A screenshot of a website

Description automatically generated

**OPEN THE CONVERSATION**

**Would you say these statements true or false? Explain**

* Following Jesus is supposed to make my life easier.
* When the next steps I need to take in following Christ are difficult, something is wrong.
* God’s word offers encouragement for both easy days and hard days.
* When a person is yielded to Christ, no suffering or difficulty they endure is wasted.

**INTRODUCTION**

We might say Paul’s daily life was filled with suffering because he had to walk or use literal horsepower to travel. He never experienced the luxury of air conditioning or clean water from a tap in his home. His meal options were likely simple and repetitive. We live in a time and place padded by conveniences we expect as normal. Though these things are all enjoyable and add comfort to our lives, we can also be lulled into resisting hard things that are really invitations to grow stronger and more resilient in our faith. We can expect times of hardship and persecution because we follow Christ, and can see these seasons as opportunities to experience the presence of God in deep new ways.

What other examples of people suffering for the sake of the gospel (modern, historical, or biblical) can you think of? What did they do and what was the impact? What does it mean to suffer for the sake of the gospel in 2025?

***READ Colossians 1:24-2:3***

1. **What words do you see in these verses that help you understand Paul’s motivation? What were the most important things to him?**
2. **In what ways is God/Jesus active in these verses?**
3. **In this passage, what do you see that gives you courage to stay the course in following Christ when things seem difficult or different than you expected?**
4. **Consider the Great Commission: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” —Matthew 28:19-20 How do you see this being carried out in Paul’s journey?**
5. **How would Paul’s suffering and labor encourage these believers?**
6. **How can we encourage fellow believers who may be experiencing difficult times or false teaching today?**

**WRAP UP**

**How willing are you to allow God to reshape your understanding of suffering, work, and the meaning of encouragement in your faith? Could you start today with simple prayers of yielding to Him in these areas?**

**“Father, help me to perceive the examples of perseverance in You through suffering that I read about in Scripture, see in the lives of Christians who have gone before me, and see around me in my life. Show me what it looks like to trust you even when the path we are on together is difficult. Help me to deeply know that I’m not alone in contenting for joy through suffering.”** *Ask for any prayer requests, and pray for one another.*

**EXTENDED CUT**

Walking in obedience with God took Paul out of his comfort zone many times. He went to places where he didn’t know anyone. He talked about God and shared the opportunity to be friends with God through Jesus with all kinds of people. He confronted, encouraged, and exhorted. Paul had a great deal of experience with suffering. He was beaten, imprisoned, and opposed (2 Corinthians 11). In Acts 14:19, Paul was stoned and dragged out of the city of Lystra and presumed dead, but he got up and went back into the town (Acts 14:20). In Acts 16, Paul and his associate Silas were “severely flogged” (v. 23) and thrown into jail, where they responded by praying and praising God (Acts 16:25). A mob attempted to kill Paul in Jerusalem (Acts 21:31). He was on board a ship that was caught in a terrible storm and ran aground on the island of Malta, where he was bitten by a poisonous snake (Acts 27–28). His ministry was marked by suffering and violent opposition. It’s no wonder Paul had so much to say about suffering! In verse 24 of today’s passage, Paul wrote that he rejoiced in his suffering on behalf of the church at Colossae (and believers everywhere). Paul had a deep understanding that, just as Jesus said in Acts 9, his personal suffering was part of God’s plan for his ministry and that God works in all things for our ultimate good and His glory (Romans 8:28). Paul said then, and his words in Scripture proclaim now, it’s worth it.

Still, it might seem odd to us that suffering would produce rejoicing from Paul. But he could rejoice in his suffering because he knew the church would be blessed through it.2 Jesus had something to say about this idea in the Sermon on the Mount. He pronounced those who endure persecution and insults for His name blessed (Matthew 5:10-12). Paul’s phrase “I am completing in my flesh what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for his body” (v. 24) doesn’t mean Jesus’s redemptive work on the cross is somehow lacking but could allude to Christ suffering alongside Paul (in whom He dwelt) as he suffered in ministry.3 Verse 25 deals with Paul’s calling. Paul had become a servant of the body of Christ because that is what God called him to do. God calls us into things for His glory, and God’s planned to use Paul to share the gospel, primarily with the Gentiles.

Let’s break down what Paul wrote about his purpose in verse 28:

“We proclaim him”: In verse 27, Paul wrote of the glorious wealth and hope that is found in Christ, and he wasn’t shy in sharing this truth far and wide. Paul took the Great Commission seriously and told everyone he could about Jesus. After his conversion, his whole life was an arrow pointing straight to Christ.

“Warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom”: Here Paul described an important tenant of the Great Commission: teaching with all wisdom. Paul wanted to make disciples, and disciples understand who Jesus is and how to walk with Him. Notice also that Paul mentioned everyone. Just like Jesus commanded in the Great Commission, Paul sought to make disciples of all nations.

“So that we may present everyone mature in Christ”: Paul’s goal was spiritual maturity. He wanted to help people find the “glorious wealth” (v. 27) and hope in Jesus that comes with spiritual maturity and really knowing and walking with Christ.

Paul wrote that he had been laboring and striving toward this goal. Think back on the list of trials and suffering we outlined above—his labor was great indeed. When Paul wrote about “his strength that works powerfully in me” (v. 29), he was pointing back to the Lord. He could labor and strive for the good of the Colossian church and the gospel because the Lord, who dwelt within him, was working powerfully alongside him.

Suggested reading:

The Book of Acts in the Bible

The Insanity of God by Nik Ripken (also a movie, etc.) <https://nikripken.com/>

*“Believers in persecution do not have a special dispensation from God. Everything they have exhibited and used in persecution to live the resurrection is available to you today.”*

Nik Ripken