

“I want to know the power of His resurrection, and to fellowship in His sufferings...” There’s quite an ominous, foreboding, and leering tension about this passage in Philippians 3:10. On one hand, this passage explains that there is great joy in the Christian life. So much satisfaction is indeed found in the nature of Christ and His resurrection. We can take comfort in the fact that He’s overcome the world and because He’s overcome the world, He resides in us. This brings incredible peace and comfort to our soul. When we think about the resurrection and the accomplishment of Christ we can’t help but be filled with a bit of wonder and awe.

Paul, in this statement in Philippians helps us to understand that joy goes much deeper than circumstances. When Paul writes this message, he is bound and imprisoned. He’s lying on a floor infested with rats, parasites, countless vermin and filth. His arms are chained to the walls; the cuffs digging into wrists to the point of drawing blood. He’s hungry and thirsty. He’s tired and alone. He’s been following Christ all these years, and now he finds himself not experiencing the circumstantial blessing that some would believe always accompanies the Christian walk. Rather, Paul is experiencing the other side of the Christian sword, the edge of suffering.

In some regard, I can’t say that I can relate to Paul here. I’ve never been imprisoned. I’ve never shared a bed with rats. I’ve never been shunned to this extent for sharing and believing in the work of Jesus Christ. In beginning this message, I want to in no way equate my sufferings with the severity of Paul’s. I know I’ve been lucky and blessed to experience the life of relative ease that I’ve had.

However in the last few years, I believe I’ve been brought to a place of identifying with Paul and with Christ in ways that I hadn’t previously. Sure, like all of us here, I have experienced some of the common woes of life, such as the ones that came in the teenage years. I have felt rejection, peer pressure, and I know the awkwardness that comes with those years. I’ve felt betrayal, backstabbing and distrust. I guess you can say that I’ve suffered, but haven’t we all to some degree?

But the last 3-5 years of my Christian journey have been different. The past few years have been marked by a nagging sense that God has withdrawn His presence in some way. There’s still a comfort and calm assurance in my mind that He’s still there, but I’ve felt that His presence has come through His loving, yet stinging hand of discipline. It is in the last few years that God has reminded me in my suffering that I have very little character and very little faith. For with every loving blow of His hand, I seem to find that all of my idiosyncrasies, maladies, and faults just billow to the surface.

In the past few years I’ve known what it is to be jobless and to have no home. I’ve known what it is like to toss and turn through the night just wondering how I’m going to provide enough money simply to feed my family. In the last few years I’ve known what it is to have my reputation tarnished, and through a ministry that I worked with in the not too distant past, I learned what it felt like to be betrayed, slandered, wrongfully accused, and unjustly treated. In the past year I’ve worked for many leaders. I’ve been underneath leaders whom were overly emotionally demonstrative and abusive. I’ve been under leaders who taught biblical error and who were leading in a direction that was not honoring to Christ. I’ve served in churches, communities that seemed to have no value for relational unity and togetherness. Through this, I have inevitably felt alone.

To add to all of this, in the past year one of my immediate family members decided that she would give into the homosexual lifestyle. Because of her decision this has sent my family

into a tailspin of awkward and unfamiliar dynamics. All the while, my family has been experiencing woes through business failings, life-changes, and bad decisions.

For the last few years it seems in whatever direction I look I find discord and problems. The one strong point has been my marriage, my kids and my relationship with Jesus. These are the only things I can look to and find a bit of hope, and a bit of joy. Everywhere else I look—ministry has not been fruitful, financially struggling, emotionally drained, spiritually wounded, and struggling with distrust, circumstantially chaotic—I find no hope. If it weren't for Jesus' resurrection I'd have no hope.

Yet there is purpose in it all. Maybe now I can relate to Paul when he says that he wants to “know the power of the resurrection.” I know Jesus' power, for it's by His power alone that I've been sustained. I know the blessings of the cross because amidst all of the tragedy of the last few years, I still have breath, love, a family, and some semblance of happiness. However, I do struggle with one particular aspect of Paul's theology. It is the statement, “I WANT to share in His sufferings.”

