

Missions Month 2023, "Embracing Suffering in the Trenches", 2/19/23
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The pattern of Jesus's life is one of suffering. And we are told that our Christian way of life will look and feel like the earthly life of Jesus.

The pattern, the way of Jesus – is one where we take up our cross and follow.

And yet, when we suffer; we are often caught off guard...surprised... sometimes in a state of shock (if severe). Shock leads to questions. Why is this happening? Why aren't things going my way? Who's out to get me? Where are you God?

Today is a challenge to **embrace suffering in the trenches.**

I recently spent time in Africa, the Middle East, and even a short stop over in Western Europe. 11 flights in a week and half, 5 days in Tanzania, 3 days in Lebanon and lots of time to think, write and watch movies on airplanes. *Photos (5 second count on each, continue to pan as I talk about my trip; then back to title slide)*

Coming back from Africa & the Middle East, my perspective on suffering is a little more global. And on Friday night we heard about the extreme suffering that's happening in the Ukraine.

But let's begin with basic suffering and trial in the personal life.

How have you suffered?

Call to mind a specific trial you are facing, or a time from the past when you faced a difficult season of suffering.

I'll share two from my life, to help you think of yours.

A Sprained Ankle

A Season of Depression

In both examples...my goal was to move beyond that suffering.

Why are we so surprised when we suffer?

1 Peter 4:12-19

Suffering for Being a Christian

12 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.

13 But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.

16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

17 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?

18 And,

"If it is hard for the righteous to be saved,
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

19 So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

The word Suffering comes from old English, with Latin roots – *sufferre* - means 'to bear a weight from below'

Literally: To be underneath a heavy burden or weight.

To Suffer is the active experience of being stuck underneath something of great physical, spiritual or emotional weight. So it's natural for us to want to get out from underneath of suffering.

"There's no one that's not suffering." Suffering, while not always equal, is universal.

Types of Suffering

- **Suffering as a human**
- **Suffering as a Christian**
- **Suffering because you are a Christian**

Types of Suffering

- Suffering as a human

- The suffering that all of humanity experiences regardless of their faith. Turn on your TV.

Muhannad's Story (Photo with Passports)

- The capacity of any human to endure extreme suffering is evidence that He or She is an image-bearer and that we live in **Brokenness**

- **Suffering as a Christian** : Common suffering experienced and expressed through the life of a Christian.

- Suffering "as a Christian" is Biblical:

- Romans 5:3-4...we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.

- The goal is not to eliminate or explain suffering. **The goal is to enter it.** And there within the suffering to discover companionship with our Lord, Jesus. He is there. Found in the midst of suffering.

- **Suffering because you are a Christian** –

Voice of the Martyrs (slide) is a great resource for Christian Persecution
Witness = Martyr in Greek

How do we Embrace Suffering in the Trenches?

We live within the space between "**as**" & "**because**"

There are still few direct examples Christian persecution in our country. But more and more, the line is blurred.

You may be left out at school or held back from a promotion because you hold to a biblical world view.

Peter's message, to his beloved friends is direct & simple. I don't want us to miss the simplicity of his message.

How do we embrace suffering in the trenches?....

(1) Stop being Surprised!

- Don't allow the surprise of suffering to attack everything you believe.
- This is the tactic of the enemy.
- When we wallow in the why, we get stuck in a feedback loop that has the danger of removing the fruitfulness of suffering.
- Jesus promised his disciples that "in this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33)

(2) Start being Joyful!

- Hebrews 4:13: But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.
- Joy is a fruit of the Spirit. It's a way to take account. To count it all joy.
- Joy is not something we can do by will alone. It's an outpouring of the Holy Spirit – whom we have in us! So this is a spiritual response! It's a response of the Holy Spirit, pouring out through our circumstances.
- This Joy, a fruit, becomes striking/startling/confounding to those who lack hope.
- It's sourced in the future glory that we share with Jesus. This is not the end!

(3) Wear the name of Jesus Boldly!

Don't shy away from the name of Jesus!

- Hebrews 4:16: However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.
- We need to be ready for the shift: that more and more we will be ready to suffer because we are Christian; because we bear that name.
- In our boldness, we never give up "gentleness & respect"

CS Lewis quote on the test of faith in the midst of suffering:

You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death to you. It is easy to say you believe a rope to be strong and sound as long as you are merely using it to cord a box. But suppose you had to hang by that rope over a precipice. Wouldn't you then first discover how much you really trusted it? C.S. Lewis, A Grief Observed.

We discover how much we trust the name of Jesus when we take a leap into unknown world of boldly wearing His Name.

If you don't think you're suffering *because* of Jesus, maybe it's time to take a step toward that idea. Not to blindly go forward, or even to seek persecution out. But to be bold in a new way. In our boldness, we never let go of gentleness and respect.

What is a step of boldness that's appropriate for your life?

Examples:

- Walk someone through the Three Circles Gospel Guide, and clearly invite them into a personal relationship with Jesus.
- Tell a friend at school that you are a Christian, and explaining why that's important to you.
- Write an editorial about the crossroads of your faith and everyday life.
- Meet a neighbor for coffee, and listening to their story.
- Spend a few minutes at work, sharing how your faith has made an everyday impact to your approach at work.
- Ask a friend how you can pray for them.
- Here's one I heard recently: get a group of guys together to play basketball, and then use the in-between time to talk about Jesus
- Become a foster parent (*embodying the Gospel*)
- Become a mentor at the Urban Promise Academy
- Join one of the monthly Broken Beginnings Gospel Outreaches in the City
- You get the idea...

Hebrews 4:19

So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I **commit my spirit!**" And having said this he breathed his last.

Luke 23:46

Closing Prayer:

1 Peter 1:6-10

6 In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Take a moment to consider what God is asking of you ...what step of boldness doe he want you to take...

Cross References:

Isaiah 43:2

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

2 Corinthians 4:17

For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

Philippians 1:29

For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.

Philippians 3:10

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...

2 Corinthians 12:10

For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

1 Peter 2:21

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

James 1:2-4

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, or you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Romans 5:3-5

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Romans 8:16-18

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

2 Corinthians 4:7-10

Treasure in Jars of Clay

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

John 16:33

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

Luke 14:27

And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

Matthew 5:10-12

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Hebrews 2:10

In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered.

The way of a Resilient Disciple is patterned after the way of Jesus. In suffering, we take on his likeness. Suffering like him we become like him, exchanging earthly suffering with an invitation to one day experience heavenly Glory. In Christ's likeness, we suffer. Imitate Christ, and you will imitate his suffering.

A Framework for the Trenches:

- > **Their Story (Listen)**
- > **Your Story (Speak)**
- > **God's Story (3 Circles Slide)**