

HOW TO BENEFIT FROM SUFFERING

Lesson 8

Suffering has been the universal experience of mankind since the fall. We know that God's original will was perfection -- perfect fellowship with him, perfect union in purpose, perfect mental abilities, perfect physical bodies, perfect nervous systems, etc. However, God created man with a will of his own. He did not want love and worship from his creatures because they had to love and worship him. He did not create man as a robot.

Man chose evil. The result? Sin, suffering, shame! Many skeptics look at this condition in the world and blame God by asking, "Why, God?" No doubt a grieved God looks at man who caused his own downfall and shame and asks, "Why, man?"

God's original will was that there should be no suffering. Yet man chose to disobey and caused his own suffering. C. S. Lewis likens this picture of man with a mother and her children. Says Lewis,

"But anyone who has been in authority knows how a thing can be in accordance with your will in one way and not in another. It may be quite sensible for a mother to say to the children, 'I'm not going to make you tidy the bedroom every night. You have to learn to keep it tidy on your own.' Then she goes up one night and finds the Teddy bear and the ink and the French Grammar all lying in the grate. That is against her will. She would prefer the children to be tidy, but on the other hand, it is her will which has left the children free to be untidy.

In the same way it is not God's original will that suffering should take place, but since He gave us the responsibility to obey Him and we did not, His will had made it possible. How do we, as God's people, understand and cope with suffering?

I. REALIZE THAT AS CHRISTIANS WE ARE NOT EXEMPT FROM SUFFERING

A. Philippians 1:29 "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to **suffer** for His sake."

B. II Timothy 3:12 "And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

A. Matthew 5:10-12 "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when *men* cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

II. REALIZE THAT SOME OF GOD'S GIANTS HAVE BEEN MEN WHO HAVE SUFFERED.

A. Job

"Behold, we call those happy who were steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful." (James 5:11) Job is the all-time example for those who suffer. He suffered ridicule from his wife, scolding from his friends, loss of his property, the death of his children, the loss of his influence, and the loss of his health. Yet, God called Job a perfect man and one who hated evil (Job 1:1). We do not understand why, in all its aspects, God allowed this to happen to Job. Yet, we do know God was in control and would not allow Satan to go further than Job could bear. "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (I Corinthians 10:13). We will be ever in debt to Job for his example to us. In him we see one who cried in faith, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him."

B. Joseph

One of the greatest verses in Scripture is Joseph's insight into God's dealing with him, even in trying circumstances and suffering, found in Genesis 50:20: "As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are today."

1. Joseph was hated by his brethren -- Genesis 37:4
2. Joseph was sold into slavery by his brethren -- Genesis 37:28
3. Joseph was put into prison because of a lie "but the Lord was with Joseph... " - Genesis 39:21.
4. Joseph was forgotten by those he helped -- Genesis 40:14, 23
Nothing seemed to go right for Joseph. In the world's eyes all that he did went astray. He suffered terribly! Yet, God meant it for good (Genesis 50:20). By his faith in God and submission to suffering the Israelite race was saved.

C. St. Paul

No one suffered more than the Apostle Paul (I Corinthians 4: 9-13; 2 Corinthians 11:23-33). Yet he could say, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" -- I Corinthians 11: 1. There is a type of Christianity

which preaches the “gospel” of health, wealth, and prosperity. They feel only the “*unspiritual*” suffer. “IF” this is true, Paul, the disciples, and Jesus were “unspiritual.”

D. Jesus

"Why hast thou forsaken me?" That was the agonizing question of Jesus as he died on the cross. He suffered physically. He suffered the rejection of his own countrymen (John 1:11, 12). Yet all for a glorious purpose: "Looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" --Hebrews 12:2

E. The disciples

All suffered a martyr's death, according to church tradition, except John the Beloved.

