

August 2008



# CLEAR VISION

A Monthly Publication of the Center for  
CHRISTIAN LIFE ENRICHMENT



## Adversity: The Crucible of Character

By Rich Blue

**A**dversity. We have all experienced our fair share of it; yet, it would be safe to say not many of us like it. We appreciate the lessons learned but often still whine about the cost. We recognize that the evolution of our maturity is closely linked to our capacity to glean truth from our hardships, losses and disappointments.

A turning point in my relationship with adversity was when I was a freshman in high school and trying out for the football team. I was competing with 60 other kids and until recently had been considered an icon of football in Orinda, CA. Now, I was struggling to keep up with my peers as I watched the stork of masculinity—puberty—pass me by while bestowing its bounty on the boys around me. Not only was it unlikely I would start, it was a very real possibility I might never see the field.

Instead of being honest with myself about what I was up against and seeking support, I buried my

head in the sand of denial and hoped for a miracle. I was not saved and the season ended up being a disaster as I played only one play. I had fallen from being a star on the field to a cheerleader on the sidelines. I did not know who I was, what I was made of and whether I had any value apart from football.

Instead of collapsing into further victimhood, I had an epiphany. One day I was in P.E. class listening to Coach Durant's pitch on why every boy wanting to feel like a man should go out for wrestling. This guy was a man's man and inspired me to believe I could rebuild my confidence and regain my athletic competence. I accepted his challenge, went out for wrestling, lost 35 pounds, worked harder than I had ever worked before, got my butt kicked every day in practice, and learned how to maximize my physical size and strength.

During this intense period of

testing, I learned several lessons which have shaped how I approach adversity:

***I learned the benefit of being broken.*** What seemed brutal at the time now seems like the most grace-filled gift I could have received. I was used to things coming easily and was in the habit of avoiding risking failure whenever possible. Hardship and disappointment have often served to "realign" my front end!

***I learned to confront my denial and embrace the truth about my circumstances.*** God wasn't going to make up for my being smaller than my peers, overweight, out of shape and massively addicted to feeling sorry for myself. If I wanted to be successful, I had my work cut out for me. When we face hard times we must anticipate the temptation to act like childish victims and hope for magical solutions.

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## Adversity: The Crucible of Character (continued)

*By Rich Blue*

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*I learned it was my responsibility to change what I could in order to maximize my chances for success.* Many of my deficits I could have shifted to assets if I had sought out the proper support and coaching. If we are going to benefit from adversity, we must seek out what Judith Wright refers to as MKO's (More Knowledgeable Others) to help instruct and guide us. We must honestly assess our present state and come up with a game plan for success.

Following my freshman football season, with the support of Coach

Durant, I made the most of my adversity and morphed myself back into a respectable athlete. I was never the best athlete on the field but I learned I could be the player with the most intention. I tasted the fruits of discipline, strategic planning, a supportive community, and hard work. I was able to take what began as a humiliating setback and transform it into a celebration of intention.

The Apostle James wrote, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must

finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:2-5 NIV). The Bible teaches that some of life's difficulties are the result of poor choices while others are opportunities intended to test our faith, increase our confidence and build our character.

If you are in the midst of adversity, think of it as an opportunity to learn and grow—a gift from a loving God who envisions you persevering and overcoming your challenges, using the lessons learned to enhance your character.

In 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 your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 1 Peter 1:6-7

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## Our Hunger for Wholeness

By Rich Blue

**L**earning from my challenges in sports built my confidence and enhanced my character; however, it did not satisfy my deeper longings for love, belonging and purpose. In fact, I was more aware of my hunger for relationships after I achieved success in football than before. My passion to reach my goals temporarily numbed me from my longing for love and community. I mistakenly hoped that success in football would be the pathway to fulfillment in all other areas of my life.

I first tasted my hunger for wholeness when several friends introduced me to a group called Young Life and it was through that fellowship I was introduced to the opportunity of having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This concept was entirely foreign to me and yet I witnessed what they were talking about through the love and care they had for each other and freely extended to me.

I gradually discovered God was in the business of using adversity and hardship to build my character

and being a Christian was more like becoming an elite member of a Special Forces unit vs. joining a country club. It was not enough for me to merely begin a relationship with God; like my high school wrestling coach, God's purpose was to teach, train, and get me into top spiritual shape.

When we experience trials and temptations, it is natural to ask, "Why"; however, this question can lead us into a quagmire of meaningless analysis and introspection. When we ask "why" we run the risk of trying to build a case justifying feeling sorry for ourselves. It is as if we think God is singling us out for suffering instead of accepting the reality that life is difficult and God intends to use our circumstances to build our character.

The more meaningful questions to ask are, "**What**"—what is God seeking to teach me through this trial or temptation and, "**How**" is he trying to build my character. Read and reflect on the story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50) and learn how his

response to adversity made him one of the quintessential examples of a person of faith under fire. See how God used adversity to help him grow out of his immaturity and sense of entitlement into a mature man of character and leader of Egypt.

After so many years of suffering, when Joseph was finally in the position to take revenge on his brothers, he chose instead to extend them grace. His words are an inspiration to all of us who want to live responsibly, avoid the temptation to exact vengeance, and trust God regardless of our circumstances:

Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them (Genesis 50:19-21).

I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

(Philippians 4:10-13)

# CLE Fall Retreat 2008

**Celebrating a Relationship Reformation**  
November 7-9, 2008



We've all heard of spring cleaning—how about fall reformation!

November 7-9, CLE will be hosting its annual Fall Retreat and our focus will be inventorying our relationships and taking stock of the unhealthy baggage we have allowed to accumulate. We will begin with cleaning, sorting, and tossing everything that does not promote authentic and satisfying relationships. We will be on the lookout for offenders like bad boundaries, dirty deals and special relationships. We will then take on filling our relationships with everything that promotes life, love and the pursuit of personal and spiritual maturity.

Save the date and sign up. Come join us for an awesome weekend living life to the fullest with others who are on the same journey!

This newsletter is intended to offer general information only and recognizes that individual issues may differ from these broad guidelines. Personal issues should be addressed within a therapeutic context with a professional familiar with the details of the problems.

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