

Seminar 3 - Blessings from Buffetings

❖ **Psalm 66:7-11 – trials come by divine appointment**

- They are often severe.
- They are always purposeful.
- They are clearly limited.

Blaise Pascal – “The heart has reasons that reason does not know.”

Warren Wiersbe – “Pray that I do not waste this suffering.”

1. Suffering deepens out fellowship with God

❖ **The supreme purpose of our lives is to know God**

- **Genesis 3:8** – Adam and Eve walked with God.
- **Revelation 22:4** – WE are destined to see him face to face.
- We were created to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.
- **John 17:3** – This is the essence of salvation.
- **Philippians 3:10-11** – It should be our greatest ambition.

❖ **Ephesians 2:1-7 - The danger of drift - the signs of a “lost love”**

- Do you long for intimacy?
- Do you cherish worship?
- Do you enjoy service?
- Are you still excited by the gospel?
- Do you love what Jesus loves?

❖ **Suffering drives us into the arms of God**

- **Psalm 73:13-22** – It drives us **to** God or **from** God – the choice is ours.
- **Job 42:5** – “My ears have heard – now my eyes have seen you.”
- **Matthew 11:28** – We are come to Jesus when we are weary and weighed down with trouble.
- “God whispers in our prosperity; he speaks in his word; he shouts in our suffering.” - C S Lewis

❖ **The experience of God’s people**

- **Hudson Taylor** - “He will not lead you in a way that you will know for that would profit you little, but he will lead you in a way that you know not so that through a thousand intimacies the way may be forever memorable, both for him and for you.”
- **Richard Wurmbrand** – “They can take away my freedom and my dignity; they can take away all my comforts and the people I love; they can even take away my life. But they cannot take from me the firm grip of the nail pierced hands of my Saviour. They cannot take my God away from me.”
- **Elisabeth Elliot** - “I am not a theologian or a scholar, but I am very aware of the fact that pain is necessary to all of us. In my own life, I think I can honestly say that out of the deepest pain has come the strongest conviction of the presence of God and the love of God.”

2. *Suffering strips away our idols*

❖ *What is the heart and why is it important?*

- **Mark 7:20-23** – The heart is the driving force of our lives.
- **Ezekiel 14:3** – We set up idols in our hearts so that they become an “*idol factory*.”
- The heart is constantly under siege.

❖ *What is an Idol?*

- “*An idol is that which we look to for all the good and in which we find refuge in every time of need. The trust and faith of the heart is what makes an idol. That which the heart chooses and entrusts to is really your god*”
- When a good thing becomes an ultimate thing, it is an idol.
- We love the wrong thing, or we love the right things too much.
- **Jeremiah 2: 5,11-13** – the riddle of the sands.

❖ *Suffering causes us to ask – “Where is my heart?”*

- Suffering strips away the idols that we love more than God.
- It changes our priorities and philosophy of life.
- It changes our attitude to the good things in our lives.
- **John 15:1-5** – He prunes us so that we will bear more fruit.
- **Psalms 51:17** – What sacrifices are acceptable to God?

❖ *What are the common idols that Christians delight in?*

❖ *Does suffering strip us of our idols? How?*

3. Suffering transforms us into the likeness of Christ

❖ God is committed to making us holy

- **Exodus 19:3-6; 1 Peter 1:15-16** - Holiness of life is the purpose of the triune God and the goal of our salvation.
- **Ephesians 1:4** – Holiness is the purpose of election.
- **Ephesians 5:25-27** – Holiness is the purpose of the cross.

❖ God's goal is to make us like Jesus

- **Romans 8:28-30** – God's purpose is to create people like his Son.
- **2 Corinthians 3:17-18** – It is the process of transformation by contemplation.
- **Romans 12:1-2** – Do not conformed to this world but be transformed.
- **Ephesians 5:1-2** – Follow God's example and live a life of love.
- **Hebrews 5:8** - Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered.

❖ Romans 5:3-4 – God is building character

- *“Character cannot be developed in ease or quiet. Only through the experience of trials and suffering can the soul be shaped and transformed.”*
- **Romans 5:1-5** – Suffering produces perseverance.
- **Hebrews 12:9-12** - God chastens those he loves.
- **James 1:2-4** – Count it all joy when you suffer
- **1 Peter 1:6-9** – Trials prove the genuineness of our faith.
- *“The greatest thing God does today is to take a sinful man or woman out of a sinful world, make them like Jesus, put them back in a sinful world and keep them like Jesus”*
- The Holy Spirit uses the Bible, people, and circumstances to transform us.
- We are to make Jesus visible, intelligible, and desirable.

4. Suffering makes our faith more vital

“Suffering strips away the things we love in order to give us better things. It dispels the illusion that we have the strength and competence to rule over our own lives. We become nothing through suffering, so that we can be filled with God's grace. It is God's nature to make something out of nothing.; hence one who is not yet nothing, out of him God cannot make anything. Therefore, God accepts only the forsaken, cures only the sick, gives sight only to the blind, restores life only to the dead, sanctifies only sinners, gives wisdom only to the unwise. In short he has mercy only on those who are wretched.”

