

How many of you have shared a challenging situation with a friend and heard the statement, "You gotta love it?" As we hear such a statement, we've learned that it isn't meant to be taken literally, that it's actually meant to say, "You gotta get through it because you have no other choice." As Paul describes suffering in our text, he mentions rejoicing in suffering, which is rather contrary to our thinking. So, as we focus on his words, we consider our theme: Suffering - You Gotta Love It.

I. God's desire is that we learn to appreciate suffering. A. However, suffering isn't our friend. 1. We don't appreciate suffering because we fail to see its purpose. What's the purpose of a mosquito? What's the purpose of poison ivy or a wasp or an ice storm? In our minds, we could do without all those things and we could also do without suffering. Suffering is painful, right? And if it's painful, we'd rather it would go away or never come our way. Appreciating suffering sounds so illogical, so out of place, so unlike our loving God. Yet, whether it makes sense or not, it has a God-directed purpose and the best we can do is to look for His purpose.

2. We don't appreciate suffering because we think there's an easier way to learn. Many of you may remember that Paul was once Saul, the man on a mission to destroy the church. Knowing Paul's background, do you think he appreciated suffering? As God used Paul, suffering became his unwanted friend. Yet Paul learned to accept suffering. Unlike Paul, most of us see only the negative side of suffering, and our conclusion is predictable. Suffering is bad, unwelcomed, and not something we appreciate. It's only when we look at the flip side of suffering that we realize that some of the most important things in life are only learned the hard way.

3. We don't appreciate suffering because we fail to realize suffering is beneficial. When a butterfly is ready to leave its cocoon, what does it have to do? It has to struggle for hours to make its way out of that cocoon, right? What happens if you help it out, if you attempt to help it avoid the struggle of emerging on its own? If you assist it, the butterfly will never fly. It's the struggle that enables it to become a beautiful butterfly. Like the butterfly, God uses our suffering, our struggles as His teaching moments. He doesn't want us to struggle, but He knows that it's through our struggles that He is able to teach us what we would have never learned any other way.

II. Realizing that we don't love suffering, how do we learn to appreciate what we cannot avoid? A. We look at Jesus. 1. As we look at Jesus, we realize that suffering was His ultimate demonstration of love. Today, we find ourselves in the midst of the Lenten season, a season for reflection and response, a season to recognize our sinfulness and the payment Jesus made for us. As we look at that cross, what do we see? We see pain, ridicule, and mockery. We see the culmination of several years of suffering. On that cross, we see not only the ultimate suffering, but the ultimate sacrifice, and the ultimate demonstration of love. Purely out of love, Jesus suffered.

2. As we look at Jesus, we learn that our suffering is temporary. When you smash your thumb with a hammer or slam your finger in the car door, how long does the pain last? When you face some type of terminal illness, how long does the pain last? Regardless what suffering we face, it's only temporary. It may last for

years, but it won't follow us into eternity. We may not like suffering, but Jesus shows us that it's all temporary, that one day in the not so distant future, all our pain and suffering will vanish, never to return again. Knowing it won't last forever gives us the courage to appreciate it and the God who is using it for our eternal benefit.

3. As we look at Jesus, we see that through Him, we have access to that living water. In our Gospel, we find Jesus talking to a Samaritan, which was unheard of because the Jews despised the Samaritans. In their conversation, Jesus offers the Samaritan woman living water, the waters of eternal life. Today, we, too, have access to those living waters, but our access came with a price tag. Jesus had to face unimaginable suffering. Although innocent, He still had to face crucifixion so that we could gain access to that living water. As we look at what Jesus endured for us, it motivates us to face our suffering in a different manner.

B. We also learn to appreciate suffering by realizing the results. 1. Paul tells us that suffering produces endurance. Those of you who have ever been on a track team, what do you do for weeks prior to your first track meet? Do you sit around eating Big Macs and drinking Cokes from McDonald's? Absolutely not! You spend hours training, practicing, building up your endurance level. Suffering does the very same thing. It produces, it creates, it manufactures endurance. Suffering is the factory and endurance is the product produced. Endurance is a necessity; it's a requirement for survival. Therefore, we must appreciate the one in order to obtain the other.

2. Suffering also produces character. Most of us have heard the statement, "He's sure a real character," but that's not the kind of character Paul is talking about. As we learn to accept suffering, it produces character, stamina, integrity, grit. It makes us a person who knows who he or she is and is willing to stand up for what they believe. Our world doesn't encourage standing. It encourages us to fall like the domino effect. Yet, within this world of go with the flow, do what everybody else is doing, our God needs us to stand, to produce character which demonstrates to the world that Jesus Christ is our Lord, that we stand on the Rock that does not move.

3. Suffering also produces hope. In our text, Paul describes a progression. First, we need endurance. Then, character. Once we have built up our endurance and created character, the result we obtain is hope. Without suffering, we lack hope. Without endurance we will never maintain our hope. Without character, our hope will be washed away by the first influence of our world. Within this progression, suffering enables us to arrive at hope and it's hope that carries us through life, that keeps our eyes on the finish line, that enables us to receive the coveted crown of eternal life. When we realize the progression, we understand the purpose of suffering.

4. People will continue to use the phrase, "You Gotta Love It," to describe what we cannot change. Yet, as you hear or use that phrase in the future, remind yourself of the truth, "You gotta love it in order to arrive at the other side of it!" Amen.