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Mentoring Through Life's Storms

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**Series: Possessing the Land:
The Process of Mentoring**

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Encouragement is a funny word. Even the use of the word seems to, in and of itself, give hope. It is the opposite of “dis-couragement” and that very word “courage” indicates it is a part of the process of building someone up in their emotions or their spirit so they can face that which they otherwise might run from.

We all like to be encouraged. We tend to gravitate towards people who encourage us. We like messages that encourage our hearts. We like to read books that are encouraging. But more and more in our society, the media has developed a “real-world” philosophy that brings in great ratings by showing gory, gloomy, gross things which leave us somewhat in touch with reality, but often not in touch with hope. There is nothing left to the imagination, as every form of crime and deceit make it into our living room as though murder and trauma were something for families to digest with their evening meal.

God is in favor of showing reality, too. He tells it like it is in Scripture, and He doesn't paint people to be cardboard saints wrapped in cellophane who never venture into the real world or make real mistakes. He does, however, know the heart of man. And He knows that we will, given half a chance, accentuate the negative and focus on the gloom and doom that surrounds those who have no hope.

So God told us in Philippians, chapter four, just after having given us a prescription for “peace that passes all understanding,” what kinds of things we are to think about. You remember the verse. It says:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.
(Philippians 4:8,9)

Paul is mentoring these Philippians by mail, and he wants them to understand how important it is for them to pay attention to what

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he has taught them and shown them. He says: "The things you have learned, received, heard and seen in me, do." This may sound egotistical, but we know from other passages that it was "not Paul, but Christ" who lived in Him who did the good works. But Paul did want them to see how Jesus looked in real lives in the real world.

Interestingly enough, Paul builds this admonition on one of the most encouraging passages in all of Scripture. He had just informed them that they had nothing to worry about; in fact, worrying would be a sin. Instead, they were to "be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let their requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God, which passes all understanding would garrison their hearts and keep them always." (Philippians 4:6,7).

On the heels of that, he said, "Finally brethren, whatsoever things are..." and he gave them a list of all of the positive, encouraging kinds of things he could think of as the basis for their thought lives and, thus, for their ministries. You don't have to read much of Paul's writings to be painfully aware that he was not afraid to rebuke and reprove. That reproof, however, always had a purpose. It was to correct and bring into line something or someone gone astray. Once corrected, the path was positive; the goal was gracious; the emphasis was on encouragement.

In fact, if there is a general theme in all of Paul's writings, it would probably be encouragement in the midst of trials, challenges to victory through a transformed perspective. Virtually everything he wrote pointed towards the reality of a hard life; but rather than focusing on a mentality that majored on life's catastrophes, he refocused life's camera on heaven, and viewed the crises through the lens of the Christ. Suddenly, pain had purpose. Suddenly, suffering meant strength. Suddenly, persecution became precious. He took Jesus' theme in the beatitudes and revisited it by applying it to the church as it existed after the resurrection, and it always led to a shout of victory.

So a great part of Paul's mentoring became a ministry of the magnificence of seeing the grace of God as it could only be seen in the midst of life's fires, the gentle rain of God's Spirit as it could only be seen in the midst of life's storms. He didn't hide the horrors of his life. He wrote in II Corinthians 11:

Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.

Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I

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suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

(II Corinthians 11:24-27)

Sounds like a story line for a shocking television drama. It would sell well as one of life's more gruesome tales of life gone wrong. Not only that, but out of all that and the ensuing spiritual revelations, came some kind of "thorn in the flesh" which Paul admitted caused him great pain and great embarrassment. What a sad life, you say. No, Paul only told us about the beatings and the perils and the thorn so he could use them to identify the most encouraging principle in the Bible, the principle of grace. From that, he said, came this philosophy of living:

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

(II Corinthians 12:7-9)

Paul said, "A neat thing happened on my way to heaven. I got to suffer. And out of that suffering came grace. And out of that grace came a kind of inner strength so overwhelming, I actually look forward to more suffering, so I can have more grace." That, he said, was what characterized his life, and that was what he wanted to teach those who would look and listen and learn by watching him. He was mentoring by suffering, because he was teaching, as he suffered, how wonderful it was to be weak enough to appropriate God's strength.

