

Suffering in the Apostle Paul

“Suffering is not evidence of God’s absence, but of God’s presence, and it is in our experience of being broken that God does his surest and most characteristic salvation work. There is a way to accept, embrace, and deal with suffering that results in a better life, not a worse one, and more of the experience of God, not less. God is working out his salvation in our lives the way he has always worked it out—at the place of brokenness, at the cross of Jesus, and at the very place where we take up our cross.”

– Eugene Peterson, *Embracing Brokenness*

Benefit #1: In our suffering, grace is experienced as sufficient (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

- And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor. 12:7-10)

Benefit #2: You experience the strengthening of Christ in your sufferings (Phil 4:12-13).

- I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things *through Christ who strengthens me*. (Phil 4:12-13)

Benefit #3: You recognize, in suffering, that the Weight of Glory in Heaven towers infinitely high above any earthly suffering because you begin to anticipate release and freedom from the brokenness of this life rather than making this earth your home (Rom 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17-18).

- For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are *not worthy to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (Romans 8:18)
- For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a *far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Cor. 4:17-18)

Benefit #4: The Gospel is adorned and goes forth in power precisely in our sufferings.

- But I want you to know, brethren, that *the things which happened to me* [namely his imprisonment in Rome] have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel (Phil 1:12)
- Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church (Col. 1:24; see also 2 Cor. 6:4-7)

Benefit #5: You are conformed to the person of Jesus Christ in your sufferings and made ready for the Kingdom of God.

- The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, *provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him*. (Rom 8:16-17)
- that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and *may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death* (Phil 3:10)
- strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that *through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God*. (Acts 14:22. see also 2 Thess 1:5)

Benefit #6: You learn obedience through hardship and suffering by continuing to walk in simple obedience.

- though He was a Son, *yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.* (Heb 5:8)

Benefit #7: Your inner man (your heart and your guts) is being renewed each day by the Living God in strength, in faith, and in godliness.

- Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, *yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.* (2 Cor. 4:16)
- “Do you want to be holy? Then you will suffer.” – John Stott
- “I am certain that I never did grow in grace one half so much anywhere as I have upon the bed of pain.” – Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Benefit #8: You experience Christ as your most treasured possession (when there is no where else to turn).

- Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ. (Phil 3:8)
- “You can never learn that Christ is all you need, until Christ is all you have.” – Corrie Ten Boom

Benefit #9: Suffering produces patience and an ability to wait on the Lord and his perfect timing.

- My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. (James 1:2-3)

Benefit #10: You may learn to pray to God (a great gift!) in your sufferings (and perhaps we only really learn to pray in our helplessness).

- In trials, you let your requests be known to God rather than living in anxiety (Phil 4:6).
- Requests to God, arising from our afflictions, are to be brought to God with thanksgiving: “give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thess 5:18)
- “Trials are intended to make us think, to wean us from the world, to send us to the Bible, to drive us to our knees.” – J.C. Ryle

Benefit #11: You learn to be content in all circumstances (Phil 4:11-12).

- I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. *I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want* (Phil 4:11-12, NIV).

Benefit #12: You experience the “beatitude blessing of Jesus” in persecution.

- Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matthew 5:11-12; see also 2 Timothy 3:10-12)

“The darker the night, the brighter the stars; the deeper the grief, the closer is God!”

– Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Per Crucem Ad Lucem | **“Through the cross to the light”** | A Christian motto signifying that suffering, sacrifice, or hardship (the cross) leads to redemption, enlightenment, and spiritual joy (the light). It represents the journey from Good Friday to Easter Sunday.