

PAIN AND SUFFERING

If you dream about a pain free life, that dream might turn out to be a nightmare! GARD is an information center about Genetic And Rare Diseases. On their web site they tell about a rare disease known as "Congenital insensitivity to pain". They summarize the disease in this way: "Congenital insensitivity to pain is a condition, present from birth, that inhibits the ability to perceive physical pain. Affected individuals are unable to feel pain in any part of their body. Over time, this lack of pain awareness can lead to an accumulation of injuries and health issues that may affect life expectancy. . ."

When I was a boy I attended the Pershing Elementary School in Tulsa, Oklahoma. A good friend, Jay Frank Dial, was a year ahead of me. Jay suffered from a disease known as "Transverse Myelitis" at nine years of age and spent the rest of his life in a wheel chair. He was paralyzed from the waist down and felt no pain in his legs and feet. On one occasion he rolled his wheel chair over their floor furnace and received serious burns on his legs. Since he felt no pain, he was unaware of his injuries until he smelled the burning of his own flesh. Jay became an expert in building model prototypes and worked for both LTV (Vought) and Bell Helicopter. His many books on W.W. II airplanes are available from a variety of sources. Sadly, he passed away in 1993. The point is, his failure to feel pain was not a blessing!

Many lepers also lose the ability to feel pain. A leper, for example, can step on a nail and not be aware of it. This injury, of course, can become infected and result in the loss of life. There have also been instances when the fingers and toes of lepers were eaten by rats while they were sleeping. Since they feel no pain, they are often not aware of what is happening.

PETER AND THE SUFFERINGS OF JESUS

After Peter made the good confession that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God (Matt. 16:16) we are told: "**From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.**" This news was a shock to Peter for at that time he was opposed to pain and suffering. So "**Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."**" (Matt. 16:21-23).

Please focus your mental and spiritual energies on these words of Jesus. It is obvious that God was not opposed to suffering for He ordained it. In fact, it was Satan that was opposed to suffering, not God! The very next words of Jesus involved every disciple taking up a cross. A cross, of course, is the very essence of suffering. "**Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it."**" (Matt. 16:24-25). Crosses are not just to sing about, they are to die upon. Crosses are not designed to be convenient or comfortable, they are designed to make you suffer! The very idea of taking up a cross involves pain and suffering.

In the next verses note how Jesus associates our present "suffering" with our "eternal reward": "**What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory**

with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.” (Matt. 16:26-27).

PETER LEARNED THAT SUFFERING CAN BE GOOD

While other Scriptures could be cited, we will illustrate Peter’s change in attitude toward suffering by referring to his first letter. This inspired letter was sent **“To God’s elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.”** (1 Pet. 1:1-2).

- It is a fact that God’s elect and chosen ones were suffering, and receiving grace at the same time.
- Peter acknowledged that they were suffering grief in all kinds of trials, but this was not bad for it was purifying their faith like gold is refined by fire (1 Pet. 1:6-7).
- The Spirit of Christ predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow (1 Pet. 1:11). Note that Christ set the example that we should follow in His steps (1 Pet. 3:21).
- **“For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”** **“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”** When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; **when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.**” (1 Pet. 2:19-23)
- **“Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed.”** **“Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.”** But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. **For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.**” (1 Pet. 3:13-18).
- **“Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin”** (1 Pet. 4:1)
- **“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.”** For it is time for judgment to begin with God’s household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, “If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” So then, those who suffer

according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good." (1 Pet. 4:12-19)

■ **"To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed"** (1 Pet. 5:1).

■ **"And the God of all grace, who called you to eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen."** (1 Pet. 5:10-11).

■ As you know, Jesus told Peter that he too would suffer and die as a martyr (John 21:18-19).

THROUGH GATES MADE OF PEARLS

It is significant that the gates to the Holy City are made of pearls: **"The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl (Rev. 21:21).**

Pearls, as you know, are formed as a result of pain. Pearls are formed when a small irritant, such as a grain of sand, finds its way inside of an oyster. The irritant causes pain and suffering and the oyster secretes a substance to protect itself from the pain. That substance transforms the worthless grain of sand into a valuable pearl. This is precisely what God does for believers!

God can make gates any way He wants to! It is significant, however, that God chose to make the gates into the Holy City out of pearls!

Please remember that God has given a purpose to pain!

