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**DAYS OF
PRAYER &
FASTING**

Rejoice in Suffering

We only need to turn on the TV or open up our phones to confirm what we already know to be true – suffering is an ever-present companion in this world. As a result of the Fall, every individual throughout the history of humanity has known suffering and we as Christians are not exempt from it. Rather, in many ways the suffering Christians are called to endure can even be greater than that which the unbeliever endures in this world.

As we face this truth, we have found that nothing is as realistic about suffering as the Bible. The Scriptures do not follow the path of other religions nor do they deny the reality of suffering. Rather, they treat it as very real. Neither do they make the error of accepting suffering as something that is real, but dismiss it as insignificant. The Scriptures are honest about the trials of the saints of God and about the

of those same trials. From Abraham to Job to David to Paul, they all suffered and suffered greatly. We could even say that many of them endured some of the worst afflictions that this life has to offer. The life of Job is a monumental testimony to this fact.

However, the Scriptures do not leave us there. Even as there is nothing as honest about suffering in this life as the Scriptures, so there is nothing as comforting in the midst of these trials. The Bible attends to the soul like a physician's balm. There is healing in its pages, comfort in its words, and hope in its exhortations. Maybe the most surprising, yet comforting, aspect of the Scriptures in the midst of our trials is what they expect from the Christian as we experience these "dark nights of the soul."

Consider it pure joy, my brothers,
whenever you face trials of many kinds...
James 1:2

It is not what many Christians will advise and counsel one another, let alone believe

themselves, that suffering must merely be endured. Make no mistake, the Bible teaches the need for endurance in the midst of trial, but it does not let us stop there. The Lord calls us to approach suffering in a unique and wholly uncommon way. As Christians, we are exhorted to rejoice in the midst of our suffering! Paul says in Romans 5:3, "More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings..." He says in Colossians 1:24, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake..."

We may be tempted to think that Paul was a little confused on this point. Maybe the suffering he experienced was superficial and therefore it was easy for him to pen such lofty words. If only he was accustomed to what we have been forced to endure, he may have sung a different tune. But then we read of the miseries the Apostle Paul experienced. He was imprisoned, beaten, lashed, shipwrecked, stoned, and in constant danger. He was subjected to hunger, thirst, extreme temperatures, and the mental anguish of worrying about the churches under his care. He was no stranger to suffering and

his afflictions were anything but minor. "But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings..." (1 Peter 4:13).

Why would the Scriptures encourage the Christian to rejoice in their suffering? And how is this of comfort to the burdened soul? The Bible expects the Christian to rejoice in their sufferings because of the benefit it provides to us, to others, and the glory that it gives to God.

As you experience suffering in this life, remind yourself that it is not a reason for complaint, but rather for rejoicing. That may seem counterintuitive, but we can rejoice because our suffering is of benefit to our own soul. Whatever trial we are enduring is "but for a moment, and is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17). Suffering prepares us for the next life. It refines us, molds us, and shapes us into the image of Christ. It tests our faith and confirms to us that we are truly the children of God. It matures us in ways that could never be realized apart from trial. It is no overstatement to say that advanced

degrees in the Christian life are obtained in the school of suffering. Jesus Himself, learned obedience through suffering: Though He was a Son, 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. Hebrews 5:8-9

With this knowledge, we can joyfully endure the anguish of suffering, because we have a greater horizon in mind. Our earthly aim is to be as conformed to the image of Christ as we possibly can in preparation for meeting Him; suffering is the well-traveled path of every mature disciple of Christ. We are picking up our cross, following after Him, and being conformed to the image of our Suffering Savior. He walked the path before us and as we walk in His footsteps we become more like Him.

In conclusion, we begin to find joy in our trials when we accept them for what they are - instructions for our soul. Trials and how to deal with them are needed to produce steadfastness - the true wellness

we should seek to become mature and complete in Christ. Pray for endurance and perseverance from the One who has already endured and proven himself steadfast. From those times through trials is when perseverance begins to spring forth; an increase in faith that buds into love; and finally, becomes complete with no lack of patience and joy.

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