

Growing Dads God's Way-24 The Most Powerful Tools in Godly Parenting: Prayer – 7 “PRAYING THAT TRIALS NEVER EMBITTER THEM”

Are you ready for some troubles? I am amazed as a pastor for the past twenty-five years how few of us really are.

Will you be taken off guard when troubles hit home? When unexpectedly you loose your health, loose your wealth, loose a family member, loose your mobility, loose your independence...or any other of a million unexpected losses we all face each day.

This morning God's Word challenges each of us to get ready and stay ready. Troublesome times are coming!

We are looking at how to disciple our children through prayer and the Scriptures. This week we are focusing on preparing our children for troubles they inevitable will face. God's Word teaches us how to see our children avoiding bitterness when they go through deep and painful trials. Troubles are one of the surest things in life. As Job said, “Man is born for adversity as sparks fly upward.” (Job 5.7) From birth life is an uphill climb against physical obstacles, socio-economic prejudices, relational jealousies, academic challenges and spiritual adversities. From the challenges of relating to people to the physical exertions of everyday life there is nothing easy about daily existence.

But as life goes on and we pick up speed we soon find that there is never enough time when we need it, never quite enough money to pay for all we want, and then comes not enough strength to do what is always coming at us. But then the worst part comes upon us, our health begins to erode, our bodies begin to show their frailties and we experience many different types of pain and discomforts.

"When God permits suffering to come to our lives, there are several ways we can deal with it. Some people become bitter and blame God for robbing them of freedom and pleasure. Others just "give up" and fail to get any blessing out of the experience because they will not put any courage into the experience. Still others grit their teeth and put on a brave front, determined to "endure to the very end." While this is a courageous response, it usually drains them of the strength needed for daily living; and after a time, they may collapse." 1

Remember, God wants troubles to push us towards Him. He wants to refine us, purge us, build us up, and overflow our lives with blessings. And all that only comes through TRIALS! So troubles are coming and without any disasters or tragedies -- just life is very hard. Most people do not make it through life without long or short seasons of anger and bitterness at someone or something. Knowing that, it is of utmost priority that we prepare our children to avoid bitterness in the trials that WILL COME.

So how do we prepare our children for emotional, spiritual, and physical troubles? The answer is of course in God's Word. Prayer is the key to raising, nurturing, and launching children that please the Lord is learning how to pray for our children. The Apostles said, "We will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word." As parents are we doing the same? Are we praying and ministering the Word to our children and grandchildren? How do we do that? We are in our seventh week of exploring how to give ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word and this is what we have found:

WE MUST PRAY FOR REALITY IN THEIR SPIRITUAL LIFE:

- 1. SEEING THEM GENUINELY SAVED.**
- 2. SEEING THEM LOVING GOD'S WORD.**
- 3. SEEING THEM LIVING IN VICTORY.**
- 4. SEEING THEM THINKING OF HEAVEN.**
- 5. SEEING THEM FINDING SIN REPULSIVE.**
- 6. SEEING THEM STAY TENDER TOWARD GOD.**

WE MUST PRAY FOR INTEGRITY IN THEIR PERSONAL LIFE:

- 1. SEEING THEM MAINTAINING A CLEAR CONSCIENCE.**

1 Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

2. **SEEING THEM LEARNING TO STAND ALONE.**
3. **SEEING THEM SEEKING TO STAY PURE.**
4. **SEEING THEM CULTIVATING A SERVANT'S HEART.**
5. **PERSONAL INTEGRITY MEANS SEEING THEM NEVER BECOMING BITTER IN TRIALS.**

Why would we pray for our children to never resist trials and become embittered by them? Because God uses trials as one of His three very special tools to shape our lives into Christlikeness. The other two tools are God's Word and prayer. We love the Word and prayer but we don't like the trials.

