

Purposeful Suffering

2 Corinthians 4:12-18

Most of us would never sign up for a season of hardship and suffering, right? Regardless, life in this world brings us such things at times anyway. For most of us, we are in such a time right now as we face the challenge of COVID-19. Of course, we pray that God would put an end to this horrible virus, but even as we do, we can know that there are things that God wants to do in us during this time. The things we learn in our suffering can become the storehouse out of which we can ministry to others. In the passage that we are looking at today, Paul reveals how he didn't view his hardships as meaningless, but rather as something full of purpose and essential for embodying the gospel to others. If we can stay teachable, like Paul, we can find purpose in our suffering.

Opening Question: What has been the most difficult thing for you so far with COVID-19?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:12-18

1. In verse 12, when Paul says, "death works in us," he is referring to what he had experienced in preaching the Gospel in various cities. Read 2 Cor. 11:24-27. What had he experienced?
2. What is the great hope that Paul shares with the Corinthians (v. 14)?
3. What does Paul say is the ultimate result of his suffering (v. 15)?

Steve said:

I would encourage you to make a list of the hardships you're experiencing because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Your hardships are probably related to the lessons you might learn that God can use in the future in the lives of others. For example:

- Staying-at-home all the time can be stressful on relationships between husbands and wives, parent and child. God might be teaching you patience or sacrificial love or self-control or forgiveness.
- God might be teaching you how to trust Him for financial provision or for your health.
- You might be learning how to "wait upon the Lord"; waiting is incredibly hard for most of us.

4. What are the lessons that you sense that you may have a chance to learn during this time of hardship?

5. Though Paul suffered deeply, he did not lose heart (v. 16). What kept Paul from losing heart (see vv. 17-18)?

6. In light of the kinds of things that Paul suffered, how is he able to call his sufferings “momentary” and “light”?

Steve said:

Paul is telling us where he focused his attention. His attention *wasn't* on “the things which are seen” - the scars from his beatings, the people who had betrayed him, the dangers he had faced; he didn't focus on those things because they were “temporal” or time-bound (and would one day fade away). Instead, his attention was on “the things which are not seen” - the renewal he experienced in the inner man and the eternal weight of glory that awaited him, and the promise of being in the very presence of Jesus; he carefully considered these things because they were “eternal” - permanent and substantive. . . .What will it take for you and me to be able to call our hardships “momentary, light afflictions”? How can we get to the place where we can say along with Paul, *“My hardship produces for me an eternal weight of glory”*? We will need to be intentional and tenacious about setting our focus upon the things God is doing in the unseen spiritual realm instead of being fixated on our hardship and loss. Many, many times a day you will need to bring your focus back to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - what the triune God is doing in this world during these uncertain days.

7. What has been your focus this past week (the temporal or the eternal)? Explain.

8. What can you do this coming week to set your gaze on the eternal, unseen things God is doing?

Practicing the Rhythms of Rooted



Daily Devotion: Memorize and meditate upon 2 Corinthians 4:16-18