Is conflict and suffering necessary?

You can either feel sorry for yourself or treat what has happened as a gift. Everything is either an opportunity to grow or an obstacle to keep you from growing. You get to choose. (Dr. Wayne W. Dyer)

www.thefluteloft.com/MyJournal/EmbracingConflict.pdf
EMBRACING CONFLICT AND SUFFERING

Over the last few months, I began journaling as an integral part of my daily devotions and worship. It has drawn me deeper into my relationship with God. None of us likes conflict, but it is part and parcel with life. With conflict, often there is suffering. Conflict can be anything from a disagreement with someone to a struggle of the mind, to a spiritual battle. Failed relationships, businesses that crash, spiritual warfare, are just some of the types of conflict that so many of us face and lack the courage to confront or don’t know how to confront. But it is courage that God commands of us. But you say “I am afraid”. Realize that you will always face situations when fear will try to rule your life, and if we do not allow Jesus to get hold of our heart, and if we do not stay focused on Him in the moment, the conflict can have a devastating impact on our lives, not only emotionally, but in all that we perform daily (our jobs, our kids, new relationships, etc.). God doesn’t want us to be knocked down repeatedly or to wallow in self-pity, or to feel guilt or remorse. Realize that your conflict is necessary and can be your spiritual road to peace and joy, and a right relationship with God.

Herein we will look at our mindset to have the right attitude towards conflict and suffering in our lives. We need to learn to regard conflict and suffering as necessary for spiritual growth. "You can either feel sorry for yourself or treat what has happened as a gift. Everything is either an
embracing conflict and suffering has been something that I have been writing about now for the last several months and below is a compilation of some of my journal entries.

THOT: Human nature wants control; God wants control. Where in your journey are you? Is your handling of conflict and suffering one of fight or flight?

Is conflict and suffering necessary?

Without conflict, our spiritual journey is unfruitful and unrewarding, for it is through conflict that God can strengthen our faith. I know for myself that should I not have broken and crushed my wrist back on October 28, 2012, the day before Storm Sandy made landfall in New Jersey, my faith would not be as strong as it is today. It was a catalyst for change in my life. Storm Sandy was the second most expensive storm in US history, just behind Katrina. Both storms caused much damage in the billions of dollars. Personal storms can also take their toll physically and emotionally. It's ironic when you think about it, but

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3 Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary, Proverbs 3:1-6
4 Bible Study Fellowship Notes, Genesis Lesson 28, page 2
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when Storm Sandy hit, a personal storm of my own began. Sometimes we need such a catalyst to shake us up a bit. In my case, breaking my wrist was just that catalyst. I am a professional musician and without my wrist and hands, I was in essence “shut down”, and so was the northeast coast of the US. Further, my marriage of more than 30 years to my wife had failed. God wanted to get my attention. It was my wakeup call.

So, back to the question. Is conflict and suffering necessary? Joseph in the Old Testament Bible suffered much, and you will see that it was a way for God to advance Joseph spiritually, and a way of clearing a path for God’s purpose in Joseph’s life. In Genesis 39, God used Joseph’s hard circumstances to train him for future leadership and to be of encouragement to others, and it was through suffering and conflict that Joseph grew in faith. The storms of conflict, sorrow, and pain may beleaguer you, but they can also drive you closer to Jesus so long as your attitude is right toward God. And yet when we do not always find comfort when we are troubled, Christ wishes for us to take heart in that “when the storms of life come, the wicked are whirled away, but the godly have a lasting foundation” (Proverbs 10:25). Through the storms it is oftentimes dark and foreboding, yet just beyond the clouds the “Son” is shining. Take hope in that and steer your course towards the “Son”; don’t despair. Set your compass on Jesus and take courage. “Be

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strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord” (Psalm 31:24). This is my prayer - “Wait for the LORD; Be strong and let your heart take courage. Yes, wait for the LORD” (Psalm 27:14).

Let’s further examine what it is to embrace conflict. From Streams in the Desert - "suffering is trying and difficult to bear, but hiding just below its surface is discipline, knowledge, and limitless possibilities"(2). Each of these not only strengthens and matures us but also equips us to help others. “Do not clench your teeth, simply waiting with stubborn determination for the suffering to pass. Instead, be determined to get everything you can from it.”(2) So God’s purpose is two-fold, it not only strengthens the person who is suffering for a time, but it also benefits others. Don’t run from it, embrace it!

