

Abundant Living

MINISTRIES

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What did you say? WHY DID YOU DO THAT?? **I.DID.NOT.DESERVE.THAT!!!**

Unjust suffering is painful. Unkind words, angry responses, critical attitudes, harsh commands, cruel glares, unsettling threats... yesterday, last week, last month, last year, decades ago! The list goes on and on.

Sharon and I hear sad stories day after day... heart-wrenching details of pain caused by mistreatment. And, in the midst of this sad suffering, I often hear Sharon kindly advise, "Let's not waste the pain."

"Let's not waste the pain??? What is that all about?! I'm tired of putting up with the mistreatment. It is absolutely not fair!"

Unfair! Unjust! I think most of us have a desire for justice. It definitely is not right that I should feel punished when I did absolutely nothing wrong!

Let me pose a question: Can *unjust* suffering benefit us in any way? Does Father have anything to say on the subject? Let me quote from 1 Peter 2. Although the comments starting at verse 18 are addressed to slaves, the principle is valid for all of us.

*It is commendable if someone bears up under the
PAIN OF UNJUST SUFFERING*

*because they are conscious of God. How is it to your credit
if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it?*

But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

TO THIS YOU WERE CALLED,

*because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example,
that you should follow in His steps.*

He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.

*When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate;
when He suffered, He made no threats.*

Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly.

I'm not only encouraged to "bear up" but I'm told that **I AM CALLED** to the pain of unjust suffering??!! Why would... why should I tolerate an injustice??

Our perspective changed when Sharon and I read a small book by Bruce Wilkinson titled *A Life God Rewards – Why Everything You Do Today Matters Forever*. Referencing Matthew 6:19-21, the writer explained that, although we can't "take our treasures with us" when we die, we **CAN INVEST right now, earning rewards which we will enjoy IN HEAVEN!**

Are you ready??? Often, we **build treasure in heaven** when we "bear up under the **PAIN OF UNJUST SUFFERING.**" It's not fun or pleasurable here on earth... but it builds treasure, earning rewards for us to enjoy **in heaven!**

Let's be encouraged and courageous. When we find ourselves in the midst of unjust suffering, we bear up, without retaliation, without threats, entrusting ourselves to Him who judges justly... **and great will be our reward in heaven!**

Life here on earth is only temporary! *Heaven* is ahead!
John Charles (for Sharon too)



A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favor rather than silver or gold. (Proverbs 22:1)

Question: I have four children... each very different from the others. One excels academically, another in sports, another in music. The fourth doesn't really "shine" in any area. He gets average grades, is mediocre in sports and has never shown interest in music or art. How do I help him feel good about himself when his siblings dramatically out-perform him?

Response: Over the last half century, much emphasis has been placed on building self-esteem in children. Many psychology books, educators and Christian writers have urged parents to discover their child's unique giftings and to then work hard in helping the child develop that particular skill... with the anticipated result being that the child will feel good about him/herself.

This philosophy is challenged as we look carefully at some principles in God's Word. Consider the following:

What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul (Matthew 16:26)? Jesus seems to be saying that human achievement holds little value compared to the condition of one's heart. But how can that be evaluated?

A person's heart is revealed much more clearly by how they relate to God and other people, than by their accomplishments in our 21st-century culture. Notice Proverbs 20:11, *Even a child makes himself known by his actions, whether his conduct is pure and right.*

This differentiation (between accomplishments and character) is further clarified in Proverbs 3:3-4 *Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.*

And again, in Proverbs 22:1 *A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.*

Notice that the "esteem" mentioned in the previous verse does not refer to viewing **oneself** with high esteem. It is saying that our goal should be to gain God's favor... and that is accomplished by placing priority on **His** standards for success, not our culture's. In Luke 16:15, Jesus says, *You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.*

For those of us who are parents and grandparents, these statements from scripture challenge us to seek a higher objective for our children, namely, the pursuit of God's approval, not society's.

In the mid 1600's, the Westminster Catechism, based on many supporting Scriptures, wrote that the chief purpose of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever (see 1 Cor. 10:31, Rev. 4:11, Ps. 73:25-26, Phil. 4:4).

A child does not have to be a high-achiever academically, athletically, talent-wise, in order to bring glory to God by their right-living. And, contrary to the self-esteem rhetoric, such a life brings true and lasting fulfillment and joy. As Jesus said (Acts 20:35), *there is greater joy in giving than in receiving.*

The following family exercise may be enlightening. At the dinner table, ask each person to list a positive description or word that comes to mind when the name of each family member is mentioned.

Then throw out names of people held in high regard in our culture... perhaps school teachers, political or community leaders, star athletes, etc... Take notice of the adjectives used in the responses. Are they positive character traits (kind, helpful, joyful, giving, patient, loving, etc...) or do they tend to focus on accomplishments (talented with art or music, strong, smart, good at a sport, rich, etc)?

It will be obvious to your family members that Jesus' sense of values is quite different than this world's!

Next month, we will explore other practices you can implement in your home to emphasize the importance of gaining a good name, **according to God's definition**, not the world's. In the meantime, let's check our own hearts. Have we been guilty of focusing more on worldly success than Godly character? We parents certainly want to model the character traits that we wish to see our children develop.

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