We have looked at mentoring by example, mentoring by intercession, mentoring by reminding, mentoring by rebuke and reproof, and in our last two studies, at how God wants us to pour grace into lives by encouraging them in the Lord. We took two classic examples of what discourages believers in those first two

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studies: discouragement from rejection, and discouragement from not measuring up to the world's view of success. They are part of a general category of things that bring about despair that are really not so much circumstantial as they are a matter of perspective.

Virtually everyone at some time fears and feels rejection, and virtually everyone struggles with the desire to accumulate money and things by comparing their lot in life with the lot next door. Paul, here, though, is trying to teach the Philippian church that there are also traumatic incidents in life which are both circumstantial and unavoidable. When these come, the natural man tends to blame God, though usually in a roundabout way.

Such were Paul's struggles. He was ministering for the Lord. Human reasoning would surmise that the more committed someone became in their walk with God and the more yielded that person became to God's service, the more God would protect them and prosper them. Spirituality, then, would be a trade-off: You serve God; God blesses you. There are two problems with that theory:

1- That would negate the whole concept of grace, and life would be a reward for services rendered, thus making us "relatively worthy" based on what we do to uphold God's "fragile" reputation.

2- You would have to define a "blessing" as something good, while Jesus defined it as something bad that revealed something good about God. He said you were blessed when you mourned; blessed when you were meek; blessed when you were persecuted and rejected.

That theology, then, won't hold water in Paul's experience or in the life of Christ. God's own Son, sent to earth to die for man, was allowed by His Father to be rejected, scorned, spit upon, and murdered, in order for grace to flow into the world and in order for men and women who were dead, spiritually, to find life. His plan was for Christ's suffering to be not only the sacrifice for sins, but also the pattern for believers, who in the midst of their temporary journey on earth on their way to heaven, fell into the hands of grief, pain, suffering, and death.

So predominate was that theme that Paul's great prayer and proclamation was,

That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

(Philippians 3:10)

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For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. (II Timothy 1:12)

The great drive of Paul's heart was to enter into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings; to come to understand what it means when it says,

If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: (II Timothy 2:12)

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. (II Timothy 3:12)

What does it mean to be persecuted? We tend to think it always has to do with being harassed for your faith. The word used here, however, literally means "to be put to flight". It is that which causes us to run or want to run. It can be persecution for the gospel's sake, but it can be also be caused by the afflictions or trials a sovereign God sends our way to test our faith, multiply our ministry, or to help us grow, spiritually. Paul understood. He wanted the people he was mentoring to understand: being a disciple would not guarantee a prosperous, healthy, trouble-free life. It would, in fact, most likely guarantee the opposite. Jesus gave us this promise,

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

The promise was one of peace. Peace is defined in your concordance as: "The tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is.." In Christ, we fear nothing and are content with our lot, no matter what that is. Then the Master tells us what that lot is. He says, "In this world ye shall have tribulation." The word tribulation is a word that means "the duress that comes from pressing together; the afflictions that result from straits". It is any form of pressure that comes from living in a real world where Satan is loose and spiritual warfare is prevalent, and sin is present.

So the Christian is promised pressure and pain. Does that mean we are to go out and look for ways to make our lives miserable? I don't think so. Does it mean we are to stop being downcast or depressed when the sky falls? Yes, it does. Does it mean we are to actually rejoice over troubles, provided they aren't simply the

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result of our wrongdoing? I think that is exactly what Paul meant in II Corinthians 12 when he went on,

...Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

(II Corinthians 12:9b,10)

That word “glory” means to rejoice over something. It is a word that reminds you of the guy in the automobile ad who jumps up and clicks his heels with excitement over being identified with that particular car. The phrase “take pleasure” literally means: “to think it good, choose, determine, decide; to do willingly; to be ready to, to prefer, choose rather to be well pleased with, take pleasure in, to be favorably inclined towards one.”

