

Titus House Newsletter

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February
2017



Why Does God Allow Suffering?

I was reading 2 Corinthians 1:1-11 today and thinking about how Paul the apostle went through suffering. It made me think about my time in prison and why I went through suffering. It made me think also of the brothers I left behind in prison and the new friends I've made since then and the suffering they must be going through. Suffering is part of life, we all suffer, and it is part of being human. The lack of afflictions wasn't how Paul experienced it, he went through a lot of suffering, along with the early persecuted church. Some people think once I become a Christian there will be no afflictions - no problems, but this isn't so. At the time we might ask just why we are going through our suffering, why does God allow suffering. Troubles can help us to come to know God better. Troubles can prepare us to minister comfort to others.

Suffering teaches us the faithfulness of God. It is a way of putting God to the task of showing up, that God is able to comfort us through the suffering, comfort which the world cannot give us. Suffering shows us how frail we are and the lack of control we have in our life. We see the lack of control we have in prison. We are told when and what to eat, when and where to sleep and where we are allowed to go. We are not in control of our own lives. Suffering puts us in the care of relying on God with our prison sentence, putting Him in control.

With suffering we are able to have compassion and empathy for others. The wardens, C.O.s and caseworkers do

not know just what it is like to be a prisoner with lack of health care, legal access, adequate food, heating and air conditioning, solitary confinement and the list goes on. Jesus left heaven to become the person of Christ the suffering servant (Isaiah 53). This way Jesus knows and can relate to what we go through, Hebrews 4:15 "For we do not have a



high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet he did not sin."

Going through suffering gives us credibility with other people. I know in my own life people have told me that I can relate to them as a sex offender making it through prison with the faith of Christ. You too can share in the credibility when a new person comes in prison and you are able to share with them how Jesus was faithful and able to see you

through the prison system serving God. Because you paid for it you earned the right to tell them.

Suffering makes us stronger. I heard about the parable of a Kung Fu student who went to his Master and asked what task he had for him to do. The Master pointed to a big rock and told him to move it. The student

went to the rock and pushed and pushed the rock all the day long and could not move it. The next day he continued to push it, the next week and month he continued to push it. A year, two years went by and he could not move it. Finally he collapsed in exhaustion and went to his Master and told him he could not do it and that he failed. The Master told him,

"It was never about you moving the boulder. It was about building you up. You are now stronger and more muscular in trying." We might also ask God why He

allowed me to go through prison or whatever we are struggling with. God will say "Look at you, you are stronger now. Now you are ready to go to the next task I ask you to do."

Suffering shows us our shortcomings, that we do not have it all together, that we need to rely on God, that we need to pray. Sometimes suffering is because of our own doing and now we are facing the consequences.

By Don Johnston



Who Are You

Who are you? Has anyone ever asked you that question? Most of us will answer with our occupation, such as, mechanic or student, or maybe we will answer with our racial or ethnic heritage. I am German or Hispanic or perhaps Navajo. Is that really who you are? Or is that just the response you have been conditioned to give?

What if we answered with "I am a human being made in the image of Christ"? I suppose that would raise a few eyebrows! According to Genesis 1:27 that is a true statement. I submit that it is even a truer response than any other we could give, yet how many of us consider that when we answer the question "who are you"? Before we were German, Hispanic, Navajo, or any

other label you care to use, we were, and are, the creation of God.

We all have things in our past that we may regret. Do you let that define you? You were once a child; does that mean that you must forever more define yourself as a child? of course not! Why then do some of us continue to let the past define who we are now? The past is just that, the past. Learn from it and move on. You are who you are today, not what you were or did in the past. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2Cor 5:17 ESV). The apostle Paul put it this way, "I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved

it, but I focus on this one thing; **forgetting** the past and looking forward to what lies ahead" (Philippians 3:12-13 NLT)

Through Christ Jesus we have been given the free gift of a new start. We can't earn it. It is a gift. God loves you, he longs for you to come back to him. No matter what you may have done in the past that does not define who you are today. God accepts you where you are, right now, today. You are a child of God. He loves you and wants you to come home. Begin your new life today, tomorrow may be too late.

