

Your Stewardship of His Sufferings
(An Invitation to Commune at His Table)

Matthew 26:36-46, I Peter 4:12-19

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This sermon is fourth in a series on suffering. The first week Philip Yancey shared, and we had a testimony; the second week Janet Yancey and Susan Jones shared, and we had a testimony; last week Aram shared, and we had a testimony. This week I'm wrapping up the series.

Sixty years ago, our world suffered the greatest military conflict in history. No one knew if the world would fall into the hands of the Japanese Empire and the Third Reich or be liberated in freedom and peace. The tide had turned in the Pacific; however, Europe still lay firmly in the grip of Adolph Hitler. Everything depended on the success or failure of an invasion. The Germans knew it, the Allies knew it, Hitler knew it, and General Dwight D. Eisenhower knew it.

Eisenhower had been appointed Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces. There were thousands of variables to be considered—moonlight, weather, tides, reconnaissance—and he was the one to decide.

On June 5, Eisenhower made the call: At 1:30 AM on the morning of June 6, the invasion began with paratroopers dropping behind enemy lines. At 6:30 AM, thousands upon thousands of American, Canadian, British, and French boys, turning into men, began storming the beach in Normandy. Thousands would die there. By the

night of June 6, Eisenhower would know if they died in glory or in vain; if the world would be free or enslaved.

I wonder how Eisenhower spent the night of June 5? Watching, waiting, sweating, doubting: *pathos*? Did he sweat blood? Did he pray in a garden? Imagine if on that night he called *you*: he said your name and asked you, “Would you come over and just sit with me, watch and wait with me, suffer with me, sympathize with me?” Would that be an honor?

When you suffer, who do you want with you? What does that person mean to you?

Well, I doubt Eisenhower would have called you. He probably called Mamie, his bride.

About 1,960 years ago, this world lay firmly in the grip of the Prince of Darkness, who had legal claim upon the sons and daughters of Adam. It was a Thursday night. Angels longed to look; creation groaned as if in travail. The King of Glory, only Son of the Father, very God of very God, had emptied Himself and wrapped Himself in weakness. He had dropped behind enemy lines to walk among the fallen children of Adam. Satan had tormented Him. His *own people* despised Him.

It was a Thursday night. He had just broken bread and prophesied His passion. He had just shared a cup and said it was His blood. In the morning, He would invade hell and do battle with the Dark Prince as He hung naked, beaten, bloodied, and nailed to a cross—a gallows—a “skulon”—a tree.

On the tree, He would bear the suffering and sin of all creation and all time. New heaven and new earth, the children of Adam, this groaning creation—all things were

dependent on Him on that cross that Friday. Like D-Day, if He was victorious, the war would be over, even if it still had to play itself out in space and time.

Well, that Thursday night He went to a garden named Gethsemane.

There He called out in anguish.

There He sweated great drops of blood.

There He pled: “Father, if there be another way, let this cup pass from me.”

And that night in His pathos—His passion—His suffering and pain, that night He turned to His friend Peter and said:

“My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me” (Matthew 26:38).

“Peter, would you [not Gabriel, not angels], would you, my friend, would you stay awake with me?” And Peter fell asleep: apathos, apathetic to Christ’s sufferings. Three times Jesus came to Peter, and three times He found him sleeping. Later that night as Jesus was beaten in the courtyard of the High Priest, three times Peter denied Jesus and fled.

So where was Peter when God hurt?

Thirty years later as an old man, Peter writes to the suffering churches in Asia Minor. The letter is not an apology but a eulogy; not an excuse for God but a blessing of God. I Peter 4:12-15 and 19:

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings . . .

Share is "koinoneo" in Greek, meaning fellowship, partake, commune in a communion—a mystic union.

. . . that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or a wrongdoer, or a mischief-maker; yet if one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God. . . . Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will do right and entrust their souls to a faithful Creator.

"Those who suffer according to God's will"

Some say it's not God's will that we suffer. Well, I don't think He wills suffering for suffering's sake. I think that's what Philip Yancey meant when he said God doesn't directly will suffering. He doesn't delight in suffering itself, and neither should we. If you delight in suffering, it's not suffering. And God may not will to be the *agent* of suffering. But it seems awfully clear that He wills the suffering of at least one man:

Hebrews 2:10: “For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering.”

