

Strength for Suffering

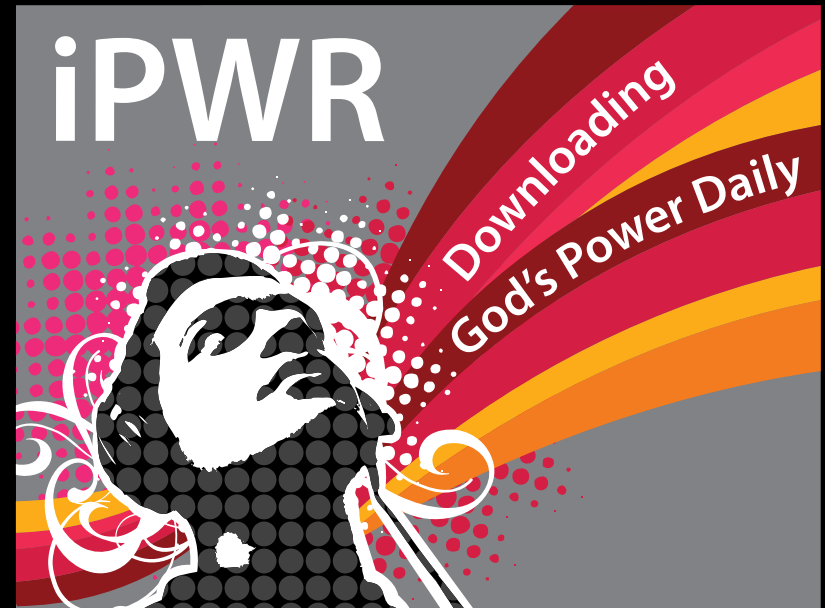
None of us like to suffer for any length of time, and there is nothing wrong with that. When we get hurt we want to do all we can to alleviate our pain as quickly as possible. But despite our best efforts or continual prayer sometimes suffering continues longer than we want it to. How do we endure suffering either in our body or in relationships or in our work? Where does the strength come from? Paul learned that it came from the Holy Spirit giving us God's grace even in our weakness. Grace is the divine enablement God alone can give to endure something you desperately want to go away. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, "...even though I have received such wonderful revelations from God. So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud. Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, 'My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.' So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

God does not abandon us in our suffering, but He doesn't always take it all away either. He does provide what we desperately need through His Holy Spirit—the internal strength to endure and even praise Him. Paul knew that and so can you. Ask the Holy Spirit to do what He did for Paul and still loves to do—strengthen you for the suffering you're enduring by pouring into you His limitless grace. His grace is still enough today!

iPWR Discussion Questions

- 1) Read Acts 7. Note how many times Israel suffers for disobedience.
How many times does Israel suffer from world events?
- 2) How often was God faithful to forgive and redeem Israel in these circumstances?
- 3) When you think of your own suffering how much is a result of disobedience to God and how much is a bi-product of a fallen world?
- 4) Do you believe God can redeem you in your suffering? How?
- 5) Have you seen God redeem your past suffering?

Week Seven Sermon Notes



Power Need and Fulfillment **April 19/20**

Power for Sharing Boldly **April 26/27**

Power for Practicing the Right Priorities **May 3/4**

Power for Loving Selflessly **May 10/11**

Power for Living Victoriously **May 17/18**

Power for Walking with Integrity **May 24/25**

► Power for Overcoming Suffering **May 31/June 1**

Power Over Demonic Forces **June 7/8**

iPWR Downloading God's Power Daily May 31+June 1, 2008

Suffering leads us to wonder if God hears us in our pain?

Habakkuk 1:2 - How long, O Lord must I call for help and you do not listen. Violence is everywhere! I cry but you do not come to save.

God wants us to come to Him with our struggles and doubts.

Psalm 34:17-18 - The Lord hears his people when they call to him for help. He rescues them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those who are crushed in spirit.

Stephen's story is an example to us of God's faithfulness in painful circumstances.

Acts 5:41 - The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus. **Acts 6:8-11**

Stephen was full of faith and the Holy Spirit

Acts 6:5 - This idea pleased the whole group, and they chose the following: Stephen (a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit), Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas of Antioch (a Gentile convert to the Jewish faith, who had now become a Christian).

Acts 6:8 - Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed amazing miracles and signs among the people.

Stephen remembered God's history of faithfulness

Acts 7:51-53 - You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? But your ancestors did, and so do you! Name one prophet your ancestors didn't persecute! They even killed the ones who predicted the coming of the Righteous One—the Messiah whom you betrayed and murdered. You deliberately disobeyed God's law, though you received it from the hands of angels.

Stephen held to the promise of eternity

Acts 7:56 - And he told them, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God's right hand!"

Stephen forgave as he was forgiven

Acts 7:59-60 - And as they stoned him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And he fell to his knees, shouting, "Lord, don't charge them with this sin!" And with that, he died.

What about my suffering?

God sustains us by revealing Himself to us.

James 1:22-25 - And remember, it is a message to obey, not just to listen to. If you don't obey, you are only fooling yourself. For if you just listen and don't obey, it is like looking at your face in a mirror but doing nothing to improve your appearance. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you keep looking steadily into God's perfect law—the law that sets you free—and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

God will bring justice.

2 Peter 3:10, James 2:13 - For there will be no mercy for you if you have not been merciful to others. But if you have been merciful, then God's mercy toward you will win out over his judgment against you.

Revelation 20:11-21:5, John 16:33 - I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.

God reminds us of the eternal life to come.

1 Peter 1:3c-5 - Now we live with a wonderful expectation because Jesus Christ rose again from the dead. For God has reserved a priceless inheritance for his children. It is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And God, in his mighty power, will protect you until you receive this salvation, because you are trusting him. It will be revealed on the last day for all to see.

Revelation 7:17 - For the Lamb who stands in front of the throne will be their Shepherd. He will lead them to the springs of life-giving water. And God will wipe away all their tears.

Acts 7:55 - But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily upward into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God's right hand.

God wants to redeem your suffering for His glory.

1 Peter 1:6-7 - So be truly glad! There is wonderful joy ahead, even though it is necessary for you to endure many trials for a while. These trials are only to test your faith, to show that it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold. So if your faith remains strong after being tried by fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. **Acts 8:1-4**

Do you believe God loves you and is for you?

Job 13:15 - God might kill me, but I cannot wait. I am going to argue my case with him. **Habakkuk 3:16-19**

How will this belief shape how you live your life this week?