



UniAdversity

Learning from Pain and Adversity

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WELCOME TO UNI-ADVERSITY

Education is one of the fundamental building blocks of our society. Higher education is offered by Universities and College Campuses the world over, and young people clamour to be admitted to the course of their choice, the course which will allow them to enter the profession they want to pursue for the rest of their lives.

And we are all thankful for the knowledge and training our education institutions provide, including universities, community colleges and technical colleges. I take great comfort that my accounts are overseen by a trained professional, and when I am sick, I choose to see a doctor who went to University, not some guy who once read a medical book and got his degree from the back of a cornflakes packet!

University offers students opportunities that would otherwise not be forthcoming, and gives them the chance to gain official recognition for the skills and knowledge they obtained during the course. But University is expensive, and not every person has the chance to go to Uni and study what they are passionate about.

In the Kingdom of God, we all get the chance of higher education. Like traditional University, it can be tough, challenging and yes, it too has assignments and the dreaded exams. But the guarantee is there that, if we complete the course and assessments, and if we hang in there and refuse to drop out, we will be rewarded with a degree that will carry us forward for the rest of our lives.

And where is this special College Campus for believers? It is right in front of you and all around you. That's right, you and I have the incredible privilege of attending God's University, studying for as long as it takes, and learning skills that we could never obtain any other way.

God's College is called ADVERSITY, and congratulations, you are already enrolled! This book is the course guide for your entire degree, and if you persevere, study hard, learn the lessons and pass the examinations, you will find yourself with a level of understanding and training far beyond your expectations.

James talks about this training, and he calls it wisdom from above, as opposed to earthly wisdom...

James 3:17-18

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Through God's school of adversity and hardship, you can be trained in life skills that will not only bless your life and family, but also attract others who struggle with pain and hardship and allow you to bless them. Your struggles, your diligent study, your victories will bear fruit not only in your own life, but in the lives of so many people you meet!

You should recognise the plans that God has for you...

Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

This means that, no matter what you face right now, no matter how hard or how painful the road ahead, when you understand the riches and blessing of the Lord that awaits you, you can change the way you see your tough times. You don't need to blame God when things go wrong, and you don't need to feel overwhelmed by pain and suffering any more.

You have the chance, the incredible, wonderful, mind blowing chance to see the big picture! You can choose to see pain, suffering and adversity not as a hurdle, not as an attack and not as a senseless burden to bear, but as a wonderful, God-given opportunity to shine and grow closer to the image of Jesus Christ.

Sure, University can be tough, and it takes time, effort, concentration and dedication to graduate. But the end result, the wisdom and faith you obtain is worth the sacrifice and pain along the way.

So welcome to God's University of Adversity. You are now enrolled, and about to study your first module. I encourage you to study hard, learn the lessons well and not drop out. Your rewards will be worth the effort, I assure you. It's time to grab your computer and text books and head to class, because the Lord has an exciting journey for you to embark upon, one that will make you into the very image of His Beloved Son.

God has a purpose for you. His primary aim is not to make you happy. Not to make you comfortable. Not to give you success in business, in your family, in your ministry or finances. His aim is that you grow spiritually continuously your entire life. He never intends for you to arrive. He continually trains and equips you for the future, and He uses two main tools to do this...His Word and the circumstances you face...

GET READY TO STUDY

God's purpose for us is that we grow and become more like the Lord Jesus Christ in our daily lives to reflect more of Him and less of us.

This is Uni-Adversity, where God uses adversity, trials, and tests to educate you and complete your education, to make you Christ like!

So first up we present the course overview, the orientation as to what God is going to do over the next several modules.

Let's face it, no matter how long we have walked with the Lord, sometimes we plateau. Sometimes we hit a glass ceiling in our spiritual growth. We get mature and think to ourselves, "I no longer have a need to grow or go any deeper in my walk with God."

Thankfully our loving Heavenly Father will allow adversity to come into our lives to move us forward in our walk with Him and cause us to grow in the things that really matter in eternity. Believe it or not, our comfort and our being blessed do not rank high on His list of priorities for our Christian life! In eternity, most of the things we strive for on earth, including money, prestige, power, and even our ministries matter little!

If we will submit ourselves to God during times of adversity we will discover something about our God and ourselves. How we respond to our trials will either make us or break us.

If we fight Him, we are in for a rough ride and a whole load of pain, and probably a lot longer course too.

It's in our interest to pay attention in class at Uni-Adversity. I'd rather not have to re-sit some of the exams to be honest, especially the painful ones. No one wants to take 20 years to do their bachelor degree, do they? If you learn fast, it is to your advantage. God sees our trials and hardships completely differently to the way we see them. We see the pain and struggle, but God sees the wonderful results, the fruit produced in our lives, fruit that brings Him glory and joy for all eternity.

Bodybuilders know that it is resistance that builds true strength. The brook would lose its song if we removed the rocks. So, here's your chance to learn how to make the best song of all!

So let's start Uni-Adversity right now. In a moment we are going to have a look at what the Apostle James teaches about adversity, but before we do that, let's address a common misconception and dangerous teaching about hardship, adversity and pain...

LESSON 1: THE RESPONSIBLE PARTY FOR OUR ADVERSITY

I have often heard it said, and preached, that God is a good God, and He would never let anything bad happen to you. All you need to do is positively confess and believe, and nothing bad will ever happen. If something bad does happen, then you are either in sin or lack enough faith.

This view is absolutely wrong. Bad things happen to good people in our fallen world. It's that simple, and if you don't face some sort of adversity or testing, check your pulse to see if you're still alive!

Don't get me wrong, I'm happy to live a life where nothing ever goes wrong. If I thought I could twist God's arm enough to give me comfort, money, power, fame and fun for my entire life, I would be up for that! But the problem with this doctrine is that, by extension, if something does go wrong, then you must be in sin, or at least have a lack of faith. This is where something in me rises up, because I believe this is one of the most destructive and hurtful doctrines in the church.

I was sharing with some young people recently about meeting Joni Erickson, a quadriplegic from age 16, and one of the greatest alumni of the University of Adversity. I saw a man pray for her healing, and when she did not immediately walk, he accused her of not having enough faith. She replied that she did have faith, but perhaps it was him who did not have enough. It was a sweet answer to a horrible accusation. Anyone who is familiar with this beautiful lady's life can see incredible fruit which God has grown through some of the most overwhelming challenges any human being could face!

There is one place in Scripture when the curtain is pulled back and we get to see the inner workings of God and Satan. It is in the book of Job. Job, a faithful and righteous man who had been leading a prosperous life, suddenly has his home, his family, his fortune and his health stolen from him by Satan. It was a test, a severe test, and Job remained for the most part incredibly faithful.

Now some say that the reason all those dreadful things happened to Job is that he lived in fear, and they quote this verse to back up their argument...

Job 3:25

What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me.

However, this teaching is built upon taking one verse completely out of context! Job lived a holy life, and despite this all this bad stuff happened to him. So why did his finances, family, health and whole life fall apart?

The Bible clearly tells us why. And here's a surprise, the devil didn't start it, God did!

Job 1:8

Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."

God allowed Satan to have his way with Job, a man who was not living a sinful life, a man who in fact was held up by God as a shining example! This might blow your theological fuses, but God set this thing up, and He did so as a test, a severe and difficult test for someone who did not deserve this treatment.

But God set limits. Satan could not take his life, and the test was only for a set time, after which God blessed Job even more than before the test. If you are facing tough times right now, don't blame yourself, and don't blame God. Satan is the guy who does this, but he can only bring adversity into your life if the Lord lets him, and only as far as God lets him.

Whatever you face right now, remember that God never loses control. The battle we face in life is not Satan out of control but God, in His grace, allowing Satan a small and limited opportunity to afflict us, and through it allow the Lord to train us. God can and will use Satan to try your faith, teach you to trust Him more and create Christ like character within you. Facing hardship does not indicate a lack of faith, it indicates a loving God who walks the road with you and trains you to become greater for Jesus than ever before!

LESSON 2: THE REALITY OF ADVERSITY

Adversity, hard times, disappointments, discouragement... They are going to come, sooner rather than later, so get ready to learn. You cannot simply wish them to stop or positively confess your way out of them. You can, however, change how you see them, seeing not undesirable pain and suffering but highly desirable chances to shine for Jesus in this dark world!

So here are some of the lessons you need to learn...

1. TRIALS ARE INESCAPABLE

James 1:2

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,

Notice James does not write, "if you face trials", but "whenever you face trials." There is an implied certainty about that. Whatever stage of life, whatever country you live in, whatever denomination you belong to, you are going to face trials, time and again, so don't think you're immune. If you don't have problems, check your pulse and make sure you're still alive and breathing!

1 Peter 4:12

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

If you are facing trials right now, don't be shocked! Be joyful. Yes, be joyful and be thankful, because God is training you to become someone greater than you already are!

2. TRIALS ARE UNPREDICTABLE

Secondly, trials are not easily predicted. The Greek word used in James 1:2 for “face” literally means to fall into, and you know when you slip and fall it's totally unpredictable. The same word is used of the man who falls into the hands of thieves in the Good Samaritan parable.

And trials are like that, aren't they? We don't see them coming, and we don't expect them to escalate. You cannot always predict a flat tyre, or a breakdown. You cannot plan out when an appliance is going to blow, or what another driver will do. You can't choose when you want to get sick or when your child comes home crying. Trials are random.

3. TRIALS ARE MULTICOLOURED

Problems in life come in a wide variety of shapes, sizes and colours. Some are minor inconveniences, some are major dramas. Some are short lived, others last years. Some you don't even recognise until you're in the middle of them, and some you construct yourself.

The Greek word used in James 1:2 for many kinds is literally “multicoloured”.

Have you ever tried to match colours at a paint shop? The bewildering variety of colours can completely baffle you, and finding the one match in a series of similar colours is a difficult task. The trials you face and just like this, and come in all kinds of crazy styles, shapes, colours and varieties. Describing trials and hardships as multicoloured is a pretty apt description I think.

We know that we face trials of many, multifaceted kinds, but can we know the reason for these trials?

LESSON 3: THE REASON FOR ADVERSITY

We know we face trials in life, some big, some small, all of them difficult in some way, but the \$64,000 question is surely, “Why do we face trials like this in life?” Why can we not just receive Jesus as our Lord and Saviour then disappear into heaven in a puff of righteous grace, never to face another trial, problem or drama again?

Here's the thing... (and this may come as a shock to some of you), God has not saved you for your comfort! His highest priority is not giving you a comfortable, cushy life, free from problems, pain, sickness and trials. The symbol for Christianity is a cross, not a cushion, so where we dredged up the idea that God never allows His children to suffer is beyond me!

James 1:3-4

because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

This pain, this adversity you face, it has a purpose. God has a reason... He is working a mighty work within you. He is not doing this to amuse Himself, and He is not doing this to make your life miserable.

He's making you mature and complete!

Pain can produce positives. Pressure can produce perseverance. Suffering can create something positive and wonderful.

No adversity happens to you except with a purpose in mind... Your maturity of character, your completeness in Christ likeness. You are not facing trials and pushing through pain for no reason, for God's amusement or pleasure. No, He always has a reason. Welcome to Uni-Adversity, now pay attention and get ready for your exams!.

The Eucalyptus and Banksia are two plants that grow in my country of Australia. I have both of these in my garden, and love them both. These trees have what is known as serotinous cones or fruits that are completely sealed with resin. These cones/fruits can only open and release their seeds after the heat of a bushfire has physically melted the resin. No fire, no heat, no seed, no fruit. And it's the same with you.

Yet you are probably asking yourself, “What possible reason can God have for putting me through what He's putting me through?” A great question, and one that mankind has asked since we got thrown out of the Garden of Eden. Here are some great reasons why a loving Father would allow suffering and adversity in our lives...

1. ADVERSITY PURIFIES YOUR FAITH

James uses the words “trials and testing”. These are the same words to describe the process of purifying gold. You heat the gold to the point where the impurities – the dross – are burned off.

Zechariah 13:9

This third I will put into the fire;
I will refine them like silver
and test them like gold.

Trials test us, sure, but they also refine us. They purify us, they make us more mature and they give us more character, including the ability to conquer even greater trials in the future.

Christians should be like tea bags. Our true colour should come out in hot water!

When I became pastor of what is now Ignite Christian Church, we faced a daunting situation. With only 50 or so people attending, the previous pastor had locked the church into a contract from which we could not escape. We had previously paid a deposit on the building in which we meet, but still required those 50 people to give \$250,000 in around 9 months.

