

## **How To Worship God When You Are In Pain**

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Rich Nathan

Worship: Worship as a Lifestyle

Acts 16:6-40

Have you noticed that it seems in recent years that you hear more explicit mention of Jesus' name after the Super Bowl, the World Series, or even the Grammy Awards? You go to the winners' locker rooms and people are jumping up and down, spraying each other with champagne. And invariably several of the players will grab the microphone and the first thing they say is, "I just want to praise my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ." Typically, the interviewer will try to steer the excited player back to the game or a highlight film. The player will comment on it a little bit, "Yes, I was running a slant pattern; I was running a post-pattern. And I just gave them a little head fake there and caught the winning touchdown."

But then he will start screaming again, "Praise the Lord. Praise Jesus! Hi, Mom!" In the background everyone is cheering, "We're #1."

Well, I've wondered about something. How come you rarely hear people praising the Lord, or thanking God or Jesus in the losers' locker room? Is Jesus just for winners? I've yet to hear someone interviewed in the losers' locker room enthusiastically saying, "I just want to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who appointed losing for us today, and for letting me drop the ball in the end zone for what would have been the winning touchdown. I just thank God that he had that ball bounce over my head on that last onside kick so that the opposing team would pick it up and run in for what proved to be the winning touchdown. Praise Jesus for humbling me today because I know in my heart that had I made the catch, or had that ball not bounced over my head, I would be utterly obnoxious, totally insufferable, beating on my chest. Thank God that he's kept me needy and dependent."

Ever hear a sports figure say something like this after a World Series:

"I just want to praise God for causing the ball to hit that pebble when I put my glove down because I will forever be known as the guy who blew the World Series for the Boston Red Sox."

"I just thank God that I missed that easy lay up at the buzzer that cost us the NBA championship. You know, had I made that lay up, I would be interviewed on all these late night talk shows and be in demand on the public speaking circuit. The fact that I missed the easy lay up means that I have five months to be alone in my apartment to think, to become a better person."

You never hear guys jumping up and down yelling, “We’re #2. We’re #2.” Why don’t the losers ever praise the Lord?

You never hear at the Academy Awards, “Praise the Lord for appointing another award ceremony for me in which I go home empty handed so that I’m never on the A-list for parties. Clearly God is good to me in allowing me to find him sufficient in all circumstances.”

Where is the attitude of Job, who in response to his wife’s advice that after all of his trouble he should curse God and die – where is the attitude of Job where he says, “You are talking like a foolish woman. Should we only accept good from God and not trouble?”

Where is Jesus’ name in the losers’ locker room?

You know, in this world people experience lots of pain and suffering. Sometimes we experience pain because we have forsaken Jesus. Many times, we as Christians, encounter great difficulty and great pain because we have broken ranks with the Lord. We’ve stopped following our leader. We’ve, for a time, separated ourselves from Christ. We are off doing our own thing. And now we are experiencing the discipline of the Lord.

If you have sex outside of marriage, you could get a sexually transmitted disease. Or if you overspend, you live under the burden of huge credit card debt. Or if you are lazy in school or drop out of school – you just don’t want to put in the effort – then you fail an exam or are not able to get a good job as a result of your prior laziness. Or you destroy a relationship when friends discover that you’ve been gossiping about them. Or you ruin your marriage through continual spousal abuse or neglect.

Sometimes the suffering, the pain that is in our lives, is the result of the discipline of the Lord because we’ve broken ranks with Jesus. We’ve gotten off the path and have gone our own way.

Sometimes we experience pain and suffering as Christians because we are following Jesus closely. There are trials and sufferings that take place precisely because you are a Christian. Jesus says in John 15:18:

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belong to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

I’ve talked with many wives, whose husbands have really gotten down on them because the wives are devoted followers of Christ. Some of you may be in that situation. That you are experiencing pressure from your husband, or your wife,

or from your family because you read your bible and want to go to church, because you want to take the kids to church, because you want to tithe to the church, and your husband or wife doesn't want you to. Some of you have experienced losing friends because you've made a Christian commitment. Throughout Christian history, missionaries and Christian leaders have suffered because they are closely following Christ, and the world hates followers of Christ. People will accuse you of bad motives. They will call you dangerous, or say that you are an ultra-fundamentalist.

