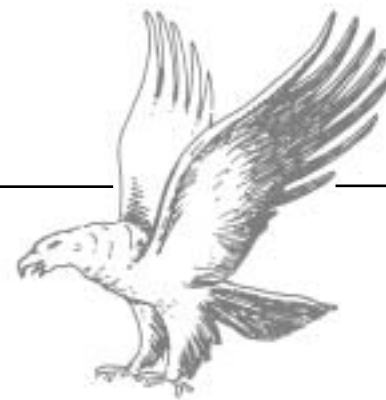


# Wings

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



December 9, 2012

## To Live Is To Suffer

As much as we would like to have it otherwise, suffering is a fact of life. We can rage against the world (or God) for its existence, or we can accept it as a tool to make us better people.

“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings” (1 Pet. 4:12-13).

Virtually all those who live in developed Western societies—but especially Americans—are a spoiled lot. We expect life to be free of pain and hardship, and when something goes wrong and we suffer, we expect somebody to fix it. We look to either government intervention, or highly advanced medical technology, or a generous tort system to step in and remove the problem. Of course, life is not that simple, and many of our problems can’t be fixed, no matter how much money and technology we throw at them. That’s when we are shocked, *shocked*, to learn that we’ll just have to learn to live with the pain. Not a few decide they can’t live with it, and chose to check out of life altogether.

Peter was writing to a small subset of humanity (Christians) whose suffering was at least partially related to their faith. However, we mustn’t think that their suf-

fering is limited to persecution. They experience the same kind of frustrations, disappointments, accidents, illnesses, and other trials that everyone else experiences. The persecution is just tossed on top of what they already have to deal with.

Peter’s advice to these people sounds somewhat calloused, like, “that’s life, get used to it.” That’s encouraging, huh?

But there’s more to it than that — a lot more. Notice that Peter directly connects the suffering that we experience with the suffering that Christ had to endure. He is not suggesting some kind of mystical sharing in the suffering of Christ, but a *similarity* to what Jesus went through. That likeness should give us reason to actually rejoice in the face of our trials.

Think of it this way. Jesus came to this earth for the express purpose of carrying out a mission for God. Everything He did contributed in some way to fulfilling that plan. His suffering was not a glitch in God’s plan; *it was a deliberate part of that plan*. The plan could not have succeeded without it. In the same way, our suffering—not just the persecution, but even the ordinary thorns and bruises of everyday

life—are intended by God to contribute to the completion of a much larger plan that we cannot yet see. Like Christ, our job is to stick to the plan (God’s will) and stay strong in the face of the hardships.

Philosopher Peter Kreeft, drawing on the experiences of Viktor Frankl in a Nazi concentration camp, argues that when we suffer, instead of asking God, “what is the meaning of this suffering?” we should view the suffering as a question coming from the other direction, namely, “What is the meaning of *your* life?” Suffering, in other words, forces us to re-examine God’s purpose for our life, and to prioritize the details of our life accordingly. Like Job, who knew a thing or two about suffering, our hardships can refine and purify us, so that “when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

As Frankl learned in the death camps, “to live is to suffer.” A life without suffering is a life without meaning. Our challenge is not to avoid it at all costs, or even to explain it, but to recognize it as “the discipline of the Lord” (Heb. 12:5-11), a tool designed to make us stronger, better people—if we will accept it and learn from it.

– David King