Martin Luther

❖ 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 – trials stretch our faith

- Suffering forces us to rely on God not ourselves.
- Self-reliance is the enemy of faith.

- *“Power is more intoxicating than alcohol and drugs. The pulpit is an exceedingly dangerous place for any child of Adam to occupy. Trials are designed to keep us dependent on God.” **John Stott***

❖ **2 Corinthians 12:7-10 - trials magnify grace**

- The thorn was a painful, chronic, limiting, and humiliating problem.
- It magnified the grace of God in Paul’s life.
- Suffering transforms our attitude to ourselves – it humbles us and removes our pride and self-reliance and teaches us how fragile we really are.
- *“We never really know that God is all we need until God is all that we have got”.*
- Trees used for masts are chosen from the exposed hill side – tested and true.
- On the other side of suffering we are more resilient

5. Suffering alerts us to eternal realities

❖ **Psalm 90:12 – “Help us to number our days aright...”**

- **Psalm 139:13-18** – Our whole life is in God’s hands.
- **Matthew 6:19-21** – We are to work for treasure in heaven.
- **Romans 8:18** – Present suffering and future glory.
- **2 Corinthians 4:17-18** – These light and momentary sufferings are preparing for us an eternal weight of glory.

❖ **Suffering can unlock the heart**

- **Luke 13:1-5** – Jesus calls for repentance.
- **Acts 16:25-31** – What brought the jailor to Jesus?
- *“Suffering is a roadblock to hell.”*

❖ **How should we help unbelievers who come to us for help at a time of suffering?**

6. Suffering leads to the growth of the gospel

❖ We are called to share in the suffering of Christ

- **Matthew 10:24-25** – The servant is not above the Master.
- **Philippians 3:10-11** – We are to share in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.
- **1 Peter 4:12-19** - We participate in the sufferings of Christ.

❖ Colossians 1:24 – We are to fill up the sufferings of Christ

- The gospel is furthered through our suffering.
- The sacrifice of Christ was once and for all and was utterly sufficient (Hebrews 7:27; 9:12,26).
- **Colossians 1:24** - Paul's suffering is **not** to add to the worth of Christ's sufferings, but to extend them to the people they were meant to save.
- What is lacking is **not** their value, but the fact that they are not yet seen and known and loved among the nations.
- **John Piper** - "God intends the afflictions of Christ to be presented to the world through the afflictions of his people."
- The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.

❖ Paul's example

- Paul more suffering than anyone (Romans 8:35; 1 Corinthians 4:9-; 2 Corinthians 4:8-9; 6:4-5; 11:23-39; 12:10, 25-29).
- **Romans 1:5; 15:20-21** – Paul was passionate about the gospel.
- **Philippians 1:12-18** – Paul rejoices that his suffering leads to the growth of the gospel.
- His guards hear the gospel, the believers are encouraged, and the gospel is preached.

7. Suffering makes our care more credible

❖ We are called care

- **Genesis 2:18** – God does not intend us to be alone.
- **Galatians 6:1-2** – We are called to bear one another's burdens.
- **Hebrews 10:24-25** – The ministry of encouragement – who is being addressed here?
- **2 Corinthians 1:3-7** – God pours in suffering, so that he can pour in comfort, so that we can become a source of comfort to others.

❖ Be careful how you use the truth

- There is a way of using a theological argument so that it damages people
- It is not the fault of the argument but of the one using it.
- Real truths can be applied incorrectly
- Not all medicine applies to every illness in the same way.
- **Matthew 11:28** – The example of Jesus
- **Matthew 12:15-21** – Jesus is the Servant of God who does not break the bruised reed.

❖ **Develop a sensitive and compassionate heart**

- **Do** encourage people to talk and learn to be a good listener.
- **Do** avoid glib answers.
- **Do not** be judgmental.
- **Do** not imagine that “one-size fits all” in pastoral care.
- **Do** pray for the person’s healing or for relief from the trial.
- **Do** give tangible physical support.
- **Do** encourage self-care.
- **Do** give emotional support.
- **Do not** belittle their suffering
- **Do** be ready to offer alternative perspectives.
- **Do** give spiritual support.
- **Do not** put them under spiritual pressure.
- **Do** acknowledge any achievements.
- **Do** monitor possible suicidal gestures or threats.
- **Do not** forget the “others” - the care givers.
- **Do** maintain a healthy detachment.
- **Do not** announce their suffering on the notice sheet without permission.
- **Do not** forget to take care of yourself.

What is a friend?

“A friend is one to whom we may pour out the contents of our hearts – one with whom we can share the burdens of our souls – good or bad a friend will listen. A friend is one with a gentle heart who will sift what is shared and keep what is worth saving. A friend understands lovingly what has been spoken in haste and blow the rest away with a heart of kindness. A friend is one who will sympathize with us when we need sympathy, be honest with us when we need honesty, rebuke us when we need rebuking, understanding us when we need understanding, forget what is spoken in frustration and weakness and seek to help and strengthen us in an hour of sorrow and uncertainty.”

❖ **What do we learn from this quotation?**