

Accepting Adversity and Tragedy

Lesson 10 Personal Trials and Suffering Positive Results

Introduction

We have gone to James 1:2-4 previously and observed that we are to accept our trials joyfully because they lead to good results. Yet this is a hard passage to accept when we are in the midst of difficult times. We need to understand how our trials can help us, and the word of God is full of explanations and examples that will help us see at least some of the benefits that are produced by them.

The Discipline of God

In Hebrews 12, the writer begins by pointing to Jesus who endured the cross (vs. 2) and hostility from sinners (vs. 3). He does this in order to encourage the readers not to grow weary or fainthearted. He then explains that God disciplines us because of His love for us:

1. Read Hebrews 12:1-13
 - a. Whom does God discipline or chasten?
 - b. Without discipline, what would we be?
 - c. Are we told specifically how God disciplines us? Are any examples given here?
 - d. Is the benefit of discipline immediately obvious (vs. 11)?
 - e. What should be our response (vs. 12-13)?
2. When we suffer personal trials will we know with certainty that God is chastening us? Is it a possibility?
3. Can we look at our personal suffering and find beneficial lessons in it, even if we are uncertain as to God's role?

Potential Benefits

As difficult as it may be to appreciate during a period of difficulty, our trials can help us serve God better. James stated that our trials would lead to patience or steadfastness, and that this in turn would lead to our being complete, lacking nothing (James 1:3-4). We noted above in Hebrews 12:11 where discipline is said to yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

Consider the possible benefits that a Christian may gain from hardship. Trials can:

- Harden and toughen us for even more difficult days ahead. Successfully enduring a trial will give us confidence for those we face in the future.
- Help us appreciate more the blessings that we have. Think of how often we take our blessings for granted until they are placed in jeopardy.
- Help us to examine and recognize what truly matters most in life. A loss of a job or declining health will focus our attention on our family, on our brothers and sisters in Christ, and hopefully on our relationship with God.
- Help us to cease depending solely upon our own strength. We frequently forget to depend upon God who is our helper (Hebrews 13:6), but a trial can cause us to turn to Him.
- Draw our attention away from the material things of life. Look at Paul's comments about what we really need in life (I Timothy 6:6-10). Unfortunately, we sometimes must suffer loss to understand that we brought nothing into the world and can take nothing out.
- Helps us to recognize the temporary nature of life. James says that our life is a mere vapor that appears for a moment and disappears (James 4:14). Paul told the rich (I Timothy 6:17-19) to look beyond the uncertainty of riches and store up a "*good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*" But all too often, it takes heartache and hardship to help us see this truth.

Look over the list of benefits above. Is it not also true that an individual can suffer a trial and have the very opposite of these benefits result? Instead of hardening them, it crushes them. Instead of causing a focus on true blessings or the temporary nature of life, the individual becomes obsessed with the suffering and sees nothing else. What really determines whether a trial will help us or weaken us? Let's look at some Biblical examples.

Two Examples

The Apostle Paul probably suffered as much as a child of God as anyone of whom we have a record. Yet he retained his faith through it all.

1. Read II Corinthians 11:23-29 for a reminder of his suffering. Then read II Corinthians 4:17 – 5:10. What was Paul's secret?

The Hebrew Christians endured great trials, but as they faced more they needed reminders to avoid being overwhelmed:

2. Read Hebrews 10:32-39.
 - a. What had they suffered in the past?
 - b. How had they responded in the past?
 - c. What did they need now (vs. 35-36)?

- d. What could be the blessing for them (vs. 39)?

A Christian's Blessings

For a person who does not know Christ, none of this lesson has any real meaning. How can there be any real benefit to pain and trials if this life is all that we have? If we are not believers, and we lose all in this life or the portion of life that seems to matter most to us, how can we possibly view trials with anything but scorn and dread?

This lesson can only be appreciated by a child of God. A Christian also has blessings that will enable him or her to overcome the problems of life. Two in particular are worth noting because they are blessings to enjoy in this life.

1. Consolation of a Christian Family

Peter remarked in Mark 10:28 that he and the other Apostles had left all to follow Jesus. Jesus responded (Mark 10:29-30) by explaining that they would receive in this life a hundredfold houses and brothers and sisters and mothers. We may lose our material goods in life, but a faithful Christian gains a family throughout the world. Thus we are told to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2). As comforting as this blessing is, we need to remember that it is a two-way street. We must also share our goods with those Christians who are in need (I John 3:16-18).

2. Peace from God

There is a peace of God that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7). It will allow us to face life without anxiety and worry (Matthew 6:25-34). It is this peace that permits us to have godliness with contentment which, Paul assures us, is great gain (I Timothy 6:6).

These blessings will be ours only if we make an effort to take hold of them and use them. God will not force them on us, but they are great promises and belong only to His family.