

When Life Goes South

PRAYER

- Begin with a few moments of sharing thanks and praises in prayer

OPEN

Respond to the following quotes about suffering:

"A faith that can't be tested can't be trusted." -Warren Wiersbe

"By affliction, the Lord separates the sin that he hates from the soul that he loves." -William Secker

"Smooth seas do not make skillful sailors." -African proverb

"A sickbed often teaches more than a sermon." -Thomas Watson

"Life is difficult...at times an endless series of problems. Do we want to moan and groan about them or face them? Do we want to teach the next generation the disciplines involved in accepting and solving them or encourage them to run and hide from them? The tragedy, of course, is that the substitute itself ultimately becomes more painful than the 'legitimate suffering' it was trying to avoid. Avoidance of suffering means we also avoid the growth that problems demand of us. Our determination to push pain away instead of meeting it head on creates a vicious cycle."

-Charles Swindoll, *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life*

Before God wants to change our circumstances, He wants to change our hearts. If our circumstances change for the better, but we remain the same, then we will become worse. God's purpose in providence is not to make us **comfortable**, but to make us **conformable**— "conformed to the image of Jesus Christ." (Romans 8:29) Christ-like character is the divine goal for each of us. However, this is difficult to understand and see when we are facing hardships and struggles. Let's learn the rewards of doing God's will under the most difficult circumstances.

LESSON ONE: We Learn through Suffering

Read Hebrews 5:8. Note that verse 8 says that although Jesus was the Son of God "he learned obedience through what he suffered." What is the point or message of this verse? What does it say about our own suffering?

LESSON TWO: We Grow through Suffering

Read Hebrews 5:9. Note that verse 9 says that suffering made Jesus "perfect" (whole or complete). What is the point or message of this verse? What does it say about our own suffering?

LESSON THREE: We can be Blessed through Suffering

Read I Peter 4:1-2; 12-13. Note the words in verse 13: rejoice, be glad, overjoyed, glory. What is the point or message of this verse? What does it say about our own suffering?

Our world says avoid all pain and suffering, but the Bible says to rejoice or even glory in it. Why would the Bible teach this? Why is suffering so critical to our discipleship in Jesus Christ? How can your small group encourage one another in your present struggles and suffering?

CLOSE in PRAYER