

LIFES LESSONS:

What I learnt about God and about myself through suffering.

There have been three major crises in my lifetime, a motor accident, a church conflict and a business failure.

Motor Accident: A man travelling at full road speed in a heavy car fainted at the wheel and swerved on to my side. I was crushed between two cars. My back was broken and pelvis fractured in two places. While laying in that condition on the side of the road I heard what was to me an audible voice. It was God speaking to Satan saying, "So far and no further you cannot touch his life." This accident put me into a traction unit". At the time this was not a matter of joy, but afterwards yielded much fruit.

This experience led to a remarkable experience with God that completely changed my life in every way. It was used to free me from a tragic legal religion into true freedom. Three months following this accident I had an incredible personal encounter with Jesus. He visited me one night and caused the awesome light of His presence to surround me. I have never been the same since. This eventually led me into full time ministry.

Job 14. 7-9 says, "For there is hope for a tree. If it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that it's tender shoots will not cease. Though its root may grow old in the earth, and its stump may die in the ground, yet at the scent of water it will bud and bring forth branches like a plant." I now know the truth of those words.

Business Crisis: In my business crises I certainly proved that my heavenly Father disciplines those he loves. The pressure often caused me to wake up in the night. One night I remember very clearly. I was feeling such a failure, circumstances were out of control, and I didn't know how I could face the next day. It was three in the morning, I felt that God wasn't hearing my cries, I was so disqualified, so depressed, so full of anxiety --- suddenly I heard my heavenly Father's voice, not audible, but so clear, "John I love you!" Those simple words revived my spirit, from them I received strength and I felt I could face any enemy that opposed me. After breakfast that morning as I walked out to my car I smelled a magnificent fragrance, I turn aside and realized it came from the blossoms of a lemon tree. It was as if God was reaching out through that tree to say I love you. This was so simple yet so profound. God is good!

During that time we lost our house that we had purchased before we married. We now lived in an old rented place. Yes naturally it would be a 'come down', but it was not so, we felt God in every room and loved living there. In the middle of that crisis, in that house, many people found Christ and have continued in their faith walk ever since.

Church Conflict: During and following those crises, we experienced a prolonged church conflict. Again I proved God with me. At one point there arose vicious false accusations against me from brothers that I had befriended and served. This caused me to go into God alone and ask, "Is any of this true of me?" I said, "Please Lord show me?" I then opened my Bible at random and looked down to read. It had opened at Psalm 31: 20 "Thou shall hide them in the secret place of thy presence from the plots of man; thou shall keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues." God presence was all around.

I found in all this when I stopped vindicating myself, God vindicated in a way that showed his awesome justice.

What I learnt about myself:

Suffering and crises certainly brought to the surface things in my character that needed to be purified. My initial reactions to injustice found me wanting.

Lessons:

1. I found that Jeremiah was right when he said, "the human heart is desperately wicked

above all things."

2. I had much to learn about grace.
3. I learnt to be honest about my motives.
4. I learnt to love those who persecuted me, even see the face of God in them like Jacob did with Esau after he had his wrestling experience with the Angel.
5. I learnt to lean hard on the Lord. I had always been independent.
6. I increased my search for wisdom.
7. I believe the pressure enlarged me.
8. I learnt to be humble when some came to say they had wronged me.
9. I learnt that I have much more to learn.
10. I now find that I can identify and help many who are themselves experiencing crises.
11. I learnt that the way to fruitfulness is firstly that the corn of wheat has to fall into the ground and die.

What suffering did for my faith:

It helped me to find real faith and abandon the parroted clichés. I came to realize that deep faith is allowed to doubt. I found that the lessons of the past made me strong so I could face the testing of the future.

All sunny skies would be too bright,
All morning hours mean too much light,
All laughing days too gay a strain;
There must be clouds, and night, and rain,
And shut-in days, to make us see
The beauty of life's tapestry.

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