God wills Christ’s sufferings. And aren’t we Christ’s body? So Paul writes, “I bear on my body the marks—stigmata—strips—scars of Christ” (not of myself). In Romans, he writes, “We are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him.”

Some say they have the full Gospel because they believe in the power of the resurrection not only over sin but also over sickness and suffering. That’s nice, but is that the *full* Gospel? Paul wrote in Philippians 3, “I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse . . . that I may know Him and power of His resurrection and the fellowship (“koinonia”: communion) of his sufferings.”

That resurrecting power—His healing power—validates suffering as His will. After all those miracles, by that Friday morning it had become crystal clear: He doesn’t *have* to suffer on that cross. He *wills* to suffer for us. Peter now writes, “Rejoice in so far as you share his sufferings”—commune in His pathos.

There is an amazing fellowship in sufferings. To whom am I closest? To those with whom I’ve suffered. My mother or father who has felt my pain as only a parent could. My bride, who suffers with me as one body. My children, even when I’m the cause of their suffering.

When my son Coleman was little and being punished, I’d send him to the green couch. The green couch was the couch of judgment. (I think he’ll always secretly hate green couches.) Well, I often found myself sitting

there with him, communing with him in suffering, bearing his judgment. God the Father has disciplined His children with a world that's been cursed, yet He can't help sitting here with us, even *for* us.

A communion,
 a fellowship in suffering,
 even when I'm the cause of their suffering,
 even when they're the cause of mine.

They're older now, and they know when they've hurt me, and it hurts them, which hurts me.

Confess your sins to your Father,
 and you commune with Him at a cross.
 A fellowship of suffering.

I remember my father telling me about World War II and how he enlisted. It being the '70's, I remember saying, "You *enlisted*? You weren't drafted?" And he looked at me and said, "Peter, of course I enlisted. All the guys enlisted for that war." And he loved to tell the stories of bomb shelter Bible studies and depth charge threats in the Pacific; fellowship and communion in those ships on the sea.

Old soldiers have such a lasting communion in their shared sufferings: united like a country united in war, like a body united in an instant by pain. (Step on my toe and my whole body is instantly united in defense of my toe.) And we are His body. We are His holy nation, a fellowship of suffering and love.

Brennan Manning tells about an old Hasidic rabbi who used to say that he discovered the meaning of love

from a drunken peasant. Entering a tavern in the Polish countryside, he saw two peasants at a table, both gloriously in their cups. Each was protesting how much he loved the other, when Ivan said to Peter: “Peter, tell me what hurts me?” Bleary-eyed, Peter looked at Ivan: “How do I know what hurts you?” Ivan’s answer was swift: “If you don’t know what hurts me, how can you say you love me?”

Do you realize that you can look to Jesus and say, “Tell me what hurts me,” and *He knows* . . . not only with His mind but with His whole being—His body. We don’t know all the reasons for suffering, but we do know where Jesus is when we hurt—*with us*.

The most eloquent book I’ve read on this topic is Philip’s book Where Is God When it Hurts? It’s one of my all-time favorite books. In that book, Philip tells Elie Wiesel’s story that I recently told you . . .

How in Auschwitz, Wiesel was forced to watch a young boy he called “the sad-eyed angel” hanged on the gallows. He hung there for half an hour gasping for air as the prisoners were forced to file past. The man behind Wiesel kept muttering, “Where is God now?” Wiesel heard a voice within him say, “Where is He? He is hanging here on this gallows.”

That was how Wiesel lost his faith. Yet that *is* our faith. Years later, Wiesel asked that question of others: “Where was God?” After being questioned by Wiesel, Francois Mauriac wrote this:

And I, who believe that God is love, what answer could I give my young questioner [Elie Wiesel], whose dark eyes still held the reflection of that angelic sadness which had appeared one day upon the face of the

hanged child? What did I say to him? Did I speak of that other Jew, his brother, who may have resembled him—the Crucified, whose Cross has conquered the world? Did I affirm that the stumbling block to his faith was the corner stone of mine, and that the conformity between the Cross and the suffering of men was in my eyes the key to that impenetrable mystery whereon the faith of his childhood had perished? . . . We do not know the worth of one single drop of blood, one single tear. All is grace. If the Eternal is the Eternal, the last word for each one of us belongs to Him. This is what I should have told this Jewish child. But I could only embrace him, weeping.