This was, in the natural, an impossible task. Almost all the church members were on some kind of social security benefit, and a few were in struggling businesses. I could not see where such a sum of money could possibly come from, and things looked bleak, but when facing this very adverse situation in the purchase of our church building, our leadership decided to step up and believe God.

As pastor, I could have collapsed and cried woe is me, but I made a conscious decision based on Scriptures God had given me, to believe God for the money, despite how exceedingly difficult attaining the building appeared. I saw the situation not as something to be miserable about, but as a test. An almost overwhelming, quarter of a million dollar test.

And God came through for us. To this day I have no idea where the money came from, but God raised the necessary finance in the required time, and I can tell you that across the church we were all built up in our faith!

Most often you cannot choose the test. The University of Adversity chooses what will be tested and when. But you do get a choice... You can always choose how you respond!

2. ADVERSITY PRODUCES PERSEVERANCE

James 1:2-4

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

When you face trials and decide to see things through, you produce steadfastness or perseverance. You learn persistence, staying power, a never give up attitude.

You discover hidden reserves of strength you didn't know were there. You find an endurance you previously never thought possible. You see it through, keeping your eyes on the goal, and then discover the incredible feeling of triumph that only perseverance brings.

Any great ministry for the Lord has to involve perseverance, which means that if you are to become great in the Kingdom of God, you need to get ready to persevere and triumph over the various trials you will face. A stamp sticks to the envelope until the job of delivering the letter is done, and so should you!

3. ADVERSITY HELPS US MATURE

Age is inevitable, but maturity is optional.

Trials and adversity help us to grow and mature into the people God wants us to be. As James says, we can become mature and complete, not lacking anything.

And strangely, God is far more interested in your character than your comfort. He wants to produce maturity not a meal ticket. He wants you complete, not conveniently cushioned.

Through the Word of God and trials we are matured. And you need both. Now one of those things is compulsory, while the other is optional. You can't get away from experiencing trials, so my suggestion is that you had better start reading the Word, or you won't mature as completely or as rapidly as God intends.

I know many elderly, mature Christians that have learned life's lessons from the adversities they have faced, but I also know a few old people who might have been in church for many years, but are still living off milk instead of solid food.

Hebrews 5:12-14

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Trials don't mean that God doesn't love you. They mean He really loves you, so much He wants to make you into someone mature and amazing! He has a plan for you, remember, to prosper you and not to harm you, and God's long range goal goes way beyond your comfort.

4. ADVERSITY REVEALS OUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

God sees everything, God understands every situation, but we can only see our situation and circumstances. Most often we do not have a true understanding of our potential, nor do we truly fathom the situation, the dangers or the opportunities. But God does!

To explore this, let's consider Gideon's call to greatness...

Judges 6:11-16

When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior."

"Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, 'Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian."

The Lord turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"

"Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."

The Lord answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive."

The Lord's estimation of us often differs from our own. God saw Gideon as a "valiant warrior" because He knew what He was going to accomplish through him. God saw the potential in Gideon that Gideon never saw in himself!

And so it is with you. God sees potential in you that I guarantee you cannot see in yourself!

Gideon saw himself as weak and insignificant because his focus was on his circumstances and his upbringing rather than on the Lord. When we believe God, and depend on Him to empower us, we start to become not what we think we are, but who He says we are—His beloved children through whom He overcomes the world...

1 John 5:4

for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

Remember, when we are weak, He is strong! In the harsh light of hardship and adversity, our strengths and our weaknesses are fully exposed, allow God's grace to transform us into who He says we are.

5. ADVERSITY IS OUR CHANCE TO SHINE

Funny how you sometimes mistakenly hit a key on your computer keyboard and it reveals a truth. I mis-hit the S letter, so this heading read "Adversity is our chance to whine." This is a

Fraudian slip, but probably true for most of us. We tend to whine long before we shine, don't we?

Put a bunch of swarthy fishermen in a boat and they look like the real deal. But when a freak storm hit the boat, Jesus' disciples showed their true colours, and their true lack of faith was revealed...

When hardships come our way, do we respond, "God, I trust You to bring me through this"? Or do we tend to say, "I'm doomed, and there's nothing anybody can do"? Or maybe we say, "Why me Lord, don't You care?"

Mark 4:38-40

Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

How often do we say things like this to our Lord? When we get into some trouble, we question His love, not His ability. And yet despite our lack of faith, He reaches out His hand and saves us. Guess He really does care after all.

When the storm hit, Jesus was fast asleep in the stern of the boat, and the disciples cried, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"

How many times have you felt the same way? Life turns stormy, adversity comes against us, and we don't see an opportunity to grow, we see disaster! We cry out: "Don't You care, Lord, that this is happening to me? God, don't You love me enough to do something about this hardship?"

The disciples woke Jesus and immediately He rebuked the wind and a great calm settled on the lake. Then He turned to His disciples and said, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (Mark 4:40).

Faith is a gift, and God has given to each one of us the ability to trust Him. He expects us to use this faith to overcome doubt, fear, and anxiety. Many times, these negative feelings accompany adversity, but that does not give us the right to whine, accuse, get angry at or run away from Jesus.

When we hit the valley of our trials, we are tempted to think the worst and wonder if we will ever recover. Satan loves to tell us that all hope is lost, that we will never achieve our goals. Our situation feels hopeless, our faith seems worthless.

In the valley of adversity, instead of learning the lessons and growing stronger, we often swallow what the enemy is dishing up and focus on our circumstances, and our shortfalls. But hey, we don't leave it there, we then go on to let fear magnify our difficulties until they seem far greater than what they really are reality!

How do you avoid this downhill spiral of misconception and deception? Where can you turn?

Why not turn to Scripture, where we read

Romans 8:28

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

All things? Even adversity? Yes, that's what the Bible says!

So, we must stay the course, continue to trust, and know that because Christ is with us, we will make it to the other side. No matter how serious the difficulty, we will recover, and our final state will be better than anything we have experienced in the past.

So adversity, far from being the disaster we might think it is, is actually our moment to shine!

If your attitude is right it will allow your time at Uni-Adversity to spur your faith to action rather than into misery and self-loathing. When you face adversity with an attitude of faith, you will find that it reveals areas in which you need to act in confidence rather than fear. When hard times come, instead of running for cover, make a commitment to trust God. Because the more you depend upon Him, the greater your faith will grow.

Then the more triumphant you will be! You will shine brightly when others expect you to fade away! Believe me, they are watching you, waiting for your faith to crumble. When you grow in wisdom and triumph over adversity, trust me they will take notice.

Matthew 5:16

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

LESSON 4: THE REACTION TO ADVERSITY

This lesson is going to be a hard one for many of us. It has been said that life is 10% what happens to us, and 90% how we respond, and God has shown me again and again that our response to our trials will either make us or break us. What does the Bible say?

James 1:2

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,

Hang on a minute... What do you mean joy? That's not the normal way people respond to adversity! The most common response to adversity I see as a pastor is for people to get angry at and blame whoever we believe is responsible for it (unless it's our own fault, then we look for someone else to blame). Or we blame the Lord for allowing this trial. Or more commonly, we do both!

The next response to adversity is to collapse and say, "Why me, Lord? It's not fair!"

Joy? You've got to be joking! I guess that means I need to paint on a happy face and pretend that everything is peachy, when inside my life is falling apart, right? Positively confess? Fake it till you make it? What kind of response are you after, God?

The Greek word used in James 1:2 for "consider" is *hegeomai*, which means to consider, govern or account for... Hence some translations say count it all blessing.

Accountants count things, they add things up and balance the books. Sometimes though when we try and count our trials and adversities they just don't seem to add up or make any sense. But counting it as blessings means that, no matter what the trials are, we can add them up to joy and something positive in our lives. We don't have to count the trials, just count them all as blessings!

When James writes, "*Consider it pure joy,*" the word used for joy in the Greek means gladness, calmness or happiness. However, it is not saying get deliriously happy because the trials you face are so difficult. It is not suggesting that when some disaster befalls us, when we lose someone we love or finances we need, when people attack us or hate us or persecute us, that we say, "Gosh, Lord, I'm so happy You have afflicted me so, please dish more out and make my happiness complete!"

What James is saying is that, in the midst of the pain and suffering we face, we also face a choice. We can collapse and have a pity party, or we can choose to respond with a quiet sense of joy, and a contentment that, despite how hard it seems, God is in control and we can trust Him. You don't have to be happy that you face a severe test, but you can be joyful because you face that test knowing the teacher, and knowing that the test is going to yield a great result.

If you face adversity right now, you may not feel any joy yet, but if you know the teacher, and know that the teacher is on your side, and that He is not out to hurt you or fail you,

there is a sense of joy. I'm was not glad that our church faced a difficult financial situation to get this building, but I am glad that this trial produced and continues to produce amazing fruit in the lives of myself, my leadership and the church members.

It is easy to look back and see how you should have reacted. Hindsight is always 20/20 vision, but having the right response in the middle of the crisis is the fast track towards maturity and character. This is the right response to adversity, and our Father in Heaven loves it when He sees us respond in faith to the difficulties we face.

So you face a choice when you face adversity... to react or to respond. Let us examine this in more detail...

LESSON 5: THE RIGHT RESPONSE TO ADVERSITY

There is a world of difference between a reaction and a response, so the next question is, rather than react, how do we respond to the trials and tests we face?

In the midst of pain, suffering and adversity, how can you genuinely respond with joy? Here's some steps you can apply immediately to help you respond rather than react to your adversity...

1. STOP AND TAKE A BREATH

Your "knee-jerk" reaction to facing adversity is rarely going to be a good one. The term "knee-jerk" refers to a medical test for reactions. If you sit on a table so your legs hang freely and strike just below the knee, you will find your lower leg jerks out as a response. This is normal. It is pure reaction, and your conscious mind plays no part in that. You cannot control it, and you cannot direct it, it is an automatic reaction.

And so it is with any adversity you face... Your initial reaction is often without conscious input, and it is difficult to direct or control. When something bad happens to you, your immediate reaction is anger, and you direct this towards someone other than yourself, and often you will get angry at God!

Proverbs 15:18

*A hot-tempered man stirs up strife,
but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.*

My wife Fiona and I started Lily House, a home for young women and girls in trouble, and many of these girls come to us with major anger issues. One of the first lessons we teach them is, when you face adversity, trials or pain, to stop, take a deep breath and not react in the heat of the moment. We explain that their first reaction is never a good one, and inevitably will be something that they are going to be ashamed of.

How do you combat the anger reaction? By making a choice to stop any reaction at all. In one of our local drug rehabilitation centres, any conflict between the residents must result in 24 hours of them not speaking to each other. They have found that, after a full day, tempers have calmed down and people are more rational.

So if you face adversity, do not react with anger, fear, pity or anything else. Take a time out and choose to respond later. If we take the time, our response is often more measured, more balanced and far more easily controlled than the initial reaction.

2. PRAY, DON'T SAY

Prayer is a powerful force if we give it a chance. Prayer is simply talking to God, and He is ready and willing to answer us and guide our lives.

But our great tendency when we face adversity is to start shooting our mouth off, to God and to others around us. Our words have power, and we can easily talk ourselves into further pain and hardship but letting our mouth run off about how we feel. It is okay to express our feelings, even towards God, but rather than say, I would encourage you to pray.

But what should we pray for? Most often any praying we do is asking God to take the pain away, or get us out of the mess we are facing. However, I believe a far greater prayer is to ask God for wisdom, the wisdom that only He can give us... and the Bible says He will definitely answer this prayer in the affirmative!

James 1:5

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

So, go ahead, ask the Lord if there is something you need to be learning here? Ask Him for wisdom, and expect Him to answer, but don't try and fake it on your own. Simply say, "Show me how to respond to this trial in a godly way, Lord."

This leads us nicely into the next step...

3. READ THE WORD OF GOD

The source of true wisdom is the Word of God, so how so many Christians live their lives hardly ever reading it is one of life's great mysteries.

If you are facing adversity, I recommend not just casually reading the Bible but immersing yourself in it. Pray, ask God for wisdom then ask for a word in season, directly from the

Bible. In my hour of need, He just delivers in spades from His Word, and He will do that for you too.

How can reading a book written centuries ago possibly hold any wisdom for modern man? It holds immense wisdom because the Bible is not just a book, it is inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit Himself, and so becomes a dynamic, living, powerful force if we give it the chance...

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

News Flash... The Bible closed on your shelf has no power to change your life. You have to read it, you have to study it, and you have to absorb its great truths into your daily life. In my secular career I am a Behavioural Optometrist, and I often prescribe spectacles for children to help them read and learn. When I give them glasses to read, I explain that scientific studies have proven that glasses will not help them if they are still in their case. They have to be placed on the nose. In the same way, the Bible has to be placed into our hearts, not left on a shelf or put under our pillow.

