

## **HOW TO RESPOND TO ADVERSITY**

### **Philippians 4:4-7**

**By Andy Manning**

#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. A few months ago as I was preparing a sermon in my office on a Thursday afternoon, my daughter knocked on my door. She said, “Dad, the movie theater is closing!” Our church had been meeting at Celebrity Theaters for years, and without warning, we heard through Facebook that the theater was closed. Not closing soon, but closed. That was a problem. Where was the church going to meet? That was not a fun position to be in. That was not a great day for me.
2. All of us will experience days and seasons like that. We will all face adversity. You might hear that you or someone you know has cancer. You might get fired or laid off. You might fail an important class in school. You might have serious marriage problems. Someone important to you might die. You might lose an important customer to a competitor. The stock market may tank, and you may lose a lot of your savings. All of us will experience problems, trials, trouble, pain, suffering, adversity.
3. How should we respond?
4. I can tell you how we shouldn’t respond. We don’t want to be shaken.
5. **1 Thessalonians 3:2-3** “And we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s coworker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you concerning your faith, so that no one will be shaken by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.”
  - i. Paul is writing to the Thessalonians. He said that he sent Timothy, a fellow pastor, to strengthen and encourage them in their faith, so that they would not be shaken by their trials and troubles.
  - ii. God wants us to be able to walk through adversity without being shaken.
  - iii. What does it mean to be shaken?
6. To get angry with God and run away from Him. To self-medicate with drugs and alcohol. To try to cover the pain with sin. To try to solve the problem with sin. To panic with fear and worry and anxiety. To lose your faith in God. To get angry and bitter, taking it out on those around us. To seek revenge. To get depressed. To end our lives.
7. So, how should we respond? Or better yet, how can we make sure that we don’t respond the wrong way?
8. Let me start with a story about Jesus (Mark 4:35-41). After a day of teaching, Jesus and His disciples got in a boat and decided to cross over the sea of Galilee. A great windstorm arose. The waves were breaking over the boat. The water was being swamped. The disciples were terrified. They thought they were

going to die. Where was Jesus? Jesus was in the very back of the boat asleep. How in the world could He sleep through such a storm? There are two possible answers. One, He was a hard sleeper. Some people can sleep through anything. Maybe He was exhausted, so He was in a deep sleep. Two, maybe He was at perfect peace. He felt such perfect peace in His heart and mind, no worry, no fear, no anxiety, no panic, just peace, that He slept through it. I think it was the latter, because when His disciples woke Him up in a panic, Jesus said, “Why are you afraid?” Jesus was in the midst of a violent storm, and yet He was at perfect peace.

9. What if we could learn to respond to adversity like that? With perfect peace. Perfect confidence. Perfect contentment. Not panic. Not worry. Not anger. Not fear. Not sin. Perfect peace.
10. The Bible says that we can, and it tells us exactly how to do that.

## II. **TEXT: Philippians 4:4-7**

1. 4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

## III. **WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU ENTER A STORM**

### 1. **Rejoice in the Lord always.**

- i. **Philippians 4:4** “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”
- ii. To *rejoice* is to express your incredible happiness.
- iii. To rejoice *in the Lord* is to express your incredible happiness about God. It means to celebrate who God is, and your relationship with Him. It means to praise and worship and adore God.
- iv. To rejoice in the Lord *always* means to praise and worship God during your entire experience of adversity.
- v. When you enter the storm, the first thing you should do is to worship. Rejoice in the Lord. Celebrate the Lord. Celebrate that...
  1. God is love (1 Jn 4:8). He will always do what is best for you.
  2. God is in control (Jn 3:27). Nothing can happen to You without His permission.
  3. God will work all things together for your good (Rm 8:28).
  4. God is almighty (1 Sam 14:6). There is no problem that He can't solve; no need that He can't meet.
  5. God will take care of you (Phil 4:19). He will meet your needs.
  6. God has a place in heaven prepared for you (Jn 14:1-4). Even if this experience is terribly painful and ends in death, you can look forward to spending eternity with God in heaven.

