

What to Speak When You Suffer

by R. Stanley

The sermon emphasizes the importance of patience and faith in God during times of suffering, using Job's experiences as a model for our confessions and attitudes.

Scripture: Job 1:21, Job 2:10, Job 6:24, Job 7:17, Job 9:10, Job 13:15, Job 19:25, Job 42:7, Matthew 12:34, Romans 8:18, James 1:19

Topics: "Suffering And Faith", "Spiritual Discipline"

Description

R. Stanley preaches on the importance of being slow to speak, emphasizing that patience in words is the crown of a perfect life. He highlights how our troubles often stem from careless or harsh words, which can damage relationships and disturb our fellowship with God. Drawing from the story of Job, he encourages believers to make confessions during times of suffering, such as praising God in all situations, accepting whatever God allows, being open to correction, acknowledging unworthiness of God's favor, trusting God in darkness, serving a God worth suffering for, and looking forward to future glory.

Transcript

"Be slow to speak!" (Js 1:19). If patience is the mark of perfection, patience in words is the crown of a perfect life. Most of our troubles are due to our carelessness in words. Relationships are damaged by hasty and harsh words. Fellowship with God is also disturbed by impatient words. He is angered more by our words than our deeds. Because, whatever is in our hearts determines what we say (Mt 12:34).

Controlling the tongue when everything is calm and we are composed is easy, and it requires no special effort. But when we are agitated with anger and agonizing in anguish, we speak out what we are not supposed to. God does not ignore what we speak in such moments. Rather He takes a serious view of it. The Book of Job vividly illustrates this point. What God said at the end of the story is a sober truth. He told Eliphaz, "I am angry with you and with your two friends, for you have not been right in what you SAID about Me, as My servant was" (Job 42:7).

No one other than Jesus suffered mentally and physically like Job. The Bible admonishes us to follow the "patience of Job" (Js 5:10,11). What he spoke when he suffered is worthy of close meditation. Based on his words approved and appreciated by the Almighty, I have compiled here a list of confessions we should make as we go through the furnace of suffering and fires of testing.

1. I praise God for everything!

"The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Praise the Name of the Lord!" (Job 1:21b).

This is a famous text for funeral services. We may read it today formally as a Bible text. But when the lips of Job gave birth to these words, it was an absolutely real confession, which sprang from a heart of honesty. The losses of Job were by no means ordinary. Death of his cattle, their caretakers and his children, all in quick succession! (Job 1:13-19). To worsen the situation, he became sick with an abominable disease.

Several advocates of positive confession tell us that Job was right when he said, "The Lord gave!" but he was wrong when he added, "The Lord has taken away!" They say that it was not the Lord but Satan who took away Job's blessings. The fallacy of this interpretation is obvious. In the very next verse of the narrative the Holy Spirit has recorded, "In all of this, Job did not sin by blaming God" (v22). The Scripture again says, "In all this, Job said nothing wrong!" (2:10b). Job's understanding was that God was supreme and sovereign; Satan was simply His servant! How profound was the theology of this patriarch! It was this knowledge that made Job praise God for everything in every situation.

We are taught to "be always thankful, no matter what happens, for this is God's will for us who belong to Christ Jesus" (1 Thess 5:18). We may not "feel" like praising God while we are crushed by pain and problems. It doesn't matter, praise God anyway. Praise God when you don't feel like praising Him. Keep on praising Him until you feel like praising Him!

2. I accept whatever God allows!

"Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?" (Job 2:10).

In an Indian Airlines domestic flight I heard two kids shouting from behind my seat, "Fly Indian Airlines. No other hostess is so kind!" I soon found out that the air hostess had given them some extra chocolates! Unfortunately the theology of many an average Christian is so childish! God is no more than a Santa Claus for them! How do we justify our belief that only seemingly good things proceed from God, in the light of the following Scriptures?

"Enjoy prosperity while you can. But when hard times strike, realize that both come from God. That way you will realize that nothing is certain in this life" (Eccl 7:14).

"The Lord God arranged for a leafy plant to grow and spread its shade over Jonah's head... But God also prepared a worm! The next morning at dawn the worm ate through the stem of the plant, so that it soon died and withered away" (Jon 4:6,7).

"I am the Lord, and there is no other. I am the one who creates the light and makes the darkness. I am the one who sends good times and bad times. I, the Lord, am the one who does these things" (Isa 45:7).

Only when we are thoroughly convinced of the sovereignty of God and that nothing goes beyond His control and happens without His permission, we can sing with apostle Paul that all things work together for good even if it is calamity or danger (Rom 8:28,35). This conviction leads us to unshakable confidence and we are enabled to "be patient in trouble" (Rom 12:12). Folks may guess and say hundred and one things about our suffering. But we can assure ourselves by asking, "Who does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this?" (Job 12:9).

3. I am open to correction!

"Teach me, and I will be silent; and show me how I have erred" (Job 6:24).

God has no pleasure in our suffering. If we sinful people desire that our children should be happy and healthy, how much more will our heavenly Father desire so for His children! But if suffering is an incomparable means to correct us and teach us His ways, will the Heavenly Father spoil us by sparing that rod?

The testimony of Psalmist David is that of all prophets, patriarchs and people who walked closely with God in their generations. He confessed to God, "The suffering You sent was good for me, for it taught me to pay attention to Your principles... I used to wander off until You disciplined me; but now I closely follow Your word" (Psa 119:71,67). Our lips may not instantly utter such words when adverse winds blow on us. But if we recollect the outcome of the sufferings of the past, we will stay patient instead of turning bitter. The unknown author of the Epistle to the Hebrews has written for us these timeless words: "No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening--it is painful! But afterward there will be a quiet harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way" (Heb 12:11).

