

Undeserved Suffering

Carl H. Stevens Jr. is pastor of Greater Grace World Outreach located in Baltimore, Maryland. Pastor Stevens is also chancellor of Maryland Bible College & Seminary and host of the international Christian radio program "The Grace Hour." This booklet was created from a message preached by Pastor Stevens.

Pastor Stevens can be seen weekly on cable television stations throughout the United States. Call us for information regarding programming in your area.

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.

Copyright © 2005

Grace Publications is a ministry of
Greater Grace World Outreach, Inc.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 5

Chapter 1 8

STREAMS THAT MAKE US GLAD

Chapter 2 13

A TABLE SET IN THE MIDST OF OUR DARKNESS

Chapter 3 18

GOD NEVER CHANGES

CONCLUSION 22

INTRODUCTION

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

"He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever" (Psalm 23).

On the run for his life, exiled from his kingdom, David had lost everything except for his mule, his sword, and his garments. After crossing the Kidron River, he made three stops. At one stop, he wrote Psalm 23, Psalm 27 at an-

other, and Psalm 63 at the last stop, which was after David's soldiers came together for battle and a miraculous victory from God over Absalom. David did not want that victory because he loved his son so much. But his soldiers did not want David to lose.

When he wrote Psalm 23, there seemed to be no possibility for David to return to the palace. As far as he could see, this was it. Yet, in his situation, he was kept—absolutely and miraculously—through his commitment to God and through the filling of God's Word. The Word of God was in David, and he wrote so many psalms, all by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

In this Psalm 23, David wrote, "I shall not want," meaning "I shall not lose or lack anything." "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures" reads like this in the original Hebrew text: "Choice pastures He caused me to rest in, with choice food." The green pastures speak of the doctrines of mercy, the doctrines of grace—the doctrines of life that we are to rest in. God also guides us beside still waters, speaking of divine quietness, faith rest, peace, inner joy. These are invisible assets that we possess when all that we can see outside of us seems so wrong.

These are great thoughts that we need to

have residing in our souls when we face difficulties or trials that seem so unfair. This booklet looks at Psalm 23 and how David was able to enjoy a deep capacity to know God in the midst of his suffering.

Chapter One

STREAMS THAT MAKE US GLAD

“He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake” (Psalm 23:3).

Here, David speaks of having his soul refreshed as he is guided in the path of God’s imputed and imparted righteousness. The Lord’s imputed righteousness came before David’s great blessings through imparted righteousness. He simply received the promises of God and thereby escaped the contamination and fleshly things of the world (2 Peter 1:4).

In the Bible, a person’s name often reflects his character. God did all this for His character’s sake, which is outlined in Exodus 34:6, “The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.”

David was in the midst of an awful time. That is why this is such an amazing psalm. He wrote it when his heart was broken because his

own son, a handsome man, just like him, was taking the kingdom away. Absalom stood by the gate and stole the hearts of the people to himself. Isagogic commentaries indicate that 75 percent of the nation was now with Absalom.

David, a brilliant and remarkable military leader, would not fight against his son. He may have felt a great measure of guilt because he had kept Absalom out of the palace for two years, after Absalom had arranged the murder of Amnon in retaliation for the rape of Absalom's sister Tamar. Honestly, I think Absalom would not have rebelled if David had not shut him out of his life. So, there were some regrets involved in David's thinking. He knew that he made some mistakes, and that it was now too late to correct them.

Despite all of this, David forgave himself and refused to condemn himself. Instead, he communed with the river of life, the streams that make glad the city of God. In Psalm 46:4-5, we read about this river and the streams. In application, every stream represents a category of precise truth and life in the Holy Spirit. Every stream channels doctrine through our grace conscience, bringing God-consciousness through the Word of life.

Doctrine was going from the heart of David's human spirit into his mind, giving him an amazing mental attitude. He had healthy emotions because so much of the Word of God was living and operating inside of him. David's will was positive toward God. Even when confronted with the circumstances involving Absalom, he was ready to trust God utterly and completely.