There is suffering because we've been bad followers of Christ. There is suffering because we have been good followers of Christ. There is suffering that is just part of the human experience in a fallen world that we have even though we follow Christ, which is entirely unrelated to our Christian profession. Your pain, your suffering, may be financial. You've been laid off. Your car just keeps dying. It is always in the shop. You have unexpected dental bills. There are huge tax bills due that you were unaware of. You can't afford to pay for college.

Your pain and suffering could be vocational. You simply cannot find a fulfilling job. The market is glutted in the field you studied for. You are working for a terrible boss and are always overlooked for a promotion.

Your suffering could be physical. You have a chronic illness. You can't get pregnant. You live in continual pain, or a loved one may have these problems.

Your sufferings may be relational. You have been unfairly slandered. Someone is ripping up your reputation. Your words have been misrepresented. You have a kid who is rebelling. You have a parent who is ill. You are single and you want to be married. Or you are married, and you are separating or getting a divorce against your desire.

Your pain could be ministry related. Your small group may be collapsing even though you've done everything you know to do, or you have been dismissed from a ministry role that you love, or your gifts haven't been recognized.

Now, in the chapter that we are going to be looking at today, Acts 16, there is a record of a number of miracles of God. Paul is marvelously, we would say miraculously, led to begin to plant churches in Europe, in Macedonia, which today would be partly in the former Yugoslavia and partly in Greece. Paul is miraculously led there. And then we see a miracle of God opening up a woman's heart so that she receives Christ into her life. And then there is the miracle of Paul delivering a slave girl from a demon. And we read about a miraculous earthquake.

But of all the miracles contained in Acts 16 – miracles of guidance, miracles of salvation, miracles of deliverance, miracles of nature – one of the sweetest and most precious miracles of all is found in verse 25 of Acts 16. Where, after having

been stripped and severely beaten with rods, Paul and Silas are thrown into jail. Their feet are in stocks. And in verse 25 we read:

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

Praising Jesus in the loser's locker room, praising Jesus in the hospital, praising Jesus from the unemployment line, praising Jesus as you do your taxes, praising Jesus when you are in prison - are these things not so miraculous that an observer would say, "Only God"? There's no accounting for that response, except for God. I've called today's talk, "How to Worship God When You Are in Pain." Let's pray.

### **Acts 16:6-10**

Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Now, we see that Paul is miraculously guided in verses 6-10 by the Holy Spirit, by Jesus, by a vision. It says:

From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis.

Neapolis was a port city on the Aegean Sea. They got out at this port. And we read in verse 12:

From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

There was an ancient Roman road that ran right across the Greek peninsula from the Aegean to the Adriatic and if you travel in Greece today, you can still see some of the massive paving stones laid down by the Romans 2000 years ago.

Well, after the amazing guidance in verses 6-10, you would expect that once they got to Philip, there would be this fabulous response to the gospel. God surely wouldn't call a church planter or a missionary to go to a city through many different confirmations, without lots and lots of prophetic words, and then have the person struggle for years. But that is precisely what He did here in Paul's life. It says:

On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer.

Paul's evangelistic method was always to go first to the Jew to share the gospel with his Jewish brothers and sisters and then, only after that, would he go to the Gentiles. To the Jew first, and then also to the Greek. That was his method. And so he goes to the place where he expects to find a synagogue outside the city by a river. Jews in those days generally built their synagogues along rivers because the running water would be used for ritual purification. We read:

We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.

