

"The Burden of the Cup"

Discerning and accepting God's will for your life in the face of Adversity

Prepared for Varick Memorial A. M. E. Zion Church



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But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

II Corinthians 4:7

A native of Columbus, Ohio, Alyce Walker Johnson was appointed pastor of the historic Clinton African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in September, 2016 by the Right Revered W. Darin Moore, Presiding Prelate of the Mid-Atlantic Episcopal District. Prior to assuming the pastorate at Clinton, she served as the Executive Minister for Trinity A. M. E. Zion Church in Washington DC. Rev. Walker Johnson has held leadership positions in church at the local, district and annual conference levels. She has also served as a strategist and consultant for episcopal leaders, the Executive Board of the Women's Home and Overseas Missionary Society (WHOMS), the Connectional Lay Council (CLC) and the Christian Education Department (CED). She is currently a member of the Management Review Team (MRT), a group of five business and strategic consultants advising the Restructuring Commission on ways to improve efficiency and effectiveness of Zion's headquarters operations.

From August 2011 to April 2015, Rev. Alyce served as the Interim Chief Administrative Officer and Chair's Liaison for Transition and Governance the for the National Council of Negro Women, Inc. (NCNW) which is headquartered in Washington, DC. In this position, she was responsible for NCNW's day to day operations (Public Policy, National Programs, Membership, Finance, etc.), strategic planning and governance.

In 2005 Alyce founded Rhema Consulting, LLC which specializes in strategy, planning, change management, executive coaching and non-profit governance. Having spent more than twenty years in government and the non-profit sector, Alyce served as the Director of the HIV/AIDS Clinic at ECCO Family Health Center (Columbus, OH) and Vice President of Diversity (United Way of Central Ohio). She spent ten years at what is now United Way Worldwide where she led the effort to re-think United Way's mission, vision and strategy. Responsible for corporate planning, budgeting and system design, Alyce was Senior Vice President of Strategy, Planning and Diversity and the National System Planning Officer when she concluded her service to United Way.

Today, a sought after preacher, teacher and lecturer, Alyce is privileged to work with government, non-profit organizations, corporations, faith-based organizations in the U.S., U.K., Africa and the Caribbean.

The daughter of the late Edward C. Walker and the late Constance M. (Walker) Scruggs, Alyce is one of seven children. She is joyfully married to Timothy Kirk Johnson and together they share their lives with two college students, Elijah and Ephraim Johnson; Santele and (Philip) Jarad Taylor and their sons, Jaidan, Tyler and Cason as well as a large family and extended family.

*And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground
and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible,
let this cup pass from me;
yet not what I want but what you want."*

Jesus (Matthew 26:39)

*There is no better than adversity. Every defeat, every heartbreak,
every loss, contains its own seed, its own lesson
on how to improve your performance the next time.*

Malcolm X

*Let me embrace thee, sour adversity,
for wise men say it is the wisest course.*

William Shakespeare

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Session Outline

Opening Remarks and Prayer

- I. Introduction – The Cup
- II. How Does Adversity Impact the Believer?
- III. Discerning and Staying Focused on God’s Will

Discussion

- IV. The Conclusion of the Matter

Closing Remarks

Prayer



I. Introduction

- a. Adversity is defined as “a state or instance of serious or continued difficulty or misfortune.”
- b. Everyone experiences adversity—even Jesus Christ! **Matthew 26:36-46**
- c. Our beliefs about adversity can help or hinder our ability to discern and/or accept God’s will for our lives IN SPITE of the challenges we face.

What do you believe about ADVERSITY? Review each statement and select the response that feels the most true to your experience and teaching.

a) If one is really walking with God, life should be easy, and things should come together without a lot of stress and strain. Hassles, adversity, and opposition indicate that God is not leading us in that direction. **Always True** _____ **Sometimes True** _____ **False** _____

b) Persistent adversity in our lives indicates a lack of faith, because as sons of God we have the power to overcome adversity and the Adversary. We are super conquerors over every situation, meaning that we can and should exercise a victorious faith over negative circumstances because it is God’s will that we not suffer through adversity and He wants us to demonstrate His power.
Always True _____ **Sometimes True** _____ **False** _____

