

Noble Suffering

The mother of heroine Elizabeth Bennet in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is a self-absorbed non-stop talker who, at one point, expresses frustration with Elizabeth by exclaiming:

"I have no pleasure in talking to undutiful children. Not that I have much pleasure, indeed, in talking to anybody. People who suffer as I do from nervous complaints can have no great inclination for talking. Nobody can tell what I suffer! But it is always so. Those who do not complain are never pitied."

Happily, we can find much better examples of how to handle suffering. This week, we will look at Job, Stephen and Jesus himself and learn some wonderful, if hard, truths about suffering. Yes, there is pain in suffering but there is also cause for wonder in all God has for us, even in the difficult times of our lives. Let's spend this week learning what we can about suffering and the wonders of God.

Monday – Suffering for Good

"For he who much has suffered, much will know." Homer, The Odyssey

1. Please read 1 Peter 3:17-22. According to verse 17, when is it better to suffer for doing good?
2. How does God express his will in Job 1:1-12? For what purpose?
3. What happened to Job in Job 1:13-22? How would your response compare with Job's in verses 20-22?

Digging Deeper (optional): How does Job's faithful relationship with God prepare him for the events in Job 42:1-17? How does this help you understand your own relationship with God in good times and bad?

Tuesday – Once for All

"To gain that which is worth having, it may be necessary to lose everything else." Bernadette Devlin, Irish politician

1. Please read 1 Peter 3:18 and Romans 6:9-11. What does the phrase "once for all" mean? What assurance does this give you about the permanence of a relationship with God?
2. In light of Luke 13:31-35, Mark 10:42-45 and John 10:10, why did Jesus sacrifice himself once-for-all?

Making it Personal: Have you entered into the life Jesus offers you? Pray for God's guidance in growing you into the person he wants you to be.

Wednesday – Water: it's not just for washing anymore!

"The Chief Monopod hung back and warned the others that they'd find the water powerful wet" C.S. Lewis, The Voyage of the Dawntrader

1. Please read 1 Peter 3:18-21. What does water symbolize here?
2. What command does Jesus give in Matthew 28:16-20? Why do you think he included the act of baptism?
3. How does Jesus' act in Matthew 3:13-17 and that of the new believer in Acts 8:34-39 each help you understand your own need to follow Jesus' command?

Digging Deeper (optional): What does Matthew 3:1-16 tell you about John the Baptist and his ministry?

Thursday – Baptism on Purpose

"I take it that every Christian delivers himself up wholly to God in his baptism, when he renounces all the pomps and vanities of Satan, and enlists himself as a soldier to fight under Christ's banner all his life after."

Frederick W. Robertson, 19th c. English pastor

1. Please read 1 Peter 3:21. How do you think being saved can lead to developing a good conscious?
2. According to verse 21 and Romans 6:3-5, what happens to us because of Jesus' resurrection? How would you use these verses to show someone that people are saved by Jesus' sacrifice through the power of the Holy Spirit and not by acts like baptism?
3. How does Romans 6:6-8 help you understand the type of pledge called for in 1 Peter 3:21?

Prayer Focus: Have you been baptized in the name of Christ? If so, ask God to refresh the meaning of that act of devotion. If not, ask God to give you the courage to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Friday – Authority

"He who rules by moral force is like the pole star, which remains in place while all the lesser stars do homage to it." Samuel Butler, 18th-19th c. English Bishop

1. Please read 1 Peter 3:17 & 22 in conjunction with John 1:1-3. What role did Jesus – God the Son – have before his birth? What is it now after the resurrection? What does this tell you about his ability to save?
2. What truth did Stephen express in Acts 7:54-58 to those killing him for speaking about Jesus? Why would his focus on Jesus' authority have led to his statements in Acts 7:59-60?

Digging Deeper (optional): What symbols of Jesus' authority do you see in Revelation 5:1-14? How is that authority recognized there?

For the Weekend: Read 1 Peter 3:17-22 and Romans 6:1-11. What steps can you take to follow God's will in light of these passages?