

Jesus Training Paul

by Samuel Logan Brengle

Jesus trained Paul through his experiences of suffering, sacrifice, and service, which helped him to develop his faith and trust in God.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 1:3

Topics: "Suffering For Christ", "Training in Faith"

Description

Samuel Logan Brengle explores how Jesus trained Paul through trials, struggles, and divine revelations, emphasizing that Paul's journey was marked by suffering and obedience to faith. He highlights that Paul's transformation from a persecutor to an apostle involved deep personal struggles and a reliance on God's guidance, particularly during his time in solitude. Brengle illustrates that Paul's experiences were not just for his own growth but served to teach the entire Church about faith, suffering, and the nature of God's love. The sermon underscores the importance of learning through trials and the necessity of being trained by Jesus in the school of suffering. Ultimately, Brengle encourages believers to embrace their own journeys of faith, trusting in God's purpose and strength.

Transcript

We learn from the Gospels how Jesus, in the days of His flesh, trained the twelve. We learn from the Acts and Paul's Epistles how the risen and glorified Jesus trained Paul.

This paper is a fragmentary study of that training and of some of Paul's struggles, inner conflicts, and fears out of and through which he was trained to triumph by obedient faith.

His experience was not one of ceaseless calm. Storms swept over him. It was not one of perpetual open vision. He was compelled to walk by faith and not by sight. He was sent forth to be a pathfinder; and no path-finder treads an easy way, whether it be across trackless wastes of sand and sea, through the tangled jungles of a tropic forest, or the denser, darker jungles of base, idolatrous superstitions and bloody and licentious rites, or the claims of a cold, self-satisfied, arrogant, petrified priesthood.

Paul was treading a way that no man had trod before him. He had turned his back on all his teachers, all the traditions of his people and was carrying the gospel to the heathen, and what he spoke and wrote he learned from no man. A strange, glorious, Divine experience had come to him on the road to Damascus and in the street called Straight. But it had to be interpreted, and he found no interpreter. For three years, out in the solitude of Arabia and in the silences of the night, he wrestled with his problems and the Lord

illuminated him, and he began to see new meanings in the ancient Scriptures. They ceased to be a binding, deadening letter, and became life and spirit. His mind was liberated as from chains. God ceased to be simply the God of the Jews, a national God. He was the Heavenly Father to whom all men are dear, and the Lord Jesus Christ was not simply a Messiah for one people, a Military Conqueror, winning and building up His Kingdom by the power of His sword. He was 'the Desire of all Nations,' bringing spiritual deliverance to all men, not with sword and battle and 'garments rolled in blood,' but by the shame and power of the cross, winning His Kingdom not by the slaughter of His enemies, but by becoming 'the suffering Servant' of all.

In Paul's Epistles, and especially in his Epistle to the Romans, we find many quotations from the Psalms and the old prophets, and these quotations are portions of the ancient scriptures into which the Holy Spirit was flashing new meanings to the mind of Paul, and they became the sheet anchor of his faith when storms swept over his soul and bitter enemies denounced his claims to be an Apostle.

One day his call came. The risen Jesus spoke to him and appointed him the Apostle to the Gentiles. He wanted to stay at home and preach to his own people, but the Lord said: 'They will not receive thy testimony concerning Me.' But Paul argued back: 'Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee: and when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.' Surely, thought Paul, they will, they must, receive my testimony. Little did he yet know the willful stubbornness and fierce bigotry of unbelief. But the call was insistent 'Depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles,' and Paul 'was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.' 'I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake,' said Jesus to Ananias, when he sent him to the blinded Saul that he might receive his sight 'and be filled with the Holy Ghost.' Little did Paul know what lay before him in the untrodden future. That was graciously hidden from him as from you and me.

There is a threefold ministry to which we are called: the ministry of service, the ministry of sacrifice, and the ministry of suffering. Some men seem called and fitted for one and some for another, but Paul was called and chosen to each and all of these ways of ministering the Gospel to his fellowmen. 'Great things' he suffered. Great sacrifices were demanded of him. Immeasurable toil and great and insistent cares pressed ceaselessly upon him. Body, mind, and soul were each taxed to the limit in his great task. It was not always by some open vision or cheering voice, but often by the things he suffered that his Master taught and fashioned him.

