

When Life Crushes You

Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. (2 Corinthians 1:9)

In Acts 19 a great riot broke out in Ephesus and there was a mortal threat to the lives of all the Christians in that city. Paul tells us that he was utterly, unbearably crushed (2 Corinthians 1:8). That is the lowest ebb the human spirit can come to, the uttermost sense of despair. He said, 'We felt that we had received the sentence of death.' Life and circumstances were hopeless; Paul had given up; and there appeared to be no way out. But God's purpose for the great trial was to make the Lord's disciples not to be self-reliant. (2 Corinthians 1:9)

One of the major reasons God sends suffering to us is to break the stubborn and resilient spirit of self-will that remains within believers after the new birth. It constantly insists on trying to work it all out by our own resources. When that fails, we run to some other human resource. We resist powerfully turning to the Lord. We resist praying, because when we pray about it, we have to admit we cannot handle this situation ourselves. Paul must have struggled in this same way.

Here is this mighty apostle, who so plainly and clearly understood the principles of how God operates, and still he had to be put through a time of testing like this that he might again learn not to rely on himself.

You read the story of Saul of Tarsus, that brilliant young Pharisee and you see a self-reliant young man who is confident and self-reliant. There is nothing he cannot do with that brilliant mind, that ability and logic, that strong, powerful personality. He felt he could handle anything, and repeatedly God had to break that after his salvation, God put him in circumstances he could not handle, that he might learn not to rely on himself, but to stretch out fully on God, whose power raises the dead.

That is a major reason for suffering. Our Father designs trouble and trials in order to destroy our determined stubbornness. This is the developing of Christ likeness. Paul learned to trust God to take him through whatever life throws at him, no matter what it is. Now that is a Christian lifestyle.

It is time for some Christians to quit acting like the world around us, constantly complaining about everything that is hard or difficult in our lives. We could see these problems as opportunities to display a different lifestyle and release in our own lives a quiet power that will keep our hearts at peace, because we know that an adequate God is handling the situation; He will take us safely through, even through the final valley of the shadow of death.