

ADVERSITY: AN OPPORTUNITY TO GROW

By Austin Pryor

As a financial advisor for more than 40 years, I have witnessed many shifts in the economy, sometimes happening very rapidly. When economic factors make sudden changes, many investors feel a very uncomfortable emotion – fear. It is hard to feel confident about investments when factors outside our control wreak havoc on the financial markets.

Even those who worship Jesus Christ can feel distress when adversity strikes, whether it affects our finances or other areas of our lives. Most Christians, at one time or another, would like to ask God why He allows pain and disappointment to touch His children. Perhaps His answer would be: “Those things happened because I was answering your prayers, to give you what you asked for!”

As you consider adverse events in a typical day, can you imagine God saying to you:

“You prayed that you could become mature, didn’t you? I’m teaching you how to depend on me more.”

“You prayed for more faith, didn’t you? I’m giving you a chance to trust me more.”

“You prayed that you might know Me better, didn’t you? I’m helping you to seek Me more.”

“You prayed that you might glorify me with your life, didn’t you? I’m refining you more.”

When our prayers contain such “spiritual” requests, we can have confidence we are praying according to God’s will. We expect Him to grant us qualities of the Christian life we are seeking. But subconsciously we might also be thinking God will answer them with a kind of supernatural lightning bolt. Something like Him saying, “Well, bless your heart, dear child, here’s all the faith, love and Christlikeness you will ever need.” Zap! But it does not usually work that way.

Do you want to mature in your Christian walk? Then expect some suffering. “Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Romans 5:3-5).

Do you want to have your faith strengthened? Then expect your faith to be tested. “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:2-4).

Do you want to know God better? Then expect to give up the things of this world that are holding you back. “I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of

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knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, so that I may gain Christ and be found in him.... I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings” (Philippians 3:8-10).

Do you want to receive His praise for your life? Then expect to go through trials. “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Peter 1:6-7).

Austin Pryor has more than 40 years of experience advising investors and is the founder of the Sound Mind Investing newsletter and website. He's the author of The Sound Mind Investing Handbook which enjoys the endorsements of respected Christian teachers with more than 100,000 copies sold. Austin lives in Louisville, Kentucky, with his wife Susie.

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. What is your typical response when the economy unexpectedly turns downward, and it appears your own finances will be adversely affected?
2. In general, how do you respond to adversity, not only financial problems but also in other areas of your life – professional setbacks, health issues, conflict in the home, sudden emergencies?
3. Do you agree that God can use – might even orchestrate – difficult times in our lives because He has a greater purpose He intends to accomplish? Explain your answer.
4. How do you think faith and adversity are connected? Can you give any examples of this from your own experience?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages: Psalm 37:3-7; Proverbs 3:5-6; Jeremiah 29:11, 33:3, 32:40-41; Daniel 4:35

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