

Life In Christ  
2 Corinthians 4:7-12  
August 22, 2021

Pain and suffering are common to people. There is not a single person in this world that has not had to endure pain and suffering. It seems that some people go through more pains and sufferings than others but all bear a certain amount of distresses and afflictions. In fact, human life on earth begins with fear and tears.

Giving birth to child is painful, but being born is also painful and fearful. When a child is born, it cries. Perhaps it cries because of a sudden temperature change, or an environmental change. Instead of the warmth of the liquid in the mother's womb, the child suddenly feels coolness and dryness. Whatever that causes the child to cry, that child begins life on earth with shock and fear.

Not only it hurts to be born, it also hurts to grow up. You probably remember ankle aches and thigh knots that you had when you were growing up as teenagers. As young bodies stretch, extend, lengthen, and realign, there is real pain. Growing is painful.

However, the most painful growing-pains often involve something more than body mass. Yes, physical growing-pain is real but growing and maturing requires a lot more.

Just getting taller, heavier, and bigger, doesn't mean you are "growing" as a human being. A human being requires physical maturation as well as mental, emotional and spiritual maturation. In other words, a human being is less a condition than a task. Becoming "human" is a mission, and this task of being a human is accomplished only through a painful series of suffering, reflecting, and learning.

Moving from infancy to toddler is painful. From toddler to kindergarten is also painful. From elementary school to middle school and then high school is painful. Separation from parents, friends, and from home to go to college is painful. Each step of growing up is painful and fearful.

Living assumes pain and suffering. Of course it also has joy and gladness, laughter and happy moments. I am not saying that life is nothing but pain and suffering. However, life does bring us pain and suffering. If distress and affliction doesn't come from us, then they come from our loved ones. Watching our loved ones suffer is as painful as our own suffering.

M. Scott Peck's wonderful book, The Road Less Traveled begins with a statement, "Life is hard." And it is but the people who have made the most significant contributions have been the people who have confronted their own adversity and have overcome it. They did not just cope with the situation, but they conquered it.

As you know Beethoven was one of the most gifted musical geniuses in human history. When Beethoven's famous "Ode to Joy" was first performed it was an instant hit. People loved it. It was a glorious music. It was the music that gave hope and joy to humanity and glory to God but Beethoven himself could not hear the music; he could hear it only in his imagination because he was already deaf by that time.

When he was first diagnosed of facing deafness, Beethoven reacted with anger and resentment. He wrote to a friend, "Your Beethoven is most unhappy and at strife with nature and the Creator." He was angry with God. He was angry with life. He withdrew himself from others but deep down in his heart he knew he could never be happy if he did not compose music. So he composed. He composed music by sensing it in his heart. He certainly conquered his predicament.

Saint Paul wrote these hopeful and comforting words in his letter to Corinthians. He wrote, "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed."<sup>1</sup>

Saint Paul faced many adversities: shipwreck, imprisonment, beatings, and chained but he had the transcending power of God in his life. The Spirit of Christ lived in him. Because he was so sure of Christ's presence in all things he faced, no matter what happened in his life, it was not strong enough to crush him or break him. By faith in Jesus Christ he not only coped with his situations, but he conquered them.

How did he do that? St. Paul described this power that helped him to overcome all challenges as the power that belonged to God; the power that came from God and not from him. He received this power by dwelling in Christ.

Maxi Dunnam, the former President of Asbury Seminary, once preached a sermon entitled, "Servants without Portfolio." In that sermon, he talked about the

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:8-9.

difference between following Jesus and being in Christ. He challenged that we should not only follow Christ but also we must remain in Christ.

“If we say we follow Christ” he said, “and we do things because we believe it is expected of us as Christians, then we will fail miserably.” Because we are trying to do it with our own power and strengths. If we set out to be servants, because we know that’s what Jesus wants us to be, we will fail. We will fail because we depend on our own strengths and skills.<sup>2</sup> I am not saying we should not do our best. We should. We must but we must also depend on God’s power, and not ours. How do we distinguish between the two? How do we learn to depend on God’s strengths and not our own?

What we need to do is to focus on experiencing the indwelling Spirit of Christ in us. We need to focus on yielding our will to God’s will.

Some of you know the story of Corrie Ten Boom (April 15, 1892 –April 15, 1983). Corrie ten Boom was a wonderful Christian woman who was arrested by the Nazis along with the rest of her family for hiding Jews in their home during the Holocaust. She was imprisoned and eventually sent to the Ravensbruck concentration camp along with her sister, Betsie, who was killed there in a gas chamber.

In her book, *The Hiding Place*, she shares a story that demonstrates how God’s power can be experienced in our lives. After her release from the concentration camp where her sister, Betsy, had died, Corrie Ten Boom lectured and preached all over the world about our need to forgive our enemies. One day she was tested by her own message.

After she had preached a sermon on forgiveness in Germany, Corrie was greeted by a man whom she recognized as the Nazi guard at the gas chamber. “How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein,” the man said to Corrie. “To think that as you say, God has washed my sins away.” Can you imagine? Can Corrie really forgive this person who killed her sister and many others?

Now listen to Corrie Ten Boom as she shares her response. “And suddenly,” she said, “it was all there. The room full of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsy’s pained blanched face. His hand was thrust out to shake mine and I who had preached so often the need to forgive to the people of Blumenfall kept my hand at my side. Even as the angry vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the

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<sup>2</sup> Maxi Dunnam, “Servants without Portfolio,” [www.esermons.com](http://www.esermons.com).

sin of them. Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him. I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand, I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity, and so again I breathed a silent prayer. ‘Jesus I cannot forgive him. Give me your forgiveness.’ As I took his hand a most incredible thing happened; from my shoulder and down through my arm, through my hand a current seemed to pass through me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger who had killed my sister that almost overwhelmed me. And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness or our goodness that the world’s healing hinges, but on Christ’s. When the Lord tells us to love our enemies, he gives along with the command the love itself.”<sup>3</sup>

You see, it is not our own strength and power that we use to do God’s work. It is his power and his might. Shaped by the indwelling Christ, we are given new eyes to see, new ears to hear, new heart to feel, and new hands to touch. This is ours, not because we try to imitate Jesus, but because we are transformed by his Spirit. Literally transformed into living Christs by his spirit. Then and only then, we are given the will to be God’s true servants.

As we focus on yielding our will to God’s will, we will find ourselves not dependent upon our own power; but on God’s power. What Jesus said will begin to be true in your life and mine. He said, “He who believes in me will do the works that I do and even greater works than these will he do.”<sup>4</sup>

St. Paul knew that God would use all his adversities as opportunities to build up his faith. If you know what you are doing is from God, you don’t give up just because you have been blown off course. You need to go on staying the course because through those experiences we grow and mature to be the persons God wants us to be. Adversities and pain and sufferings can be the opportunities to experience God’s blessings in a new way.

That is what the Gospel is all about. It is about taking that which is useless and making it useful; taking that which is hopeless and making it hopeful; taking that which is broken and making it an instrument of healing; taking that which has been defeated and making it victorious. That is what the cross is all about--a symbol of shame now an emblem of victory.

St. Paul discovered the immeasurable strength of God when he experienced his greatest weakness. “We are afflicted in every way,” he wrote, “but not crushed;

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> John 14:12

perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed....” Now, such is a life in Christ. So let us open ourselves to the transcendent and transforming power of God. Let him work in us. Let him transform us. Let him make us victorious.