The Life You Have Always Wanted
(But Need Spiritual Discipline to Obtain)
#5 The Experience of Suffering

Introduction

When identifying the factors that were the most formative in spiritual growth: SUFFERING is the number one answer.

When difficulties begin, most believers start asking “WHY?” And although God does not always clarify His will, sometimes our sufferings are there:
- To help draw us closer to the Lord: II Cor. 12:7-9
- To help us identify and deal with sin: Ps. 119:67
- To help us draw closer to other believers: II Cor. 1:3-4
- To help us comfort others: II Cor.1:4

But the question we ought to ask is “What is NEXT?” The Life we have always wanted comes in part from mastering a life of ENDURANCE.

Remember: Mastering a life of endurance is not a “straight line.” Consider the example of Job:

“While the book of Job does contain a grief experience, it does not present a picture of a man methodically working his way through clearly defined stages of grief. Rather, it is an account of confused people, of faith and doubt, of hope and despair, of anger and acceptance, of rebellion and surrender, of threats and promises.” (Mildred Tengbom)

Endurance

“It is not miserable to be blind, it is miserable to be incapable of enduring blindness.” (John Milton)

Consider James 1:2-4

A. The needed mindset: “Consider it pure joy” - “Account it all Joy” – “Complete joy, nothing but joy” (Rom. 12:12)

I Peter 1:6 “in all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”

Notice the mindset of Christ: Heb. 12:2
B. **The difficult situation:** when you “face trials of many kinds”

“face:” This is an unexpected trial (Ps. 116:3). It is something we “fall into” and are encompassed by.

“trials:” an affliction, a persecution, poverty, a calamity of any kind

Note: This is not a ‘temptation” to sin. God cannot tempt someone to sin (James 1:13-14)

C. **The solution:** Endurance/Perseverance

Note: some translations use the term “patience” in this verse. There actually are two different words for “patience” in the NT:

“Patience”- in Galatians 5 (fruit of the spirit) patience is a kind of long suffering, a passive response to things
“Patience”- in James 1, patience is an act of endurance, something you do, it is an active response

Endurance/Perseverance: It is the term “hupomoneo”
It means to stay under something, to remain under a heavy load. It is the act of choosing to remain there regardless of the circumstances.

Consider the stages a runner experiences during a marathon: pleasure, drudgery, labor, temptation to quit (“hitting the wall”) and finally, endurance.

D. **The Result:** “you may be mature and complete” James may have been referring to the five exercises of the pentathlon. When a runner completed all five stages, he was “complete.”

It is the idea of lacking nothing in your spiritual life. The cycle of bearing up under the various difficulties of life produces a valuable “fruit” in the life of a believer and he/she is then COMPLETE...lacking nothing...having all he/she needs to finish.

**Some Biblical examples of the roads (of suffering) that can lead to the life we have always wanted:**

**The road to Moriah** (Abraham-Gen. 22)-Notice the role of testing in the life of a believer. “Testing: a difficult experience through which a person’s true values, commitments and beliefs are revealed.”

**The road to Shiloh** (Hannah-I Sam. 1)-See the role of excruciating loss and a sense of emptiness can have in a person. Her perseverance and willingness to take it to God resulted in a child (that she gave up).
The road in Galilee (Woman with an issue of blood- Luke 8:43-48)-Note the role physical pain and the toil it takes after a long time of suffering. This woman suffered for 12 years until Christ healed her.

The road to Rome (Paul with the thorn in his flesh-II Cor. 12:7-10)-Look at the role unanswered prayer plays in our lives. Notice Paul's conclusion: God often will meet us IN our difficulties, not take us out of them.

The road to Peniel (Jacob-Gen. 32)-Note the impact and role of family issues and trauma. Before his encounter with his brother, Jacob had a significant moment with God.

The road to Anathoth (Jeremiah- Jer. 16, 20, 38) -Consider the role disrespect and rejection played in the life of this Godly prophet. He was not allowed to marry, he was put in stocks and ridiculed by the nation, and he was thrown into a well.

The road to Calvary (Jesus-Luke 22:42)-Don’t miss the role obedience plays as we embrace the importance of endurance. “Take this cup from me”- Please no, Lord. “Yet not my will but yours be done”- I will obey and endure.

So What?
Some “to dos” as we learn to run our race with endurance:

1. Keep our eyes on Jesus (Heb. 12:1-2)
2. Avoid the extraneous “stuff’ of life (I Cor. 9:26)
3. Wait for His strength and help. Rely on Him (Isa. 40:31)
4. Finish well (Acts. 20:24)
5. Take home the prize (I Cor. 9:24)
   And lay those crowns down at His feet. (Rev. 4:10-11)

Discussion Questions:

1. Share a time when you “hit the wall” in life. What caused you to “quit?” What could you do differently next time around?
2. Was there a time when you truly experienced joy in a very difficult situation? What brought that joy?
3. How is God “training” you right now? What spiritual discipline helps you with endurance?

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