

God's Purpose for Suffering

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

GRACE PUBLICATIONS

P.O. BOX 18715

BALTIMORE, MD 21206

Printed in Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A.

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Greater Grace World Outreach, Inc.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	5
---------------------------	---

<i>Chapter 1</i>	7
------------------------	---

SUFFERING FOR THE BODY'S SAKE

<i>Chapter 2</i>	12
------------------------	----

*SUFFERING THAT REVEALS A MYSTERY:
CHRIST IN YOU*

<i>Chapter 3</i>	18
------------------------	----

SUFFERING NOW WILL REVEAL ETERNAL PRAISE

<i>CONCLUSION</i>	25
-------------------------	----

INTRODUCTION

There are so many reasons why people suffer. In Ecclesiastes 2:22-23, the everyday details of life often bring suffering. Bona fide suffering can come as a guilt-reaction to sin. Wounds and scars in our souls from wrong decisions bring suffering (Ephesians 4:17-19). When people marry the wrong person, they suffer greatly (Ezekiel 16). We suffer when we do not isolate sin and move on, putting it behind us (Hebrews 12:15). Nature groans, the believer groans, and the Holy Spirit groans when we are backslidden and cannot pray as we ought because we are out of fellowship with God (Romans 8:18-27).

Some of the worst suffering comes as a result of rejecting spiritual authority, which is a covering to protect us from the consequences of poor decisions (Judges 19-21; Matthew 7:29-8:13). In that same category is the suffering that comes from rejecting the Word of God. We suffer when our emotions are not kept with God's mind

(John 20:9-18). God will allow natural disasters to bring suffering when there is no pivotal force of believers with godly character to hold back judgment upon nations (Isaiah 59). To stray, even temporarily, from a conscience of godly norms and standards because we lack standards of conviction and grace will cause us to suffer (Jeremiah 3:24-25).

There is, however, suffering that brings positive results for us in eternity and for the furtherance of God's plan here on earth. We may suffer to demonstrate the power and provision of God, to manifest His grace (2 Corinthians 12). Suffering for the body's sake—for Christ's sake — when we are faced with unusual trials enables us to identify with others (1 Corinthians 12:26; Romans 12:16). Our godly responses in those situations speak volumes to the atmosphere. We become witnesses in the invisible angelic contest (1 Peter 1:12, 1 Corinthians 4:9), testimonies of God's power and provision in the midst of suffering, while we store up degrees of glory for all of eternity.

Chapter One

SUFFERING FOR THE BODY'S SAKE

“Even now I rejoice in the midst of my sufferings on your behalf. And in my own person I am making up whatever is still lacking and remains to be completed [on our part] of Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of His body, which is the Church” (Colossians 1:24, Amplified Translation).

Paul was in a dungeon in Rome. Historical records reveal that the surroundings were horrible beyond our comprehension—dark, cold, filthy, rat-infested. In addition to those conditions, Paul also had a thorn in his flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7)—a messenger sent from Satan to aggravate him. But in a moment, he started rejoicing with a tremendous anointing.

A thorough study of the Greek syntax in Colossians 1:24a includes a present active indicative verb in the dative case of advantage. It reveals that even though he was in prison, Paul

rejoiced in his sufferings because he was suffering for others in the Body of Christ. He really said, “Now, regarding my experience in the temporal realm, now being in prison, I rejoice in my sufferings for you.” It was a motivation of love that totally occupied his heart.

We don’t know what Paul was thinking of prior to that experience, but we know that the anointing came upon him suddenly. Paul was not experiencing “expiatory suffering.” That was Christ’s suffering on the Cross, having finished the work of redemption once and for all, making a way for every man to be saved. But Paul’s suffering was for the sake of the Church, in Christ’s stead, to spread the Gospel, to plant churches, and to reproduce disciples.

The Shares of Suffering

Persecution came against Paul from several directions. Devout Jews—men and women—and those in the pagan businesses were among those who attacked him. In Colossians 1:24, by using the Greek word, *antanaplenoo* (to “fill up” or “make up” that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ), Paul was saying, “I am taking a *full share* of suffering.”