c) That adversity is caused by one’s personal sinfulness, and brought on because sin and idolatry have weakened our defenses. If we are really loving and obeying God as we should we would be spared adversity and manifest victory.
Always True _____ **Sometimes True** _____ **False** _____

d) Adversity, temptation, or suffering is specifically, personally, and intentionally sent by God to discipline us, to purify our motives, or to prepare us for service to Him. (2) God is in complete control of everything that happens to us, good and bad, and that nothing happens unless it first goes across His desk for approval.
Always True _____ **Sometimes True** _____ **False** _____

e) Adversity is the direct result of demonic oppression or the attack of the Devil. Adversity validates that we are on the right path and the Enemy is trying to discourage us.
Always True _____ **Sometimes True** _____ **False** _____

f) Adversity is the necessary consequence of sin’s entrance into the world, and affects believers and unbelievers alike. Everyone will face adversity, which may or may not be related to our choices or actions, or that God or the Devil are involved. Learning to handle adversity well will result in purification of our motives, strengthening of our faith in God’s deliverance, and free us from the bondage of needing to be comfortable, among other things.
Always True _____ **Sometimes True** _____ **False** _____

What Where Does Adversity Come From?

Adversity comes from **four (4)** main sources and we need to discern the source in order to handle it appropriately:

- The fallen world – **Genesis 3:16-18**
- Our choices – **I Cor. 7:28**
- The Devil and wicked spirits – John 10:10; Ephesians 6
- As a Result of Relationship with God and Jesus Christ – **II Timothy 3:10-11**

II. Adversity Has an Impact Christians

- A. Check on our Attitude – Matthew 15:17-19
- B. Build up our Courage – Matthew 14:24,27
- C. Expose our Spiritual Weakness – Matt. 14:28-31, I Cor. 10:13
- D. Strip Us Down to our Real Motives – James 4:1,2
- E. Remind us of the Power of Prayer James 4:2-4
- F. Affirm our Choice to Follow Christ – John 15:18-20
- G. Grow us in Christlikeness. – Romans 8:28,29
- H. Increase our Humility and Submission to Him – Job 42:1,2
- I. For cleansing and reconciliation Gen. 50:20
- J. To Demonstrate God's Amazing Power – Deut. 29:29, Mark 7:33-37
- K. To Demonstrate the Sufficiency of God's Grace – II Corinthians 12:9,10)

III. DISCERNING AND STAYING FOCUSED ON GOD'S WILL

1) Walk with God. Seek to know Him and not just to know about Him.

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. **Proverbs 3:5-6***

2) Surrender your will to God's. He is NOT your rubber stamp! Before God will begin to reveal His will to you, you must be committed to doing whatever it is that He desires for you to do. God will likely be slow to show you His plan if He knows you are not ready to submit to His will.

*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. **Romans 12:1-2***

3) Obey what you already know to be God's Will. Read the Bible—God is very clear about many, many aspects of His will. If we do not obey the things that God has shown us clearly to be His will, why would we think He would reveal any further information regarding His plan for our lives? Obedience is an important first step.

4) Seek godly input. Make sure that you have at least one godly advisor in your life. If you don't already have a godly mentor, prayerfully seek one right away.

Remember that you are basically a composite of the five people you spend the most time with.

Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety. The church is designed to help you greatly with this. I would encourage you to be in church every single time the doors are opened. The more you involve yourself with a community of believers, the greater your chances will be of finding godly men and women who can help you discern God's will.

Proverbs 11:14

5) Pay attention to how God has wired YOU and do YOU.

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

I Peter 4:10

6) Listen to God's Spirit.

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." **John 10:27**

When you pray, spend twice as much time listening than speaking/talking! Keep a notepad handy—identify the questions that you need God to answer for you, which might include:

"What is the next step in my career?"

"What is the next step in my ministry?"

"What is the next step for my family?"

"What is the next step for my marriage?"

"What is the next step in my education?"

"What is the next step in my finances?"

Meditate on your questions and **allow God** time to speak to your heart.

7) Listen to your own heart.

Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass." **Psalms 37:4-5**

8) Take a look at your circumstances. Read this text 3 Times:

“Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.” Acts 16:6-10

God often clearly demonstrates His plan for our lives by lining up circumstances in obvious ways. And He also shows us what His will is NOT for us to do in that same way. It is not His will for you to take the job that is not offered to you. If you are 5’ 6” tall and weigh 125 lbs., it is not likely that God has created you to play professional football.

