

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

Learning By Suffering

By Steven Harper

The author of the book of Hebrews wrote to the early Jewish disciples of Jesus in order to exhort them to **“hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering”** (Heb. 10:23), instead of turning away and going back to the Old Law. He reminded them they had already **“endured a great struggle with sufferings”** (Heb. 10:32) and had **“joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods,”** knowing they had **“a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven”** (Heb. 10:34).

Later, he would remind them they needed to **“run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”** (Heb. 12:1, 2), and gently chastised them, saying, **“You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin”** (Heb. 12:4). Whatever sufferings they had endured were not even close to the degree of suffering Christ endured. The point was clear: Don’t give up!

Earlier, the writer pointed to the example of Jesus, and noted, **“though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him”** (Heb. 5:9). Clearly, the inspired writer sought to encourage faithfulness in these brethren, though they had suffered for their faith in Christ [which was not unexpected for the Jews], but the example of Jesus should have been good enough to convince them they could endure those sufferings. If He could endure even greater suffering, they could endure their trials.

An important point to note in the example of Jesus is the fact He **“learned obedience by the things which He suffered.”** Jesus learned something by going through those sufferings, and this means we can learn from sufferings, too. But what?

We Are Not Alone In Suffering. The sufferings Jesus endured were physical, but the sufferings we may endure can also be spiritual trials and the trials of life itself. But Peter warned the early disciples, **“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world”** (1 Pet. 5:8, 9). Though our adversary will most certainly tailor his efforts to each one of us (Jas. 1:13), we must know that we won’t be the only ones he tries and tempts; he opposes every disciple of Jesus Christ! Just know that you are not alone in your suffering, and use that to your advantage; those who have already endured his trials may help you endure yours!

We Can Be Content With What We Have. The apostle Paul once wrote, **“I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”** (Phil. 4:11-13). Paul had enjoyed abundance and he had suffered lack, but note that he learned to be content — whatever the state.

Far too often, we allow our environment to dictate our attitude and our ‘happiness’ when, if we followed Paul’s example, we could be happy wherever we are and with whatever we have. The writer of Hebrews, in fact, reminds us, **“Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’”** (Heb. 13:5), which leads us to the next point:

We Can Trust in the Lord. When Paul wrote that he had learned to be content, he noted the one factor that allowed him to be content: His strength was in Christ. For us, this means we should not face trials and sufferings as if we have to ‘tough it out’ all by ourselves, but that we should trust in the Lord to give us the strength to endure whatever comes our way. Whether we have much or nothing at all, trust that God knows what you need (cf. Matt.

6:8) and that He will not forsake you. The sooner we learn this, the better off we will be!

We Can Rejoice. Let's just be completely honest here: No one feels like rejoicing when they are going through trials of their faith — or trials of any sort! We want to wallow in our misery and we want to cry out, “WHY ME?!?!” But note the words of Peter to the early disciples: ***“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy”*** (1 Pet. 4:12, 12). This sounds really strange to the world, and maybe even to a lot of believers; how can we rejoice when others are persecuting us because of our faith, and when we are suffering?

Peter answers that, reminding us that when we endure those trials for our faith, we [in a sense] partake of the sufferings of Christ; that is, we get a small glimpse of what our Savior endured for us when He went to the cross. I know many disciples would love to be able to lessen or remove that suffering He endured, but we know we cannot do that; it is done. BUT, we can partake [share] in the sufferings He endured and, by this, your bond and fellowship with the Lord can become stronger. That is a good thing!

We Can Glorify God. The habit of man is to praise God when things are going great, and blame Him when things are not so great. But note what Peter wrote to the disciples of the first century: ***“if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter”*** (1 Pet. 4:16). This also sounds strange to the world, and maybe even to a lot of believers; how can we glorify God when life is terrible and when we are suffering?

Consider Job as the answer to that; Job had lost almost everything he had, and the devil expected him to curse God when that happened, but what we find is, ***“Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’ In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong”*** (Job 1:20-22). He would even say later, ***“Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him”*** (Job 13:15). Even stranger! How could Job say this? How could Job praise God in the midst of great suffering? It is because he knew God. Though he didn’t understand why things were happening as they were, he knew God, and he still trusted the loving, merciful, and gracious God.

Though some TV preachers tell you the life of a Christian is all roses and rainbows, such is simply untrue. We will most likely face persecutions and trials at some point (cf. 2 Tim. 3:12) so, when they come, let us not allow the trials to overwhelm us, but take the occasion to learn some important lessons that will help us face them the next time a little more prepared, a little stronger, and a lot closer to the Lord. Learn to not ever give up. — ***The Words of Truth and Reason***, June 28, 2020. ■

The Apostle Peter on Suffering

1 Peter 2:21-23 - ***“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.”***

1 Peter 3:18 - ***“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.”***

1 Peter 4:1 - ***“Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin.”***

1 Peter 5:10 - ***“But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.”***

Christ suffered for you, are you suffering for Him?

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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