Facing Death with Doctrine

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4).

Here is a beautiful picture for us. Everyone has to die. Yet, when a person dies and goes to be with Jesus Christ forever, the people who are left must realize that they are left here to live. They have not yet fulfilled God's purpose.

There are many situations where the physical body is wracked with pain, yet the soul receives a grace blessing, and there is a beautiful, indescribable death. Consider Stephen, in Acts 7. As he was being stoned, he saw Jesus standing up to receive him into glory (Acts 7:55). This is why Paul said, "To die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). We put off this tabernacle of pain and

toil and weariness, and we receive a new, glorified body (2 Corinthians 5:1-8). Death becomes a beautiful thing because Jesus comes and says to the one who is dying, "I will be with you. I *am* with you."

Time to Move On

"Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying,

"Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel.

"Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses.

"From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast.

"There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

“Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them” (Joshua 1:1-6).

Oh, if people would only realize that Jesus Christ is inside every believer because of the promise made to Joshua: “I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.”

The Lord spoke to Joshua, in effect saying, “I know that you are sad about Moses’ death. But move ahead. Get over this Jordan River.” Moses had died, and the angels took care of the memorial service and the burial. Joshua’s place was with the living. As with Joshua, we can move forward with the Finished Work of Christ and advance in the grace, love, peace, joy, and power of God.

Many valleys are overshadowed by death. Cancer, heart disease—you name it—these things overshadow our valleys. But we do not have to fear.

Chapter Two

A TABLE SET IN THE MIDST OF OUR DARKNESS

David was in a great valley. His son was leading a revolution against him, and the rebellion had driven David from the throne of Israel. Yet, David did not fear.

There are two great thieves in our lives: fear and procrastination. So many times, Jesus said "Fear not." Don't worry about anything (Philippians 4:6). When you actually face some situation, if you think with God now, you will be built up in faith.

Then we have procrastination, a thief of time, caused by a lack of managing our thoughts, our time, and our schedules. This often results in low productivity, causing a fear of failure. We reach our goals through faith, by looking to the substance of the things we hope for (Hebrews 11:1).

With regard to failure, nobody can have suc-

cess unless they fail. We don't make a provision to fail, but only a provision for God. David failed again and again, but he knew how to turn to God, get up, and go on.

Seventy-five percent of the people went against David. Yet, he had no fear of the satanic evil that had infected folks who, he thought, loved him. They had taken the side against him, but God was on David's side, and it wasn't time for him to go home to be with the Lord.

"Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me" was David's confession. The practical meaning here points to the rod as representing the power of God in his life, and the staff, which speaks of the protection of the Lord that was upon him.

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over" (Psalm 23:5).

This is where we get into the subject of undeserved suffering. A person gets great blessings and even prosperity from the genuine imputation of God's righteousness toward him. His righteousness is in us, so He must bless us. There are times when we may experience something unpleasant for the sake of a future ministry toward someone else. Yet, because of those

times, the greatest rewards of reigning with Christ come when we stay quiet, Spirit-filled, and calm in the midst of undeserved suffering. We let God take over in those times, and we glorify Him within.

Great believers have endured undeserved suffering. Fanny Crosby lost her eyesight, but she became an awesome writer of hymns and spiritual songs. Amy Carmichael, a missionary to India, was confined to bed and yet managed to minister and love people through her writings and poetry. Helen Keller ministered tremendously in spite of being blind and deaf.

Throughout the Bible, we have the great stories of Joseph and Paul and John and many others who were persecuted and martyred. But when that happened, God prepared a table for each one, right in the midst of their trials.

A Banquet of Rest and Love

Shuelechah is the Hebrew word for “table,” and it refers to a very interesting table—a banqueting table. Everything upon this table has been precisely prepared and placed in order, fit for a king.

The type of banquet was only prepared for kings. The good news is that we are all kings

and priests (see Revelation 1:5-6). Everything is prepared for us, and it is prepared in precise order, according to the mind of God. For David, this banquet was the Word of God, served up in green pastures of mercy, rest, grace, and love. Two months before Absalom was defeated, every single ingredient had to be on the table.

