

# **Robert R. McLaughlin Bible Ministries**

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## **The TREE OF LIFE weekly teaching summary from the week ending March 22, 1998**

Tree of Life 03/22/98

### **The Doctrine of Suffering and Solutions.**

Tree of Life for 03-22-98

If we were to devise a plan we would also supply a way in which to execute that plan, right? Well, God has designed a perfect plan for each believer's life, He has also provided the perfect power by which to execute His plan. God's plan is effective only if the believer opts for residing in it according to God's rules and provisions. In fact, apart from the filling of the Spirit and knowledge of God's word (1John 1:9 & 2Peter 3:18) the believer does not reside in God's plan. Many Christians believe that they are executing God's plan but in reality they have no idea what it truly entails. God must be worshiped in Spirit and in Truth, John 4:24. There is no other way to follow God. He provides the way to Him, but we must seek and follow the accurate plan He has laid out.

This plan involves our weakness and His power, that is the equation for spiritual growth and the glorification of God. Unfortunately most believers fight against being weakened and standing helpless before God. They would rather try to help God and insert their futile human efforts. They stubbornly refuse to grasp the fact that whatever they offer by way of human effort is considered dead to God since it is part of our old sin nature and was rejected on the cross. The vital truth that must be recognized and applied in the spiritual life is that our weakness is God's opportunity to finally work on our behalf!

Our weakness must be met and recognized in order to behold and apply God's strength in our lives. Now, because it is not natural for us to recognize our helplessness, God has provided a perfect way of bringing us

to the helpless state we need to arrive at in order to accept His power. How He does this is through the vehicle of suffering! Specifically, undeserved suffering which is the weakness referred to in 2Corinthians 12:9. Our weakness is brought out in undeserved suffering at each stage of spiritual adulthood. Note that undeserved suffering for blessing is only administered in spiritual adulthood. God never brings in undeserved suffering in spiritual childhood, He waits until the believer arrives at the first stage of spiritual growth, **spiritual self-esteem (SSE)**. Never would He burden us with more than we could bear, 1Corinthians 10:13.

So, in **SSE**, God administers **Providential Preventative Suffering (PPS)** in order to challenge our arrogance, advance us to the next stage of spiritual growth, (**spiritual autonomy SA**), and bless us. Once at **SA**, God brings in more undeserved suffering, Momentum Testing which serves to advance us to **Spiritual Maturity (SM)**. When the believer arrives at **SM** the undeserved testing that comes to him then is Evidence Testing which glorifies God to the maximum! Each stage of spiritual growth has its own undeserved suffering for blessing. We have been studying the PPS of the apostle Paul when he was in SSE, 2Corinthians 12:7-9. This PPS serves to remind the believer of his dependence on predestination (i.e., the plan of God) thereby forcing him to use divine assets under circumstances that human ability cannot resolve. We tend to grow arrogant concerning our achievements so God makes sure that our achievements have absolutely nothing to do with His plan. What the focus of His plan is, is His grace. His grace is always sufficient to meet all our needs! What made Paul great and that which can make us great is undeserved suffering and the utilization of God's grace. Nothing we have is due to our efforts! All is from the grace of God, this must be realized in order to advance in the plan of God. Paul recognized that his advantages came from one source... the grace of God! In so recognizing, his arrogance was cancelled.

God will do whatever He needs to do in order for us to come to realize that we are nothing and His grace is everything. We are completely dependent on the grace of God and though this is a statement of fact, most believers live their lives dependent on something else. To be dependent on anything other than the grace of God ushers in ignorance, deception, rationalization, and arrogance. Arrogance destroys the ability of SSE to control one's life. Just as Paul was given a thorn for his flesh as a blessing from God, undeserved suffering in your life is also a tremendous gift from God. Painful as it may be, a significant amount of suffering can be the incentive for choosing a direction that serves us and those around us more effectively. If you learn from your suffering you are able to help another

who is in the same phase that you have already completed, 2Corinthians 1:4-7. When you go through suffering you need to look for the lesson involved and the benefit of it rather than attempt to get out of it. The solution in undeserved suffering is never to get out of it but apply the divine solution (problem solving devices) and extrapolate the benefits from the experience.

