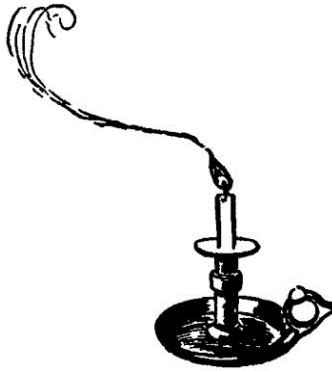


THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

God's solid foundation stands firm. 2 Timothy 2-19

Vol. 15 No. 10 – OCTOBER 2018



Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel,
but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in
the house.

Matthew 5:15

www.anabaptistmennonites.net

For A Conservative Anabaptist Perspective

From The Editor's Desk

WE KNOW NOT

We know not the hour of the Master's appearing
Yet signs all foretell that the moment is nearing
When He shall return – 'tis a promise most cheering
But we know not the hour.

There's light for the wise who are seeking salvation
There's truth in the Book of the Lord's revelation
Each prophecy points to the great consummation
But we know not the hour.

We'll watch and we'll pray with our lamps trimmed and burning
We'll work and wait till the Master's returning
We'll sing and rejoice every omen discerning
But we know not the hour.
F E Belden 1858-1945

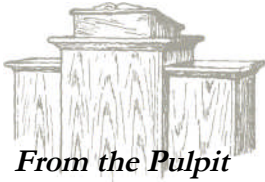


Matthew 24:36 ^(ESV) “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.”

Luke 12:40 ^(ESV) “You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

These are the words of Jesus, they are self-explanatory, so let us not be misguided or deceived by any person who claims to know the time of the Master's reappearing based on their interpretation of Scripture.

Revelation 22:18-19 ^(ESV) “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.”



*Number 7 of 12 expository messages from
The Book of Ecclesiastes by:
Brother Linford Berry
Calvary Mennonite Fellowship Virginia*

Suffering and the Sovereignty of God

I invite you to turn with me to Ecclesiastes chapter 7.

As we looked at chapter 6 the title of that sermon was “Satisfaction and the Sovereignty of God” the question that I asked then was, What makes you happy, what would it take to make you happy?

The question I want to ask you today is; What good is suffering?

Now suffering is not something that we want to talk about, suffering is not something we want to endure but suffering is a part of all of life, we all suffer, this is a universal problem, it is a universal condition, we suffer through illness, we suffer with the death of loved ones, we suffer by being betrayed, those who are close to us betray us many times, we suffer from broken relationships, we suffer economic distress, we suffer from others criticism and hurtful comments, sometimes we’re taken advantage of.

Many times our struggle is internal we struggle with ourselves, we undergo suffering inside.

And as we looked at the end of chapter 6 the last verse we saw that we don’t know what’s good for us, who knows what is good for man while he lives a few days of his life, his vain life which passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun? [Ecclesiastes 6:12](#).

So we don’t know what’s good for us only God knows that.

One of the keys that we will see today is that wisdom and trust in God doesn’t necessarily guarantee that you won’t have hardship, that you won’t experience suffering, that you won’t experience grief and pain, grief and toil, but rather wisdom in trusting God does guarantee that you will know how to get through it, you will know how to live in it.

You see fools and wise people, we will be talking about both fools and wise people here in this chapter, both of these people experience many of the same kind of circumstances, the same kind of stresses and struggles and suffering, the wise people, people who trust God in it, know how to get through it and fools never learn they never mature and they never progress and they never grow.

So what good is this suffering?

Let's read Ecclesiastes chapter 7.

Ecclesiastes 7:1-29 A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of birth. ² It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart. ³ Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad. ⁴ The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. ⁵ It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools. ⁶ For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fools; this also is vanity. ⁷ Surely oppression drives the wise into madness, and a bribe corrupts the heart. ⁸ Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. ⁹ Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools. ¹⁰ Say not, "Why were the former days better than these?" For it is not from wisdom that you ask this. ¹¹ Wisdom is good with an inheritance, an advantage to those who see the sun. ¹² For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money, and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it. ¹³ Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked? ¹⁴ In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him. ¹⁵ In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing. ¹⁶ Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself? ¹⁷ Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time? ¹⁸ It is good that you should take hold of this, and from that withhold not your hand, for the one who fears God shall come out from both of them. ¹⁹ Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city. ²⁰ Surely there is not a

righteous man on earth who does good and never sins. ²¹ Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. ²² Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others. ²³ All this I have tested by wisdom. I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me. ²⁴ That which has been is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out? ²⁵ I turned my heart to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness that is madness. ²⁶ And I find something more bitter than death: the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her. ²⁷ Behold, this is what I found, says the Preacher, while adding one thing to another to find the scheme of things— ²⁸ which my soul has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found. ²⁹ See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.

