

The University Of Hard Knocks

(Based on an article by Wayne Jackson, "The Value of Human Suffering," *Reason and Revelation*, April 1997, pp. 25–27)

Ecclesiastes 7.2–4

Don Ruhl • Savage Street, Grants Pass, Oregon • October 17, In the year of our Lord Christ, 2021

Scripture Reader and Reading: Michael Crisp – First Peter 1.6–7

Song Leader and Song Suggestions: Larry Amberg – Songs on victory, suffering, et al.

Prelude:

I. Many people have advanced degrees from the University of Hard Knocks.

A. They have bitter experiences, but

1. those experiences made better people.
2. C. S. Lewis said:

"Life with God is not immunity from difficulties, but peace in difficulties."

B. A poem by Robert Browning Hamilton,

**I walked a mile with Pleasure
She chatted all the way,
But left me none the wiser
For all she had to say.
I walked a mile with Sorrow
And ne'er a word said she;
But oh, the things I learned from her
When Sorrow walked with me!**

C. From Ecclesiastes 7 you will see

1. that Solomon had advanced degrees from the University of Hard Knocks.
2. He then encouraged us to attend the University also:

- 2 It is better to go to the house of mourning
than to go to the house of feasting,
for that is the end of all men;
and the living will take it to heart.**
- 3 Sorrow is better than laughter,
for by a sad countenance the heart is made better.**
- 4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,**

but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

– Ecclesiastes 7.2–4

II. I will not address the whys of human suffering,

A. such as whether the suffering is

1. our own fault,
2. someone else's,
3. a consequence of living on earth, or
4. chastisement from God.

B. Regardless of the reason,

1. we need to see that there are valuable things to be learned
2. when we attend the University of Hard Knocks.

Persuasion:

I. Suffering Highlights Our Human Frailty

A. Many people desire to be their own god,

1. wanting to be accountable to no one,
2. believing that they are the masters of their fate, and
3. the captains of their own souls!

B. However, suffering shows our weaknesses,

1. that we are not gods, but
2. that we need the true and living God.

C. From Ezekiel 28, you will see

1. that the Lord wanted the king of Tyre to see this truth.
 - a. The king claimed to be a god, but
 - b. through suffering the Lord showed the king

c. that he was not a god:

9 Will you still say before him who slays you, “I am a god”? But you shall be a man, and not a god, in the hand of him who slays you.

– **Ezekiel 28.9**

2. Therefore, if you

a. think higher of yourself than you ought to think, or

b. think that you are greater than others,

(1) suffering will show you the truth quickly.

II. Suffering Can Point Us to God

A. Trouble has a way

1. of causing us to look

2. to a force greater than ourselves.

a. This is generally when we find,

b. as Paul put it, the “God of all comfort” (2Co 1.3).

3. Psalm 18 undoubtedly speaks for many people:

**6 In my distress I called upon the LORD,
And cried out to my God.**

– **Psalm 18.6**

B. How often do people turn to God during

1. times of affliction

a. as compared to

2. times of prosperity?

III. Suffering Helps Us to See that Sin Is Ugly

A. Romans 5 makes a declaration of a truth

1. that we often confirm during our suffering:

12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.

– **Romans 5.12**

- a. This does not mean
 - b. that our personal suffering is always the result of *our sin*,
 - (1) nor does it affirm
 - (2) that we are being punished for Adam's sin.
2. It shows
 - a. that through *one man's single sin*
 - b. death, and its accompanying sorrows,
 - (1) came into the world.
 - (2) Suffering is in the world because of sin!
- B. If our suffering is the result of sin we have committed,
1. we can then see just how horrible sin is,
 2. repent of it, and seek forgiveness.

IV. Suffering Helps Us to See What Is Valuable

- A. Our world perspective normally changes during suffering.
1. What was *important* before
 2. is often *not* important anymore.
 - a. What was *not* important before
 - b. is often important *now*.
- B. By this, suffering helps us to appreciate the things that matter.
- C. Because of this, many people turn to Christ or rededicate themselves.
1. I know a man who was going to have brain surgery and it frightened him.

