



Behind Enemy Lines Training Saints

Written by an Inmate

On Suffering

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Today, I want to speak with you about suffering. Why do we suffer? This is a question that is asked by all of us at some point, because we all suffer. But why?

We know that when sin entered the world, with it came sorrow, suffering, and ultimately death. But why, when we are trying to do what's right, do we still suffer.

Christ warns us over and over that we are going to struggle. Jesus tells us in **John 15:18**, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you." In **Verse 19**, we get an idea why: "If you were of the world, the world would love its own: but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." St. Peter even calls us "aliens and exiles."

Jesus says He chose us out of the world making a clear distinction between what is His and what is the world's! St. James says in his epistle in **James 4:4**, "Unfaithful creatures! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

Now I want you to take what St. James said and look at it from the opposite perspective. Friendship with God is enmity with the world. Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of God makes himself an enemy of the world.

This adds a whole new aspect to the reason for our suffering. Jesus asks in the Parable of the Lost Sheep in **Luke 15:4**, "What man of you having a hundred sheep if he loses one, does not leave the ninety-nine in the pasture to go find the one which is lost?" This parable is also a two-way street. We were all once that lost sheep, and our loving Shepherd rescued us. He chose us out of the world.

But, the other side of that coin is this. The devil will also come to find the one he has lost. If the devil's got a hundred people doing his bidding, and one of them comes to God, guess who he's coming after?

Now, St. Peter makes a distinction between suffering for wrongdoing and suffering for doing what is right. **1 Peter 2:19-20**, "for one is approved if, mindful of God, he endures pain while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it, if when you do wrong and are beaten for it you take it patiently? But, if when you do right and suffer for it and take it patiently, you have God's approval."

We know that when we do wrong and suffer for it, that is simply our punishment. That is just. But, when we suffer for doing what is right, we have God's approval. Now we're getting somewhere!

Jesus tells us plainly in **John 15:20**, "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also."

Look what is being said: we will be persecuted. Why? Because Christ chose us out of this world full of sin and death, the world hates us. And because the world hates us, we are going to suffer as long as we are in this world. But, ... the suffering that we are guaranteed to face, as long as it isn't for wrongdoing, is achieving for us the approval of God.

Brothers, we are being tested ... in **Genesis 22** after Abraham and Abimelech made their covenant of peace over the well. In **Genesis 22:1**, it says "God tested Abraham." God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son. And because of Abraham's obedience, it was credited to him as righteousness. He passed the test!! **Proverbs 17:3** says, "The crucible is for silver, and the furnace for gold, but the Lord

tests the heart.” **1 Thessalonians 2:4**, St. Paul says, “but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts.” Buy why does God allow our hearts to be tested? What is the purpose?

Job in the **Old Testament** lost everything. He tells us in **Job 23:10**, “But He knows the way that I take: when He has tested me I will come forth as gold.” Job trusted God. Job knew that God was somehow making him better. Job was a good and faithful servant who suffered loss upon loss, but he stayed faithful. Job is a powerful example of faithfulness through hardship. He knew that God would make him “come forth as gold.”

There is a much bigger picture than what we often see. We get so caught up in the “**what**”, we often lose sight of the “**who**”!!! God loves us!

St. Paul asks us in **Romans 8:35**, “who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” Then in **Verses 38-39** he says, “For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” God loves us!!!

God is trying to teach us to trust in Him. Sometimes we suffer unjustly; it’s because we live in a world that is full of evil. St. Paul tells us in **Ephesians 6:12**, “for we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” Make no mistake, we are at war, and war will bring suffering. In **2 Timothy 2:3**, St. Paul says, “Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.” We are soldiers fighting together, and Jesus is our leader. He too suffered in this world.

St. Peter tells us in **1 Peter 4:1**, “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same thought, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.” He continues in **Verse 12**, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you.”

Brothers, suffering is our proving ground! It makes us stronger, it teaches us to trust in God, it is perfecting our faith!!!

St. James goes a step further and tells us in **James 1:2-4**, “Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for 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.” Perfect, Complete, Lacking in Nothing!!! Then he says in **Verse 12**, “Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love Him.” Blessed is the man who endures!

One of my favorite verses is **Romans 8:28** where St. Paul says, “We know that all things work together for the good of those who love Him, those who are called according to His purpose.” He knows we love Him. We are here in this room for Him. No matter what happens in this world, no matter how bad it gets, no matter what we go through, God is with us! We never suffer alone, and in our suffering, God is working all things together for our good.

St. Paul says in **Verse 18** before this, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. That is exactly what we should continue to focus on, “the glory that is to be revealed to us!”

In **2 Corinthians 4:8-9**, St. Paul says, “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed.”

Know, my brothers, it is not in vain. Our trials, our tribulations, our temptations, our suffering is not in vain!!!

St. Paul says in **Verses 17-18**, “For this slight and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things which are seen but to the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are unseen are eternal.”

Why do we suffer? Because God chose us out of this world. We are aliens and exiles; we are outcasts - hated because we don’t fit in. This world hated Jesus for the same reasons. This world is full

of darkness, and people enjoy the darkness because it hides their wicked ways and evil deeds. The world hated Christ because He is light, and His light exposed the darkness, and revealed its wickedness. His light shines in us, so the world hates us too; therefore we suffer!

But ... this suffering is momentary. Every trial, every tear, every injustice, every temptation, every battle, every single test we face will come to an end!!! This too shall pass.

What is the purpose of going through all of this? It is to make us grow, help us to relate to and understand one another. It is to build our trust in God, and to teach us to rely on Him. It is to perfect our faith and make us complete. It is achieving for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison!!!

Brothers, face your suffering, knowing that it is temporary, and that God is faithful to see you through it. AMEN.