

Joy Shaped In Suffering

The resurrection power working in us, in the midst of suffering, gives us joy.

Today's Text: 2 Corinthians 4.7-18

1. Suffering has a mission, which is to kill joy

Suffering is a result of sin, in some form or another. It is part of the human journey and will not end until Christ returns to make all things new. Sin impacted every part of this world, and we now live with its effects and the suffering that it brings upon us. There are a few reasons for our suffering:

- I. Our own sin brings about terrible consequences – because we are sinful to the core of our being, we have the most profound potential for destruction. It manifests itself in things like pride, arrogance, selfishness, lust, obsession, laziness, fear, anxiety, mistrust, anger, impatience, dishonesty, greed... the list goes on and on. When these character issues surface, we damage ourselves and others around us.
- II. The sin of others against us can bring even a lifetime of suffering to us. Many have lived under great emotional and physical distress because of abusers, addicts, criminals, oppressors etc. There are many who have lost loved ones because of reckless behavior like drunk driving or other unnecessary accidents. Others suffer because of corruption and abuse of leadership, which leads to debt, poverty, social struggles and more.
- III. Circumstances – we all suffer to some degree with general life circumstances which are out of our control, such as natural disasters, illness, economic crises and job losses.
- IV. Evil – some Christians will suffer as a direct result of following Jesus. The Bible promises that Christians will be hated and persecuted for their faith. This has happened all throughout history, and cannot be avoided.
- V. God – Suffering is permitted by God for his own purposes. This we see in the book of Job.

Instead of embracing the reality that suffering is here to stay, we try and avoid it at all costs. Instead of accepting it, we live with a quiet resentment about it, and we direct our anger and distrust towards God, knowing that he is ultimately in control. This reveals some belief issues in us - we do not believe that God is good and that he loves us, or we wrongly believe that we have done something wrong, or that we should be better during the suffering.



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Our wrong beliefs about God ensure that we are unable to experience joy in our suffering.

2. When we acknowledge and embrace our frailty, in the midst of suffering, we'll be surprised to find joy

- Read 2 Corinthians 11:24-28 & 2 Corinthians 1:8-11

Scripture tells us how much Paul suffered in his life, as a follower of Christ. Yet, he had such a different perspective on it, which allowed him to experience joy in his suffering. His suffering kept him humble, allowing him to reflect on his own frailty and reminded him all the time of his absolute dependence on God. His weakness reminded him of God's strength, and it allowed him to rely fully on God and not on himself. God did not need Paul to be strong, and he does not need us to be strong either. In our suffering and in our times of frailty, we too get to experience God's love and provision for us, and it is in those times when we experience his joy, in ways that are difficult to describe. Our culture shuns weakness and dependence, and yet this is the very path that God uses to bring us joy.

3. Suffering is temporary but the glory of God, and the joy that comes with it, is eternal

Suffering grows our affections for Christ and causes us to become more like him. When Jesus was on the cross, in absolute suffering and weakness, it appeared that God was done with him. But it was in this dark place where God did the greatest work. His power was manifest most spectacularly when it seemed like all hope was lost.

God's power still triumphs in and through human weakness. His power sustains us and graces us through to the other side of suffering. Many of us have come through suffering, and remember the moments when we did not think we would survive it. We now look back and we see the handiwork of God in the process and in the strength he gave us to get us through each day. We experience joy in the suffering when we realise that he is pouring his power into us, so that we can endure it.

God does not remove suffering because he works in and through it to make us more and more like Christ. The work he does in us lasts forever, and so it is worth it. As we suffer, we pursue him, and as we see him more closely we love him more and more.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do we try and avoid all forms of suffering, and how does this negatively affect our lives?
2. Why is suffering one of the primary ways that God uses to change us?
3. Why does suffering often produce humility?
4. Why do you think that a growing dependence on God produces joy in us?
5. In what way does our suffering and God's power go hand-in-hand? If you have experienced this in your own life, share it with the group.



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6. In what way has your past suffering changed you for the good? Explain.
7. What role does surrender play in the process of suffering?



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