If we resist the troubles and trials of life, becoming angry at our circumstances and those who hurt us, we miss one of the greatest tools God uses in our lives. And if we stay angry about life and unforgiving of those who hurt us there is a dangerous weed that begins to choke our lives called bitterness. So this morning we need to embrace our ministry of praying that trials never embitter us or our children.

Paul writes to the church at Ephesus that bitterness travels in bad company. He notes the evil companions that hang out with the attitude of bitterness. We should be praying that we and our families beware of bitterness and all his evil buddies. So, to focus our hearts, open with me to Ephesians 4:30-32.

Stand, read, and pray!

Here is what we should be praying taht those we love and want to please the Lord – avoid in their lives.

1. **Bitterness** (^s like a smoldering fire. The Greeks defined this word as long-standing resentment, and as the person who refuses to be reconciled. So many of us have a way of nursing our wrath to keep it warm, of brooding over the insults and the injuries we have received. This brooding grudge-filled attitude of Simon the Sorcerer in Acts 8:23 and Esau in Heb. 12:15 is characteristic of pagans and not Christ's children. It is the spirit of irritability that keeps a person in continual acrimony, making him tart and poisonous, Every Christian might well pray that God would teach him how to forget like God taught Joseph in Genesis 41.51-52.

² These definitions paraphrased from Barclay, William, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians (Revised Edition)*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press) 2000, c1976. And MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Ephesians 4:30-32*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983.

2. **Wrath** () are the outbreaks of passion and has to do with wild rage, the passion of the moment. The Greeks defined as the kind of anger like the flame which comes from straw; it quickly blazes up and just as quickly subsides.
3. **Anger** () is long-lived anger, a more internal smoldering, a subtle and deep feeling. Unlike , they described as anger which has become habitual. To the Christian the burst of temper and the long-lived anger are both alike forbidden.
4. **Clamor** () is the shout or outcry of strife and reflects the public outburst that reveals loss of control.
5. **Slander** (, from which we get blasphemy) is the ongoing defamation of someone that rises from a bitter heart.
6. **Malice** (, the general term for evil that is the root of all vices. All of these, he says, must be

What was the solution? Paul gets very practical, he says **put away from you**. The word the Spirit guides him to pen is from a word that is used for taking off clothes (cf. Acts 7:58; 1 Pet. 2:1). Just as after a long day of hard labor the workman takes off his dirty work clothes, so we as believers must discard the filthy, tattered rags of their old life. Paul may be reflecting one of the applications of baptism in the early church. Those being baptized would lay aside their old outer clothes before their baptism and be given a new white robe afterwards.

So God is saying bitterness and its buddies are part of the old life, so put aside these rags of our old life. When there is an accident the rescue people come and quickly clean up the stained pavement. When there is contamination of an area the crews quickly isolate and rid the area of the dangerous materials. So bitterness and its buddies must be avoided or its poison will spread. Then he tells us to put on our new clothes of *kindness* (). The Greeks defined this quality as the disposition of mind which thinks as much of its neighbour's affairs as it does of its own. Kindness has learned the secret of looking outwards all the time, and not inwards. He tells us to forgive others as God forgave us. So, in one sentence, Paul lays down the law of personal relationships—that we should treat others as Jesus Christ has treated us.

Paul the Apostle who experiences so much hardship and pain in his life tells us why we must avoid and prayerfully protect ourselves and those we love from bitterness. The key is that bitterness *grieves the Holy Spirit who* lives within us as Christians. When bitterness is allowed to take root and grow our heart is filled with bitterness and anger that grieves God's Spirit. Just as a home is ruined by anger and fighting so God's Spirit is only at home when the climate is hospitable for His love, joy, and peace which He then produces

in our lives as we obey Him. God has explained that His Spirit cannot leave us; we are sealed until that day when Christ returns to take us home. We are still saved even if we have these sinful attitudes, but our salvation is emptied of joy and blessing.

