

5 Ways Suffering Brings Life

One of my favorite verses is Philippians 3:10. Here Paul is in prison, yet instead of asking God to rescue him from prison he says:

“... to know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and *the fellowship of His sufferings*, being conformed to His death: if somehow I might make it to the resurrection of the dead.”

Most people read the first part of that verse and stop. But in order to receive resurrection power, you must first die. No one has ever been raised from the dead that wasn't dead first.

We embrace this death—entering into His sufferings—by suffering for the gospel. Here are five spiritual benefits of suffering:

1. With suffering comes intimacy. There is a level of intimacy with Yeshua that can only be obtained through suffering. Paul equates knowing the Messiah with participating in His suffering.

2. Yeshua invites us to suffer with Him. When I went through a particularly painful event many years ago—so painful, I thought I was finished in ministry—I heard the voice of the Lord. I knew I could defend myself and many encouraged me to do so. But Yeshua's word to me was, “I am inviting you to die with me.” The minute I said yes, peace entered my soul and I knew he would vindicate me. And he did within just a few months. I would have short-circuited His intervention had I defended myself.

3. Suffering brings maturity. In Bible College we had a young ‘prophet’ come and minister. He was 18 and clearly anointed, but our director warned us that only the *years* bring wisdom. He was exposed as a homosexual a few years later. Joseph as a teen had a prophetic gift, but he was too immature to use it.

By blabbing to his brothers he ended up as a slave—then a prisoner. After many years and trials he was finally mature enough for the calling. His suffering prepared him. In a span of a few hours he became the most powerful man on earth.

4. The greater the call, the greater the suffering. King David received the call to be King as a boy. And for a while things progressed as if it could happen any minute: Invited to play harp for Saul, kills Goliath, becomes a general and even gets a promise from the rightful heir, Jonathan, that David would be king in his place. And then suddenly the king wants to kill him. For more than a decade he suffered as he ran from Saul. But in the end, this all served to prepare him. The older, more mature David had two chances to kill Saul, but wouldn't. He had grown and shortly thereafter became king.

5. From death comes life. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:10-12 that when we embrace death for the gospel, it will produce life in our hearers. All the suffering He endured for the gospel released a powerful anointing in his efforts to preach the Good News.

We lived a year in Ukraine not long after the revolution. We battled an apartment full of fleas, a bathroom that spewed out sewage through our floor every night and threats from the Mafia. It was hard! But in the end, we left behind a new congregation that has flourished until this day.

While suffering isn't meant to be fun, there is simply no other way to be all that God has called you to be.

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