

The Mission of Adversity and the Spiritual Value of Disappointment

Full Text of Talk by Dr. James Perry ■ February 16, 2019

Progress is the watchword of the universe. Adversity and disappointment are tools provided to us in mercy and grace by the heavenly Father to ensure that we continue to progress spiritually. Adversity rescues us from our comfort zones and disappointment stimulates us to change as we experience adversity. It is a value given to us because of the relativity of our concept frame, which must continually give rise to higher and higher concepts.

Consider this:

48:6.36 (555.4) Even as mortals, so have these angels been father to many disappointments, and they will point out that sometimes your most disappointing disappointments have become your greatest blessings. Sometimes the planting of a seed necessitates its death, the death of your fondest hopes, before it can be reborn to bear the fruits of new life and new opportunity.

On the night Jesus gave his talk on "The Mission of Adversity and the Spiritual Value of Disappointment, he had recently been rejected by his own community of Nazareth. We are told that his hearers never forgot the lesson he imparted, but we are not given the contents of the talk. We are left to ponder what he said. To understand the reason that evolutionary creatures must have such challenging experiences, we are free to use our spiritual imaginations.

Let us survey then what the Revelation has to say about adversity and disappointment in general and what the Life of Jesus reveals about this matter specifically. Finally, I will share some personal experiences and my efforts to extract spiritual meanings from them.

The Urantia Book has quite a bit to say about adversity and disappointment. As we view life in all of its manifestations, we see the spectacle of interminable struggle against the force of adversity and the ever-present emotional reaction--disappointment. But why

must we struggle against the force of adversity and its subsequent emotional reaction of disappointment? Here is a clue:

P.258 - §11 *Your anxieties and sorrows, your trials and disappointments, are just as much a part of the divine plan on your sphere as are the exquisite perfection and infinite adaptation of all things to their supreme purpose on the worlds of the central and perfect universe.*

"The universe of your origin is being forged out between the anvil of justice and the hammer of suffering; but those who wield the hammer are the children of mercy, the spirit offspring of the Infinite Spirit."

And added to this are these gems:

P.556 - §14 12 *The greatest affliction of the cosmos is never to have been afflicted. Mortals only learn wisdom by experiencing tribulation.*

47:8.7 (538.5) ... *Coming up through great tribulation serves to make glorified mortals very kind and understanding, very sympathetic and tolerant.*

154:2.5 (1719.1) *Universe difficulties must be met and planetary obstacles must be encountered as a part of the experience training provided for the growth and development, the progressive perfection, of the evolving souls of mortal creatures. The spiritualization of the human soul requires intimate experience with the educational solving of a wide range of real universe problems. The animal nature and the lower forms of will creatures do not progress favorably in environmental ease. Problematic situations, coupled with exertion stimuli, conspire to produce those activities of mind, soul, and spirit which contribute mightily to the achievement of worthy goals of mortal progression and to the attainment of higher levels of spirit destiny.*

All mortal creatures living within the present sphere of the Supreme share his incompleteness, his imperfection. Perfection attainment is a mandate of the heavenly Father. On higher universe levels, the stimulus of enforced struggle is not needed because these beings understand the nature of struggle and voluntarily embrace it. But not so on the lower universe levels, such as the level on which we live. We are told that "the world is not to be regarded as an enemy; that the circumstances of life constitute a divine dispensation working along with the children of God." And as we reflect upon the varied and difficult circumstances of life, we ponder such a statement and wonder why it is true.

The mystery is partly unraveled by this revelation:

P.1097 - §6 *Loyalties are not exercised in behalf of the great, the good, the true, and the noble without a struggle. Effort is attendant upon clarification of spiritual vision and enhancement of cosmic insight. And the human intellect protests against being weaned from subsisting upon the nonspiritual energies of temporal existence. The slothful animal mind rebels at the effort required to wrestle with cosmic problem solving.*

The animal nature, our inaugural status on the material level, requires the stimulus of adversity and struggle. In facing these situations, our emotions often take flight on the wings of anxiety and crash land on the rocks of depression.

