*"All new life comes out of the dark places, and hasn't it always been?"*

ANN VOSKAMP

*"We enter God's intimate sphere through the door formed by the wound in the side of God's word and Son."*

HANS URS VON BALTHAZAR

## SOLIDARITY IN JESUS' SUFFERINGS

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|---|---|
| **Desire** | to be with Jesus in my pain and in his pain |
| **Definition** | We are in solidarity with Jesus' sufferings when we hold our pain and bear our burdens together with Jesus and his own sufferings for the world. |
| **Scripture** | "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death." (Philippians 3:10)<br>"Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 2:3)<br>"Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance." (Romans 5:3)<br>"He was despised and rejected by men,<br>a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering." (Isaiah 53:3) |
| **Practice Includes** | • connecting my trials to Jesus' own (temptations, hardships, betrayal, disappointment, conflict, etc.)<br>• imagining I am with Jesus in all things<br>• meditation on how Jesus responded to conflict and hardship<br>• letting pain go into Jesus' wounds |
| **God-Given Fruit** | • fellowship with Jesus in the midst of trials<br>• compassion for those who suffer<br>• ability to hold pain without bitterness<br>• forgiveness<br>• mellow patience in trials<br>• trust that Jesus will redeem all that is broken<br>• not transmitting my pain back on people |

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# Solidarity in Jesus' Sufferings

**Jesus' life was tough.** He was misunderstood, ridiculed, betrayed, abandoned, abused, beaten, wrongfully accused and executed. Jesus' suffering was so bad that he prayed for God to step in with an eleventh-hour stay of execution. Mark says that "horror came over him." Luke writes that Jesus was "exhausted," pushed to the limit (Luke 22:45).

Yet under these circumstances Jesus handed himself over to God and "learned obedience" (Hebrews 5:7-9). He didn't automatically do everything right because he was God. Jesus had to learn to hand his human will and longings to his *Abba* when things didn't go as he wanted. He had to learn to trust God and risk on God's goodness all the way to the very end.

Ann Voskamp writes in *One Thousand Gifts,* "Out of the darkness of the cross the world transfigures into new life. . . . *It is suffering* that has the realest possibility to bear down and deliver *grace.*" In Gethsemane Jesus didn't pretend everything was fine. He was vulnerable, weeping and dependent on prayers of friends who let him down. So when a friend betrays you, don't stuff your pain. Go stand with Jesus in the garden and say, "I know how you feel, and I am here for you." Imagine Jesus turns to you and says, "I know what's happening and I've got your back. Let's stick together here." When your temptations are so private you want to isolate yourself, go find Jesus in the wilderness and sit with him as he contends with temptations to escape a hard path. Jesus lived through a huge miscarriage of justice. His trial was rigged. His crucifixion unjust. When life hands you unfairness, Jesus invites you to be in solidarity with him and his own sufferings. You don't have to face sorrow alone. Jesus wants to share it.

Paul writes in Philippians 3:10: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death." Knowing resurrection power sounds awesome. Still, every life comes with the opportunity to "fellowship in Jesus' sufferings." We can get to know the "man of sorrows" and taste the cross. We can stand in solidarity with Jesus' pain and find a greater capacity for deeper giving and receiving. Suffering on its own won't ennoble. But suffering united to Jesus can enlarge our heart, our empathy, our compassion and our ability to be vulnerable and knowable.

In your joy and pain join your heart to Jesus. Empty your sorrow in his wounds, and let Jesus fill your "holy vacancy" with himself. Because at the center of the universe is a cross, and God is hanging there in solidarity with a broken world for love of you.

In the seventeenth century Madame Guyon wrote, "God gives us the cross, and then the cross gives us God." Is there a better picture of solidarity than Jesus hanging on the cross in solidarity with our brokenness and in solidarity with God?

The cross is the "great reversal." It is the "violent grace." It is the paradox at the center of universe that holds our pain. None of us are free to choose whether or not we suffer. But we are free to choose bitterness or solidarity with Jesus. Donna Schaper writes in her online blog *Stillspeaking Daily Devotional*: "Jesus used his wounds as a kind of authority, to show people he had 'been there and done that.' Some of us just nurse our wounds and don't put them to use. . . . The choice is ours. Grave-digging is a low paid occupation. Rising, now that is a job with benefits." We can choose solidarity in Jesus' suffering and rise. Our wounds can be transformed just like his into sacred wounds that honor God.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How do I tend to react when life is unfair? What do I do with the pain?
2. Where am I most easily triggered? And how does that trigger put me in touch with God or out of touch with God?
3. What is it like to fellowship in another's suffering?
4. Describe a time you felt solidarity with someone.

## SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

1. Take time to read through one of the Gospels. Imagine you are there among Jesus' disciples. How would you like to support Jesus as his story unfolds? Talk to Jesus about this.
2. Choose an event in Jesus' life that mirrors an experience in your own: unjust accusations, betrayal by friends, being misunderstood by family or colleagues, becoming exasperated with others, facing temptation and so on. As you read the story of the event, imagine Jesus sharing in your suffering. Pray deeply into this solidarity with him.
3. The world is broken and full of need. Do something that puts you in solidarity with someone's brokenness. For example, visit a nursing home, a prison, a shut-in; serve at a homeless shelter; provide resources through Angel Tree, the Salvation Army or a community center. Offer your cup of water in Jesus' name.

## RESOURCES ON SOLIDARITY IN JESUS' SUFFERINGS

*God Has Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time* by Desmond Tutu
*A Grace Disguised* by Jerry L. Sittser
*Invitations from God* by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun