

CHAPTER 13

ON SUFFERING & INNER PEACE

Suffering is enduring through physical or emotional hardships, that are above and beyond the normal kind of burdens experienced in everyday life. No one enjoys suffering. No one understands fully, why people have to suffer in this life.

We all seek inner peace. We seek a sense of satisfaction with what we are doing. We have a strong desire to have a calmness within ourselves that is unshakable. Each day we set about in our lives, with the goal of locating this inner peace. Unfortunately, some think it lies in alcohol or drugs; others seem to feel it lies in abundance of money or 'things'; and then some look to an inner sanctum of friendship... They are OK as long as other supportive people are around. Despite our attempts, inner peace often seems to be an elusive commodity.

But the scriptures have much to say about both suffering and inner peace. Let's first try to understand why we suffer. Then we can take a look at what the Bible has to tell us about achieving the inner peace we all want so much.

Suffering

In some instances we suffer hardship as punishment for something we did or failed to do.

On occasions, God allows us to suffer as a corrective measure. As humans, we sometimes need a 'nudge' to redirect our paths towards a life with Christ.

Some of us suffer because through it, people are brought to salvation. Both the one suffering and those observing the actions of the sufferer can be affected and influenced toward salvation.

And then, some of us suffer in life..... and we have no idea why. But God always knows the reason for our travail.

Punitive Suffering

Virtually none among us enjoys punishing our children. I'm sure God has much the same problem. But there are times when punishment is necessary. Looking back, I am grateful to my parents for the times I was punished. It was needed. I learned from punishment and it influenced my life for the good. I see now, how difficult it was for them to mete out that punishment; yet their love for me required it.

The same kind of relationship exists between God and mankind. God knows that punishment may cause suffering. But in the long run, enduring it helps us;

Prov. 3:11-12 (NIV)

My son do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.

We should not be angry or upset with God, over the times when He carries out discipline;

Prov. 12:1 (NIV)

Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid.

Heb. 12:5 & 6 (NIV)

... My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.

Heb. 12:11 (NIV)

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Corrective Punishment

Sometimes we need to just stop and think for a while, about what we are doing with our lives. Some never do it. Others give thought, and decide to continue along their current paths. Some of us conclude that what we are doing with our time is not fruitful..... not for our families, friends, others. Perhaps we see our deeds as wrong, or even ungodly. Ideally, such introspection should cause us to change our plans and decide to proceed differently with our lives.

When we do not reflect on the circumstances of our lives, and do not correct those paths and actions that really need changing, then God may step in and act on our best behalf;

Prov. 3:7 & 8 (NIV)

Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.

Rom. 5:3 & 4 (NIV)

... we also rejoice in our suffering, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Suffering Leading To Salvation

One of the best examples of a person suffering for the sake of magnifying the gospel of Christ, is the life of the apostle Paul. Despite an apparent physical impediment (which Paul says tormented him), God would not heal it. Nor could Paul or the other apostles remove it, even though they were blessed with miraculous gifts. Even though Paul prayed for healing, God refused. God knew Paul's perseverance with the work of the gospel. God knew that his work was producing positive results despite his ailment.

Because of his impediment, Paul never had to be concerned about becoming 'puffed up' with self-importance. On the contrary, it helped him to more effectively teach the gospel of the New Testament;

II Cor. 12:7-10 (NIV)

... there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times, I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weakness, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Of course, it's through Jesus Christ's suffering that we even have an opportunity for eternal life with the Father. Not only is this a great example of suffering for the sake of salvation, but it puts a relativism to suffering. After all, Jesus was willing to suffer for all mankind and endured to the point of death. Considering that, perhaps we can more easily accommodate the tribulations affecting our own lives;

Heb. 5:8 & 9 (NIV)

Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

I Pet. 2:21-24 (NIV)

... 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. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

I Pet. 4:19 (NIV)

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

I Cor. 11:32 (NIV)

When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

Whether we do or do not know the reason we are suffering an ordeal, God does give comfort and assurance to those who continue to follow Him;

Rom. 8:28 (NIV)

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Phil. 4:13 (NIV)

I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Inner Peace

Within each of us is the capacity to seek and absorb inner peace. We all strive for the peace that can exist deep within our souls. Such peace gives us assurance that all is calm, all is right with our souls. It isn't just a matter of happiness or restfulness. But these emotions are present when we experience true inner peace.

Obtaining this peace depends on our ability to *yield* and *relegate* our problems and crises to God. we cannot do the whole thing alone. God is willing to help us get through this life, but we have to let Him guide us through the tough parts;

Phil. 4:6 & 7 (NIV)

Do not be anxious about anything; but in everything, by

prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present our requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

I Pet. 5:7 (NIV)

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Psalms 9:9-20 (NIV)

The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you.

Psalms 55:22 (NIV)

Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.

Psalms 34:18 (NIV)

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Prov. 3:21-26 (NIV)

My son, preserve sound judgment and discernment, do not let them out of your sight; they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck. Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being snared.

Matt. 6:25-34 (NIV)

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

Inner Peace & Astrology

Too many people seek peace of mind through the machinations of astrology. Practitioners of astrology discern events in the lives of people, from the relative positions of objects in the sky..... the sun, moon, planets, and stars. Astrology is an 'art' and should never be confused with the science of astronomy.

When one places life hopes and plans on the outcome of celestial processes, God is being *bypassed*. We can not know what the future holds for us. The best we can do is ask God to look over us and keep us on the safe and correct life path. When we know by faith that it will be so, then He will help us. Consulting an astrologer means that faith and hope has been placed in a human being. God is relegated to a subordinate position in our lives. For a Christian, this is indeed a poor state of affairs. God doesn't have much good to say about astrologers;

Isa. 47:13-14 (NIV)

"... Let your astrologers come forward, those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you. Surely they are like stubble..."

In this negative statement, it's clear that God does not respect what astrologers do. Gesenius (Reference -13; #7179) defines 'stubble' as used here, to mean, "straw, or chaff- as dispersed by the wind." The essence of the definition being, something that has no use.

The Christian will avoid astrology in all its forms. Inner peace will only come from within; and from within, we seek God as our peace.