2. He and I had a lengthy talk and he started attending all the services.
 3. This continued after the surgery.
 4. However, as the memory of it wore off, so did his spirituality.
- D. Therefore if suffering causes you to turn to God, that is good.
1. Once that happens, base your spirituality on the truth.
 2. This is one of the valuable lessons of the Psalms:

**67 Before I was afflicted I went astray,
 But now I keep Your word.**

**71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted,
 That I may learn Your statutes.**

– Psalm 119.67, 71

V. Suffering Helps Us to Be Compassionate

- A. We can be compassionate toward others
1. without having suffered the same thing.
 2. However, it should especially be true
 - a. that we are compassionate toward someone
 - b. who is suffering what we have already suffered.
 3. Therefore, sometimes we suffer,
 - a. not for our personal benefit, but
 - b. that we may show compassion to someone else.
- B. Is this not true of Christ?
1. He had nothing to gain from his suffering.
 2. His suffering was all about us!
 - a. Hebrews 2 shows
 - b. that His suffering was for our benefit:

18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to

aid those who are tempted.

– Hebrews 2.18

(1) Not only can he comfort us, but

(2) he has saved us from our sins.

(a) He has also opened up

(b) the way to heaven.

C. A woman suffers in childbirth but it is not for her benefit.

D. Therefore, our suffering might simply prepare us to help another person.

VI. Suffering Helps Us to See that Earth Is Not Our Home

A. Romans 8 brings out a wonderful truth

1. that we need to remind ourselves of

2. when we suffer:

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

– Romans 8.18

B. When we suffer abundantly

1. we do not want to live here forever, and

2. we even eagerly long for

a. the time and the place

b. where suffering will only be a memory.

C. It is also God's desire and plan

1. that we not live on this planet forever, but

2. that through the ultimate form of suffering,

a. death,

- b. we leave earth and join Him.
- 3. By suffering we grow homesick.

VII.Suffering Helps Us to Pray

A. Why is it that we have a natural tendency

- 1. to pray when we suffer?
 - a. Not only do we pray, but
 - b. we pray more intensely,
 - (1) with feeling
 - (2) that we may not have had before.
- 2. Luke 22 shows this in Jesus,
 - a. who prayed with great earnestness
 - b. when he contemplated his forthcoming suffering:

44 And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. And His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

– Luke 22.44

B. Have you ever so prayed

- 1. that it drained you physically and emotionally?
- 2. If so, it probably happened in response to suffering.
 - a. You needed God.
 - b. God wants you to need Him.

VIII.Suffering Helps to Prepare the Soul for Eternity

A. In First Peter 1, you will read

- 1. that suffering works as a purifier
- 2. to make us fit for heaven:

6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be,

you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

– 1 Peter 1.6–7

3. Even as fire removes the impurities from gold,
 - a. so suffering removes the impurities
 - b. from our lives and from our faith.
 4. Suffering helps us to see whether we are living by faith.
- B. How many people in life do you know who are
1. wise,
 2. successful,
 3. worthy of imitation, and
 4. well-liked
 - a. who have not suffered?
 - b. If you are not sure,
 - (1) ask them, and
 - (2) you will be surprised to learn what they have suffered.

IX. Suffering Helps to Create Virtues

- A. Romans 5 brings out this very point:

3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

– Romans 5.3–4

- B. How hard is it to be kind
1. when all is *well* and

2. there are *no* irritations?

C. How easy is it to be kind

1. when all is *not* well and

2. there *are* irritations?

D. This is when

1. Christians let their lights shine and

2. preach great lessons.

X. Suffering Helps to Separate the Shallow from the Deep

A. When I played high school football the coaches said

1. that they were going to separate the men from the boys.

2. Through the daily practices and scrimmages, and

a. eventually games,

b. they would discover who was really serious about playing football.

B. Likewise, suffering separates the men from the boys:

10 “Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?”

– Job 2.10

Exhortation:

I. We do not want to go looking for suffering, but

A. it can be a valuable experience for us.

B. When it arrives,

1. make the most of it.

2. Use it to better yourself.

II. If you are suffering and

A. are having trouble seeing the things of which I have spoken,

B. let us pray for you.

III. If you want to avoid eternal suffering,

A. believe on the Lord Jesus and

B. obey Him without delay.