THE TESTIMONY OF PAUL

The Apostle Paul was set apart from birth to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15-16). After his blinding confrontation with Christ on the Road to Damascus, the Lord sent a man named Ananias to lay hands on him and restore his sight. **"The Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.'** (Acts 9:15-16). From the very beginning of his service to Christ, Paul knew he was going to have to suffer!

- Paul's persecution began in Damascus when the Jews conspired to kill him (Acts 9:23). Even the governor ordered his arrest, but Paul escaped by being lowered in a basket from a window in the wall (2 Cor. 11:32-33).
- When Paul came to Jerusalem the Grecian Jews tried to kill him (Acts 9:28-30).
- On his first missionary journey Paul was driven out of Antioch in Syria and Iconium (Acts 13:50-14:7).
- At Lystra Paul was stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19-20).
- Paul compared his suffering with that of his critics by writing: **"Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger**

from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. (2 Cor. 11:23-28).

- Paul warned Timothy: **“You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”** (2 Tim. 3:10-12).
- Paul, however, did not complain about his suffering, he rejoiced because of it: **“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us”** (Rom. 5:1-5).

THE LIVING AND THE NON-LIVING

Please note that the very thing that causes a living tree to grow, will destroy a tree that has been cut down. A living tree requires sunshine, and rain. Jesus told a parable about a tree that also needed fertilizer (Lk. 13:6-9). Take a board from a tree that has been cut down, however, and expose it to sunshine, rain, and fertilizer and see how long it lasts. The point is, the suffering that caused Paul to rejoice will destroy someone who is not rooted and grounded in Christ (Eph. 3:17). You drop a seed in the ground and the water, sun, and fertilizer will cause it to grow. You drop your watch in the ground and the water, sun, and fertilizer will destroy it!

MIRACLES OF HEALING

Jesus is a faithful and merciful high priest who is filled with compassion. **“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with confidence, so we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need”** (Heb. 4:15-16).

The Scriptures are filled with examples of miracles that Jesus performed because of His compassion: He had compassion on the sick (Matt. 14:14); the lepers (Mk. 1:41); the hungry (Mk. 6:34-42); a widow whose only son died (Lk. 7:13); Etc. Yet when Paul pleaded three times with the Lord to take away his thorn in the flesh the Lord replied: **“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”** (2 Cor. 12:8-9).

Didn't Jesus have compassion on Paul? OF COURSE HE DID! JESUS LOVES EVERYBODY! JESUS WILL NEVER TEMPT ANYONE BEYOND WHAT WE ARE ABLE TO

BEAR (1 COR. 10:13). PLEASE NOTE THAT EVEN THOUGH PAUL'S THORN IN THE FLESH WAS A MESSENGER FROM SATAN, GOD USED PAUL'S SUFFERING TO DEFEAT SATAN!

Paul said triumphantly: **“Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:9-10).**

There is no doubt that the Father loved Jesus. Over and over we are told that the Father loves the Son (Jn. 3:35; 3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 15:9; 17:24; Matt. 3:17; 17:5; Mk.1:11; 9:7;12:6; Lk. 3:22; Etc.) In spite of the Father’s love for Jesus, however, Jesus still had to suffer. In fact, it was for the joy that was set before Him that He endured the cross. Because of this we are to **“Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (Heb. 12:2-3).**

COUNTING THE COST

“As they were walking along the road a man said to him, ‘I will follow you wherever you go’ (Lk. 9:57). Unfortunately, this man didn’t know where Jesus was going. Jesus, in fact, was on his way to Jerusalem to suffer and die. So **“Jesus replied, ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head’” (Lk. 9:58).**

The price you must pay to follow Jesus is not 10%, it is 100%. Jesus explicitly explained this in Lk. 14:26. In order to follow Jesus you must love Him more than you love your father or mother wife or children, brothers or sisters, or even your own life. Anyone who does not carry his cross cannot follow Jesus.

Jesus continued: **“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’ ‘Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.” (Lk. 14:28-33).**

William Borden was heir to the vast estate of the Borden Company that was founded in 1857. It became the largest producer of dairy products in America. Instead of pursuing a life of luxury and ease, however, he chose to be a missionary and died for Christ in a foreign land. He had written the following words in the back of his Bible - “No reserves – No retreats – No regrets”.

William Borden now knows that the Apostle Paul was right when he wrote: **“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that shall be revealed it us” (Rom. 8:18).**

We too can share in the glory that shall be revealed in us and someday God will wipe every tear from our eyes. Furthermore, we will live forever in a land where there is no death or mourning, or crying, or pain, for the period of pain and suffering has forever passed away (Rev. 21:4).