7. God is all-knowing (Pr 5:21). He knows and sees exactly what you are going through.
- vi. Now, this is counterintuitive. This is the opposite of what we feel like doing when we enter a storm. It makes sense to praise God when life is good; when we experience a victory, a breakthrough, a win; when we get through the storm. When we enter a storm we get angry, we worry, we panic, we self-medicate. But the Bible tells us that we should praise God not just when we emerge from the storm, but all during the storm.
- vii. Why does God want us to rejoice in the Lord during hard times?
  1. It puts our problems in the proper perspective.
  2. When you read the story of David and Goliath, what stands out is David's amazing confidence. He was not afraid of Goliath. He was eager to take on the giant, even though he was just a boy. Why? Because David didn't compare Goliath to himself; He compared Goliath to God. David said, "Who does this jerk think he is? He is talking trash about almighty God!" And compared to God, Goliath appeared like a harmless housefly.
  3. When we don't take time to rejoice in the Lord, our problems seem huge; scary; deadly; insurmountable; unassailable.
  4. But when you rejoice in the Lord, it causes you to see your problem in the light of God's greatness. And when you compare your problem to almighty God, your problem is nothing more than a temporary annoyance. It will give you the strength and confidence to conquer it.
- viii. Notice that Paul gives this command twice in one verse.
  1. **Philippians 4:4** "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"
  2. Why twice? Two reasons. One, because it is so important. And two, because it is not natural. It will be hard. But if you want to experience God's peace, then rejoice in the Lord always!

**2. Let your graciousness be known to everyone.**

- i. **Philippians 4:5** "Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near."
- ii. To be gracious is to be marked by kindness and courtesy (Merriam-Webster). It means kind, polite, and generous (Oxford). It means behaving in a pleasant, polite, and calm way (Cambridge).
- iii. In other words, when you go through hard times, continue to treat people right. Continue to be respectful, polite, kind, and courteous. Continue to be nice.
- iv. The temptation when we go through hard times is to throw the fruit of the Spirit out the window. Forget nice. Forget kindness. Forget

gentleness. Forget patience. Forget people's feelings. We get rude. We get loud. We get selfish. We get inconsiderate. We get mean. We get harsh. We raise our voice. We blow a fuse. And we hurt people.

- v. The old saying is true: "Hurt people hurt people."
- vi. When we are hurting, the natural thing to do is to hurt the people around us. Not necessarily on purpose, but we just stop caring about the people around us and focus all of our attention on ourselves. We stop being careful with our words. We stop being considerate. And we hurt others.
- vii. Instead, when you are going a hard time, continue to be gracious. Continue to be Christlike. And if you screw up, which is bound to happen from time to time, then apologize. People will tend to give you more slack when you are going through a hard time, but that doesn't mean you are off the hook. You still need to try to be gracious, and apologize when you blow it.
- viii. This will help you to increase your influence in the lives of people around you. When people see that you are nice and polite, even when you are going through a hard time, their respect for you will grow.
- ix. Notice the rest of verse 5.
- x. **Philippians 4:5** "Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near."
- xi. What does He mean the Lord is near? The word "near" means close in time, or in proximity. Some translators think it means that the Lord is coming soon. But if that's what Paul meant, then he was wrong. That was written two thousand years ago, and Christ still hasn't returned. I believe Paul is saying that the Lord is near in proximity. He is with you. What does that have to do with being gracious? I believe what Paul is saying is that even though you are going through a hard time, God is still watching how you treat others, and He will still hold you accountable. Just because you are going through a hard time doesn't mean you are exempt from treating people right. God still expect you to treat people right, and He is near; He is watching and will hold you accountable.
- xii. In other words, in the midst of your adversity, you still need to treat people right, because God is watching.

### **3. Don't worry about anything.**

- i. **Philippians 4:6** "Don't worry about anything."
- ii. This verse tells us what not to do. Don't worry. Don't be anxious.
- iii. What is worry? To keep thinking about unpleasant things that might happen or about problems that you have (Oxford). It is to feel nervous and upset because you keep thinking about a problem that you have or could have in the future (MacMillan).