But bitterness also is a sin that:

"grieves³ God the Father who forgave us when we trusted Christ. Here Paul put his finger on the basic cause of a bitter attitude: We cannot forgive people. An unforgiving spirit is the devil's playground, and before long it becomes the Christian's battleground. If somebody hurts us, either deliberately or unintentionally, and we do not forgive him, then we begin to develop bitterness within, which hardens the heart. We should be tenderhearted and kind, but instead we are hardhearted and bitter.

Actually, we are not hurting the person who hurt us; we are only hurting ourselves. Bitterness in the heart makes us treat others the way Satan treats them, when we should treat others the way God has treated us. In His gracious kindness, God has forgiven us, and we should forgive others. We do not forgive for our sake (though we do get a blessing from it) or even for their sake, but for Jesus' sake. Learning how to forgive and forget is one of the secrets of a happy Christian life".

So what do we need to teach them and pray for them? Just four timeless truths:

1. **SEEING THEM NEVER BECOMING BITTER IN TRIALS comes as we teach them that adversaries are placed in life by God.**
 - o II Samuel 16:11 "... Let him alone, and let him curse; for **so the Lord has ordered him.**"
 - o 1 Kings 11:14 Now **the Lord raised up an adversary** against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite; he was a descendant of the king in Edom.
2. **SEEING THEM NEVER BECOMING BITTER IN TRIALS comes as we teach them that BITTERNESS IS DEADLY.**
 - o Hebrews 12:15 Looking diligently lest any man **fail of the grace of God**; lest any root of **bitterness springing up trouble** [you], and thereby many be defiled; (KJV)
3. **SEEING THEM NEVER BECOMING BITTER IN TRIALS comes as we teach them that TRIALS ARE VITAL. "**

³ Quoted from Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

- o James 1:4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. That⁴ is the end result of trials: maturity, completeness, not lacking in anything of spiritual importance and value.
- o "After you have suffered for a little while," Peter assures us, "the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you" (1 Pet. 5:10).
- o Moab was a pagan nation southeast of Israel, of whom Jeremiah wrote: "Moab has been at ease since his youth; he has also been undisturbed on his lees, neither has he been emptied from vessel to vessel, nor has he gone into exile. Therefore he retains his flavor, and his aroma has not changed" (Jer. 48:11). Good wine had to be repeatedly "emptied from vessel to vessel" in order for it to become sweet and drinkable. In that process, the lees, or dregs, would remain in the bottom of each vessel, until, after several pourings and settlings, the wine was pure and clear. Jeremiah's point was that Moab's undisturbed, untested life had left its people unpurified.
- o That was also Esau's problem. He cared nothing for the things of God, being content with satisfying only his physical appetites. He was immoral and godless, selling "his own birthright for a single meal" (Heb. 12:16).

4. Finally, **SEEING THEM NEVER BECOMING BITTER IN TRIALS**

comes as we teach them Joseph's secret. Turn over to Genesis 50:19-21 – Meet Joseph, because Joseph, shows God's cure to self-pity and bitterness. So how do we pray and minister the Word so that they avoid bitterness? The key is not to let it root and spread.

Remember God's plan:

- Rejected by dad and brothers.
 - Abused and exiled by his own country.
 - Unrecognized for tremendous service.
 - Accused falsely of moral laxity.
 - Imprisoned unjustly for revenge.
 - Injured and forgotten by co-workers and employers and friends.
 - All the makings of basket case!
- o Joseph reminds us that the Lord **IS ORDERING LIFE'S EVENTS.** Psalm 105:16-20 Moreover he called for a famine upon the land: he brake the whole staff of bread. 17 He sent a man before them, [even] Joseph, [who] was sold for a servant: 18 Whose feet they

⁴ MacArthur, John, Jr., *James: The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press, Publisher) 1998.

- hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: 19 Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him. 20 The king sent and loosed him; [even] the ruler of the people, and let him go free. (KJV)
- o Joseph reminds us that the Lord **IS WORKING ALL THINGS TOGETHER FOR HIS GOOD** [Resist self pity] Genesis 50:19-20 And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for [am] I in the place of God? 20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; [but] God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as [it is] this day, to save much people alive. (KJV) How? Genesis 41:51-52
 1. BE FORGETFUL. Intentionally forgot past hurts – not nursing them! Genesis 41:51 And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God, [said he], hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house. (KJV)
 2. BE FRUITFUL. Purposefully looked for God's hand guiding and blessing. Genesis 41:52 And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction. (KJV)
 - o Joseph reminds us that the Lord **IS WANTING US TO USE THE WEED KILLER PROVIDED BY GOD**. Hebrews 9:14 How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (KJV) Hebrews 10:22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. (KJV) Respond God's way, THE CHOICE IS COMPLETELY YOURS THIS MORNING:

"We can⁵ allow bitterness to destroy us, or we can allow God to develop us into the persons He wants us to be. We must choose to view our circumstances and hurts as tools to be used by God to further develop our spiritual lives.

Why not pray: I repent of my bitterness. You never withhold forgiveness, so I, too, cannot withhold it. Lord, help me view those who hurt me as tools in Your hands to shape my life for Your GLORY."

⁵ Stanley, Charles, *In Touch With God*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson) c1997.

APPENDIX OF RELATED MATERIALS

Peter is preeminently the apostle of *hope*, as Paul is the apostle of *faith* and John of *love*. As believers, we have a “living hope” because we trust a living Christ (1 Peter 1:3). This hope enables us to keep our minds under control and “hope to the end” (1 Peter 1:13) when Jesus shall return. We must not be ashamed of our hope but be ready to explain and defend it (1 Peter 3:15). Like Sarah, Christian wives can hope in God (1 Peter 3:5, where “trusted” should be translated “hoped”).

It is only when we depend on the grace of God that we can glorify God in times of suffering. Peter also emphasized God’s grace in this letter. “I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it” (1 Peter 5:12, NIV).

The word “grace” is used in every chapter of 1 Peter: 1:2, 10, 13; 2:19 (“thankworthy”), 20 (“acceptable”); 3:7; 4:10; 5:5, 10, 12. Grace is God’s generous favor to undeserving sinners and needy saints. When we depend on God’s grace, we can endure suffering and turn trials into triumphs. It is grace alone that saves us (Eph. 2:8–10). God’s grace can give us strength in times of trial (2 Cor. 12:1–10). Grace enables us to serve God in spite of difficulties (1 Cor. 15:9–10). Whatever begins with God’s grace will always lead to glory (Ps. 84:11; 1 Peter 5:10). 6

Christians Are Being Prepared for Glory (1 Peter 1:6–7)

We must keep in mind that all God plans and performs here is preparation for what He has in store for us in heaven. He is preparing us for the life and service yet to come. Nobody yet knows all that is in store for us in heaven; but this we do know: life today is a school in which God trains us for our future ministry in eternity. This explains the presence of trials in our lives: they are some of God’s tools and textbooks in the school of Christian experience. Peter used the word “trials” rather than “tribulations” or “persecutions,” because he was dealing with the *general* problems that Christians face as they are surrounded by unbelievers. He shared several facts about trials..7

The Word of God, prayer, and suffering are the three “tools” that God uses in our lives. Just as electricity must run through a conductor, so the Holy Spirit must work through the means God has provided. As the Christian reads the Word and prays, he becomes more like Christ; and the more he becomes like Christ, the more the unsaved world opposes him. This daily “fellowship of His sufferings” (Phil. 3:10) drives the believer back to the

6 Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

7 Richards, Lawrence O., *The Teacher’s Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1987.

Word and prayer, so that all three “tools” work together to provide the spiritual power he needs to glorify Christ.⁸

The important thing for us to know about these “scattered strangers” is that they were going through a time of trials, through much suffering and many persecutions. At least fifteen times in this letter, Peter referred to suffering; and he used eight different Greek words to do so.

