

God Meant it for Good

By George Davis and Michael Clark

God meant it for good--what wonderful words are these, proceeding from a broken heart, which suggest that all life's struggles and sufferings work together toward some greater good, for those who love the Lord and are called according to His purpose.

Joseph, the favored son of Jacob in the Old Testament, endured many things at the hand of his brothers. His brothers were jealous because their father favored him and gave him a special coat of many colors. Few of us have known the level of betrayal and suffering that he knew as a result. Worse yet, Joseph had dreams that seemed to suggest that God also favored him. The brothers grew to hate this "dreamer" who dared to believe that God had a special plan for his life.

One day, Jacob sent Joseph out in the field to check on his brothers. "Here comes that dreamer" they said among themselves as they saw Joseph approaching from a distance. They plotted to kill him but instead ripped off the special gift of his father's favor, the coat of many colors, threw him into a dry cistern and later sold him to some Ishmaelite traders passing by on their way from Gilead to Egypt. In Egypt, these slavers sold Joseph to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials. Joseph served Potiphar, as a faithful steward gaining his trust and esteem for seven years before everything fell apart again. Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him and when failing to do so, she falsely accused Joseph of molesting her. Potiphar threw Joseph into Pharaoh's prison where he suffered for another seven years.



All these injustices happened because of the envy and hatred of his brothers, right? If anyone had a reason to be bitter, Joseph did. When he later interpreted the dreams of his fellow prisoners, Pharaoh's baker and wine taster, he ask one of them to be sure to let the king know that he had been unfairly imprisoned and enslaved. Finally, after two more years of bondage, Joseph was

called before Pharaoh to interpret a dream that warned of a great famine throughout the land. This time he mentioned not a word about his injustices, but pointed the king to God alone. It would seem that the last vestiges of resentment and blame were finally

gone. Because of God's favor on his life, Joseph was exalted and made second in command in all of Egypt. He was put in charge of storing food for the coming famine.

As God would have it, Joseph's father and brothers heard of the stores of food down in Egypt in the midst of the famine and Jacob sent the brothers down into Egypt to bring back food. They eventually came in and stood before Joseph, not knowing who he was for he was dressed like a king. It had been over twenty-one years since they had been face to face. A lot had changed. Wouldn't a little poetic justice be in order here? This was Joseph's chance to "set things right" and take his revenge. What would you do? Would Joseph throw them into prison to give them a taste of what he had suffered at their hands? Then would he "throw away the key"? How often we have heard men who have been wronged say, "I will forgive, but I will *never* forget!"

Joseph's words, spoken to his brothers after he finally revealed his identity to them, show the deep and precious work God did in his heart through years of suffering. He finally came to see beyond the ill-intentions of his brothers and see God's greater purpose in it all. When the eyes of the brothers were finally opened to see who this great leader of Egypt really was they panicked. To their surprise and relief Joseph said to them, "[You meant evil against me but God meant it for good...](#)" (Genesis 50:20-21 WEB).

What wonderful words are these, proceeding from a broken heart, which suggest that all life's struggles and sufferings work together toward some greater good, for those who love the Lord and are called according to His purpose (See Romans 8:28)? Could it be that even the greatest sorrows of our lives are messengers of good? This was the lesson that Joseph learned through his many wounds. Though men mean to do evil to us, God means it for good. He uses anything that happens to us to bring us into the perfection of His Son, Jesus Christ (See Hebrews 12:6).

Today's Josephs

Today, many are coming out of abusive church systems. Those, calling themselves "brothers," sold them into religious captivity. Those who loudly claimed to love them unconditionally now shun them and speak ill of them behind their backs. As a result, many of these wounded ones are openly hurt and bitter. They have been betrayed and their coat of many colors ripped from their backs and soaked in blood. Sadly, the gift that they dared to manifest among jealous brethren is now silent and they seek to avoid

further wounding by focusing on the evil intentions of their brothers, often searching the scriptures for ammunition against their foes. "I'm never going to be hurt like that again. . . You meant it for evil. . ."

In the movie, "Patch Adams," there is a scene where Patch has just been put in an insane asylum, having given up on life altogether. One of the patients, an old man, comes up to him and thrusts four fingers inside his focal distance as he looked at the man's face. Then the man shouted, "How many fingers? How many fingers do you see?" Patch stepped back, looked and said, "Four." The man then said, "You are an idiot!" and stormed off. Later, Patch found out that this man was a genius and had voluntarily become interned because he could not stand the world outside. He went into the man's room and asked him what the answer to the riddle really was? The man said, "Three." If you had looked beyond the fingers and focused on my face you would have seen three fingers, not four. You have to look beyond the obvious manifestation to see the solution to your problem."

