

AFFLICTION AND THE CHILD OF GOD

In the last decade, I have met a great number of believers who are experiencing incredible suffering: physical, spiritual and emotional. These have been times of testing and refining in the Body of Christ.

Looking at my own trials, I have learned much about the ways and purposes of God through suffering. Therefore, I would like to share some of these insights so that you, the reader, may receive a measure of comfort in your affliction.

Many times God will not spare his children from pain and tribulation. Some of our distresses come from His hand and they have an eternal purpose in His plan.

According to Romans 8:29, God intends to conform us into the image of His Son. Suffering plays a big role in accomplishing this divine plan.

1 Pet 4:12-13 *Beloved, think it not **strange** concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as **ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings**; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.*

Peter tells us that fiery trials are a normal Christian experience; there is nothing strange about it! It's the fire of God that comes to try and purify us until the Image of His Son is molded in us and His glory can be seen. "...*Christ in you the Hope of glory...*" (Colossian 1: 27).

The "glory" is non other than the nature of God. When Moses asked the Lord to show him His glory, God answered him, "*I will make all my **goodness** pass before thee and I will proclaim the name (character) of the Lord before thee; and I will be **gracious** to whom I will be gracious, and I will show **mercy** on whom I will show mercy.*" (Exodus 33:18, parenthesis mine). The Lord is good, gracious and merciful; to be in His Image therefore is to have the very nature and character of God reproduced in our life. Someone said it this way: "our theology must become a biography".

God is going to have a body of people through which He will manifest Himself to the world. Afflictions, when permitted to do the work they are meant to do, will bring forth a people who shine with the beauty of Jesus.

SUFFERING PURIFIES US

Malachi prophesied that there would be a time when the Lord would come suddenly to His Temple like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap purging and purifying His people like silver and gold.

Mal 3:3 “...*And he shall SIT as a refiner and purifier of silver...*”

We – His people - are His temple – individually and corporately, (*know ye not that ye are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*) – I Corinthians 3:16). We are the place of His habitation and He desires to fill it with His glory.

The prophet says that the Lord will SIT like the refiner of gold. In the natural, the person in charge of the refining must keep the purifying process under constant scrutiny. The heat must be just right: not too hot or not hot enough. Also the scum that comes on the top must be skimmed. This requires concentration, attention and time. Therefore he **sits**. He is not in a hurry; He will take all the time that is necessary until the precious metal is so clear that He can see His own reflection in it.

God is in control over our trials and tribulations. He is a loving Father, too wise to make mistakes and too kind to be cruel. He will not allow us to be tested beyond what we are able to bear (I Corinthians 10:13), but He will try us to the limit of our tolerance so that in our brokenness we may experience His comfort and in our weakness, His strength. Thus we learn how to extend His consolation to others who are suffering.

Psalm 85:5 “*Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee...*”

Heb. 11:34 “*...out of weakness were made strong...*”

2 Corint. 12:9 “*...my strength is made perfect in weakness...*”

SUFFERING TESTS OUR FAITH

Luke 18:8 “... *Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*”

Sometime God allows Satan to sift us like he did Peter. He removes from us all sources of confidence and security. He withdraws from us. He turns a deaf ear to our cries (or so it seems). Promises we have been waiting for remain unfulfilled. The sense of His presence is removed. He hides from us and He is silent. He is developing our faith!

I once read somewhere that faith is not real faith until it is the only thing we have left.

Jesus didn't spare Peter from severe testing; but He told him, “...*I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not...*”

In Hebrew 11:35-39 there is a list of people whose faith failed not.

“...others were tortured...others had trials of cruel mocking and scourging, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sown asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword...and these all, having obtained a good report through FAITH received not the promise...”

This is the kind of faith that can trust in God and gives peace even when facing death. It is the faith of martyrs. It's the faith that doesn't get offended at God and continues to trust Him even when deliverance does not come in the way we expected. It's the faith of Job that, when tried by suffering declared, “*though He slays me, yet will I trust Him*”. Because of this faith, still in his suffering, Job had a revelation of God more glorious than that of a miracle. It is the triumphant faith of I John 5:4 “...*this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.*”

SUFFERING WORKS HUMILITY

1 Pet 5:5-7 ... *for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God,*

that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.

Phil 2:5-11 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

*and being found in fashion as a man, he **humbled** himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Pride will destroy our fruitfulness in the kingdom. God cannot use us because He will not share His glory with another. Therefore His loving hand of discipline will allow suffering to expose the prideful motives of our heart. Humility comes as we repent and allow His fire to break us and mold us. As we yield to the “breakings”, the Holy Spirit will bring us to **spiritual** fruitfulness. The release of the life of Jesus within us can only come through brokenness, which crushes all desires of self-life.

A person who is never been broken is full of himself, of his plans, his ambitions, and his aspirations. This is the kind of vessel the world has molded us into. After sin came in, humanity was no longer in the image of God (we fell short of it). God, our Father, who is the heavenly potter, has to smash the vessel of clay, shaped in immorality, idolatry, fear, independence, self-sufficiency, etc. in order to form a vessel of honor that He can fill with Himself. (Jeremiah 18:4-6).

The Bible says that after the painful humbling process, in due time, God will exalt us. A careful study of the Scriptures reveals that His exaltation comes in the form of a greater release of His authority, which is proportionate to the degree of our humiliation: Jesus was exalted to the highest place (a name above all names) because He descended to the lowest one.