The believer does not develop courage from being happy in life but from surviving difficult times and by being challenged by adversity. Trials, temptations, disappointments not only test the fiber of our character but strengthen it. Suffering and adversity is the state in which we truly become acquainted with ourselves. Things do not go wrong so that we may become bitter and give up, things go wrong (as we call it) in order to break us down in regard to self. Only then can God build us up in regard to His grace. Only then can we become all that God intends for us to be. You will never know your own strength until you are met with adversity! Every defeat, every heartbreak, and every loss contains its own lesson on how to improve one's performance the next time. Just as a gem cannot be polished without friction, a man cannot be perfected (matured) without trials. Just as fire is the test of gold, adversity is the testing ground of the strong believer, 1Peter 1:3-7. So, when a believer reaches SSE part of his reward is undeserved suffering!

God's grace and power is revealed in our undeserved suffering. Undeserved suffering is our weakness and brings to light our helplessness. Undeserved suffering is a grace provision for a short time in order to prevent us from reliance on self. Now, what is the thorn that was given for Paul's flesh? Human curiosity would love to know exactly what that thorn entailed! That is precisely why God the Holy Spirit did not find it necessary to record for us what the thorn was. If we knew what Paul's thorn was, every time we encountered that particular affliction, Christians could claim it to be a sign of SSE since that is what Paul had at his stage of SSE. People are always looking to make an idol out of something or someone. Rather than increase their faith in God, most Christians look for an easier set up, something more tangible, something more within their control. So, the word of God does not specifically indicate what Paul's thorn was, but rather what it did to him. We are to learn the principle of the thorn not the category of the thorn. God states only that it was an angel sent from Satan to torture Paul. Satan meant it to destroy Paul, as the principle of Psalm 76:10 goes, God used it to force Paul to rely on His superior provisions. God uses adversity to benefit His people, even the

pressures that our enemies have designed to harm us can be turned to blessing.

Under the first mention principle thorns are associated with the curse of mankind and nature at the fall of man, Genesis 3:18; Romans 8. Thorns are also used in the Bible in connection with man's failure and are a symbol of man's negative volition toward God, Num 33:55; Jud 2:3. The word thorn is also a sign of Satan's power, Proverbs 22:5. Thorns also describe distractions in life, Matthew 13:7,22. Thorns are also used for cosmic involvement and negative volition toward doctrine, Hebrews 6:8. Jesus Christ wore a crown of thorns signifying that He was made a curse for us, Matthew 27:29; Mark 15:17; John 19:2 cf Galatians 3:13 & 1Peter 2:24. In the millennial reign of Christ, nature will be delivered from the curse brought on by the fall of man, Isaiah 55:13; Eze 28:24.

Verse 8 of 2Corinthians 12 describes a prayer which Paul prayed to God three times, in this prayer Paul begged God to remove from his life this thorn which was actually a blessing. Paul knew a lot of doctrine but here he made a false application. He failed in this area three times before he realized, through God's silence, that he already possessed the solution: God's grace. Therefore, the correct prayer under suffering is that you would see the benefits of the suffering before it is removed! No believer should ever pray for the removal of any category of suffering for blessing, that is blasphemous. You cannot advance in God's plan without undeserved suffering.

Prayer is one of the most misunderstood and distorted benefits in the Christian way of life. A lot of believers pray for strength when they are faced with suffering. But strength doesn't come from prayer, it comes from metabolized doctrine in the soul thereafter utilized. Prayer is not designed to give you strength. Strength in suffering comes mechanically through doctrine resident in the soul, applied to the situation of suffering. And, if you do not love God's word thereby having a wealth of metabolized doctrine resident in your soul ready for application, you will have no divine solutions available in times of suffering, or at any time. Many Christians pray for things that God's word tells them they can have another way. God's plan is a precise and accurate plan and must be executed the right way... God's way! People are always praying for something that comes another way. Prayer is not designed to be a problem solving device, but a weapon of power in the hands of the royal priest. Your spiritual advance depends on your willingness to go through undeserved suffering and see the benefits and lessons, and apply the proper divine solutions.

