

Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church 2080
West Grand Blvd.
Detroit, Michigan 48208
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“True Community - The Biblical Practice of Koinonia”¹

Lesson 10: The Fellowship of Suffering

Goal: To learn what true community is and to practice biblical *Koinonia*.

Objective: To experience *koinonia* by actively desiring to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings.

Scripture: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings.” (Philippians 3:10)

Overview:

Over the past months, we have been studying various expressions of true spiritual fellowship or *koinonia* within the church body and with other Christ followers. This month’s lesson focuses on the fellowship of suffering. We will explore the often-dreaded perspective of suffering with even unknown challenges that could lead to growth in relationship with Christ through our willingness to share in His suffering. “Most Christians can appreciate Paul’s yearning to know Christ in a more intimate way, and we certainly identify with Paul’s desire to experience the power of the resurrected Christ in his life, but we pause a bit when we come to his desire to know the fellowship of sharing in Christ’s suffering.”² “This fellowship refers to a partnership and deep communion of suffering that every believer shares with Christ. Given the suffering Christ has already endured and exceedingly more, He is willing to comfort and strengthen us when we suffer.”³

“The universal testimony of those who have suffered for the sake of Christ and His church is that they have experienced a deep fellowship, an intimate communion, with Him in the midst of their sufferings.”⁴ Paul’s identification with Christ’s suffering inspired him to desire the experience of a closer relationship with Christ. He shared this desire for growth with the Philippian church, which was to not only personally *know Christ* but also “*the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His suffering, becoming like Him in His death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*” [Philip. 3:10-11]¹⁰ To “know” means to experience. To experience the power of His resurrection was also his goal. That power which

¹ Bridges, Jerry. True Community - The Biblical Practice of Koinonia. Colorado Springs, CO, NavPress (2012) Print.

² Ibid p. 125

³ MacArthur Study Bible, note for Philip. 3:10, p.1826.

⁴ Ibid p. 127

brought Christ forth from the dead now operates in us as believers' since we have been "raised with Christ" (Col. 3:1).

Paul's own experiences and suffering enabled him to express the truths of Scripture with sincerity through his relationship with Jesus: "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*" [Philippians 3:14]. Every Christian who places their faith and trust in Christ can realize the same confidence, strength and spiritual growth through a personal relationship with Christ even in the valley of suffering. Moreover, we learn several things: that Christ is faithful and powerful, nothing can separate us from His love, and that His grace is sufficient for our weaknesses.

Paul realized that his sharing with Christ in his suffering would advance the cause of Christ and His church. He understood that his identification with Christ and work on behalf of Christ would certainly mean suffering.⁵ As Christ followers, we too can and should promote kingdom building. Our willingness to suffer for the cause of Christ is a sign of being God's children and we will be ultimately glorified with Him. [Rom. 8:17] The apostles rejoiced because they were counted worthy to suffer for His name. [Acts 5:41]

Christ does not leave His people to suffer alone.⁶ Neither should we leave our brothers and sisters to suffer alone. Fellowship is to stand with them in love in their suffering even those who are persecuted for the sake of Christ. Believers suffering in other parts of the world are members of Christ's body. The body of Christ is found among all nations and people of every color. We must remember to pray sincere and fervent prayers on their behalf, too. God may reveal some other things that we can do toward meeting their needs.⁷

As a community of believers, we share in one another's suffering, as we partner with them during their trials, hardships, and losses. As we stand with them, compassionately, in what they experience, God can use us as instruments of His love to be a source of comfort and encouragement. "God does intend that we so closely identify with our suffering brothers and sisters that their hurts become our hurts."⁸ [Bridges, Jerry. True Community]. "Those of us who are parents tend to so identify with our children that we experience their hurts"⁹ As parents would, we place their need before our own. It is only God's love manifested through us that gives us this ability to reach out in true fellowship to others in need.

"But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God, for to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we you should follow His steps." [1 Peter 2: 20-21]

⁵ Bridges, 126.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid, 134.

⁸ Ibid p. 133

⁹ Ibid p. 131

Point to Ponder:

“Because Christ regards the suffering of believers as His suffering, it follows that we can share in the fellowship of His suffering as we identify with other believers who suffer.”¹⁰

Discussion Question #1:

Do you know any fellow Christians who seem willing to share in Christ’s suffering in the way that Paul expressed his desire to the Philippians?

Discussion Question #2:

“Why would it be important, as a goal to share, in the totality of Christ’s experience?”¹¹

Helpful Scripture Passages:

Acts 5:41, John 16:33, I Peter 3:15, Romans 12:15

Closing Prayer:

Dear Lord, help us to grow in our willingness to know your sufferings and the power of your resurrection. We pray that, like Paul, we will truly seek to know You in a more intimate way so that we may grow in our personal relationship with You. Your death and suffering on the cross and the shedding of your blood paid the price for our sins. Your powerful resurrection from the dead bears witness to the eternal life that is ours as a result of our faith in You. Father, help us to embrace and share the truth of your Word so that we can advance your will for the church and promote the cause of Christ in whatever way that we can even if it means suffering. Help us to stand in love, compassion, and fellowship with others who are suffering. May we value all of the experiences that render true growth so that we may bring glory to Your holy name. In Jesus the Christ’s name we pray! Amen!

¹⁰ Ibid p. 130

¹¹ Ibid p. 136