I WANT!!! How can someone want to experience Christ's sufferings? The cross exemplifies ULTIMATE humiliation, nakedness, exposure, and yet ULTIMATE LOVE. The cross' toil caused the creation of a new word—*excruciating*. Because up until that point there was no “one word” that could describe the pain that Jesus suffered, they had to come up with a new one simply to capture its depth. And even before the cross, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus experienced a clinical condition called *hematohidrosis*. The agony of considering the cross; the agony of experiencing separation from His Father in taking the wrath and anger for our sins, brought Jesus under so much stress that He literally sweat blood.

How is it that I, or you could WANT to share in this suffering? Why would anyone choose a depth of love that reaches to these ends?

Yet somehow this is possible. Not only is it possible for me in my suffering but it is also possible for all of us. Even though it may not feel like it, the Scripture tells us that “death, suffering, and Christ's cross is operative in us, so the LIFE...” (2 Cor. 4:12). LIFE IS AT WORK IN YOU. That means somewhere in the midst of our suffering is a hidden quest to bring about LIFE. It is as it was at the cross. Jesus' death and sacrifice was horrifying, yet the life that sprang forth was saving. Jesus' loss was great, but greater was His gain. If Jesus hadn't suffered the cross, then you nor I, nor countless believers would be heaven-bound today. You or I would have no hope, and no purpose.

Suffering is going to be a given in our lives. The question today has to do with our perspective in regard to that suffering. We need to see suffering from a heavenly perspective. We need to see suffering and trial from His perspective, so that when it comes, it won't come by surprise in order to be received begrudgingly, but it will be accepted willingly as it is coming from the Fatherly hand of God.

I Peter 1:6-12 is our text today. I want to start by reading the first portion: “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

Peter in this passage is quickly going to help all of us categorize our suffering. He's going to help us identify the work of God in our suffering, so that he can move onto showing us the hope in it.

"In this you rejoice, though now for a little while..." Peter begins with this first line to comfort us. And I think before we look at suffering and the message of God in this passage and sermon, we first need to take comfort as a community and as a body that suffering is always "for a little while." We may define this little while with one word—wait. We're all waiting—waiting for or in something—and waiting brings suffering doesn't it?

You may be waiting on a dream to come to pass. Every waking hour of your day is spent just agonizing over when this dream will be born into reality. You may be waiting for a big break, a promotion, or a new job. You may be waiting for a spouse, or to get pregnant, or for a verdict on those shaky medical tests. You may be waiting to graduate, or even get your first car. You may be at life's end waiting for when God takes you home.

Whatever your "little while" is, it can cause you and all of us to deal with some very unpleasant emotions. We may be forced to come face to face with disappointment or discouragement. We may be at the end of something in our life, and we are caused to feel the pressure of its loss. These times can fill us with countless "What ifs," and can leave us calling into question all our mistakes and failures. On the other hand, we might be at the beginning of something, and amidst all the anticipation, there still may linger some doubt and discouragement when things don't quite move or progress as we'd like. This can cause depression, and it can cause us to depart or withdraw into ourselves.

That "little while," is the same little while that Paul was experiencing in Phil. 3:10. This little while was the same season that Jesus was in throughout His ministry and just before His death. This same "little while" is the same thing that I'm struggling with today in my present situation, and I'm sure we are all experiencing to various degrees.

The next line that Peter speaks here is going to gather all of us together under one protective wing. Peter does not name specific trials and agents of waiting; he simply says that "you have had to suffer all kinds of trials." Last week we talked about the sufferings in the church at that time. Nero was on a tirade and he was persecuting and barbequing Christians, literally on a stick.

This may not be your lot. But maybe your "all kinds" of trials are among this list:

Health Trials, Wrongful accusation, Victim of a Parent that favors another sibling or a boss. Secret Sin, Persecution, Doubt. Unbiblical domineering or passive husband. Domineering or harsh wife. Political upheaval and uncertainty, Stock Market bears and bulls, friendships, courtships, pets die, family member dies, household items break, cars don't run, living from pay check to pay check.

Am I getting you in their somewhere? If not, we need to come back to God's words through Peter. They implore us in our trials. The Scripture doesn't say you won't have trials...in this way providing you false security. This Scripture also doesn't belittle your suffering by offering up a list of "Valid Trials" thus including some of you and excluding others. No! It includes you—it includes me—it includes us!