Here is the beautiful thing: God's righteousness and justice produces a judgment of no condemnation. Even in our failures, God's integrity is backed up with immutability, so His will never changes. No matter what happens to us—God does not change (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8).

"I will never change My relationship with you," God says. "You are My son. You are My daughter. You couldn't change Me even if you denied Me after you received Me. You cannot change Me, because I change not. What My Son did on your behalf, I must honor. I can do nothing but honor My Son. He did everything He was supposed to do."

In the midst of suffering, these truths remain. When I received Him, I was made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). It is the Lord who supplies all wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, so

that no flesh can glory in His presence (1 Corinthians 1:30-31).

Chapter Three

GOD NEVER CHANGES

We need to get straight the reality that God cannot change His mind. As long as we have an old sin nature—and we will have that until we go home to be with Christ—we are capable of anything, just as those in the world are. Never be surprised when you find that some Christian is living in sin. An old sin nature is at work in each of us. We can do anything an unsaved person can do because we have an old sin nature. God forbid that we would continue in sin (see Romans 6:2; Romans 6:15). When we fail, we rebound, and we are restored to fellowship with Him, though there may be a measure of consequential suffering.

But in the midst of undeserved suffering, always keep in mind that God cannot change. His sovereignty, His righteousness, His omnipotence, His integrity, His justice, His immutability, His omniscience, and His omnipresence all

relate to the agreement He designed and implemented through His only begotten Son.

God Is With Us

In the presence of his enemies, David enjoyed the amazing presence of God. The enemies ached to kill David, but they could not find him. He was isolated in the presence of God, who was providing for every need through genuine blessings, because righteousness has to bless righteousness.

If we don't experience the blessing right away, unless there is a need for discipline, the situation is for our promotion. Many times in David's life when he was being disciplined by God, someone would talk against him. Then, God would remove the discipline from David and bless him instead. The discipline went off David and onto the person talking about him. Not many people understand that principle today, and they wonder why they are having such troubles.

Renewed Capacity

Even in the darkness of that time, David was in the midst of a banquet, and his face was before God's face. What did God do? He anointed

David's mind and expanded his capacity for the suffering he was experiencing.

Our capacity is vital for our blessing, our honor, and our growth. When a plant stops growing, it dies. We should be growing day in and day out. We should be more meek today than we were yesterday. We should be able to forgive more readily today than we were able to forgive yesterday. We need to keep growing in our capacity for God.

In the midst of his trial, David was so filled with the Word of God that he just walked in the desert, worshipping and praising God. He sang psalms and would not accept defeat. He would not accept being sad or sorry at that moment.

"Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;)

"Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God.

"For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God" (2 Corinthians 9:10-12).

God provides everything for our capacity,

from the seed to the harvest. He is going to keep adding to you as you give Him your capacity in the midst of suffering. No matter what happens to you, no matter where the trial is, if you establish your capacity, God will add to it and provide what you need in the inner man. You will enjoy an amazingly beautiful soul, flooded with the presence of Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

It is so important that we learn how to develop our capacity no matter what our circumstances. Whatever my circumstances, I have to learn how to enjoy God. The joy of the Lord is my strength (Nehemiah 8:10). No matter what God may be allowing you to experience, live in the inner joy, the inner river, the inner streams of doctrine in your life. Not only will that bless you, but it will make others glad.

I have started a new practice. Every morning, I am going to say something good to everyone I meet, and I am going to mean it. I do this with my wife. Every single morning, I start it off by saying something edifying. It may be just one sentence, but it is never contrived. Through a heart filled with the Holy Spirit, I can use words to bless people.

One of the things Christians need to learn how to do is develop the activity of visualization. The Word is powerful. The Holy Spirit is

powerful. Let's allow God to take that energy and help us to visualize miracles, goals, purposes, and successes. Be prepared with a divine provision to consider the reality of success in God's purposes. Though His plan may include undeserved suffering, rest assured that His ways are perfect. Partake of the banquet He has prepared.