

Finding the Good in Suffering

The plethora of dieting regimens, marathons, and fitness programs are united in showing us that there are benefits to suffering. We may extend our life through improved physical strength, better hone the mind, or even achieve stronger emotional health through the regular release of endorphins. There are many forms of chosen suffering that bring about benefits to the mind, soul, and body. But what about unchosen suffering? Can there be a benefit?

Arguably, we live in a time that seeks to avoid unchosen suffering as much as possible. Of course, that's a general human outlook: avoid suffering. Yet, there have been periods of time when the dominant cultural impulses had some sense of embracing unchosen suffering or at least did a better job of making peace with the trials of life.

As much as chosen suffering can improve us, it's often true that unchosen suffering can refine us as well. What matters, though, is how you react to the suffering. I was reminded of that when reading *A Prayer for Right Living* by an unknown Confederate soldier, circa 1861-1865. The prayer is found in the *Manual of Prayers* compiled by Rev. James D. Watkins. Here it is:

I asked for strength that I might achieve; I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey. I asked for health that I might do greater things; I was given infirmity that I might do better things. I asked for riches that I might be happy; I was given poverty that I might be wise. I asked for power that I might have the praise of men; I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God. I asked for all things that I might enjoy life; I was given life that I might enjoy all things. I got nothing that I had asked for, but everything that I had hoped for. Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered; I am, among all men, most

richly blessed.

Like the potter working clay, unchosen suffering will shape us. But will we allow it to shape our souls for the better or the worse? Will we find peace in suffering, will we suffer well, or will we turn to anger and bitterness? Such is the human condition that each person has the free will to choose how he will react. It is a true test of one's character.

(Image: Mirror: Cancer patient Felix Glenny)