Perhaps at that moment he should have only embraced Wiesel weeping. I believe God embraces Wiesel weeping, even in Mauriac. But God does hang on the gallows—the skulon—the cross. And there, I believe, He bears the pain of every gallows for all time. So:

Are you alone and misunderstood? He knows that pain.

Are you rejected, abused, and abandoned by your lover? Look at the Groom on the cross. He knows that pain.

Are you tormented by demons? Do you see what He battles as He hangs there? He knows that pain.

Are you feeling forsaken by God and utterly confused as to why things have happened? Listen to God nailed to wood, screaming to God: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” He even knows that pain.

If you say, “I’m an old man . . . He died at 33 . . . how could He know my pain?” or “I’m a woman . . . how could He know the pain of my abortion?” well, I believe He knows it mystically, truly, upon His cross. And even more, He knows it now *in you*. If you are His, you are His body united with Him in that instant of pain, surrendered to His cross.

Where is God when it hurts? If you’re a Christian, God is in you (empathos), impassioned in your suffering. That’s an insult—a scandal—to Jews and Muslims. It’s folly to Gentiles, to Greeks: that the apothos Logos—the unsuffering philosophical God—would take on the flesh (the pathos, passion, and sufferings) of men. Yet that’s our creed. So He *knows* your pain. The Logos became flesh, even *our* flesh.

And if you say, “Well, I suffer because of my own sin,” Paul writes, “He became sin for us.” He knows that pain, and He knows your pain. But until you surrender it, you don’t know it’s His, and you can’t commune with Him there.

Peter says, “Don’t suffer as a murderer or thief” (one who cherishes sin), for then you suffer in darkness alone, apart from Christ. But surrender your sin, and if you still suffer, then you suffer as a Christian having “entrusted your heart to a faithful creator.” You no longer suffer as a murderer or thief; you suffer as a forgiven murderer or thief—a new creation—a Christian. And the very place of

sin and shame becomes a testimony to grace and a revelation of His love for you.

But please understand: There is a stewardship of suffering, just as there is a stewardship of money, possessions, and time. So you must offer your sufferings to your Lord—your Groom.

An old man shared with Brennan Manning:

I love my wife with all my heart, but there is a part of her past that is like a room sealed off. She was in Auschwitz in the forties. She has never spoken about it. After all these years of marriage, I can't say that I really know her.

Bride of Christ, that is a sin—maybe *the* sin. Surrender your sufferings to Jesus. And if you surrender your sufferings to Jesus, they are not yours. They are His. The “fellowship of His sufferings” is not just being tortured for your faith. His sufferings are at least whatever you give Him. So surrender your sufferings, and they are not yours; they are His. You feel *His* pain, *His* wounds in your flesh. You bear His “marks” on your body like you spend His money and manage His resources. In fact, the sufferings were His all along. You just finally surrendered them. They are a stewardship: “good works created in Christ Jesus beforehand that we would walk in them.”

Now, I hope you realize I’ve been preaching this text backwards. For Peter, the question was not, “Where is God when I hurt?” The question was quite literally, “Where am I when God hurts?”

- When Jesus calls, “Peter, would you remain and watch with me?”
- When He is reviled and beaten?
- Was I there when they crucified my Lord?
- When Jesus says, “Peter, what hurts me?” do I look back bleary-eyed at Him, or do I *know* and tremble because I was there?

For Peter, the real wonder is not that the Apothos apathetic God of the philosophers or the distant God of the Jews enters into the pathos of men, but that apathetic, sleeping, dead men like himself are invited into the burning pathos that lies in the bosom of the Father.

Peter is not saying here, “Be comforted, you poor things. God knows your pain.” He’s saying, “Rejoice! Rejoice, for you can taste God’s pain.” For Jesus stands in the garden still, and He says to you in your suffering:

Would you watch with me? For my soul is
sorrowful unto death. I ask you, my Bride,
my friend, my brother and sister, know me,
taste my cup. Peter, taste, just taste what it is
to love this fallen world. Taste my body
broken and my blood shed.

