

Growth Through Suffering

"It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn Your decrees."

Psalms 119:71

As I sat and listened to the patient in hospital describe their medical difficulties I was amazed at the sequence and complexity of their issues. It seems that a domino effect had occurred as each problem caused another until they had to be hospitalized and undergo a series of surgeries.

I could not help being very distressed for the person and wondering on the human level how they would ever cope. Life would not be the same for them after this series of problems.

After I left them a verse came to mind that I had been pondering for some time. The Psalmist said, "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees." Psalm 119:71 How can we ever call suffering good? Is that what the Psalmist meant to say? One writer has well said, "Sin is pleasant but not profitable, sorrow is profitable but not pleasant".

We learn more in the school of adversity than in the circus of entertainment. While the tuition fees are high in

the classroom of experience the lessons learned are not soon forgotten. Only from the crucifixion of the old person does the resurrection of the new person come. Afflictions are the stuff for making exceptionally good character.

It is too bad but most of us would rather be ruined by the good life than grow into the best of people by trials. The Psalmist had learned the secret of a godly character. It comes through adversity. This principle is at the heart of true godliness.

It is said of even our Lord and Saviour, "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered." Heb. 5:8 Jesus chose the way of suffering, not as a result of personal sin, but suffered the just for the unjust in order to bring us to God.

We learn to trust in God through our trials and it is a costly but effective teacher. It is also a powerful witness and encouragement to others when we suffer humbly, in submission to the will of God.

On the other side we need to speak in appreciation to those who suffer well and let them know their witness to God's sufficient grace helps us in our circumstances. When a new widow goes to church the first few times and sees a widow of some years singing God's praise and joyful in the Lord it is the best sermon she will see for some time to come.

Some of the most powerful sermons ever delivered have been given without a word spoken. The sermon is the life lived trusting God when circumstances are painful and confusing to the one who suffers.

I believe everyone should read the books written by Dr. Helen Roseveare, missionary to what was then the Belgian Congo in Africa. She has remarkable stories to tell of how people lived and some died for their faith under dreadful circumstances. As one who suffered greatly she can say, "It was good for me to be afflicted."

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