

The Benefits of the Christian Walk

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A Warren Goss wrote a book in 1867 going into great detail about his experiences as a POW during the Civil War. In his book, *The Soldier's Story of His Captivity*, he states this, "Suffering develops real character; disguise throws off its mask under bodily and mental anguish, unreservedly, and indeed unawares, and shows the true character. Suffering is the crucible of human metal, and pure indeed must be the gold which is not tarnished or turned to dross by the heat of unmitigated afflictions. Under the tortures of imprisonment, that goodness must indeed be real which never forgets itself, but stands firmly upon its pedestal to the last. (Goss, 41). This statement he makes early in his journey through the prison system of the Confederate Army. Mr. Goss is taken prisoner while he is wounded as a Union soldier. He makes this statement while he is in the Belle Isle prison. He had already suffered greatly. He was wounded and then he gets sick while in prison. He tells how there is overcrowding in the prison to the point where they can't move around and they have to sleep in human waste and the heat of the Summer is unbearable. Then, there is the flies and other unmentionable things he wouldn't go into detail with. Maybe one of the worst things he witnessed was how many soldiers became worse than animals while living in those conditions. Men stealing clothes and shoes off sick soldiers or stealing the worm-infested bread from the hands of the sick so they could try to satisfy their own hunger. This is why Goss makes that statement about how suffering in anguish shows true character. That's a scary thought. Goss has a hard time seeing human beings becoming lower than animals. The sad part about this is he hadn't yet been taken to Andersonville Prison. If you read accounts of soldiers that were able to survive as human beings in that prison, the conditions there were beyond horrible. In other words, Goss hadn't seen the worst yet. As I was reading some of his book online, it made me think for a moment. I usually get grumpy and angry when I'm sick. How in the world would I be able to handle the conditions that Mr. Goss had to go through? My suffering is so small

compared to his. Mr. Goss is just one example of many people through the ages who had to suffer greatly. We hear a lot about those who suffered in prison camps, but not is mentioned about those who suffered greatly in prison camps during the American Civil War on both sides. One of the great blessings a follower of Jesus has when dealing with great suffering is having Jesus on their side during the suffering. Paul brings this up in great detail in Philippians and we're going to take a look at this today. In Philippians 4: 4 – 20, we read, “⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness[Ⓜ] be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ What you have learned[Ⓜ] and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

God's Provision

¹⁰ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

¹⁴ Yet it was kind of you to share[Ⓜ] my trouble. ¹⁵ And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. ¹⁶ Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.[Ⓜ] ¹⁸ I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

This may be the most aggravating Scripture in the Bible. Pastors use this Scripture a lot when visiting sick people. Paul starts off right away in verse 4 to say we are to rejoice always. This sounds nice and we like reading it, but do we believe it. As I'm writing this sermon, I'm recovering from food poisoning and I will tell you, I had a hard time rejoicing during the sickness. Usually, we are focused on our sickness and it's hard to rejoice over it. Thinking about Jesus or about our salvation many times takes a back seat to sickness. For Paul, it seems he was able to rejoice even in times of trouble. He viewed his relationship with Jesus even higher than sickness.

Plus, Paul goes a step further in verse 6 and tells us do not be anxious about anything but in every situation by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving present your requests to God (NIV). Not only are we to rejoice in the Lord always, now Paul wants us not to be anxious about anything. This is putting salt on a wound isn't it? The Greek term Paul uses for rejoice means calmly happy, God speed (AMG Bible). The Greek term Paul uses for anxious, depending on your translation means we are not to be anxious for anything. I was thinking about that Union soldier that kept being moved from one bad prison to the next until he was in the worst of them all – Andersonville. As he watched all the horrible events going on around him, how could he continue to keep his sanity? How could we keep our sanity in such conditions? Paul wanted the Church to be calmly happy at all times and not to be anxious about anything. How do we get to this point?

Paul gives us the answer in verse 7 where he states that the peace of God, which surpasses or transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (NIV). Paul had such a close relationship with Jesus that Paul's mind and heart was under guard by the Holy Spirit. Paul knew all about having true peace even during a horrible storm. We can't forget that when we are dealing with some type of bad event that we need to pray for His Spirit to guard our heart and mind with peace. This is the only way we can handle life's difficulties. This peace lets us know that Jesus is near at hand to help us in every situation. This is why Paul was anxious about nothing. He knew someone greater was on his side to see him through any situation. Jesus gives us that promise in

Matthew 28: 20, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (NIV)". We allow ourselves to suffer so much because we don't ask the Lord for peace right away during a bad event and I'm guilty of this. Paul was able to face any bad event with God's peace in his heart and mind. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Lutheran pastor, was hanged by the Nazis and the Nazis doctor at the camp stated Bonhoeffer died bravely and composed after praying fervently to God. Bonhoeffer had the peace of God even while he was being hanged. I've seen good Christians die in peace. This is the peace of God guarding their heart and mind while death is upon them.

Then, because of this peace from God, we can do what Paul tells the Church to do in verses 8 and 9. During bad events, we can still think about pure things, noble things, lovely things, and admirable things. The peace of God helps us to stop focusing on our misery and focus on wonderful things. This is a great benefit we have when we know Jesus as our Savior.

Another thing the peace of God helps us with can be found in verse 11, "I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances (NIV)." Paul learned to be content when in need or in plenty. The peace of God helps us to be content in whatever the situation we are in. Again, we must learn to pray to our Lord for peace when dealing with bad events right away. I like what Paul tells us in verse 13, "I can do all this through him who gives me strength" (NIV). Paul knew where his strength came from. It wasn't his own strength he depended on. He depended on the strength of Jesus in all things. This strength is the love and peace of Jesus. This is a beautiful thing when one can be content in all things. This is a gift of the Spirit. What a benefit!

Finally, Paul finishes up in verse 19 where he states, "And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Jesus Christ" (NIV). Paul was content in knowing the Lord would meet all his needs and Paul believed Jesus would do that for His Church. This is real faith in Jesus. We rely too much on other things to supply our needs. When you believe that Jesus will supply all your needs, this washes away anxiety. We become content in every situation knowing the Lord is always there. This is what King David meant in Psalm 23: 1, "The Lord

is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. (NIV)” Say that to yourself – the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. That should be etched into our minds. Paul was only teaching Jesus. Jesus laid the groundwork on being content and not being anxious about anything in Matthew 6: 25 – 34, “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? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (NIV)” The peace of God will guard our heart and mind and make what Jesus tells us become part of our character. I don’t know about you, but this sure sounds good. Let’s pray for God’s peace in our lives.

AMG Hebrew Greek Key Study Bible. AMG Publishers: Chattanooga, 1984

NIV Study Bible. Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids, 1995