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Suffering is Never for Nothing

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“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

— Romans 8:28 (NASB)

Pastor Harry Walls once said, “Hard times have high purposes.” It is hard to figure out those purposes when you are actually in the middle of the hard times. Nonetheless, it is important that we consider all that God is doing amidst our sufferings. I want to encourage you that with Jesus, suffering is never for nothing.

First, suffering has a sanctifying purpose. Romans 8:28-29 teaches us that, “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren.” As a Christian, I am sure you have prayed that God would help you to grow in repentance, put off old sins, grow more holy, and become more like Jesus. Those prayers can be answered through trials. As James 1:2 says, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials.” Since God is producing and bringing about greater Christlikeness, deepening our sanctification, this ensures no suffering is wasted. Hard times have high purposes, and your suffering is never for nothing, because God uses it to make you more like Jesus.

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Second, suffering also has a severing purpose. 1 John 2:15, commands, “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” In Psalm 73:25, after struggling with envying the wicked, Asaph came to his senses and cried out to God, “Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.” Suffering reorders and recalibrates our affections for heaven and the Lord of heaven. Hard times help us to remember this earth is not our home, but we are sojourners and strangers. We are pilgrims on the narrow road to our eternal home in glory. Suffering deepens our longings for the day when Christ makes all things new. Hard times have high purposes, and your suffering is never for nothing because God uses it to sever the remaining love for the world, deepening your love for Him and longings for the next world.

Third, suffering has a purpose of service. Psalm 46:1 comforts us with “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” and 2 Corinthians 1:3 teaches us that God is the “Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.” It is right that we cry out and cling to the Lord in our sufferings. But 2 Corinthians 1:4 also teaches us that God “comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” You see, we forgive as we’ve been forgiven, we love as we have been loved, and we are to comfort others in suffering as we have been comforted. Hard times have high purposes, and your suffering is never for nothing because God uses it to equip you to comfort others when they suffer in the same way.

Fourth, suffering has a gospel purpose. In Philippians 1:12-14, Paul gives the church in Philippi an update on his gospel ministry from a prison cell. He notes beautifully that his imprisonment has served to advance the gospel to the imperial guards of Rome and made others bold to preach Christ without fear. God is so beautifully sovereign that suffering will give you gospel opportunities to tell others of the hope you have in Christ, even when your heart is broken. The unbreakable and undefeated power of the gospel is displayed through our unchanging hope as we hold fast through suffering. Our Lord Jesus was the Suffering Servant, a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief. He sympathizes with our weaknesses and meets us in our sufferings as One who has sinlessly endured the worst suffering on our behalf. Philippians 1:29 says, “For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” The apostle Paul longed to deeply, intimately, and personally know Jesus and the power of His resurrection, share in His sufferings, and become like Him in His death. Samuel Rutherford said, “You will not get to heaven quietly in Christ’s company without conflict and a cross.” Hard times have high purposes, and your suffering is never for nothing because God uses it to proclaim the gospel through you and brings you closer to Jesus as you suffer.

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Finally, suffering has a divine purpose. We won't always know the exact reason behind our sufferings. Even though we won't always know the why, we always know who is in control and that God's ultimate purpose is bringing about the praise of His glory, which is our ultimate good. Through it all, we know that God is not only sovereign, but holy, wise, righteous, merciful, gracious, just, loving, faithful, and kind. We will have to wait until eternity to better understand some things, but even then, we will praise God for His wisdom. Until then, we must trust Him and know that He is infinitely trustworthy.

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As you suffer, remember that gracious and simple command of Hebrews 12:3: "Consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." As the classic hymn says, "What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear." In Christ alone we will find peace through all trials and seasons of suffering.

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<https://www.forthegospel.org/read/suffering-is-never-for-nothing>

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