The key to forgiving our brothers is locked away from us until we finally come to see that our wounds are the wounds of a dear Friend (Proverbs 27:6). Until we see God's hand in our sufferings, we are destined to wrestle with flesh and blood, pointing the finger at our persecutors and blaming them for the injustice of it all.

In man's distorted, promiscuous view of love there is no room for pain, no place for discipline, and no value in wounds. Therefore, pain is met with resentment and wounding with retaliation. There can be no lasting healing until we finally stop blaming our brothers and start thanking our Divine Friend, who loves us enough to wound us that he might heal us. Until we come to see that "God meant it for good", we can never forgive our brothers and know the goodness of His wounds.

"Come, let us return to the LORD! He has torn us in pieces; now he will heal us. He has injured us; now he will bandage our wounds. In just a short time, he will restore us so we can live in his presence. Oh, that we might know the LORD! Let us press on to know him! Then he will respond to us as surely as the arrival of dawn or the coming of rains in early spring." (Hosea 6:1-3 NLT)

Beyond the wounds are restoration, healing and a renewed desire to follow on to know the Lord. In fact, without them, we would never be released from the shell of our human natures and stretch forth toward His marvelous light.

The Holy Spirit, through the writer of Hebrews, speaks of the hostility from sinners that the early believers suffered, as the child training of a Father. "For consider Him (Jesus) who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him..." (Hebrews 12:3-5 NKJV) The heavenly Father's discipline has one end in view, "...for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness."

In his message entitled "Let us go on," T. Austin Sparks said regarding the sufferings of these early believers.

"Their sufferings may have come from devil-driven men, from the very devil himself, and yet they're in the hands of a Father, Father has hold of those sufferings for the training of His children."

In the book of Hebrews there is a great promise for those who submit to the hand of their Father, "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." (Hebrews 12:11 NKJV). The question is, will we patiently submit to His mighty hand and wait for the promise of the harvest? Will we open our hearts to receive the peaceable fruit of righteousness, the mind of Christ within?

Until we see that the stripes that others have inflicted upon us are not the wounds of our enemies, but the strips of a loving Father we can never be free from bitterness and resentment. Until we can honestly say, "God meant it for good...Faithful are the wounds of a friend," we will resist the purging blows of God our Father. Sometimes we might feel as Job did, "...he breaks me with a tempest, multiplies my wounds without cause." Job could not see it then but he would learn through his sufferings that God's wounds are not without cause but for cleansing and blessing! They are for healing! They are for good. So goes the proverb, "Blows that hurt cleanse away evil, as do stripes the inner depths of the heart." (Proverbs 20:30 NKJV). This gives new meaning to the words "by His stripes we are healed"(Isaiah 53:5), for it is the Father who controls the scourge.

Stripes; the Marks of Ownership

"Anyone God uses significantly is always deeply wounded. . . We are, each and every one of us, insignificant people who God has called and graced to use in a significant way. . . On the last day, Jesus will look us over not for medals, diplomas, or honors, but for scars." (Brennan Manning, *Ruthless Trust*)

Like the precious alabaster box of ointment which anointed the feet of Christ, there must first come a breaking, then He is not only blessed, but the perfume of the ointment is sure to fill the whole house. We must love the Lord more than we love our own lives before this can happen.

Another one who suffered greatly at the hands of his brothers was Paul. If anyone had a right to be bitter for the way he was treated, Paul did. However, like Joseph, Paul saw beyond his wounds, and those who inflicted them, to the real reason for the scars. "On my own body are scars that prove I belong to Christ." (Galatians 6:17). In that day, it was customary for slaves to be branded on their bodies with the names or mark of their owners.

Paul saw the many stripes that had been inflicted upon him, not as evil but as good - as proof of Christ's ownership. Five times he received the dreaded "forty stripes save one" at the hands of his fellow Jews (See 2Co 11:24,) because of the calling, grace and favor of God (the mantle of many colors) on his life. Was Paul bitter about the way he was treated? No. His feelings are recorded in Romans 9: 3, "If there were any way I could be cursed by the Messiah so they (the Jews) could be blessed by him, I'd do it in a minute. They're my family." (Romans 9:3 MSG)

We have said all this to ask this question, how much "house-church reform" is circumventive and reactionary in nature--trying to avoid further pain? How much of our "kissing off of the institutional church" is moldering in "righteous indignation"? Do we have a heart like Paul had? Would we sacrifice our blessing that our persecutors could be blessed?