So what good is suffering?

I would like to answer this in seven ways from this text.

The first answer is suffering is good for our reputation because it makes us wise, verses 1 through 4.

The 2nd is that suffering gives us a long term perspective, verses 5 to 12.

The 3rd suffering drives us to depend on God, verses 13 and 14.

4th suffering destroys the idea of Christian karma and the associated self-righteousness, verses 15 to 22.

5th suffering shows us that there are worse things than death, verses 23 through 26.

6th suffering proves that we won't ever be able to figure it all out, verses 27 to 29.

And the 7th we find in chapter 8 verse 1, so we rest in God who will give us true wisdom and peace,

Suffering causes us to confront the realities of life in the ways that pleasure never will, suffering is a part of life it is a very real part of life. Suffering kind of winds its way around even the joyous things in life so yesterday we had a wedding, tomorrow we have a funeral, that's the way life is, that's the way life works

What are we to learn from this? Well we learn here in this text that a good name is better than precious ointment.

And how do we get a good name? How do we arrive at having a good name?

Well think with me there are two days, two days in our life where our name will be prominent, what are those 2 days? The day of our birth, the day of our death. Two days when our name will be prominent when it will be heralded, when it will be announced.

We send around these birth announcements here in our congregation and we listen carefully for the name and then we read the obituary in the newspaper.

When our grave stone is placed there will be our name and below our name are two dates, the day we were born the day we die and between those two dates is a dash and that dash encompasses all of life, it is just like that, it's a dash. And what exists between those two dates what happens between those two dates determines whether our name is lovely like a perfume, not the stinky kind, or whether our name stinks.

What happens between those two dates in that little dash that we call life will show will tell what it is who it is that we are.

Oftentimes we don't know what our character really is, we don't know what someone else's character really is until things get hard and when things get hard that is when reputations are built.

So what kind of name you going to have? Are you going to embrace suffering and sorrow and pain and struggle and toil and learn the lessons that God has for you to learn?

Is your name going to reflect the sovereign goodness and glory of God in all of life?

Or are you going to turn to partying and comedy, to laughing, to feasting, to drinking to try to get rid of the suffering in your life to try to avoid it, to try to take your mind off it?

You see there is this thing that we all face, this impending death, but not only do we face that we also face the problems of life while we live.

Solomon suggests that we would be better off going to a funeral than going to a party and the reason he gives is that death is the end of every man.

I have some bad news for you this morning you are going to die! I checked the death rate in Rockingham County and it stands at 100%, you are going to die! And no matter where you live the death rate is the same!

Neither jogging nor liposuction nor all the brown rice in China will keep you healthy for ever, you are going to die! Death is the destiny of every man.

And the person who trusts God has come to terms with this, he has come to terms with the brevity of life, he doesn't live as though life will go on for ever, he lives as though there is an end.

Wise people go to funerals and pay attention.

Foolish people just want to laugh all the time.

Are we opposed to laughing? No, not at all, Solomon actually told us in Ecclesiastes chapter 3 that there is a time and a season for everything, there is a time to laugh and a time to mourn, but fools don't know that, fools try to laugh at the wrong time, sometimes it's just not funny, sometimes it is just hard, sometimes there is nothing to laugh about, sometimes you just need to embrace grief and suffering and sorrow.

It says here in verse 4 the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure or house of mirth.

When hardships come, when trials come, when suffering comes, when difficulty comes, when strife comes here is what happens, fools eat, drink, dance and laugh their way through their problems and all they are doing is ignoring and avoiding them.

Wise people embrace suffering and mourn through it.

Fools refuse to go through the hard stuff of life; wise people accept it knowing that on the other side there is God and an opportunity for real joy in God.

When the preacher here talks about the house of the feasting he is talking about this escape mechanism we call food, so I'm depressed so I'm going to eat that will fix it! Yeah and then I will be fat and depressed, that is so much better. Or I'm depressed so I will drink I'll become intoxicated, well that will definitely fix it, till the next morning when you wake up from your drunken stupor and you find out that life is worse than it was before.