Apparently, there was no synagogue. In Orthodox Judaism, even to this day, in order to form a synagogue there must be a quorum of ten men. Apparently, there weren't enough Jews in that area even to get a synagogue up and going. There are these woman sitting around and Paul thinks like a Christian, "Well this isn't what I expected, but how can I serve Jesus in this situation?" "While I'm delayed in this repair shop for three hours..." "I'm sitting around in this waiting room waiting for the doctor to get done with his round of golf..." "I'm put on hold for the 15<sup>th</sup> time..." "How can I make the best of this situation?" So he sits down and begins to speak to the women gathered there.

One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God.

In other words, she believed in the God of the Jews, but she had not yet become a Jew.

And here's the miracle:

The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.

Do you know that whether someone is near to Christ or far from Christ, it is always a miracle when a person becomes a believer? The Lord must open an individual's heart. See, only the Lord can enlighten someone's understanding so that they finally grasp the gospel, and they say, "Oh, I see. I understand why I'm separated from God. It's because of my sin. But now, for the first time in my life, I see how much God loves me. He sent his Son Jesus to die for that very thing that keeps me separated from God, my sin, and to remove the obstacle between me and God from my path. And God offers me forgiveness of all of my sins as a free gift. I now understand that all I need to do is receive the forgiveness purchased for me at the cross by Christ, and I can be saved."

God alone can enlighten a person's mind so that they can understand the gospel message. So that they say, "Oh, I get it." God alone can move someone's

emotions so that they want Jesus, so that they are warmed to Jesus, instead of cold. So that they fall in love with Jesus. God, alone, can move someone's emotions. God, alone, can strengthen someone's will so that they choose Jesus and choose to endure and walk with Jesus even when times are hard.

It is a miracle when a person's heart is opened. His mind is enlightened and his emotions move. His will strengthens.

And you know, you can tell when a person's heart is opened. It's not so mysterious. First of all this woman gets baptized. Verse 15:

When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home.

That's what baptism is, a public profession of Christ. If Jesus has opened up your heart, you are going to follow him in water baptism, and you are going to tell others about him.

But here's the real sign of God's opening someone's heart, verse 15:

"If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

When God opens up a person's heart, what will always follow in the wake of that is an open home and an open wallet. You can tell Christians, friends. Christians are people who open up their homes to people who are in need, and they open up their wallets. Stinginess and Christianity are utterly incompatible. If you really, really have a hard time giving, if you are a stingy person and you refuse to tithe your paycheck, if you have real difficulty opening up your home, having a group at your home, practicing hospitality, the question needs to be asked, "Is Christ really in your life?" Could the Spirit of Jesus, who is generous and welcoming, be in the life of an individual who is stingy and utterly inhospitable? An open heart will always lead to an open home and an open wallet.

Now, Paul encounters other difficulties in this chapter. He is followed around for days by a slave girl who it says in verse 16:

earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling.

She is demonized and Paul casts out the demon. It says in verse 19:

When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities.

Real Christianity will often come in conflict with entrenched economic interests.

One of the toughest things for missionaries throughout history has been that the proclamation of the gospel runs counter to someone's financial interests. It happened in India when the British East India Company wanted to make money on the backs of Indians. They regularly harassed missionaries.

It happened down South when Christians would go and try to preach the gospel to the slaves. See, when the gospel comes to a person, he is changed. You preach the gospel to a prostitute, and her pimp is not going to make money off of her anymore. If you preach the gospel to a drug addict, then the dealer is not going to make money any more. It's the same thing with a gambler or the purveyor of pornography. When Christ sets a person free, there are often economic consequences for someone who is living off of that person's bondage. And people don't like that.

So we read that:

the crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Now this has been a bad week for Paul. He is led to Philippi and after all of this miraculous guidance, there's very little to show for it. He's followed by a demonized girl for days. He's attacked by a mob, stripped and beaten, unfairly thrown into prison – not a good week.

Now, there are a number of responses that would have been very natural for Paul to have to his circumstances. He could have become really afraid, "Oh my goodness, my world is falling apart. What's going to become of me? The only light I see at the end of the tunnel is the headlights of an oncoming train. I see no way out of prison. I'll probably die here." He could have become afraid.

He could have been self-pitying. "Why me? Why are these terrible things happening to me? Why doesn't anyone care about me? I'm all alone. No one understands."

