

Lost & Found Center Teaching Series



BENEFITS OF BARRENNESS

Introduction

I would never say that suffering is good. However, I would say that suffering has yielded some mighty impressive benefits. For those of us who are children of God, we are aware that the suffering of the one called Jesus of Nazareth, who was the literal son of God, has yielded an incredible benefit to mankind. Because in that suffering is the forgiveness of sins for all who will believe it.

The writer of the Book of Hebrews says it this way:

In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. Hebrews 9:22 NIV

He is saying in essence, that without suffering there is no possibility of forgiveness. We sometimes think that God will just forgive and forget. But the reality of this existence is quite the contrary. Our universe and everything known falls under the authority of God. Under this kingdom order, there is no forgiving and forgetting. There must be suffering. Suffering is required for forgiveness. Suffering then has real benefits.

For those of us who are children of God, our present suffering yields the additional benefits of sound character. This is what Paul talked about in Romans when he said:

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Romans 5:3-4 NIV

Paul so understands the concept of suffering that he can look at it in a way to make him rejoice. Why? Not because he's crazy, but because he sees what it produces. He sees the end of the road of suffering is perseverance, character and hope. He sees valuable spiritual assets produced from very negative experiences. And yes this is sometimes God's way. But he has been trained to look at it in a way that produces the very opposite of what we would expect. Isn't that right. Isn't the natural effect of suffering, despair? Notice in the realm of God, the outcome of suffering is hope. What a concept.

The hope produced from suffering is a very resilient hope indeed. Hope that has been birthed through suffering is something pretty rock solid. That's the essence of what Paul says when he explains this hope as we look at the next verse of this passage:

And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. Romans 5:5 NIV

What he's saying above is we will not be disappointed in this hope, because it has been birthed by God through the Holy Spirit. Did you get that? So here is a key.

It wasn't the suffering that did the trick. It was the opportunity afforded God through the Holy Spirit to build something incredible in us. Let me put it another way. When we suffer as a believer in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit has access to us in a way that he normally doesn't. He has access to a deeper level of our beings. He has access to us to bring about core changes, to bring about the character of God in us. Can he accomplish this in our lives without suffering? That's a good question. A better question is this:

Are you willing to face anything in your life that the Holy Spirit wants to show you? If not then suffering may be your best avenue toward real and lasting growth.

Enter Barrenness

Like suffering, I would never say barrenness is good. However, with our new found perspective, there must be another way to look at barrenness as well. First, let me define barrenness as follows:

- unproductive or unfruitful
- without capacity to interest or attract
- mentally unproductive
- not producing results

Anything sound familiar? This is a good indication of what barrenness is. Is your life one of barrenness? Are you going through a period of barrenness in prayer, in your ministry, in your gifts, in your purpose, in your calling, in your outlook, in your hopes, in your motivations? Do you feel a sense of lacking? Does your spiritual life seem ineffective? Do you think you should be further along from what you've heard and read and now understand about God. Are you in a state of barrenness - or is it only me?

Help From Samuel

In order to understand this we need a little help from the book of 1 Samuel, so let's go right to the scripture.

There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none. 1 Samuel 1:1-2 NIV

So a certain man was named Elkanah. The scripture is so specific of this guy that we know his tribe, his father, his grandfather, his great grandfather and his great, great. There should be no confusing this guy. He had two wives. One wife named Peninnah gave him

children and the other wife Hannah did not. Hannah was barren. And her barrenness did not occur for a short period of time. As we continue to read:

Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the LORD Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the LORD. Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters.

1 Samuel 1:3-4 NIV

Now the word of God reveals the source of Hannah's barrenness to us.

But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the LORD had closed her womb. 1 Samuel 1:5 NIV

The source of Hannah's barrenness was God himself. Did you get that? The source of Hannah's barrenness was God himself. Let that one sink in for a moment. Had Hannah done anything wrong? No. Was Hannah in God's will at this time? Yes. And amidst the relentless teachings on prosperity in our current era, was barrenness God's will for Hannah? Yes. Did it hurt? Is barrenness painful? Is it confusing? Look back at the definition of barrenness again for a moment. And here's some additional confusion. What do you think Hannah's name means? It means favored.

And because the LORD had closed her womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. 1 Samuel 1:6 NIV

Can you say persecution? Sounds like Hannah is being persecuted for a situation that she didn't create. Sounds like the one named "favor" isn't getting a whole lot of it. Again, how long did this last?

This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the LORD, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. 1 Samuel 1:7 NIV

Year after year. A state of barrenness. A situation you didn't create. A situation of pain. A situation where you question your value and your purpose. A situation where you don't understand. A situation where your peers don't understand. A situation with no resolution from the Lord. How long could you last?

Is this fair? Is this really God? We only know it's God because scripture says clearly two times that the LORD had closed her womb. I am happy for all of us that the scripture makes this clear. Just think what we would be preaching if it wasn't. Without the scripture no one has a clue. The Hannahs of this world have difficulty seeing past their pain. The Peninnahs enjoy their feeling of superiority. They think they have the answers because they don't have the pain. They think they are the favored ones. But whose name

means favor? They feel pity for the Hannahs. Nobody has a clue. Remember that for your test. Again, can this really be God? Yes. Is this really fair? I say yes because of this:

**He is the Rock, his works are perfect,
and all his ways are just.
A faithful God who does no wrong,
upright and just is he.** Deuteronomy 32:4 NIV

All his ways are fair. Everything he does is perfect and right. The Lord wants us to understand some of the depths of his ways. His ways are not intuitive. Human intuition is irrelevant with respect to God. The only way to understand God's ways are through his spirit. We require a translator. We require an explainer. Without that, we have no chance.

