

Purpose in Pain

✖ As a young believer, whenever circumstances that I viewed as roadblocks to an otherwise smoothly sailed life appeared, I took them as something to remove. They had no business causing a detour in my well-organized, over-controlled lifestyle. I had determined that anything negative must be the devil's playground, and I needed many hours of standing on the Word to void that which I perceived as his sinister activity. However, this seemed to have no effect. Situations remained.

Avoiding them or trying to pray the problems away was of no use either. Troubles sometimes arrived in a rush with no advance warning. It was confusing. Shouldn't believers be exempt from the normal living that existed for nonbelievers? Doesn't the writer of the psalms tell us that the crooked will be made straight? Doesn't Jesus calm troubled waters? But I also kept coming across words such as "suffering," "trials" and "testing" from New Testament writers. Could it be that somehow the Father allowed those dreadful situations in my life? If so, why?

The more I thought about it, the more I came to recognize that difficulties, along with other forms of trouble, serve a purpose in a believer's walk.

Over the years, it has become clear that if we've laid our lives out at God's disposal, if we've determined to be His disciples, then as the God whose sovereignty reigns over all, He is in charge of them. As His followers, like the sheep we are, we have yielded control of our lives to His care. Where He guides us and into what pastures He leads us, whether full or lush greenery or dry of anything but dust, must have His stamp of approval upon them. Ultimately, difficulties of most kinds are for our benefit and growth in Him.

It is a tenet of the faith that the nature of Jesus, His seed within us, is to be developed. In order for His life to have

more evidence in our own as He becomes more enlarged as our life force, the self-life must die. Only He can change our lives into the image of His Son. How better than to endure a number of Spirit-led difficulties in order to bring us into a new awareness of His presence in and with us at all times, while at the same moment creating a desire in us to remove the ever-present self from the throne of our hearts? It is Jesus who must occupy that space. It is His newly created, newly birth life in ours that sanctifies us and brings us to levels of behavior that on our own are just so many works.

Unlike Paul's statement to his Philippian brethren that he suffered the loss of everything in order to become more fully acquainted with Jesus, I have spent too much of my Christian walk complaining about the various depressing circumstances in which I found myself and announcing loudly to the Lord that I didn't much agree with His plan for my life. The road of discipling is a bumpy one, and I don't like bumpy rides; they frighten me.

Perhaps that's the way of many of us. We simply don't like disruptions, changes or painful situations. We'd rather have a superhighway existence even in spiritual matters. It's the human condition of our thinking and an ease of living that we somehow expect as the true Christian walk. God has other ideas. He will sometimes send us problems in order to train us for His ultimate destiny. Despite the fact that we are in the world in the physical sense, He guides us on a journey that is spiritual in nature, while often using things of this world as His tools. There is a type of sting in this walk, for the finger of God will touch us with "saddle sores" of His holy pain, cleansing crucible fires, loss of self-life and changed perspectives. However, there's a why to all that seeming negativity. God has a purpose in it. Despite the hurt, sorrow and defeats endured, it is a wonderful purpose.

Looking at Rebekah's life (see Gen. 24) as a type of our own Christian walk, we learn that the messenger sent to get her,

as a bride for Isaac is a type of the Holy Spirit sent to prepare us for our heavenly bridegroom. Her trip on camels was not an easy one. Neither is ours, but as believers, the bride of Christ, we sometimes must take a peculiar and difficult journey on the backs of some unlovely, beastly experiences on our way to a fuller, deeper relationship with Jesus, all the while submitting ourselves to the chastening effort of the Holy Spirit, who is preparing us for that destiny.

Rather than seeing our trials as stumbling blocks, let's embrace them as opportunities to receive further preparation for that blessed day when we meet our Bridegroom, Jesus, face to face.