In the heat of the fire

“Glorify ye the Lord in the fires” (Isaiah 24:15 KJV). God, in our affliction, wants us to honor Him just as Daniel had when he was thrown into the fire. Daniel glorified God in the fire. This could also be analogous to our circumstances; our fires. God’s fire is a refining fire. He wants us all to come out from the fire victorious and un-burnt. This is precisely where God wants us in order to develop a stronger faith and trust in Him, to experience a new birth or renewing of the mind. Okay, so you are in the heat of something. Maybe you are going through a divorce, or you

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have lost a loved one, or you are dealing with a difficult situation or person. I speak for myself, but I don’t feel sorry for myself. The circumstances are what they are. Be strong and courageous and face them. Do not cower from them, but look to God for victory in your circumstances as all things are possible with God. Nothing is insurmountable for God. So remember that when a period of suffering comes, it is in the fire that we are refined to glorify God. “Be strong and let your heart take courage, All you who hope in the LORD.” (Psalm 31:24).

It is God’s fiery kiln that softens our hearts and molds us according to His will for we are His clay; He is the potter; and we are the work of His hand (Isaiah 64:8). When we allow God complete control of our lives, He becomes our strength and our comforter. And as with Joseph in the Bible, he also uses our trials and tribulations to the benefit others. God turned Joseph’s suffering into hope, and in turn, to blessing.

In the Story of Joseph, we see that Joseph had to go through some pretty tough stuff. This is a story of real human suffering and success. The Bible tells us that Joseph was transformed over years of conflict and suffering into a faithful and trusting person in God. His sufferings lasted 13 years. In the story of Joseph you may recall that Joseph was hated by his brothers, sold into slavery, and

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ultimately after many years of imprisonment, promoted to ruler over Egypt. This is a type of rags to riches story but with much more drama. How could this be? God formed Joseph as the clay and by the work of His hands, and during this journey, it was Joseph who made the decision to give control to God in his trials and tribulation, and as a result, Joseph’s faith and hope in Christ grew. Like Christ, Joseph forgave his brothers for their unjust cruelty, and after Joseph became the ruler of Egypt, he gave them resources during a time of famine and saved them from certain death.

If I were to emphasize the most positive qualities about Joseph, it would be these that I believe helped him to have victory over his conflicts and sufferings:

- Like Christ, Joseph regarded others as more important than himself, taking the form of a bond-servant.
- Like Christ, Joseph forgave his oppressors.
- Like Christ, Joseph was victorious over his trials and tribulations not by his own power, but by God’s. Joseph brought his conflicts and suffering under submission to God.
- As a result of the above characteristics of Joseph, his hope was established in God. He was a man of great faith and trust.
THOT: Associated with fire is pain and suffering. God wants us to accept it and embrace it in order for Him to refine us in His image. He wants us to glorify Him in the fire and shine on brightly as a candle. I like looking at candles burning in people’s windows during the Christmas season, and I like burning a candle at the dinner table. Some candles even cast off a pleasant aroma, but the candle cannot shine without a burning flame.

Getting alone with God

Solitude is good for everybody at times for it helps us to sort out our goals and purposes. But the solitude that is most beneficial is the solitude of getting alone with God and praying through your hard prayers and afflictions. Sometimes it is only through suffering, heart break, sickness, or failed desires that that aloneness is possible. Too many times we push God out of our minds, not intentionally, but our minds are so often cluttered with busyness and confusion that we cannot hear God speaking. Yet, when God gets us to a point where we just can’t say anything anymore, and we in quiet solitude are truly listening for God and we are in right spirit with His Holy Ghost, only then when we call for help will we hear His small still voice. It is also then when our hard prayers are answered. “When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and

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delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones, not one of them is broken” (Psalm 34:17-20).