- iv. My personal definition: Worry is freaking out and stressing out about what might happen, so much so that you are distracted from your mission and responsibilities, and you are blocked from enjoying the riches that you have in Christ.
- v. My second personal definition: Worry is a perpetual, consuming fear of what might happen.
  - 1. Worry is perpetual fear. It is non-stop. It is on-going. It doesn't go away. It stays with you all day and all night; it is with you at home, at church, at work, and at the gym.
    - a. Researchers at the University of Idaho Counseling and Testing Center say worry is the act of continually repeating the same thinking pattern over and over (<https://www.christianpost.com/news/are-you-a-worry-wart.html>).
  - 2. Worry is a consuming fear. It dominates your mind, your emotions, and your energy. Worry is a single-minded focus on a threat. When you are worried, it is hard to focus on anything else. It's hard to pray, to sleep, to work, to listen to a sermon, to praise, to enjoy life.
- vi. The word "worry" comes from the Old English word *wyrge*, which originally meant to strangle. When you worry, it feels like you are being strangled. I can literally cause you to be short of breath.
- vii. The Greek word for worry means to cut the heart in pieces (Thomas Watson). Worry is emotionally painful. It is a terrible state to be in.
- viii. Worry can cause physical problems like an upset stomach, headaches, and muscle tension. It interferes with your appetite, sleep, and job performance. It's no wonder that many people try to cope with the pain of worry by seeking relief in harmful lifestyle choices such as overeating, smoking, or drugs and alcohol.
- ix. **George Burns** "If you ask me what is the single most important key to longevity, I would have to say it is avoiding worry, stress, and tension. And if you didn't ask me, I'd still have to say it."
- x. And it's also no wonder that the Bible tells us not to worry.
- xi. In Matthew 6:25-34, in Jesus' greatest sermon – the Sermon on the Mount – He said not to worry.
- xii. **Matthew 6:25-34** "25 "Therefore I tell you: Don't worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 Consider the birds of the sky: They don't sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth more than they? 27 Can any of you add one moment to his life span by worrying?"

28 And why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wildflowers of the field grow: They don't labor or spin thread. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these. 30 If that's how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won't he do much more for you—you of little faith? 31 So don't worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' 32 For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. 34 Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

- xiii. In this passage Jesus gives us five reasons why we must not worry:
1. It distracts you from what is most important.
    - a. **Matthew 6:25** "Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing?"
    - b. When we worry, we focus on temporal earthly things instead of spiritual things.
  2. It is unnecessary since God promises to care for you.
    - a. **Matthew 6:26** "Consider the birds of the sky: They don't sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth more than they?"
    - b. God feeds the birds, and clothes the wildflowers, and you are far more important to God than they are.
    - c. **Matthew 6:33** "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you."
    - d. You just need to focus on your relationship with God, and He will take care of the rest.
  3. It doesn't help.
    - a. **Matthew 6:27** "Can any of you add one moment to his life span by worrying?"
  4. It is an act of atheism.
    - a. **Matthew 6:32** "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them."
    - b. When you worry, you act like Gentiles who don't believe in God.
    - c. Worry is functional atheism. When we worry, we act like God isn't in control, like He doesn't love us, like He can't or won't take care of us.

5. It distracts you from the present.
  - a. **Matthew 6:34** “Therefore don’t worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”
  - b. If you are focused on tomorrow, then you can’t focus on today. And today is challenging enough.
  - c. If you are worried about tomorrow, you can’t be the husband, the father, the man, the woman, the student that you need to be today.

**4. In everything, present your requests to God.**

- i. **Philippians 4:6** “Don’t worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”
- ii. So, the Bible tells us not to worry. But it’s hard not to worry. That’s almost like saying, “Stop being hungry. Or stop being lonely.” It’s like telling you to stop feeling a certain way. The only way you can stop worrying is if you intentionally replace it with another activity. That brings us to prayer. Instead of worrying, pray.
- iii. How do we respond to problems? Pray.
- iv. This verse gives us three synonyms for prayer: prayer, petition, and requests. All of them essentially mean the same thing.
- v. When you enter a storm, pray about it.
- vi. And anytime you are tempted to worry, stop and pray.
- vii. **1 Peter 5:7 (NLT)** “Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.”
  1. The word “worries” in this verse is the same Greek word as in Philippians 4:6. When you are tempted to worry, give it to God. Pray about it.
- viii. I love Philippians 4:6 says “in everything.” There is nothing too big to pray about, and nothing too small to pray about.
  1. **Unknown** “There is nothing too great for God’s power, and nothing too small for his fatherly care.”
- ix. There are countless stories in the Bible about the power of prayer.
  1. I love the story of King Hezekiah of Judah. He was a very godly man. He became terminally ill with a skin infection or disease. The prophet Isaiah told him, “Set your house in order, for you are about to die.” Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, and wept, and prayed for healing. Before Isaiah left the room, God gave him a message for Hezekiah. God added fifteen more years to his life (2 Ki 20).
  2. Or what about the story of Hannah. She was childless, and she was teased and ridiculed for it. One year when they went to the