So, when we turn to God's Word, what wisdom can we learn? When I face trials of various kinds, I love to read about Bible characters who faced similar situations, and read what they said and did in response.

One of my favourites is Habakkuk, who accused God of being unfair because the wicked seemed to prosper while the good guys suffered. He whines and complains, and God puts him in his place, then at the very end of this small book, Habakkuk finally takes his eyes off the circumstances and perceived unfairness, and places them back on God...

Habakkuk 3:17-18

Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.

So the right response to adversity, the fast track through Uni-Adversity, the way to become a mature, powerful and influential Christian is not just to be faithful in the adversity, but to be joyful. There's that word again, joy! Can you consider it pure joy when you face trials and tests at Uni-adversity?

LESSON 6: THE REWARDS FOR ADVERSITY

The rewards for attending and attaining the right training at Uni-Adversity are not just centred around intellectual knowledge, but practical and applied experience that provides three fantastic rewards in your life and walk with God...

1. PERSONAL GROWTH AND MATURITY

You get to learn from the trials you have triumphed over, or if you flunked out badly, you get to sit the exam all over again. Yes, that is correct, if you do not learn the lesson, God doesn't flunk you out of the course, you get to sit the exam again and again. How many times? Well, that depends on you and how quickly you learn the lessons of Uni-Adversity.

Either way, you gain valuable knowledge that is practical, powerful and applicable to every aspect of your life. You gain maturity and character, wisdom and irrepressible joy. And the ultimate aim is to give you something which no man can destroy... Hope!

Romans 5:3-4

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.

The Greek word here for glory means boasting or pride. Now normally these are not good traits to have, but in this context, it means the satisfaction of knowing it's been a job well done. You feel good, feel triumphant and begin to feel more mature in Christ. Combine this with reading the Word every day, and you have the double whammy... You have two proven tools that yield great maturity.

In good times we can survive with a shallow root system, but in tough times our roots must go deep. In good times we can stand alone, but in tough times we need to interlock our root systems and send them down deep!

As Christians face the winds of adversity and the storms of trouble, they rise like the skylark. They are like the trees that survive the storm because their roots are driven deep. They are like the trees that grow on mountain ridges—trees battered by winds, yet, trees in which we find the strongest wood. These trees are strong because their root system goes deep, and importantly their roots interlink with the trees around them to provide a superior level of stability and strength.

The skylark, the flowers, the trees—all these illustrate Job's words:

Job 23:10

*But he knows the way that I take;
when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.*

The Christian who understands this aspect of God's nature can find comfort in their suffering and peace in their pain. Job again illustrates this...

Job 5:17-18

*"Blessed is the one whom God corrects;
so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty.
For he wounds, but he also binds up;
he injures, but his hands also heal.*

Growth and maturity mean not blaming God, but staying close to Him and making a conscious decision to learn the lessons of Uni-Adversity!

2. THE ABILITY TO HELP OTHERS

Another wonderful benefit from our time at Uni-Adversity is that we have the opportunity and privilege of helping those around us, especially those facing the kind of trials we have learned through.

Experiencing trials and adversity gives you empathy with what others are going through. But graduating and triumphing in your Uni-Adversity course gives you powerful, proven strategies to help others in their hour of need. You can go beyond just pitying them or feeling for them and actually tutor them in the course, so they too can triumph as you have!

My wife and I lost all of our wealth in the collapse of Storm Financial, at the height of the Global Financial Crisis. It was not pleasant, and it was not fun, and I do not recall much in the way of joy in my heart as I watched a million dollars disappear in a moment, and our personal debt jump from \$127,000 to \$850,000 overnight.

I didn't enjoy the experience one little bit! And I certainly did not enjoy losing our family home. But we kept trusting God, despite the pain and fear, and I am really rejoicing in what this has ultimately done in my life, Fiona's life and even our finances (which the Lord has slowly begun to restore). God is so good!

Therefore, when the church faced an incredible shortfall financially, I had no hesitation in encouraging the leadership that God was able to do what He had promised, and even more...

Ephesians 3:20

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,

I can face our financial future and the future of our Church with real confidence, because I've been there, done that, got the T Shirt and have experienced God coming through when we needed Him most. Trust in God is something that is built over time, and the more you learn to trust, the more you see God do which utterly amazes you.

Jesus does the same with us. He is not some far away God throwing blessings and cursings down on unsuspecting man, He has been to this earth and lived the lives we all live. He suffered, He understands, He empathises and He can show us strategies to triumph too...

Hebrews 2:18

Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

3. ETERNAL REWARDS

Much of our discussion about Uni-Adversity centres on the short term value, but we must also make mention of the long term value and rewards you can receive because of your time in adversity...

James 1:12

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

Make no mistake, every time you face tough times and trials, when you triumph you are building a reward in heaven. You are laying up treasure that lasts eternity...

Matthew 6:19-21

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

No, I'm not sure what this looks like, but what I am sure of is that God has special rewards and crowns for those who are faithful and triumph over hardship and adversity. People who want to know what the reward is are usually the ones who will see the result and weigh up if it is worth the effort. If we truly live by faith, and if we learn our lessons well at the Uni-Adversity, you don't have to know the exact nature of the eternal blessings you will receive. You know the King, you trust the King, and that is enough!

SO WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Life is going to throw all sorts of things at us, but again I remind you, it's not what life throws at us but how we respond to the challenge. We do not need to know the reason for the trials we face, but we should trust Him by responding the right way, and believing Him for the reward that will bring us through to true spiritual maturity.

God has a purpose for every trial that comes into your life. Nothing happens to you without His approval or purpose. He has the power to work things out to your good, regardless of the circumstances you are facing.

God's perspective is not the same as yours. God sees the whole picture, and especially the end point clearly, and He understands the purpose and outcome of your trials. While all you and I see is the pain and the problem of the present, our loving Heavenly Father the future.

So what is it you seek in your life? God's command or your comfort? Spiritual maturity or sensual monotony? A break from the pain, or a broken and contrite spirit?

Psalms 51:17

*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

At Uni-Adversity, God is going to develop a people that have tried and proven His faithfulness, who have learned to grow through adversity and are willing to follow Him. These are the greatest of His saints, and they are willing to change whatever is necessary, and pay any price, to graduate from Uni-Adversity. Are you willing to pay your tuition fees and be trained and equipped to fulfil the potential God sees in you?

HOW UNI-ADVERSITY TRAINS AND EQUIPS THE SAINTS

Adversity, as we have seen, comes to us all. If you are struggling or facing tough times today, you are not unique, and you are not on your own.

We have learned that the question is not whether you will face trials, because we all will, but rather how you will face them. Can you face them with joy, and can you trust your Heavenly Father to do the right thing by you?

All university and college courses cost money, cost time and take effort and often pain to graduate from. So why would anybody bother to go to university? They are seeking training and equipping for the future career they desire. Universities and colleges train and equip people for their future lives, to fulfil the purpose to which the student feels they are called.

God's Uni-Adversity trains and equips you for life, and for the purposes and future He has for you. This is a core reason why we can ignore the pain of adversity and embrace the difficult times, because we know that He is preparing us, training us for future service.

OUR PAIN, HIS PURPOSE

If you want God's best for your life and if you truly desire to be used by Him, at some point you will have to study at Uni-Adversity. We might enjoy fine weather, but constant sunshine makes a desert, hard crusty and unproductive. Rain and storms are the forces that produce lasting fruit in your life for Jesus.

This means that God can and will use adversity in your life for His good purpose—and yet, sadly, many people view adversity as only negative and defeating. You can decide right now that you will not be among them!

In the presence of trouble, some people grow wings; others buy crutches.—Harold W. Ruopp

Perception is how you see things, not just what you see. When you face Adversity, do you just see the adversity itself, the pain, the hurt, and the hopelessness? Or do you see what God sees? ... He understands that He is using tough times to train and equip you for greater and more powerful service in times to come!

That's what Uni-Adversity is about. It is God's training facility to train and equip us for the life of service He is already planning for us.

Romans 8:28

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

God has designed adversity, regardless of its source and irrespective of the pain and discomfort it causes, to become a turning point from which you will take your greatest leaps forward in spiritual growth. His aim is spiritual growth and maturity, and He is not afraid to break a few eggs to make a beautiful omelette.

If you face trials right now, I want to offer you wonderfully encouraging news... These trials are not without restriction, but fully controlled by God. He allows adversity into your life only as long as it takes until He accomplishes His purpose in you. He will not keep pain and hardship in your life one second longer than is necessary.

ONLY AS LONG AS IS NECESSARY

In 1 Samuel 30 young David, on the run from King Saul, faced a tough situation. Amalekite raiders had attacked his camp, carrying off all the wives and families of the men, including his. The men were not so merry and in their pain they turned on David, so David turned in his adversity to the Lord...

1 Samuel 30:6

David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the Lord his God.

If you look at Christians facing trials, you will see different types. Some people are almost wiped out by trials, while others learn to stand in the confidence of God's faithfulness. Some blame God, or at least whine and complain about the situation, while others have an overwhelming sense of stability and immovable strength.

Some run from the storm, refusing to learn from their adversity, lurching from crisis to crisis, living a life that resembles a soap opera. Others weather the storms, heads held high, confident, bold, and not discouraged by any obstacle that comes along.

Graduates of Uni-Adversity feel certain that God is going to see them through the heartache and bring them out whole, joyful, and more mature on the other side. Look around at Christians you know who have persevered gracefully through adversity, and I will guarantee that you'll see the godly maturity. If you see a Christian that you admire, I guarantee you that they have faced more than their share of Adversity, pain and heartache.

Adversity has an unusual habit of showing us where we stand in our faith.

Do we doubt God? Do we thank Him for His faithfulness during the stressful, heart-wrenching times? Do we trust that He will never leave or forsake us? Do we trust that He knows best, even if it is beyond what we think we can bear?

Adversity is a tool which offers one of God's most accurate measures of our faith—it reveals our endurance level. It clearly displays our trust, or lack of it, in Him. None of us knows how much difficulty we can withstand until we are tried. Like an athlete in training, we must learn to push through the pain if we are to one day stand on the winner's podium.

Quitters never win, and winners never quit!

TAKE IT TO THE LIMIT ONE MORE TIME

Right now, whatever you face, however overwhelming your adversity, remember this: God has put a limit on all adversity. The devil is not winning, the situation is not out of control!

Because you are a child of God, the Holy Spirit is living inside of you, and He knows what you can bear, even if to you it feels beyond bearing. The psalmist said:

Psalms 34:19

*The righteous person may have many troubles,
but the Lord delivers him from them all;*

He won't push you too far, and He won't let you suffer longer than is necessary. If you can trust Him in this one, simple point, you can trust Him for everything in your life!

And some pain is too much to bear. The loss of a child, the breakdown of a relationship, these cause pain which seems beyond anything possible to survive. Yet many godly believers face the same thing and do survive. Trust the Lord, because He knows you better than you know yourself, and He loves you!

When we learn and mature in the midst of tremendous adversity, God is pleased because He sees His purpose being fulfilled in us. Every difficulty we face, He sees our destiny rolling out ahead of us. We are growing spiritually, becoming stronger in areas of weakness, and increasingly being conformed to the likeness of Christ. We learn the secrets of ministering to others who might be in pain. We are being equipped and trained for service.

In short, God is thrilled when we respond correctly to adversity! And when we fail, He loves us enough to not give up on us, but allow us graciously to sit the exam again.

At the University of Adversity, your teacher will not let you fail the course... you just get to sit the exam again and again until you learn the lesson. I for one would like to pass at my first attempt, wouldn't you?

SO WHAT COURSES ARE OFFERED AT UNI-ADVERSITY?

All colleges and universities offer courses, each designed to specifically target skills the student needs for their future career. Here are principles we can learn when we are trained and equipped through our adversity: and remember, learning these correctly will limit the time we have to spend going through the tests!

COURSE 1: ADVERSITY BUILDS YOUR CHARACTER

Adversity is God's tool of choice for building godly, spiritual character. Until we experience heartache, disappointment, and pain, we are not properly equipped for service He uses adversity to mould and shape us; He does not bring it into our lives without purpose.

Romans 5:3-4

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Whatever struggles you face, the prize is not relief from the pain. The prize is persevering and winning, whatever the cost, and that is the character God seeks.

Rick Warren says, "Every problem is a character- building opportunity, and the more difficult it is, the greater the potential for building spiritual muscle and moral fibre."

