

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



February 19, 2012

Strength Through Weakness

When we view the sufferings in our lives as negatives, we're missing an important lesson. It is through these experiences that God makes us better, stronger people.

“And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

We have no idea what Paul's thorn in the flesh was, but we do know why he had it: “lest I be exalted above measure” (v. 8). Paul saw that divine purpose in all the hardships that came into his life. He “took pleasure” in his sufferings, not because he was a masochist looking for sick thrills, but because he understood that all the experiences of his life, both good and bad—including even the terrible mistakes he had made—were designed to make him a better person. The training was tough, but he knew the end goal was worth it.

Examine the lives of other Bible characters and you see the same pattern emerge. Job had to lose everything in order to learn that without God, he was

nothing; Abraham had to sacrifice his son in order to learn the meaning of obedience; Joseph had to go through slavery in Egypt before he could save his family, Moses had to spend forty years watching sheep before he was ready to deliver God's people, David had to endure the mad ravings of Saul before he could become king, Queen Esther was forced to deal with the scheming of Haman in order to save her people, Peter became a great apostle, but only after he felt the humiliating sting of failure in denying Christ.

We could go on and on: Jacob had his big brother, Esau, the Israelites had their wilderness wandering, Jonah had his whale, Daniel had his lions' den, Elijah his Jezebel, John the Baptist his Herod, Jeremiah his dungeon, Jesus His cross . . . Get the message?

We are hard pressed to think of *any* major Bible character whose achievements were not offset by some kind of severe trial or failure in their lives. The painful experiences did not destroy these people. Instead, their trials taught them patience, humility, dependence on

God — the very qualities that ultimately contributed to their greatness.

Suffering is not just garbage that we must slog through in life. Rather, it is an essential ingredient to our character development. Peter says concerning the fiery trials that come into our lives, “do not think it strange . . . , as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice . . .” (1 Pet. 4:12-13). The trials are not a breakdown in God's plan; *they are a critical part of His plan*, a necessary element to God fulfilling His will for our lives. Without them, our character would be lacking, our moral strength deficient.

So like Paul, when hardships come into our lives, we should take courage and face them head-on, cheerfully accepting them as the learning experiences God intends them to be. Even when we bring the pain upon ourselves through our stupid mistakes, the lessons we learn can still be a pathway to a greater outcome. The sufferings may drive us to our knees, but in that humbled position, we will find the strength that will make us better people.

— David King