In other words, it is a choice. It is to choose, by an act of the will, to glory in, or rejoice over, willingly accepting infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, and distresses in order for the strength that is in Christ to be manifested through the weaknesses that are in us. What are those things?

Infirmities – a native weakness or frailty; feebleness or sickness.

Reproaches – a wrong springing from insolence, an injury, affront, or an insult or mental injury inflicted by the violence of a tempest

Necessities – stress produced by being placed in straits of some sort through needs or affliction.

Persecutions – to be put to flight through difficulty

Distresses – a narrow place, extreme calamity

Paul is sharing the gamut of physical and emotional distress. It can be anything from sickness to being misunderstood to being simply pressed and depressed by circumstances to experiencing a calamity—some kind of unexpected tragedy or overpowering pressure that totally changes the course of your life. It can be emotional, physical, or spiritual. It can be a minor disturbance or a major calamity. Whatever it is, if it is allowed by a sovereign God, Paul says it has a sovereign purpose. That purpose is to strip away the strength of the flesh until we, in our exposed weakness, turn to the only consistent, lasting, unshakable source of strength

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there is: that inner strength that is only revealed when our outer strength fails.

Paul didn't say he sought it. He said he expected it. And he didn't say it was fun. He said that when it came, he simply "took pleasure in it". He chose to rejoice. He chose to see it as sent from God, and therefore, as a privilege granted by a loving, gracious Redeemer designed to help him enter into the "fellowship of His sufferings". That word "fellowship" means "to share in by participation". I do not understand all of the implications of that promise. I do know, however, that Paul understood enough to not only accept it as necessary, but to plead for it as essential.

Our lesson, remember, is about mentoring. It is about how Moses and Paul and Jesus took those they loved or those God gave them and poured into them certain principles and absolutes so that through the process of being taught and watching real life experiences in their mentors, they might come to a form of maturity that results from transferring thoughts and concepts and feelings from one person to another.

Paul wanted all those who followed him, which was the entire church, including us, to understand that the course of this life would not only include suffering, but that suffering was God's divine sandpaper to bring to a lustre the finish of grace on the life of the believer. So convinced of its necessity was he, that he finally came to the realization that it was okay to pray for it to go away, provided we understand that often God will say "no" and add "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

Now, we all know that. I know that. I have taught it for years. But, beloved, when trials come, when storm clouds gather, when pain persists, when grief overpowers us, the enemy knows how to make us forget to rejoice or glory in it. In fact, given just a little time, instead of rejoicing, we begin to get...(here comes our word) depressed. We get discouraged and our lack of courage allows the oppression to lead to depression. Our focus goes inward. Our spirits turn downward. We rewrite Philippians 4:8 like this,

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are discouraging, whatsoever things are depressing, whatsoever things are hopeless, if there be anything to complain about, anything to cry about, anything to rail at God about, think on these things.

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No, we don't consciously say that. But that becomes our mentality. Satan loves it. God is grieved. Those about us pick up the negativity in our spirits, and those we mentor decide that II Corinthians 12 was a good idea for Paul, but we're not Paul and it won't work in a real world. That is a lie straight from the pit, but through the negative side of mentoring, we have projected man's perspective of suffering rather than God's, thus missing out on transferring perhaps the most valuable biblical principle known to the church: "that the trying of our faith worketh patience."

There is, I believe, a second tier to this principle, and that is: As you grow in Christ, Satan is freed to send tribulation in waves, and it is often the second or third assault that gets you. We can remember to rejoice when the car breaks down, but if the same afternoon, Dad loses his job, Mary breaks a leg, and Bobby fails Spanish, suddenly nothing makes sense any more. We begin to wonder if God was preoccupied and forgot to "bless" us (which is, incidentally, exactly what He was doing). In reality, God, who will not test us above our capacity to bear it, saw fit to free Satan to hit us with both barrels to see what our response would be, and to open our hearts again to a new level of spirituality.