Now, you may be thinking, "O.K., I understand that we're all lumped into one big suffering mass, but where's God in this and where is His perspective?" If you're thinking this, then you can join the rest of the world. Everyone is looking for an explanation for their trials and

suffering. The problem is, without finding God's reasoning and purpose in our suffering, we can't find any hope or peace amidst our experiences. Our job today is to gain hope! If possible, our job today is to even gain JOY! Greater still, our hope today is to be able to resonate with Paul when he says "I WANT to fellowship with Christ in His sufferings." This is the pinnacle—where we can join willingly in the mission of Jesus—the mission of suffering.

Let's begin by looking at "a little while." This statement, if you think about it, is filled with HOPE! This line clearly states that your "various trials," whatever they may be, are for a short time. They are not forever. The pain you feel may endure for another moment, another hour, or even another decade, but it won't last forever. Even if you cry a particular tear for the rest of your time on this earth, you know that in heaven there are no tears (Rv. 21:4), for Christ will wipe them away. Every tear will be redeemed and vanquished. I Peter says, "even though at **present** you may be temporarily harassed by all kinds of trials..."

Christ is not asking you to endure for always. Just for now. This is a small comfort, and we'll get to greater comfort in a second. For even Christ describes Himself in the Scripture as the Coming One (Hb. 10:37). We're waiting on Him. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus is *erchomai*, or in the ACT of coming (Mt. 24:30, 2 Thess. 1:10). He will come as a ruler. He will appear (John 21:1), and it will be in the brightness of unforgettable and unmistakable light (2 Thess. 2:8). His appearing is going to be literal, Glorious and Powerful. It is in the future that Christ is coming, but the Scriptures tell us that it is CERTAIN (I Jn. 3:2-3).

Did you know that Christ's second coming is prophesied about more in the Scriptures than His first coming? Over 25% of the verses in the entire Bible deal with Christ's Second Coming. You know why I think that is? I think He had in mind our "little while." He had in mind Jesus' "little while" as He stood before the cross. He had in mind Paul's "little while" in prison. Jesus knows our propensity to doubt in times of waiting because He faced these same temptations during His time as a man. There is no man on earth other than the perfect Jesus, who responded perfectly in every trial that can give us a Godly perspective and promise amidst our woes.

This is why Peter goes on to say, "though you may not see Him, you do not see Him now, yet you believe in him and are filled with inexpressible and glorious joy." God's very nature is Invisible, yet He's Ominipresent (Everywhere all the time). Therefore, a lot of His ways and purposes are going to be invisible to you. God clearly states that He is unsearchable; "you do not see Him now..." Meaning, you can't always understand the mind of the Lord (Is. 55). His thoughts are higher than yours, yet His purposes are always good.

It is because of His promise that He's working all things together for the good of those who love Him (Rm. 8:28), and it's because He has promised to finish the work He started in us (Phil. 1:6), that we can stand firm in our "little while." You may not see the answers...good He is invisible. You may not understand the reasons...good He is unsearchable. God is trying to preserve for you the greatest JOY known to your heart. WORSHIP. He's trying to leave you at a place of awe and bewilderment, because He wants you to trust in faith that He alone is good. He doesn't want you to be running in anxious circles through your reasoning. He wants you, in some respects, to give up and admit you're not God. That's a good thing. It breeds love. And you may not get out of your trial right this instant, but remember He's coming!!! He's always coming.

God is not like man that He should slumber. He's always advancing and always fighting. You know what He's fighting for? He's fighting for His glory, and what's most glorious to Him is how His relationship was with you in the garden. He was close to you. Well, why does God

allow times of waiting? Well for one, you may find that you withdraw to be with Him more often when you're waiting, don't you? You pray more, you pursue Him more; you depend and desire His relationship with you more wholeheartedly because you feel the loss of something in your heart. That's His goal—your trust. When you're waiting and getting depressed, discouraged, or disappointed, he knows that you'll come to Him and find what your soul needs most—HIM! He fills our belated dreams with Himself.

And don't get me wrong in thinking that God is some sadist who gets pleasure from seeing you run to Him in your pain. God catches us by the ear in our rebellion most of time. The way He can lovingly lead us back to His side, and get through to us that we're on the wrong path, is to allow pain to reveal our need for Him.

