

Whoever finds his life will
lose it, and whoever loses
his life for my sake will
find it.
Mt 10:39

Share the teaching
Guard the sharing

Male Call

February 1, 2008— The Mercy of God, the Sovereignty of God, the Suffering of Jesus and the Mind of Christ

or

When Bad Things Happen to Good People – How Do Good People Respond?

6:00 – 6:05	Coffee & Donuts Opening Prayer
6:05 – 7:00	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.</i> - I Corinthians 4:11-13</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord</i> - Psalm 112.7</p> <p>1) <u>DO WE SUFFER/EXPERIENCE HARDSHIP? IF SO, IN WHAT WAYS?</u></p> <p>a) Suffering vs. persecution vs. hardship...</p> <p>b) Open discussion...</p> <p>2) <u>WHY DO WE SUFFER? (NOT AN ALL-INCLUSIVE LIST!)</u></p> <p>a) We live in an fallen world. Suffering is a direct, unavoidable consequence of the Fall (sh*t happens).</p> <p>i) But, God is wholly sovereign and omnipotent – and personal, engaged in His creation.</p> <p>ii) We must recognize that He either <i>wills</i> or <i>allows</i> suffering. (c.f. Job)</p> <p>b) Simple physical cause-and-effect</p> <p>i) God’s creation operates according to His design – and if we, by our own <i>free will</i>, chose to violate His laws, we can expect logical consequences.</p> <p>ii) We probably shouldn’t always try to read too much into this. (If we step in front of a bus, is the result necessarily anything more than the obvious result of our “sin?”)</p> <p>c) Discipline / punishment</p> <p>i) Recognize that we can suffer for doing wrong.</p> <p>ii) <i>And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”</i></p>

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:5-11)

d) To refine and purify us (e.g. gold)...

- i) *Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. (1 Peter 4.1)*
- ii) God also uses suffering as a means of disencumbering us of the things which keep us from following Him completely – to remove baggage from us that we aren't willing to put down by ourselves.
- iii) *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. (Hebrews 12.1)* Note how this verse is sandwiched between the sufferings listed in the 'faith hall-of-fame' in Hebrews 11 and the encouragement to endure hardship and discipline further on in Hebrews 12!

e) ...and to build character

- i) *Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. (Romans 5:3-4)*

f) To prove the validity of our faith – how do we know that it is real until it is tested?

- i) *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1 Peter 1:6-7)*

g) For the greater good

- i) Consider the story of Joseph (Genesis 37 – 48). Did God *will* or *allow* Joseph to be sold into slavery, put into prison, etc?
- ii) *And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you....So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. (Genesis 45:5,8)*

h) To bless us by allowing us to participate in the sufferings of Christ.

- i) *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. (1 Peter 4:12-13)*

3) HOW DO WE (SHOULD WE) RESPOND TO SUFFERING?...

a) Rejoice!

- i) *“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.” (Luke 6:20-23).*

b) Repent – learn, change.

i) *Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.* (Revelation 3:19)

c) Encourage those who are suffering

i) *Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.* (Hebrews 13:3, etc.) (cf. Male Call challenge to “ask the 2nd question”)

4) ...AND HOW DO WE GET THERE?

a) Recognize that it is Process. Spiritual growth and maturity, like physical growth and maturity, generally takes time and experience.

b) Trust God! Believe that His will for you is good

i) *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.* (Romans 8.28)

c) Develop a spiritual, Christ-centered perspective

i) *But we have the mind of Christ.* (1 Corinthians 2:15)

ii) *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.* (Romans 12:2)

d) Abide, live in communion, walk by faith, immerse yourself in His Word – and accept that He will allow you to suffer in order to bring you to the place where you can rejoice in your suffering!

EXAMPLES / THOUGHTS FOR CONTEMPLATION

In The Heavenly Man¹, Chinese Christian Brother Yun writes:

There are many ways the Lord may lead a Christian during his or her life, but I'm convinced that the path of every believer will sooner or later include suffering. The Lord gives us these trials to keep us humble and dependent on him for our sustenance.

The Bible says in 1 Peter 4:1, "*Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.*" I believe when suffering and pain increases, sinning decreases. I've certainly not yet reached the point of being "done with sin". I still complain to the Lord when I suffer.

How we mature as a Christian largely depends on the attitude we have when we're faced with suffering. Some try to avoid it or imagine it doesn't exist, but that will only make the situation worse. Others try to endure it grimly, hoping for relief. This is better, but falls short of the full victory God wants to give each of his children.

The Lord wants us to embrace suffering as a friend. We need a deep realization that when we're persecuted for Jesus' sake it is an act of God's blessing to us. This might sound impossible, but it is attainable with God's help. That is why Jesus said, "*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.*" Matthew 5:11-12.

We can grow to such a place in Christ where we laugh and rejoice when people slander us, because we know we are not of this world, but our security is in heaven. The more we are persecuted for his sake, the more reward we will receive in heaven.

¹ The Heavenly Man, Brother Yun & Paul Hattaway, Monarch Books, 2002 (pg. --).

When people malign you, rejoice and be glad. When they curse you, bless them in return. When you walk through a painful experience, embrace it and you will be free!

When you learn these lessons, there is nothing left that the world can do to you.

Hudson Taylor, early missionary to China, comes to see the hand of God in suffering, following persecution and imprisonment in Ningpo. As related in Hudson Taylor's *Spiritual Secret*²:

So already, the circumstance that had seemed a great calamity was being recognized as among the "all things" that work together for good "to them that love God." It was one of not a few hard lessons through which Hudson Taylor was learning to think of God as *The One Great Circumstance of Life, and of all lesser, external circumstances as necessarily the kindest, wisest, best, because either ordered or permitted by Him.* And it was not long before he came to see in his detention in Ningpo another remarkable evidence of the love and care of God.



MORE REFERENCES FOR THOUGHT & CONTEMPLATION

- † *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* (John 16:33)
- † *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* (Philippians 4:7)
- † *"Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."* (Matthew 24:9-13)
- † *"I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one."* (John 17:13-15)
- † *Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the*

² Hudson Taylor's *Spiritual Secret*, Howard Taylor, Moody Publishers; 1955 (pg. 78).

	<p><i>rest? Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Luke 12:22ff)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> † Life of Job. † Life of Daniel and of Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego (cf. Daniel 3:17-18). † Life of Charles Spurgeon. † Life of Joni Eareckson Tada. † Leadership University Online; the Suffering Church (http://www.leaderu.com/focus/persecution.html) † <u>Fox's Book of Martyrs</u> (http://www.reformed.org/master/index.html?mainframe=/books/fox/fox_martyrs.html) † <u>Suffering and the Sovereignty of God</u>, J. Piper & J. Taylor, Crossway Books, 2006.
7:00	Closing Prayer