

Mastering The Circumstances Of Adversity - Philippians 4:10-12

To **Master** means, “directing or controlling; to conquer, to subdue.” **Circumstances:** “events or situations; a condition or state of affairs. **Adversity:** misfortune, hardship.” We may find ourselves in circumstances that we may prefer not to be in. However, rather than mastering our circumstances, we often allow the circumstance to best us. A hint that circumstances may be getting the best of us is when we may think or say, “we are just doing all right *under the circumstances*.” As Christians we should not be under the influence of circumstances but rather be on top the circumstance. I’ve heard it said that happiness depends on happenings, while joy depends on Christ. Many people are intimidated by adverse situations, they don’t know how to cope, this make for a fair-weather Christian mentality. When things go awry, and they will this type of person questions God saying, “Why me?” or “Woe is me!”

The words of our text are the words of a man who mastered the adverse circumstances of his life. We too should heed the Apostle Paul’s example and seek to be masters of the situation. Consider Paul’s circumstance when he wrote the letter to the Philippians, he was not a free man, he had been placed in prison because of his desire to preach the gospel. Paul was a prisoner of the Lord who had become a prisoner of the Roman government. While being in prison at any time in history is no picnic, the prisoners of Paul’s day were placed in dark dungeons where there was little to no light and they were bound with stocks and chains limiting their mobility.

As if those conditions were not bad enough, Paul oftentimes found himself without the necessities of life in his prison situation. How could he be content in such adverse circumstances? In contrast, it is said that while Napoleon was imprisoned at St Helena, he would stand with hands behind his back looking out over the sea from his prison. He was restless, unhappy, and bitter. He had not mastered his circumstance. He did not know the secret. That secret can be found in **Philippians 4:7 which reads, “And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”**

Paul was content for his heart and mind were focused on Christ Jesus, not because his situation was good. Paul didn’t always get it because our text in **Philippians 4:11 reads, “for I have *learned* to be content in whatever circumstances I am.”** For Paul, like it is for us, it is a *learning process*. Just as Paul had to learn how to master adversity we too must strive to master adversity. Paul would not allow his circumstances to master him, but he mastered them, as evidenced by **Philippians 4:12 which reads, “I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.”** These are not only words simply to be admired but words to be taken to heart and emulated. These are the words of a man who is all in for Christ, he has mastered his circumstances we should strive to get to where Paul was.

Paul's laser-like focus on Christ allowed him to become God's ultimate disciple through his discipline in every circumstance. It's easy to be a Christian when everything is going our way but when adversity strikes we can become cynical and think we don't deserve the valleys or lows of life. We may selfishly think we deserve peaks or highs of life only. **Ecclesiastes 8:14 summarizes my thoughts best as it reads, "There are righteous men unto whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous."** We must learn to take the good along with the bad. In the movie *Forrest Gump*, Tom Hanks has a famous line where he says, "life is like a box of chocolates." There are pieces of chocolate in the box that are less desirable than others, yet it's still chocolate. Life is the same way. Every bit of life may not be as we have scripted, yet it is still life.

Some are mastered by adverse circumstances, when things don't go well, they 'check out' - they go deep into depression - forgetting that God is control, and according to **James 4:8, "if we draw close to God he will draw close to us."** Paul reminds us in **Philippians 4:13 which reads, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."**

Let us consider Job. Job was a man who was able to master his adverse circumstances. He lost everything. Satan attacked Job where it would hurt the most. In Job 1:1-22, he loses his children then he loses all of his possessions. He was wiped out financially. He went from wealth to poverty overnight. Job's patience is renowned as James 5:11 declares it. Instead of allowing adversity to master him, he mastered the adversity. Instead of cursing God as Satan wanted him to in Job 2:5, we read that Job praises God. Job did not sin with his lips.

There are many social ills that plague our society. When we life get us down, that gives a foothold to the devil. Instead of turning to God many turn alcohol or drugs to cope with adverse circumstance. Both choices may spiral out of control quickly leading to addiction and abuse which only exacerbates or compounds the situation. We can ill afford to allow ourselves to fall prey to such as Christians, lest we risk all, from our influence to our salvation.

Some are being mastered by ingratitude. When you look at what others have from a material standpoint and are not thankful for what God has afforded you, that is a problem. There are some who are willing to rob and steal to get what they don't have. Can you imagine a CFO who makes 7 figures extorting from his company? This happens often and it makes no sense. Or the Janitor that loses his job by stealing cleaning products that he could easily afford.

I Thessalonians 5:18 reads, "in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." We must cultivate a heart of thanksgiving."

As followers of Jesus, we must master *all* circumstances of life. In time of plenty, we are to be in control. When it comes to money, we must master it by becoming good stewards over what God has given us, rather than allowing money to master us. |

Timothy 6:10 reads, “**For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.**” If we don’t master money, it will probably master us. Remember the rich ruler that asked Jesus poignantly, “what good thing must I do to have eternal life?” (Matthew 9:16 and following) Jesus’ response was for him to go and sell all that he had and give it to the poor. The young man ended up going away sad because he had a *lot* and was not happy with the idea of giving it all away, as Jesus had suggested.

In every circumstance of life, we, like Paul, must be in control. Our lack of control could lead us toward a path of destruction. When we have good health, when we have bad health - master it. When all is going well, and misfortune comes, master it. When gainfully employed or unemployed - master it. There is no circumstance that we cannot master, if our relationship with Jesus is what it should be. If our relationship with Christ is right, we can say as Paul did, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13).” The one who gave Paul the power to accomplish the improbable and master every circumstance, does the same for those that have entered into a covenant relationship with Him by being faithfully obedient. **I John 4:4** reads, “**You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.**” We dare not let the worst of circumstances overcome us. King Solomon said in **Proverbs 24:10**, “**If you are slack in the day of distress, your strength is limited.**” Solomon is reminding his readers that the time of adversity, in reality, is a test of our strength, an opportunity to demonstrate how much faith we have in God. We can’t afford to assume difficult circumstances won’t come our way, we should always be fixing our thoughts on the cross and not lose focus.

When Jesus was put to death on the cross and buried in the tomb, it seemed as though circumstances had beaten mankind. But in just three days Jesus mastered the circumstance of death and the grave. And Paul, looking back on that momentous occasion, penned in his letter to the Corinthians, “**O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? (I Corinthians 15:55).**” The master of all circumstances is able to save *anyone* that willing to submit to his loving will. All of us are or will be dealing with some sort of adversity in life. We can’t let it drag us down and forget our first love, seeking a pity party. Use the power of prayer! **Philippians 4:4** reads, “**Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice!**”