**Winning Over Adversity**

**Introduction**

* **Imagine someone** who lives in a condition where everything is provided for them:
  + **Free housing** and housekeeping
  + Personal **chef** and **shopping service**
  + **Laundry** service
  + Personal **chauffeur** to take them anywhere they need to go
  + Free **use of a vehicle** including **gas**
  + Private **counseling** whenever required
  + **Free electricity** and **communications**
  + A wide range of free entertainment offerings
* **Can you think of anyone** who lives under those conditions?
  + I can
  + And I’m looking at about 113 of you (i.e., the kids on the Seton Swim Team)
* Think about your life situation right now
  + **Your ONLY real responsibility is to improve yourself**
  + Your **biggest problems** are things like
    - having **three tests** one week.
  + I’m **not belittling** that, believe me.
    - To paraphrase the famous Notre Dame coach **Lou Holtz**:
    - **You’ve never been 59, but I’ve been 16.**
* As you grow older, this is **going to change**
  + One day there are likely going to be **people depending on you** for:
    - Housing
    - Meals
    - Laundry
    - Transportation
    - Counseling
    - Electricity and Communications, and
    - Entertainment…
    - **….and more!**
* **And you are going to encounter adversity in the process?**
  + I’m **not going to ask you Dads** this because I don’t want to embarrass you.
  + Moms, how many of you have **been up at 2:30 in the morning cleaning up puke?**
* Have you ever stopped for gas on the way to swim practice and seen all those **work trucks at 7-11?**
  + And you **complain about getting up early**?
  + Those guys get up earlier than we do during swim season **for 40 or 50 years**
    - And they **work outside** in the cold of the winter and the heat of the summer
  + And **I complain** because **the air not flowing** well in the pool area
    - I have to say to myself, **“Oh stop!”**
  + And I’ll tell you a **little secret**, I hate getting up early just as much as you do.
  + These guys have gotten so used to this adversity that **they would laugh if we called it “adversity”**
  + It’s **just what adults must do** for those that they love.
* Believe it or not, **this is what I think about on a pool deck**
  + There are loads of people who can **coach swimming better than me**
    - Coach Mulhern, Ross, and Palazzo for instance
    - Why do you think I have them coaching the top two groups instead of me?
  + But preparing you to swim fast is **not what this is all about**
  + I’m **trying to prepare you for the rest of your life**
    - And that life is **going to involve adversity**
    - And it could involve **significant adversity**
  + **With people depending on you**, you are going to have to **be able to overcome that adversity** and thrive.
* **Imagine** that the company your **Manufacturer’s Rep Agency** has represented for more than 20 years gets **taken over by the bank** and flipped to a **competitor**
  + And then imagine,
    - A company in which you are **heavily invested**, and for which you **raised a bunch of money** from friends, is informed they are **losing their key integration partner**,
    - And to **top it all off**,
      * your high school swim **team loses the conference championship for the first time in 29 years** because of you **weren’t paying close enough attention**.
  + **All in the same week!**
* You might start to ask yourself, **“What did I do to anger the God’s”**
* It has been a **painful run for me since early January**.
  + Even my **weight has been going back up**
  + I knew I had an issue when I was **standing on the scale** and caught myself **sucking it in**
    - **Colleen** said, “you realize that’s **not going to make you weigh less**?”
    - I said, “I know but it’s the **only way I can see the numbers**”
* Shortly after all of this went down, I was having a **conversation with the Director of National Accounts** at my customer.
  + We were having our own little **pity party**, and
  + He said, “**Man, you’re sure taking this pretty well.**”
  + I said, “**David, we’re lucky. This is the way we get to suffer**.”

**Suffering as a Blessing**

* For me, one of the reasons that I **love the Catholic faith** is that it helps me **make sense of the world** in which I live.
* Despite what charlatans like **Joel Osteen** says, you **can’t pray your way to prosperity** or **out of pain**
  + It’s **obvious**
    - Just living in the world, we can **readily observe** that **bad things happen to good people**
  + Our faith **doesn’t dismiss** something that obvious
    - It **explains** by **connecting**
      * the **role of suffering** in our lives
      * with **what happens next**
* The Catholic faith has what I think is a **beautiful teaching** on this connection
  + I’m no theologian, but I had a very good friend, **Deacon Bernie Ragan**, who described it to me in a way that made a lot of sense to me:
    - He always told me that **he did not believe God would have to judge us** 
      * Because he believed that **we judge ourselves** first.
    - That when we **look into the face of God**,
      * it would be **like a little child** who **knows he’s done wrong**,
      * **looking up at his mother** 
        + **ashamed** and sad that he’s disappointed her.
    - That **suffering is something we would want** to endure so that our **soul would be cleansed** for the beatific vision.
      * Even **suffering on earth**.
    - Such an **easy concept intellectually** - but how **hard** it is to internalize.
      * Suffering **is a blessing**?
      * When **offered up**, it **cleanses our soul so that we can stare into the face of God with joy**?
      * Really?
      * How **easy it is to lose faith and wonder** why an almighty God allows anyone to suffer
        + Much less some of the families who are suffering in our own Seton community.

