

Daily Devotional, February 10, 2021 Growth Through Suffering

“But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and God’s provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” Philippians 1:18-21

When Paul was imprisoned in Rome, he said “remember my bonds.” At this point in time, Paul was under house arrest, which meant that he could move about freely in an apartment type setting. But soon after, Paul was facing more scrutiny, and was thrown into an ancient prison that would make our current prisons seem palatial. He was probably in a hole in the ground — dark, wet, cold and unsanitary. Paul was surely tired, hungry and physically spent. He was suffering. It would be reasonable for Paul to ask Christians to pray that God would get him out of that awful place. He had miraculously done it before. And Paul was a chosen servant — an Apostle. Jesus guided Paul. He was with Paul. He cared for Paul. He did many miracles by the hand of Paul. He changed the world by using Paul.

So why didn’t Paul get depressed and lose hope? Why wasn’t he angry at God and miserable to everyone around him? Why didn’t he get lost in his suffering? Surely God would answer Paul’s prayer. Paul was doing what God wanted him to do. He was working under God’s will. And yet, he was suffering miserably.

Paul’s heart was so connected to Jesus that his focus was not on his pain, but on the glory of God. He did not blame God for his suffering. And he had no comforting care. He had no Tylenol or Ibuprofen. He couldn’t shower. He couldn’t eat or drink when he wanted. There was no “outhouse” in his prison cell. And what was Paul’s response when he was suffering like that? Patience and obedience. Carefully writing down God’s word. He freely gave what strength he had to ensure he accurately relayed God’s message.

Every one of us faces dark days and impossible challenges in life that are extremely difficult to endure. Sometimes it seems so unbearable that we are willing to do almost anything for relief. In the midst of pain and suffering, we find it hard to trust God’s purpose and plan for us. We seek relief, not relentless suffering.

But it seems like almost all the suffering we experience is physical, not spiritual. Paul was suffering by choice, because of his obedience to Christ. As a result, he did suffer physically yet he did not complain. When we think of suffering, we usually mean some physical dilemma. We tend to focus on physical issues first, and if there’s time and energy left over, we might “suffer” a little for Jesus.

Should we pray for the sick? Of course we should. But God’s will is bigger than us, whether we are in comfort or pain. His plan does not exclude suffering. Our focus should always be on God’s purpose and calling, and God’s glory, no matter what. Our need for God’s help is one way God keeps us close to Him.

Prayer: Lord, thank you that our comfort is abundant through Christ. Nothing in the world can bring us the comfort and peace that you alone can offer. Thank you that you understand our trials, and that you care. Through our own struggles and pain, help us to be your vessels to offer comfort and strength to others who are hurting. In Christ we pray, Amen.