temple for worship, she prayed to the Lord for a child and wept with many tears. God helped her conceive, and she had a son named Samuel, who became a prophet and judge of Israel (1 Sam 1).

- x. While prayer does change things, it also does something else. It is therapeutic. It helps you to not worry. It helps you to experience God's peace in the midst of storms.
- xi. **M. R. Vincent** "Peace is the fruit of believing prayer."
- xii. What happens if you pray, but it doesn't make you feel any better? You keep on praying. You ask others to pray for you. And you pray with others.

## 5. Give thanks.

- i. **Philippians 4:6** "Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."
- ii. The last thing to do when you enter a storm is to give thanks.
- iii. The first thing to do is to rejoice in the Lord. The last thing to do is to give thanks to the Lord.
- iv. What's the difference between rejoicing in the Lord, and giving thanks? To rejoice in the Lord is to praise God for who He is. It is to praise Him for His love, His power, His sovereignty, His promises, His salvation. To thank God is to thank express gratitude for past blessings, for the different ways that He has already blessed you in your life.
- v. The power of thanksgiving is obvious. If while you are in a storm you focus on the good things in your life and not the bad, the things that you have rather than the things that you lack, the things that are going right rather than the things that are going wrong, it's going to make you feel better.
- vi. Katy Perry (who is not a model Christian), said that gratitude is what saved her from suicide. In 2017 she broke up with her boyfriend, and she contemplated suicide. But she focused on gratitude. The first thing she does in the morning is thank God for His blessings, and that turned her life around.
- vii. A large and growing body of studies have found that exercising gratitude leads to better sleep, improves interpersonal relationships, leads to better stress and hormonal regulation, and even reduces physical pain. Giving thanks is for mental health what vegetables are for physical health.
- viii. So, when you enter a storm, and the entire time you are in the storm, take time daily to give thanks to God for the many ways He has blessed you. Thank Him for food, clothing, shelter. Thank Him for family,



friends, spouse, children, parents. Thank Him for your health. Thank Him for salvation, for eternal life, etc.

#### **IV. THE PROMISE**

1. To those who take the five actions above, a strong promise is made.
2. **Philippians 4:7** “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”
3. What is this peace? It is the feeling of tranquility or calmness. A feeling of confidence, or a sense of well-being, that everything is going to be okay.
4. The passage tells us two things about this peace.
  - i. It is the peace of God. This means two things.
    1. It comes from God. It is not a peace that can be obtained anywhere else, or produced by anything else. It is supernatural.
    2. It is the peace that God Himself has. God doesn’t worry; He doesn’t panic; He doesn’t fret; He doesn’t vex; He doesn’t fear; He doesn’t get frustrated; He doesn’t lose His temper; His is not discontent. He is at perfect peace. This is the peace that Jesus, the Son of God, had on the boat. The peace of God. And it is available to you and me.
  - ii. It surpasses all understanding.
    1. Moises Silva “God’s peace transcends our intellectual powers precisely because believers experience it when it is unexpected, in circumstances that appear to make it impossible.”
    2. It’s reasonable to freak out when you face storms; to worry; to panic; to get frustrated; to fear; to be anxious. But to be a perfect peace in the storm, that transcends human reason.

#### **V. CONCLUSION**

1. Being a Christian doesn’t mean that God will take away your problems. But God can help you respond to problems in the best way. He can help you respond with courage, wisdom, strength, and best of all, peace.