

Suffering Is a Teacher

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Heb 5:8 Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

This is an unusual insight into the earthly life and experience of Jesus Christ. This verse seems to suggest that God the Son had need of learning something. In our modern day English, this would really seem like the case. But when we understand the meaning of “learn,” and we apply the right connotation to it, we can see that this learning mentioned here is about Christ going through the experiences of suffering as the Son of man and, by that, gaining the experiential sense of it. God had never felt what it was like to suffer in the flesh...He had never lived in the flesh. God had never “gone through” a set of experiences called suffering. He knew all about suffering from the “God is a Spirit” angle; but as Jesus, the Son of Man He experienced in the flesh all that humans feel, see, are exposed to. All the mental and physical stimuli that accompany suffering were experienced by our Lord. That is the sense of our text. That is also the framework within which it is said that he “learned” obedience. In the force and power of all His sufferings, He must act the part of the Representative Man. He must face suffering, go through suffering, be the target for that which causes suffering, and yield Himself to it within the constraints of the will of God the Father. He did that fully, and when He did, as God-man He understood with a two-part (God AND man) perspective what suffering by creatures was all about.

The almost incomprehensible fact of this experience of God the Son / Son of Man strikes us like a lightning bolt with a realization about the great grace of God! He who needed nothing, took upon Himself an experience of suffering that He might be the complete sympathizer with our suffering human condition! Because He in love for our immortal souls would provide an all-sufficient Savior.

Because Christ has left us this legacy of His own experience recorded in the Word, we are bound to look into it and get lessons for ourselves on how we might model our thinking and our actions after His perfect example. He who was the model sufferer left us an example to follow. May the Holy Spirit enable us to understand a few facts about this great truth.

I. We Are Not Exempt From Suffering Just Because We Are God’s Children

- The proverbial complaint, “why me?” should never be used by a child of God
 - It appears that scripture teaches us that an inescapable element of our inheritance with God is a certain amount of suffering: (Rom 8:17) And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together.
- > We usually view this statement about suffering as having to do with abuse by the world, persecution, or hatred. But this statement should also **stand as a proof** of our being heirs of God (we are heirs and joint heirs IF SO BE THAT WE SUFFER WITH HIM)
- > Also, it should stand and **as a caution to us** that part of that status (being an heir) is going to be about suffering.
- In Paul’s list of sufferings we read about in 2 Corinthians 11, it’s not hard to notice that a lot of those things are incidental to his journeys and missionary ventures, and are not really

elements of persecution or the results of men's malice and hatred:

- 2Cor. 11:24-27 “Of the Jews five times received I forty *stripes* save one. 25 Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, **thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep**; 26 *In* **journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea,** *in perils among false brethren*; 27 **In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.**

II. Suffering Is Designed For Experiential Learning

- “Pain and suffering are the dark strands through the tapestry of your life, providing the shadows that give depth and dimension to the masterpiece God is fashioning within you.” (Joseph F. Girzone - Founder of the Joshua Foundation)
- It reminds us of our temporary earthly existence
- > Job 14:1 Man *that is* born of a woman *is* of few days, and full of trouble.
- It reminds us of our frailty
- > Psa 103:15-16 *As for* man, his days *are* as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. 16 For the **wind passeth over it, and it is gone**; and the place thereof shall know it no more.
- It purges out impatience
- It reminds us of our helplessness in the face of forces
- It reminds us about our own carelessness
- It drives us to God

III. Obedience Is a Principal Lesson To Be Learned From Suffering

- We find that our experience within the Kingdom of God is all about spiritual learning
- The **two principles** which we need to carry with us on our road of learning about obedience is summarized by two portions of scripture:
- > Learning about obedience is all about submission to, and compliance with, the will of Christ in our lives.
 - 2Co 10:4-5 (For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;) 5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and **bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;**
- > Regardless of the magnitude or type of suffering we do, the Lord has positive purposes in it, and

has selected suffering to teach us obedience.

- Jer 29:11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, **thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.**

– This is a statement from God that assures us that through all kinds of trials, He has thoughts of peace toward us, and contemplates a certain end result controlled by Him.

- Rom 8:28 And we know that **all things work together for good** to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.

■ What about the process of obedience during suffering?

- > Obedience to submit to things that are enjoyable or gratifying is a no-brainer
- > Obedience to submit to things that are uncomfortable, painful, demanding, even agonizing is a response that must be trained into us.
- > Obedience during suffering demands resignation to, and dependence upon, God (see 1Pet 2:23 Who, ...when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed *himself* to him that judgeth righteously....”)
- > Obedience in suffering demands the highest view of the experience of suffering (see 1Pet 4:19 “Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to *him* in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.”)

“If suffering is accepted and lived through, not fought and refused, then it is completed and becomes transmuted. It is absorbed, and having accomplished its work, it ceases to exist as suffering, and becomes part of our growing self.” (E. Graham Howe [Author and Psychotherapist first part of 20th century] and L. Le Mesurier)