

WHY ME? HELP AND HOPE FOR THE HURTING: SECTION THREE

Three Responses That Empower the Sufferer – Submission/The Application (continued)

Peter provides us with an important distinction between submission and humbling oneself, in his formula for responding to adversity; painting a complete picture of the response which God desires. First, we must submit to God in order to avoid being guilty of rebelling against His authority. But there is also a need for humbling ourselves under God's mighty hand. The word for "humble" refers to someone who is poverty stricken and who occupies a low social status. It was also used of someone who lacks power and influence. To one extent or another, this is the condition of an individual who is immersed in a trial. Peter's command is that we allow ourselves to remain in such a humble condition, since it in turn will provide God with the opportunity to accomplish His purpose during the course of it. Instead of rebelling with angry pride and taking matters into our own hands, we submissively and humbling leave it in God's hand. Why? Peter offers the same reason as James. Furnishing God with the appropriate attitude, so that He can accomplish His purpose for the duration of an adverse circumstance, is guaranteed to result in our spiritual exaltation. Peter details this "upgrade" in v10 –

"After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you."

Properly responding to adversity will always take the Christian to a newer and higher level of spiritual development and maturity. It may not happen easily or quickly. This work which God seeks to accomplish is a process that takes time. But His iron-clad, guaranteed promise to us is that it will happen, eventually. Therefore, the key practical factor in responding with submission, in the midst of our suffering, involves *"understanding the difference between giving in and giving up."* Submission to God means "giving in" but it does not mean "giving up." We "give in" to God because He is our ultimate authority figure. Refusing to do so is an act of rebellion that will result in nothing positive for our lives. However, we do not "give up." Our submission to God should not be accompanied by a fatalistic, pessimistic sense of hopelessness in facing the difficulties of life (John 11:8-16). Instead, as we give in, we must realize that we are surrendering ourselves into the hands of a loving and caring God (1 Peter 5:7), whose desire for us in this trial is only our ultimate and eternal good. Without this awareness, how will we ever persevere through our adversity and emerge from it, where and what God wants us to be? This is why James begins his epistle with the following encouragement in 1:12 –

"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."

The all-important first response of submission must involve giving in but not giving up. It is this attitude on the part of the suffering Christian which will maximize what God can accomplish in our most difficult times of life.