COURSE 2: ADVERSITY INCREASES YOUR AVERSION TO SIN

When we face adversity we often also face our own human weaknesses, and this causes us to realise how sinful we are. Many hardships and difficulties we face are actually of our own doing, maybe something we have said or done, so our sin is again exposed to us.

In a crisis, even many sinful people decide to get right with God in the midst of their adversities. Some remain angry, sure, but many want to connect with a God they are aware that, even if they do not know Him, somehow God is in control of things.

When we face trials and tests we know that they will produce pain and sorrow. We must make sure that the sorrow we feel is Godly sorrow which turns us from our sin, not worldly sorrow, which makes us self-centred, depressed and draining.

2 Corinthians 7:10

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

COURSE 3: ADVERSITY OFTEN HITS YOU WHERE YOU FEEL MOST CONFIDENT

Adversity often comes in the areas where we feel the most confident. God wants to break our self-reliance, and build our absolute trust in Him.

Psalms 9:10

*Those who know your name trust in you,
for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you.*

He made us for a loving, intimate relationship with Himself, and He uses adversity to remind us of the fact that we must be fully dependent upon Him.

And the more we know Him, the deeper our trust will be. That's why you need to read the Bible every day. To know Him is to trust Him. To trust Him is to not rely on yourself, but to follow Him where ever He goes, whatever He asks and however much He decides to put us through.

Knowing Him intimately makes you realise that you can trust Him, even where pain is involved. As you grow closer to Him you realise that He will never, never leave you!

COURSE 4: ADVERSITY REMOVES PRIDE AND SELF-CENTREDNESS

Paul writes,

2 Corinthians 1:8-10

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,

Paul clearly says that the adversity in his team was great to teach them not to rely in themselves, but on God. This was the Apostle Paul, one of the greatest men ever, whom God led through the Uni-Adversity lessons to teach him how to rely on his God rather than his obvious abilities.

*All the water in the world
However hard it tried,
Could never, never sink a ship
Unless it got inside.
All the hardships of this world,
Might wear you pretty thin,
But they won't hurt you, one least bit
Unless you let them in.—Author Unknown*

Doing things in life in our own strength is like letting the water in. Doing it in God's strength is the way to conquering your Adversity!

COURSE 5: ADVERSITY DEMONSTRATES GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

The beautiful hymn "Great is Thy Faithfulness" teaches tremendous lessons, and it is based on this encouraging verse...

Lamentations 3:22-23

*Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.*

That's the thing. You face trials, and you recognise you cannot stand on your own, so you need to fall upon the limitless and awesome faithfulness of God. And here's the thing... Every time you do this, you learn more and become utterly convinced that God is faithful, ... He is totally dependable, He will never let you down.

This is my testimony, after facing our adversities... God is faithful, He has never and will never forsake me... Or you, if you decide to walk the journey with Him.

Psalms 37:25

*I was young and now I am old,
yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken
or their children begging bread.*

You can't tell me any different, because I just know! That is faith!

COURSE 6: ADVERSITY ENABLES YOU TO COMFORT OTHERS

When you have a revelation of how faithful God is, when you have been through Adversity and out the other side as a victor in Christ Jesus, then you can help others who face the same thing. Your pain opens the door to help you minister to others in their pain.

2 Corinthians 1:4-5

who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.

So when we learn the lessons of Uni-Adversity, we in turn can be used by God to teach others. Maybe we should pray not for God to remove affliction from us, but to empower us by affliction, that we might minister to others.

Many of you have suffered or are suffering. I believe God will use this suffering to empower you, and bless others in and through what God has taught you in Uni-Adversity!

COURSE 7: ADVERSITY IMPROVES YOUR SERVE

If you want to become an effective servant, and this is one of the key aims of my entire life, then adversity is God's way of moulding you into a mature and effective servant.

When you know Jesus Christ as your Saviour, God sees you as a son or daughter. You might struggle at times, sometimes falling, but He sees you as justified, redeemed, forgiven, and reconciled to Him.

When God looks at you He sees someone full of His unconditional love, indwelt by His presence, sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, whose name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

And He also sees all of your potential—all the good you could accomplish for His kingdom.

Romans 5:3-4

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,

So take comfort—adversity won't take up permanent residence in your life. But when it's present, it can develop good things if you're willing to trust Him. Therefore, no matter what dark moments you may walk through, be confident that He's going to bring you into the light. And when He does, it will certainly be worth it.

COURSE 8: ADVERSITY GETS YOUR ATTENTION

When adversity comes against you, you most often cannot choose how it happens or through whom it happens, but, you can choose how you respond.

So many people face adversity, and all they do is focus on the trial and the pain. People in pain tend to be very self centred and self focussed, because this is what pain does to you. It fills your mind, it takes over your life, and you feel like no one understands what you are going through.

You can choose to get discouraged, you can choose to give up. You can choose to be angry at a person, or God or both. You can choose to fight hard or curl up into a ball and cry. Or you can choose to trust God and discover what it is that He wants from you in this situation!

You can choose what gets your attention. So what do you focus on when you face tough times?

Colossians 3:2

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

God's ultimate design is not to give you a comfortable, wonderful life, but to conform you to the likeness of Jesus. Through adversity, God develops the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22, 23)—in us.

A traveller in Africa saw one of the large butterflies of the tropics struggling to free itself from the cocoon. He took pity on its struggles and with his knife cut the cords at which it was straining, and it came safely and easily out. But all the brilliant colouring was gone! The anguish of the struggle was necessary for that. The beautiful colours of the soul are won in the struggle with, and the victory over, trial and adversity.

So if you are facing pain today, physical, emotional, relational, or financial, it's time to take your eyes off the Adversity and place them firmly on Jesus...

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and Grace!

Today, as you face adversity or pain of any kind, what are you focussed on? If you're in the middle of trials, tests and pain, it's so hard to drag your focus off your troubles. But if you learn these lessons, you will be blessed beyond measure, made mature and complete and become a blessing to many. Your future career awaits as a powerful, Holy Spirit led child of God!

COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT UNI-ADVERSITY?

When you first enrol at University, it is a whole new experience. My first impressions as a University student (a Freshman for our American friends) was one of awe, because everything was so much bigger than my home school in my home town. I was fearful and had many questions, but I knew that I had an incredible opportunity to study for a profession which would provide skills, knowledge and income for a lifetime.

When you come to Christ, when you ask Jesus into your life as Lord and Saviour, you are also enrolled in the University of Adversity, and you have the incredible opportunity to learn and grow through any situation, good or bad, high or low, mountain top or Valley.

Let's face it, life is full of ups and downs, a roller coaster of experiences, emotions and relationships. So, given the variety of terrain you face, where is your education at Uni-Adversity going to be most effective? When you are on the highest peak, or down in the lowest valley?

We learn more from our valley experiences than our mountaintop experiences. We may not enjoy them as much, but we definitely learn more from them.

James 5:10-11

Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

As noted earlier, by any standards, Job got a raw deal! Faithful, righteous, caring and successful, a good father and a good man, God boasted of him and thereby lined him up for a frontal attack by Satan. Job had to go through some very dark, excruciating days, but James reminds us that God never abandoned Him. It always helps to remember God's unchanging compassion and mercy when we suffer. God might seem distant in your darkest days, but He is right beside you waiting for you to reach out to Him.

But this doesn't mean you have all the answers! There are always questions, and especially so when you are suffering. So let's explore some of these common questions together...

QUESTION 1: WHY AM I CRITICISED DURING TIMES OF ADVERSITY?

Often as we struggle with adversity, we find ourselves being criticised, often by those who are closest to us...

Job 2:9-10

His wife said to him, "Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!"

He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"

In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

When you face difficult circumstances and then have to endure negative opinions and comments from others, you need a special kind of courage to stay positive— you must recognise that despite their words, you need to continue to believe that the Lord is with you, leading and guiding you!

Just because you're in Uni-Adversity and facing tough times, it does not make hope and faith automated responses. You must make a choice, and this requires an act of your will and a fair slice of courage!

And the comments of others often don't help, right? Others have a peculiar talent of kicking you when you are down. Unbelievers will say things like, "So where is this God you speak of now?" Even Christian friends often say and do things that are, shall we say, less than supportive. They question your motives, your faith and whether you can hear God at all.

Church should be a place where we are supported and built up in our darkest times, not forsaken and criticised! Church should be a place that speaks life and faith into our Uni-Adversity lessons.

But the enemy knows that he can ruin your relationship with God by discouraging you, and that the words of those you love can be the most effective tools he has to bring you down in your hours of trial. If you are feeling unsupported and criticised by those around you, make a conscious choice to encourage yourself with the Word of God.

Using scriptures like Psalm 23, or Psalm 42, build your faith and constantly reminds yourself that your loving Heavenly Father has a purpose in your pain! If your church is critical of your lack of faith in adversity, find a new church that is supportive.

Whatever anybody says, for good or for evil, find out what God says and choose to believe that!

Deuteronomy 31:8

The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

QUESTION 2: WHERE IS GOD WHEN I'M IN PAIN?

As a child, I often had to have needles for my asthma. The doctor and my mum would have to chase me around the surgery. As far as I could tell, the doctor was assaulting me, and my mum was an accomplice! As a child, I could not see the greater good those injections would result in. And this is often the case for us when we face pain and adversity... we want to avoid the pain, and cannot see the long term consequences, the fruit that adversity will produce in our lives.

So where is God when you are hurting?

Isaiah 63:9

*In all their distress he too was distressed,
and the angel of his presence saved them.
In his love and mercy he redeemed them;
he lifted them up and carried them
all the days of old.*

He's right there with you, hurting with you, feeling every pain, just as my mum was when I faced those injections. Now that I am a father myself I understand... But I didn't as a child!

Isaiah 56:5

*But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.*

God does not leave us to suffer alone when the tough times come. No, He is right there with us, ever mindful of the pain we endure, not only watching and giving us the grace we need to learn the lessons, but also acting on our behalf so we don't suffer a moment longer than we can bear!

QUESTION 3: HOW CAN A GOOD GOD ALLOW SUFFERING IN A BELIEVER'S LIFE?

A common question is how can a good God allow suffering for those who love Him? If you ask this, you're not the first...

Psalms 10

*Why, Lord, do you stand far off?
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?*

Or how about Moses

Exodus 5:22

Moses returned to the Lord and said, "Why, Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people? Is this why you sent me?"

Adversity that goes beyond your ability to control it simply proves that God is God, and we are not! When we consider the suffering we face, we become acutely aware of our need for Him and His intervention to save us. We need His grace and love, and we need it now!

Satan makes mileage out of this question, especially if you have been told that God will never allow adversity in your life. Again, this shallow theology concentrates on you getting your way, not God having His way with you to develop your character.

I love how Spurgeon puts it...

“God knows that soldiers are to be made only in battle; they are not to be grown in peaceful times. Warriors are really educated by the smell of powder, in the midst of whizzing bullets and roaring cannonades...Is He not developing in you the qualities of the soldier by throwing you into the heat of battle, and should you not use every application to come off conqueror?”

God allows suffering in the lives of believers because He has a higher purpose. As we recognise His handiwork behind the scenes, and as we learn to trust Him no matter what circumstances we face, then we will be learning the lessons of adversity well.

QUESTION 4: WHAT IS THE POINT OF ADVERSITY IF IT MAKES ME FEEL WEAK?

If you face adversity, chances are you feel overwhelmed or weak at some point. Most of us know what it feels like to be disappointed in ourselves, embarrassed by our failures, rejected but those we thought we could count on, overwhelmed by circumstances, criticisms and adversity.

What is it that you face today that is overwhelming you?

Regardless of how you feel, whatever brings you to your knees in weakness carries the greatest potential for the greatest spiritual victory.

2 Corinthians 12:9

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

If you feel weak, rejoice because you are in a perfect position to learn the deep lessons of Uni-Adversity. If you feel weak, turn to the Lord because He is strong and will carry you through all trials. If you feel weak, you are ready to truly trust God now!

QUESTION 5: HOW DO I DEAL WITH FEELINGS THAT PLUNGE FROM STRUGGLING TO DISCOURAGED TO HOPELESS?

Since stepping up to become pastor of Ignite church, I've had my fair share of adversity. I met with a leader of our denomination who told me I had faced more adversity and personal attack in my first 6 months than most pastors face in 20 years.

That was encouraging!

At times I've felt discouraged and yes, even hopeless! Then the Lord gave me one of my favourite passages (I know we had this one before, but I think we need to read it again)...

