

Growing Through Persecutions

"We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing.

Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring."

2 Thessalonians 1:3-4 (NIV)

When I was in my early 20's I recall hearing a missionary report on Christians in Russia. The presenter gave much detail about the suffering of God's people under the atheistic Communist dictators. It was a story filled with sadness and suffering.

The missionary then made a statement that was shocking beyond anything else we had heard from him that evening. It was a short sentence indicating that the persecuted Russian Christians were praying that believers in the western world would not be ruined by their material riches.

Until that evening I had never considered myself at risk because of our relative wealth compared to much of the world. I went home and pondered over that statement for several hours.

Had I missed something I

wondered? What good can possibly come from suffering I thought? That was the beginning of my search for meaning and purpose for the pain and suffering endured all around the world.

One of the most important objections people have to believing in a "good" God are these matters of pain, sorrow, and death. How does all of this make any sense?

One answer that Paul gives is that those who suffer tend to become much better people. Christians who endure pain become more loving toward others, their faith grows stronger, and they glorify God in their patient endurance of trials.

We need to thank God for the spiritual giants among us. These people bear eloquent witness to the worth of trusting the Lord rather than giving up in disgust

when things turn against us.

Do you grow during seasons of trial in life? Is your faith stronger now than it was before the grief came on you? Do not let your time of trial go to waste. Suffering is not for nothing. That which is so unwelcome in your life now will soon prove its worth as you find the pain driving you into the loving arms of your heavenly Father. Trust the Lord when you cannot understand His ways.

Psalm 43:5 (NIV)

"Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God."

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