

A Sacrifice of Praise

by

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“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God My Savior.”

Habakkuk 3:17-18

Awhile back, one of our Journey brothers commented on how Pete McKenzie always has a core message about being a Man of God and how Rocky Fleming always has a core message about Abiding in Christ. These are their “Life Messages,” as they say. As I begin to write this devotional, I’m concerned I might become known for messages about suffering. I truly hope that is not my “life message” for I’m truly ready for a season without so much of it. However, you must write about what you know and where God has you, and I have a feeling there will be many of you out there who will be able to relate.

My baby girl turned 7 last week, and as I was reflecting upon her life, I couldn’t help but realize that the last 7 years of my life has been filled with challenge. Meredith has been a source of joy in the midst of it all, and I’ve thanked God many times for sending her to us to be a light in the midst of our darkness. We have had extreme financial difficulties, a small business on life support, strained family relationships, challenges with our children and foster children, the draining of a retirement account....the list goes on and on. I don’t say all this to receive pity. I say all of this to say, *“Thank you, Lord. I praise Your name!”*

What?! Yes, as much as it is a challenge to do so, I am praising my Father in Heaven. Back in the beginning of this season of suffering, I had the privilege of getting to know Don Leetch and Dean Kerns, the founders of Dayspring Greeting Cards, headquartered in Siloam Springs, AR. These men had walked with the Lord as business partners and marketplace pastors their entire adult lives and were role models for me of how to “Live it Out” as a disciple of Christ. The late Don Leetch led a devotional around a campfire one night which I’ll never forget.

He read Hebrews 13:15:

“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise- the fruit of lips that confess His name.”

He explained that we must get to the point where we can offer God a “sacrifice of praise.” He described this as “*praising God for the difficult things in your life.*” He said it is called a “sacrifice” because it is hard to do. Let that sink in for a minute. Stop and think of all the difficult things in your life. You know what they are because you have most likely been praying fervently for God to remove them or fix them. Don lead us in a time of prayer, as we held our hands open and thanked God out loud for the struggles in our lives. It was the most powerful time of prayer I think I have ever experienced. One by one, men were uttering unimaginable prayers of thanksgiving:

Lord, thank you for my cancer.

Lord, thank you that I am broke.

Lord, thank you for this difficulty with my wife.

Lord, thank you that my son is far away from you right now.

It sounds crazy and counterintuitive, I know. However, as Don explained, we have to understand that God wants us to trust Him. If He allowed something difficult into our life, we must accept it and rather than scorn God for it, we should praise Him. Job understood this, as he discussed his suffering with his wife.

“His wife said to him, ‘Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!’ He replied, ‘You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?’” Job 2:9-10

Isn’t this the ultimate test of Trust? It’s easy to thank God and believe we trust in Him when things are going well. It’s another thing to trust Him when life looks gloomy. I’ve always liked the way Bruce Wilkinson explains Pruning and Discipline and how we must decipher pain through a holy grid to understand what God is doing. The only problem is, many times, we will not understand what is going on. One of my Journey guys, who has studied the Book of Job extensively, points out that in all of Job’s interactions with God, He was never let in on the initial part of the story where Satan challenged God and God offered Job. So, Job had many unanswered questions, but he chose to bless God rather than curse Him.

My mind also goes to our Lord Jesus, who faced the ultimate test as He prayed about His coming crucifixion. In Matthew 26:38, He says, ***“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.”*** And He called out to God, ***“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me.”*** V. 39 But as a model of total submission and trust, His final prayer was this:

"Yet not as I will, but as You will."

So, it's normal to be in anguish and perplexed over the pain and circumstances in our lives. It's okay to question God and pour your heart out and ask Him to change things. But the truth is Peace comes when we Praise Him, no matter the circumstances or outcome. It is in this place of sacrifice that we discover how much He loves us and that His Will is better than ours. It is here where we find Joy that transcends understanding.

So, I challenge you to offer God a "Sacrifice of Praise" today. Speak it out loud. If you do, you will discover a newfound power over darkness. You will say, like Habakkuk, after he rejoiced in the Lord in the midst of hardship:

"The Sovereign Lord is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, He enables me to go on the heights."