Drinking when you are depressed, eating when you are depressed, partying when you are depressed what is that? It's foolish, fools sit around and waste their time they numb themselves with entertainment and technology because they think that they can escape reality they don't want to deal with it.

But the one who trusts God in suffering, the one who knows that God is Sovereign that He is loving and good will embrace the suffering because they know that God is working and through that suffering will come true joy.

Now it might not happen in this life, it might not happen today or tomorrow but as the apostle Paul writes to live is Christ and to die is gain. So to endure suffering as a good servant of Christ is to become wise in this life and truly joyful in heart.

Suffering secondly gives us a long term perspective.

Not only does it help us to have a good name and to live wisely but suffering gives us a long-term perspective, embracing our suffering trusting in the sovereignty of God even in the midst of suffering gives us a different view, different perspective and so as we see here in verse 5 we would rather suffer rebuke and criticism than to enjoy the praise of fools and why is that?

Well because the praise of fools won't last very long, the praise of fools is kind of like this crackling and cackling of burning bushes like brush.

If any of you have tried to cook over a fire you know that if you just grab that brushy stuff and throw it under the kettle it won't make your food very warm you need something more substantial, you need something that will last that will have that staying power.

And what he is saying is that rebuke is that what has staying power it sticks with you it changes your life for the long-term.

The praise of fools, the flattery, the empty and shallow it feels good for a little it makes a big show but it is gone and has no lasting value.

A long-term perspective will keep us, verse 7, from taking a bribe for short-term gain when we know that in the end bribery leads to oppression, bribery leads to a system that drives us crazy, we can't stand it, but so many people take the bribe because they see the short term benefit they want the money now they will deal with the other stuff later.

Suffering demonstrates that it is not what is in the moment that is so important but rather what will be the end result, better is the end of the thing than its beginning, verse 8.

Over and over the preacher tells us that we cannot know the rest of the story it is not ours to know we don't really know what is good for us, God does. And the reason God knows what is good for us is because He does know the rest of the story, He knows it all the way to the end and so in the midst of our suffering, in the midst of our trials, in the midst of our stress we can trust God that He knows what He is doing and that the end of the story will be better than the beginning.

Suffering teaches us patience.

Our society has lost its taste for patience, our society has lost its appetite for the long haul we want everything now, not tomorrow, not this evening, not 2 hours from now we want it now! And if we don't get it now we throw a fit! We want instant coffee, we want fast food, we want immediate gratification, we want instant entertainment, our computers and our modems keep getting faster and faster and we chafe at the idea of having to wait even 2 seconds for the page to load. I know, I'm there.

My Internet has some problems when it rains, water must get in the phone lines somewhere, things slow down to a crawl, well relatively speaking, compared to the dial-up that I enjoyed 6 years ago it's lightning fast but it is still a crawl because I want it now!

How many times have we allowed ourselves to become impatient when sitting at a red light, when waiting for someone else in line?

How many times have we been impatient with our wives or our children, our families?

How many times have we been impatient with our church?

I can think of plenty of times when I have been impatient.

Richard Hendrix once said 2nd only to suffering waiting may be the greatest teacher and trainer in godliness, maturity and genuine spirituality most of us will ever encounter.

God is interested in character development so He will test our patience to develop our perseverance and He frequently does this because life is a

marathon it is not a sprint, it's a marathon, God is building patience in us He uses suffering to do that, He is building patience in us so that we will go the distance in our marriages and our families and our church and our ministry and our life.

So don't be quick tempered is what the preacher is saying here. That's a short term perspective that is the response of a fool who can't see past the end of his nose, that is not the response of one who trusts in God's sovereignty.

Furthermore he goes on to say in verse 10 don't try to relive the past, there is no such thing as the good old days, no, such things as suffering happened then too, things were hard, life was difficult, people died, people got sick, those were not the good old days.

The problem is we tend not to remember the bad things from our past we tend to put them out we block it out especially if we have been drinking and eating our way to tuning out, we block it out we forget about it and we look back with nostalgia and romance and we say, Oh those were the good old days!

But if you went back and asked those people they wouldn't think they were the good old days.

He says here this is the question that comes from a fool not from a wise person.