We do not write these things from a lofty perch. We are working through many of these issues even now. Nor do we suggest that anyone support such unbiblical and abusive systems by any means. Paul did not go back into the synagogues of the Jews to come back under their authority, but to bring them out of the bondages of men's traditions into the perfect liberty of Christ. We recognize that until all bitterness and malice are put aside, those fleeing these abusive systems are in reality trading one bondage for

another. They escape the lash and chains of outer taskmasters only to be eaten up from within by the worst abuser of all, bitterness and self preservation. If they do not break this codependent cycle of abuse in their lives through forgiveness, they will likely come under new abusers and it is happening, even now, in some home-church circles.

As a child, when I (George) would tell my mother what horrible things my siblings had done to cause me to hit them or retaliate in some other way, she would interrupt my righteous indignation with these words, "Two wrongs don't make a right." I grew to hate that saying.

Years later, the Lord led my wife Charlotte and me to attend a "church" in our area. We grew to deeply love many of the people we met there. To put it mildly, this church was authoritarian in nature, having an "apostolic hierarchy" that at times was overtly brutal in its treatment of people. I often asked the Lord, "Why have you sent us here?" I was especially affected when they mistreated those whom I had come to love so deeply. It was inevitable that finally a situation arose where many were deeply wounded. I took offense. I felt like Moses. I secretly wanted to beat these taskmasters to death one at a time. Before long however, God revealed that my intentions were not even that noble for I was reacting, in no small part, to previous hurts in my own life, when men had done similar things to me. Were the actions of these abusers right? No. They were dead wrong. But two wrongs don't make a right. The wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God.

I, Michael, have gone through much the same experiences in authoritarian church structures. Today, twenty years later, we have finally come to that place where we are thankful to God for sending us to these places. He taught us many hard lessons there. We now see God's hand in it all. Does that mean that we want to go back? Never! Not in a million years! It was like being in the military. We are glad we went, but never hope to have to go through that again. All we are saying is, "God meant it for good!"

Going to the Root

We are amazed at the glorious gifts the Father has bestowed upon brothers and sisters we meet outside the walls of denominational Christianity. We often comment on how desperately all God's children need those gifts. Sadly, much of what these dear brothers and sisters have to say is rejected not for reason of content but because they are prejudged as having the wrong attitude. The chief argument used against them is,

"They have a root of bitterness!" Only God knows how many times these words have been used to reject truth?

Since when is truth dispassionate? Must one appear calm composed and unruffled before what he says can be considered true? Simply because something is spoken in anger does not make it untrue? If God speaks to us out of his wrath, should we refuse to hear him until He gets His attitude right? Truth is truth regardless. Try to imagine these words of John the Baptist being spoken softly with a soft spoken lisp in his voice, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

Stereotyping the messenger has become a groundless and convenient excuse for doing away with the message. The saying goes, "If you can not attack the message, attack the messenger." We are well aware of the tendency, within certain church circles, to mistake frankness for bitterness and we neither can nor should waste our time trying to answer that. The real question that all of us should entertain is, to what degree are they right? Is there any bitterness in us that would discredit the message God desires to communicate through us? Can people get beyond our judgment to the good of our message? And there is much good to be gleaned from many. Is our message spoken out of a sincere concern for the blessing of others or are we reacting out of personal hurt and un-forgiveness?

One time when I, Michael, was working through many of these issues within, I heard the Lord say, "Michael, is there a book of 'Reacts' in the Bible?" I said, "No Lord, there is just a book of 'Acts.'" I have discovered in reading this book again, that those who operated in the power and authority of the Holy Spirit did not react, but rather acted under His influence, not the influence of their own souls. This is all that God wants from His true servants in the church, today.

We are not accusing anyone here. We ask these questions of ourselves and ask that you also consider them. We believe that God has moved "outside the camp" to make the very statement that he made to Moses when he moved the tent of meeting outside the camp of rebellious Israel to wait for a new and faithful generation that would follow Him more perfectly. We are nearing the end of that time which some call "the church age." There is now occurring a new exodus, led by that prophet, like Moses, (Jesus) outside the orthodox religious camp. God is moving on! We do not deny this! Neither do we suppose that we are the only ones with a burden for those who refuse to go unto

Him outside the camp of religion. We are simply concerned that our attitudes and actions do not become convenient excuses for not answering God's clarion call. Let us all first search our hearts as we go forth with His message!

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

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