* **After my conversation** with David, I thought,
  + “Man, **that was pretty good**.”
  + “But **why doesn’t it feel very good**.”
* I was really **struggling hard** with that question for those middle weeks in January
  + I think **some of you may have noticed**
    - I’m sorry for that
  + But since that time, I’ve had **four (4) important realizations** that completely changed the way I was thinking about this
    - I hope they might help you one day when you **take the inevitable “big hit”** in some aspect of your life.

**A Call to Humility**

* The **most immediate** and impactful realization was **my total lack of humility**.
  + **What makes my problems so special?**
  + If I **thought** about it for even just a **few seconds**,
    - I could **think of 10 people with bigger problems** than me.
  + Compared to them, it is **sort of embarrassing to even use the word “suffering”**?
* I was sitting in **a Board meeting with a CEO** whose company we are **selling for less than the debt** right now
  + **Another source of pain** for me on top of everything else
  + **10 years of his life** is coming to less than nothing, and
    - In our pre-meeting chit-chat, I was **telling him about my** business **problems**
  + Then it hit me
    - **“Hey Jim, wake up! The world is not about you!”**
* I thought about that GK Chesterton book, **The Invisible Man**
  + **Listen up** here, you middle schoolers, because this is going to be a **summer reading assignment** for you.
  + It’s a bizarre little story that is actually about the **people that pass through our lives, unseen**.
    - Like the **woman who set up the coffee and breakfast** in the hotel at States
      * Can anyone **remember what she looked like**?
    - Or the guy **cleaning the bathroom** at **O’Hare Airport**.
      * On a recent trip, after walking past him on my way out of the restroom, I turned around and said, “**Thanks for cleaning up after us.**”
        + He just **nodded and smiled**
        + But **you know who was smiling bigger – me!**
  + **Was part of my problem that I needed to start thinking of someone other than myself?**
* I thought about a book on **John Paul the Great** to which I recently listened
  + He called it the “**The Law of the Gift**”
    - ***Responsible self-giving, not self-assertion, is the road to human fulfillment***
  + Then Cardinal Wojtyla's said that his favorite line from Vatican II says, "***Man finds himself only by making himself a sincere gift to others***" (Gaudium et Spes, no. 24).
* How **paradoxical**
  + **If I want to re-find myself, I need to look away from myself.**
* I could feel it **starting to work**.
* This doesn’t **require big showy acts**
  + It can be in the **little mortifications**
  + One thing I’ve been doing for years that not even my wife knows about
    - I **never walk past a single piece of trash.**
      * I’m not going to dive into a big mess, but
      * If there is just **a lone piece of trash screaming to be picked up**, I bend down and
      * Say a **little prayer for someone, usually Fr. Sean** who repeatedly asks me to pray for him.
        + Fr. Sean gets all my trash prayers 😉
* That is why, by the time we got to the Championship season, I finally realized that **as hard as the season had been on me, swimming was actually gift to me.**
  + **Turning outside of myself** was **more than a mere distraction** from my struggles
  + These **daily acts of humility gave me a sense of purpose**
* I was feeling better

**We Must Live with Our Choices**

* The next thing I was realized is that my adversity was founded **in a choice I, myself, had made.**
  + **This was my own darn fault.**
* **How many times have I told all of you** how lucky you are because:
  + You were born in a **free country** where
    - any **advantages or disadvantages**
    - can be **negated or overcome**
    - by the **choices** you make
* **Bad choices are frequently the cause of suffering**
  + **Quit your job** for a dumb reason
  + **Drink too much**
  + **Have sex** before you are married, or
  + **Not doing your Algebra homework**
* But that **leads back to humility**
  + **We are not special**
  + If we **make a bad choice**, and **bad things happen** as a result
    - We **just need to own it**
* **Suffering can also happen from good choices too**
* In this case, **I don’t think I made a bad choice**, but
  + **I did choose to make my living** as an entrepreneur and a private equity and venture capital investor
    - It is **not exactly a risk-free way** to support a family.
* I have this **picture of Sam Walton**, the founder of Walmart, hanging in my office
  + I see his “**Entrepreneur’s Creed**” every time I walk through the door
    - “**I seek opportunity, not security**”
    - “**I want to take the calculated risk, to dream and to build, to fail and to succeed.**”
* **Sometimes I fail**, and sometimes I succeed
  + I **have consciously chosen** to run without a net
  + It’s what **allows me to coach** and teach
  + Yes, **I work all the time**, but I **don’t “go to work”**
* When things go poorly, I’m fond of saying, “**that’s why they call it risk**”
  + Sure, **I could get a job**, probably a pretty good job
    - With a salary and bonus and benefits and a 401K match.
    - Maybe even a pension if I stay there for 30 years
  + But **that is not the choice** I made
    - Now **I have to own that**
* As I pondered whether, knowing all that I now know, **would I make a different choice**
  + **No!**
  + **“So, suck it up sweetheart”**
* I know a bunch of you boys were **pretty upset** when your **400 Free Relay got DQ’d** in the Final at States for an early take-off.
  + It **didn’t faze me one bit**
  + We all **knew we had to beat Covenant** to win the Boys State Championship
    - And we also knew that, with Will Charlton on the back end of their relay, **that was unlikely**
    - So, **we were going to have to take a risk**
  + Yes, it **cost us the State Runner-up** by a single point
    - But I’d **do that 100 out of 100 times**
    - You’ll never catch me playing for 2nd place
  + There were tears and **there was suffering**, but **we made a choice**
    - And I think **you all can proudly own that choice**