I think Peter longed to go back to the Garden; not Eden but Gethsemane. Some believe they are the same place (both Jerusalem). Even so, I suspect Gethsemane is closer to heaven than Eden. Peter longed to go back and watch, remain, commune, and know Jesus—the last Adam—at the tree of pain. So now he writes, “Rejoice!” You *can*.

Perhaps the deepest truth is not that God knows our pain but that *we* can know *God's* pain. Why do we suffer? Think with me:

Who is it that suffered first, Jesus or us?
 Who is being made in whose image?
 Who is the perfect image of the invisible God?
 Who is "the same yesterday, today, and forever?"

So was the suffering of Christ Plan B because we messed up? Or was the suffering Christ Plan A all along?

- John writes, "He was crucified from the foundation of the world."
- Peter writes, "He was destined before the foundation of the world."
- Paul writes, "We were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world to know Him and live for the praise of His glory in grace."

I think all that means that God suffered first. So perhaps pain exists eternally in some form at the heart of God in the bosom of the Father from whence Jesus came. Perhaps pain is part of God's necessary being-ness, pre-existent to creation. "God is love." Love implies freedom. Freedom implies pain. And then God said, "Let us make man in our image."

I'm talking about things I cannot comprehend, but:

Can one ever truly know love without pain?

Can one ever know God without love?

Can one ever know Jesus without knowing what hurts Him?

Who hung on the gallows first: Jesus or the sad-eyed angel boy?

- When Abraham climbed Mt. Moriah to sacrifice his dearly beloved son, was God feeling Abraham's pain, or was Abraham tasting God's pain?
- When Hosea walked the streets to redeem his whoring bride, was God feeling Hosea's pain, or was Hosea tasting God's pain—Jesus' pain?
- When Joseph, having been forsaken and abandoned by his brothers, said to his brothers, "You intended it for evil but God intended it for good," whose image was he being shaped in?
- When Job cried from the ash heap, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" who was feeling whose pain? And who suffered first?

Several times I've prayed with friends who have been ritually abused, who have suffered the worst things I could imagine. And Jesus has given them visions that He was there (before they even knew Him), suffering all along with them, even if they were not yet with Him. Maybe He was there first somehow. For now that their suffering is surrendered, He has transformed it or perhaps revealed it as it is in eternity: not a curse but a gift of communion with Him.

Could it be that all our suffering in this world is an invitation to communion with Jesus? An invitation that can be refused? We can keep it to ourselves in bitterness, faithlessness, denial, apathy, and fear. We can use suffering as a weapon against God rather than as a communion with God.

Perhaps all suffering is an invitation, and each invitation is unique (unique to you and Jesus). Could it all be an invitation to sit in a garden with our Lord of love where He reveals the most intimate depths of His soul? And He has called *you*, for you are His friend—His Bride.

He bears hell for you such that you don't have to. However, in this fallen world, He does give us a taste of what He suffers for each of us.

Will you taste?
Will you watch with Him?

For a month you've heard testimonies about suffering and God's grace: Jenny Morgan, Diane Turner, and Vince Bollinger. I don't think I suffer much compared to many of you, but I'd like to give a testimony too.

There's great joy in being a pastor and preacher, but there's also pain. Preaching hurts, being misunderstood hurts, failing hurts. Last year a friend came to my office and read me a letter. It was a litany of things I was doing wrong and how I quenched the Spirit and limited God. He included the dreaded line: "It's not just me, but several others think so too."

I know I fail, and I guess I quench the Spirit (although I do not want to). The letter seemed mean and unfair, but maybe it was partly right. It's agony sorting it out.

Well, soon after, I sat alone in my office preparing the sermon, feeling very alone, knowing I'd be judged as I preached, knowing people were talking even as I prepared, hurt because of my own sinful pride and even more because I didn't think these people had heard the Gospel but had missed God's heart—body broken and blood shed—that is, Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

I sat there in anguish longing to quit, longing to hide, pleading in my heart, "Let this cup pass from me," thinking about my suffering . . . thinking about *my* suffering as I read in Matthew about *Christ's* suffering. I don't know how it happened, but a thought entered my head almost like a voice: "Peter, it hurts loving my Bride . . . doesn't it?"

All at once, everything changed. Not that I was wrong or right, but that it wasn't about me. It wasn't my sufferings but His. I dropped on the floor weeping. I sat on my office floor weeping . . . in a garden . . . with Jesus . . . in a place where "pain and delight flow together, and tears are the very wine of blessedness" (Tolkein). You see, it's a privilege to suffer with Jesus.