IV. The Conclusion of the Matter

1. Hope Matters

Romans 15:4 states *“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”*

There is a very close relationship in Scripture between godliness (being like God) and adversity. In fact, godliness is more clearly seen and revealed through adversity. **II Peter 1:5-6** suggests that godliness is built upon perseverance (enduring adversity). In **James 1:2-4**, perseverance is given a human quality, being pictured as one who works—doing a perfect work, purifying faith and godliness. **Romans 5:3-4** expresses a similar truth *“Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”*

Hope, called an anchor in Hebrews, keeps us focused, grounded or steady—while we ride out whatever storm we must face.

2. Character Matters.

Having godly character is a good way to get God’s attention when you’re in a predicament. **II Peter 2:9** says that the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials. In **I Timothy 4:7-8**, godly character is compared to physical exercise *“Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”*

Physical exercise requires resistance against something: gravity, weights, body weight, etc. No resistance, no work, no gain. But the benefits of physical exercise are many—relieving tension and stress, stimulating the mind, helping maintain stable weight, controlling appetite, boosting self-image, improving flexibility, increasing “good” (HDL) cholesterol, strengthening bones, etc.

Godliness is training against resistance. We actually exercise (and grow) our faith by and through handling adversity.

REMEMBER:

Memorizing Scripture is a good mental exercise, but when remembered and applied in times of adversity it is especially profitable. Scriptures held in the mind but not applied are profitless.

3. Grace Matters.

II Corinthians 12:8-10 *“Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.*

*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.**”*

Paul prayed three times, thinking that he could alter his circumstances. But the answer to his prayer was not to change the circumstances but to change him—to give him whatever he needed internally in order to endure the outward circumstances.

Jesus experienced the same thing in the garden of Gethsemane. His prayer for another way was not answered, and He surrendered to the will of God, which in that case was to endure the cross, and despise the shame associated with it (**Hebrews 12:2**).

4. Discernment Matters.

Try the “three prayers test.” If your circumstances are unchanged, make up your mind to go **through** the adversity and not around it. Begin praying for strength to endure, for patience, for love for others, for other elements of godliness.

5. Leadership Matters.

In II Timothy 2:3, Paul encourages Timothy to “*endure hardship with us [the English transliteration is sugkakopatheo –literally “suffer evil,” i.e., undergo one’s share of suffering or share in hardship with someone] like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.*”

Christian servant-leadership requires a strong commitment to the purposes of God even at the expense of our own comfort. We must be prepared to go the more difficult way if that is the way the Lord leads.

Again, Paul exhorts Timothy, and thus all who would serve the Body of Christ, to “*...keep your head in all situations, endure hardship (Greek kakopaqew)...discharge all the duties of your ministry*”

II Timothy 4:5

Kingdom leaders are servant-leaders who have demonstrated an ability to handle adversity in a healthy way—people who can endure all kinds of personal opposition, accusation, judgment, and persecution without bitterness, desire for revenge, defensiveness, and lashing out against others.

- ❖ Christian servant-leaders must be people of integrity, who do not sell out their values when things get tough and they stand to lose something.
- ❖ Christian servant-leaders exercise godliness regardless of the personal cost.
- ❖ Christian servant-leaders are prepared to meet the greatest resistance when necessary.

The true God is not calling us to an easy life, but a life of obedience and faith despite the circumstances.



NOTES

Lined area for notes.

THROUGH IT ALL

(Andrae Crouch)

*I've had many tears and sorrows,
I've had questions for tomorrow,
There've been times I didn't know right from wrong.
But in every situation,
God gave me blessed consolation,
That my trials come to only make me strong.*

Chorus:

*Through it all,
Through it all,
I've learned to trust in Jesus,
I've learned to trust in God.
Through it all,
Through it all,
I've learned to depend upon His Word.*

*I've been to lots of places,
I've seen a lot of faces,
There's been times I felt so all alone.
But in my lonely hours,
Yes, those precious lonely hours,
Jesus lets me know that I was His own*

*I thank God for the mountains,
And I thank Him for the valleys,
I thank Him for the storms He brought me through.
For if I'd never had a problem,
I wouldn't know God could solve them,
I'd never know what faith in God could do.*