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Daily Devotional - Sunday, February 19, 2017 - Responding to Persecution

FEBRUARY 19TH 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

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1 Peter 3:13-18

Persecution has been a common experience in Christianity ever since the apostles first proclaimed the message of salvation. Even in places that have been blessed with a long period of peace and prosperity, there is no guarantee how long that will continue. And though we may never face severe repercussions like imprisonment or death for our beliefs, we've probably all felt the sting of rejection or ridicule. Whatever form the harassment may take, we should all be prepared to suffer for Christ.

Peter wrote to a group of believers who were treated harshly because of their faith. His goal was to offer encouragement and a reminder to follow Christ's example: Though sinless, He suffered in our place to bring us to God. And while the crowd at the cross mocked Him, He never responded harshly. Instead, He patiently suffered in full submission to His Father, "entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" ([1 Peter 2:21-23](#)).

Without this perspective, we could quickly descend into self-pity or angry resentment when we're mistreated. But Peter reminds us that we are blessed when we suffer for the sake of righteousness. Not only will we receive a reward in heaven ([Matthew 5:11-12](#)), but we may also have an opportunity to gently and reverently be a witness for Christ.

A wise response to persecution flows from an accurate understanding of God's ways. Unfair suffering is sometimes a part of His will for us, just as it was for Christ. But we can trust our Father, knowing that He can work every situation for our good and His glory.

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Daily Devotional - Thursday, February 16, 2017 - How to Avoid an Empty Life

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[Daily Devotional - Thursday, February 16, 2017 - How to Avoid an Empty Life](#)

[Psalm 16:11](#)

In public, most people appear happy and confident. But beneath the surface, many feel empty. In fact, it is possible to be in a large crowd and yet still feel alone.

A lot of men and women see no meaning or purpose in life. Attempting to overcome the emptiness, some become busy, others turn to drugs or alcohol, and still others strive for more money, power, or love. Though pleasure exists for them, it is usually short-lived.

There's a reason why life can feel empty: Man was created with a yearning that God alone is able to satisfy. Individuals cannot be fulfilled until they experience His transforming and unconditional love. Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" ([John 10:10](#)). In other words, the Lord wants us to feel complete, which can happen only through a relationship with Him.

However, even a person who is saved can feel empty. This could result from disobedience: A slight detour in one's walk with the Lord can become a way of life, depriving a believer of deep satisfaction. It's also possible for Christians to live according to God's Word without fully surrendering their desires to Him. For example, many believers still try to fill up their own void with achievements, wealth, or relationships. When aspirations like these are given higher priority than the Lord, they are a form of idolatry.

We can live a full life only when we seek God above all else. Pray for His guidance as you search your heart. Confess any sin, and ask God to fill your life as only He can do.

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Daily Devotional - Tuesday, February 14, 2017 - Showing Agape Love

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[1 Corinthians 13:1-13](#)

Divine love empowers us to respond calmly to difficulties, demonstrate patience in seasons of waiting, and sacrifice without complaint. We offer God's love when we can:

Forgive others. The son wasted his money in riotous living and discovered both the empty promises and destructive quality of sin. Upon the boy's return, his father forgave him completely. Love made it possible to wipe away the past (Ps. 103:12).

Act generously. The son, having just fed pigs, arrived at his father's estate with few expectations. The forgiving dad greeted him most warmly and dressed him in the finest garments. Godly love, which keeps no record of wrongs, enabled the father to show generosity.

Serve joyfully. What a celebration the father had upon the prodigal's return! His joy in his lost son's homecoming overflowed to others. Love expresses itself in willing service.

Restore those who fall. The one who both abandoned his father and squandered his inheritance was again given full rights as a son.

When we mess up, our heavenly Father patiently waits for us to turn back to Him. He accepts our repentance, rejoices in our return, and restores intimacy with Him. The elder brother in this parable missed the point because of his self-righteous attitude ([1 John 1:8](#)). He didn't recognize his mistakes or the many times his father had shown him love and

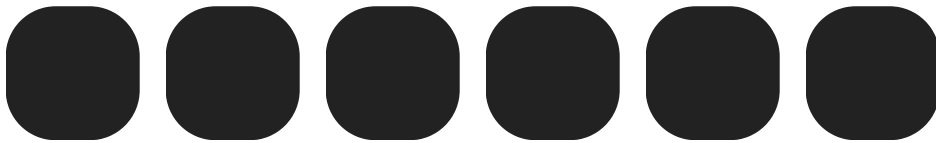
forgiveness.

God calls us to a lifestyle of agape love. To whom could you extend the divine love that forgives, restores, and serves with generosity and joy?

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Daily Devotional - Monday, February 13, 2017 - The Power of Love

FEBRUARY 13TH 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

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[Luke 15:11-32](#)

In Jesus' day, three Greek words were used to express "love"—*eros* (physical intimacy), *philia* (friendship), and *agape* (fruit produced by the Holy Spirit, as listed in [Galatians 5:22-23](#)). Our heavenly Father cares for us with agape love, and to bring us into a right relationship with Him, He sacrificed His Son ([1 John 4:10](#)).

The parable of the prodigal son gives us a good example of this type of love. Agape is evident in our life when we:

Respond calmly to difficulties. To the son's untimely demand for his share of the inheritance, the father didn't reply with angry words about ungrateful children. Though the prodigal's attitude must have caused pain, the man held his tongue and did not retaliate. In calmness, he could think more clearly and chose to love ([1 Corinthians 13:4-5](#)).

Sacrifice without complaint. Though he knew his son was committed to a ruinous course, the father quietly fulfilled the request. In doing so, he chose the way of love, directing his efforts towards preserving their relationship.

Wait patiently. Out of deep affection, the father let his son leave and stay away. What heartache the man must have felt! Yet he remained hopeful and waited for the young man to recognize that sin cannot deliver what it has promised. This patient response is possible only through the power of agape love ([1 Corinthians 13:4](#)).

The Holy Spirit's work in our life empowers us to show selfless and sacrificial devotion to the development of another person. In that way, we become people who respond calmly, patiently, and without complaint. Which kind of emotion do you offer to others—human or divine?

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Daily Devotional - Friday, February 10, 2017 - No Excuses

FEBRUARY 10TH 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

Daily Devotional - Friday, February 10, 2017 - No Excuses

[Jonah 1:1-17](#)

Jonah fled toward Tarshish to escape God's plan. The prophet mistakenly thought that ignoring a divine command would cause the Lord to withdraw or change it. Instead, God repeatedly and dramatically intervened in Jonah's life until the man submitted.

Jonah believed he had good reason to be reluctant. The Ninevites were a bloodthirsty people determined to conquer Israel. So walking across the city while crying, "Nineveh will be overthrown" was a frightening prospect. And, as the prophet later revealed, he worried that God would spare the city if the people repented ([Jonah 4:2](#)). Jonah wanted them destroyed! Therefore, his reasons for fleeing seemed right in his own eyes. But God was not deterred.

There's simply no adequate justification for rebellion. It's not uncommon for people running from God's will to use this six-word phrase: "I know what God says, but ..." I can tell you with absolute certainty that everything on the other side of "but" is a waste of time. The Lord isn't interested in excuses or selfish ambitions. He desires only obedience. He has reasons for asking a believer to take a specific action, and His purposes are always good. Consider the amazing benefit to Jonah and his countrymen if their enemy Nineveh

became an ally that worshipped the same God.

The Lord doesn't change His plan to suit our purpose. Rather, He'll use events, people, and the prompting of the Holy Spirit to move us into the center of His will. For your own benefit, go willingly. You may not like the task God assigns, but if He wants it done, then it must be worthwhile.

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