

SUFFERING FOR A REASON

Dan Nelson

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There is so much pain and suffering in this world that thinking people from every corner of civilization can't seem to help but ask "why?". Is there any purpose to such suffering? Like most families, we have our own share of suffering. This week a member of our family died most unexpectedly. In his young fifties and without any real warning signs, he suddenly had a heart attack and died. To add to the shock, this took place two days after his only daughter had her first baby. The family had gathered to celebrate a happy time and welcome a new addition; not mourn the loss of another so dearly loved.

It seems that sometimes life's events do not make sense. When my own father died almost ten years ago, at age forty-nine, he left young children who were not only now fatherless, but the high medical bills would result in sudden poverty. I couldn't help but question the fairness of it all. This week I happen to be studying Philippians chapter 1 where the Apostle Paul introduces a letter of encouragement to many he had converted to following Jesus Christ. They were undergoing persecution and it was only getting worse. Life was not easy and was made much worse because of their faith in God. Most people assume that turning to God should make life easier not more difficult. What the Christians receiving this letter were experiencing was anything but an easy life and their genuine Christian faith was making them enemies at every turn. The scripture reads like a coach talking to his players. C'mon, you can do it! Don't give up. Finish what you started. Someone reading the Apostle Paul's letter for the first time might think him quite presumptuous, detached, and possibly even arrogant. That is, until you learn his own story. Until you discover upon further digging into the text that the Apostle himself had already been arrested, beaten, whipped, stoned, and imprisoned on so many occasions that we wouldn't have the space here to describe it. That when he had first met the Philippians some ten years before as recorded in Acts 16, he was imprisoned. And he was now writing this letter from inside a Roman jail cell with chains binding him. The Apostle Paul knew what it is like to suffer and did it willingly. He had the credibility of his story so he knew he could truly encourage someone else that is also suffering. Sometimes it takes someone else who has been there to encourage you to carry on. When you have gone through a few things yourself, many times you have acquired the strength and

wisdom to encourage others. Maybe you also have experience hardship and tears. Is it possible that God wants you to use your story to help others? Is it possible that when you help others through your own pain, it gives purpose behind some of your experiences? Is it possible that your own life story is exactly what God wants to use to strengthen someone else? That is what God did with the Apostle Paul and it may be true for you also. When Paul says, "my chains are in God", I think he understands the bigger picture. How about you?

Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. This article was published in 2004. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



P.O. Box 1443
Ojai, CA 93024
(805) 640-9498
www.calvaryojai.org

Sunday Worship:

9:00 & 10:30am
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave, Oak View

Mid-Week Study:

7:00pm Thursday
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View