

Embracing the Cross through Brokenness in Our Marketplace Call

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An ancient Arabian fable tells of three merchants who crossed the desert. In the daytime, they would pitch tents for shelter from the desert sun. When the stars came out, they would ride their camels in the cool of the night. At one point, the merchants crossed a dry riverbed under the stars.

"Halt!" said a voice from the darkness.

All three men jumped down from their camels and huddled in fear. "Who's there?" one of them said.

"Don't be afraid," said the voice in the dark. "I won't harm you if you do as I say. See those pebbles at your feet?"

By the dim starlight, the merchants saw thousands of pebbles in the riverbed.

"Each of you-pick up a pebble and put it in your pocket."

The three merchants obeyed. Each took a pebble from the riverbed.

"Now leave this place," the voice said, "and don't stop until daybreak."

The merchants mounted up. One said, "What's this all about?"

"I will only say this," the voice replied. "In the morning, you will be happy-and sad. Now, go!"

Baffled, the three merchants proceeded on their way. As they traveled, they wondered what the voice meant by saying that they would be both happy and sad.

When morning came, the merchants stopped. Each man pulled the single pebble from his own pocket and saw that it sparkled in the morning sunlight. The "pebbles" were precious gems. One man had a ruby, another an emerald, and the third a sapphire.

"Jewels!" one merchant said, his face shining with joy.

"Oh, no!" wailed the second. "There were thousands of jewels all over the riverbed! Each of us took only one! Why didn't we grab handfuls?"

"Look!" shouted the third, pointing behind them. A desert wind had whipped up, erasing their tracks. "We can never find our way back!"

The voice in the desert had spoken truly. The merchants were happy and sad. They had found wealth in the desert-but they could have taken more!

This parable reminds us of the desert places that we will all go through on our way to finding God's will for our lives. God leads us out into the wilderness and invites us to fill our pockets with the riches of His wisdom and grace. Tragically, we pick up only a pebble or two. A day will come when we look back and feel happy for the riches we have found-and sad that we didn't gather more. The cross is designed to make deposits into our lives.

Brokenness Is God's Method of Making Spiritual Deposits into Our Lives

In the Old Testament we find this insightful verse: "I will give you the treasures of darkness, hidden riches in secret places, that you may know me, the Lord, Who calls you by name" (Isa 45:3). During a seven year period of adversity God made deposits into my life that resulted in a whole new direction that led to my current ministry to men and women in the marketplace. It led to the writing of TGIF Today God Is First, which is being used around the world to encourage men and women in the workplace. All of this would not have happened had God not allowed a crisis to take place in my life that created enough pain to draw me into a place of seeking Him with all my heart. These are the ways of God. At the end of the seven year period God restored all I had lost.

The Cross is the Foundation for Every Believer's Call

Every believer is called to experience the cross: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Phil 2:5-9). Jesus gave us the example of a life that is lived under the cross. You and I are called to this same life.

The Cross is a Sign of Adoption

The cross is a sign of adoption for every believer. "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love" (1 Peter 1:6-8). Many people think that suffering is a sign of God's displeasure. Certainly we can suffer because of our own sin. In fact, there are three reasons you and I may suffer adversity in our lives:

3 Reasons We Will Encounter the Cross

There are three reasons most of us will experience the cross.

1) Sin

Sometimes we experience a crisis because we have sown the seeds of sin and we reap what we sow. This becomes motivation to come to the cross, often for salvation.

2) Generational Sin (subconscious strongholds)

Sometimes we have generational issues that are not often seen until problems surface that are rooted in these issues.

3) Calling

Sometimes we experience adversity simply because of the call upon our lives, like Joseph.

So, when we are in a crisis we first want to ask, "Why am I in this crisis? If it is not because of our own disobedience, then it can be from unknown generational sins or strongholds, or it can simply be a consequence of the calling on our lives as in the case of Joseph, who did not sin, but was thrust into thirteen years of adversity because of a destiny placed upon him to save an entire nation.

Early Signs You Are Experiencing the Cross

You can quickly discern when God is taking you into a season of the cross when you have feelings like these:

"Why am I going through this?"

*"This makes no sense, God. I'm not in sin!
Why is this happening to me?"*

"My world is falling apart."

"I feel like I'm in a freefall and have nothing to hang onto. I can't control anything."

"It's not true! How could they think such lies!?"

"How could he/she betray me like this?"

The cross often makes no logical sense to us. We feel we are being wrongfully treated and there is emotional and sometimes even physical pain associated with the cross. However, God's ultimate purpose in the cross is this: The cross is a custom designed assault to remove pride and self-assurance. Its primary goal is humility, greater dependence upon God and increased intimacy with Jesus. The cross is painful, bloody and very personal. Common attributes of the cross usually involve the removal of

- Relationships
- Resources
- Predictable circumstances
- Everything you receive comfort and strength from

Resurrection

Ultimately we want to see a resurrection to our situations. Death without resurrection is no victory. This often happens in the natural but sometimes we never receive the fulfillment, such as those listed in Hebrews 11. However, I find many do receive a restoration in this life.

"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Rom 6:4).

God Turns Messes into Messages

John Bunyan, who wrote *Pilgrim's Progress*, grew up in poverty and taught himself to read. He struggled with feelings of not being forgiven by God. His wife died of a sudden illness and he turned totally to God in his pain. He began to preach throughout England but because he did not have a license, the authorities arrested him and eventually imprisoned him 12 years for preaching without a license. While in prison he experienced God's presence in a special way and wrote the classic bestseller book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, that could only have been written by a soul that was refined by the fires of adversity.

Cross Becomes Your Authority

Walking successfully through your season of the cross gives you the authority to minister the message God deposits into your life during that season and to fulfill the purpose for which God created you. The level of adversity is always dependent on the level of call, our cooperation and the depth and width of the ministry and purpose He plans through your life.

