

Prayer in Suffering

By Kim Butts

Recently, I have heard the heart cry of several friends and family who have been enduring significant seasons of suffering. Some are dealing with physical and emotional struggles; others, with financial stresses and setbacks or prodigal children. Still others are agonizing over the suffering or loss of family members or friends. Most are in a place where their prayer lives have become paralyzed. I have been in these dark places of despair, and struggled with the “Why me, God?” questions. Yet, it was in these times of desolation and anguish that God spoke most clearly and it was in the hopeless places where I found the most hope...and where I learned without a doubt that the God of all comfort was very present.

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 has always held for me the all-important key to enduring difficulties: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who 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. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.” This passage came to the forefront after experiencing a devastating season of suffering in my own life which I thought might never end.

I began to see something happen that I had never expected, and did not fully comprehend until time had passed. But our grace-filled Father patiently used my painful experiences and trials to minister into the lives of others who were walking through similar circumstances. It was the fulfillment of the

truth from 2 Corinthians taking root in my life. Seeing this promise come to fruition was life-changing for me, and has allowed me to see suffering in an entirely different light. I don't have to like it, but if I patiently endure it, God will be faithful not only in the midst of what I am walking through...He will take it and use it for His kingdom's purposes!

To punctuate this point, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 says, "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." If God's will for me is to joyfully and prayerfully give thanks in the midst of every circumstance, then I must be an obedient child, even when I am unsure...even when I am angry...and even when I don't feel like praying, trusting that He will make use of every season I am in! I would suggest that it is best when we don't feel like praying to do two things. First, just breathe the name of Jesus into the space around you. His Name keeps the enemy at bay and His Name releases the power of Christ into our situations. Second, play worship music so that your surroundings are permeated by the Presence of the God of Comfort. He is attracted to our worship, so as we focus on Him rather than upon our circumstances, He will reveal Himself in ways we may never expect!

God isn't asking me to do anything He has not done Himself. "Since Jesus went through everything you're going through and more, learn to think like him. Think of your sufferings as a weaning from that old sinful habit of always expecting to get your own way. Then you'll be able to live out your days free to pursue what God wants instead of being tyrannized by what you want" (1 Peter 4:1-2, MSG). Several prayer points jump out at me through this passage:

1. **Remember.** I need to continually pray that I will always remember that Jesus has gone through all I have and will ever suffer and more! Picturing Christ on the cross or being pierced for my transgressions or even bearing the sin of the world should be enough to keep me from

complaining about my own state of affairs. The Father heart of God was broken to experience the suffering of the Son, and I have to believe that He aches over mine as well. 2 Corinthians reminds me that He is the God of comfort and promises that comfort is mine if I will be willing to receive it in place of demanding my own comfort.

2. **Think.** God may be doing something in me that only He knows and which might not be accomplished if I were to get my own way by avoiding or trying to get out of suffering. His ways are higher. I do think it is okay to let God know when I suffer and that I am angry about it as long as I don't dwell there. If I can discipline myself to share the burdens, ask why, and express anger...I will be free to receive His comfort and trust that His purposes in allowing my suffering will be for the benefit of my own spiritual growth and to help others who walk through similar experiences.
3. **Choose.** By becoming free of the tyranny of what I want, I will be able to have the freedom to pursue what God wants – His kingdom purposes rather than the purposes of my own kingdom. Will I receive victory in the hands of Jesus Christ or be defeated at the hands of Satan?

Scripture has many promises and much reassurance for those who endure suffering. There are remarkably powerful graces from the Father to us if we will persevere in the face of trials. May the Word encourage you no matter what you may be facing today:

- “And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast” (1 Peter 5:10).
- “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have

its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:2-4).

- "We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Romans 5:3-4)."
- "I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul" (Psalm 31:7).
- "For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help" (Psalm 22:24).

And the ultimate consideration for believers who are going through trials and suffering is rolled out for us in Romans 8:18: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." This earth is not our home. This body is only a poor reflection of what is to come. Let's choose to lean into the Presence of Jesus Christ, who loves us with an all-encompassing love. As we continue to trust Him, He will step into suffering with us and bend His ear towards our cries for mercy. We must continue to trust that He will redeem and bring light into situations and circumstances that seem dark and impossible for the sake of His glory.

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