He could have been envious. "How come other Christians don't suffer the way I do?" Like the writer of Psalm 37 who frets and is upset because he is doing worse than other people. "Why am I single and this other person is married?" "Why is my marriage going so poorly?" "Why am I the only one who can't find another job?" "Why am I stuck here in jail, while everyone else seems to be having a good time?"

Envy. He could have been angry. “How dare these people do this to me? How dare they relate to me in this way? How dare they beat me? How dare God allow this, after all I’ve done for him? I’m following him. I’m doing his will. I’m preaching the gospel. How dare you, God, let me be beaten? You know, I prayed for protection. I’ve been praying the Prayer of Jabez every day.”

See, there’s self-pity, envy, and anger. Let me suggest one more possible response.

Friend, you can tell where a person’s heart is when they are squeezed. Very often, a person runs back to their favorite addiction – their drug of choice. “I’m under pressure right now, so I’d better reach for the bottle.”

“I’d better reach for the chocolate cake and eat it all. I’ll turn to my favorite escape.”

What does the apostle Paul do? Verse 25:

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

Friends, these are not super human beings. They were Christians who had been trained to respond to pain by choosing, in the midst of their pain, to worship God.

Now, some secular counselor may come along and say, “Oh well, they are just in denial. They are using religion as a form of denying their pain.” But Paul and Silas were not in denial. They knew that their circumstances were not good.

One of the most liberating things you could ever discover about life is that, with God’s help, you can choose your response to whatever comes your way. If you are in pain now, let me offer you a liberating thought. You do not have to be afraid for yourself, for your family. You do not have to live in fear.

You do not have to live in self-pity, isolated, depressed, licking your wounds, rehearsing all the bad things that have been done to you. You don’t have to live that way.

You don’t have to live envying others because of their good fortune and the fact that life turned out well for them.

You don’t have to be angry with the world. You don’t have to be angry with God.

You don’t have to sin. With God’s help, you can choose to worship him, even when you suffer.



You say, “How? How can I worship God? How did Paul, with his back bloody, beaten and bruised, feet in stocks, everything in life going the wrong direction, how did Paul choose in that circumstance to worship God?”

First of all, Paul was convinced that God had appointed this suffering at this time, in this way, for him. Paul would not say that God had merely allowed him to suffer, that God is like the world’s best chess player, who doesn’t will the moves of his opponent, but can check them for good. Paul would say, and indeed the Bible would suggest, that God plans, God designs, and God appoints suffering in the life of his children.

He wrote in Ephesians 1:11:

God works all things according to the counsel of his will.

All things. He has a good and wise purpose in all that happens.

1 Samuel 2:6-7 says:

The Lord kills and makes alive; he brings down to Sheol and raises up.  
The Lord makes poor and rich; he brings low, he also exalts.

Jesus said in Matthew 10:29,

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father.

The birds don’t drop to the ground except by the will of our Father in heaven.

From morning till night, over all the comings and goings of our lives, James tells us in James 4:15 to say:

If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that...

Isaiah 46:10:

God says, My purpose will be established and I will accomplish all my good pleasure.

Proverbs 16:33:

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.

You say, “Well, what about people’s free will? What about people’s choices?”

After the World Trade Center disaster, many Christian theologians and pastors were interviewed on TV. The question was posed: “Well, why did God do this?” Many of the pastors and theologians said, “Well, God didn’t do it. It was the abuse of man’s free will. Terrorists did it. God didn’t appoint this. He didn’t design it. He just allowed it.” According to the Bible, friends, there may be multiple causes for any suffering, for any pain, for any tragedy. But it’s simply not biblical to say behind it all and above it all is the design of God.

I want you to see this. What is the greatest tragedy that has happened in the history of the world, the greatest injustice, the greatest suffering? When has a person suffered more than anyone ever has? And not just physically, but emotionally and spiritually? And when has it been the most unjust? The most undeserved?