If we learn the lessons God has for us in suffering it will help to protect us from the foolishness that accompanies a short-term perspective.

He uses the illustration here of a big inheritance in verse 11, a big inheritance is left and the foolish person we know will spend it and squander it and waste it and it will all be gone and have no value and not only will he be poor but he will also be foolish.

A wise person, a person who has wisdom who has a long-term perspective will be able to make the best of that money and money will be useful it will be helpful it will provide protection and then he will be wise in more ways than one.

Another example of this happened recently, well it's not so recent anymore but in 2008 when there was a downturn in the markets, I was sitting in a

business meeting of a secular organisation, I serve there as one of the Board of Directors, and people were all alarmed because our investments were losing value quickly, this was the global financial crisis of 2008 and they made this rash decision to pull all the money out of the market and only one or two of us stood up and said, no that's a short-term perspective, this is the worst time to pull out of the market. Yes it's bad, it's bad and the headlines are bad and it looks bad but this is the worst time to pull out of the market. But they pulled it anyway, if they'd left it there 2 years later they would have had it all back.

You see that's the long-term perspective and the short term perspective all it cares about is what is going on right now.

And in our suffering sometimes we suffer and it's intense and it's personal and it is right now and we want to throw in all the chips to bailout but that is the short-term perspective, the long-term perspective is the perspective that God is in control, that God will make it all right in the end and so we stick it out we stay the course, we learn patience.

So if you have a lot of money and you don't have a lot of wisdom you will lose all your money and it will actually destroy your life.

The preacher said earlier I have seen another evil under the sun, God gives a man wealth, honour, possessions but does not enable him to enjoy them instead a stranger feasts on them. But if you have wisdom it preserves the life of him who has it.

So embracing and enduring suffering gives us a long-term perspective of wisdom.

Number 3, suffering drives us to depend on God.

Here in verses 13 and 14 we find the crux or the centre of this whole passage both literally and figuratively this is where it all comes together and the preacher says consider what God is doing, not what you're doing, not what is happening to you, not how bad you feel, if you are suffering use it as a means to consider what is God up to, what is God all about, what is He trying to accomplish?

Many people have discovered that it is folly to kick against the Sovereign God, to kick against what God is doing.

And the first and foremost thing that you need to understand here is that God is big and you are small. And when something in life seems crooked

we're usually very quick to try and tell God how to straighten it out instead we should let God straighten us out that's what He needs to do, that's what He's trying to do through suffering but we want to straighten it out. God is hard at work, God is working, He is working for our real spiritual good not just in one way but in many ways, He works through suffering, He works in all kinds of ways and therefore we are called to trust him even when the way seems crooked, even when we don't understand.

And whenever we have trouble doing that, and I would suggest we all have trouble doing that, when we have trouble trusting God with the crooked things of life, the broken things of life, the messed up part of life the first thing we should consider as we consider what God is up to is we should consider Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Remember, that our good Shepherd, our Saviour Jesus, He once had a crooked way, a crooked lot in life and that crook came in shape of a cross. In his prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus asked his Father if there was any way to make this way straight to relieve him of this suffering but He would do it if there was no other way and as Jesus considered the work of God He could see that the only way to make atonement for his people's sins was to die on that crooked cross of Calvary.

And so Jesus suffered the cross that God gave him to bear and He trusted his Father, waiting for his Father to straighten things out when the time came for the resurrection.

If God can straighten out something as crooked as the cross then surely He can be trusted to do something with the crook in your life. Think about it, God himself sending His Son to die a cruel death at the hands of his own creation what is more crooked than that? What is more terrible than that? And yet God straightened that all out through the power of the resurrection.

This was the testimony of a man that some of us really appreciate, he no longer is with us his name is James Montgomery Boice, the last time that he spoke to his congregation was soon after he discovered that he had a fatal and aggressive form of cancer, he only had a few weeks to live, he was a pastor, he was a preacher, he was a teacher at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia and this cancer was his crook his suffering and so Doctor

Boice asked a question, If God does something in your life would you change it?

To say it the way the preacher in Ecclesiastes would have said it if God gave you something crooked would you straighten it out?, Would you? Would you change your disability, would you change your disease, would you change your job or your finances, would you change your appearance, your abilities, your situation in life or would you trust God for all the crooked things in life and wait for him to make them straight just like Jesus did when He died for you.