However, we are given the following truths of comfort to cushion our negative emotional responses and lack of understanding. Ponder these quotes of mercy (*Paper 3:5.6-14; p. 51*):

Is courage--strength of character--desirable? Then must man be reared in an environment which necessitates grappling with hardships and reacting to disappointments.

Is altruism--service of one's fellows--desirable? Then must life experience provide for encountering situations of social inequality.

Is hope--the grandeur of trust--desirable? Then human existence must constantly be confronted with insecurities and recurrent uncertainties.

Is faith--the supreme assertion of human thought--desirable? Then must the mind of man find itself in that troublesome predicament where it ever knows less than it can believe.

Is the love of truth and the willingness to go wherever it leads, desirable? Then must man grow up in a world where error is present and falsehood always possible.

Is idealism--the approaching concept of the divine--desirable? Then must man struggle in an environment of relative goodness and beauty, surroundings stimulative of the irrepressible reach for better things.

Is loyalty--devotion to highest duty--desirable? Then must man carry on amid the possibilities of betrayal and desertion. The valor of devotion to duty consists in the implied danger of default.

Is unselfishness--the spirit of self-forgetfulness--desirable? Then must mortal man live face to face with the incessant clamoring of an inescapable self for recognition and honor. Man could not dynamically choose the divine life if there were no self-life to forsake. Man could never lay saving hold on righteousness if there were no potential evil to exalt and differentiate the good by contrast.

Is pleasure--the satisfaction of happiness--desirable? Then must man live in a world where the alternative of pain and the likelihood of suffering are ever-present experiential possibilities.

We crave to have these beautiful and desirable qualities as a part of our characters; but being experiential creatures, we can acquire them only by and through continuous effort:

P.1266 - §3 *All this must be according to the Father's plan, which has predicated finite progress upon effort, creature achievement upon perseverance, and personality development upon faith.*

We must develop a type of faith that can survive all disappointments, all trials and tribulations of life. Again, adversity is necessary to force us to move forward in this struggle to convert man the animal into man the spirit.

Michael, the Creator Son incarnated in the form of a human being, was subject to the vicissitudes that human beings undergo. Consider these truths:

He lived his mortal life just as all others of the human family may live theirs.^{128:1.7}
(1408.4)

...who in the days of the flesh so frequently offered up prayers and supplications, even with strong feelings and tears, to Him who is able to save from all evil, and his prayers were effective because he believed.

Wherefore it behooved him in every respect to be made like his brethren that he might become a merciful and understanding sovereign ruler over them.

When Jesus was 14, his earthly father Joseph died unexpectedly, forcing Jesus to assume the head of the family, which included his mother and seven other children. He was supposed to attend the schools in Jerusalem the following year, but this crisis ended that plan. We are told that Jesus struggled valiantly to support his family; despite this, the family sank into poverty for many years, only emerging as the younger children became old enough to assist financially. He suffered further difficulties when Herod refused to pay him what was owed the family on account of Joseph's death.

These difficulties and responsibilities caused him to draw closer to his Paradise Father, constantly seeking the Father's will. These struggles mobilized the spiritual potentials wrapped up in his human soul, and this enabled him to become perfect even as the heavenly Father is perfect. Subsequent to his completion of the requirements of mortal life and awareness that he is a Son of God, Jesus still suffered many disappointments, the greatest being the rejection of his mission by the Jewish authorities, which resulted in his being put to death.

A little more than one year ago, I experienced adversity and disappointment, and I can attest to the truth that these events have caused a further increase of spiritual values within my soul. These precious meanings continue to sustain me spiritually.

