

Wholeness

Weekly Biblical reflections for looking after our Wellbeing

Reflection 4: Living a life of Endurance

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:2-4

Emotional Wholeness means suffering is okay.

What a bold statement!

There is a common myth in society that states by being a good person, or even as a Christian, there will be no suffering. As we all know, this is not the case. There is an often misquoted Bible verse that seems to perpetuate that myth, you have probably heard that 'the sun shines on the righteous' but the actual verse is quite different in its meaning;

But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. Matthew 5:44-45

Unfortunately, suffering and pain are part of life whoever we are, and actually many would say a necessary part of life. A life without emotions such as fear, sadness and anger is not a life of emotional wholeness.

So how does endurance fit in to this? Endurance is experiencing pain and suffering usefully; it doesn't spend time asking why, it asks what am I gaining or learning from my pain. We may not see it at the time, but we can look back and see the difference.

In psychology terms this is known as post traumatic growth or adversarial growth. Lots of research has been done in this area with interesting findings;

'It has been found that between 30 and 90 per cent of people who experience some form of traumatic event report at least some positive changes following trauma, with the figure varying dependent on the type of event and many other factors (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1999). These positive changes can underpin a whole new way of living that embraces the central tenets of positive psychology (Linley, 2000)ⁱ

People have reported having more wisdom, compassion, a deeper spiritual connection and learning to live in their vulnerabilities. Is it easy? No, but maybe we can learn something from it.

James, in the verses above, is asking us to think differently about pain and suffering, or in his words, trials. He asking us to think, and perhaps pause our immediate reactions to think and learn. When he talks of great joy he doesn't mean no pain or grief, as joy is independent of the trial itself. Something deep rooted within us, not buffeted around by external circumstance, but a gift from God. As John Calvin said;

"There is nothing in afflictions that ought to disturb our joy"

Perhaps then it is about rejoicing not in the trial itself, but in what the trial brings.

Trials will produce perseverance – the Greek word used here does not describe a passive waiting but an *active endurance*, it is the quality that helps you finish a marathon or sit quietly waiting for a dentist appointment. Endurance then completes a work so that 'you become mature and well developed, not deficient in any way'ⁱⁱⁱ – or another way of putting it – emotionally whole.

Questions to reflect on:

- What joy has this period of time brought into your life?
- What have you reclaimed during these current times?
- What positive changes have been brought about in your life during this time of endurance?
- Can you rejoice in what these trials have brought?

Prayer

Thank you, Father, that despite the trials we have faced this year, you have been in the midst of them. Thank you, for I have been able to reclaim areas of my life I thought were lost and I have been able to develop endurance to bring about positive change in my life. Help me not to question why, but understand what I have gained. Amen

Next week: Living a life of Kindness

ⁱ https://thepsychologist.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/articles/pdfs/0303positive.pdf?X-Amz-Algorithm=AWS4-HMAC-SHA256&X-Amz-Credential=AKIA3JJOMCSR35UA6UU%2F20200923%2F%2F%2Fs3%2Faws4_request&X-Amz-Date=20200923T104649Z&X-Amz-SignedHeaders=Host&X-Amz-Expires=10&X-Amz-Signature=2299f3caa87bd9a2f9ff15b70cf851425f9f4d8f59327b9ff878602e39471de0

ⁱⁱ James 1:4 The Message