

Day #1: The Crucible of Crisis

Read: Psalm 119:67; James 1:2-4

Who in their right minds would prefer hard times to easy? Ask 100 people which they prefer, and 100 would answer the same: *give me the GOOD TIMES!*

So how does one account for two very strange statements I heard recently? At a small group meeting a woman started her word of praise to God by saying, “I thank God for my stroke.” Then in May, while in Nepal assisting earthquake victims, I heard a man say, “I thank God for the earthquake.”

Crazy, right? But consider the fuller context of both.

In the case of the woman, she was thankful for her stroke because it brought her back to the Lord and also was healing her relationship with her estranged son. Though walking is now a bit of a challenge for her body, in a figurative sense, her spirit has a new spring in its step!

The man in Nepal is a pastor, and he has good reason to thank God for the April 25th 7.8-magnitude earthquake! Though his life became very difficult since that fateful day, he rejoices because the earthquake has brought his neighbors to their church in search of a safe place to sleep. The close contact between believers and unbelievers has resulted in quite a few of his formerly lost neighbors finding Christ!

It makes one wonder if, as Paul and Silas left Philippi, they, too, were *thanking God for the earthquake*, which resulted in their early release from jail, and more importantly, in the salvation of the jailer and his family!

Such stories are not all that unusual. Many know of people whose lives have been completely turned around by tragedy. I recently heard a story of someone whose difficult temperament was utterly transformed by a cancer diagnosis. Today she is a joyful person who is grateful to God for all the friends she discovered she has. She never knew such joy B.C. (before cancer).

So, there’s obviously another side to suffering, a side we could call an “inconvenient truth.” This truth is hinted at by the Apostle James in his bizarre statement, “Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds...” (James 1:2).

For these 30 days, we will consider the ubiquitous presence of “things-going-badly” in life. We may reach some surprising conclusions about crises, ourselves, the human experience, and yes, even about God.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Have you or someone you know ever said, "I thank God for my cancer", or an earthquake, or some other great trial or loss? How could this be true? Share your story.

What are some lessons you have learned or gains achieved through suffering that make it suffering worth it (not that we have a choice)?

Even unbelievers have said they thank God for cancer, or some other hard thing that has happened. How might someone walking with Jesus through suffering mean this in a way that an unbeliever could not?