Doctor Boice answered his own rhetorical question by testifying to the goodness of God's sovereign will he said if we try to change what God has done then it would not be as good we would only make it worse.

The preacher who wrote Ecclesiastes said something similar here in verse 13, consider the work of God, do not try to straighten out what God has made crooked.

Our Saviour would tell us the same thing when you consider the work of God remember my love for you through the crooked cross and trust our Father to make everything right in his own time.

Verse 14 says God has made the bad times, God has made the good times and who are we to tell him what is right?

Fourthly suffering destroys the idea of Christian karma and the associated self-righteousness.

What do I mean by Christian karma? Well it is the popularly accepted view today in our culture and in our Christian culture especially that bad things happen to bad people and good things happen to good people and if you just do good things then good things will happen to you and if you do bad things bad things will happen to you.

And there is a certain element of truth in that, sometimes.

But when good people die young and foolish people live a long life it kind of puts an end to this idea that is so popular in our culture, this idea that if you only serve God and you give lots of money to me then God will bless you with health and wealth and prosperity.

You see that's exactly the same theology that Job's friends had, you remember what happened to Job don't you, everything happens to Job in a terrible way, he loses his money, he loses his children, he loses his reputation, he is sitting there with boils all over his body scratching himself with a broken piece of pottery, he is miserable. He has been dealt a terrible blow. He is listening to his leaky faucet of a wife, the only thing that God did not take from him, and he probably wished that she would have been the first thing taken.

And Job's friends come and they don't come to gather around him to pray for him, to love him or to bring him chicken noodle soup or hot chocolate, no, they come to accuse him and say, Job what have you done, surely you must have done something terrible, I mean this is a pretty terrible situation you're in, surely you must have done something awful.

And Job says well I don't think I've done anything all that bad, I don't think I've done anything that has caused this situation in my life.

And they said, Oh no, that's not how God works, good people receive good things and bad people receive bad things.

No they don't.

Look at your Bible heroes, look at Jesus, look at Stephen, look at Peter and Paul, what happened to them? They suffered, they were tormented and persecuted and killed. That's what happens to good people.

You see the point is that although generally speaking God does reward righteousness with longer life and enjoyment of life and even in Job's situation God eventually did restore to him all that was lost and more but we cannot know the end of the story, we are Job, we are in the middle of suffering, we don't see the end when God will restore everything to us and so we must trust God in the bad times and in the good times and this will prevent us from rushing to judgement in a self-righteous way when we see people suffering or when we see the foolish person living a long prosperous life.

And that's what he saying to us here, don't think too highly of yourself, don't think yourself overly righteous just because good things are happening to you doesn't mean that you are in the will of God, it doesn't mean that you are a wise person, it doesn't mean that you're a good person.

Chances are good that God will bring suffering and sorrow into your life to show you that you aren't.

But on the flipside just because something bad is happening to you don't consider yourself a fool.

What matters is whether or not you fear God and he says the person who fears God will come out from both of them.

The person who fears God will trust in him regardless of whether there is good or bad circumstances. And then you will be truly wise he says in verse 19 with a wisdom that is stronger than 10 rulers who are in a city.

You see the wisdom of God that comes through trusting his sovereignty in suffering this wisdom is more powerful than 10 politicians who scheme and connive trying to get their way.

This wisdom is something that is settled and sure.

If you don't believe that if you aren't yet convinced look at what he says next, take note of the fact in verse 20 that nobody is perfect, nobody is righteous, there is not a righteous man on all the earth who always does good and never does bad, that includes me and every one of you.

This is the message of the Bible from the fall of Adam and Eve all the way through the book of Revelation, this is the reason we need the Gospel, this is the reason we must trust God because we're not trustworthy.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, there is none righteous, no not one.

So if you are going to believe in the Christian version of karma then there shouldn't be any good that happens to anybody because we are all sinful and the fact that God does bless us, the fact that God does bless the wicked and the unjust with rain along with the one who fears him simply demonstrates to us that God is in control not some kind of mystical force of karma.

And once again lest you be tempted to think too highly of yourself notice what he says in verses 21 and 22, when you hear someone speaking badly about you, maybe it's an employee, remember you have done the same thing you are not immune, so don't let your happiness depend on what other people say about you, don't let your happiness or satisfaction depend on what God has given or what He has taken away rather trust in God that He

knows what is best, that He can restore everything that is broken everything that is crooked but we must trust him completely.