Early on the morning of August 13, 2017, I was awakened by my wife Marion, who seemed to be having severe muscle spasms while asleep. Because of their severity, I wondered if she was having a bad dream. Then I thought that perhaps the muscle relaxant she had taken before bed was causing an adverse reaction. As I attempted to awaken her, she fell out of bed and was in and out of consciousness. When she came to, I helped her to the bathroom and noticed that she was having difficulty using her left hand. Upon returning to bed, she fell again, and I struggled to get her back to bed. I let her sleep for a while, thinking that her muscle relaxant was causing these symptoms. I did not comprehend that she was having a stroke. Eventually we took my wife to the hospital, and she was diagnosed with having a massive thrombotic stroke. It was too late to give her a clot-busting medication. I felt terrible that I had missed the stroke, and possibly had missed the opportunity for her to gain full recovery. And then the guilt began to rise within my mind and soul. I had helped so many patients during my medical career; yet when it came to really helping the most important human being in my life, I failed.

Two months later, I awoke from sleep with chest pains that would not subside. After being hospitalized, I was diagnosed with a myocardial infarction (heart attack). With Marion in a nursing home undergoing rehabilitation for stroke, I experienced another

round of adversity and disappointment. After being treated for the MI with stent placement, I began cardiac rehabilitation, which resulted in a painful side effect of continuous neck strain. With a heart attack and neck pain, I was further handicapped in providing care for Marion, who still has weakness in her left leg and has a left arm that is paralyzed.

Jesus said, "Man should always pray and not faint." Throughout these adversities, my wife and I have continued to seek the Father's will, trying to extract the spiritual values and meanings from our experiences. We must not allow disappointment to derail us, to deprive us of our faith in the Father.

What insight can we obtain about a faith that is disappointment-proof?

We are confronted with many challenges as we live this life. Many adverse events that we experience seem to defy a workable solution. Some problems are such that only the passing of time can resolve them. In time, we find that some of our challenges pass away without too much hardship. Still there are other adversities that require faith for us to continue to try and resolve them. Faith is the tool that the Father has given us so that we may obey his command to be perfect even as he is perfect.

And it is often difficult to maintain faith in the face of these seemingly overwhelming and unresolvable problems. But as we continue to pray and trust the heavenly Father, we eventually realize that the *willingness to struggle with problems stimulates growth*. With growth comes greater spiritual insight and an increase in spiritual status, which redounds to an increase in God-consciousness. These outcomes may not be evident during a struggle with some mountainous problem, but our decisions--and thus our performance--validate that we have made progress.

We must grapple with demanding problems and we must grow in faith while doing so. Without faith, we may grow weary and ultimately give up. So, we want to keep our faith strong and vibrant—in short, we want our faith to be disappointment-proof. But how?

Let's ponder this snapshot of Jesus' faith:

196:0.3 (2087.3) *Jesus did not cling to faith in God as would a struggling soul at war with the universe and at death grips with a hostile and sinful world; he did not resort to faith merely as a consolation in the midst of difficulties or as a comfort in threatened despair; faith was not just an illusory compensation for the unpleasant realities and the sorrows of living. In the very face of all the natural*

difficulties and the temporal contradictions of mortal existence, he experienced the tranquility of supreme and unquestioned trust in God and felt the tremendous thrill of living, by faith, in the very presence of the heavenly Father. And this triumphant faith was a living experience of actual spirit attainment (emphasis mine).

We must ensure that our faith is living. A static faith cannot keep pace with the divine value and meanings that emerge from rapidly changing moral and spiritual situations. Our lives are dynamic and our faith must be as well, never losing its potency, undergoing fatigue, or becoming discouraged or disappointed.

The certain proof that our faith is living rather than dead is that we are able to extract and comprehend the divine meanings and values from adverse experiences, recalling the truth that nothing of value is ever lost.