We would say the Cross of Jesus. Here is the innocent Son of God, who never sinned, never did anything wrong. He came to the earth, filled to the full with the love and grace of God. His whole life was a life of undeserved suffering, culminating in the Cross where he not only suffered physically, but suffered spiritually worse than any man or woman ever has. He drank to the last drop the cup of the wrath of God. He experienced in his own being eternal hell, separation from the Father, so that he cried from the Cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

And what caused this worst of all human tragedies? Who made Jesus suffer like that? Look with me at Acts 4:27:

Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.

Who is responsible for the death and suffering of Christ? The Governmental leaders – Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, the people of Israel, the Jews, the Romans – they all got together to conspire against Jesus.

But is God off the hook? He’s just allowed it? He’s just responding to the abuse of man’s free will? No, verse 28:

They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

And that word in Greek for “decided beforehand,” *pro-orizo*, is incredibly strong. It communicates predestined, decided beforehand what would happen and caused it to happen.

Yes, there are multiple causes for every tragedy – people, Satan, our own stupidity, our own choices. But overall there is the design and the will of God.

And I tell you this is so important to be convinced of, in all pain that you go through, because you cannot *not* worship God in the midst of difficulty. If you have the least bit of doubt that this present disease, or financial setback, or relational problem, or whatever is outside of God's control, reducing God's role in your pain will never result in you having any peace or having any contentment.

See, I can submit to God's will even if he wills for me losing, failure, and difficulty. I can submit to the will of God based on the Bible and based on my experience in the past that God is good and that his purpose at this moment, though mysterious, though I don't understand it, though I'm confused, though I'm grieving, I can submit to the will of God. What I can't submit to, what I can't find any peace in, what won't provoke me to worship God is the idea that wicked people, Satan, or some accident, or a natural disaster, a down economy, or a fallen world has caused this to happen. Apart from the design of God, all that we have is a supreme massive tragedy that maybe God can somehow fix. Apart from the design, the will, the purpose of God, all we have is crazy, purposeless, random events.

Friends, this is where Christianity and a Christian worldview run squarely counter to the worldview of our entire culture. Because our entire culture has been formed by evolution and naturalism and down the core of the core we are a culture that deeply believes that events are entirely random, that it is just time and chance. How do you worship when it's just time and chance and craziness? Where's the peace in all circumstances? Where's the contentment in your life? Where's the power to worship God no matter what?

Listen to John Bunyon, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, the best-selling Christian book of all time, apart from the Bible. Bunyon was a very poor man, he was a tinkerer. He used to fix things. His wife was very poor. His father-in-law died when his wife was younger. The only things his father-in-law left to John's wife were two books – *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* and *The Practice of Piety*. John and his wife had four children – Mary, Elizabeth, John and Thomas. Mary, the oldest, was born blind.

John was converted under the preaching of John Gifford. One day he was asked to preach in church, and he was so effective, he was so popular, that the church grew and grew. People came by the hundreds to hear John Bunyon preach.

Well, the Anglicans were in power. They tried to shut down all non-Anglican preaching. Across the country they passed a series of parliamentary acts forbidding any non-Anglican to preach and forbidding any service that wouldn't use the Book of Common Prayer. Bunyon refused to stop preaching, and they threw him in prison, where he remained for twelve years. He could have gotten out at any time if he just simply agreed not to preach. He refused.

And he was tormented by his decision in prison. He said, "The parting with my wife and poor children has often been to me in this place like the pulling of the flesh from my bones. And not only because I am too fond of God's great mercies found in my family, but also because I have often brought to mind the many hardships, miseries, and wants that my poor family was needing while I was taken from them, especially my poor blind child, who is nearer to my heart than everything I have in this world. Oh, the thoughts of the hardship that my little blind one must be going under. My heart is breaking to pieces."