III. REALIZE THAT GOD USES SUFFERING FOR HIS OWN HIGHER PURPOSES

- A. **2 Cor. 1:3-5** “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and 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.”
- B. God allowed an impediment (a thorn in the flesh) to keep Paul from "exalting myself". "Though Satan was its messenger" (2 Cor. 12:7),
- C. "I want you to know, brethren, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel" -- Philippians 1:12

Paul at the time of this writing was in prison -- suffering. Yet, God allowed him to see a higher purpose -- the Gospel would progress. In fact, Philippians 1: 13 shows us the Gospel was penetrating to Caesar's guard and “everywhere else” and (verse 14) others were preaching more boldly due to Paul's suffering.

- B. **Hebrews 12:11** “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”

IV. REALIZE “THE SUFFERINGS OF THIS PRESENT TIME ARE NOT WORTHY TO BE COMPARED WITH THE GLORY THAT IS TO BE REVEALED TO US. (Rom. 8:18)

One can bear the pain of sickness if the doctor tells him he will soon be cured. In the same way we can bear misunderstanding and suffering if we know Jesus is coming back to right all wrongs and to give us a new life and a new glorified body - 2 Corinthians 5: 1; I John 3: 1- 3.

V. REALIZE GOD HAS PROMISED TO DESTROY ALL SUFFERING, PAIN, AND DEATH

"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." Revelation 21: 4

When the Rev. David Seamonds was in India as a missionary, his son, Steve, was born with a club foot. In order to correct this condition, the Rev. Seamonds was instructed to twist Steve's foot in the opposite direction for a certain length of time each day. The pain was excruciating for little Steve. His father said he felt like his son hated him at times. He knew that Steve did not understand why his father made him go through such pain. Yet, today Steve is a healthy man without any impediment. He now appreciates what his father did, even though he did not understand his sufferings then.

Can we not see as Christians that God is as loving and as wise? Let us trust God in our sufferings. Let us realize he has a purpose -- even though we may not see it. Let us sing with the songwriter, "For I know whatever befall me, Jesus doeth all things well!"

YOUR MOVE:

This lesson deals with five realizations related to suffering. Rank them in terms of their value in comforting you, with the most valuable first, second most valuable next, etc. Explain your ranking.

HOW TO LIVE A PRACTICAL CHRISTIAN LIFE

Lesson 9

The book of James, deals with many of the practicalities of the Christian life:

1. practical evaluation of trials (James 1: 2- 12)
2. practical insight into temptation (1: 12-18)
3. practical obedience to the Word (1: 19-27)
4. practical evaluation of others (2: 1- 13)
5. practical faith (2:14-26)
6. practical use of the tongue (3:1-12)
7. practical wisdom (3:13-18)
8. practical advice against worldliness (4:1- 12)
9. practical plans (4:13-17)
10. practical patience (5: 1- 12)
11. practical prayer (5:13-18)
12. practical love (5:19, 20)

Every Christian wants to be practical. He wants his religion to work seven days a week -- not just on Sunday. James tells us how to succeed in this worthy goal.

Since it would be impossible to deal with all the above stated themes in this lesson, we will deal with only one -- the practical use of the tongue. Nothing could be more practical than to study something most of us do daily -- talk.

From the book of James we will look at three themes regarding the tongue: its description, its danger, and its control.

I. THE DESCRIPTION OF THE TONGUE (3:1-5)

Before James describes the tongue, he gives a warning and a description of perfection. In verse 1 James warns against everyone desiring to teach. James says the teacher will be judged with a stricter judgment; no doubt because greater knowledge brings greater responsibility. The teacher is responsible that those he teaches know the truth. If the teacher were to teach improper doctrine he would corrupt not just one, but many.

In verse 2, James says the mark of perfection is the control of the tongue.

A. *The tongue is compared to a bit (3:3)*

Bits are small, but they have a great effect. So it is with the tongue. It is but a small member of the body when compared with arms, legs, etc., but none have a greater impact on our lives and the lives of others than the tongue.