He did it with Job. "While they were yet speaking" another wave hit. He did it with Jesus in the wilderness. "Then the devil," and "Again the devil," says Matthew chapter four. Satan waited until Jesus was in the weakest possible condition, physically, then hit him 1-2-3. Jesus understood that his physical weakness only increased his dependence on the Father, whose word would always defeat the enemy, so He simply responded each time: "It is written".

Mentoring is an awesome responsibility. It means that someone is always watching; someone is always asking; someone is always expecting of you a level of response that is not natural for you. You don't want to teach them something that doesn't work for you, but at the same time you know that if God said it, it will work. For this reason, a lot of people shy away from disciple-making at a deeper, more relational level because they do not want to be hypocrites, and they know their own hearts.

How, then, do we learn to be encouraged and how, then, do we learn to teach others to be encouraged when, by man's standards, we have virtually nothing to be encouraged about? How do we point to the "Son" when clouds cover the sky? How do we see the lightning that is flashing about our heads as a source of light rather than

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as a source of destruction? How do we see the rain as a source of refreshment, rather than as a potential hazard that might flood our lives with waves of affliction we cannot swim against?

I believe that the Bible teaches us that there are three ways to be encouraged in the Lord. And, Beloved, there is no other way to be encouraged, spiritually, other than in the Lord. Man's philosophies may emotionally lift us temporarily, but the only true blessing that comes out of physical calamity, even death, is spiritual reality, even life, and only God can give that. Therefore, only a relationship with Jesus Christ and His Living Word can take the thunder of life's storms and use it as a musical backdrop for the melody of transformation. Only a close fellowship with a Living Savior can give meaning to life's afflictions, calamities, and pressures. So if you are mentoring or encouraging someone, and they are not born again, you are asking them to accept principles they cannot understand, and to make decisions they cannot make. The first decision they must make is to invite the Living Son of God to come into their hearts, forgive their sins, and give them eternal life. At that point, and only then, can they begin to give meaning to suffering.

There may be a surface blessing for suffering to an unbeliever, but it is surface, and it is fleeting. He or she has no eternal rewards to look for, no indwelling Spirit to comfort them, no ability to transfer pain into power or grief into grace. Grace, in fact, is a subject beyond their capability to grasp. That is why times of great stress and struggling are perfect times for someone to reach out to Jesus and be born again. Evangelistically, the moment may be now. But don't give them the principles first; introduce them first to the Savior. Then, the principles will be interpreted internally by God's indwelling Spirit, and they can grasp the reality of it and apply it to their lives.

But most of those we are seeking to impact or influence are believers, and are acquainted with God's word. We want to be encouragers, and we want to be encouraged. What are we to do? What are those three ways to be "encouraged in the Lord"?

The first one, and the only one we will have time to look at in this lesson is the most obvious:

We are to encourage one another. The problem is: most of us don't know how to do that effectively, and one of two things happens:

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1- We come across as too objective or super-spiritual, giving counsel without listening; giving principles without compassion, and the person we are trying to encourage thinks we just don't understand or just don't care. Either way, we leave, feeling good that we went, but they are no better off than they were before. In Job's case, he was worse off.

2- We come across super-emotional, and instead of leaving the heart of God with them, we leave with the broken heart of the hurting one transferred to us. So instead of "encouraging them" we access their "discouragement" and go home in the pit of despair ourselves. It is why those who counsel or disciple regularly are so tempted to become either cold and unfeeling or easily overwhelmed by all of the hurting people they encounter. Satan has a field day, either way.

There are some biblical principles for encouraging others. Let's look at them carefully.