How did Bunyon interpret his pain, his separation from his family, the suffering of his children, the absence of his wife, persecution from governmental authorities, the religious harassment? How did Bunyon interpret it all? Here's what Bunyon says:

It is not what enemies will, nor what they are resolved upon, but what God wills and what God appoints that shall be done. And as no enemy can bring suffering upon a man when the will of God is alive, so no man can save himself out of the hands of God when God will deliver him up for glory. We shall or shall not suffer even as it pleases the Lord. God has appointed who shall suffer. Suffering comes not by chance, or by the will of man, but by the will and appointment of God.

Paul was able to worship in prison because he was deeply convinced that God had appointed this suffering at this time in this way for him. And Paul was deeply convinced that God's appointment of suffering would result in his own good, in good for others, and the good of the glory of God.

The patriarch Joseph, after he had suffered at the hands of his brothers, even sold into slavery, had been unfairly thrown into jail, lost companionship with his father for many years, the patriarch Joseph announced the Christian's perspective on suffering when he says in Genesis 50:20:

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Do you believe that, friends? Do you believe that no matter what someone's intention is towards you, to stab you in the back, to hurt you, to hurt a family member, to stupidly drive drunk without regard to anyone on the road, do you believe that God intends everything that happens in your life only for good, if you are his child? Do you believe that nothing can happen in your life but that which God intends it for good, no matter what anyone else intends? Do you believe that?

Do you believe that if you suffer because of your own stupidity, and you get back in line and return to Christ, that God intends even the discipline that you suffer now, maybe for years to come, that God intends all of that for your good?

As Hebrews 12:10 says:

Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best. But God disciplines us for our good that we may share in his holiness.

Sometimes, in our worst moments, we would prefer a God who didn't care enough about a relationship with us to discipline us. A God who would just say, "Run along. So long as you pray the sinner's prayer, do what you please." But God is not like that. He is a jealous God. He is a ruthless God, to root out of our lives everything that separates us from him.

There is a reason, Christian, that sin never works out for you. That your relationships always blow up. That you are always unhappy. That you always lose and never win when you sin. Because God loves his children too much to let them sin without pain. If you can sin without pain, then you are not one of God's children.

All of God's designs are for your good. Do you believe that?

I've quoted the hymn of Lina Sandell, who was the daughter of Jonas Sandell, pastor of a Lutheran church in Sweden. When Lina was 26 years old, she accompanied her father on a boat trip to Gothenberg. During the boat trip he slipped and fell overboard and drowned before Lina's eyes. The tragedy so affected her that she became a hymn writer, a worshiper of God in the midst of her pain. And she wrote the hymn "Day by Day" which goes:

Day by day and with each passing moment,  
Strength I find to meet my trials here.  
Trusting in my Father's wise bestowment  
I've no cause for worry or for fear.  
He, whose heart is kind beyond all measure,  
Gives unto each day what he deems best  
Lovingly as part of pain and pleasure,  
Mingling toil with peace and rest.

God is kind beyond all measure. What he gives is the Father's wise bestowment. He gives what he deems best. Lovingly, it is part of pain and pleasure. Do you not like this idea that God designed suffering and that God's design of suffering, of losing, of failing, of not getting the job you want, not getting the husband you want, that it may be for your good? Do you not like this?

Would you prefer a religion that teaches the only thing that God is ever going to want for you or anyone you love, your family, your friends, everyone in your circle, the only thing that God is ever going to desire is comfort and ease and full bellies and prosperous times around the family fireplace? That's what I want.

But then I'm reminded of a quote from the British writer, C. S. Lewis, who said, "I don't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew that a good bottle of port wine would do that." "If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable," Lewis said, "I certainly don't recommend Christianity."

Paul was convinced that God appointed suffering in his life for his good and for the good of others. Let me tell you a few stories. Some may be familiar to you, others completely unfamiliar.

Back in the 4<sup>th</sup> century there was a monk named Telemachus, who lived in Asia. But he thought God was saying to him, "Go to Rome." He lived in one of these cloistered monasteries and didn't understand it. But he took his little possessions and put them in a sack and set out for Rome.

When he arrived in the city, everyone was thronging in the streets. He asked why was there all the excitement. They said that this was the day that all the gladiators would be fighting and killing each other in the Coliseum, the games.