B. *The tongue is compared to a rudder (3:4)*

The ship is great, but it can be directed by a small rudder. Again we see a large impact due to a small force.

C. *The tongue is compared to a fire 3:5)*

All of us have seen the charred remains of a forest set ablaze by a spark from a careless cigarette smoker. In the same way a small word or a little slander can get a whole church or neighborhood aflame with devastating rumor.

II. THE DANGER OF THE TONGUE (3:6-8)

A. *The tongue is a destructive instrument.*

"The tongue is a fire" (3:6). fire can be useful, but nothing is more destructive. Unless quickly put out, fire can gut a building or a whole town in a brief time.

B. *The tongue is a deceitful instrument.*

The tongue has so many evils stemming from it that it is an "unrighteous world." It can curse, criticize, condemn (judge), contaminate! All this adds up to an "unrighteous world."

C. *The tongue is a disturbing instrument.*

The tongue disturbs our lives. There is not a part of life the tongue does not touch. It "stains the whole body." Our minds are corrupted until eventually our bodies are corrupted; then all who listen to us are defiled. No wonder the writer of Proverbs said, the one who keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble.

(Proverbs 21:23)

D. *The tongue is e deadly instrument.*

1. It is full of deadly poison
2. A person can be murdered by gossip as well as by a gun.

III. THE CONTROL OF THE TONGUE (3:13-18)

This passage is primarily a description of practical wisdom. It is also an answer to one who cannot control his tongue. The answer is a heavenly wisdom which will control our speech and help us speak in the wisdom God gives. Two types of wisdom are described:

A. Earthly wisdom

1. Its source (3:15)

- a) earthly -- its horizon does not extend beyond this world. It is inspired with only earth's values in mind. It disregards God's point of view.
- b) unspiritual -- it does not come from the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 2:14). Therefore, it is not spiritual.
- c) devilish -- it is demon-like because it is full of pride and selfish ambition. The source of many people's speech is what these adjectives describe: earthly, unspiritual, devilish.

2. Its fruit (3:14, 16)

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| a) bitterness | d) boasting |
| b) jealousy | e) disorder |
| c) selfish ambition | f) every vile practice |

B. Heavenly wisdom

- 1. pure -- God's wisdom, which should govern our speech, is, above all, free from filth and contamination. In the context (3:13-18), it is said our speech should be free from bitterness, jealousy, selfishness, ambition, arrogance, etc.
- 2. peaceable -- God's wisdom will not allow our speech to cause controversy all the time. Purity must precede peacemaking, however. (See also Matthew 5:8-9).
- 3. gentle -- if our wisdom is marked by gentleness, our speech will be also. We will be sweetly reasonable.
- 4. open to reason -- easy to be entreated
- 5. full of mercy -- forgiving

6. full of good fruits -- instead of speech that brings death, our speech will bring life. (Ephesians 4:29-32; Colossians 4:6)
7. without uncertainty -- we will not be deceitful in speech. We will say what we mean.
8. sincere -- we will not pretend to have done what we have not or be what we are not.

Our speech will be governed by these rules.

YOUR MOVE:

Think of three occasions in your life when your tongue was used wrongly. Now write yourself a note of commitment indicating how you purpose to rightly use your tongue. Be specific.

HOW TO BE A GOOD STEWARD

Lesson 10

John 3:16 is perhaps the greatest verse in the Bible. In it we find God's plan of salvation for the world. We find the means of salvation -- the vicarious death of Christ. We find the motive of salvation -- love. We also find the proof of God's love -- "God so loved... that he gave." Someone has said you can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving. We discover the same truth in spiritual things. As we love God we will give to him.

In this lesson we will study what the Bible says about stewardship and learn how to be good stewards.

