

Don't Waste Your Suffering

*"Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters,
that my circumstances have turned out
for the greater progress of the gospel,
so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ
has become well known throughout the praetorian guard and to everyone else,
and that most of the brothers and sisters,
trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment,
have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear..."*
Philippians 1:12-14 (NASB)

Many of us have had loved ones whose physical suffering has led them to desire to depart and be with the Lord. Often we do not know what to say to them. We have a sad conflict of interest because we wish them to stay with us. Death is so permanent and to think of living without their presence breaks our hearts. Our desire to keep them with us is selfish. What we need to do in such situations is give them permission to die.

Something else that is exceptionally important is to urge them to use their suffering for the good of others. This is what Paul does in our verses for today. He has been imprisoned wrongfully. However, he has an audience he would never have had if he was not in prison. So, instead of simply feeling sorry for his situation, he witnesses to the guards and others sharing the Gospel in that segment of society that he could not otherwise reach.

Paul never felt sorry for himself. Instead, he found ways to share the Good Shepherd and sow the good seed of the Gospel wherever he was.

Can you use your suffering for the good of others? If you are a single parent, consider joining with others to organize a single mom's/dad's group in your neighbourhood. Find ways to share the Gospel when you go to the cancer clinic. Possibly your calm manner will get people asking why you can seem content – even joyful – as a cancer patient. At the funeral home making preparations for your loved one's funeral the staff will observe your calm spirit at such a challenging moment in time. The peace of God which passes understanding will be the way you use suffering for a witness.

There are many ways to exploit suffering for the good of others. Instead of moaning about our trials get creative in how to witness and use these difficult situations for the glory of God and the good of others.

When I survey
the wondrous cross
On which
the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt
on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord,

that I should boast,
Save in the death
of Christ my God!
All the vain things
that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head,
His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love
flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love
and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose
so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm
of nature mine,
That were a present
far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul,
my life, my all.

- Isaac Watts

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