

Suffering with Hope: An Eternal Perspective

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Intense suffering often brings with it hopelessness and great disappointment. And yet, the Biblical perspective is that suffering refines our character and brings about hope (Romans 5:4). This workshop will discuss pragmatic ways that we can handle suffering in this life that can build our hope and faith in God.

Introduction

Romans 5:2-4 And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character hope.

Romans 8:17,18 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

“After an extensive tour of the US, the well known German pastor and theologian Helmut Thielicke was asked what he observed as the greatest deficiency among American Christians. He replied, “They have an inadequate view of suffering.” (*Where is God When it Hurts?*, P. Yancey, p.19)

“You are one of God's rough diamonds, and He is going to have to cut you so that you may really shine for Him. It takes a diamond to cut a diamond. You are to be ground and cut, and hurt by other diamonds, by other Christians, by spiritual Christians. But the more cutting and the more perfecting, the more you are going to shine for the Lord.” (G. Marshall from *His Victorious Indwelling*, Aug. 9th p. 296)

PREPARATION

Think through ahead of time how you'll respond to suffering

- Suffering will come because we live in a broken world. Romans 8:20, 22, 23
- Suffering will come because we are sinners. Psalm 81:10-12; Prov 1:20-33; 4:19; 6:27; 13:15; 15:19; Romans 1:18-32; Luke 17:1,2; 2 Cor 4:7-12)
- Suffering will come because the world persecutes the followers of Christ. (John 15:18-27; Colossians 1:24; 1 Peter 2:12, 18-25).
- Suffering will happen to both non-Christians and Christians. Bad things can and do happen to Christians. (Matt 5:45)
- Suffering will come because the Evil One is relentless. (Job 1, 1 Peter 5:8)

Suffering as an opportunity

- Elisabeth Elliot said “the same sun that softens wax, hardens clay. Same suffering that makes one bitter and breaks them, turns someone else great.” (*Suffering and the Steward Leader*, teaching by Tim Keller).
- Robert Bly: “Where a man's wound is, that is where his genius will be. Wherever the wound appears in our psyches...whether it stems from isolation, disability, or disease, that is precisely the place for which we will give our major gift to the community.” (*Iron John*, p. 42)
- Larry Crabb: “A profound encounter with pain brings us to make a choice. Either we change or we sink into bitterness, despair, or hedonism. Either we accept the fact that life is not all about us and how we feel now and what happens here,.” (Larry Crabb, *Shattered Dreams*, p. 88) -- and we turn into God. We seek God in a deeper way.
- “Tears have become my deepest form of worship. When dreams shatter, we long to experience God's nearness in a way that dries our tears. Instead deeper tears are released. We get in touch with a profound desire that we have no power whatsoever to satisfy. When we realize how deeply we want Him, He seemingly disappears. But it's a hopeful hurt. It doesn't feel exactly good, but it does feel clean. Through our tears we actually can sing “Great is Thy Faithfulness” and “It is Well with my Soul.” We can even sing “I love you Lord,” not without an ache in our hearts but somehow through the ache.” (Larry Crabb, *Shattered Dreams*, p. 88)

PURPOSE

Exposure

- “Sometimes all that separates Christians from non-Christians is our understanding of how to produce those good feelings. The pursuit of soul pleasure remains primary. It continues to be the aim behind our choices rather than an occasional and welcome by-product of a higher aim; the aim of glorifying God as the object of our deepest, most passionate desire. We continue to want something or someone more than God. We don't think that's our biggest problem, but it is. As long as our purpose is to have a good time, to have soul-pleasure exceed soul-pain, God becomes merely a means to an end, an object to be used, never a subject rightfully demanding a response, never a lover to be enjoyed. Worship becomes utilitarian, part of a cunning strategy to get what we want rather than a passionate abandonment to someone more worthy than we.” (Larry Crabb, *Shattered Dreams*, p. 32)

Produces godliness

- ***Develops character....***
 - James 1:2-4: 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.
 - Romans 5:3-5 We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

- ***Builds compassion in us...***

- 2 Corinthians 1: 3-5: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.

- ***Brings humility....***

- Job 42:1-6: Then Job replied to the Lord: "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge? Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. You said, listen now, and I will speak. I will question you, and you shall answer me. My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

- ***Builds our Faith***

- 1 Peter 1:6-8: 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. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him, and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

- ***Produces an eternal weight of glory***

- 2 Corinthians 4:16-18: Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

PATIENCE

- ***God sustains us***

- Psalm 55:22 Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.

- ***Experience peace***

- 1 Peter 5:6 Humble yourselves therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

- ***The best things are yet to come***

- James 5:7-11 Be patient, then brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable drop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.
- "I believe that suffering will be healed and made up for, that in the world's finality, at the moment of eternal harmony, something so precious will come to pass that it will suffice / *believe* that suffering will be healed and made up for, that in the world's finality, at the moment of eternal harmony, something so precious will come to pass that it will suffice for all hearts, for the comforting of all resentments, for the atonement of all the crimes of humanity, of all the blood that's been shed, that it will make it not just possible to forgive, but to justify all that's happened." (Ivan Karamazov, the atheist character in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*)
- Romans 8:18 Paul I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed in us.

CONCLUSION

Preparation
Purpose
Patience

FURTHER READING

Disappointment with God: Three Questions no one asks Outloud by Phillip Yancey
Shattered Dreams: God's Unexpected Pathway to Joy by Larry Crabb
Where is God when it Hurts? by Phillip Yancey
Walking with God through Pain and Suffering by Tim Keller
Forever: Why You Can't Live Without It by Paul Tripp