Supernatural Barrenness

Back to Hannah. If God had placed her in a state of barrenness, then no spiritual declaration, no spiritual confession, no spiritual impartation, no authority, no power is going to deliver her but the Lord himself.

Hannah is in a supernatural state of barrenness. Hannah wants to have children. Isn't that a natural thing to desire? That can't be too much to ask. Bearing children is part of her design. That would be ordinary. From my last lesson, I defined ordinary as "according to the natural order." It would have been according to the natural order of things for Hannah to have a child. But God favors her doesn't he? He favors her so much that he holds back the ordinary. Did you get that?

God favors Hannah so much that he holds back the ordinary.

This is God. This is so wonderfully counterintuitive. Our mind thinks that when someone is blessed everything goes right for them. That is modern teaching in a nutshell. However, the life of Hannah defies this teaching. Through Hannah's life the Lord is showing us that he will often hold back the ordinary for those he favors. Why does he do this? Well we just went over it in the first section.

Let me put it another way. The Holy Spirit is a tunnel worker. He tunnels into our lives. He's at work tunneling deep into our heart, the core of our being. Even though he has the power, he refuses to dig in areas that we have roped off from him. These are areas we are just afraid of seeing what will be dug out. Sometimes through our pain and suffering, we give him access to dig in areas that we've kept him out of.

So when God holds back the ordinary, he's often giving the Holy Spirit more time. He knows that through our pain the Holy Spirit will have greater access. When God has

greater access to the depth of our being, great things are released in the earth. How do we know this. Let's continue reading.

Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the LORD's temple. In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD. 1 Samuel 1:9 NIV

Hannah at this point will do and say anything. Her suffering has brought her to the brink. And this is what she prays:

And she made a vow, saying, "O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head." 1 Samuel 1:11 NIV

She prays to the Lord that if she would get a child she would dedicate him to the Lord. Here is the greatness of Hannah's prayer. She's telling God that out of her he can bring forth what **he** wants. Hannah has now unknowingly positioned herself in line with the Lord's purposes. And it was barrenness that got her there.

So in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the LORD for him." 1 Samuel 1:20 NIV

And we know about this Samuel who anointed the first two kings of Israel, King Saul and King David. Scripture speaks of the remarkable life of Samuel summing it up:

Samuel continued as judge over Israel all the days of his life. 1 Samuel 7:15

Samuel stood as the representative for God as prophet and judge all the days of his life. Samuel was no accident and neither was Hannah. Hanna was favored. The Lord wanted to do something special.

Can you see from Hannah's experience that the Lord desires we view barrenness differently? When the Lord's hand causes barrenness it means that he's positioning us. It means that we have favor – not the opposite. It means the Holy Spirit is tunneling to new depths in our heart. It means he wants to do something outside of the ordinary in our lives. If we could just look at it this way, we could even rejoice in our barrenness. What a concept.

Remember again in Romans 5:3-5, the Apostle Paul comes to the conclusion that he can rejoice in the midst of suffering not because he enjoys it, but because he understands what the Holy Spirit can birth in him as a result.

The true benefit of barrenness is to move us out of the ordinary into the realm where the Lord operates.

Help from Hagar, Sarah and Galatians

The lives of Hagar and Sarah speak to us in a similar fashion.

For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. Galatians 4:22 NIV

Paul is using the lives of Sarah and Hagar to represent two classes of people in the earth; those whose lives are limited to the ordinary and those who operate according to a different plan. There's our word "ordinary" again. The son born by the slave woman was born in the "ordinary" way, or as I would say born according to the natural order. The son of Sarah however was born according to a different order - the promise of God.

Just like with Hannah, God created a distinction from the ordinary by bringing barrenness. Scripture tells us that Sarah bore Isaac after she and Abraham had passed the time for ordinary child bearing. Since the ordinary had been collapsed, there would be no doubt that this was the hand of God. This is one of his ways.

Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Romans 4:19 NIV

If the true benefit of barrenness is to move us out of the ordinary into the realm where the Lord operates, then the Lord desires that we live, think and become children of promise. And those of you going through barrenness right now think of it as birthing of God's promises in you. If we can look at it that way, it changes everything.

Conclusion

See I don't want to say that the main benefit of barrenness means something good is coming. That's too easy. I want you to see that the benefit of barrenness is that real work is happening in you. It is the real work of the Holy Spirit that brings the good things later.

So here's my new philosophy. When I think about my life and review my past failures, regrets and embarrassing moments (it amazing how many there are), I now have a bit of ammunition. I face the memory. I don't avoid it. I acknowledge it and I ask the Holy Spirit to plant a seed in my pain, my regret, my failure and birth something of God. I really do. When I face any of life's current challenges that bring fear or anxiety or powerlessness or anger, I don't try to just think of something else. I face it. I feel the fear. I feel the pain. And I ask the Holy Spirit in this moment, to reach deeper inside me and release something of God.

And, in my times of barrenness, my times of being unproductive or unfruitful, in the times I feel lacking in capacity or mentally unproductive or when I am just not producing results, I remind myself that I will gladly suffer the ordinary to become a child of promise. I ask the Holy Spirit to use this time of barrenness to align me with God's purposes. I ask the Holy Spirit to use this time of barrenness to break me out of the ordinary.

May the Lord help us see things this way. Amen.

Notes

For Questions or Comments please respond to lostandfoundcenter@yahoo.com and visit www.lostandfoundcenter.org for additional information.

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