Habakkuk 3:17-18

*Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.*

If you feel hopeless, helpless, or powerless—unable to deal with people or problems and on the verge of exhaustion—take heart from that passage! When everything looked the bleakest, when the crops failed, and the animals disappeared, there was always hope! Imagine it, no food, no livestock, everything up to mud, but somehow in the middle of all that life threatening adversity, Habakkuk didn't just say he had faith, he actually rejoiced!

So how could he find such hope in the face of unmitigated disaster?

He got a revelation from God. In Habakkuk 2:2-3 we find the prophet spending time pressing into God, reading His Word, seeking His heart and His purposes. He asked God why (and who hasn't been there?), and frankly didn't like the answer he got! But he saw the vision, wrote it down and waited, fully confident that God would come through for him. He learned from the University of Adversity.

That's why he rejoiced. That's why James said, "Count it all joy when you face trials of many kinds."

Not that it is fun, but that God is working a greater work within you.

The pain isn't fun, the hurt isn't pleasant, and the feelings of discouragement and hopelessness can be almost debilitating, but in the middle of whatever you face, God is working in and through these adversities to bring about something special within you!

Nehemiah was another who faced insurmountable difficulties, from physical hardship to venomous attacks, but he gave a great word to people of God...

Nehemiah 8:10

And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

Your feelings are valid, they're normal. When you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you're entitled to feel discouraged. But keep walking through the valley until the Lord brings you out the other side. Whatever you do, if you're walking through the valley of the shadow of death, don't camp there!

Sometimes the road through your Uni-Adversity course is long, hard and discouraging. You struggle on, you fail a few examinations and must repeat a class or two. Your mind is filled with questions like the ones we have just looked at, and many times you might be tempted to drop out and give up.

This can lead to depression, and this in turn affects your ability to study, learn and trust the Lord in your hardship. So let's look at the whole question of depression, and how we can overcome this powerful force for destruction in our lives.

WHEN DEPRESSION SETS IN

Depression is one of the major ailments of modern society, and students are often severely affected by depression. One might think that, with all our modern conveniences, mass media, social media, along with a plethora of medications and therapists, that it might be a decreasing phenomenon, but the opposite is the case.

While the causes of depression in modern society are many, from chemical imbalances through to relationship breakdowns, it is certainly a very clear and present danger when it comes to Uni-Adversity. Why? Because when you face adversity, you often find that it becomes too much to bear. Struggling with adversity becomes overwhelming, depressing, discouraging and crushing... Giving the devil the perfect opportunity to attack and plunge you into depression.

Let's face it, at Uni-Adversity it can be hard, discouraging and even soul destroying when constantly facing adversity. Pain and suffering have a way of wearing you down, and over time your once strong faith can be disappointed so often that you begin to even doubt if God loves you at all.

Disappointment can be a killer. But to see disappointment in its true purpose, try changing the first letter to "H". That's right, disappointment becomes HIS appointment! When you stop and see the truth behind the many disappointments you face, then you realise that God has not changed, even if the circumstances are grim.

Inevitably, in the heat of the moment and the chaos of the fight, these disappointments can begin to stack up and cause discouragement and eventually depression.

Remember this: Disappointment is inevitable; discouragement is a choice. As you read this next section, decide in your heart to choose life not death, blessings not cursings, God's way not Satan's way.

Deuteronomy 30:19

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live,

FEELING DOWN AND ACTING OUT

Most of us will be familiar with the symptoms of depression. We would know that sinking, overwhelmed feeling of being down, and we have experienced it at some time in the past, or possibly even now. When you suffer with depression enough, the whole situation can easily sink into clinical depression, including mood swings, isolating yourself from others, loss of appetite, loss of drive and a host of other symptoms.

Clinical or long-term depression needs to be treated by trained professionals. But some of us just find that facing hardship pain at Uni-Adversity wears us down and can plunge us into depression.

Depression causes you to act in a way you normally wouldn't, say things you normally wouldn't, make decisions and give in to temptations that you later regret. Depression makes life miserable, for you and everyone around you, and if you allow it, depression can control your life, your relationships, your future and fuel your addictions.

No one is immune to being depressed, and when you face adversity after adversity, it's tempting to fall into depression and never get out!

Christians usually try and hide it. We are often taught that we need to be positive, and to confess positive things, but we speak positive things at the expense of revealing the true pain we feel. We look good on the outside, we seem to have it all together, but inside we are a mess, struggling to cope and we feel like we are faking life. Depression is a lonely place to be, and many who plunge into depression choose to fight this fight alone behind closed doors every day.

There is also very much a physical side to depression. When you are tired, sick, stressed or if you have an underlying medical problem, you are far more prone to the effects of depression. According to <https://beyondblue.com.au>, there is often no single cause of severe depression, so medical and psychological advice can form part of a treatment.

But many times feelings of depression occur simply because you've struggled with your Adversity for too long. You're tired, you're down, you're sick of it, and you're over it!

Some of you feel like you've been smashed and kicked around a time or two, and this chapter is for you.

You may not know this, but the Bible actually holds some great keys when it comes to dealing with Adversity, and the overwhelming depression that it often gives rise to.

And when it comes to dealing with a Uni-Adversity sized depression, we can do no better than examining the life of one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament, a man who stood for the Lord against incredible odds, triumphed over overwhelming adversity, but sunk into unfathomable depths of depression.

Enter the prophet Elijah. (1 Kings 17-19)...

MAXIMUM PROPHETS

Every investor wants maximum profits, and among all the prophets, this guy is the one of the maximum prophets! In 1Kings 17, Elijah predicts a horrific and debilitating famine that sweeps across the nation.

A short time later, in 1 Kings 18:44, at his word, the drought is broken. Incredible, even the weather is obedient to the word of this man of God!

Elijah is most famous for challenging and defeating the 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. At his word fire reigned down from Heaven and consumed the sacrifice,

1 Kings 18:38-39

Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God."

Elijah was so amazing, he is one of only two people recorded in the Bible to not pass through death.

That's pretty special, right? But we are not going to look at his victories today so much as the depths of depression Elijah found himself in. If you are feeling overwhelmed and depressed by the Adversity you face, be it in your health, business, relationships or anything, then be encouraged because you are in good company.

It doesn't make you less spiritual or less godly when you face depression, it makes you normal, it makes you human... It simply means you need Jesus!

But this does not mean we should ignore the signs of depression and try and fake it on our own. It is going to involve you seeking God, turning from depression and seeking help to be an overcomer.

It also can make you a more powerful person for God in the future. It helps you understand when others are depressed. So, for your lessons today at Uni-Adversity, let's do a case study on the amazing prophet Elijah, and see what we can learn about overcoming depression and adversity.

Here's a few things you need to know about depression...

LESSON 1: IN DEPRESSION, WE OFTEN FEEL BLAMED BY OTHERS

When people face adversity, they often blame God or others around them. So, especially when you are hurting and feeling down, you will find some other hurting person attacking you, often someone you love or are close to.

You might be able to handle the attack under normal circumstances, but when you are depressed yourself the attacks seem unbearable.

In Elijah's case, it was someone whom he had previously blessed in his ministry... In fact, he'd saved her and her son's lives. The miracle was a jug of oil that refused to run dry, which saved the widow and her son from certain death in the drought...

1 Kings 17:16

The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.

So, having worked a miracle to save the widow and her son, you would have thought he would have been thanked, right? You certainly wouldn't expect the woman to turn on him. But the very next verse says this...

1 Kings 17:17-18

After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill. And his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. And she said to Elijah, "What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!"

In her grief, in her hopelessness, she lashed out at the one who had previously sustained her life! Sounds unfair, right? It wasn't Elijah's fault, but he bore the brunt of her anger!

So Elijah went to prayer. Elijah prayed to the Lord, laid 3 times on the boy...and once again God moved and vindicated his servant... And the boy was healed!

1 Kings 17:22

And the Lord listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived.

Nevertheless, when people attack you it can wear thin quickly, especially if you're feeling down to start with... I personally have been hurt many times since become a pastor in the church, but like Elijah, I decided to just keep on ministering. And so should you, even when it hurts. You're in Uni-Adversity, remember! Keep going, keep serving be encouraged that God is using you to bless others. Learn to not lash out yourself, and learn to be patient and gracious when you are on the receiving end! These are lessons God wants you to learn.

LESSON 2: DEPRESSION OFTEN HITS AFTER A HIGH

Life has highs and lows, peaks and valleys, just like a mountain range. Just like a mountain range or a roller coaster, the lows often come right after the highs. We may scale the heights of spiritual victory only to soon find ourselves in the dark valley of depression.

Elijah had experienced perhaps his greatest triumph, on Mount Carmel, when fire came from Heaven and consumed the sacrifice. One of the greatest acts of God experienced by any prophet in the Bible, but immediately after this incredible victory Elijah crashes into the Great Depression! How many of you know that when prophets fall dramatically, it's a Great Depression?

I can relate to this. I would often return from ministering before tens of thousands of people in a stadium somewhere and find life at home or at work under attack. I routinely found myself depressed in the first few days after returning from ministering. Once I recognised this, I could adjust appropriately. I could say, "I feel down... Yes, that's normal and it will be gone soon."

After the high of faith defeating the prophets of Baal, then this...

1 Kings 19:3

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness.

So powerful, so anointed, yet he ran from a woman called Jezebel because he feared for his life. He escaped to his man cave, literally, to be fearful, miserable and alone. But Paul says,

2 Timothy 1:7

God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

When fear comes in like this, you know it's not God. Even a great man like Elijah feared and ran. He was victorious, he grew fearful, then he was down.... defeated.... Elijah was running scared and he was alone...

LESSON 3: ARE YOU LONESOME TONIGHT?

Stress does nasty things to people, and it is one of the major triggers for big time depression. And Uni-Adversity can be high stress at times!

Stressful situations can drive us to inappropriate responses, and make us experience feelings that are not really true. Under pressure we often make bad decisions, and that's what Elijah experienced. Under pressure from the godless Jezebel, fearing for his life, after seeing the promises of God enacted before his eyes and at his own word, he panicked, fled and got depressed!

He also felt so alone, and he complained about it...

1 Kings 19:10

He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

But God set the record straight...

1 Kings 19:18

Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him."

Under intense stress, Elijah collapsed and felt alone, like he was the only faithful one left! Depression magnified the extent of the problem, and led him into the false impression that he was the last faithful man of God left.

God did not condemn him for this depression, He ministered to him and told him the truth, and God will do that with you also if you come to Him. God changed Elijah's perception of events, and God can change yours also.

Here's the thing... When you are in a great church, you never need to face life alone. As Christians, we are stronger together!

LESSON 4: DEPRESSION AMPLIFIES THE NEGATIVE

If you have ever been depressed, you will recognise that one of the chief characteristics of depression is that it makes everything seem worse (as Elijah discovered). Good things in your life suddenly seem bad, and the bad things seem worse than ever!

This is how depression operates, and because each negative is made more negative, you can create a gigantic negative feedback loop and ultimately a perfect storm of misery. Everything bad seems to escalate, and everything good loses its goodness. David said,

Psalms 38:6-8

*I am bowed down and brought very low;
all day long I go about mourning.
My back is filled with searing pain;
there is no health in my body.
I am feeble and utterly crushed;
I groan in anguish of heart.*

Physically debilitating, bone weariness, crushing anguish... This is depression, this is how it feels.

Consider Job, who had everything in the world taken away from him, including family members, his wealth and his health. He was crushed, depressed, in despair and cursed the day he was born

Job 3:11

*“Why did I not perish at birth,
and die as I came from the womb?”*

He said of mankind,

Job 5:6-7

*For hardship does not spring from the soil,
nor does trouble sprout from the ground.
Yet man is born to trouble
as surely as sparks fly upward.*

Recognise that when you're down, everything looks bad, tastes bad and smells bad. Depression amplifies the negative, and ultimately can lead to this...

LESSON 5: DEPRESSION MAKES YOU WANT TO GIVE UP...THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL

Secular writers call it, "The Dark Night of the Soul," but believers are not immune to going through such depression, especially when facing adversity.

In fact, Elijah was so down he was on the point of taking his own life. Have you ever felt so depressed that suicide seemed like a good idea? Have you ever felt so low that you despaired even of continuing to live? Are you there right now, so depressed that you just want the pain to stop?

1 Kings 19:3-4

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."

It can be extremely disheartening to endure many challenges and setbacks. It can be soul destroying to sit in the University of Adversity and not be able to grasp the lessons, or have to re-sit the exams again and again. Sometimes it's just all too much and it's at those moments we think of ending it all.

However, though we know disappointments are inevitable, discouragement is a choice. We don't have to give in to defeat. But hey, if you're struggling right now, you're in good company with Elijah! Even the great Apostle Paul experienced this...

