

8. Learning to Deal with Suffering in Ministry

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to bring glory to God in their lives. We help our children the same way that Paul and Timothy helped the Corinthians. They helped the Corinthians by providing their own lives as an example so that they could see how to bring glory to God. However, Satan is not happy when our lives bring glory to Christ. As a result, we can expect opposition from Satan. As a result, in our topic today, we will learn how to deal with suffering as we minister and serve the Lord. This will also give our children an example to follow.

In 2 Corinthians 4:7-10, Paul and Timothy wrote, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. *We are* hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed--always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.” Here, we see that Paul and Timothy give us an example to follow when we suffer. The message that we share is a treasure. However, Paul and Timothy point out the fact that we have this treasure in earthen vessels. Earthen vessels speak of the clay pots that were used to hold the garbage. Since a clay pot held the garbage, if it broke, you just replaced it with another clay pot because the pot was not important. Paul and Timothy used this illustration to show that we are not the important thing. The message is the important thing because God can use any person to share the message.

God actually shows His greatness by allowing people like us who have no importance to share a message that is so valuable. God uses people like us because it shows the fact that the message of God is so powerful that God can use any person to deliver His message. In fact, Numbers 22:28-30 shows that God even used a donkey to deliver His message. We want to show our children our thankfulness to the Lord for the fact that He chooses us to deliver His message.

Paul and Timothy described the suffering that they experienced as they delivered the message that the Lord gave to them and gives to us. They received pressure from every side but they were not crushed. They often did not know what to do but they did not feel like they had been abandoned. They were forced to flee but they were not destroyed. Their bodies continually showed the marks of beatings and other forms of suffering. They realized that these attacks were really against Christ so they did not take it personally. Just as Acts 5:41 says about the apostles, “So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name,” Paul and Timothy rejoiced for the privilege of suffering for Christ. Here, we see an example for our own lives when we suffer. We can show our children how to be thankful for the privilege of suffering for Christ.

Paul and Timothy went on to say in 2 Corinthians 4:11-15, “For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you. And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed and therefore I spoke,’ we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present *us* with you.

For all things *are* for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.” Here, we see that Paul and Timothy had chosen to follow the example of Christ.

Paul and Timothy said that they were delivered to death for Jesus’ sake. The word that is translated “delivered” means *to deliver up a condemned person to death*. It is used of Christ in Matthew 27:2 where we read, “And when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor.” In fact, Paul often faced what looked like certain physical death. He said that when that happened it provided an opportunity for others to see how Christ had responded when he was delivered to death. Paul and Timothy viewed suffering and death as the way that the Lord had chosen them to show to others what it meant to have life through Christ. Paul and Timothy were filled with joy because their choice had resulted in the salvation of the Corinthian Christians.

Paul and Timothy quoted from Psalm 116:10 which says, “I believed, therefore I spoke, ‘I am greatly afflicted.’” David wrote this Psalm at a time when he was suffering and David had looked to the Lord in faith for either present or future deliverance. Here, we see that Paul and Timothy looked at the example of David and it gave them an example for their own lives. In the same way, we can look to the example of Paul and Timothy when we experience suffering or persecution. As we have our faith in the Lord when we go through such difficult times, we are also providing an example for our children.

The reason that David, Paul and Timothy could have such a great peace even in the middle of suffering was due to the fact that they knew by faith the One who had raised Christ from the dead. They knew that they could also look forward to resurrection even if they were killed for following the Lord. That is why Paul had written the Corinthian Christians earlier in 1 Corinthians 15:57-58, “But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” We can have peace and continue to serve the Lord in persecution because we know that Christ had victory over death.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children develop this same confident assurance so that whatever persecutions they may face in their lives, they will be able to look to the One who raised up Christ from the dead. We can share the hope that we have in our lives that is described in Titus 2:13-14 which says, “Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.” We want to show our children that we can rejoice even in suffering because of the confident hope that we have that Christ will come one day to take us to heaven to be with Him for all eternity. In the same way, we can help our children to develop that same confident hope in their lives as they see our example. In this way, we show our children that we can give thanks to the Lord because our response to suffering is bringing glory to God.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 goes on to say, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward

man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.” Here, we see why we do not need to get discouraged and give up when we go through difficult times in our service for the Lord.

It is true that our physical body is getting old and wearing out. The day will come when this physical body will go to the grave if the Lord does not come first. However, we see just the opposite for our inward man. Here, we are reminded that our entire inward man, including both our soul and our spirit, is being renewed day by day. Isaiah 40:31 says, “But those who wait on the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” We see that the Lord is continually renewing our spirit and giving us inner strength as we yield to Him moment by moment.

Romans 12:2 tells us, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Here, we see that Christ also renews and transforms our souls as we learn to renew our mind through the Word and ask the Lord to give us His strength to carry out His will. As this continual renewing is happening in our inner man, our emotions are motivated by the love of Christ and 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 tells us that this makes it possible for us to live for Him who died for us. As we practice this daily renewing in our inner man, we also give our children an example to follow in their own lives.

As Paul and Timothy were experiencing this continual renewing of the inner man, they looked at their suffering as light affliction which only lasts for a moment. In the same way, we are able to provide an example for our children when we understand that any present suffering is only for a moment. There is no comparison between this light suffering and the eternal life to which we look forward. Instead of looking at the problems that we see in our daily life, we look forward to the things which are not seen. 2 Corinthians 5:7 says, “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” We also want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to walk by faith and not by sight as we provide an example for them to follow.

We are reminded that the things that we see are only temporary. The things that are not seen are the things that are eternal. Romans 5:3-5 says, “And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” We help our children learn to deal with suffering in their ministry for the Lord by reminding them that the suffering will produce perseverance, character and hope in their lives because their lives will experience the love of God being poured out in their hearts by the Holy Spirit. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to rejoice in suffering.