



Suffering

— by Peter Hammond

“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps.” 1 Peter 2:21

Often, when we are suffering illness, injustice, unfair treatment, frustrations and traumatic situations, we cry out ‘Why?’ Why do bad things happen to good people? For what reason am I suffering?

Perhaps we should ask ourselves why Christ suffered. He was the only truly good, perfect and completely unselfish person who has ever walked this earth. Yet Christ suffered. Jesus was misunderstood, slandered, falsely accused and lied about. People accused Him of being insane. He was accused of being demon possessed! Some accused Him of being a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and outcasts. He was accused of teaching people not to pay their taxes, and of inciting riots.

The religious leaders made plans to kill Jesus. One of His handpicked disciples, Judas, betrayed Him. Jesus was forsaken by His friends and followers. Many of His disciples turned back and would not follow Him any more. When Jesus was arrested all of His disciples left Him and ran away.

Christ’s Example

Jesus was unjustly arrested, illegally tried and wrongly condemned. Our Lord Jesus Christ was mocked, insulted, slapped, beaten, whipped and crucified. Christ Himself suffered for us and left us an example to follow in His steps.

Many people may consider teaching on suffering to be negative. It is not negative to teach on the reality of everyday life. To recognise that suffering is inevitable is not discouraging at all. The Lord does not keep us from suffering, He keeps us in suffering. And the Lord has never expected us to do anything for Him that He has not already willingly done for us. Our Lord and Saviour has led from the front, by example.

Apostles Example

The Apostles taught: *“We must through many tribulations enter the Kingdom of God.”* Acts 14:22. In this way Paul and Barnabas strengthened the followers of Christ and encouraged them to continue in the Faith.

It is always a privilege to suffer for our Lord Jesus Christ. The suffering is temporary, but the glory is eternal. We should note the example of the Apostles, who, rather than claim comfort, safety and luxury at home, chose rather to suffer for Christ while obeying the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ.

After a lifetime of church planting, the Apostle Peter was crucified upside down in Rome. After fearless preaching, James the elder was beheaded by Herod in Palestine. Whilst preaching the Gospel in Greece, Andrew was crucified. After preaching to the Gauls, Phillip died as a martyr in Asia minor. Nathaniel preached the Gospel in India and Armenia before »



being flayed alive and beheaded. Thomas established churches throughout Babylon and India before being axed to death. Matthew was burned to death for preaching the Gospel in Abyssinia. James the younger was crucified while evangelising in Egypt. Jude preached the Gospel throughout Syria and Persia before being martyred. Simon the Zealot preached the Word throughout Syria and Mesopotamia and was sawn in half in Persia.

Matthias was crucified on a missionary outreach in the Crimea (present day Ukraine). John was banished in exile to Patmos. (He was the only one of the Apostles who was not martyred.)

All will Suffer

“Yes, and all who desire to live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” 2 Tim 3:12. Not some. Not many. Not even most. All. And not may suffer persecution, but will.

Genuine Faith

So what then is the purpose of suffering in the Christian life? The Apostle Peter wrote: *“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, that is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour and glory at*

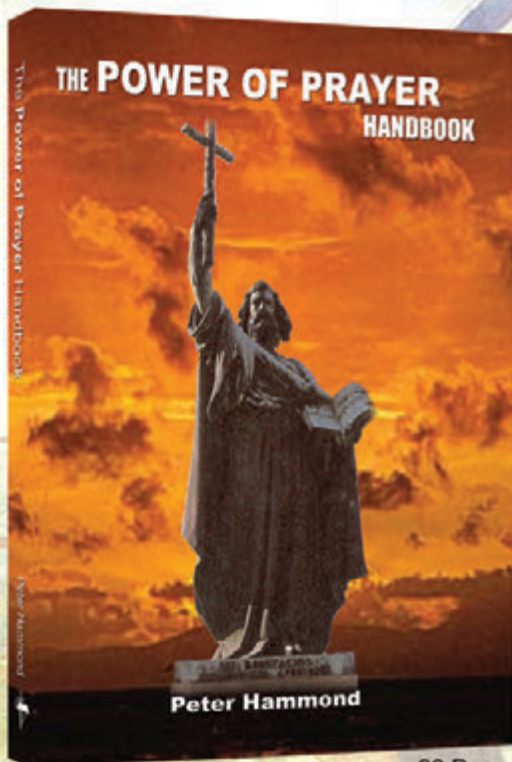
the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.” 1 Pet 1:6-7

The Apostle James encourages us: *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience....Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”* James 1:2,3,12

Pursuing Purity

Suffering purifies us and prepares us for special service. All of God's great men knew great suffering while God purged and prepared them for His service. Joseph experienced twelve years in slavery and prison before being raised up to be governor of Egypt. Moses spent forty years in the desert before becoming the deliverer of Israel. David was an outlaw and a fugitive for years before becoming the King of Israel. The Bible is full of examples of great men of Faith, enduring sufferings for the Lord. There is no shortcut to maturity. *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”* Rom 8:28. ■

DR PETER HAMMOND is the author of *The Power of Prayer Handbook* . www.frontline.org.za



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