

Suffering – God’s Special Instrument

PURPOSE: To create in the students the correct attitude toward suffering, so that when they suffer, they will do so with the correct attitude

OBJECTIVES: By the end of the lesson the students will:

1. Willingly accept suffering as a means of growth in their lives.
2. Willingly pray for other who are suffering for the cause of Christ.
3. Willingly submit to God in the midst of suffering.

KEY VERSES: II Corinthians 1:3-11

Introduction: *(An Introduction like this can be used.)*

Here’s the account of a Christian going through physical suffering, and how he responded:

Several years ago I was going through a very difficult time in my life. I was not quite 30 years old at the time. For several years I had been experiencing pain in my back and hips as a result of a physical problem called Marie Strumple’s Disease. It is something like arthritis. It usually begins in the mid-teens. The pain goes along with the stiffening of the joints and is very bad. In the process calcium was deposited around my spinal cord and also in my hip joints. The pain in my left hip was increasing. The best way that I can describe the pain is this: It felt like an abscessed tooth only it was in my hip. It would keep me awake for hours during the night. I remember that morning shortly after Christmas. I woke up and tried to put weight on my leg. The pain was excruciating. I could not put any weight on the leg. I agonizingly got to the phone and called my director to explain the situation. There I was all alone and suffering greatly. I remember that day very well. I thought that I would be in a wheelchair the rest of my life. I clearly remember crying out to the Lord very real tears in pain and distress. I talked clearly to the Lord and said something like this: “Lord, I don’t know if I will ever be able to walk again. And maybe I will live in pain the rest of my life. But I will serve and love you the rest of my life. Thank you that you care for me.” The pain did not go away but I experienced a closeness to the Lord right then during the hour of my greatest need. It was like the Lord was wrapping me in His arms and telling me that He loved me and cared for me. I basically said to the Lord: “I am your willing sacrifice. Do to me what You want. I am yours.”

Transition: *(Use something like this.)*

All people suffer to one degree or another. Some of us appear to suffer more than others. But, whether it be mental, emotional, physical or spiritual, all of us, at some point in our lives, suffer. No suffering is easy. Why do Christians suffer? What does God think of our suffering? Is He involved in any way? What should our involvement be in the lives of those who are suffering?

Now, back to the previous story, the suffering Christian shared, “During the time when I was suffering so much, I heard a sermon that helped me get a good perspective on suffering. It helped me understand why we suffer and how that affects the body of Christ. I’d like to share that with you today. Please turn

with me to 2 Corinthians 1:3-11 and read along with me.”

I. Paul’s Suffering and why we suffer.

A. We suffer → God comforts. vv. 3-4a.

God is given the title: “Father of compassion and the God of all comfort.” Isn’t that beautiful! All the comfort that we need has its source in God. This is how great our God is.

B. We suffer → God comforts → We comfort others. vv. 4b-7.

As we receive comfort from the Lord, we are able to pass that same comfort on to others. Paul puts other people into the formula in verse seven when he states that sharing in the suffering also makes us capable of sharing in the comfort. Sharing in the comfort also makes us capable of sharing that comfort with others. When you know that someone has suffered, it is much easier to accept their comfort.

C. Suffering causes us to rely on God alone and not ourselves. vv. 8-10.

1. Paul’s suffering in Asia.

In these verses Paul explains to the Corinthian believers the greatness of his suffering in the province of Asia. Although we don’t know precisely the event or events that he was referring to, we know that it must have been a terrible ordeal. Knowing that Paul was actually stoned and left for dead one time gives us a clue that the event he was writing about must have been very difficult. He states that the pressure was so much that the team feared that they were going to be killed. It sounds like they had decided that there was no way out and death awaited them.

2. From suffering to complete dependence.

But the story doesn’t end here. Paul gives us another reason why God allowed him and his companions to suffer. Verse nine provides great insight into why God allows us to suffer. In Paul’s case He allowed this to happen so that they would not rely on themselves but on God alone. This is powerful! Don’t we usually think of the Apostle Paul as one who always depended upon the Lord Jesus. But here we see that he needed a reminder that he must depend solely upon the Lord. What an example for us!

D. Prayer for the ones suffering is used to build unity in the body of Christ.

The final reason God allows us to suffer is found in verse eleven. In this verse we see how God builds unity in the body of Christ through praying for those who suffer. We can pray for one another. Paul said clearly that he was helped by the prayers of the Corinthian believers. This is one way we can help one another and build each other up. Suffering binds the body together.

II. Conclusion and Application.

- A. All of us will suffer. Perhaps you are suffering right now. Let's learn to relax and receive from Christ the comfort that he so willingly gives. Go to Him.
- B. In the midst of our suffering, we can comfort others. The suffering Christian mentioned at the beginning remembered numerous times when people came up to him and said that he was an inspiration for them because of the way that he handled suffering. This was true because he was receiving God's comfort and as a result was able to comfort others.
- C. Suffering helps us to focus. We live in a day and an age of independence. We want to be our own bosses. But what does God do through suffering? He bends us and molds us. He helps us understand that we cannot live on our own. We can't even live the Christian life. This is that point of complete weakness and submission when we say to our Lord a great big "Help, I can't live on my own. I can't even live the Christian life. You have to do it in me and through me." Remember the Christian mentioned in the beginning when he said to the Lord, "I will love and serve you even if I never walk again." This is especially difficult for very talented, gifted people such as each of you in this room. It is so easy to forget that we need the Lord in everything. That is another reason why God allows us to suffer. Someone said something like this: "If God wants to use you greatly, he must first hurt you deeply." This breaking most assuredly involves suffering. If we want to be used by God, we must be willing to be broken, to suffer. Let's be pliable and learn our lessons quickly. The result of all this suffering is joy in the presence of the Lord.
- D. Pray for those who are suffering. Pray that they will be pliable in the hands of the Lord. Pray that they will look to the Lord for the source of their comfort and that they will grow as a result. God uses the prayers of believers to sustain us. Praise be His holy name.
- E. Remember fellow believers around the world who are persecuted (and sometimes killed) simply because of their faith in Christ. (See the websites: www.persecution.org and www.persecution.com) Pray for comfort and strength for them. Pray that in spite of persecution, the Gospel still spreads in their areas (2 Timothy 2:9). Pray that leaders and persecutors in these countries will repent and come to Christ.