



A Spiritual Encouragement Message November 17, 2020

Just Pray

by Derrick Victor

I can still recall the hollow words of distant relatives in my youth, “just pray to Jesus”. I was eight years old and dealing with a grown man physically assaulting me on a regular basis. One evening was cut short with an ER visit after I committed the vile crime of chewing with my mouth open. Apparently, breaking my nose was the solution to that problem. “Just pray”, they’d say. Unfortunately, I was ill-equipped with nothing more than, “just pray”. So, I prayed, and I prayed. Yet, day after day, I continued to be ignored by God (in my mind) and this man continued to abuse me. How could I find peace in prayer when my prayers went unanswered every day?

Perhaps you have asked yourself that question... After all, we’ve heard and read James’ message so many times, **“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds” (Jam. 1:2)**. Yet, in every trial, it can be so difficult to understand where joy is to be counted or even acknowledged. How can I find joy in the death of a child? How can I find joy in a virus that has taken the lives of 1,673,235 people (worldometers)? How can I find joy in the ramifications and consequences of government lockdowns (e.g., suicide, child abuse, spousal abuse, unemployment, etc.)? How can I find joy in brethren who are at each other’s throats (emotionally and metaphorically) over the aforementioned challenges?

Well, it starts by keeping our mind on these things

- Jesus – In **Hebrews 12**, we read, **“Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.”** Now, this text is not so much a comparison as it is a reminder of the example set before us. God, in all His wisdom sent down His Son to become **“like his brothers” (Heb. 2:17)** in every respect. He breathed, bled, felt, and fought in every way you and I have. He was fully man. Jesus did not come here and have a 30-year career, big house, 2.5 kids, and two cars while managing His faith. He came here, dealt with immense persecution and pain, and promised that we would deal with the same (**Matt. 10:34-39**). When we are dealing with great difficulty, we are in good company.
- Judgment – The Apostle Paul told Timothy, **“The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later” (1 Tim. 5:24)**. Maybe you’re

upset that the government didn't respond fast enough or hard enough to the virus? Maybe you think the government has responded too harshly and has overstepped their place? Perhaps you're somewhere in the middle, acknowledging that we are in a very difficult spot as a nation. Wherever you fall in these categories, it is imperative that we recall the Judgment of God. No one escapes judgment. This means, the people who lead us in our families, churches, cities, states, and countries, are all going to answer to God for the decisions they've made. We may not see the results as soon as we'd like, just as I did not stop getting abused as soon as I would have liked. However, my soul is secure, and my abuser went to his grave in sin. He has to answer for his sins. Likewise, the leaders who make decisions for us will answer to God one day. Knowing that they will answer in judgment is often enough to keep me humbly grateful that I do not lead the church or the state. I am merely a man who struggles with the decisions made. Yet, my soul is secure. May we not lose our souls through needless rebellion simply because we forgot that God, will bring justice.

- Journey – In chapter 9 of 1 Corinthians, Paul discusses the faith as an athlete running a race (**9:24-25**) or a boxer training for a fight (**9:26-27**). Likewise, he tells the Roman church that God is the Potter, and we are his clay (**Rom. 9:19-24**). Does he not have every right to make us and mold us as he chooses? Now, I would not be so arrogant to presume every action God makes throughout my life, whether good or bad. However, it is clear that God disciplines his children (**Heb. 12:5-8**), and that every pain we endure produces in us perseverance, which brings us to the point of lacking nothing (**Jam. 1:3-4**). I cannot rightly say that God wanted me to be abused so that I could become the man I am today. However, I am grateful He has used my experiences in childhood to help me connect and relate to others. I'm fully convinced that some of the difficulty we face is meant to create in us the ability to serve others. You and I are on a journey of faith. This journey is not always easy, and it sometimes gets to a point of breaking. Yet, we know the destination. We know that if we just keep putting one foot in front of the other, we will have served many people for the greater good on this earth, and we can eagerly anticipate the words of God, **“well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:21)**

Sometimes words with good intentions can become trite in the minds of people who are hurting. We know we should pray, count it all joy, and keep moving forward. Do these things by reminding yourself of Jesus, Judgment, and your Journey. He hurts with you; He will make people answer for our hurt, and He is molding you into the person you need to be. Consider that God is holding you in His desired direction like an archer holds a bow and arrow. Sometimes He pulls the string a little too much, but eventually, he releases the arrow and we hit His mark. I pray these words will give you strength and guidance. God bless!