That's high drama. Usually it's just a little prayer muttered under my breath: "OK, I surrender." Please see that we all have a Bride to love—His Bride—His people. We all have sufferings. Let them be *His* sufferings. Then when you feel them, they aren't yours. However, they are about you, not as a curse but as a gift.

So Peter writes, "Rejoice in so far as you share in Christ's sufferings." Peter had missed one invitation long ago, and he wouldn't do it again.

As you know and according to legend, Peter fled Rome in 64 A.D. As he ran out of the city, he had a vision of Jesus walking the other direction. He dropped to His

knees crying, “Lord, where are you going?” And Jesus replied, “To Rome to be crucified.” At that, Peter turned and ran into the city where he was crucified upside down on the gallows.

I believe Jesus got there first, and Peter just longed to remain, to watch, to be with Him and commune with Him at the tree.

“Rejoice in so far as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.”

On that night, that same night, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to the disciples saying, “Take and eat. This is my body.” And He took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them saying, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is the blood of my covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until I drink it new with you in my father’s kingdom.”

Heaven is many things, and it is a banquet: V-Day for all who went through D-Day. It’s a banquet for conquering warriors.

So picture a great table: broken bread and great wine, roast lamb and stout beer, lots of singing and back-slapping, and stories of courage, fortitude, and faith. Around the table are old warriors with scars—deep scars—stigmata. And now they are “gloriously in their cups” (not drunk on wine but filled with the Spirit). They’re all protesting how much one loves the other when the warrior at the end of the table shouts out: “Peter, do you love me?” And Peter shouts out, “Yes! You know I love you.” And Jesus shouts out, “Then tell me what hurts me!” Peter yells, “Getting crucified in Rome for the love of your Bride hurts

you!” And Jesus yells, “Peter, you *know* me. Thank you for suffering with me. Have some more wine!”

He shouts, “Jenny Morgan, what hurts me?” She shouts, “Loneliness hurts you, my Lord, for you are love.” He cries, “You know me, and you, my Bride, will never be lonely again.”

He shouts, “Diane and Jim, what hurts me?” They answer, “Being wounded and misunderstood and judged by your own people.” And He cries, “You know me, and I know you. I judge you as my own.”

“Hey Vince! Stand up and tell me what hurts me.” Vince cries, “ A body apathetic to your love, that does not feel your pain or joy.” He cries, “Vince, you know me, and you’re not apathos to me. You are my body, and thank you, thank you, thank you for suffering with me. Thank you for your faith.”

“Elaine, what hurts me?” She says, “Hell hurts you,” and He says, “You know me like few others know me.”

He cries, “Peter, what hurts me?” I answer, “My fear, my doubt, my sin when I nailed you to the wood.” And He cries, “You know me. We suffered those things together, didn’t we? I could not love you more.”

He calls to you, “Do you love me? Then tell me what hurts me.” I think He’s giving you an answer, unique in all creation. Come surrender your suffering and commune with Him in His.

Where are you when God hurts?

[Song: “Were You There When They Crucified My Lord”]

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
 Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
 Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
 Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?
 Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?
 Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
 Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?

Were you there when they pierced him in the side?
 Were you there when they pierced him in the side?
 Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
 Were you there when they pierced him in the side?

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?
 Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?
 Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
 Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

When you surrender your suffering, a few things could happen. One thing that could happen is that God could take it away. That happens sometimes.

Sometimes when we surrender our suffering to Him, He reveals to us, “That’s not my suffering; that’s a ridiculous suffering. Just drop it.” (Sometimes I try to pay for things He’s already paid for.)

Sometimes when you surrender your suffering, you realize, “Lord, this is *your* suffering, and you’re asking me to suffer it with you.” So “rejoice in so far as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.” And *very soon* His glory will be revealed.

Let me sum up the book of the Revelation for you: Very soon His glory will be revealed, and all creation, heaven and earth, everything above and below, will look and see the glorious King revealed in all His glory standing upon the throne. They will be filled with awe as they look at the King of Kings and see wounds—stigmata—scars in His hands and feet, a slaughtered Lamb. All creation will gasp in wonder at what He has done. Then you will say, “Hey! I was there! Look and see on *my* hands! Look on my feet!” Everybody will stop, and He will look at you and say, “Yes. I’d like ya’ll to meet my Jerusalem, my garden, my Mamie, my Bride who was with me.”

