

Why God Allows You to Suffer

"Yes, certainly, I count everything as loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have forfeited the loss of all things and count them as rubbish that I may gain Christ, and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God on the basis of faith, to know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death" (Phil. 3:8-10).

I have been suffering, and as I have suffered, my eyes have been opened to others who are suffering. I always knew of others who were suffering, but there is a difference in knowing of someone and then knowing that someone in truth. My own minor experiences with suffering kept me from being able to enter the suffering of others. But as I have personally suffered, I have found a new ability to enter others' suffering as they have entered mine.

Enter is an interesting word for this phenomenon. My friends and I have gone through a doorway that brings us into each others' suffering. We don't sit outside peering in through a window. We sit in the room together, sharing the experience in a way that others who have not suffered cannot. There is a fellowship, a companionship, a camaraderie in this room of suffering in which we mutually sit. Paul calls this the fellowship of suffering.

In Philippians 3, Paul is talking of this fellowship in terms of Jesus and His suffering. We enter into a special place where He sits, as He enters into ours. He is the Man of Sorrows, well acquainted with grief. We have a fellowship with Him in our suffering in particular that is worth meditating on. But Paul also talks of the church as Jesus' body. So it

makes sense to me that when I enter another believer's suffering, I am entering into Christ's as well. This fellowship of suffering involves both the Head and the rest of His body.

"If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it" (1 Cor. 12:26).

The fellowship of sufferers is a room for the mature in the faith. Suffering moves one from kindergarten to master's level faith pretty quickly. People wise up. Their naive notions of how their lives would turn out burn off. They put off trite kindergarten sayings of Christianity. They recognize the prosperity gospel for the heresy that it is. They quiet down and man (or woman) up.

Here are some of the things I have experienced in fellowship with other sufferers.

1. Quiet sitting rather than trite answers.
2. People who pray asking God for advice rather than offering advice of their own.
3. People who can give wisdom on how to BE rather than what to DO. (Sufferers understand being in a situation where you can't control the outcome while non-sufferers feel threatened by that idea and have a hard time with anything except advice on how to get out of your suffering.)
4. People who understand this world is not our home.

There comes a moment in the path of suffering when you move from efforts to jettison the weight from your shoulders toward adjusting the weight so you can carry it for the long haul. Not all suffering lasts all of life. I have been healed from severe foot pain that kept me from activity for a good year or so. But I have not been healed from type 1 diabetes, and I have had to learn how to manage it, knowing that I am likely

to wear an insulin pump for the rest of my life.

A rebellious child is something one can wait in hope in this life for their return to faith. But the child who died from cancer is a permanent loss, a weight that cannot be jettisoned from the story of your life. Such weight is impossible to bear if you don't believe in the joy set before us, the destination in eternity that will not disappoint. Sufferers, especially those permanently scarred by circumstances that can not be undone in this life, get this deep, important truth in a way non-sufferers don't.

Maybe the best thing about the fellowship of suffering is the mutual encouragement we receive to persevere from others in the circle. Wesley Hill's *Washed and Waiting* did this for me. His struggle was in a totally different area of life, but the last chapter on his vision for enduring in suffering and temptation ministered deeply to me. When my friend admonishes me from his wheel chair to not quit; when my rejected sister in Christ reminds me that there is nowhere else to go, for Jesus alone has the words of life; when the woman dying of cancer writes of mundane faithfulness to the bitter end; the fellowship in this suffering empowers me to persevere, to count the loss not worthy to be compared to the glory of knowing Christ.

"Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ ..." (Phil. 3:8, KJV).

If you are suffering, your first reaction, especially if you are early on in your suffering, is likely to find others whose suffering reconciled. The estranged couple who worked it out. The cancer patient who recovered. The parents of a rebellious child who saw their child return to the faith. But as your suffering continues, you'll find a deep treasure in those who

have endured without earthly resolution to their pain. Their perseverance will bless you as they know this world is not our home and look to the treasure that lies ahead.

“Look! I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whoever believes in Him will not be ashamed” (Rom. 9:33, MEV).

Enter into this fellowship with Jesus and His body. Do not be afraid of it, for it is life giving in the garden of faith. You are not left to walk this road alone.

*Adapted from **Wendy Alsup's** blog, . Wendy has authored three books including By His Wounds You are Healed: How the Message of Ephesians Transforms a Woman's Identity. She is also a wife, mom and college math teacher who loves ministering to women.*