To my brothers and sisters who have already accepted Christ, I thank God daily for you. Remember that everyone you meet is one of God's creations, some just don't know it yet.

May God keep you and bless you

Brother Mark

Who & How to Contact DOJ

The U.S Department of Justice, Civil Right Division, 950 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Office of Assistant Attorney General, Main, Washington, DC 20530 (888-736-5551 or 202-514-3847)

- 1) You can file an Americans with Disabilities Act complaint alleging disability discrimination against any prison or jail. For example, if you need a wheelchair, a hearing aid, etc. Write to the above and write "forward to Disability Rights Section" on the envelope.
- 2) If you have been discriminated against because of your race, color, or national origin, including limited English proficiency, by programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance, write the address above and on the envelope write "forward to Federal Coordination & Compliance."
- 3) The Special Litigation Section works to protect the rights of people who are in state prisons and local jails. If you can identify a systemic pattern or practice that causes harm, this Section

would send a letter to the prison or jail describing the problems and what steps the jail or prison must take to fix them. Then, the Section will try to reach an agreement with the jail or prison by the jail or prison fixing the problems. If an agreement cannot be made, then the Attorney General may file a lawsuit in federal court. Write above address and "forward to Special Litigation Section".

- 4) If you experience excessive force or other constitutional violations by wardens and prison guards (even indirectly), write above address and "forward to Criminal Section" Include as many details of the incident as possible, such as the dates and times, names of possible witnesses, and supporting documents. This violation is called "brutality under the color of law".

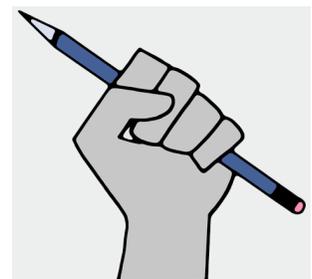
Or in prison or jail preparing for reentry or in reentry

- 5) The Housing and Civil Enforcement

Section works to protect some of the most fundamental rights of individuals, including the right to access housing free from discrimination, Write above address and "forward to Housing and Civil Enforcement Section" on envelope.

- 6) Prohibits employment practices that discriminate on grounds of race, sex, religion, and national origin. Write above address and also "forward to Employment Litigation Section" on envelope.

(Taken from the National CURE Newsletter)





New Mexico's Indeterminate Parole Nightmare By Larry Neely

Titus House receives many letters and phone calls regarding the indeterminate parole supervision. New Mexico has 5-20 parole and 5-life parole requirements for certain sex offenses, and there is continuous difficulty with the Parole Board in terms of (1) termination of supervision and (2) consequences for violation of parole conditions. Before going further, these requirements are imposed pursuant to statute. See § 31-21-10.1 NMSA (Sex offenders; period of parole; terms and conditions of parole). Explaining the problem is relatively simple; solving it will not be due to the current political environment.

The definition of "sex offenses" for purposes of triggering the 5 to 20 indeterminate period of parole supervision are:

- kidnapping when committed with intent to inflict a sexual offense upon the victim;
- criminal sexual penetration in the third degree;
- criminal sexual contact of a minor in the fourth degree; and
- sexual exploitation of children in the second degree.

The definition of "sex offenses" for purposes of triggering the 5 to life indeterminate period of parole supervision are:

- aggravated criminal sexual penetration;
- criminal sexual penetration in the first or second degree;
- criminal sexual contact of a minor in the second or third degree; and
- sexual exploitation of children by prostitution in the first or second degree.

The process for termination of super-

vision is defined by statute. The statute reads, "When a sex offender has served the initial five years of supervised parole, and at two and one-half year intervals thereafter, the board shall review the duration of the sex offender's supervised parole. At each review hearing, the attorney general [AG] shall bear the burden of proving by clear and convincing evidence that the sex of-



fender should remain on parole." See 31-21-10.1(c) NMSA. Clear and convincing evidence is a very high evidentiary standard to meet; unfortunately, the Legislature failed to provide sufficient precision in terms of what the AG must demonstrate to carry that burden. Does this language mean the AG must prove that the person is likely to commit another sexual offense? Does it mean that the person should remain on parole because the constant surveillance will reduce the risk of recidivism? Does it mean that the person can benefit from additional structure and counseling required by parole authorities?

