with it misery, both to the bitter person and those close to him.
Many times people blame God for not preventing the situation. They might even doubt the reality of God. Since the Lord let adversity happen, they question whether or not He is who the Bible says He is. Some people end up rejecting the Bible entirely. When people’s partial knowledge of Scripture and God’s ways lead to unmet expectations, they close their Bibles thinking that He doesn’t keep His promises. The problem is not God’s faithfulness but their interpretation of His promises in accordance with their own plans.

At worst, some people turn their backs on God permanently. They cannot accept a hardship or loss in their lives and become so angry with the Lord that they never return to Him. People waste their lives when they walk away from God and His Word, and forfeit all the good plans He had for them.

2. WALK INTO A DEEPER RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. Instead of turning away from the Lord, the better option is to draw close to Him in adversity. This approach results in an unshakable faith and enduring patience. In the midst of our pain, the Lord proves Himself trustworthy, not to do what we want, but to keep His promises and stay with us through the suffering. And when we understand that God is with us and has a purpose for our adversity, He gives us the patience to wait for His perfect timing. We can trust Him because He will never prolong our suffering beyond what is necessary and will see us through till the end.

God does not leave us alone in our suffering. God told Joshua to be strong and courageous because He would be with him wherever he went (Josh. 1:9). This same promise is ours today. Each time we trust the Lord in times of adversity, we gain courage to persevere and to face the next challenge with confident faith.
Adversity also prompts us to examine our lives. As we turn to the Lord in our pain and difficulties, He reveals sin and wrong thinking so we can repent, be cleansed, and live a holy life. This is one of the ways He conforms us to the likeness of His Son and changes our desires so we don’t want anything in our lives that does not fit our holy identity as His children. The Bible calls us saints and that is how we should act and see ourselves (1 Cor. 1:2). Having been trained through adversity, holiness becomes more than a word, but an obedient lifestyle. It’s not a sinless life but one that is fully committed to Christ and has no desire to sin against Him.

As we draw closer to God in times of hardship, we develop a love for His Word. In fact, our first response to adversity should be to open the Scripture, asking the Lord what He desires to say to us. The Bible is our most precious possession because it’s God’s voice speaking to us in written language, giving us encouragement, direction, comfort, and correction. When we approach life with a surrendered will, a determination to follow Christ, and firm faith in His Word, we’ll accept God’s dealings with us, even if they include pain and hardship, knowing that His goal is to make us holy and useful for His purposes. When we have this attitude toward adversity, our witness for Christ attracts other people to Him.

**HOW TO TURN A CRISIS INTO AN OPPORTUNITY**

Our heavenly Father always has a purpose for adversity in our lives, and we can profit from it if we respond correctly. Here are 15 ways you can make the most of a trying situation:

1. **Trust that God is working everything in your life for your good.** [Rom. 8:28]

2. **Believe that our heavenly Father is in control of everything.**
   When you and I believe in God’s sovereignty, it’s easier to retain our hope—even if we don’t understand why we are suffering.

3. **Accept that the Lord’s ways are higher than ours.** [Isa. 55:8-9]
   Don’t lose heart by questioning God’s intentions; instead, trust that He is good and intimately involved in your life.

4. **Refuse to make quick judgments in the midst of a crisis.**
   Ask, “God, what are You doing in my life?”

5. **Focus on the Father instead of the crisis.**
   Meditate on Scripture, which fuels your awareness of the Father’s comfort and unconditional love.
6. **AVOID DWELLING ON THE PAIN.**
   It’s normal to feel loss and suffering, but instead of fixating on the grief, go to the ultimate source of strength—the Word of God [Ps. 103:19].

7. **RECALL PAST CRISES AND THE OPPORTUNITIES THAT FOLLOWED.**
   Seeing God’s handiwork through past hardships will encourage you in your current trial (See Rom. 8:29.)

8. **DON’T HOLD ON TO YOUR ANGER.**
   Even if you feel upset at first, don’t let that emotion take root in your life. Releasing your irritation frees you to see God’s purpose in your circumstances.

9. **SUBMIT YOURSELF TO GOD’S WILL.**
   Joseph faced every trial with a humble heart that was willing to grow and learn. When we believe the Lord’s promises, we are also motivated to surrender to His will in every situation.

10. **DEMONSTRATE A SPIRIT OF GRATITUDE.**
    Even in the darkest valley, knowing the Lord has good plans for your life is a powerful motivator of thankfulness.

11. **DETERMINE TO VIEW THE TRIAL AS A CHANCE TO SEE GOD AT WORK.**
    Choose to approach the situation with hope and a desire to learn.

12. **REFUSE TO LISTEN TO UNSCRIPTURAL INTERPRETATIONS OF YOUR SITUATION.**
    No matter how well-meaning others are, they are not in your exact situation. Ask God how you are to respond to adverse circumstances.

13. **REMAIN IN CONSTANT PRAYER, LISTENING FOR THE FATHER’S INSTRUCTIONS.**
    God will often use hardship to draw you closer to Himself. Pain, trials, and suffering are all used by the Father to develop your intimate relationship with Him.

14. **DO NOT GIVE IN TO FLUCTUATING EMOTIONS.**
    When you pray and your situation doesn’t change, you may want to give up on God. But remember that feelings are often the enemy of obedience. We ought to keep praying, trusting God to answer in His time and in His way.

15. **OBEY GOD AND LEAVE ALL THE CONSEQUENCES TO HIM.**
    No matter what, know that the Father loves you and is in control. You by trusting your entire life to Him.

We may not have a choice regarding affliction, but when it comes, we must decide how to respond. We can either yield to it, knowing that the Lord has something good in mind, or we can turn away from Him, live in rebellion, and waste our lives. What will you choose? 🙏
A PRAYER FOR THE REDEMPTION OF OUR TRIALS

DEAR HEAVENLY FATHER,

We thank You for walking with us through hard times. Help us to see our circumstances from Your perspective and teach us to trust You when we don’t see clearly. Redeem our most painful experiences and use them to make something good. Remind us that our troubles are only for a season, and that You will give us the grace and strength to persevere if we hold fast to You. We are grateful for Your presence and can find peace in the storms of life because You are always there for us. You do not leave or forsake Your children, and we know that we will receive blessings when we stay faithfully at Your side. Thank You for Your divine love, care, and protection. Amen.

IF YOU’D LIKE TO KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, VISIT INTOUCH.ORG/BELIEVE. You can also contact us at intouch.org/contact or call 1-800-789-1473.

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Our Guidebook for Adversity
Printable Scriptures

The Word of God shows us how to walk through times of adversity. It reminds us of His love, tells us about His purposes for trials, encourages us to endure, and strengthens us in the process. One of the primary reasons we struggle in adversity and give in to despair and hopelessness is ignorance of the Scriptures. The Lord wants to help us through affliction, but we must open His Word to receive His guidance, comfort, and assurance. Here are a few printable verses to get you started, and encourage you during life's toughest moments.

- ‘Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand’
  Isaiah 41:10

- “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world”
  John 16:33

- For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.
  2 Corinthians 1:5

- God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble
  Psalm 46:1

- “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”
  1 Peter 4:12-14

- “Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal”.
  2 Corinthians 4:16-18

- Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.
  James 1:2-4

- No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.
  1 Corinthians 10:13

- Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you. He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.
  Psalm 55:22

- For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.
  Romans 8:18