- o Some of these Christians were suffering because they were living godly lives and doing what was good and right (1 Peter 2:19–23; 3:14–18; 4:1–4, 15–19).
- o Others were suffering reproach for the name of Christ (1 Peter 4:14) and being railed at by unsaved people (1 Peter 3:9–10).

Peter wrote to encourage them to be good witnesses to their persecutors, and to remember that their suffering would lead to glory (1 Peter 1:6–7; 4:13–14; 5:10).⁹

Hear Paul’s advice to Timothy: “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). Paul warned the Thessalonians, “You know quite well that we were destined for [trials]. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted” (1 Thessalonians 3:3, 4). He told the Christians in Antioch the same thing: “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). “Dear friends,” said Peter, “do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed” (1 Peter 4:12, 13).

In Acts 5:41, the apostles “went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.” To the Philippians Paul wrote, “To you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Phil. 1:29). Why was suffering a cause for joy? The New Testament suggests at least five reasons.

1. First, **trials can push us closer to Christ**. Paul wrote, “That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings” (Phil. 3:10). Suffering in the cause of Christ yields the fruit of better understanding of what Jesus went through in His suffering.
2. Second, **trials can assure us that we belong to Christ**. Jesus said, “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you” (John 15:18). Because “a disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master” (Matt. 10:24), we will suffer. Paul warned

⁸ Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

⁹ Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

Timothy, "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). Peter tells suffering Christians, "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you" (1 Pet. 4:14). Suffering causes believers to sense the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives, which gives assurance of salvation.

3. Third, **trials can earn us a future reward**. "If indeed we suffer with [Christ] in order that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:17-18). "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison" (2 Cor. 4:17).
4. Fourth, **trials can help us lead others to Christ**. Church history is filled with accounts of those who came to Christ after watching other Christians endure suffering. 10

Finally, Peter speaks of the law of Christian suffering. He says that, after the Christian has gone through suffering, God will restore, establish, strengthen and settle him. Every one of the words which Peter uses has behind it a vivid picture. Each tells us something about what suffering is designed by God to do for a man.

1. **Through enduring trials God will *restore* us**. The word for *restore* is difficult in this case to translate. It is *κατασκευάζω*, the word commonly used for setting a fracture, the word used in Mark 1:19 for mending nets. It means to supply that which is missing, to mend that which is broken. So suffering, if accepted in humility and trust and love, can repair the weaknesses of a man's character and add the greatness which so far is not there. Suffering is meant by God to add the grace notes to life.
2. **Through enduring trials God will *establish* us**. The word is *συνιστάνω*, which means to make as solid as granite. Suffering of body and sorrow of heart do one of two things to a man. They either make him collapse or they leave him with a solidity of character which he could never have gained anywhere else. If he meets them with continuing trust in Christ, he emerges like toughened steel that has been tempered in the fire.
3. **Through enduring trials God will *strengthen* us**. The Greek is *ἐπιβελώνω*, which means *to fill with strength*. Here is the same sense again. A life with no effort and no discipline almost inevitably becomes a flabby life. No one really knows what his faith means to him until it has been tried in the furnace of affliction. There is

10 MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983.

something doubly precious about a faith which has come victoriously through pain and sorrow and disappointment. The wind will extinguish a weak flame; but it will fan a strong flame into a still greater blaze. So it is with faith.

4. **Through enduring trials God will settle us.** The Greek is *κατασκευάζει*, which means *to lay the foundations*. When we have to meet sorrow and suffering we are driven down to the very bedrock of faith. It is then that we discover what are the things which cannot be shaken. It is in time of trial that we discover the great truths on which real life is founded.

Suffering is very far from doing these precious things for every man. It may well drive a man to bitterness and despair; and may well take away such faith as he has. But if it is accepted in the trusting certainty that a father's hand will never cause his child a needless tear, then out of suffering come things which the easy way may never bring.¹¹

¹¹B arclay, William, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters of James and Peter (Revised Edition)*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press) 2000, c1976.