Next to ensuring that our faith is a living one, we must steep our faith in the goodness of God no matter how trying the circumstance. The goodness of God is the foundation of our trust. We must believe wholeheartedly that the Father knows which experiences are best for our individual growth--in time and in eternity. Admittedly, this is often very difficult to our material natures, as we strain to be released from the fetters of suffering. But we must possess our souls in patience, believing that the Father is the author and finisher of our faith--that he can and will complete the work that he has begun in us.

And through all the emotional upheavals, we must continue to pray and worship, to continually seek the Father's will. This practice will impart the necessary power in our souls to "endure as seeing Him who is invisible." Prayer yields insights while worship illuminates our destiny. As we continue to submit to the Father's will, our exercise of faith begins to take on the qualities of becoming disappointment-proof as we begin to realize the Father's presence. Such a faith will never stumble over the ups and downs of material life; rather will such a faith exert itself in the very midst of these painful circumstances—our attitudes will be, in every circumstance, "not my will but your will be done."

The development of a disappointment-proof faith requires that we allow this faith to stand for our relationship with the heavenly Father. Our relationship with him grows as we continue to submit to his will. And when this faith stands for our relationship with him, our faith will never be disappointed; we will experience the delights of his character and reveal it to our brothers and sisters.

Through all of our upheavals, the spirit responds with hope. When the supreme level of human effort is reached and no further effort can be made, one of two things happen—either despair sets in or hope rises. If the spiritual response is embraced, hope uplifts the soul from its bed of affliction and elevates it to a spiritual landscape—a picture of the future—where spiritual values are recognized and conserved. This view reveals that nothing of spiritual value is ever lost.

This faith assures the soul that it will survive any contests with adversity. In fact, the soul will emerge from the struggle victorious and even stronger than it was. Like the material and intellectual aspects of mortals, the soul needs exercise also. It needs to flex its spiritual muscles and sharpen its teeth of truth against the foes of spiritual perfection. The spirit empowers the soul with spiritual and moral power.

The spiritual response to adversity also imparts courage to the soul, the quality that equips the soul to grasp the faith broadcasts of the Father's love and mercy. This courage is of such a nature that it causes the soul to boldly declare its perfection in the spirit, to boldly acknowledge its divine sonship even while its material self may be crumbling. Courage causes the soul to stand and grapple with what may appear to be overwhelming odds. It dares to assert that

P.59 - §5... Even if I cannot do this, there lives in me one who can and will do it, a part of the Father-Absolute of the universe of universes. And that is "the victory which overcomes the world, even your faith.

This courage causes the soul to pursue meanings of truth wherever they lead. It allows the soul to stand even when all around it are retreating. This courage is the antidote to cowardice.

Underpinning the spiritual quality of courage is trust. Trust is necessary for faith to do its work of transmuting the potential values of growth into the actual values of growth. The process of growth is often painful, as the soul is required to become more than it is. Grappling with adversity often causes quite a bit of uncertainty and sometimes confusion. The spirit diffuses tranquility into the soul, acting as a tranquilizer that calms everything down even in the midst of the storm.

This tranquility is the transport of the soul into the very heart of the spirit where it rests securely:

P.1096 - §4 Jesus portrayed the profound surety of the God-knowing mortal when he said: "To a God-knowing kingdom believer, what does it matter if all things

earthly crash? Temporal securities are vulnerable, but spiritual sureties are impregnable. When the flood tides of human adversity, selfishness, cruelty, hate, malice, and jealousy beat about the mortal soul, you may rest in the assurance that there is one inner bastion, the citadel of the spirit, which is absolutely unassailable; at least this is true of every human being who has dedicated the keeping of his soul to the indwelling spirit of the eternal God.

Finally, there is the response to adversity by the spirit with increased augmentation of goodness. This goodness becomes palpable as the soul cries out for help from its maker, the heavenly Father. The heavenly Father responds with this quality that hails from the very center of his being. The Father's goodness is of such a quality that it causes the soul to have faith, hope, and trust in the Father. The absolute eternal and infinite foundation of goodness is the final assurance and absolute insurance against any and all harm to the soul. The Father is absolutely moral, and not only that, he loves his children with an absolute and eternal affection. The Father has created this evolutionary environment of imperfection to assist his children to become perfect even as he is perfect, but he is also in the very midst of this environment holding his children's hands every step of the way. There is no force, no power, no being who can pry his grip loose. The Father loves us.