It is clear that this statute was poorly crafted and needs revision. In addition to not providing precision in terms of what the AG must prove, the statute does not provide guidance in

terms of what the board should do when a person violates a condition of parole. Is the person revoked to serve the remainder of the parole period, or should the person get another chance for community supervision? Since the statute empowered the parole board with the authority to determine when a person should be released, the individuals serving on the board are vital because it is they who decide how rigidly to examine each parolee. Even though it is abundantly clear that a revision to the statute is needed, the likelihood of that being achieved is low. This is because legislators fear political attack ads in the next election cycle, which would likely invoke a voter backlash against those who dared to act responsibly.

This means the best approach may be a constitutional challenge. I am working with the Law Offices of the Public Defender (LOPD) and a private attorney in Albuquerque on this issue, and we are exploring the most viable legal challenge to bring. If we are successful in the courts, the Legislature will have no choice but to revise this poorly written law.

Please be patient and understand that this problem will not be solved quickly; we sympathize with those caught in this legal nightmare. We will keep you informed through the Titus House and NARSOL newsletters of our progress as this unfolds.



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Remember if you change your address you need to let us know if you want to continue to receive this newsletter



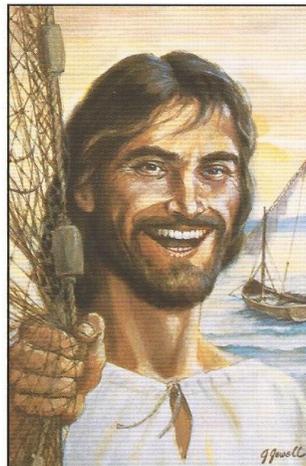
“Sorry, Brother Ambrose. Retweeting counts as breaking your vow of silence.”

Hebrew 13:3-Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

More than Conquerors

For I am certain that neither prison wall, nor segregation unit, nor long-term sentence, nor probation period, nor family rejection, nor bouts of depression, nor crazy cellmate, nor cruel officer, nor gang, nor liquor store, nor denial of appeal, nor lockdown, nor lack of visits, nor sleepless nights, nor failed job interviews, nor street corners, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord,

You are more than conquerors, You are God's chosen, beloved ones. Go and live like it!



"Humor is a sign of God's creativity. Look at giraffes," the Rev. James Martin told USA Today. "If Jesus didn't have a sense of humor, he wouldn't have been fully human."

“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.” Psalm 98:4

From the Joyful Noiseletter

Monthly Pledges

If Titus House has encouraged you, if you believe in what we do, we encourage you to make a monthly pledge to this ministry. We have one supporter who is an inmate in Colorado, a believing Messianic Christian, who has given us \$5 a month for quite a long time. That comes to \$60 a year. The average person would think, "I could never send \$60 to Titus House." Others send us a strip of stamps. It all adds up and for the past 10 years our needs have been met. Of course we would like to do more for the inmates and new releases in 18 states. We believe we can begin to accept calls again from inmates who have completed all their mentoring sheets. Calls from outside NM are at least \$4 for a 20 minute call. The total cost of the paper newsletter per month is \$210. We mail to 250 people. Your five dollars a month is sending our letter to five people. We also send our letter to another 250 via email. Thank you for being a part of this vital ministry.

Outside sign at St. Malachy's Catholic Church, Madrid, IA:
“Souled out, Kneeling room only.”
— via Rev. Dale Schoening
Woodward, IA

Circle of Concern

Circle of Concern is aimed at breaking down isolation and fear by providing a safe place for registrants and their loved ones to get together, build community, and learn ways to step out and take charge of their lives and overcome the stigma they face. The Circle of Concern is a group

of concerned registered offenders, family and friends that meet together on the 2nd Sunday of each month. We are meeting this month on February 12th, 2017 at 6-8pm. We will be having a potluck. We meet at Foothills

Church, corner of Tramway and Candelaria on the far east side of Albuquerque. We encourage and try to help each other. It is a safe place to share our strengths and struggles. We hope you will join us.