Once in Asia some great trouble befell him, and he writes: 'We were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired of life: but we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead; who delivered us from so great a death.' In such manner Jesus trained and developed the faith of Paul and taught him to trust only in God. Could he not in some easier way have taught Paul to trust? Possibly, but He chose this way, and it must have been the best way. Paul was strong and self-reliant, and like Jacob at Jabbok, whose thigh was disjunct, he had to be broken to become 'as a prince' and have 'power with God and with men.'

In his letter to his Thessalonian converts he exhorts them to 'comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.' How did Paul, with his trained and master mind, learn to be 'gentle' with the 'feeble-minded' 'as a nurse cherisheth her children'? How, with his passionate, aggressive nature, did he come to put his strength at the disposal of the 'weak'? How, with his impetuous and fiery spirit, did he ever become 'patient toward all'? Like his Master, who, in the days of His humanity, 'learned obedience by the

things which He suffered,' so Paul was trained and so he learned from Jesus in the school of suffering.

We see how latent lightnings in his soul could flash and leap forth like a thunder-bolt in his retort to the High Priest who had commanded him to be smitten on the mouth: 'God shall smite thee, thou whited wall for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?' It is true that when rebuked for so speaking to the High Priest, he meekly replied: 'I wist not, brethren, that he was the High Priest for it is written, "Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of Thy people."

But would Jesus have retorted as did Paul? When He was smitten by an officer because of His perfectly reasonable answer to the High Priest, Jesus quietly said: 'If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou Me?' Who am I that I should presume to judge Paul? I dare not judge him. I love him too tenderly; I have lived with him too intimately for over forty years; I am too greatly awed by his sacrificial life, his lofty character, his Christ-like spirit, to attempt to pass judgment upon him, but if in that retort he fell below the standard of the Master, how is his spirit to be made meek and lowly as the Master?

'I, Paul, myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ,' he wrote the Corinthians. How did he learn this meekness and gentleness of Christ? There is but one way. 'Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me,' said Jesus, 'for I am meek and lowly in heart.' Paul came to Jesus, took upon him the yoke of Jesus, received the spirit of Jesus, and submitted whole-heartedly without murmuring and complaint or self-pity to the discipline of Jesus, and so learned his lessons. >From that day Jesus met him, on the Damascus road, he was no longer 'kicking against the pricks.' He might stand stoutly up against a traducer, but he bowed instantly at the word of Jesus. 'The carnal mind which is enmity against God,' went out of him for ever, and he followed Jesus with the passionate ardor of the perfect lover and the docility of the slave of love. Inbred sin is that something within that leads a man to selfishly seek his own way instead of God's way, his own pleasure instead of God's pleasure; that exalts itself, that frets and repines or stubbornly resists in the presence of God's will. From all this Paul was set free.

That was 'the law -- the power -- of sin and death,' and with that he had painfully and hopelessly struggled, until he felt that he was like the ancient Etrurian murderer, who, for punishment, was chained face to face, chin to chin, limb to limb, to his dead, rotting, putrefying victim, and he cried out 'O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this dead body?' But meeting Jesus, believing on Jesus, casting himself in self despair upon Jesus, yielding to Jesus, Paul exultingly cries out: 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit, for the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.' His heart was pure of sin, but purity is not maturity. Purity comes instantly when the surrendered, pardoned soul intelligently and gladly, in simple faith, yields all its redeemed faculties and powers in an utter, unconditional, irreversible dedication to its Lord. But the ripe mellowness, the serene wisdom, the Christlike composure of maturity can only come through manifold experiences as we walk with Jesus in service, in sacrifice, and suffering, and learn of Him.

Paul's spirit had to be disciplined, and he had much to learn as well as much to suffer. When Jesus commissioned him, He said: 'I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen' -- the things he had already learned -- 'and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee.' So the teaching and training and maturing of Paul began and continued through the years until at last he could write: 'The time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.'

His Lord did not spare him, but He never failed him. And so out of wide experience and intimate knowledge Paul could write letters that were the revelation of the plan, the purpose, the mind, the character of God in Christ; letters that have come down across two thousand years and are still as sweet and fresh and life-giving as clear waters from everlasting springs, bubbling up in deep, cool valleys, fed by eternal snows from great mountains.