We have these days short-term courses and distant education as substitutes for rigorous training and systematic learning in classrooms for long years. Substitutes are invented to save time and enjoy ease. But as for God, He never changes and He is not in a hurry. Times are in His hands. Life's lessons are not learnt overnight. Patience and perseverance are inevitable. No wonder the saints of old called suffering a school!

4. I am unworthy of God's favour!

"What is man that You magnify him, and that You are concerned about him?" (Job 7:17).

Have I not walked in integrity? Why then does God let me suffer like this? Have I not served Him faithfully all these years? Why then did He allow this calamity in my life? Have I not been unselfish and sacrificial in my dealings with people? Why then did He permit this loss in my business? Have I not loved Him so dearly that I never enjoyed any ungodly pastime? Why then does He punish me like this in displeasure? These questions flood our minds and fill our mouths when we suffer.

Though these questions may appear sensible, they are wrong. We need to correct our thinking. We don't add anything to God by our offerings or service. He is absolutely absolute in Himself and He doesn't need anything from us (Acts 17:25; Psa 50:7-13). He won't feel miserable or helpless if we desert Him. We don't do Him favour by serving Him. Rather we are fortunate to be called by Him. He doesn't in the strict sense need us; we need Him. The right confession would be what a man like Paul made: "I am not worthy to be called an apostle... But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out His special FAVOUR on me... I have worked harder than all the other apostles, yet it was not I but God who was working through me by His GRACE" (1 Cor 15:9,10; Eph 3:7,8).

Job seems to have had a better understanding of God's grace than we who are living in the dispensation of grace. He said, "Who am I, that I should try to answer God or even reason with Him? Even if I were innocent, I would have no defence. I could only plead for MERCY" (Job 9:14,15). More the thorns in life, greater the appreciation of God's grace (2 Cor 12:9).

5. I trust God in darkness!

"God's great works are too marvellous to understand. He performs miracles without number. Yet when He comes near, I cannot see Him. When He moves on, I do not see Him go" (Job 9:10,11).

It is the "why" and "what" questions which disturb our equilibrium and make us pour out words of impatience while suffering. There will be calm in spite of storm if only we know "who" is in control.

God is light and He is in the light. This is only one side of divine revelation. Solomon the wise had known the other side. He once prayed, "O Lord, You have said that You would live in thick darkness" (1 Ki 8:12). Glittering light and pompous show will there be where earthly kings are seated. It's different with the King of kings. "The Lord is King... Clouds and darkness surround Him" (Psa 97:1,2).

Christian life is comparable to a walk from the outer court to the innermost sanctuary through the holy place of the Tabernacle. There is sunlight in the outer court, candlelight in the inner court, but no light in the innermost court. One has to walk there only in faith and not by sight or any other sense (2 Cor 5:7). In Heavenly Jerusalem also there will be no lamplight or sunlight, but the Lord Himself will be the Light (Rev 22:5). When we walk in faith, quit asking questions, and quiet the turbulent mind, it will be heaven on earth even if the times would be worst ever.

In our humanness we may cry out, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" But we should quickly commit ourselves to Him, saying, "Father, I entrust My spirit into Your hands!" (Mt 27:46; Lk 23:46). Dr. Raymond Edman (1900-1967), a longtime President of Wheaton College, calls this the "discipline of darkness" (Isa 50:10).

6. I serve a God worth suffering for!

"Though God slay me, I will hope in Him" (Job 13:15).

"Bless God when He blesses you; but curse Him when He crushes you!" This was the philosophy of Mrs. Job (Job 2:8-10). Sadly many Christians are ruled by this philosophy. We may not actually "curse" God, but what do we do when we don't praise Him? If we follow Jesus only "because of" the blessings we receive from Him, our relationship and religion are utilitarian. Following Him "in spite of" buffetings and brickbats is true service and pure worship.

What the three Hebrew young men spoke before King Nebuchadnezzar weakened his strategy. They politely but firmly said, "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. But even if He does not, Your Majesty can be sure that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up!" (Dan 3:17,18). The early disciples had the same spirit. When they were flogged for their dauntless witness, they rejoiced that God had counted them worthy to suffer dishonour for the Name of Jesus (Acts 5:40,41).

As we approach the end of endtimes, our days of adversity seem to outnumber the days of prosperity. That will be no excuse for our murmuring and complaints. Because, in the very first instance we are called not only to believe on Christ but also to suffer for Him (Phil 1:29). The New Living Translation renders it as the "privilege of suffering!" An active Christian earns the frown of the devil. The devil will attack him in all areas of his life--physical, mental, spiritual, financial and social. If Christ died for us, no suffering of ours will be too much, and no sacrifice too great!

7. I look forward to the future glory!

"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that He will stand on the earth at last. And after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God! I will see Him for myself. Yes, I will see Him with my own eyes. I am overwhelmed at the thought!" (Job 19:25-27).

What lies beyond death and grave is the greatest strengthener of our feeble hands and weak knees. We have every reason to be agitated and lose patience in suffering if there is no life after death. How many long hours we sometimes wait in visa issuing offices to travel overseas! How much we rejoice when the visa is finally stamped on our passports! How much more patient should we be today for the glory land we would enter tomorrow! "What we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory God will give us later" (Rom 8:18).

When we lose patience in any situation, virtues leave us one by one, and vices lift up their ugly heads. We suddenly realize that we have spoken detestable words which are too many to be taken back. If we are quiet and confident, we can declare, "God knows the way I take; when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10).

I quote Paul (Rom 5:3-5b) in conclusion: "We can rejoice when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us -- they help us learn patience. And patience develops strength of character in us, and character strengthens our confident expectation of salvation. And this expectation will not disappoint us!"

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