

ROMANS (12:12)

Hope FADES Without Prayer

PART 68 – APRIL 23, 2006

WHY DID HE DO IT?



Why did Jesus choose to go through it all? The PAIN, the suffering, the affliction; He endured it all with such incredible patience. *Why?*

There are obvious reasons (e.g. love, compassion, protection) but there is one big reason that would likely be overlooked if the writer of Hebrews hadn't pointed it out.

He suffered death on the cross. But he accepted the shame as if it were nothing because of ... - *Hebrews 12:2 NCV*

Q: What? What's he going to say?

... the joy that God put before him. - *Hebrews 12:2 NCV*

Q: Because of the "joy"?

It wasn't the joy of suffering (that ain't joyful!); it was the joy "put before him", that is, the joy of *hope* for what God would accomplish through the affliction. Joyful hope in God's plans offsets affliction. Think about the grief and pain (at a believer's funeral) that is offset by the joyful hope of reuniting in Heaven.

Q: And what sustains our joyful hope?

A: Intimacy with our Heavenly Father.

Now let's read Romans 12:12:

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. - *Romans 12:12 NIV*

Joyful hope (in God's plans) will carry us through affliction, when sustained by a faithful relationship with the Lord. Three questions today: What does it mean to be:

- 1) "Joyful in hope"
- 2) "Patient in affliction"; and
- 3) "Faithful in prayer"?

JOYFUL AND PATIENT

When Paul says, “Joyful in hope” he’s not talking about wishful thinking. He’s describing a *confidence in* and an *expectation of* the power and purpose of God in our lives. But, what does this kind of joy look like and feel like?

1. This joy is **spiritual**

People make the mistake of thinking of something as “spiritual” simply because it has to do with the *human spirit*; and that something is “natural” because it has to do with the *human body*.

Q: Ever hear someone announce that they’re participating in some type of mystical quest because they’re ... “spiritual”?

When something is called “spiritual” in scripture, it means it comes from the Holy Spirit and has the character of God’s Spirit. Anything produced apart from God’s Spirit is “natural”.

Envy, pride, jealousy, hatred, and selfishness all come from the inner spirit (heart) of man, but are called “natural”, because no influence of God’s Spirit is needed to produce them.

2. This joy is **spontaneous**

In Galatians 5:22, Paul calls our joy a “fruit” of the Spirit. Humans don’t possess the power to *make* fruit grow. But, why do we say that some people have a “green thumb”?

They’ve learned to remove the hindrances to growth, while protecting an environment that promotes growth. In the same way, we can’t produce joy with willpower; but we can ensure that the roots of our joy reach into the right “soil”.

3. This joy is **substantial**

In the parable of the four soils, Jesus warns us to beware of the *substance* of our joy.

The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. - *Matthew 13:20-21 NIV*

Q: Why did this particular joy vanish so easily?

A: It wasn’t in God, but in the comforts God gives.

If our joy is simply a product of our own spirit in response to pleasant circumstances, it will decrease when affliction comes.

So, now let's pull these three things together: *Spiritual joy is spontaneously produced by God's Spirit when the substance of our joy is grounded in God himself.* And then we can be glad even when we grieve because we have hope. Our God is too wise to make mistakes; too loving to be unkind; too powerful to be opposed; and too protective to forsake us.

And what Paul means when he says to be "patient in affliction" is to "hold onto our hope", and don't let go. When times are tough, be patient ... and never stop praying.

FAITHFUL IN PRAYER

Christ is the unshakable basis of our hope in God.

Q: But how do we shakable beings keep our hearts fixed on him?

A: We must be: "faithful in prayer".

Paul is making three statements about our hope in Christ: We should rejoice in our hope. We should hold onto this hope. And, we must sustain our hope.

One of the functions of prayer is to enable us to see and savor Christ as being more precious than anything else. Without faithful prayer our hearts will drift away and start feeling that our hope is in money and work and family and a hundred things that compete with Jesus as our treasure. The great battle for the "green-thumbed" believer is to remove the hindrances, and to protect the environment for our joy in Christ to grow. And this means being *faithful* in prayer.

Q: What does it mean to be *faithful* in prayer?

A: It means to be persistent, determined, and disciplined.

It's the opposite of random, occasional, and unintentional.

There are so many NT scriptures like Acts 2:42.

They devoted themselves to ... prayer. - Acts 2:42 NIV

Q: The question is: are we devoted (faithful) to prayer?

We're all so different. Different schedules, different family situations, different demands, different stages of life, and different levels of spiritual maturity. But we should each try to balance five facets of faithful prayer:

1. Free *and* Formed

I must strike a balance between unstructured prayer, when I pour out my heart, as well as utilizing structured resources like the Bible and lists and patterns for praying. Which do you tend to lean toward?

- If I'm all *unstructured*, I can become shallow and flippant.
- If I'm all *structured*, I could become mechanical and stale.

Here's how to have a conversation with God: Open your Bible and put one elbow on each side. As you read, watch for a command, promise, challenge, or warning that speaks to you; then pray.

- God speaks through His Word - you respond through prayer.

2. Alone *and* Assembled

Learning to pray with and for others matures us in ways that meeting with God alone doesn't. That's why I encourage this. This isn't advanced Christianity ... it's basic Christianity.

3. Desperate *and* Delighted

It's good to go to God with your deepest heartaches, but don't neglect to thank and praise Him for all the good things. You might consider keeping a "praise list".

4. Explosive *and* Extended

Q: Do your prayers tend to be short bursts of praise and requests, or lingering sessions of speaking and being silent?

Sometimes I make a quick phone call to Shar, and other times we spend a whole evening together. Relationships require both.

5. Spontaneous *and* Scheduled

If your time with God mainly consists of "parking-lot-prayers" ("Lord help me find a parking space"), something's out of whack. It's important to speak to God spontaneously during the day. But we also need to plan the place and take the time for regularly scheduled meetings with our Messiah.

And now, notice what the first letters spell: F.A.D.E.S.

Hope fades without faithful prayer. But when we cultivate consistent communion with the Lord, we'll find ourselves *rejoicing in* and *holding onto* our hope.