When we are waiting, God also knows our greatest weaknesses and human failings tend to surface. He exposes our frailties and sin and allows us to be purified. This is a joyous thing. God is ridding you of filth and what hinders you. When that anger, disillusionment, and questioning comes up, He's simply exposing your motives and your heart so you can see what is in there. Don't get disgusted with God. Get disgusted with yourself. Get happy with God because He loves you enough to take the time to expose the poison in you. It is and will kill you if He doesn't do something about it. In waiting, it is a time to confess your sin to Him and rid yourself of all your sinful attitudes and motivations, in order to grow into the character of Christ. This should fill you with boasts about Him—Your great joy. This is His goal.

God wants to weed out all those mistresses and false lovers. He wants to expose your silent idol allegiances. By KNOWING MORE THAN YOU, God wants to get you to doubt your abilities and reasoning. By BEING UNSEEN BY YOU, God wants you to doubt your faculties of sight and self-trust. He wants you to distrust everything about yourself so that you'll fully lean on Him.

When you think about it this way, your "little while" or waiting, grows love if you respond rightly to it. This is what God's looking for. That junk in your life—selfish motives, covetousness, greed, anger, lust, immaturity, and faulty logic—is what is causing you to trust yourself and not God. By trusting in something that is imperfect like yourself, you're crippling yourself into a pattern of failure. God wants to heal you by restoring your trust in Him—the thing that is perfect—so that you can find hope in all things.

This is what God is referring to when He says you are "receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls." Don't get caught in the lie that God's salvation is only about purchasing a ticket for you into heaven. God not only wants to save you from the perils of hell He wants to save you from the perils of yourself—the perils of today. Without Him, you are a cancer. "Don't believe me?..." Look at the world around you. It's cancerous, destructive, and it's in utter failure. This world is a reflection of our stewardship. This world is a product of our sin. We did this. Our job was to steward and take care of the garden and we neglected to because we chose our own appetite for that fruit of independence, over God's word for our lives; since then creation groans (Rm. 8).

God is our Deliverer from the world and ourselves NOW, as well as our HOPE for the world of heaven to come. Salvation saves us from all the perils of today. His salvation applies to your marriage, your kids, your friendships, your school and work, your health, your anxieties and all your stress. His salvation is a grace to you during your trial right now. Do you get that? Does that get through to your heart?

And you know what also is a grace to you?...Your trial.

Huh?! Our trials are God's grace in our lives? Yes! Back in vs. 5 of 1 Peter God tells us that His salvation and grace secures us until the end. It says that our eternity in Jesus if we believe is "shielded by God's power until salvation (the end)." So if God's deliverance is a grace to shield us and keep us firm until the end, why won't He shield us from trials? Why will He not only shield us from all of our trials, but He also makes it clear that He gives them to us?

In II Corinthians 12:7, God gave Paul a thorn in his flesh. Paul described it as a messenger of Satan to TORMENT him. A messenger of Satan! Here we see the trial and torment of Satan not being at war with God, but actually acting as a servant to bring about God's purposes. How can this be? Well, Paul tells us in vs. 8-10:

"Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

As in the story of Abraham sacrificing his own son Isaac (Gen. 22:6-9), God was not bringing about hurt to these men, but rather He was helping them. Paul apparently had a propensity toward pride, and pride is poisonous in a person's life.

After all, Paul had seen visions that you or I will never see in this life. Paul had had a miraculous conversion. Paul was not only a scholar among the "worldly and collegiate", he was also a scholar and authority among the collegiate Christians.

On top of this Paul had suffered an incomparable and exhaustive amount:

II Corinthians 11:21-29; "Whatever anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?"

As is stated here, if anyone had reason to boast, Paul did. He knew more than you or I. He struggled more than you or I... If Paul were competing with us, he would win on all accounts. Paul would always get the upper hand. And I imagine that this was a struggle for Paul. Paul was a real human being just like you and I. I'm sure he struggled sometimes in comparing Himself to others. There was no comparison alive at that time that held a candle to Paul. Oh how this could boost a man's ego and self-confidence.