1- We need to understand what qualities are necessary for us to become encouragers:

- a- Availability (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12): If we aren't there for them when they need us, our claim of desiring to be mentors falls on deaf ears.
- b- Responsibility (Deuteronomy 1:38, II Chronicles 35:2): We must be willing to take on the responsibility of helping. They can sense when we are there, driven by duty, but not committed for the long haul. You have to pay a price over time for those who are hurting to trust you when the sky begins to fall.
- c- Sensitivity (Galatians 6:1-5): Going to them and demonstrating a willingness to listen is a good start. But they can tell if your heart is picking up their heartbeat or not. If they see a shield of unconcern between you and them, the principles you feed them will fall on deaf ears. Job's counsellors were perfect examples. When Jesus stopped to listen, He entered into the suffering and pain of those He listened to. Which leads us to the fourth quality:
- d- Involvement (Acts 28:14,15): Unless we are willing to get involved, we can't help. If they need help, we need to help them find it. Maybe we can't give them what they need or do what needs to be done, but we can be available, responsible, and sensitive enough to help them find the help they need.

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It may be physical, it may be emotional, it may be spiritual, it may be medical. Real encouragers lift you up by listening, caring, and then, if necessary, doing what needs to be done.

2- We need to understand the difference between comfort and encouragement:

Comfort is covering over the heartache of another with compassion and understanding.

Encouragement is replacing the heartache of another with God's perspective.

One relieves the immediate hurt with a caring interlude. The other goes beyond that, and lifts the hurting one into God's presence to see that God is weeping, too, but that beyond His tears lies a purpose and beyond their tears lies hope. Anyone can comfort. Only a believer can truly encourage someone in the Lord, because God is really the encourager. It is interesting that the word "comfort" means "to sustain", while the word "encourage" means "to strengthen". Comforting involves removing the pain of the sorrow; but encouraging takes the comfort and carries it a step beyond, infusing the downtrodden one with a kind of inner strength that makes the pain, which may not go away, seem to actually become purposeful. The comfort eased their broken heart. The encouragement gave them hope and direction. They were two parts to the same equation.

The Holy Spirit is our "Comforter". (John 15:26) He alone can "comfort us in all our tribulation" (II Corinthians 1:3,4) That same "Comforter" desires to use His word, His people, and our desire to be changed, to not only comfort us, but to see that we are "encouraged" in the Lord. In Deuteronomy, chapter 31, we have a picture of the pattern of how to be an encourager. Let's look at it:

And Moses went and spake these words unto all Israel.

And he said unto them, I am an hundred and twenty years old this day; I can no more go out and come in: also the LORD hath said unto me, Thou shalt not go over this Jordan.

The LORD thy God, he will go over before thee, and he will destroy these nations from before thee, and thou shalt possess them: and Joshua, he shall go over before thee, as the LORD hath said.

And the LORD shall do unto them as he did to Sihon and to Og, kings of the Amorites, and unto the land of them, whom he destroyed.

And the LORD shall give them up before your face, that ye may

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do unto them according unto all the commandments which I have commanded you.

Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the LORD hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it.

And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed. (Deuteronomy 31:1-8)

Moses was mentoring Joshua. In verses 1-6, he addresses the whole nation in Joshua's hearing and for Joshua's good. In verses 7-8, he addresses Joshua directly, which brings us to principle 3:

3- We need to understand how to give encouragement:

a- General instruction sets the stage, but usually you need to speak to the one needing courage one to one.

Then Moses told it like it was. He didn't soft-peddle the problem. He was 120 years old, and he couldn't lead them any more. In verse 7, he told Joshua without apology that the job was his.

b- Don't discount the reality of the problem. We tend to do that. To the one we are encouraging, the problem may seem insurmountable. To us, it may seem only mildly difficult. Don't communicate your ignorance through insensitivity. If the problem seems real to them, it must seem real to you.

c- As soon as possible, bring God into central focus. No matter what the problem is, God is the solution. Spend all day on the problem, and you'll both get depressed. As soon as the person's heart is open, lead them into the "Son-light". Do that with God's word. As soon as Moses had their attention, he reminded them of God's promises to them, and encouraged them by reminding them that they weren't going through this alone, God was and would go through it with them (verse 6).

d- Communicate victory, not defeat. Moses was an old man, but he was all but shouting and singing a victory song in verses 3-8. He reminded them of what God had done before, of what God was about to do, and he reminded them that they had no reason to be afraid or discouraged. The same God was about to

fight for them again, and He had never lost a battle.

