Becoming a Woman of Purpose

CHAPTER NINE - OUR PURPOSE:

TO TRUST GOD THROUGH SUFFERING

“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.” Philippians 1:29-30 KJV

Through affliction He teaches us many precious lessons that otherwise we would never learn. By affliction He shows us our emptiness and weakness, draws us to the throne of grace, purifies our affections, weans us from the world, and makes us long for heaven. J.C. Ryle

The apostle Peter wrote, “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps;” (1 Peter 2:21). We have been called to suffer; in fact, Paul writes that it is our privilege to suffer for Christ. Our purpose, our privilege to suffer? - these words seem somewhat strange to our ears today. What is God after? His desire to conform us to the image of Christ and His ways of doing this are certainly opposite of our ways and our thinking. Why must we endure affliction and what should our response be to suffering? Good questions that perhaps can help us begin to grasp God’s tremendous heart to have us cling to and live only for that which is the highest, the best, and eternal.

Our Purpose: To Grow Through Suffering

1. We have studied that God works all things together for our good. Part of the all things is affliction. As you read 2 Corinthians 1:1-11, write down the purposes God has in our suffering.

2. Is there a personal example of suffering you can express? As you look back on your experience, have you been able to discern any of God’s purposes that Paul identifies in his letter to the Corinthians? Why, or why not?

Real life requires death. Death involves the experience of suffering. Suffering is required for growth.

Even the Son of God was required to suffer in order to enter the fulfillment of His maturity and mission . . . (Hebrews 2:10, 5:8-9).

Suffering is equally necessary for us because it strips away the pretense that life is reasonable and good, a pretense that keeps us looking in all the wrong places for the satisfaction of our souls. Dan B. Allender
3. Peter's first letter provides a helpful perspective on enduring trials. What truths about God, His purposes in suffering, and our response to suffering can you find in the following passages?

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4. Describe any struggles you may have with the reality of suffering. Is there a specific Scripture that helps your understanding of suffering?

Perhaps the most valuable way we profit from adversity is in the deepening of our relationship with God. Through adversity we learn to bow before His sovereignty, to trust His wisdom, and to experience the consolations of His love, until we come to the place where we can say with Job, "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you" (Job 42:5). We begin to pass from knowing about God to knowing God Himself in a personal and intimate way.

Jerry Bridges

Our Purpose: To Trust God

5. It is important to remember that when we suffer, we are not alone. Not only is God with us, but our fellow believers share the same experiences of suffering that we go through (see 1 Peter 5:9). Read these verses and record your observations of God’s involvement with us in our adversity.

Psalm 140:12

Isaiah 43:2

Isaiah 63:9
6. We are told that we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God (see Acts 14:22). What thoughts are given in these Scriptures that encourage you to persevere in trusting God, increasing your dependence on Him?

Habakkuk 3:17-19

Romans 8:15-18

2 Corinthians 4:7-10

7. What truth about God helps you the most to trust Him? Explain.

Let this encourage those of you who belong to Christ: The storm may be tempestuous, but it is only temporary. The clouds that are presently rolling over your head will pass, and then you will have fair weather, an eternal sunshine of glory. Can you not watch with Christ for one hour?

Bid faith look through the keyhole for the promise and see what God has laid up for those that love Him. You serve a God who keeps covenant for ever. Having already bathed in the fountain of His tender mercies, how can you stand on this side of eternity, afraid to wet your feet with those short-lived sufferings which, like a little splash of water, run between you and glory? 

William Gurnall

AUTHOR’S REFLECTION – Several years ago I spoke at a women’s retreat. A few years later I was invited back. A dear lady who had been at both retreats came to me and said, “Cynthia, you’ve grown since you were here before.” I thanked her and said that I hoped I was still growing. Later as I thought about her comment and what had happened in the intervening years, I realized that the difference she noticed in my life was the result of suffering.

In the particular trial I had been going through, the Lord seemed to draw a line and ask me if I would trust Him unconditionally. There were to be no promises or guarantees that I would like the outcome. As I pondered the possibility that the struggle I was having might never change or might even get worse, I was crushed. Yet I sensed that the real issue was my choice to cast my burden upon the Lord, trusting that He could take the trial and ultimately work it for His glory and my good.

Oswald Chambers says, “The way to find your self is in the fires of sorrow. . . . If you receive yourself in the fires of sorrow, God will make you nourishment for other people.” And so, through our suffering, God is willing to risk His relationship with us so that the relationship can be ever deepened. Whenever we choose to trust Him implicitly, we are freed from the oppressive weight of suffering, we are drawn more intimately to our precious Savior, and other people can see that we have been with Jesus.

No wound? No scar?
Yet as the Master shall the servant be,
And pierced are the feet that follow Me:
But thine are whole: can he have followed far
Who has nor wound, nor scar?

Amy Carmichael
8. Over the next few days, think about how God uses affliction and suffering to help you grow and trust Him. To help your reflection and application, carefully consider these verses.

“For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (KJV)

Use these questions to guide your meditation.

9. What encouragements from the Scriptures can help me to persevere through suffering?

10. What keeps me from fully trusting God with my life?

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE MEMORY: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18
2 Corinthians 1:1-11

1. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia: 2. Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. 3. Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; 4. Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. 5. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. 6. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. 7. And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation. 8. For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: 9. But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: 10. Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us; 11. Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.

Hebrews 2:10

For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

Hebrews 5:8-9

8. Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; 9. And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;

1 Peter 1:3-9

3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. 4. To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you. 5. Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: 7. That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: 8. Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: 9. Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.

1 Peter 2:18-25

18. Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. 19. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. 20. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. 21. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: 22. Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: 23. Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: 24. Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. 25. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.
1 Peter 4:12-19

12. Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: 13. But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. 14. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. 15. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busy-body in other men’s matters. 16. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. 17. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? 18. And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? 19. Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

1 Peter 5:9

Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

Psalms 140:12

I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor.

Isaiah 43:2

When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

Isaiah 63:9

In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.

Acts 14:22

22. Conforming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

Habakkuk 3:17-19

17. Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: 18. Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. 19. The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hind’s feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.

Romans 8:15-18

15. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. 16. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: 17. And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. 18. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

2 Corinthians 4:7-10

7. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. 8. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9. Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; 10. Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.