Rejoice in so far as you share Christ’s sufferings.

Relevant Texts and Quotations (from bulletin)

And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." Peter declared to him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." Jesus said to him, "Truly, I say to you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you." And so said all the disciples.

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go yonder and pray." And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, thy will be done." And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."

Matthew 26:30-46

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share [koinoneo: fellowship, commune] Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or a wrongdoer, or a mischief-maker; yet if one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God. . . . Therefore let those who suffer

according to God's will do right and entrust their souls to a faithful Creator.

1 Peter 4:12-16, 19

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation [koinonia: fellowship, communion] in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation [koinonia: fellowship, communion] in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body

1 Corinthians 10:16-17a

For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake . . . that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship [koinonia: fellowship, communion] of His sufferings, being conformed to His death

Philippians 1:29, 3:10

The idea of suffering is inseparable from the NT concept of Koinonia (Fellowship; Lord's Supper). He who arms himself with the same mind as Christ will have to suffer in the flesh (1 Peter 4:1; cf. 2 Corinthians 11:23 ff.). To suffer "as a Christian" (1 Peter 4:16) means to share in the suffering of Christ (1 Peter 4:12-13; Phil 3:10), to suffer with him (Sympaschomen, Romans 8:17). Indeed, such is the Mystic Union existing between Christ and his body the church that their sufferings may be identified as one and the same.

B. Gartner, Dictionary of New Testament Theology

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church

Colossians 1:24

Q: How can we believe in a good God when there is so much suffering around us?

A: Suffering in and of itself is useless, but suffering which is a share in the passion of Christ is a marvelous gift for human life. The most wonderful of gifts is that we can share in Christ's passion.

Q: What should we do when suffering comes to us?

A: Accept it with a smile.

Q: Accept it with a smile?

A: Yes, with a smile, because it is the greatest gift that God gives us.

Q: What? To smile?

A: To smile at God. To have the courage to accept everything that He sends us, and to give to Him what He asks of us with a big smile.

Mother Teresa

Here I saw a great union between Christ and us, as I understand it; for when he was in pain, we were in pain. . . . I understood that we are now, as our Lord intends it, dying with him on his cross in our pain and our passion; and if we willingly remain on the same cross with his help and his grace until the final moment, the countenance he turns on us will suddenly change, and we shall be with him in heaven. . . . And the reason why he suffers is that of his goodness he wants to raise us higher with him in his bliss, and in return for the little pain we suffer here on earth we shall have an exalted, endless knowledge of God, which we could never have without that. And the worse the pain we have suffered with him on his cross, the greater the glory we shall enjoy with him in his kingdom.

Julian of Norwich

This night the Lord showed me a picture of Jesus entering Jerusalem right before His crucifixion. A river of blood was following Him, everyone else's blood flowing after Him and He was soaking it up like a sponge. When He was being beaten I saw His flogging as though I was the person holding the whip. I also saw it as though I was the whip...saw me flying towards Him and then digging into his back and tearing away the flesh. All the blood that He had soaked up was starting to pour out, only it was different than when it went in. The blood that He soaked up was dark red, like deoxygenated blood after it has been all used up and drained of nutrients. He took it in and made it His own and when it flowed out it was bright red, like fresh blood full of oxygen and life giving nutrients. As each blow of the whip hit His back, an orphan would appear around him, some of them were people I know; friends, family, others I know, Alexis, Elaine – representing every child of God. Throughout the beatings, He would look into the eyes of every person who has ever suffered for Christ, holding their hands as if to say, "Look at the suffering I endure willingly, I do this because I love you." Then Christ got up and carried His cross and the group of orphans followed him. He was placed upon the cross and the orphans gathered around the base. His blood, the renewed blood he had soaked

up from everyone around Him, now flowed freely and covered the orphans who let it fill them through every pore of their bodies as if they had no blood of their own. Then the blood continued to pour down the hill and over all the people around and all the world and as it reached each person, they would either soak it in or it would burn them like acid.

Dale Eben,
Lookout Mountain Community Church, Saturday Night Service

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren.

Hebrews 2:10-11

Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

I John 3:2

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