

MY HEROES AND MY CHURCHES

Romans 5:5-6

“We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom He has given us.”

(Read Hebrews 10:22-25 / 32-36)

Suffering can draw us closer to *God*; to *others* and to **our best selves**. Paul suffered so much, that he could be called the “Job” of the New Testament. He was stoned and left for dead; was imprisoned; was beaten almost to death and if that wasn’t enough, he came down with some kind of suffering he called “*a thorn*” in his body that “*tortured him*” every day*. He told Christians like you and me, in Rome, how he felt about it and what it did for him. (*2 Corinthians 11:22 – 12:10).

One of Satan’s most powerful weapons, to cause us to lose our faith in God and to lose faithfulness to Him; is suffering. It causes many Christians to doubt the love of God, disobey the Word of God, and defect from the service of God. There are a lot of bitter people in our churches, some still sitting in pews, who are secretly angry with God over the course their lives have taken. They forget, that for most of us, coming to God in the first place, and finding closeness to Him after that, came out of some crisis in our life that we could not handle. Most of us have been driven to God many times by our storms.

If we keep on serving and trusting God, we will see Him coming through the midst of it; like He did that night on Lake Galilee, to the disciples. If He does not *deliver* us, He will use it to *develop* us - make us stronger, better people. Most of the time, the Lord’s best servants, like

Paul, are those who have suffered and found in Him, their comfort, their strength, their hope, their love for others. The words we admire, like courage, compassion, mercy, endurance, trust all come out of the crucible of pain.

Paul found joy in the midst of “**sufferings**” (pressure – those things that can crush us) because they produced “**character**” (Romans 5:4). This word actually means “**proof**” and points to a life God approves. The TEV translates it “**God’s approval**”. Most of the time it is suffering that produces men and women, to whom Jesus will say when they meet Him, “**Well done, good and faithful servant**” (Matthew 25).

We get God’s strength *from each other*, as we assemble together in His house. In all the New Testament letters, only one verse tells Christians to go to church (meeting places). After Paul wrote Romans, there came a time in Rome when Peter and Paul both were executed by Nero (*ancient writings*). Christians there were beaten, killed, exposed to public shame, had their property taken, etc. (Hebrews 10:32-35).

And God came through their storm to them. He raised up someone to write “Hebrews” for them and for us. The Holy Spirit of Jesus, through him, told them to go to church and meet together to “*encourage one another*” (10:24) – give each other the courage to go on (10:36) (Persevere).

In every church I have been a part of, I have found some of God’s people who have inspired me to “keep on keeping on” no matter what life throws at me. I want all of you to know – you are my heroes. You don’t whine; you shine. You don’t get up and say, “Good Lord, morning”; but “Good morning Lord.” And no matter what you have on your plate today, when asked how you feel, you answer, “Fine, I hope you are.” That helps me! That helps everybody. That makes us want to go on for God and it makes us want to go to church.