2 Corinthians 1:8-9

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death.

Thoughts of suicide are real, but you must never act on them. I had to bury my own brother-in-law who took his life, and he was a Christian, so I know the pain it causes, but I'm telling you know that suicide is never God's way.

Suicide is at best a permanent solution to a temporary problem. The reasons why people do it are many and varied, most often selfish, many times just to try and stop the pain. If you're feeling this way, then let me share what God thinks about you, your pain, your adversity and your thoughts of ending it all...

Psalms 34:18-19

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all;

If you are discouraged and depressed today, the Lord knows that this is when you need Him the most, and He wants to comfort you. His strength and courage are always available to those who come to Him. He will see you through the adversity and doesn't want you checking out early.

Bill Newman tells the true story of a couple on the point of divorce, who went away for one last weekend because the man had a conference in another city. While he attended the convention, she stood before the open window in their high-rise condo and was about to throw herself out when he unexpectedly returned, stopping her actions. That evening they were invited to a tent crusade that was visiting the city. They both walked forward and accepted Jesus as their Saviour. The lady later said, "I'm glad I checked in with Jesus before I checked out of life!"

Whatever you face, however hard or overwhelming, the Lord loves you, is close to you and will carry you through it. Ask Jesus into your life today and experience it for yourself.

Psalms 55:22

*Cast your cares on the Lord
and he will sustain you;
he will never let
the righteous be shaken.*

A PRESCRIPTION FOR OVERCOMING DEPRESSION

Firstly, let me reiterate that if you suffer from long term clinical depression you need to seek the advice of a doctor, psychologist, psychotherapist or counsellor. As a Christian, this is not a lack of faith, it is a wise thing to do.

However, when facing feelings of depression there are some practical and positive things you can do... And no matter what Uni-Adversity throws at you, no matter what you are facing right now, here's a prescription for triumphing over depression, discouragement and adversity...

STEP 1: TAKE CARE OF THE PHYSICAL- R n R

The first thing to do is to deal with the physical stressors you face. Depression is characterised by lack of sleep, anger, weight loss or gain, loss of energy and recklessness. Before you delve deeper into your depression, meet the physical needs.

God did that with Elijah. God knew he was exhausted, discouraged and hungry. He had physical needs, like any other man. He lost his appetite; his thinking was disturbed; he withdrew from everyone. During this dark period, he curled up under a tree, wanting to die. He was weighed down by life

Proverbs 12:25

Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up.

So, what did God do? Chastise him? Rebuke him for lack of faith? No, God loved him and first met his physical needs...

1 Kings 19:4-6

He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

God knew he needed some practical help... Elijah needed food and rest, a chance to recharge the batteries. If you are depressed, don't add guilt at being depressed to your depression! God does not condemn you for being depressed, He loves you, He has plans for you and He is here to lift you out of the pit you find yourself in.

Matthew 11:28-30

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

STEP 2: SHARE THE LOAD

Depression almost always leads to isolation, and it's in this isolation that the devil can pick you off at will. You may feel alone as Elijah did, but the truth is (just like him) you are not alone.

1 Kings 19:18

Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.”

Whatever you face today, don't do it alone! A church should be a community, a family, and within your church you should have trusted people who will stand with you, cry with you, pray with you and work with you to help God lift you out of depression.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

*Two are better than one,
because they have a good return for their labor:
If either of them falls down,
one can help the other up.
But pity anyone who falls
and has no one to help them up.
Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.
But how can one keep warm alone?
Though one may be overpowered,
two can defend themselves.
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.*

The three strands are you, your supportive friend and Jesus! Please do not try and battle depression alone (which most people try to do). Open up and share your heart with those who love you. Together we can support each other... it is never a good option to try and solve your depression alone!

STEP 3: SPEND TIME WITH GOD

God loves you and walks with you through your depression. He is always there, waiting for you to turn to Him. He says,

Psalms 34:18

*The Lord is close to the brokenhearted
and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*

1 Peter 5:7

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Joshua 1:9

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

If you want to triumph over depression and graduate from the University of Adversity, reading His Word is essential. The better you know Him, the better you will be, so take the reading plan at the end of this book and commit to reading the Bible every day.

And don't miss church. Many people isolate themselves when they get down, but it is when you are feeling down that you need to be at church, especially if your church is a good one! Join a connect group, arrange coffee with someone, get involved in a ministry, because fellowship with on fire believers brings you closer to God, and can help to lift the burden from your shoulders.

STEP 4: LISTEN TO GOD'S VOICE

It is not always easy to hear the voice of God, but as you fellowship with Him and read His Word you will learn to distinguish His voice. We live in a crazy busy world, so you need to be quiet before God and really listen.

Most often in our down times God speaks quietly, He doesn't scream at us!

1 Kings 19:11-12

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

You might be looking for God to speak to you in flashing neon lights, by a word of prophecy or by being singled out by the pastor and commended. But most often those who truly know Him hear His still, small voice.

If you can't hear Him, ask someone who can to pray with you. Whatever you do, don't go through your depression alone, because God's people long to share the journey out of depression with you.

STEP 5: DECIDE NOW- THE FIRST STEP

The very first step towards any change is a simple one... You need to make a decision. A decision to change, a decision that you've had enough of being like this. Almost all of us pass through valleys, but some of us decide to set up camp there. Don't stay in the valley when the heights are calling you...

Psalms 23:4

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.*

If you are in the valley of the shadow of death today, God is right there with you, and fellow Christians are right here for you if only you decide to reach out to them.

Let me finish this section with a famous poem that has blessed so many struggling through the valley of depression...

Footprints in the Sand - by Mary Stevenson

One night I dreamed a dream.
As I was walking along the beach with my Lord.
Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life.
For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand,
One belonging to me and one to my Lord.

After the last scene of my life flashed before me,
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.
I noticed that at many times along the path of my life,
especially at the very lowest and saddest times,
there was only one set of footprints.

This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it.
"Lord, you said once I decided to follow you,
You'd walk with me all the way.
But I noticed that during the saddest and most troublesome times of my life,
there was only one set of footprints.
I don't understand why, when I needed You the most, You would leave me."

He whispered, "My precious child, I love you and will never leave you
Never, ever, during your trials and testings.
When you saw only one set of footprints,
It was then that I carried you."

Do you know Jesus? Are you in the valley right now? Do not ever think you are alone. If you feel alone, it is because you've decided to be alone. The Lord is reaching out to you, not wanting you to be alone but sharing every moment, every difficulty, every cry of pain with you. Decide now to recommit your life to Him, then give Him your problems. He is waiting right now.

1 Peter 1:6-7

In all 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 the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

KEEP A GUARD

I was recently reading a book by Peter Wagner called “Humility”, and to my surprise I found an entire chapter relating humility to overcoming adversity.

I'll admit that I'd never equated humility with handling adversity, but upon studying this relationship I've discovered that it is critical. Uni-Adversity is, like any academic institution, all about education. It uses the school of hard knocks to get us there, and as we go through the various assessments, we learn, we grow and we become more like Jesus.

So, before I go through the steps you need to take to turn adversity to advantage, I want to mention 4 aspects of your lifestyle you need to carefully watch in order to stay humble as you learn and graduate the University of Adversity.

1. WATCH YOUR HEART

During adversity it is tempting to become hard hearted. When people tell you to “Toughen up, Princess,” they are referring to your resilience, not your heart. Hard hearted people resist being taught, resist forgiving others and face dire consequences in the future because of their hard heartedness...

Romans 2:5

But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

So as you face adversity, keep your heart soft, towards the Lord and towards those who hurt you.

Matthew 6:14-15

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

I believe that this verse sums up the importance of guarding your heart and keeping it soft towards the Lord.

Proverbs 4:23

*Keep your heart with all vigilance,
for from it flow the springs of life.*

Life flows from having a heart that is guarded against attack from the enemy, be that in criticism, depression or anything else. So determine to guard your heart, or as the ESV says, keep your heart with all vigilance, because if God has your heart, nothing and no one can destroy you!

2. WATCH WHAT YOU SAY

In adversity we must guard our tongues, because when you're down you tend to lash out under pressure and speak negatively over everything. Even the positive things in your life. Just a twist of a word, a cynical, negative statement, a subtle tone of voice or the dreaded silent treatment will provoke our adversaries, and drive away our supporters.

Ephesians 4:29

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

3. WATCH WHAT YOU REMEMBER

Memories have the power to influence our actions now if you let them, especially negative memories. Past failures in your own life drag you down, and when you see them in the lives of others they have the power to hurt them and make them attack you more.

Isaiah 43:18-19

*“Forget the former things;
do not dwell on the past.
See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland.*

Let the past be past at last.

4. WATCH WHAT YOU PRONOUNCE

In the middle of adversity and attack it is tempting to say, “I told you so!” This is especially true when those causing your adversity appear to take a fall.

If you want to be humble and learn to become like Jesus, do not pronounce negative judgement on others, and do not pronounce positive boastings about yourself.

Proverbs 24:17-18

*Do not gloat when your enemy falls;
when they stumble, do not let your heart rejoice,
or the Lord will see and disapprove
and turn his wrath away from them.*

Be humble, learn, serve and bless others, even your enemies, and you are set to graduate this class at Uni-Adversity.

10 WAYS OF TURNING ADVERSITY INTO ADVANTAGE

Adversity does not need to be negative. In fact, it can become a great advantage in your life. If you humbly listen and humbly learn the lessons in Uni-Adversity then what you currently face and what is causing you pain can become your springboard to success in life!

Failure is not the opposite of success, it is part of success!

Here are 10 steps you can take to turn adversity into advantage in your life...

STEP 1: KEEP A TRUE PERSPECTIVE

In the middle of your trials and tests, step back and see the big picture, and especially see it from God's point of view.

In times of adversity, your problems tend to dominate you and become an all-consuming part of your life. It is all you think about, all you talk about, it is ever present and controls every aspect of life. You begin to think that stopping the pain or dealing with the immediate problem is all that matters.

Perspective is seeing things in a different way. True perspective is seeing things God's way. His way is the long-term goal, and He is prepared to use adversity in your life to achieve His long-term plans to prosper you and not to harm you.

Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

As you face adversity, you have limited time and energy, so you need to work smarter not harder to overcome it. If you step back and see the big picture over years, not the crisis right now, then you will be able to major on the big things, and minor on the things that long term will not count for much.

STEP 2: ADMIT THAT YOUR CRITICS MAY BE RIGHT

As you struggle through adversity, you are sure to face criticism about what you have done and how you have done it. Don't assume all critics are wrong, or that they are against you.

Growing through adversity means being humble enough to weigh up the opinions of a critic and change where necessary.

As a pastor I have no shortage of critics. I have been criticised for many things, some justified, some not so. I am even criticised by leaders in my denomination, but I choose to call them mentors, not critics!

Proverbs 19:20

*Listen to advice and accept discipline,
and at the end you will be counted among the wise.*

STEP 3: LOVE THE CHURCH

As I mentioned, oftentimes when we are going through adversity, we isolate ourselves and pull away from church. I see it all the time, people struggling, in crisis or in sin, pulling away not towards the church family that loves them.

It is a foolish idea. When you are down, when you are under the hammer, that is when you need friends who stand with you, love you and support you through the tough times.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

*Two are better than one,
because they have a good return for their labor:
If either of them falls down,
one can help the other up.
But pity anyone who falls
and has no one to help them up.*

STEP 4: CHOOSE YOUR BATTLES

If you try and fight everything, every time, you will exhaust yourself and collapse. Wisdom is knowing which battles are truly important, and which you can let go through to the keeper.

“You need to know when to hold ‘em, know when to fold ‘em, know when to walk away, know when to run,” says Kenny Rogers.

Proverbs 29:22-23

*An angry person stirs up conflict,
and a hot-tempered person commits many sins.
Pride brings a person low,
but the lowly in spirit gain honor.*

If you fight every fight you stir up conflict for yourself, and make life a misery for everyone around you. Some fights you do not need to fight.

So how do you decide which battles are important in the long term? Ask God, and then be obedient to Him...

I was once dragged before the Optometry registration board because another professional had lied about me. My future hung in the balance. I knew I had done nothing wrong (except been good at what I was doing), but a spiteful, angry psychologist had taken exception to my success with children with learning problems. I stewed for months leading up to the hearing, and God gave me this verse...

2 Chronicles 20:17

You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you."

When I stood before the panel, they said I was doing a great job, they were pleased to meet me and keep up the good work. I said nothing ... I didn't have to! God did it!