Joshua, as we read in the early chapters of the book of Joshua, heard everything Moses said. He was truly encouraged, and he led the people with confidence and courage, just as his mentor had. The encouragement was contagious, the confidence was communicated, and God simply moved the mantle of leadership from one man to another, and the work of God and the words of God marched on to another land and to another generation.

It had not been easy, this trip through the desert. It would have been easy for Moses to give up. It had not been easy for Paul. He had endured beatings, being shipwrecked, being sent to prison, being made fun of, being torn by circumstances and thorn alike. It had not been easy for Jesus. Scorned and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He came to His own, and His own received Him not. They hated Him. They laughed at Him. They spit on Him. Yea, they crucified Him. The King of Glory entered glory, not on the wings of earthly acceptance, but through the horror of a Roman Cross. Can we not learn from Moses, from Paul, and from Jesus, then, that if we are to pass the baton to another generation, we must be willing, if need be, to suffer, for them to see the value in suffering; and we must be willing, at whatever the cost to us, to teach and demonstrate the grace that suffering provides, the strength that only weakness appropriates.

To the unbelieving world, it makes no sense. It never will. To the believer, it makes sense when viewed from afar in someone else's life, but we always come to the conclusion: "I thank God for them, but it's not for me." Indeed. And we all suffer from the temptation that as we glory as Paul did in the tribulation, to begin to glory in our glorying, and actually become proud of our pain, or use our trials as sources of self-exaltation through self-pity. That must break God's heart.

Jesus didn't exalt His willingness to go to the Cross. He exalted the Cross. Stephen's testimony wasn't his willingness to be stoned, but his attitude when he was. Paul's testimony wasn't one of pride, but of deep humility that God would allow him the privilege of entering at that level into His Master's sufferings.

You and I have a calling. It is, if need be, to suffer for His sake. It is also to learn to be encouraged and to encourage others, that the suffering that both we and they have the privilege of experiencing will not focus on itself, but lead men and women to see the grandeur

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of God's perspective and the glory of God's transforming power that requires our weakness to perfectly reveal His strength.

And doesn't that make weakness a "blessing"? Indeed it does. Should we not, then, actually welcome weakness when it comes? Indeed we should. Will that make a difference in how we view life?

For Further Study and Application

1- Reread Philippians 4:8,9. Define the following words: true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtue, praise. Take one of those words per day or week and ask God to shape your thoughts using that one word (true, honest, etc.) Ask God to alert you to whatever thoughts you focus on that are the opposite of those thoughts.

2- What was Paul's problem in II Corinthians, 12? What kind of thorn might it have been? Why didn't God heal him? What promise did God give Paul instead? Have you ever claimed that promise?

3- Is it possible that the more faithfully you serve the Lord, the more tests He will allow into your life? Why is that thought so contrary to the natural mind?

4- Paul asked God to let him enter into "the fellowship of His sufferings". What do you think that means? Have you ever prayed that prayer? Would you be willing to do so?

5- Paul came to "glory" and "take pleasure" in his infirmities. What does that mean?

6- Try to imagine what "infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, and distresses" mean in today's vocabulary. Can you make practical application to each of them?

7- Does God sometimes free Satan to attack you in waves? Why would He do that? What is Satan's goal? What is God's?

8- What do you think is the difference between comfort and encouragement?

9- Moses was about to go home. He was leaving an awesome challenge to the people and to his disciple, Joshua. Read Deuteronomy 31:1-8 and see how he "encouraged" them in the process.

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