

Christian Perspectives: Adversity brings beauty into life

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During the summer, I usually spend a lot of time hiking around Inglis Falls, since I camp in Owen Sound.

I love the cliffs and the hillside dotted with boulders and trees along the side of the Sydenham River. Walking from Harrison Park in Owen Sound up to Inglis Falls along the Bruce Trail is my daily morning ritual; a time for me of connecting with God and opening up my heart to hear what He has to say.

In the last few years, there have been a lot of trees that have fallen due to high winds and extreme weather. This summer, I assume due to the ice storm, there seemed to be more than ever. I saw many huge trees that lost limbs or have been uprooted, fallen against the rocks or propped up by other trees.

But I noticed something else: there were large, healthy trees that seemed to be growing straight out of the tops of the large rocks. Roots spread down over the rock into the soil beneath. As I walked and observed, I did not see one tree that had grown on top of a rock that was damaged or had fallen.

Some of these boulders were taller than I was, and yet the roots stretched out over and across, down into cracks or whatever was necessary to reach the soil. These trees stood firm, and appeared to be very healthy.

I have often thought of how rocks represent adversity in the Christian life. Hard times, bad situations, chronic illness or long-term suffering of any kind are like large boulders that seem to get in the way of the path of life that we are walking. And yet those hardships are the very things God uses to make us strong, if we learn to trust Him through it.

Our life is like one of those trees, with roots grown around the rocks to dig deep into the soil of God's truth and love. The larger the boulder, it seems, the stronger the roots and the tree. I want my life to be strengthened by those things that are trials to me; I don't want my growth to be stunted because I fight God and try to get rid of the hardship in my life.

Our society seems to be convinced that the only "good" life is the one that is pain free.

We expend a lot of time and energy trying to get out of our problems or dull the pain. Yet these are the very things God allows in our lives to refine us and make us strong.

In Acts 4, when the persecution of the church was starting and Peter and John had been imprisoned for preaching the Gospel, the believers cried out to God in prayer. What did they cry? "Rescue us from those who want to harm us? Protect your church?" No. They prayed, "Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus" (v 29-30).

What would happen if we prayed like that, instead of the "get me out of this" prayers that so often are the first things that come to our minds?

There is another thing that God showed me through this time of contemplating the growth of the trees. There were many dead trees that needed to fall over, and similarly there are dead things in my life that need to be uprooted so that new growth can take place; things that belong to my old life and have no place in the life of a follower of Jesus.

Things like worry, negativity, selfishness or pride. What are those things for you? Take some time to ask God to point out those ?dead trees? that need to go from your life. Ask Him to strengthen you so that you can grow strong into Him through those situations that cause you pain. A strong, healthy tree is beautiful to look at, and the rocks become part of the beauty.

May it be so with my life and yours. This in itself is a miracle worth praying for.