And you may say to yourself, but isn't that what God wants? Doesn't God want us to have a good self-image, an independent spirit, and a confidence in ourselves.

NO! Like I said, pride is a poison. We get drunk on this poison and we turn toward our own resources as a result. Like with any poison, when we drink it, we are depriving our body of what it needs most—health and nourishment. Instead of providing our body with what it needs, we are constricting our body and killing it. The same is true when we turn to our own strength. We are killing ourselves because we are being deprived of what we were made to live on and for—Jesus. As a result, we are depriving ourselves of the nourishment and supply of God’s resources, and we are depreciating our own strength.

In light of this, God, as in Paul’s case, may often administer a constrictive agent to us for the purpose of daily acquainting us with our own weakness. Paul learned that this thorn was not a curse but it was a blessing. God was trying to keep Paul cognoscente and reminded about heavenly things. In this way, God was insuring that Paul would stay dependent on heaven for His resources, and this would ensure that Paul would be getting the best nourishment for His soul.

We have to get God’s perspective in suffering. If we do not get it, we won’t suffer well. We certainly will not “want” to fellowship in Christ’s sufferings if we do not see God’s blessing to us through suffering. God is trying to, as is said in verse 6, “to prove our faith genuine.” Now what does this mean?

Well, there’s a popular false belief that accompanies this thought, and it comes in the story of Abraham and Isaac. There we see God testing Abraham’s faith by asking him to kill his own son—the promised son—the son Abraham had waited for 99 years to get. When he gets his knife in the air, and is ready to kill his son, God tells him to stop. God then says in Genesis 22:12; “Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”

According to a system of thought on this passage, God tests us so that He can know our faith is strong enough for the next test. This implies that God does not know how we’ll respond until He puts us into some kind of incubator to see how we respond to His stimuli. This view deflates the purpose of God in our trial, not to mention it also challenges God’s entire character and Omniscience.

The Scripture is very clear that God knows our heart. Therefore any work of His hand to exercise a trial in our lives is not a growth tool for God, but rather a tool by which He uses to grow and encourage us. He did not test Abraham because he didn’t know what was in Abraham’s heart, but rather He wanted to encourage Abraham by revealing to Abraham what was truly in his heart. This is how God works. He gives us trials to expose our hearts to us, so that we can act accordingly. God knows when there is anger, hurt, sin, and deceit in our hearts, and by way of discipline, He constructs life circumstances perfectly so that those heart issues will come out. (EG: bad drivers, long lines, quirky people etc.) In this way, God does us the grace of showing us who we really are.

When He tests our heart, and junk spills out, we have the opportunity to show humility in acknowledging and repenting of our sin. God clearly says that He is close to the “broken and contrite in spirit,” so this is His way of drawing us closer to Himself. In recognizing our frailty and humbly realizing our weaknesses we are drawn to lean on Him more, thus making ourselves stronger.

On the other hand, when he tests our heart and righteousness spills forth, we can be encouraged. We can see God’s handprint on our life, and we can see the work He’s actively doing. This gives us confidence that we are indeed His elect, and His sons and daughters. Hebrews 12 tells us that God disciplines those whom He loves and calls sons and daughters. By

seeing good fruit come out of us in trial, we are drawn to see that He loves us, for He has been working on us. In this He is deserving of praise and adoration for His work (more on this later).

Vs. 10-12 “Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.”

I think to conclude this section in talking about God we need to see in verse 10-12 that Christ’s sufferings were handled with the greatest planning and care. This will encourage us presently and into the future in how Christ handles our sufferings—past. For the Prophets foretold the suffering of Christ, which means that it was planned in advance. Jeremiah wept over the message, Ezekiel went to great lengths by dramatizing the work of God over a pile of feces; Daniel was thrown into a lion’s den, and Nehemiah endured gossip, slander and belittling at the hands of Sanballat (Neh. 2:19). Not to mention countless others that gave their lives and suffered fearlessly so that we could see the story of Christ’s sufferings written down.