**It’s Time to Work Harder**

* The **realization** that **I am living with a choice** I made and had to own it **led logically to my third realization**:
  + It was time to **head back** to the cold water of **the Freedom Center** at 6:04 a.m. and **get back to work**.
* Again, quoting former Notre Dame Coach **Lou Holtz**
  + “***Life is 10% what happens to you and ninety percent how you respond to it***”
* I have a **slightly different twist** on that same concept that some of you have heard me say many times:
  + “***Never play the victim, even if you are*.**”
* **Why?**
  + Because **it’s just not helpful**.
  + **When you play the victim** and blame someone else for your problems
    - You are **just quitting**
    - You are **succumbing to the things you can’t control**
  + If we are going to live God’s plan, we need to **control the things that we can control**
    - And **one of those is how hard we work.**
* So, I’ve **jumped back into the fight**
  + **Thanks to Vickie Zadnik** who has been helping me with my Algebra class, and
  + **To Pat Mulhern, Ross Palazzo, and DD Ross** for handling so many practices without me
    - The truth is they **handle them without me** even when I’m there 😉
* You **can’t be a quitter** if you are going to be a good swimmer, and
  + you can’t be a quitter if you choose to make your living the way I do
* I **understand why you might be upset** when you have a bad race or don’t swim a PR, but
  + that **doesn’t necessarily mean** **you didn’t do your best** on that particular day
    - You can **sulk but that turns out to not be particularly helpful**, or
    - You **can own it** and ask what went wrong?
      * How did I **eat**?
      * How did I **sleep**?
      * Was I properly **hydrated**?
      * Did I **warm-down prope**rly after my last race
  + And most importantly,
    - **am I going to get back in the water on Monday** with a renewed commitment?
* It’s **OK** for you **to say that someone is better than you**, but
  + **no one should be able to say they try harder than you**.
* It’s why **I just go crazy**
  + when you can swim a 50 Free in 24 or 25 seconds and **you take the 100 out in 28**, or
  + when you take the 100 out really fast and then **shut it down at 80 yards** **when it really starts to hurt.**
* It is why I was even **more passionate** that normal **about the 500 Free** this year.
  + If you **can’t face up to 9 or 10 minutes** of continuous swimming,
  + **I’ve failed to prepare you** for what’s coming in your life.

**Who’s Got It Better Than Me?**

* And finally, in the midst of all these sleepless ponderings, I came to the **biggest realization of all**:
  + **If this is what suffering looks like to me, I’m pretty darn lucky**
* My **challenges became increasingly manageable** as I pondered the **countless good things in my life**.
  + **What am I worried about?** 
    - I have the **important things**
  + Starting with **the most important**
    - I am **still madly in love** with the varsity swimmer I met at Notre Dame more than 40 years ago
      * And **she**, quite understandably 😉, **is madly in love with me too!**
      * She was **a little slow on the uptake** early on, but she finally figured it out.
  + And this is **not an existential crisis for me**
    - I’ve **spent a lifetime developing the gifts** that God gave me
    - I have **ability to figure this out**
    - And **I will.**
* My **mother** always used to say, “***Everything happens for a reason***.”
  + I believe that
  + I know that this, in God’s providence, **will lead to some good somehow**
    - I’m **just hoping** that good is **while I’m still on this earth**!
* Maybe this an **opportunity the change**?
  + Fr. John Heisler once said, ***“Pain and sorrow are the movements that lead you to change*”**
  + **What change can I make** to turn this into a some good?
    - The answer to that question is **going to take some more sleepless nights**, but I’ll figure it out too.

**Conclusion**

* When I **first told** my customer David, “**We’re lucky. This is the way we get to suffer**”,
  + I knew that **was true intellectually**, but I’m **not sure I fully accepted it**.
* It was only after I:
  + **Recognized** my own **arrogance**,
  + **Accepted** that this was ultimately **my own choice**,
  + **Recommitted** myself **to more hard work**, and
  + **Acknowledged** all the reasons that I had **to be grateful** in my life
* that I **fully understood** **how powerful what I had instinctively said** to David actually was.
* **For all my trials this season**, I have come to realize that **I truly am a very lucky man**
  + ***Who has it better than us? Nobody!***

Now let’s move on to the **final part of our program**.