Remember, what God does not remove He intends for you to bear. So, you either let the adversity defeat you, or you defeat it. Here, Paul was momentarily effected by the discomfort of the angel Satan sent. So he did not pass the test until after the third time, then he realized the answer which had already been given, God's grace provides all!

God always nurtures the positive believer's growth in just the right way and with just the right amount of undeserved suffering. Too much or too little adversity/prosperity, or the wrong combination, or the wrong timing would retard the believer's spiritual progress. Though we are told to come boldly to the throne of grace, Hebrews 4:16, we never have the right to question the sovereignty of God nor ask for the cancellation of His divine wisdom. Prayer cannot be used to violate divine protocol. When you realize that God has your life completely under control you won't complain about what doors He opens for you to pass through. If you can't see the benefit of it at that time you need to rest in faith, knowing God's perfect knowledge is at work. And, it's knowledge of Jesus Christ, not supernatural events, which builds the knowledge needed to put muscle on one's faith.

Paul was not accustomed to not being answered by God! Remember Paul communed with God directly during his three year course in Arabia, Galatians chapters 1 & 2. So for Paul not to receive an answer to his prayer was NOT normal! Finally Paul found the answer which he had all along, My grace is sufficient you, for my power is perfected in weakness. Weakness being, undeserved suffering. The Greek word for weakness is *astheneia* which here refers to Paul's providential preventative suffering, and in general refers to undeserved suffering which protects us from becoming proud. Such a weakness may be a physical affliction, people testing, thought testing, system testing, or disaster testing depending on what God deems to be fitting. So, in predestination it's God's power plus human weakness which equals victory. At every stage of spiritual growth there is power and weakness. It is therefore not something to be dreaded but something to be embraced as the means of your spiritual advance. Even when you fall on your face at least you are moving forward. It is through our helplessness that God's strength is granted power. And, God's power is achieved or accomplished in human weakness.

Now, this weakness is not a reference to sin or failure. This weakness is a helplessness from the pressure of suffering. It's a helplessness to fulfill God's plan. And remember, what is needed in God's plan is God's power so it is necessary that our human strength be repelled. Our weakness must be our means of attaining God's power. God's power and human weakness means spiritual advance if you make the proper doctrinal applications. At

the time of going through undeserved suffering, we may feel that we have failed because we were so weak but neither weakness nor undeserved suffering is the location of our strength, it's merely the means. The power is accomplished by means of the weakness of human ability. So, the pattern of achievement is God's power combined with man's weakness or helplessness. This is how spiritual growth is accomplished. Too many believers rely on their Christian service, their counseling, sharing, emotional experiences, etc., as the power for living the Christian life. The Christian way of life is to be executed in the power and provisions which come from the grace of God alone. Today most believers are simply duplicating admirable qualities of mankind and that is what leads to legalism, emotionalism, and spirituality by morality rather than learning the divine plan.

The great victories accomplished by our Lord while on earth were not done so in freedom as we think of it. His great victories were accomplished out of His respect and obedience for the Father's plan and the Father's authority. The power attained through the Spirit and Truth does not set us free to run with our own plan but to serve in obedience and awe the divine plan of God our Father! So, the greatest victory was not the function of our Lords' freedom but His respect and obedience to the Father's plan. In the same manner, the apostle Paul's greatness was not arrived at through his freedom which he accumulated in his spiritual growth, but through his obedience to the word and grace plan of God. We too are offered the same pattern of spiritual growth and greatness... through obedience to the Father's plan. But, an integral part of His plan for our lives is undeserved suffering! Many see themselves as being free in Christ and lose their sense of responsibility. The true power of God comes when you humble yourself when being mistreated and passing through undeserved suffering. In God's plan, He provides the power we need to apply to our experiences of weakness in suffering. It is the power of God alone that carries us beyond human solutions. And, it is God's power employed by man in helplessness which produces accelerated spiritual growth.

So, after three times of misapplying prayer, Paul changes his attitude and focuses on Jesus Christ which led him to the proper grace adjustment. He remembered doctrine, began to think objectively, utilized the problem solving devices and regained control of his life! Once in line with the power offered to him in SSE and seeing undeserved suffering for the blessing it is he continued forward to the next stage of spiritual adulthood, spiritual autonomy!

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