Decide ahead of time which battles need to be won, and concentrate on them. If your child seems rebellious, do not try and win every battle. I have seen parents fighting to get their child to not watch a certain movie, then let them go out partying and doing drugs. Pick your battles, and choose the ones that really matter long term.

STEP 5: RECOGNISE THAT YOU WIN SOME AND YOU LOSE SOME

In life you can't win everything every time. No one does.

A failure is never a loss when you learn from it. It is a gain when you decide to learn and not repeat the same mistake.

Thomas Edison invented the light globe and significantly impacted the lives of everyone on the planet. He tried thousands of metals as filaments, and was criticised as failing. His famous quote was, "I have not failed 10,000 times, I have successfully found 10,000 ways it will not work." Needless to say, he found the right filament and changed the world.

Psalms 73:26

*My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever.*

So, in your trials and adversity, do not be so hard on yourself! It's ok to struggle, and it is ok to fail. Ask God to teach you to rely on Him, and it is lesson learned!

From God's viewpoint, your failure, your weakness is His opportunity to give you victory. When you figure out you cannot do it all yourself, when you are driven down to your knees, you realise that it's not about you, it's never been about you, it's always been about Him.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

If you fail, if you struggle, if you feel weak, weary and over it... Rejoice! You are exactly where God wants you to be!

STEP 6: CHOOSE TO SEE THE GOOD

Negative thoughts beget more negative thoughts, and pretty soon you are so cynical you don't believe anything good about anything or anyone!

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

When something bad happens, choose to see the good. When someone attacks you, choose to see the good in them. When the road is long and hard, when there seems no way out, when you are weighed down and weary, do not just choose to see the good... Choose to see the God in everything!

STEP 7: BE OBEDIENT TO GOD

God honours obedience above any religious thing you can do. He does not want organised religion, he does not want rituals, tall steeples, bells and smells... He wants obedience. If you are ever to graduate the University of Adversity, you need to learn to obey the Lord and learn from Him.

Deuteronomy 28:1-2

If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God:

1 Samuel 15:22

But Samuel replied:

"Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord?"

*To obey is better than sacrifice,
and to heed is better than the fat of rams.*

Since taking on the senior pastor position at Ignite church, I have found myself attacked by many people. I have attracted a host of people who disagree with various ways the church is run, it's direction, it's emphasis.

There are so many voices in my ears, I don't know who to listen to... And so I turn to God. Every time I have considered where the church is going, I turn to the Lord. Every time I have been hurt, I go to God, read His Word, and seek the advice of godly advisors. I listen, weigh things up, then obey.

In all things my burning desire is to obey. Not to obey you, someone's theological slant or opinion or even my own desires. I desire to obey the Lord, in all things, because to obey is better than sacrifice!

STEP 8: PRAY, AND ASK OTHERS TO PRAY TOO

God wants us to pray, in fact, He wants us to live in a constant state of prayer, that's why He says,

1 Thessalonians 5:17
pray continually,

We are urged to pray, not only for ourselves but also for each other...

Ephesians 6:18
And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

I have a team of prayers in this church who pray and receive words from God for me, and I value them. Their prayers and support are vital. It is like a prayer field, a force field that surrounds and protects.

When you face adversity, you need to pray, and you need to be bold enough to share with others and ask them to pray for you. Prayer changes things. Prayer changes you!

STEP 9: READ THE WORD DAILY

There is no substitute for reading the Word of God. You can attend church, listen to Worship music, watch Christian TV... All are good but none of these is an alternative to reading the Word of God daily.

That is why I have prepared a Bible reading plan, which I include at the end of this book. This Bible reading plan has changed hundreds of lives, and it covers the highlights of the Bible asking you to read only two chapters a day. If you love genealogies, lists of laws or teachings about skin diseases, then this is not the plan for you. However, if you want to read most of the Bible every day, this plan is unique and proven to deepen your relationship with God.

2 Timothy 3:16

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

This powerful Scripture achieves little in your life if the Bible remains on the shelf. It collects dust, that is about all.

The power starts to come when you read it. The power really comes when you read and obey it.

James 1:22

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

As you face a crisis, as you seek to learn from adversity, the Bible is the key. I take time every day to sit and read from the Word of God, and I have truly found that,

Psalms 119:105

*Your word is a lamp for my feet,
a light on my path.*

The Bible is your text book for the University of Adversity. Without it you experience all the adversity without explanation, without knowing how to learn or understand, without learning how to respond to the various trials life throws at you.

If you ever want to grow, you need to place the Word of God into your heart every day. Not once a week, not randomly opening the Bible and stabbing at a random verse... Follow a plan, and see if the Lord doesn't speak to you day after day.

I cannot lead our church without prayer or without the Word of God. And it is better in my heart than on a shelf.

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

STEP 10: STAY FOCUSED

In your time of adversity, when things are tough, when you are in pain, that is when you need to focus. But what do you focus on?

2 Timothy 2:4-5

No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules.

Soldiers concentrate on their missions. Athletes focus on and give their all to their events. Servants of Jesus need to focus and concentrate on serving the King.

When you are in adversity, so many things run through your head. So much fills your mind. The bills, what he or she said, what they did, what may or may not happen. Every night you put your head on the pillow and this massive array of thoughts parade through your head. You can't seem to switch them off. You try and try, and the worry and anxiety controls your thought patterns, dreams and your whole life, right?

2 Corinthians 10:5b

and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

In adversity you need to take this type of thinking captive, and focus on what is truly important. You need to set your mind on things above, not on earthly things (Colossians 3:2).

Hebrews 12:1-2a

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

Focus on Jesus. Read the Word, pray, and focus on Jesus.

In addition to being a pastor, I am also an Optometrist. I have studied the workings of the eyes and the brain. It is a physical fact that, if you concentrate on a single point, your peripheral retina begins to shut down. Your peripheral vision closes in.

I once was invited to lecture helicopter search and rescue crews on how to search from the air. All sentries or searchers need to realise that you must keep your eyes moving. If you stop, you will focus on the one point, to the exclusion of your wider vision.

But when you focus on Jesus, something amazing happens. Everything else comes into perspective. Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you (Matthew 6:33).

Refuse to focus on circumstances, but lift your eyes to focus on Jesus...

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.

GRADUATION

The aim of pursuing any university degree is to graduate. If you have the perseverance and learn the lessons well, this can be one of the greatest events of your life.

I remember my graduation from the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia. I was 21 years old and the proud owner of a Bachelor of Optometry, with Honours. I remember walking across the stage, shaking the Vice Chancellor's hand, and receiving a tiny, rolled up piece of paper.

I was all decked out for the occasion in a square, pointy hat and long flowing robes... I looked like a crazed monk! But that day my family and wife of just a few months were watching and cheering for me, just as they had encouraged and cheered for me for four long years.

And so it is with you at Uni-Adversity.

YOU'LL NEVER WALK ALONE

There are many times when we face adversity that we feel alone, totally alone. We know that God loves us, and we might be aware that our friends and loved ones are behind us, but we all have to face that examination alone... Just you and those dreaded tests.

But that is just a feeling, and it is far removed from the truth...

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

How are the great cloud of witnesses, and what are they doing? To understand this, let's look at the context of the passage.

Hebrews 12 comes right after Hebrews 11 (no surprise there, right?) which is the great chapter on faith. In this chapter, the many saints who have gone before us are mentioned, and we have every reason to believe that these are the great cloud of witnesses.

I cannot imagine this stellar audience of past champions sitting passively in the stands drinking tea and eating scones. I believe that they are witnesses to the event you are now running in, and as they watch you suffer for your faith, they are rising to cheer you on!

You never attend the University of Adversity alone... these witnesses you cannot see are out there 100% behind you. Add to them your friends and family, others at church and, of course, your lecturer and chief tutor Jesus Himself, and this should give us the courage and the drive to keep going. As the old song says, We never walk alone!

POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

If you are reading this book, you have not fully finished your Uni-Adversity training yet. No, there is more to come, but as you continue to study and learn, you are being further equipped to take on even more challenging courses, and triumph in them!

There will come a time when the pressure eases up and you realise that you have passed the current test. You have learned the lessons well, and are able to apply them with great wisdom, and help those around you who are struggling under the same burden.

You've studied hard, hurt a lot but learned what you needed to learn to become more Christlike. So does this mean it is time to take a break, maybe have a gap year of travelling around Europe causing mischief?

No, my fellow student, the best is yet to come! You might have graduated, but you have not yet moved on to excel in postgraduate studies. There are honours to be obtained, there are doctorates, associate professorships and even professorships. The Uni-Adversity courses are challenging, and there is always more to learn, more grace to discover and greater triumphs ahead.

No, you're not done yet, not by a long shot. One day you will be, and in that moment you will be called home to glory, the glory that you spend so many years studying at Uni-Adversity to achieve, and you will hear your Lord say these incredible words over you...

Matthew 25:23

His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

The message for all of us is clear... We must keep on studying and learning the lessons of the University of Adversity, until one day we graduate into the arms of our Lord and Saviour!

But please, do not let this discourage you! There is much to learn, and something to suffer, but there will be good and wonderful gifts along the way. As you grow in maturity and strength of character, as you begin to change into the image of your Lord and Saviour, you will know that the pain, the sacrifice, the effort, the disappointments and the hard work are all worth it!

Keep your eyes on Christ, keep your heart soft towards His Spirit, and keep going, not turning to the right or the left. You are a champion, you are a winner, and you are an alumnus of the greatest university on earth, God's very own...

UNIVERSITY OF ADVERSITY

For more free teaching from Pastor Darin Browne, in audio and written form, please visit

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"Ignite Your Bible" Reading Plan
Ps Darin Browne

