

EVERY LESSON IS A LESSON



THE YOUNG WOMAN FROM MOROCCO
"She asked for tent poles, but the Chinese had none.
So, recalling her life with the mast maker,
she made the emperor tent poles for his home."

Scripture:

Romans 5:1-5

Endurance

¹Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Romans 6:5-10

We will also live with him

⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For whoever has died is freed from sin. ⁸But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.



ENDURANCE AND CHARACTER

**Suffering produces endurance,
and endurance produces character,
and character produces hope,
and hope does not disappoint us,
because God's love has been poured
into our hearts through the Holy
Spirit that has been given to us.**

-- Romans 5

THE ROMAN FORUM AND THE CAESARS

Tonight, Rick Steves and I are going to take you to the place where Paul wrote these words about

endurance, character, hope and God's love. He was a long way from hope, there in that prison just beyond the fringe of the Roman Forum. Paul was in Rome. He was in prison below the streets, near an underground stream awaiting his death for being a Christian. For a hundred years people were tortured and imprisoned for being a Christian under the reign of emperors who took Rome from a Republic to a corrupt vehicle that made them comfortable in exchange for entertainment and years of war and conquest. Then, a hundred years later under Constantine, people fought and died because they were not Christian.

The abuses done in the name of religion are

chilling. The attempts of politicians to co-opt the purity of our religious impulses for political ends is an ongoing tragic chapter.

But we will save Paul for tonight. We will save the Roman Forum, the Pantheon, and the Mamertine Prison for tonight. All of them are in an introduction I have put together to the spiritual treasures of Italy. Later we will travel to Florence for the early and the high Renaissance, the David, the Domo, and the Uffizi, and then to Sienna and Assisi.

FROM JUDGMENTS TO LESSONS

So I want to move from judgments to lessons. I want to move to the lessons of endurance and character that are the content of this chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans.

In fact we may even judge our endurance, our character, our lives, and our careers differently some day.

What seems like a tragedy, or what truly is a tragedy, may fit differently when we assemble the pieces of our lives.

**A bold move may have paid off.
A foolish decision may come back to haunt.**

But today, I want to tell you the story of a woman who learned the simplest and most basic truth imaginable. Simply, "Every lesson is a lesson."

Live each moment with integrity, consult others, and act with honesty, and each moment will be a cherished lesson someday – even the tough ones.

A good lesson in keeping your perspective is: Take your job seriously but don't take yourself seriously. - Thomas P. O'Neill

A tough lesson in life that one has to learn is that not everybody wishes you well. - Dan Rather

Experience is a hard teacher because she gives the test first, the lesson afterward. - Vernon Law

Life is a long lesson in humility.

- James M. Barrie

Love is the hardest lesson in Christianity; but, for that reason, it should be most our care to learn it. - William Penn

Sensible people often learn from their enemies. It is from their foes, not their friends, that cities learn the lesson of building high walls and ships of war. - Aristophanes

So every single day, I found something to be grateful for and that's a powerful lesson.

- Alice Barrett

LEARNING LESSONS, NOT JUDGMENTS

If you reflect upon the hardships of life – the disappointments, hurts, losses, illness, all the tragedies you may suffer, I want to suggest that you look at them differently. See every lesson as an opportunity for learning and growth. Knowledge will empower you, but guilt only makes you weak. Rise to its challenges instead of feeling defeated, victimized, and always offering excuses. We only have to ask if we are paying attention to each lesson as it is offered.

THE YOUNG WOMAN FROM MOROCCO

A wonderful story illustrates this point. It is an essay called *The Speed of Light*, by Gwyneth Cravens. A lot of people will find themselves in her story about a young woman who began her life as a spinner of yarn in Morocco, and marveled at where her life took her.

There was a young girl from Morocco whose father was a spinner.

He became prosperous in his craft, and took her with him on a voyage in the Mediterranean. He wanted to sell his thread, and told his daughter that she should also look for a young man who would make her a good husband.

But a storm caused the ship to flounder near Egypt, killing the father and casting the daughter ashore. Miserable and exhausted, barely able to remember her previous life, the girl wandered in the sand until she finally met a family of weavers. They took her in and taught her how to make cloth. Eventually she became contented.

But after a few years, she was captured on the seashore by slavers who then sailed east to Istanbul and took her to its slave market. A man who made ships' masts went to the market to buy slaves to help him with his work, but when he noticed the girl, he took pity on her, bought her, and took her home to serve his wife.

But pirates stole the cargo he invested in, and he was unable to buy the other slaves. He, the girl, and his wife had to make all the masts themselves. The girl worked hard and conscientiously. The mast maker found her to be so capable that he eventually granted her freedom and made her a partner in his business, which she came to enjoy.

One day he asked her to accompany a shipment of masts to Java. She agreed, but off the coast of China the ship was struck by a typhoon. Again she was washed up on a strange seashore, and again she cried out against fate. "Why do these bad things keep happening to me?" she asked. No answer came. She got up out of the sand and started walking inland.

Now, there was a legend in China that a foreign woman would appear and make a tent for the emperor. Because nobody in China knew how to make tents, the whole population, including one generation of emperors after another, wondered about this prediction. Once a year, the emperor

sent out emissaries to every town to bring all the foreign women to the royal court.

In due course, the shipwrecked woman arrived before the emperor, who asked her through an interpreter if she could make a tent. "I think I can," she said. She asked for rope, but the Chinese had none, and so, recalling her girlhood as the daughter of a spinner, she asked for silk and spun it into rope. She asked for thick cloth, but the Chinese had none, and so, recalling her life among the weavers, she wove the kind of cloth used for tents. She asked for tent poles, but the Chinese had none, and so, recalling her life with the mast maker, she made tent poles. When she had all these things ready, she tried to remember as best she could, all the tents she had seen in her life. At last she put together a tent.

The emperor marveled at the construction, and at the fulfillment of the old prophecy, and offered whatever she wished. She married a handsome prince, remained in China surrounded by her children, and lived to a happy old age. And she realized that although her adventures had seemed terrible when they were happening, they turned out to be essential for her ultimate happiness.

In hindsight, she discovered the magic within her dreadful circumstances. She was able to see the perfection in the grand scheme of things. While it is not always easy for us to view our situations from a great perspective, it is essential in order to find the good in what appears to be unfortunate circumstances.

To ease this process of learning, you must first master the basic lessons of compassion,

forgiveness, ethics, and ultimately humor. Without these essential lessons, you remain trapped in your limited view and unable to parlay mistakes into valuable learning opportunities.

(The Speed of Light Source: Cherie Carter-Scott retelling the story by Gwyneth Cravens)

RESULTS WILL MANAGE THEMSELVES

Be attached to lessons in growth, ethics and honesty. Results will manage themselves.

How many times have you seen a forgotten thread from your youth reemerge as a skill that serves you later? Not every lesson needs to make immediate sense. But the good lessons will rise and serve you as they are needed.

- Are you a traveler? You may not understand the lessons of Homer's *Odyssey*, until you have traveled some miles in your own life.
- Have you lost someone you care about? You may not comprehend the Twenty-third Psalm until you have walked through the valley of the shadow of death and sensed the presence of God.

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GOD HAS A PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE.

Faith in God calls out to us to translate all of our experiences – both good and bad - into valuable lessons of character.

God's plan for your life is waiting in your future, but is often understood only in your past. One day it will all make sense. Have faith!



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