Now we are beginning not only to understand but to gain inspiration and insight that will allow us to proceed through this material life with same consciousness of the heavenly Father that Jesus experienced. Can you imagine that? Being spiritually conscious of the heavenly Father as we make our way through this valley of human toil! The experience of this great truth does not take away the trials and tribulations, but it does transcend them. When once we realize that within us is a divine spirit who works in, with, and as us, we are mightily inspired to begin to look at these struggles from a more positive perspective.

Now consider this faith-inspiring admonition given by Melchizedek:

101:6.17 (1113.6) Through the appropriation of the faith of Jesus, mortal man can foretaste in time the realities of eternity. Jesus made the discovery, in human experience, of the Final Father, and his brothers in the flesh of mortal life can follow him along this same experience of Father discovery. They can even attain, as they are, the same satisfaction in this experience with the Father as did Jesus as he was. New potentials were actualized in the universe of Neadon consequent upon the terminal bestowal of Michael, and one of these was the new illumination of the path of eternity that leads to the Father of all, and which can be traversed even by the mortals of material flesh and blood in the initial life

on the planets of space. Jesus was and is the new and living way whereby man can come into the divine inheritance which the Father has decreed shall be his for but the asking. In Jesus there is abundantly demonstrated both the beginnings and endings of the faith experience of humanity, even of divine humanity.

And then ponder this admonition from the Solitary Messenger:

111:7.2 (1223.4) I admonish you to heed the distant echo of the Adjuster's faithful call to your soul? The indwelling Adjuster cannot stop or even materially alter your career struggle of time; the Adjuster cannot lessen the hardships of life as you journey on through this world of toil. The divine indweller can only patiently forbear while you fight the battle of life as it is lived on your planet; but you could, if you only would—as you work and worry, as you fight and toil—permit the valiant Adjuster to fight with you and for you. You could be so comforted and inspired, so enthralled and intrigued, if you would only allow the Adjuster constantly to bring forth the pictures of the real motive, the final aim, and the eternal purpose of all this difficult, uphill struggle with the commonplace problems of your present material world (the spiritual perfection of the human soul) (emphasis mine).

The Solitary Messenger then asks:

111:7.3 (1223.5) Why do you not aid the Adjuster in the task of showing you the spiritual counterpart of all these strenuous material efforts? Why do you not allow the Adjuster to strengthen you with the spiritual truths of cosmic power while you wrestle with the temporal difficulties of creature existence? Why do you not encourage the heavenly helper to cheer you with the clear vision of the eternal outlook of universal life as you gaze in perplexity at the problems of the passing hour? Why do you refuse to be enlightened and inspired by the universe viewpoint while you toil amidst the handicaps of time and flounder in the maze of uncertainties which beset your mortal life journey? Why not allow the Adjuster to spiritualize your thinking, even though your feet must tread the material paths of earthly endeavor?

In the end, we shall be like the caterpillar that emerges from its cocoon as a beautiful butterfly. We too shall transform from dreading another struggle to attaining that high and glorious state, where we have

26:5.3 (291.3) ...learned to feast upon uncertainty, to fatten upon disappointment, to enthuse over apparent defeat, to invigorate in the presence of difficulties, to

exhibit indomitable courage in the face of immensity, and to exercise unconquerable faith when confronted with the challenge of the inexplicable.

Our battle cry will have become: "In liaison with God, nothing--absolutely nothing--is impossible." ^{26:5.3 (291.3)} Adversity and disappointment will have achieved their mission of creating a disappointment-proof faith and a soul who always cries: 'Not my will but your will be done!'

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