He thought to himself, "It's nearly four centuries after Christ and people are still watching men be killed for entertainment." He ran to the Coliseum and heard the gladiators shouting, "Hail to Caesar. We die for Caesar." He thought, "This isn't right" and jumped over the railing and went into the middle of the field. He got between two gladiators and held up his hands. He said, "In the name of Christ, stop!"

The crowd protested and began to shout, "Run him through, run him through."

A gladiator came over and hit him in the stomach with the back of his sword. He sent Telemachus sprawling in the sand. He got up and ran back again saying, "In the name of Christ, forbear, stop!"

The crowd continued to chant, "Run him through."

One gladiator came over and plunged his sword through the little monk's stomach. Telemachus fell into the sand, which began to become red with his poured out blood. One last time he held up his hand and he said, "In the name of Christ, stop this!" A hush came over the more than 50,000 people in the Coliseum. Soon a man stood up and left. Then another. And another. Within a short time, the entire crowd emptied out of the arena. It was the last known gladiator contest in the history of Rome.

God appoints suffering not only for your good, but for the good of others. Let me tell you about Helen Roseveare. She was born in a very wealthy family in England. Her father had been knighted for his service to the Crown during WWI.

He was a renowned mathematician. Helen went to an exclusive girls' school and then on to Cambridge, where she received her medical degree.

Many of her family members served in missions. Helen, from the time she was a child, was formed to be a missionary. In 1953 she went to the Congo. She had a brand new concept. Instead of setting up a medical clinic where a physician would work like crazy, around the clock, completely overwhelmed and never meeting everyone's needs, she decided to set up a training center, where she trained Africans to be nurses. They would be able to go into the villages and be able to provide basic health care.

The work grew and grew and was very successful. She also started Bible studies at the clinic and had dozens and dozens of Africans coming in for Bible studies.

Well, Dr. Roseveare's work became a threat to some of her male colleagues. They felt that it was inappropriate for a woman to be overseeing a clinic like this and teaching male students. So they petitioned the mission agency she worked with, and the agency agreed. She was becoming a divisive problem. They sent a male doctor down there who essentially took over her entire work. He ran the clinic as if it was his own. He wouldn't let Helen teach the Bible.

After a couple of years of serving under that kind of tyranny, Dr. Roseveare left the field and went back to England to husband hunt. She figured, "Well, if I got married, at least my husband would be able to protect me, and I could do whatever I wanted down in the Congo." So she fixed up her hair and got new clothes and went out with a few different men. One man in particular she was really interested in marrying told her that he cared for her a great deal, but he didn't want to marry her. This was a very hard thing for her to go through. First, the clinic. Then she couldn't find a husband. She prayed and prayed, but God just wasn't opening any doors for her to be married.

In any case, she felt the Lord was leading her back to the Congo. It was the time of independence, and the African soldiers were attacking not only white governmental officials, but also missionaries. Many of the missionaries fled. Helen decided to stay. She felt that the Lord would certainly protect her.

One evening a soldier broke into her little house. He beat her and punched her over and over again in the face. He knocked out some of her teeth. He broke her glasses. He dragged her along the floor by her hair and finally brutally raped her – violating her throughout the night. Helen had a depth of spiritual maturity that had been worked into her over the years of disappointments. She believed that even this horrible event would be used by God in her life and in the lives of others.

Shortly after her rape, a Mother Superior from a Catholic convent called her and said that she had a young nun who was suicidal because she, likewise, had been raped. She felt that she had lost all of her purity, and that her life was over. Helen was able to minister to that young nun and, out of her own experience of suffering, bring comfort and understanding. She saved that young nun's life.

After a few more years of working in the Congo, Dr. Roseveare left. Do you know what God did? God made Helen Roseveare one of the most influential speakers to Christian students in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Dr. Roseveare's testimony and her obvious maturity had such an extraordinary effect, particularly on single women, that literally thousands of single women have become missionaries because of her.