One day, the mother of two disciples desired of the lord that her two sons may sit in His kingdom one on His right hand and one on His left. Jesus answered, “...ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” Jesus was referring to the Cross where He drank the cup of suffering and experienced the fire of God’s wrath over sin.

We all want to move in God’s power and authority, to occupy a place of prominence and of great significance, but are we willing to pay the price embrace the cross and walk down the path of humility paved with pain?

SUFFERING TRIES GOD’S WORD TO US

Ps 18:30 “ *the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him.*”

Prov. 30:5 “ *Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in Him*”

Ps 19:7 “ *...the testimony of the LORD is sure...*”

“Often our feet find themselves in the path of tribulation especially after we receive the promise that something special is about to happen” (Anonymous). This is to teach us to walk by faith **in His promises** and not by sight.

Jesus once told His disciples to get in the boat, cross the lake and meet Him on the other side. His followers heard His Word, yet as soon as a storm came over the waters, they were filled with fear, doubt and hopelessness.

When the storm of life rages around us, when the circumstances tell us that there is no way that God’s promises could ever be fulfilled, when the waiting for them has been so long and when there are no warm feelings about God’s presence, it is so easy to sink into despair. Yet, if we hold on to that promise, resisting the temptation to give up and look elsewhere for answers, we will discover that the Word **alone** is enough to hold us and to take us to the other side.

SUFFERING DEVELOPS THE LOVE OF GOD (AGAPE)

God is love (I John 4:8). To be made into the image of God is to love like God does. The name of this type of love is Agape. Agape is the same as God. It is inherent to his nature. It is not what God does, but what He is. He cannot help but Love. It's like the sun shining in the sky: where the sun is there is the sunshine.

Agape is unconditional, unselfish; it gives itself without discrimination like the sun shines on the flower and on the dung.

To give oneself without discrimination spells suffering: God loved us by giving Himself and that caused Him much pain. Suffering therefore is the essential element of Agape, which – unlike natural affection – must be learned through many trials and tribulations, until we can suffer at the hand of others without resentment. Jesus displayed this on the cross when He said, “Father forgive them” while pain, shame, mocking and rejection was being inflicted upon Him. Therefore, because Jesus forgave those who were crucifying Him, God was released to deal in mercy toward the wrongdoer so that the sinner could be reconciled to Himself. (If Jesus had not forgiven, God would have had to bring judgment.)

Suffering in itself then has no value; it is our reaction to the suffering that makes the difference. God will allow our exposure to trials to continue until we learn to respond to them as He does.

HOW TO TRIUMPH IN SUFFERING

Let us not waste our sorrows. Let us keep in mind that “*we are His workmanship*” that's why we are being sifted. Trusting in His love, let us accept all perplexing circumstances from His hand. By surrendering to His perfect will, let us cooperate with His fine-tuning work until His purpose is accomplished in us.

The following suggestions will bring victory in our trials:

1. Learn to see Jesus in your furnace. You are never alone. It is the same God and the same love. Just because we are going through hard times, His love hasn't changed. He is merely detaching you from your circumstances, by drawing you to Himself in order to attach you to His power and His anointing.

2. Remain firm in the Word He has given you, even when there is no evidence of Him being around. Remember: facts are not truth...His Word is truth. So, do not believe your circumstances or your feelings, but cling to the truth of His Word.
3. Confess who you are in Christ (His child, the apple of His eyes, an heir and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ, the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus, the redeemed of the Lord, more than conqueror in Christ Jesus, His workmanship, etc.)
4. Thank Him for what He is doing **in you** and for the glory that shall be revealed. Thank Him for all the people that have caused you harm, for those that have been or are unkind to you. They are His instruments to prepare you for this eternal splendor. *“He has created the smith that blows the coals in the fire”* and He *“has created the waster to destroy”* (Isaiah 54:16>
5. Look at your pain as means to enter into the heart of God, to feel what he feels. A backslider, a rebellious son or daughter will make us partakers of God’s feelings toward the lost
6. Pray for others throughout the world that are facing the same trials as you are. Thus you will defeat Satan who wants to take from us our most powerful weapon: prayer!
7. Ask: what do you want me to learn? “Which wrong attitude or motive you want to reveal in me? Pray like David did: *”Search me o God, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”* (Psalm 139:23-24)
8. Bless your situation and don’t curse. Don’t lean on your understanding of what is good or what is not: stop eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. Remember the passage in Romans 8:28-29. *“All”* things work together for good...the positive situations and the negative ones. We need two poles, one positive and one negative, in order to have a flow of electric power. And so it is in the spirit: we need the positive as well as the negative experiences for the life of God to flow through us.
9. When in depth of despair, hopelessness, despondency, call upon the **mercy** of God. When the prophet Jeremiah found himself in such state, he remembered the only thing that renews the hope we lost: *“...it is of the Lord’s mercy that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness.”* (Lamentation 3:21-23)
10. Pray for your enemies. (Matthew 5:44).

11. Praise...praise...praise. Delight in His Word. Draw nearer to Him in spiritual intimacy. Our joy is our communion with Jesus during our suffering. There we find strength because the JOY of the Lord is our strength.

12. Expect an enlargement. Trials and tribulations, when they have accomplished their work, will produce a greater revelation of you to yourself, a greater revelation of God, and a greater ministry to others.

13.

Finally, dear child of God, remember that the will of God will never lead you where His Grace cannot keep you. HIS GRACE IS SUFFICIENT.

Laura Pedota

www.laura@truthandlightministry.com