

Growing through Hardship

A devotional with thought provoking questions

Gladys Aylward, a missionary to China during and after World War II, brought a hundred orphans, ages four to fifteen, safely over the mountains of China to Sian in Shensi.

But not without cost. When Aylward arrived in Sian with the children, she was gravely ill. She had suffered internal injuries from a beating by invaders in the mission compound. In addition, she battled fever, typhus, pneumonia, malnutrition, shock, and fatigue.

Through her ordeal Aylward learned to choose Christ over anything else life had to offer. When the man she loved, Colonel Linnan, came to visit her in Sian and asked her to marry him, she declined with the belief that marriage would compromise the calling God had given her to the children of China. Gladys served God in China and England until her death in 1970.

Through our hardship, pain and suffering in life and ministry, we learn obedience, and obedience always increases our maturity in Christ.

Source — Gary D. Preston, *Character Forged from Conflict* (Bethany, 1999)

Easter weekend we contemplated on one of the evidences of the resurrection life of Christ in us, a changed life. (*You can watch the April 12th, 2020 service by going to www.onelifechurch.ca.*)

When we accept Christ in our life there is an immediate change. But we also need to continue to grow in the Lord (**2 Cor.3:17-18**). We call this maturing, growing in Christlike character. Just as we mature in life, from a baby to a child to an adult, full-grown mature people, so we ought to grow and mature in Christlike character. Of course, this is not always easy to do. In fact, I have found that it is in the hardships, pain and difficulties of life, I discover how much I have matured by my responses to the hardships, pain and difficulties.

How does maturity in Christ happen? A key is by being obedient to the word of God, whether to the written word of God or the revealed word of God as He speaks it to you in your heart. Some of these words

we may find easy to obey while others may be much more difficult to obey.

It was the same for Jesus, especially when He went to the cross for you and I. Listen to what the Hebrew writer says ... **Hebrews 5:7-10** *“During the days of Jesus' life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and He was heard because of His reverent submission. 8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from what He suffered 9 and, once made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him 10 and was designated by God to be High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.”*

Consider **vs.8 & vs.9**, Jesus learned obedience from what He suffered. Jesus, who was God in heaven, who came down to be like one of us taking on the form of a bondservant, in the likeness of men (**Phil.2:5-8**) learned obedience through suffering, to the point of death, even the death of the cross!

Think about that for a moment! Jesus walked through hardship. And while He did, He obeyed His Father's instructions, perfectly submitting to His Father's will. As a result, something happened, He was 'made perfect' (*complete, nothing lacking, fully mature*) in every way.

This process of obedience & submission through hard times was necessary, so that He was perfectly equipped to receive the authority and responsibility to be our perfect 'High Priest' and 'The' author of our salvation.

This process was also necessary so that God the Father could highly exalt Him and give Him a name that is above every other name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow of those in heaven, on the earth and those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is LORD, to the glory of God the Father (**Phil.2:8-11**).

God's purpose and plan for Jesus was to be the author and High Priest of our Salvation, to elevate Him and to give Him a name that is above

every other name. God's plan and purpose for Jesus was authenticated and activated by Jesus through His obedience and submission as He walked through the deepest pain and hardship with a heart rightly submitted to and trusting in His Father.

Likewise, God has a plan and purpose for each of our lives. God wants to help you fully achieve His plan and purpose in your life. We too will face hardships, pain and difficulties. Because Jesus learned obedience through suffering, He is able to help us come through. Ponder on the following thoughts:

1. Jesus is able to help us in our hardships (**Heb.2:18**)
2. Jesus is a perfect example to us, so we can do it (**Heb.4:15**)
3. Jesus' spirit in us. The spirit of complete obedience & submission, which is able to carry us through the hard times (**Romans 8:2, 11; John 16:33**)

Do you see that? When we are thrown into hardships, into problems, into uncomfortable places, places where the pressure is on, places where the future is uncertain, Jesus is able to help us through it all.

I think that is why Paul declares in **Philippians 3:10-14 (NIV)** *“I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”*

I think Paul realized that although hardship, pain and suffering tried to stop him from completing the call in his life, he learned to lean on the Lord. He obeyed the Lord and kept moving forward. Rather than trying to get out of the hardships, pain and sufferings. I believe, Paul realized that as he obeyed the Lord, especially in difficulty, something happened on the inside of him! He grew in God.

Paul was not content to just live a “saved life”. His aim was to mature more and more in the Lord to be transformed into the likeness of Christ! That was how he could be confident of finishing his race and accomplish the high call of God in Christ Jesus.

Now it’s your turn. Take a few moments to reflect on your life:

What difficulties, hardships and challenges do you need some help with?

How do you think the Lord wants to help you face hardships? (*Ask Holy Spirit to show you a scripture, a picture or a thought*)

In what area do you think you need to grow in Christ like character? (*Ask Holy Spirit to show you if you don’t know*)

Ask the Lord how He wants to help you grow in Christ like character. (*Ask Holy Spirit to show you a scripture, a picture or a thought*)

Q. Have you made a commitment to the Lord?

Acts 2:21 “And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord Shall be saved.”

Remember that God will always work something good in the midst of our hardships, pain, difficulties and challenges. During this health crisis, keep your eyes fixed on Him!

Philippians 3:10-11 (NIV) “I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in his death, **11** and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

If you would like to someone to pray with you, please email info@onelifechurch.ca and someone will contact you.

For more on One Life Church, please visit our website
www.onelifechurch.ca