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
1 Genesis 1 Psalm 1	1 Genesis 21 Psalm 10	1 Genesis 33 Psalm 26	1 Deuteronomy 27 1 Corinthians 1	1 Judges 1 Psalm 41	1 1 Samuel 11 Job 1
2 Genesis 2 Psalm 2	2 Genesis 22 Psalm 13-12	2 Genesis 34 Psalm 27	2 Deuteronomy 28 1 Corinthians 2	2 Judges 2 Psalm 42-43	2 1 Samuel 12 Job 2
3 Genesis 3 Psalm 3-4	3 Genesis 23 Psalm 13-14	3 Genesis 35 Psalm 28	3 Deuteronomy 29 1 Corinthians 3	3 Judges 3 Psalm 44	3 1 Samuel 13 Job 3
4 Genesis 4 Psalm 5	4 Genesis 24 Psalm 15	4 Genesis 36 Psalm 29	4 Deuteronomy 30 1 Corinthians 4	4 Judges 4 Psalm 45	4 1 Samuel 14 Job 4-2
5 Genesis 5 Psalm 6	5 Genesis 25 Psalm 16	5 Genesis 37 Psalm 30	5 Deuteronomy 33 1 Corinthians 5	5 Judges 5 Psalm 46	5 1 Samuel 15 Ecc 1
6 Genesis 6 Psalm 7	6 Genesis 26 Psalm 17	6 Genesis 38 Psalm 31	6 Deuteronomy 34 1 Corinthians 6	6 Judges 6 Psalm 47	6 1 Samuel 16 Ecc 2
7 Genesis 7 Psalm 8	7 Genesis 27 Psalm 18	7 Genesis 39 Psalm 32	7 Joshua 1 1 Corinthians 7	7 Judges 7 Psalm 48	7 1 Samuel 17 Ecc 3
8 Genesis 8 Psalm 9	8 Genesis 28 Psalm 19	8 Genesis 40 Psalm 33	8 Joshua 2 1 Corinthians 8	8 Judges 8 Psalm 49	8 1 Samuel 18 Ecc 12
9 Genesis 9 Mark 1	9 Genesis 29 Psalm 20	9 Genesis 41 Psalm 34	9 Joshua 3 1 Corinthians 9	9 Judges 9 Psalm 50	9 1 Samuel 19 Proverbs 1
10 Genesis 12 Mark 2	10 Genesis 30 Psalm 21	10 Genesis 42 Psalm 35	10 Joshua 4 1 Corinthians 10	10 Judges 10 Psalm 51	10 1 Samuel 20 Proverbs 2
11 Genesis 13 Mark 3	11 Exodus 14 Psalm 22	11 Genesis 43 Psalm 36	11 Joshua 5 1 Corinthians 11	11 Judges 11 Psalm 52-53	11 1 Samuel 21 Proverbs 3
12 Genesis 14 Mark 4	12 Exodus 15 Psalm 23-24	12 Genesis 44 Psalm 37	12 Joshua 6 1 Corinthians 12	12 Judges 12 Psalm 54	12 1 Samuel 22 Proverbs 4
13 Genesis 15 Mark 5	13 Exodus 17 Psalm 25	13 Genesis 45 Psalm 38	13 Joshua 7 1 Corinthians 13	13 Judges 13 Psalm 55	13 1 Samuel 23 Proverbs 5
14 Genesis 16 Mark 6	14 Exodus 20 Ephesians 1	14 Genesis 46 Psalm 39	14 Joshua 8 1 Corinthians 14	14 Judges 14 Psalm 56	14 1 Samuel 24 Psalm 61-62
15 Genesis 17 Mark 7	15 Numbers 9 Ephesians 2	15 Genesis 47 Psalm 40	15 Joshua 9 1 Corinthians 15	15 Judges 15 Psalm 57	15 1 Samuel 25 Psalm 63
16 Genesis 18 Mark 8	16 Numbers 11 Ephesians 3	16 Genesis 48 Romans 1	16 Joshua 10 1 Corinthians 16	16 Judges 16 Psalm 58	16 1 Samuel 26 Psalm 64
17 Genesis 19 Mark 9	17 Numbers 12 Ephesians 4	17 Genesis 49 Romans 2	17 Joshua 11 Matthew 1:18-2	17 Judges 17 Psalm 59	17 1 Samuel 27 Psalm 65
18 Genesis 20 Mark 10	18 Numbers 13 Ephesians 5	18 Genesis 50 Romans 3	18 Joshua 12 Matthew 3	18 Judges 18 Psalm 60	18 1 Samuel 28 Psalm 66
19 Exodus 1 Mark 11	19 Numbers 14 Ephesians 6	19 Deuteronomy 1 Romans 4	19 Joshua 13 Matthew 4	19 Judges 19 Lamentations 3	19 1 Samuel 29 Psalm 67
20 Exodus 2 Mark 12	20 Numbers 20 James 1	20 Deuteronomy 2 Romans 5	20 Joshua 14 Matthew 5	20 Judges 20 Philippians 1	20 1 Samuel 30 Psalm 68
21 Exodus 3 Mark 13	21 Numbers 21 James 2	21 Deuteronomy 3 Romans 6	21 Joshua 15 Matthew 6	21 Judges 21 Philippians 2	21 1 Samuel 31 Psalm 69
22 Exodus 4 Mark 14	22 Numbers 22 James 3	22 Deuteronomy 4 Romans 7	22 Joshua 16 Matthew 7	22 1 Samuel 1 Philippians 3	22 Isaiah 1 Psalm 70-71
23 Exodus 5 Mark 15	23 Numbers 23 James 4	23 Deuteronomy 5 Romans 8	23 Joshua 17 Matthew 8	23 1 Samuel 2 Philippians 4	23 Isaiah 6 Psalm 72
24 Exodus 6 Mark 16	24 Numbers 24 James 5	24 Deuteronomy 6 Romans 9	24 Joshua 18 Matthew 9	24 1 Samuel 3 1 Peter 1	24 Isaiah 7 Psalm 73
25 Exodus 7 Galatians 1	25 Numbers 25 2 Timothy 1	25 Deuteronomy 7 Romans 10	25 Joshua 19 Matthew 10	25 1 Samuel 4 1 Peter 2	25 Isaiah 12 Psalm 74
26 Exodus 8 Galatians 2	26 Numbers 31 2 Timothy 2	26 Deuteronomy 8 Romans 11	26 Joshua 20 Matthew 11	26 1 Samuel 5 1 Peter 3	26 Isaiah 25 Psalm 75
27 Exodus 9 Galatians 3	27 Genesis 31 2 Timothy 3	27 Deuteronomy 9 Romans 12	27 Joshua 21 Matthew 12	27 1 Samuel 6 1 Peter 4	27 Isaiah 26 2 Peter 1
28 Exodus 10 Galatians 4	28 Genesis 32 2 Timothy 4	28 Deuteronomy 10 Romans 13	28 Joshua 22 Matthew 13	28 1 Samuel 7 1 Peter 5	28 Isaiah 27 2 Peter 2
29 Exodus 11 Galatians 5		29 Deuteronomy 11 Romans 14	29 Joshua 23 Matthew 14	29 1 Samuel 8 Habakkuk 1	29 Isaiah 29 2 Peter 3
30 Exodus 12 Galatians 6		30 Deuteronomy 13 Romans 15	30 Joshua 24 Matthew 15	30 1 Samuel 9 Habakkuk 2	30 Isaiah 30 Philomon
31 Exodus 13 Joel 2		31 Deuteronomy 15 Romans 16		31 1 Samuel 10 Habakkuk 3	

"Ignite Your Bible" Reading Plan
Ps Darin Browne

Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1 Isaiah 36 Psalm 76	1 2 Kings 8 Psalm 90	1 2 Chronicles 10 Psalm 105	1 2 Samuel 1 Psalm 119:96-176	1 Jeremiah 1 Psalm 140	1 Acts 1 Psalm 143
2 Isaiah 37 Psalm 77	2 2 Kings 9 Psalm 91	2 2 Chronicles 11 Psalm 106	2 2 Samuel 2 Psalm 120	2 Jeremiah 5 Psalm 141-142	2 Acts 2 Psalm 144
3 Isaiah 40 Psalm 78	3 2 Kings 10 Psalm 92	3 2 Chronicles 12 Psalm 107	3 2 Samuel 3 Psalm 121	3 Jeremiah 12 Proverbs 26	3 Acts 3 Psalm 145
4 Isaiah 42 Psalm 79	4 2 Kings 11 Psalm 93-94	4 2 Chronicles 13 Psalm 108	4 2 Samuel 4 Psalm 122-123	4 Jeremiah 13 Proverbs 27	4 Acts 4 Psalm 146
5 Isaiah 43 Psalm 80	5 2 Kings 12 Psalm 95-96	5 2 Chronicles 14 Psalm 109	5 2 Samuel 5 Psalm 124	5 Jeremiah 17 Proverbs 28	5 Acts 5 Psalm 147
6 Isaiah 49 Psalm 81	6 2 Kings 13 Psalm 97-98	6 2 Chronicles 15 Psalm 110	6 2 Samuel 6 Psalm 125-126	6 Jeremiah 18 Proverbs 29	6 Acts 6 Psalm 148
7 Isaiah 50 Psalm 82-83	7 2 Kings 14 Psalm 99-100	7 2 Chronicles 16 Proverbs 16	7 2 Samuel 7 Proverbs 21	7 Jeremiah 23 Proverbs 30	7 Acts 7 Psalm 149
8 Isaiah 52 Psalm 84-85	8 2 Kings 15 Proverbs 11	8 2 Chronicles 17 Proverbs 17	8 2 Samuel 8 Proverbs 22	8 Jeremiah 26 Proverbs 31	8 Acts 8 Psalm 150
9 Isaiah 53 Proverbs 6	9 2 Kings 16 Proverbs 12	9 2 Chronicles 18 Proverbs 18	9 2 Samuel 9 Proverbs 23	9 Jeremiah 27 Hebrews 1	9 Acts 9 Jude
10 Isaiah 54 Proverbs 7	10 2 Kings 17 Proverbs 13	10 2 Chronicles 19 Proverbs 19	10 2 Samuel 10 Proverbs 24	10 Jeremiah 28 Hebrews 2	10 Acts 10 John 1
11 Isaiah 55 Proverbs 8	11 2 Kings 18 Proverbs 14	11 2 Chronicles 20 Proverbs 20	11 2 Samuel 11 Proverbs 25	11 Jeremiah 29 Hebrews 3	11 Acts 11 John 2
12 Isaiah 58 Proverbs 9	12 2 Kings 19 Proverbs 15	12 2 Chronicles 26 Revelation 1	12 2 Samuel 12 Luke 2	12 Jeremiah 30 Hebrews 4	12 Acts 12 John 3
13 Isaiah 60 Proverbs 10	13 2 Kings 20 2 Corinthians 1	13 2 Chronicles 32 Revelation 2	13 2 Samuel 13 Luke 4	13 Jeremiah 33 Hebrews 5	13 Acts 13 John 4
14 Isaiah 61 Colossians 1	14 2 Kings 21 2 Corinthians 2	14 Esther 1 Revelation 3	14 2 Samuel 14 Luke 5	14 Jeremiah 37 Hebrews 6	14 Acts 14 John 5
15 Isaiah 64 Colossians 2	15 2 Kings 22 2 Corinthians 3	15 Esther 2 Revelation 4	15 2 Samuel 15 Luke 6	15 Jeremiah 38 Hebrews 7	15 Acts 15 John 11
16 1 Kings 1 Colossians 3	16 2 Kings 23 2 Corinthians 4	16 Esther 3 Revelation 5	16 2 Samuel 16 Luke 7	16 Jeremiah 39 Hebrews 8	16 Acts 16 John 12
17 1 Kings 2 Colossians 4	17 2 Kings 24 2 Corinthians 5	17 Esther 4 Revelation 6	17 2 Samuel 17 Luke 8	17 Jeremiah 40 Hebrews 9	17 Acts 17 John 14
18 1 Kings 3 Psalm 86	18 2 Kings 25 2 Corinthians 6	18 Esther 5 Revelation 7	18 2 Samuel 18 Luke 9	18 Jeremiah 52 Hebrews 10	18 Acts 18 John 15
19 1 Kings 17 Psalm 87	19 Ruth 1 2 Corinthians 7	19 Esther 6 Revelation 8	19 2 Samuel 19 Luke 10	19 Ezekiel 1 Hebrews 11	19 Acts 19 John 17
20 1 Kings 18 Psalm 88	20 Ruth 2 2 Corinthians 8	20 Esther 7 Revelation 9	20 2 Samuel 20 Luke 11	20 Ezekiel 2 Hebrews 12	20 Acts 20 John 18
21 1 Kings 19 Psalm 89	21 Ruth 3 2 Corinthians 9	21 Daniel 1 Revelation 10	21 2 Samuel 21 Luke 12	21 Ezekiel 3 Hebrews 13	21 Acts 21 John 19
22 1 Kings 20 1 Timothy 1	22 Ruth 4 2 Corinthians 10	22 Daniel 2 Revelation 11	22 2 Samuel 22 1 John 1	22 Ezekiel 10 1 Thessalonians 1	22 Acts 22 John 20
23 1 Kings 21 1 Timothy 2	23 Nehemiah 1 2 Corinthians 11	23 Daniel 3 Revelation 12	23 2 Samuel 23 1 John 2	23 Ezekiel 11 1 Thessalonians 2	23 Acts 23 John 21
24 1 Kings 22 1 Timothy 3	24 Nehemiah 2 2 Corinthians 12	24 Daniel 5 Revelation 13	24 2 Samuel 24 1 John 3	24 Ezekiel 18 1 Thessalonians 3	24 Acts 24 Revelation 15
25 2 Kings 1 1 Timothy 4	25 Nehemiah 3 2 Corinthians 13	25 Daniel 6 Revelation 14	25 Psalm 129-130 1 John 4	25 Ezekiel 22 1 Thessalonians 4	25 Acts 25 Revelation 16
26 2 Kings 2 1 Timothy 5	26 Nehemiah 4 Psalm 101-102	26 Hoses 1 Psalm 111-112	26 Psalm 131-132 1 John 5	26 Ezekiel 33 1 Thessalonians 5	26 Acts 26 Revelation 17
27 2 Kings 3 1 Timothy 6	27 Nehemiah 5 Psalm 103	27 Hoses 2 Psalm 113-114	27 Psalm 133-134 Jonah 1	27 Ezekiel 34 2 Thessalonians 1	27 Acts 27 Revelation 18
28 2 Kings 4 Titus 1	28 Nehemiah 6 Psalm 104	28 Hoses 3 Psalm 115-116	28 Psalm 135 Jonah 2	28 Ezekiel 37 2 Thessalonians 2	28 Acts 28 Revelation 19
29 2 Kings 5 Titus 2-3	29 Nehemiah 7 Amos 3	29 Hoses 10 Psalm 117-118	29 Psalm 136-137 Jonah 3	29 Ezekiel 43 2 Thessalonians 3	29 Malachi 1 Revelation 20
30 2 Kings 6 Micah 5	30 Nehemiah 8 Zephaniah 3	30 Hoses 14 Psalm 119:1-95	30 Psalm 138 Jonah 4	30 Ezekiel 47 2 John 3 John	30 Malachi 2 Revelation 21
31 2 Kings 7 Micah 6	31 Nehemiah 13 Zephaniah 4		31 Psalm 139 Nahum 1		31 Malachi 3 Revelation 22