These last verses here show us the troublesome journey that others took, all so that you and I would be assured about Christ’s sufferings. They were and are real. This makes yours and my suffering real. It gives our trials incredible purpose. For we too labor for those that are going to come after us. Hopefully they will be encouraged at the trials we endured, so that they can have the truth of Jesus passed down to them. Let this give you a bigger view of your suffering as it functions within God’s plan. Not only is it planned and for your encouragement and edification, it also plays a part in His bigger plan of redemption. Your struggle is not just about YOU. It’s about others. You’re not just struggling for yourself, you are struggling for others. Just imagine Paul’s suffering. If Paul had not have suffered, we would not have half of the New Testament today.

Depending on how well you walk this “little while” journey with God, may determine how well you are able to help those who may need your insight when you come out on the other side.

In my days as a youth pastor, I always wished I could go back to High School knowing what I knew now. I would have handled the torment, the loneliness, the hormones, the peer pressure, etc. all very differently. I would have chosen to be a better light. But in those trials I lost sight of what I was doing. It became so much about me that I lost the grand design of God in the mix, and as a result many people went through High School without seeing the depth of Jesus in me. Oh what an opportunity I missed. I don’t want to miss it again, and I certainly don’t want my legacy or family line to miss it. I want to learn from that. I want to go through my trial NOW, as I wished I had gone through it then. I want to go through it maintaining the viewpoint and perspective of God in my suffering.

He is bringing about a good work in me, and He is completing something. He’s moving in my life and maybe the fact that I don’t see it is a good thing. He may be doing something so amazing that my human mind simply cannot comprehend it. His work may be so vast in fact,

that I may only know the grandeur of His good work after He finally pulls me out of it and shows me the beautiful mansion He's made out of my mess.

You can act on this revelation as well. You can choose within your struggle to maintain your fallen perspective or the perspective of God. You can choose to start battling within your "little while" with the hope of the Second coming. You can choose to see your trial in light of the bigger picture—the fight of God to reach the lost in the world—even after you're dead and buried. You can choose to see your suffering in some of the same respects as you see the cross.

Your suffering, like the cross, was and is planned, determined, and purposed by God to encourage you as a son or daughter. It may also be to reveal your rebelliousness in an effort to restore you to Jesus. On this note, please do not make the mistake by thinking that God is simply disciplining you to ONLY reveal your righteous standing with Him. This is the case sometimes, but often it is half the story. He may also be disciplining you to reveal your rebellion. There are two sides to the coin.

Also remember that every suffering has a promise in it and behind it. Remember Joseph. On account of his big dreams and immaturity he was dumped in a hole, hated by his brothers, abandoned, wrongfully accused, mistreated, sold into slavery, framed for adultery, imprisoned and forgotten in prison. Yet even through all of this, there was still a promise. God was weaving a promise through every pain of Joseph's experience, in order to bring about salvation to the Jewish people. He was raising Joseph up to protect his people in a time of great famine. You can ACT ON THE PROMISE that God has your SALVATION in mind, and in your SALVATION He plans to save others. In fact, He probably has your salvation in mind more during your trial than at any other time! He is either currently delivering you from destruction (yourself) and that is why it hurts, or He is about to deliver you and that is why you are confused and a little in the dark.

All of this is God's effort to bring you and us to His place of greatest delight—a place of praise and adoration. 1 Peter says that the trial you are going through is purposed so that it "may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." God's whole goal is that you would be brought to a higher reverence, need, and honor of His name. This is worship.

Worship is *shachah* (Heb.), or *proskuneo* (Grk.), meaning submission and surrender. Worship is Submission, and during this time we can bring great honor to God's authority by obeying and heeding what He says about our suffering and embracing a posture of Joy in it. We can submit under the authority of our elders and our leaders, in allowing them to lead us through suffering. Can you imagine our lives if we enlisted the help of our God-appointed authorities to help us. Instead of seeing authorities as a hindrance we could see them as a tool to help and mature us. In submitting to their encouragement in our suffering and discipline (Heb. 12, Matt. 18) we can grow into maturity. This can only bring greater unity, community and fellowship amongst the body.

