

"Take your part in SUFFERING, as a loyal soldier of Christ Jesus." 2 Timothy 2:3

"EVERYONE who wants to live a godly life in union with Christ Jesus will be persecuted." 2 Timothy 3:12

"We are OFTEN troubled, but not crushed; sometimes in doubt, but never in despair; there are many enemies, but we are never without a friend; and though badly hurt at times, we are not destroyed." 2 Corinthians 4:8,9

"It was to this that God called you, for Christ Himself SUFFERED for you, and left you an example that you should follow in His steps." 1 Peter 2:21

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SUFFERING IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE?

"Be glad about this, even though it may now be necessary for you to be sad for a while because of the many kinds of trials that you suffer. **THEIR PURPOSE IS TO PROVE THAT YOUR FAITH IS GENUINE.** Even gold, which can be destroyed, is tested by fire; and so your faith, which is much more precious than gold, must also be tested, **SO THAT IT MAY ENDURE.**" 1 Peter 1:6,7

"My brothers, consider yourselves fortunate when all kinds of trials come your way, for you know that when your faith succeeds in facing such trials, **THE RESULT IS THE ABILITY TO ENDURE.** Make sure that your endurance carries you all the way without failing, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." James 1:2-4

"Happy is the person who remains **FAITHFUL** under trials, because when he succeeds in passing such a test, he will receive as his **REWARD** the life which God has promised to those who **LOVE** Him." James 1:12

“Since we are His children, we will possess the blessing He keeps for His people, AND we will also possess with Christ what God has kept for Him; for IF WE SHARE CHRIST’S SUFFERING WE WILL ALSO SHARE HIS GLORY.” Romans 8:17

‘My dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful test you are suffering, as though something unusual were happening to you. Rather BE GLAD THAT YOU ARE SHARING CHRIST’S SUFFERINGS, so that you may be full of joy when His Glory is revealed,” 1 Peter 4:12

“We know that IN ALL THINGS God works for good with those who love Him.” Romans 8:28

SUFFERING PURIFIES us and PRE PARES us for special service. All of God’s great men knew great suffering while God PURGED and PREPARED them for His service. JOSEPH experienced 12 years in slavery and prison before becoming Governor of Egypt. MOSES was 40 years in the desert before becoming the deliverer of Israel. DAVID was an outlaw and a fugitive for years before becoming King of Israel. The Bible is full of examples of great men of faith enduring suffering for the Lord. There is no shortcut to maturity.

THE APOSTLE’S TESTIMONY

Many may consider teaching on suffering to be negative. It is not negative. To teach on suffering is to recognise THE REALITY of everyday life. To recognise that suffering is inevitable is not discouraging at all. Notice what sort of message the apostles of the early church taught:

“They **strengthened** the believers and **encouraged** them to remain true to the Faith. ‘WE MUST PASS THROUGH MANY TROUBLES TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD,’ they taught.”

What was the experience of Christians in the early church?

The Apostle Paul, that great “Apostle of Faith”, wrote about some of his experiences:

"I have been in prison more times, I have been whipped much more, and I have been near death more often. Fives times I was given the thirty-nine lashes by the Jews; three times I was whipped by the Romans; and once I spent twenty-four hours in the water. In my many travels I have been in danger from floods and from robbers, in danger from fellow-Jews and from Gentiles; there have been dangers in the cities, dangers in the wilds, dangers on the high seas, and dangers from false friends. There has been work and toil, often I have gone without sleep; I have been HUNGRY and THIRSTY; I have often been WITHOUT ENOUGH FOOD, SHELTER, OR CLOTHING. And not to mention other things..." 2 Corinthians 11:23-38

It is always a privilege to suffer for Jesus. The suffering is temporary, but the Glory is eternal.

Note the testimony of the Apostles who, rather than claim comfort, safety and luxury at home, chose rather to suffer for Christ whilst obeying the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20.

PETER was crucified upside down in Rome after much outreach.

JAMES the elder was beheaded by Herod in Palestine after fearless preaching.

JOHN, after a life of evangelism, was boiled in oil and banished in exile to Patmos.

ANDREW was crucified in Greece whilst spreading the Gospel here.

PHILIP died as a martyr in Asia Minor after preaching to the Gauls.

NATHANAEL preached the Gospel in India and Armenia before being flayed alive and beheaded.

THOMAS established churches throughout Babylonia and India before being axed to death.

MATTHEW was burnt to death whilst preaching the Gospel in Ethiopia.

JAMES the younger was crucified whilst evangelising in Egypt.

JUDE preached the Gospel throughout Syria and Persia where he was finally martyred.

SIMON the Zealot preached the Word of God throughout Syria and Mesopotamia and was sawn in half in Persia.

MATTHIAS was crucified on a missionary outreach in the Crimea.

*"I consider that what we suffer at the present time cannot be compared at all with the Glory that is going to be revealed to us."*Romans 8:18

The Lord does not keep us from suffering, He keeps us in suffering. And the Lord has never expected us to do anything for Him that He has not already willingly done for us.

"CHRIST HIMSELF SUFFERED FOR YOU AND LEFT YOU AN EXAMPLE.." 1 Peter 2.21

Jesus was misunderstood, slandered, falsely accused and lied about:

"People were saying, 'He's gone mad!'" Mark 3:21

"You have a demon in you!" the crowd answered", John 7:20

*"Look at this man! He is a glutton and a drinker, a friend of tax collectors and other outcasts!"
Matthew 11:19*

*"We caught this man misleading our people telling them not to pay taxes to the Emperorwith
His teaching He is starting a riot." Luke 23:2,5*

Jesus was hated and betrayed:

"If the world hates you, just remember that it has hated me first." John 15:18

"From that day on the Jewish authorities made plans to kill Jesus." John 11:53

"But Jesus said, 'Judas, is it with a kiss that you betray the Son of Man?'" Luke 22:48

Jesus was forsaken by His friends:

"Many of Jesus' followers turned back and would not go with Him any more." John 6:66

"Then all the disciples left Him and ran away." Mark 14:50

Jesus was unjustly arrested, illegal tried and wrongly condemned:

“Then, Jesus spoke up and said to them, ‘Did you have to come with swords and clubs to capture me, as though I were an outlaw?’” Mark 14:48

“The chief priests and the whole council tried to find some evidence against Jesus in order to put Him to death, but they could not find any. Many witnesses told lies against Jesus but their stories did not agree.” Mark 14:55,56

“Pilate... said to them. . . ‘I have not found Him guilty of any of the crimes you accuse Him of. Nor did Herod find Him guilty for he sent Him back to us. There is nothing this man has done to deserve death. So will have Him whipped and let Him go.’”
Luke 23:14-16

“They shouted back, ‘Kill Him! Kill Him Crucify Him!’” John 19:15

Jesus was mocked, beaten, whipped insulted, slapped and crucified.

“Some of them began to spit on Jesus and they blindfolded Him and hit Him.” Mark 14:65

“Herod and his soldiers mocked Jesus and treated Him with contempt.” Luke 23:11

“Then Pilate set Barrabbas free for them and after he had Jesus whipped, he handed Him over to be crucified.” Matthew 27:26

“People passing by shook their heads and hurled insults at Jesus.” Matthew 27:39

Realistic preaching is always encouraging. One does not strengthen people by telling them what they want to hear. Fairy tales and fantasies about endless blessings is not only cruelly false but destructively self-indulgent. Comfort softens us, but hardship strengthens us. Wealth often

breeds selfishness and greed, but suffering can encourage sharing and love.