Get All God Desires for You to Get

It is very important to get all the jewels of the process of the cross He takes you through. If you do not successfully walk through this season then you are not qualified to minister from that place. It is the depth of your cross experience that will determine the fruit that will come from your life as a result of the cross.

Michael Molinos, a writer and Christian leader from the 1600s, says "The first darkness is that which comes from sin. It is a darkness that is filled with unhappiness and leads the Christian to eternal death. The second kind of darkness is darkness which the Lord allows within our inward part in order to establish and settle virtue. This is a happy darkness because it illuminates your inward spirit, strengthens it and gives it greater light. I would have you see these times of darkness as a happy darkness, a darkness in which you should persevere in your inward pursuit. It is a manifest sign that God, in His infinite mercy, is seeking to bring you into the inward path. How good will be the results, dear friend, if you will but simply embrace these times with grace and with resignation! Such times are for your spiritual good. These times of darkness do not slow you down in your journey toward Him! They may seem to, but in fact they hasten you toward the final point of your journey".

Overcoming is Not Always Good

Some of us are such good survivalists that we have not been brought low enough to learn the most important Kingdom lessons of the cross - humility and brokenness.

"I would kill you myself if I could," said a mentor to me back in the days when I was struggling to make sense of my own adversities. He could see my struggle and my efforts to extricate myself from the cross God was applying to my life at that time.

God uses emotional pain to motivate us to seek Him to reveal those issues in our lives that still need the cross; healing and wholeness. It is the greatest thing He can do for a follower of Christ. Otherwise, we remain stuck in our dysfunctional stuff.

There is often a death of a vision before the true vision is realized.

We see this principle in Joseph, who had a dream to be over his brothers one day. That dream died but was later fulfilled in ways he could never have imagined. Abraham had a vision for a great nation but tried to help God fulfill that dream when he conspired with Sarah to lie with his maidservant and give birth to Ishmael instead of waiting for Isaac, the promised son. The disciples had a vision for an earthly kingdom only to see that dream die when Jesus died on the cross. So often the original vision God places in our heart is not the pure vision that God wants to birth. We must wait for God to birth His vision.

Birthing of new things is often out of dark places

The birthing process often comes in a time of darkness. In Genesis 15:12 we read, "a thick and dreadful darkness came over" Abram. It is in the depths of that strange and terrible darkness that God tells Abram his descendants will one day be slaves in a strange country, but they will come out of that nation with great possessions and return to the land that we now call the Holy Land. The ways of God are often painful and require a depth of soul experience to fulfill the purposes of God in our lives. A. W. Tozer once wrote, "It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until he has hurt him deeply."

Leadership is Birthed through the Pain of the Cross

Leadership often is birthed through pain. Tozer said, "A true and safe leader is likely one who has no desire to lead, but is forced into a position of leadership by the inward pressure of the Holy Spirit and by the pressure of an external situation." Such was the case with Martin Luther. He was surprised to be used by God to reform the Church. Luther was simply struggling for salvation before God, and was the most surprised person of all to set off the cataclysmic 16th century movement we now simply call, the Reformation.

The same can be said of me. My journey of a seven year pit experience from 1994-2001 took me through an incredible time of adversity. It was during that period that God birthed TGIF and my leadership in the faith and work movement. I was the most surprised person the first time I heard someone say I was the leader of the faith and work movement. There were many before me who could claim that, but God had placed me into leadership in this area during this season.

God will use failure in your life to break down that strong desire in your heart to see

your name in lights. And when he finally breaks you of that lust for recognition, He may place you before the lights like you never imagined. Joseph probably could have cared less that he was elevated to the position of second in command to Pharaoh. He had become dead to his situation and was simply motivated by his obedience to God. "Beware of the Christian leader who does not walk with a limp," says Bob Mumford

The Cross Means Moving in God's Timing

The cross also means moving in God's timing, not our own. David waited for God to elevate him to be king and willed himself to wait for God's perfect timing for God to fulfill His promise to him. Jesus waited for the right timing to fulfill his purpose. His followers wanted him to fulfill a purpose that was not God's purpose.

Samuel Morse was a businessman born in 1791

Samuel Morse who grew up desiring to be an artist. It was difficult to make a living as an artist in America during that time. Then his wife died; then his mother and father also died soon after. He went to Europe to paint and reflect on his life. On his return trip aboard a ship, he was captivated by discussions at dinner about new experiments in electromagnetism.

During that important occasion, Morse made the following comment, "If the presence of electricity can be made visible in any part of the circuit, I see no reason why intelligence may not be transmitted by electricity." In the face of many difficulties and disappointments, he determinedly perfected a new invention, and, in 1837, applied for a patent that became what we know today as the telegraph. He also created Morse code. It was only later, after many more setbacks and disappointments, that his projects received funding. He said later, "I will wait patiently for the direction of Providence." Morse went on to create several other inventions and can be recognized today as the father of faxes, modems, e-mail, the internet and other electronic communication.

What is the Goal of the Christian Life?

It is D E A T H ! So Christ may live through us! The cross is for every believer. Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." (Matt 16:24-26). One day a mentor said to me, "I would kill you myself if I could." I was struggling to get past my own stuff. I was trying to birth something only God could birth through embracing the cross.

In 1 Samuel we find these words; "I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who shall do according to what is in My heart and in My mind. I will build him a sure house, and he shall walk before My anointed forever (1 Sam 2:35-36). Are you ready to be that faithful marketplace leader in whom God can reveal His life through you? The only way to do this is by embracing the cross and allowing His life to be fully realized through you.

Finally, consider these words from the Apostle Paul, "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39).