To be a good steward, remember the following points:

I. EVERYTHING BELONGS TO GOD

A. "... for all the earth is mine" Exodus 19:5

A. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; the world, and those who dwell therein." Psalm 24:1; I Cor. 10:26

God says the world and all it contains are his. This includes US! According to Deuteronomy 32:6, there are two reasons why everything belongs to God:

1. By right of creation -- He made everything, so everything is His.
2. By right of redemption -- He bought us with the blood of Christ. I Corinthians 6:19-20 tells us "... you are not your own; you were bought with a price..." When we recognize that EVERYTHING we have belongs to God, it will help us to be the stewards we should be.

II. GOD HAS MADE US THE MANAGERS OF HIS POSSESSIONS

A. Matthew 21:33-46 gives the account of a vineyard owner going on a trip and leaving the vineyard to be cared for by his servants. During his trip, the owner sent back to get fruit from his vineyard.

B. Matthew 25:14-30 -- the parable of the talents

C. Luke 19:11-27 -- the parable of the pounds.

In both of these accounts the Master leaves different sums of money with his servants and departs on a journey. When the Master returns, he blesses those servants who had multiplied their capital and punishes those who did nothing.

III. WE WILL GIVE AN ACCOUNT TO GOD FOR OUR STEWARDSHIP

- A. "So each of us shall give account of himself to God."
Romans 14:12.

All of us will stand before God to answer for the way we have managed what he gave us. The Bible shows we will account for:

1. How we used our time -- "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of the time because the days are evil." (Ephesians 5:15-16)
2. How we worked -- "rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that whatever good any one does, he will receive the same again from the Lord..." (Ephesians 6:7-8)
3. What we talked about -- "I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter." (Matthew 12:36)
4. How we spent our money.
 - a) God commands that we tithe (Malachi 3:10b)
God is pleased with our freewill offerings above our tithes (2 Corinthians 8:1-5)
 - v. 2 -- "... the wealth of their liberality..." These Christians were not wealthy in possessions, but rich in their generosity.
 - v. 3 -- "... gave beyond their means..." These Christians gave beyond what they could afford and trusted God to take care of them.
 - v. 4 -- "... begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints..." The Macedonian Christians asked for the opportunity to share in God's work through giving.
 - v. 5 -- "... first they gave themselves to the

Lord... " The key to good stewardship is first of all belonging completely to God. Then we can truly give unselfishly.

- b). God is interested in how we spend the remainder of our money after we give our tithes and offerings.

Luke 15: 11- 32 contains the parable of the prodigal son. The prodigal son was the object of Christ's lesson not just because he left home, but also because he wasted his resources in riotous living.

Luke 16: 1- 3 shows the shrewd steward was punished for wasting his master's goods.

5. How we used our gifts -- "As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (I Peter 4:10). The spiritual gifts we possess should be used for God and the spreading of the Gospel. We will give an account of how we used our gifts.
6. How well we witnessed -- "But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts" (I Thessalonians 2:4).

God has entrusted the Gospel to us and we must share the "Good News." We will answer to God one day as to how well we invested this gift.

IV. GOD IS INTERESTED IN OUR ATTITUDE AS WE GIVE

"Each one must do as he had made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." 2 Corinthians 9:7

V. GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF US AS WE GIVE TO HIM

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well." Matthew 6:33.

VI. THE CHIEF QUALITY REQUIRED OF A STEWARD IS FAITHFULNESS

"Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy."
(I Corinthians 4:2)

Stewards are not rewarded for their production, as seen in the parable of the talents. The steward who increased five talents was rewarded the same as the steward who increased two talents. The stewards were rewarded for their faithfulness to the task.

YOUR MOVE:

Section III of this lesson teaches we will have to account for six expressions of stewardship, according to the Bible. Rate yourself in regard to each area of stewardship responsibility on the scale below:

STEWARDSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES	MY RATING
	Low High
1. How I use my time	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
2. How I serve God	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
3. What I talk about	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
4. How I spend my money	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
5. How I use my spiritual gifts	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
6. How I witness to others	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10