Jesus meant, and Paul felt, that his experiences were not for himself alone. Through him Jesus was teaching the whole Church for all time -- teaching you and me. When in Paul's sore trials and tribulations his faithful Lord comforted him, he says that it was that he might comfort others with 'the comfort wherewith he was comforted of God.' 'For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and Salvation . . . or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and Salvation.'

We may be sure that when Paul writes he writes out of experience. When he wrote to those he loved at Ephesus, 'put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil,' we rest assured that he had first-hand knowledge of those wiles and the hopelessness of any defense unless panoplied in 'the whole armour of God.' When he writes, 'Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked,' there flashed into his memory some dark and lonely, painful and prolonged period when the arch-enemy of his soul, 'the accuser of the brethren,' plied him with questionings and doubts and fears and forebodings for the future and accusations for the past, until his harassed soul seemed to him like some soldier on the field of battle, who was the target of archers who had dipped their darts in pitch and flame, and against which darts his only defense was his shield, the shield of faith. These darts would quench their flame in his life blood, if he did not manfully use this shield; but against it they fell harmless.

In the first of his letters, the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, he reminded them that in spite of the painful and shameful and dangerous treatment he received at Philippi: 'We were bold in our God to speak unto you the Gospel of God with much contention.' Bold. But listen. In one of his letters, his Epistle to the Ephesians, written from Rome, where, he says, he is 'an ambassador in bonds,' he asks for the prayers of his brethren 'That I may speak boldly as I ought to speak.' Do we not get a hint from this of the temptation from which he suffered, and against which he girded himself and asked the sympathetic help of his brethren? He was old and worn, bruised and scarred, chained in prison and surrounded by relentless foes, and he was tempted to timidity and cowardice in preaching his gospel. Dear old Paul. Like his Master and ours, 'he was tempted in all points as we are.' But he fought on and triumphed. It is no sin to be tempted. It is sinful to yield. Paul did not yield, and so he remained in the school of Christ, and so Christ trained him.

It was out of such manifold experiences that he could write with an assurance that has reassured myriads of tempted, harassed souls: 'There hath no temptation overtaken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.'

Paul had mountain peak and paradisiacal experiences, but he also had hours of depression. How could it be otherwise, unless miracles had periodically been wrought for his deliverance?

Jesus would not turn stones into bread to satisfy His own hunger after forty days of fasting. And in training Paul, He did not pet and pamper and so spoil him. Heroes, martyrs, world-conquerors, saints, are not made that way. 'Who are these arrayed in white robes before the throne? And whence came they?' asked

John in the Apocalypse. 'These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb,' was the answer. Paul had great tribulation, and how could he escape the depression of reaction, when bruised from beatings and stonings, smarting and bleeding from cruel whippings, when hungry and thirsty, pinched with cold, and exhausted from shipwreck and long and painful journeys? Add to these physical hardships his constant 'care of all the churches,' his anxiety for his poor, persecuted converts in far-off heathen cities; add further his constant danger from relentless enemies, who followed him from city to city; and, finally, add to all these the hellish darts of Satan, and we get some conception of the infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, and distresses in and through which Jesus trained, disciplined, beautified, enriched, perfected, and matured the spirit of Paul, until he gloried and took pleasure in his infirmities, for in these it was revealed to his faith, rather than in his own native strength, and powers, did the power of Christ rest upon him. He says, 'I have learned' -- and learning is a process often prolonged and painful -- 'I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased ' -- old-time Salvationists, from force of circumstances, had to learn that lesson, but Paul adds: 'I know how to abound' a very difficult lesson, and one very dangerous not to learn -- 'everywhere and in all things I am instructed' -- still in the school of Christ -- 'both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengthened me.' Hallelujah!

Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers, And he bears a laden breast,

Full of sad experience moving Towards the stillness of his rest.

I see Thy school is not an easy one, O Christ, and I would learn of Thee. Train me, teach me.

Dost Thou reply to me as to James and John: 'Ye know not what ye ask?' Still, O Lord, train me, discipline me, teach me.

Dost Thou ask, 'Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? 'Thou knowest, O Lord, I trust Thy love and Thy wisdom, and into Thy hands I commit my spirit; so, teach me, train me, that I, with Paul, may 'know Thee and the power of Thy resurrection and the fellowship of Thy sufferings ' -- 'the fellowship of Thy sufferings.' That I may 'comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that I may be filled with all the fullness of God' and thereby 'show to this generation Thy strength, and Thy power to every one that is to come.'

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