The way he described it, there are shares of

suffering that have to be met in order to establish ministries and reproduce the work of Christ throughout the world. In other words, a certain amount of suffering is necessary for the furtherance of the Gospel. In fact, through the book of Acts we see that persecution in the early days of the Church caused believers to be scattered across the Roman Empire, which brought the Gospel to places it had never been before.

Christ went through His great share of suffering when He was in His physical body on earth. Then He was buried, resurrected, and now He is in heaven. So Paul was saying that as Christ's servant, he had to continue a share of suffering that Christ could no longer take up in person. But there is also a great mystery mentioned in verse 27: "which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." Christ was in Paul, as He is in us, sharing the suffering we allow Him to work into our lives.

The Privileges of Suffering

The Church has been called to suffer, yet many people leave godly churches during periods of persecution. Paul, however, rejoiced in his suffering because it was for *others*. Second Timothy 2:12 explains clearly that if we suffer with

Christ, we will also reign with Him. Those who suffer for the Body's sake—who exhibit a relaxed, positive volition in the midst of their trials—will reign with Jesus. According to 1 Peter 1:6-8, though we be tried with fire, we can *rejoice* (*agalliao*) with unspeakable joy. That means we can literally have a party going on in our souls, as Paul experienced in the dungeon, while our outward man is suffering.

It is important to understand 2 Timothy 3:12, “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” That verse doesn't limit persecution in any way. It says *all* who live godly will suffer to a degree. Each of us will experience our share, but we have the privilege of sharing it with Christ.

Satan hates to see us reveal Christ in the midst of trials. Always looking for a way to attack godly believers, he may attack marriages if he can't get at us through any other means. So many believers suffer in the very institution God designed to reveal the intimacy of a believer's union with Christ on earth. But, to suffer for Christ in my marriage means that even if my spouse doesn't deserve it, I have the option of being Christ to her instead of reacting to negative projections. I wouldn't consciously think of

it that way, and I wouldn't take up a martyr's complex. Yet I would rejoice, rather than resort to separation or divorce or becoming depressed, knowing I could suffer for my spouse in my marriage.

Chapter Two

SUFFERING THAT REVEALS A MYSTERY: CHRIST IN YOU

Satan's kingdom is organized into armies of demons that come after believers with strategies of hell.* If he can't get at a believer through the marriage, the devil may attempt to influence a child into rebellion and cause pain that way, or he might attack finances. But to reveal the great mystery of an indwelling Christ is cause for great joy and rejoicing when we are under attack.

Jesus declared, "If you confess Me before men, then I will confess you before the Father in heaven. But if you deny Me before men, I will deny you before the Father" (see Matthew 10:32-33). Certainly, this doesn't mean we can lose our salvation. Yet, if I am the innocent party in a bad marriage, and I will not communicate Christ to the guilty party, then I am denying Christ's nature that lives in me. Jesus Christ is in me, the Holy Spirit is in me, but I grieve and quench the

Holy Spirit because of my reaction to my spouse.

Prepare for His Appearing

If I hold anything against another believer, I deny the love of God, the grace of God, the mercy of God, and the forgiveness of God in the presence of the guilty party. When it comes time for God to evaluate my life at the Bema Seat, Jesus Christ will have to represent me honestly before the Father. Even as my advocate, He must say in effect, “He denied Me before others. This man wouldn’t accept My life as a manifestation of grace to flow through him as a channel of communication, as a means of manifesting eternal life through a motive of love.”

Of course, we know that even now, Jesus Christ is pleading our case before the Father through intercession (Hebrews 7:25), and we will be forever happy in heaven. Still, we may experience a period of shame in response to this evaluation at the Bema Seat. “And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming” (1 John 2:28).**

Denying Christ isn’t something that happens

simply by going out into the world and hanging out in barrooms. It is much deeper than that. It is a process of decisions. A woman who defrauds her husband of sex for no biblical reason is denying Jesus Christ to her husband when the Word says to honor him. A husband who defrauds his wife or lives in anger and doesn't communicate Christ to his wife denies the Christ who is in him the opportunity to use his body to express resurrection love to his wife. If we confess Jesus Christ before men and reveal the expression of His thoughts toward others, then He will confess us before the Father.