Number 5 suffering shows us that there are worse things than death.

There are worse things than death and the preacher here he sought to figure out how things worked he schemed, he tried to figure this thing out and he was frustrated at every turn.

He failed to truly discover what the ultimate purpose in life was and the reason that he failed to discover it, the reason he was frustrated at every turn, was because God is the one involved, God is the key to all of this.

In all his searching and in all his scheming the preacher comes up against that time and time again and in one particular way here the preacher has discovered that some things are worse than death.

The preacher, the man Solomon, has sought happiness, he sought pleasure and fulfilment in women, we read about that earlier and he has been utterly disappointed, it has taken over his life. How else can you explain 700 wives and 300 concubines? Something has taken over. Today we would say this man has a disorder and so he lived his life dealing with the bitter results of his choices and his corrupt desires.

You see many times as we have already talked about our sufferings are brought on by circumstances out of our control, sometimes our suffering is brought on by others, sometimes our suffering is brought by God but sometimes our suffering is brought on by our own sinful choices and sinful desires. And that is what Solomon was confronting right here. But the answer in either case is that we must trust God. If our suffering is the result of our sinful decisions our sinful desires then our suffering should point us back to God who provides a way of escape, who provides restoration, forgiveness. But this escape requires death, it requires death of self, it required the death of Christ on our behalf. So there is something worse than death and the suffering for our sins shows it to us, reminds us of it.

Sixthly suffering proves that we won't ever be able to figure it all out.

In this passage the last couple of verses of chapter 7 Solomon recognises that he won't ever be able to figure it all out and if Solomon couldn't figure it all out, guess what, you can't either, Solomon was the wisest man that ever lived, the Bible tells us that.

He kept adding things up, he added one thing to another he says to find the scheme of things to figure out how things worked, to figure out what was the meaning and purpose of life and he kept adding 2+2 and he kept getting 5, it wasn't working, it wasn't adding up and the reason that the maths didn't work and the reason the maths doesn't work for us either is because we are messed up.

And what Solomon ends up with is the reality that although God created us perfect we messed it up and we cannot put it back to rights again only God can do that and suffering constantly reminds us of this, constantly brings it before us.

Here we have one wise man among 1000 women, one wise man among 1000 women and nobody can figure it out. I don't think the preacher here is knocking women in this passage, in other places like the Proverbs and the Song of Solomon he speaks very highly of women, in Proverbs he even refers to wisdom as a woman, I think what he is saying here even among the 1000 women that he had around him, the wives and concubines, there was not one of them that was the essence of wisdom the kind of wisdom he was talking about in Proverbs.

A true woman in that sense of wisdom couldn't be found among all his wives and concubines.

Can you just imagine the scheming and conniving and the jockeying for position and favour that was happening there in that house of 1000 women, I doubt there was very much wisdom, I'm sure it was a mess, they were seeking out many schemes but Solomon and all his wives couldn't put things back together again, this was worse than Humpty Dumpty.

Only God can do that, only God can put things to rights again.

And so we rest in God who will give us true wisdom and peace.

Look at chapter 8 verse one and this verse really belongs to chapter 7, Who is like the wise? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine and the hardness of his face is changed.

So we must come to the conclusion that Solomon came to, trust and rest in God, He is the one who is really wise, He is the one who really knows what's going on who knows the interpretation of this, who understands the why, He knows what goes on from the beginning all the way to the end and

if we trust in him then He can make our face shine even in the midst of suffering and hardship.

He alone can change the hardhearted and hard faced, in him we find rest for our souls, peace in our relationships and we can have this even in the midst of incredible suffering and pain but we must surrender everything to him, we must repent from our own selfish ambition and desires, we must trust in the righteous Christ who is the one and only man that was completely and totally righteous.

We won't find that peace any other way; we won't find that joy, that perfection, that righteousness any other way.

We won't find it in 1000 women but we will find it in God's sovereign grace as demonstrated through his Son Jesus Christ.

So in conclusion don't waste your suffering, don't avoid it, don't minimise it, don't try to escape it but rather embrace it and embrace God, the God who gives us all things both good and bad. Trust God in the good and bad, let the bad things point you to the God who knows all things, to the God who knows what is best for you. Romans 8 says "we know that for those who love God all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose." Let your suffering remind you of the God who himself suffered in order that you might have all the blessings and all the goodness that belong to him.