Attitude

This is very important! Attitude toward troubles and afflictions can strengthen your faith. Trust God and He will bring you through them victoriously for His own glory. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” (Proverbs 3:5-6). This is His promise! God shall direct your paths so “that thy way shall be safe and good, and happy at last.”(2)

“Beware of the temptation to sin by indulging in self-pity, bitterness, worry, or defeatism. Be careful not to miss the purpose for which God allowed this suffering. Suffering is never easy. However, to discover later that we wasted our suffering because we complained and refused to bring it to God to be blessed by Him will cause an even deeper anguish of soul.”(3) Always give thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father (Ephesians 5:20).

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Embrace your conflict

When I was first learning how to snow ski, my tendency was to lean back on my skis because of my fear of falling. On the contrary, I needed to learn how to lean down the slope over the tips of my skis. Human nature is to hold back, to whine and complain, and to feel sorry for oneself in our afflictions, to run away from difficulties. Yet God wants just the opposite. God wants us to lean into the problem, not sit back, and to have complete faith in Him.

Conflict is part and parcel of everyday life. We can run from it, or we can face it head on as David did in the story of David and Goliath. Each of us has our own Goliath. Can we not learn from David’s example that if we run at our conflict, we will be victorious? God wants us to deal with our conflicts, pray about them, and conquer them. David, as a result, was later put in a position of leadership. David embraced his conflict. And when you follow God’s Word, the more steps you take on your journey will aid you in overcoming your conflicts and sufferings. D. L. Moody said, “The Bible was not for your information, but for your transformation”. May we not be conformed to the mindset of the world, but rather be transformed by the renewing of our mind in Christ Jesus (Romans 12:2). God commands us to be strong and courageous (Joshua 1:7). God has commanded us to “not tremble or be dismayed for the Lord is with us wherever we go” (Joshua 1:9).
Did you know that courage and fear are brothers? “It is when faith and fear collide that courage can be yours ... They always go together, so courage isn’t the absence of fear, but the ability to do what you need to do EVEN when you are afraid. To act in Christ’s power even when your knees are knocking or your stomach is doing cartwheels. Or as cowboy actor John Wayne defined it: Courage is being scared to death ... and saddling up anyway!” (4) These are sometimes hard commands to follow especially when you have experienced a loss in your life (or as Joseph, endured unjust punishment), but if we would only have the confidence to claim God’s promise that He “will never leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5), we would be on the road to victory. In Matthew 28:20, it says also “I am with you always”, wherever you go, whatever your circumstances. God wants us to pray and meditate and praise Him in all things. In this way we will experience hope and joy instead of sorrow and defeat, and we will be made strong and blessed by God to serve and encourage others. Rather than succumb to our circumstances, God wishes for us to possess the land that He has given us, TODAY. That land is God’s promises to us.

THOT: When you pray, God doesn’t always remove the conflict; rather He helps you ride out the storm.
IN CONCLUSION

Why is embracing conflict so important?

Conflict helps us to highlight our weaknesses. It is a catalyst for change and improvement.

Conflict can strengthen and mature us in our faith, but also equip us to help others.

Conflict can help us re-evaluate decisions we make concerning the circumstances we are in, and now hear God for them.

Conflict helps us to emerge victorious over our circumstances if we allow God to have control. In 1 Samuel 2:6-10 we see God as the One who controls every aspect of our lives from wealth to our physical and emotional well-being. In verse 9, it says “He keeps the feet of his godly ones”. Therefore, exult in the Lord your God. **Always give thanks for all things** in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father (Ephesians 5:20).

I know it is hard sometimes, but I am convinced that if we step out on a limb in faith, exposed and vulnerable, God will take control and you will experience Him in a very personal way and know that He loves you, and your hope and strength in the Lord will be established. You will find encouragement from God’s still small voice in a vast

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number of everyday experiences also when you connect on a higher level with Him.

We can **rejoice also when we have conflicts**, for we know that they help us develop endurance, and “**endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope**” (Romans 5:3-4, HCSB version).

As I look back through my daily journal since I started it in October of 2012, I can see God’s hand in my circumstances and many answers to prayer. I highly recommend journaling as a way to healing, reflection and of gauging your spiritual growth!
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- Cresting the wave
- Into the Storm

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Philippians 4:6-8

"Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things".

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