A View toward Glory

“Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:6-8).

“But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be

revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:13).

Paul was living in an age when only a remnant of Christians were willing to suffer. When Christ allows the Church to endure tremendous periods of suffering, people will find fault and search out reasons to leave godly assemblies. These people do not want to pay the price of identification with those who suffer. They would rather take the easy way than to go through it; they are not partakers of Christ’s sufferings.

But those who are willing to enter into His sufferings receive so much more, according to 1 Peter 1:6-8. Christ’s glory is revealed in their glorified bodies. With that understanding, we can boldly confess Romans 8:18: “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

Degrees of Glory

“If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s

matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Peter 4:14-16).

Paul always looked forward and reckoned that his present sufferings were not worthy to be compared with the glory that would be revealed in Him in heaven. Degrees of glory are revealed in a man’s glorified soul, which leaves the body if he dies before the Rapture. The human spirit and the soul make up the *soul body*, which goes up to God (Ecclesiastes 3:21) while the physical body perishes.

God reveals His glory in men so that we will have exceeding joy. The words in 1 Peter 4:14-16 amplify this doctrine. If we are put in the place of suffering and remain at rest in the Word of God and in faith, then every detail of suffering (as with our obedience in the details of life, in Matthew 10:42) will add a degree of glory that rests upon us now and will be revealed in eternity. So if a man of God were to go through thirty-five difficulties in a month, then he would receive thirty-five degrees of glory, increasing the brightness of his soul body forever.

**For a detailed look at some of Satan's key strategies and our appropriate offense, read Dealing Precisely with Demons and Exposing Satan's Armies, by Pastor Stevens, Grace Publications, 1998.*

***Read The Bema Seat: Presented in Joy or Grief?, by Pastor Stevens, Grace Publications, 1996.*

Chapter Three

SUFFERING NOW WILL REVEAL ETERNAL PRAISE

“Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though *now for a season....*” (1 Peter 1:6). If we are walking with Christ, rest assured that we will suffer seasons of discomfort from time to time. But when we encounter such trials, they will be more precious than gold—more valuable than anything on earth. These trials are recognized in heaven, *forever* precious, as having an eternal weight in glory. The evidence is revealed by thunderous praise at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

In 1 Peter 1:7, the word for praise is *epainos*, which speaks of the inaudible applause of the angels. That means that when we suffer persecution, and we choose to glorify God, then degrees of glory are added to our soul body. As we maintain faith-rest in an attitude of love (Zephaniah 3:17), those degrees rest there—they can never be taken away. Though God cannot add

more degrees if we fail to continue on in our walk with Him, He will not subtract from us what He has added.

For every degree of glory added to our soul body, a degree of glory is reserved for us in heaven, to be added to our new glorified bodies. Some people in heaven will have a magnificent white raiment over their glorified bodies (Revelation 3:4b-5a). It will appear as an indescribably bright light. And though everyone in heaven will have a glorified body, when we see these people in heaven, we will see that their trials were made precious for all of eternity. This is why 1 Peter 4:13 says we are to rejoice when we partake of Christ's suffering. When His glory shall be revealed, we will be glad with exceeding joy, as the Spirit of glory rests upon us (1 Peter 4:14).

Walls That Protect and Do Not Divide

Too often, when trials press on the outside, Christians will withdraw into emotionalism, sublimation (by taking up a new habit), or human good in the old sin nature. But if the Word of God is dwelling in us richly with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs as a manifestation of His presence, then whatever we do

will be done to the glory of God. Precise categorical doctrine is illuminated by the Holy Spirit and is brought into remembrance in the conscious mind (John 14:26). That doctrine is not merely knowledge, but it circulates and becomes assimilated into each part of the soul, forming a wall that protects our mind and emotions. That way, no matter what happens to us, we will not internalize it—no matter how long, how serious, or how deep the trial.

According to Proverbs 25:28, a man who cannot rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, without walls to protect from the attacks of the enemy. That is why we are to build walls of doctrine in our souls. Furthermore, there is a celebration of doctrine going on during the trials. We can rejoice in tribulations and testing, because we know there is a reason behind the trials. It is not because God does not love me or because I am being chastised for not being confessed up-to-date. We understand that the trials give God opportunities to use us as witnesses against Satan in his appeal case in the angelic contest. Just as it was with Joshua in Zechariah 3 and with Job, our lives are being used to reveal the character of Almighty God, which Satan cannot stand.

As we understand the correlation of 1 Peter 1:6-8 in the doctrine of suffering, we will see the great value and purpose God places on the trials and temptations He allows. So now, for a little while, we may suffer “manifold temptations”—attacks from many sides—yet these times of suffering are precious, stirring applause among the angels on our behalf, though we cannot see them.

“Honour” (1 Peter 1:7) refers to the degrees of glory being added to our soul body from day to day because of our positive decisions, while “glory” speaks of the accumulation of these degrees over a lifetime. Some of the people who have had the most difficult times down here are going to be blessed in the richest way in heaven. We may have watched them go through all kinds of trials that never seemed to stop. Yet, when they take it all in faith-rest, with no anger and with no negative reactions, they are fulfilling a purpose on earth, doing all to the glory of God—*suffering for the Body’s sake*. What amazing glory will be revealed when they receive their new bodies in heaven!

Shine as the Morning Star

When Jesus was on the Mount of Transfigu-

ration in Matthew 17, the great light that was in Him was revealed on the outside. Everything He did in His human life honored the Father. His words, His confession, His behavior—every aspect of His life was absolutely perfect, and He accumulated a shocking amount of glory. Seeing this glory, all that Peter, James, and John could do was to fall down on their faces. They couldn't even look at Him because of the brightness of His appearance, but Jesus calmed them (Matthew 17:7).

Jesus Christ always let it be known that the glory He revealed came from making good decisions in His humanity. Everything Jesus did—every word that He spoke, every life that He touched—was all in accordance with the Father's will. He was never discouraged, negative, or depressed, and the glory they saw was the result of His oneness with the Father. Then, in John 17:22, He prayed that we would have the same glory. In fact, during a given day, we could add fifteen, twenty, or thirty degrees of glory to our soul body—degrees of light that will rest upon our spirit now and will be revealed in our glorified body forever.

We Will Know Why

In eternity, we are not going to have lots of questions. People will walk with a brilliant raiment over their glorified bodies, and we will be overwhelmed with the testimony of their lives. Many who appear with such great light will be members of God's Morning Star Order* (Revelation 2:26-28), enjoying special heavenly privileges as they reign with Christ forever.

We don't need to argue and fight against suffering. People have left churches that were facing persecution because they couldn't handle a time of suffering. In many cases, they would come out and say plainly, "I want to keep my reputation." In Luke 6:26, however, Jesus said, "Beware when men speak well of you." People want to be well-spoken of and, as a result, they may sacrifice identifying with Christ in order to have a good report among men.

Once the foundation, which is Christ, has been established in our heart and the walls of doctrine have gone up, we begin to build the rooms of our soul. In the basement is Love, where the premise for every motive is set. The kitchen is Grace, where a continual feast is prepared. The living room is Mercy, where we can

rest because of a Finished Work. There are three guest rooms upstairs for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. When we start to build this spiritual Home for the Lord, we will suffer. But James 1:2-4 says to count it all joy! Patience will have her perfect work so we may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

**Read The Morning Star Order by Pastor Stevens, Grace Publications, 1998.*

CONCLUSION

There are reasons for suffering that bring glory to God, so we are never to judge anyone who is going through a trial. Our part is simply to think no evil, to believe the best, and to pray. And, when something comes against us, instead of reacting we can see how to add degrees of glory for now and forever.

A carnal man enters a trial and self-destructs. He suffers because problems in his emotions have never been resolved, and he is angry at every other thing. The Spirit-filled man triumphs in a test, knowing that glory will be his reward; his emotions are kept by God's mind, as he receives and responds to love and grace from the Father.

When pressures come to the Spirit-filled man, he can be very quiet. There is no need for tension. What good does it do to become upset? Has worry every delivered anyone? A relaxed man is one who rejoices in temptation, who fel-

lowships with Christ and rests in God's plan. He knows that God will provide what is necessary to go through the trial, and He makes it most precious.