Again from [Romans 8:31-39](#), What shall we say to these things if God is for us who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but gave him up for us all, how will He also not with him graciously give us all things.

Jesus Christ is the one who died, more than that He was raised, He is at the right hand of God who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

Sounds like suffering to me.

No, as it is written: For your sake we are being killed all the day long, we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I'm sure that neither death nor life, nor angels or rulers, nor things present, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” Romans 8:26

Prayer is the language of a Christian's heart. At times we conclude that we have not prayed enough or been fervent enough. These evaluations of our prayer life have their place, but have we found ourselves pleading to God for grace and mercy in behalf of one who deserves judgment or is especially needy? May we open our hearts to intercessory prayer.

As in all things in our Christian life our must be built on the example Jesus Christ, our Saviour, our Teacher, and as you read the following words spoken by our Lord meditate how we can become like Him in our prayer life.

[John 17:6-21](#)

“I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. ⁸ For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹ I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹ And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³ But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. ¹⁴ I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. ²⁰ “I do not ask for these only, but

also for those who will believe in me through their word,²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

Jesus had come to the end of His earthly ministry. It would be just a matter of hours before His disciples would forsake Him and Peter would deny even having an acquaintance with Him. In less than a day Jesus Himself would be accused falsely, condemned, and crucified. Within three days Jesus would have made atonement for the sins of the whole world and opened a way of salvation for all mankind. It was with unfathomable love for His followers and those who would later believe on Him that Jesus prayed to God. This was a special prayer for the church. He interceded to the Father in our behalf. This should fill our hearts with reverence and thanksgiving. "We love him, because he first loved us" [1 John 4:19](#).

Christ's intercessory prayer was all-inclusive. It encompasses every area Christians struggle with today. This prayer is precious because it was prayed specifically in behalf of those whom God had given Him. It stands in contrast to His next recorded intercessory prayer when He asked God to forgive those who crucified Him.

Christ prayed for the keeping of the church. He prayed that His joy would be fulfilled in us. He asked God that we might be kept from all the evil influence that is in the world. Our text ends with an intercession for the unity of believers.

At times we struggle or are alarmed as we look into the future and try to envision the path the church must take in these perplexing times. Can we rest assured that Jesus included all these concerns in His prayer to His Father in our behalf? This should not create complacency in us but rather give us courage and faith as we face the future.

Jesus ended His intercessory prayer with this statement: "That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them" John 17:26. This is the love we must embrace when we intercede for others.

Do we also feel the compassion that Jesus had for His disciples and the church? Love and compassion are fundamental virtues we must possess as we intercede for our brothers and sisters.

It would seem that intercessory prayer should be more Spirit-directed and not so much a result of feeling. Many times we feel for our brother and are

touched by the burden he maybe bearing. Our feelings would dictate that we pray God to take this burden from him, when in reality God may be placing this burden on him to prepare him for some future work, or He may possibly use it for a refining purpose.

When the Holy Spirit asks us to intercede for someone, we must be willing not only to pray the prayer but also to go and help this person. As we plead to God for our brother, it also softens our own heart.

At times a whole congregation may agree to intercede in behalf of a straying friend or a fallen brother. These are times of strengthening for the brotherhood. The person we intercede for then must let God work in his life.

It is one thing to pray for someone but quite another to actually have the faith that God will bring it to pass. Our prayers should be prayers of faith. Intercessory prayer is not limited to certain groups or ages. Youth should

be encouraged to use this avenue of prayer. It takes humility to approach the throne of grace to plead for a fellow wayward youth. We know a certain judgment has been placed on their life, and their eternal destiny is at stake. Then we plead to God for His grace and mercy in their behalf. These are not wasted prayers. God will remember them. What a joy it is when a wayward soul repents.

Our prayers should always contain an element of thanksgiving. Regardless of the needs at hand, our prayers should include praise to God's name. As our hearts are lifted up to God in worship, we find release as we present our needs to Him.

Our communication with God is our spiritual lifeline. As we grow in our Christian life and also in our prayers, we draw from a tremendous wealth of spiritual blessings and experiences, which further aids us in believing through faith that God also answers intercessory prayers.

