

Overcoming Adversity

Adversity has many names, including struggle, obstacles, difficulty, challenges, frustration, and stress. Nonetheless, it generally refers to a difficult situation or condition: misfortune or tragedy.

There are of course many sources of adversity. It can be caused by natural disasters which result in the loss of lives and possessions. It can be caused by illness as in the case of Helen Keller. She contracted a disease that might have been scarlet fever or meningitis when she was only 19 months old which left her blind, deaf and consequently mute. Adversity can also be caused by the choices and actions of others. Many tragic road accidents, for instance, are the result of drivers under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Finally, adversity can be caused by our own choices and actions.

While we may hope that the sun will always shine brightly and the sky will always be blue, the truth is that problems, big or small, present themselves to us throughout our lives. No matter how clever, how carefree, how happy-go-lucky we are, we will encounter difficulty, frustration, confusion and sometimes, even heart wrenching moments that can turn our world upside down. Learning to overcome adversity therefore is important for building character and resilience. Every challenge and every difficulty we successfully confront in life serves to strengthen our will, confidence and ability to overcome future obstacles.

What then should we do when adversity does come our way? How can we overcome adversity? If adversity is inevitable in life, a priority should first be placed on coming to terms with our conditions, and learning to accept and live with adversity rather than feeling bitter about it and being obsessed over how it is not “fair”. It is also important to put our problem into perspective and not to magnify it. Once you realise that what you have to deal with is no different from

what other people have to go through, you will not develop self-pity and you will be more ready to embrace the challenge. Take inspiration and learn from those who have dealt successfully with adversity. I like reading inspiring stories of how people overcame seemingly insurmountable difficulties. They confronted and triumphed over their day-to-day struggles instead of surrendering to them.

Last year, I talked about Helen Keller in an assembly about miracles. Helen Keller lost her sight and hearing at a very young age. Instead of resigning to her own tragic mishaps, she overcame her deafness and blindness to become an educated person advocating women's rights. J.K. Rowling, the famous writer who brought Harry Potter alive to millions of readers, was born to a poor family, had a bad marriage, was unemployed and living on the dole - a classic example of what one would call an abject failure. And when she wrote her first Harry Potter book, it was turned down by most publishers. You can imagine the kind of humiliations, heartbreaks and hardships that such a talented and intelligent university graduate had to bear. "That period of my life was a dark one," she once said, "and I had no idea then how far the tunnel extended, and for a long time, any light at the end of it was a hope rather than a reality."

In August this year, all eyes were on the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio and the spectacular display of strength, prowess and determination by athletes competing for glory and fame. Yet, there was relatively less attention on the 2016 Summer Paralympics which was also held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 7 September to 18 September 2016. The Paralympic Games are a major international multi-sport event for athletes with disabilities.

Even though I am not a very sporting person, I still enjoy watching both games as the athletes are truly inspirational. Despite the doping scandals and the misbehaviours of some of the visiting athletes, no one ever doubts the sacrifices they have made and the obstacles that they have to overcome before they can reach the top, the pinnacle of their achievements. And for the athletes with disabilities, they deserve a special salute from me.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aDdh2439hnU>

Watching Ibrahim Hamato play table tennis is to appreciate nothing is impossible. Hamato lost his both arms in a train accident when he was only 10 years old. Yet, this has not turned him away from the sport that he has always loved. "Everybody should work hard for what they love, and what you think is good for yourself," the 41-year-old told the International Table Tennis Federation. "The disability is not in arms or legs; the disability is to not persevere in whatever you would like to do." He may not have made it to the finals but his unyielding spirit has already won our respect.

For the Paralympic athletes, their adversity is visible. For others, the adversity may be more subtle or more internal. But every single human has to deal with adversity at some point in their life. There are many other stirring and moving stories that you can find everywhere around you. They are testimonies that even though adversity may come in different sizes and shapes, it has to be confronted and it can be overcome.

For Christians, this positive mindset towards adversity is based on a very firm foundation of faith and hope in God. We persevere because we know who holds tomorrow and we know God always has a plan for us. What we can do is to put our trust in Him and He will lead. For it is written in Philippians 4:6-7, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

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