Paul was convinced that God's designed suffering was for his own good, for the good of others, and for the glory of God. Listen to me now. I'll close with this. There is nothing in this world that God finds more precious than when one of his children suffers well and continues to worship him in the midst of pain.

It is a good thing when you are grateful for the mercies of God in your life. It is a good thing when you kneel down and say to God, "thank you" for his very manifold blessings – for the blessing of your children, for the blessing of food, for the blessing of a good marriage, for the blessing of a satisfying work, for the blessing of provision, for the blessing of a beautiful day, for the blessing of your vacation. It is a good thing when you kneel down and say thank you to God and return thanks.

But it is a glorious thing, it manifests the glory of God, when you, as a Christian, suffer well and continue to choose to worship God in the midst of your pain. See, if you are living like most of us are, in a middle class existence – you have a nice house, you have a bank account, you have insurance, you have a decent job, everything in your life is going pretty well, you are healthy, no one is going to come up to you in the midst of your prosperity and say, "How do you do it? How do you remain so content, so happy in the midst of all your comfort? What's your secret? How do you walk around with a smile on your face when everything in your life is going so well?"

But friend, when you worship God in the hospital, when you kneel down and lift up your hands to God in worship when another door has been slammed in your face for employment, when you've been stabbed in the back, when a family member of yours is hurting, you've just lost the big game and you are in the losers' locker room, when you are sitting in prison like Paul and you can still worship God at midnight, it has a shattering affect on people around you.

I don't think it was just the earthquake that converted the jailer. I think it was the joy of the apostle Paul. How do you do it? What's your secret? How can you not be falling apart? I'd be just absolutely out of control. How do you do it?



Let me tell you a story. There was a Masai warrior named Joseph. Joseph was walking along one of those hot dusty roads in Africa, and he met someone who shared with him the gospel of Jesus Christ. He accepted Christ as his Lord and **Savior**. The power of the Spirit began transforming his life. He was filled with such excitement and joy that he went back to his village to share the good news with members of his local tribe.

He began to go door to door, telling everyone he met about the cross of Jesus and the salvation it offers. He expected to be accepted. Not only did the villagers not care about what he was saying, but they became violent. The men of the village seized him and held him to the ground while women beat him with strands of barbed wire. He was dragged outside of the village and left in the bushes to die.

Somehow Joseph managed to crawl to a waterhole. And after days of passing in and out of consciousness, he found the strength to get up. He wondered about the hostile reception. Perhaps the people did not understand, or perhaps he thought that he communicated the story of Jesus incorrectly.

After rehearsing the message over and over aloud, he decided to go back to the village and share his faith another time. He limped into the circle of huts and began to proclaim Jesus. "He died for you that you might find forgiveness and come to know the living God."

Again, he was grabbed by the men in the village and held down while the women beat him. They reopened wounds that had just begun to heal. Once more, they dragged him unconscious from the village. To have survived the first beating was remarkable. To have lived through the second was a miracle.

Again, days later, Joseph woke up bruised and scarred. He was determined to go back a third time. He returned to the village, and this time they attacked him before he had a chance to open his mouth. As they flogged him for the third and, probably, last time, he spoke to them about Jesus. Before he passed out, the last thing he saw was that the women who were beating him began to weep. This time he woke up in his own bed. The ones who severely beat him were now trying to save his life and nurse him back to health. The entire village came to Christ.

Choose to worship God when you are in pain. There's nothing that brings more glory to God and is more precious to God than that. Let's pray.

## **How To Worship God When You Are In Pain**

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February 16-17, 2002

Rich Nathan

Worship: Worship as a Lifestyle

Acts 16:6-40

### **I. Our Experiences**

- A. Suffering of All Types
- B. Results of All Types
- C. Responses of All Types

### **II. Paul's Convictions**

- A. He was convinced that God appointed this suffering at this time, in this way for him.
- B. He was convinced that everyone of God's appointments for his children was for good:
  - 1. Good for Himself
  - 2. Good for Others
  - 3. Good for God and His Glory