Worship is *yare* (Heb.), *phobeomai* (Grk.), (Ecc. 12:13, Duet. 8:6). These words imply an awe and reverence toward God in His work through our suffering. This means that we will not waste our sufferings, because Christ has redeemed them. This means that we will obey God's commands, listen to His voice, walk in His ways and turn from evil. We can worship God in our suffering through turning from the evil that God unearths in our life, and turning toward the righteousness that He teaches us. Can you imagine if we handled suffering in this way rather than with grumbling, discouragement and depression? Suffering would no longer be a tool to hurt us, but to help us. We would no longer have to act on the defensive, and merely "survive" through the suffering, but we can turn to the offensive and "thrive" by gleaning everything

helpful from and through our trial. Our trial can become a treasure trove of wisdom and learning.

Worship is *avad* (Heb.), and *latieno* (Grk), which means to worship through our service. Peter tells us that there are numerous and various trials. This would imply that there are going to be numerous opportunities and ministries that form to meet these various needs. We need to allow God to use and redeem our pain in His time, so that we can help others—bearing their burdens in love (Gal. 6:2). Can you image if we took a joyful perspective of our suffering as a way to serve? Normally we don't serve or share because "we can't handle our own stuff, so why would we take on someone else's?" But when we see God's work in us as a means by which He uses to help us to serve someone else, our pain is redeemed and filled with purpose. This will bring great joy to our life and allow us the freedom to pour out our lives as a living sacrifice into others who are hurting in order to serve and bring them to the same joy we now know (Rom. 12:1)

In Thessalonica (1:3-4) Paul explained that the church was growing in faith, because of the great trials they were enduring. I believe it's because they were being drawn together in affection toward each other because of their pain. They were meeting together and encouraging each other (Heb. 3:13) because each person needed encouragement and saw the growing value in community. They were being filled with overwhelming affection and compassion for each other (Phil. 1:8), for they were sharing in each other's pain. Because of their trials they were losing a spirit of Independence and were drawing together as a community because as a body (I Cor. 12), they realized they needed each other.

Not only can I envision an increase in our love for each other growing, but our love for the lost as well. They currently are enduring all kinds of trials as well, yet they have no answer. But we are told in I Peter 3:15 to be prepared to give an answer "for the hope that we have" when people see our joy. Our right response to suffering can lend a saving answer to those that are lost. It can also extend a hand of hospitality to the lost and hurting due to our compassion for them (Heb. 13:2). In embracing our pain, we can effectively *incarnate* or live amongst those in pain. We can identify with them, but we can also effectively minister the gospel to them for people want to be ministered to by those who have suffered the same things they have. It feels as if they can relate.

And finally, worship is *lodah* (Heb.) and *exomologeō* (Grk.), which means giving thanks. Can you image your lives and the life of those in your Christian community and in our world, if we thanked God for our suffering because we now see His good purpose in it (Psalms, Phil 2:10-11, Luke 9:16)? If this were the case, we would live life unaffected and indestructible to the enemies' influence. Satan's desire is to get us discouraged, depressed, suicidal, addicted etc. during our trial. His purpose is to steal the abundant life that God is trying to work in us through that trial (Jn. 10:10). Satan will do everything he can to crush God's purpose, but he can't if we're thankful. Thankfulness is spiritual warfare. When our hands are in the air in thankfulness, they release their death grip on life's maladies, thus allowing God to take those burdens for us. As we thank Him, we release our hands and allow God to move. And when our eyes are on Him, there's nothing Satan can do to distract us because our suffering and trial are now filled with nothing but purpose and Godly perspective. This completely frustrates the enemy and his work.

A heart that rightly responds and perceives God's hand in trial is going to worship in submission, love and obedience, service, and thankfulness. Can you imagine this type of life?

Can you imagine this type of church or Christian community? Can you imagine this type of home? In fact, if we respond to God's hand in trial correctly, we will experience the abundant life that only He can offer.

I WANT to share in Christ's sufferings. Do you? This is the joy of the cross. Your pain is redeemed and so also are you if you confess and believe in Jesus. If you believe or if you don't believe, the invitation is the same. Come to Jesus and let Him redeem you. If you're a Christian, let Him redeem and Deliver you from what you're dealing with now. If you're not a Christian, let Him redeem and Deliver you from Hell first, and then enter into a life where God will take ownership in your life. In submitting to His Lordship, we also put ourselves into direct line with His blessings. Though His blessings may come in the form of uncomfortable pain, we can thank Him before, in, and beyond the storm, for in every suffering Christ is drawing us back to Himself. This is His journey and labor of love.



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