

Suffering and the Will of God

Intro

For the past 2 weeks we have been focusing on marriage and we have heard 2 powerful testimonies of how God has brought healing and reconciliation to marriages that looked to be over. We also heard in these testimonies how difficulty and suffering and hard times brought people to a point of deeper surrender and trust and yieldedness to God. It is amazing how great God is at taking negatives and turning them into positives.

Well today, I want to pick of the theme of suffering and hardship and share with you some principles from God's Word about suffering, and then we are going to hear from someone who has really experienced this first hand.

Principles of Suffering

1. God is sovereign over our suffering. Ps. 103:19 in the NAS

What I mean by this is that He is in control and can be trusted. Sovereignty = God so very reigns. Now I know we all struggle with the questions of why there is evil and why do bad things happen to good people and did God cause this or just allow it. Well, we may never fully know the answers to those hard questions this side of heaven, but we do know that God is in control, that nothing happens that He is not aware of, and that He is good and loving and can be trusted no matter what happens.

One of the main reasons bad things happen is because God gives us a free will and with that free will we often abuse it and do things that grieve God and hurt other people. Because God is loving, His loving nature requires Him to give us a free will (because love never controls another or makes them a puppet) but with that free will comes a lot of pain and hurt and sin that God Himself is not to blame for. At the same time, God is loving and gracious and kind and caring and wants to work through the pain and hardship to bring forgiveness and healing and His mighty presence.

So, rather than spend a lot of time on asking "why", I have found it far more fruitful to ask, "how does God want me to trust and obey Him in the midst of this hardship?" Though we may never fully know why something happened, we can know that God can use suffering for His glory and our good (**the cross shows this!**)

TS And this leads us to the 2nd principle:

2. God wants to use hardship to conform us to the image of Christ.

Rom. 5:3-5 + the verses Keith gave us

God's Word promises that following Jesus will not be easy and that we will experience a lot of challenges. But one of the main ways God wants to work in these difficulties is to shape and mold our character, and this is often accomplished in the way silver and gold are refined and that is through the furnace where the impurities are burned away!

TS in the midst of the pain and suffering, God desire:

3. God wants to become our all-in-all in the midst of suffering. Ps. 62:1-2

Sometimes it is not until Jesus is all we have that we realize he is all we need. And sometimes God allows us to be stripped of things and people that we are putting before Him so that we will look to Him as our all in all.

TS this doesn't mean that we don't need other people, because:

4. The body of Christ is meant to be "Jesus with skin" during hardships. Romans 15:1-2

Even the Lord Jesus, when in the Garden in agony, told His disciples that His soul was grieved to the point of death and to keep watch with Him in prayer. These were His garden friends, and we need garden friends, too. Strong Christians that can be there to support us and pray for us during hard times. This is one of the functions of the body of Christ and why it is important that we be in close relationship with others, in a small group, or have people that can support us during hard times.

2 Cor. You help us by your prayers

**5. Suffering reminds us that we are not ultimately made for this life.
2 Cor. 5:1-2**

Unless Jesus returns in our life, death is inevitable and upon death the follower of Jesus will go to heaven to be with God forever!!! Now, I believe in divine healing; I believe in praying for healing for those who are sick and in physical pain. At the same time, it is clearly not always God's will to heal or else we would never die. Therefore, physical sickness and suffering is certainly a reminder that we are not ultimately made for this planet, but rather we are ultimately made to be with God for eternity, and our lives here are a bootcamp for our life forever with God. Let us never forget that. Having this eternal perspective helps us to keep the right focus when we are suffering.

TS Finally,

6. God wants to make us into "wounded healers." 2 Cor. 1:3-4

What I mean by this is that the most effective people at helping others who are suffering are those who have been through suffering and seen God's faithfulness in the midst of their pain. There is nothing like being able to talk to someone who has been through what you are going through (whether it be a marital challenge or cancer or losing a loved one or a struggle with some sin or ...). When you can talk to someone who has been through it and come out trusted God, it gives you great encouragement and hope.

And we have the privilege of having that for you today. I want to introduce you to

Keith LeClair ... from Atlanta Family: Married to Amy (brother is Travis George) with 2 boys ... grew up in this area

- a. How did this happen? Were you a Christian at this time? ... God spared you physically to save you spiritually? Injured at 17

- b. Walk us from there to how you received Christ. ... (were you mad at God over this? 9 year battle before surrendering (8 years after accident – got married) Ping pong Church Legalistic Christians Saved 6 years ago

- c. What have you been doing this week in schools? 12 schools this week ... reality check

- d. What has God done in you and through you because of this? ... I wouldn't be doing this job ... my whole perspective/theology on why we suffer: 2 Cor. 1:5-11 ... Jesus being asked about the blind man..... James 1 ... Phil. 4 (catheter issue) ... on consider is joy ... perseverance reaching others (God brings people into my life all the time) ... small group ministry

- e. How much is an eternal perspective helpful?

- f. Tell us about the pregnancy deal

- g. Any final things you want to say to people?