

When an Answer to Prayer is Your Problem

Several years ago I took part in a management seminar in which we were asked to retrace our professional steps and graph the highs, lows and plateaus of our careers. When we finished that exercise, we were instructed to chart our spiritual journeys during the same period.

Once we started analyzing our information, an interesting, though not altogether surprising, pattern emerged for nearly everyone. In spite of the pain of trials and hardships, most of us had come into our own as men and women of faith during the worst seasons of our lives.

In the midst of pressures of every description—from firings to bankruptcies to broken relationships, God was working in us to make us the kind of people we'd prayed to become. Our prayers to become more godly were being answered!

We've always been aware of the character-building potential of desperation. James, "a bondservant of God," wrote: "The testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (1:3-4, NKJV).

There is something potent in our difficulties that enriches our faith and produces in us the spiritual fruit of patience, without which we'd be incomplete, unfinished. We receive intense spiritual training when we face situations in which God alone holds the reins to our success or failure, life or death.

The apostle Paul wrote that he would boast only of his weaknesses. Likewise, we must be moved to "take pleasure" in anything that pushes us past our natural ability to cope (see 2 Cor. 12:9-10).

Unconquerable circumstances will reveal the power of God to us and in us. Certainly, the events that have done the most to mold me into the woman I am today have been the trials, struggles and disappointments I know I've survived by God's grace alone. There are things over which I've agonized in the presence of God, only to have Him reply to me as He did to Paul, "'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness'" (v. 9).

Physical and emotional challenges, limitations, weaknesses and setbacks drive us to God for help. Paul says our frailty draws His power to us.

Our encumbrances are conduits for His strength to flow to us and out to others. Our struggles are reasons to practice endurance and surrender, to linger on our knees until our hearts are persuaded of the truth about who He is to us at that moment.

I'm beginning to see the worth in those things that pain me and humble my heart because throughout the course of my life, they have consistently directed my attention to "the rock that is higher than I" (Ps. 61:2). There I've assuredly found shelter, but also a new level of anointing, authority and power—a higher place in God.

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