

**Philippians 1:12-30**  
**(Psalm 30; John 16:33)**  
**“Rejoicing in Suffering”**

## **Introduction**

Remember that Paul wrote this – his most joyful letter – from prison. He understood that life in this present age is fleeting, that those who live for success or fame, for wealth or pleasure, have set themselves up for disillusionment, because those things are themselves fleeting and cannot, even at their best, satisfy our deepest longings and desires. If we make them ends in themselves, in the end they always disappoint. Yet, sadly, most spend their lives in pursuit of just such things, only to realize too late that they have given their best for what was not worthy of their best.

Last Sunday we observed, along with Christians around the world, the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. The suffering of Christians for their faith has been vastly under-reported. The Geneva Report delivered to the United Nations in 2001 stated that while Christianity is the world’s largest religion, numbering one sixth of the world’s population, it is also the most persecuted religion, with “over 200 million Christians in at least 60 countries ... denied fundamental human rights solely because of their faith” (p.6). Those numbers have likely increased since 9/11.

Yet even as we pray for those who are suffering persecution, and as we realize the many dimensions to suffering that any one of us may face, where ever we live and labor, we should hear the note of joy in the apostle’s words, as he challenges us to realize how our loving Heavenly Father is able to use suffering for our good. Look with me at three ways that Paul describes good coming from suffering.

## **Body**

### **1. God can use suffering to advance the gospel (1:12-18).**

- When friends see us suffer well, they are emboldened in their witness.
- When others see us suffer well, they talk about Christ, too.

### **2. God can use suffering to deliver us from fear (1:19-26).**

- Suffering can deliver us from fear of living.
- Suffering can deliver us from fear of dying.

### **3. God can use suffering to encourage us to live worthy lives (1:27-30).**

- Suffering can remind us of our unity with one another.

- Suffering can remind us of our union with Christ.

## **Conclusion**

Apart from God's grace, we naturally cling to the illusions and prejudices of this present age, and give our lives to what is unworthy of people created in God's image for intimate loving friendship with God. C.S. Lewis wrote that pain is "God's megaphone." Through pain, he gets our attention and reminds us that here we have no continuing city, that only what is done for his glory and the good of others is of any lasting worth. So may we learn to rejoice, whatever comes, knowing that for those who have been brought from death to life, "to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (1:21).

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