Intercessory prayer can be somewhat intimidating. We are praying for mercy on someone's behalf when really he deserves judgment. How do we approach the God of heaven who pronounces judgment on evil and ask Him to show mercy instead?

When the children of Israel sinned and worshipped the golden calf, Moses interceded on their behalf. He approached the Lord as though he was the

one who had sinned (Exodus 32:32). In Exodus 33:17, God told Moses, "I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name."

Intercessory prayer should not be intimidating because there is no one else to whom we may turn. We are to "come boldly unto the throne of grace" (Hebrews 4:16). But we should feel small—really small. We are asking the great God of the entire universe for mercy. The smaller we are in these matters, the greater God can be. Let us trust Him for answered prayers and always be ready to thank and praise Him for all the answers He gives.

Jesus also left an example on prayer in the Sermon on the Mount when He said: "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."⁷ "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words."⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.⁹ Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Matthew 6:5-13

Many years ago, a family was sent to China as missionaries. Their home congregation promised to support them financially and with prayers. Years passed by and the monies needed began to dwindle slowed to a trickle and finally ceased. The family carried on the best they could. Finally the dreaded diseases of the country fell on the wife and daughters, and, after a tremendous test of faith and integrity, death claimed them. Feeling defeated and dejected and at the point of spiritual failure, the husband finally had no recourse but to return home. The years abroad and the death of his family had aged him considerably to where the folks at home did not recognize him. He decided to attend the next intercessory prayer night scheduled at his church. He slipped in the back pew unnoticed. With intense interest he listened to the requests for prayers from his congregation.

There was no lack of requests. One woman needed more money to send her daughter to college. One man was eyeing a promotional position in his company and asked the believers to pray in his behalf. Another needed a new vehicle, and so the list went on.

When all the requests had been formulated, someone asked the man in the back pew if he cared to introduce himself and if he would care for intercessory prayer in his behalf.

The man, trembling, exposed his identity. This was met with an audible gasp from the group. He talked of the work in China, of his family, and why he had returned. He asked nothing for himself.

The story goes on to say that those attending were ashamed of their prayer requests. These were not needs that required intercession. They had become so focused on their own wants that they had forgotten their missionary. The planned prayer was never uttered, but a revival had begun.

May we remember to pray for the needs of others that souls would be saved. Pray for the church and her leaders. Pray for her missionaries. Do not forget the intercessory prayer on behalf of others. Some day you may be in need of it.



WE CHOOSE TO BE CHILDREN OF GOD

There may be among my readers—alas!—some to whom the word *Father* brings no cheer, no dawn, in whose heart it rouses no tremble of even a vanished emotion. It is hardly likely to be their fault. For though as children we seldom love as we ought, though we often offend, and although the conduct of some children is inexplicable to the parent who loves them, yet if a parent has been but moderately kind, even the son who has grown up a worthless man will now and then feel, in his better moments, some dim reflex of childship, some faintly pleasant, some slightly sorrowful remembrance of the father around whose neck his arms had sometimes clung. In my own childhood and boyhood my father was the refuge from all the ills and pains of life.

Therefore I say to son or daughter who has no pleasure in the name *Father*, you must interpret the word by all that you have missed in life. All that human tenderness can give or desire in nearness and readiness of love, all and infinitely more must be true of the perfect Father—of the maker of fatherhood, the Father of all the fathers of the earth, especially the Father of those who have specially shown a father-heart.

This Father would make to himself sons and daughters indeed—that is, sons and daughters not merely by having come from his heart, but by having returned there—children in virtue of being such as whence they came, such as choose to be what He is. He will have them share in his being and nature—strong wherein He cares for strength, tender and gracious as He is tender and gracious, angry where He is angry.

He has made us, but we have to be. All things were made through the Word, but that which was made in the Word was life, and that life is the light of men. They who live by this light, that is, live as Jesus lived—by obedience, namely to the Father, have a share in their own making. The light becomes life in them. By obedience they become one with the Godhead. "As many as received him, to them gave He power to become the sons (and daughters) of God." He does not make them the sons of God, but He gives them power to become the sons of God. In choosing and obeying the truth, man becomes the true son of the Father of lights.

From "Discovering the Character of God" George MacDonald used by permission



Compiled & Edited by: J van Loon
 E-mail: shimaracourier@gmail.com
 Web: www.anabaptistmennonites.net