

PART FOUR
SUFFERING



STEWARDSHIP

MAXIMIZING GOD'S BLESSINGS FOR HIS GLORY
& OUR BENEFIT



Last month, 18 year old Steven Fields discovered that he had an extra \$30,000 in his bank account. Some people might take a picture of their bank balance and post it on facebook, but the vast majority of people would call their bank to report the error. Not Steven Fields. He went straight to the ATM machine and withdrew as much as he could. Then he bought a BMW at the local dealership and afterward he celebrated with a stop at a fast food restaurant.¹ Needless to say he's in big trouble.

This beautiful passage in Philippians 3 is all about banking and accounting. Paul speaks of counting gains and losses. These are accounting terms and Paul related them to suffering and the resurrection. He used what I call "resurrection math." Eighteen year old Steven Fields was bad at accounting. He took a gain which was not his and turned it into a loss. The loss is jail time or whatever the judge ultimately hands down as sentence. Paul did the same thing. He took a gain--or what he thought was a gain--and turned it into a loss. And then he took a loss and turned it into a gain. Paul practiced resurrection math and we'll see how it related to the stewardship of suffering.

2 Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. 3 For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—

4 though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Let's remind ourselves of the basis of all stewardship. Why are we stewards? Because God owns everything. last week we added to that the fact that God owns us as well. By creation and redemption, Jesus owns us. We are literally called slaves of Christ. And this understanding is the core of dealing with all manner of suffering. God owns us. He owns our bodies, our souls, our pocketbooks, our futures our lives. Therefore, when we suffer, we suffer as God's own possession.

I had three distinct colds this past winter. When the third one hit I was getting a little bummed out about it but one day I literally said out loud to myself, "Well God owns my body." Now I know right now some of you are thinking. "Don't blame God for you being sick. If you just took your vitamins or ate better or got more sleep or took this special tincture or magical elixir you would never get sick."

Let's leave that aside for now, shall we? It is true that much of our suffering is from our own doing. I would never dispute that fact. But I am talking about suffering in general. Laying aside our bad choices and their consequences, God owns us. Being sick a few times is nothing more than a slight inconvenience, compared to real suffering, but I was reminding myself that if God owns me, then what right do I have over my body? Like I said about all of our car troubles last month-'it's only money'. Not only that, it's not even *my* money, is it? If God wants to take one of my cars and send the other to the intensive care unit, what complaint do I have? If God wants to send me three relatively mild viruses in 3 months, what complaint do I have? My cars belong to God and my life and my soul belong to God.

So that's the foundation of all stewardship and suffering. Now let's see how Paul used "resurrection math" to give us even more encouragement in our suffering. You are probably familiar with verses 5-6 where Paul listed all of his gains. And remember--he is counting here. He is laying out two ledgers. It's just like the way you balance your checkbook. First you take all of your deposits and add them together and then you take all of your outstanding expenses and add them together and see what it totals up. This is exactly what Paul did. And I am not just taking the illustration of a bank or checkbook. This is precisely what he did. When Paul used the words count, gain and loss, he was actually using accounting and banking terminology from the first century.

So first he added up his positive column. And the end goal here was to impress God with his spiritual bank account.

- **circumcised on the eighth day**-exactly as the Law demanded, which meant his parents obeyed the law, he came from a good family

- **of the people of Israel** -he's not one of those wicked Gentiles
- **of the tribe of Benjamin**-remember your first king, Saul? Same tribe as him. Even the same name!
- **a Hebrew of Hebrews**- a summary statement, you could not get more pure than Paul
- **as to the law, a Pharisee**-he was not one of those 'liberal;' Sadducees, he was a conservative. He ran on a right wing platform. He was not a conservative in name only. he was what we would call a "true conservative."
- **as to zeal, a persecutor of the church**- He did not merely teach the law or even merely obey the law. he actively persecuted those who disobeyed the law.
- **as to righteousness under the law**, blameless- this was a challenge to his contemporaries. In calling himself blameless he was challenging anyone to bring a charge against him. This was not just empty boasting. He was absolutely confident that no one could bring a charge of disobedience to the law. As far as outward actions went, he was truly without blame.

That's an amazing list. In terms of a spiritual bank account, Paul was a multi-billionaire. He was at the top of the Forbes list of the most spiritually wealthy people in the world. And each year when you checked that list, he was always at the top. If anyone could buy his way into heaven, it would have been Paul?

But then he made this shocking statement in verse 7. *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.* So the ledger with all of the positive gains was no longer a gain. But notice that he didn't just say that the positive ledger was wiped out. That would be like having ten million dollars in your bank account and the losing it all. You'd still be at zero. But Paul said, *whatever gain I had, I counted as loss.* His positive ledger was not merely wiped out, it actually became a negative ledger, what we usually call a debt. So all of his gains became losses and then his losses became gains.

How did the change happen? This is what I am calling 'resurrection math.' These prior gains were counted as "eternal dividends." These were the things that would gain Paul a divine advantage. But in light of the cross and especially the resurrection, the accounting was turned upside down: gains became losses and losses became gains.

What exactly is resurrection math? it's a lot more than just a change in perspective. Sometimes a simple change in perspective is all we need. John Piper offered a very different perspective on the problem of evil.

How can God be a God of justice, yet allow so much good to happen to people who dishonor him by disbelieving in him, or giving lip service to his existence, or paying no more attention to him than the carpet in their den, or rejecting the kingship of his Son, or scorning his word, or preferring a hundred pleasures before him?

- How can God be righteous and do so much good to us who are so unrighteous
- Where was God when nine million planes landed safely in the United States?
- Where was God when the world revolved around the sun so accurately that it achieved the Winter solstice perfectly at 5:12 AM December 21 and headed back toward Spring?
- Where was God when the President was not shot at a thousand public appearances?

- Where was God when American farms produced ten million bushels of corn, and 2.8 million bushels of soybeans — enough food to sell \$100 billions worth to other nations?
- Where was God when no terrorist plot brought down a single American building or plane or industry?
- Where was God when the sun maintained its heat and its gravitational pull precisely enough that we were not incinerated or frozen?
- Where was God when three hundred million Americans drank water in homes and restaurants without getting sick?
- Where was God when no new plague swept away a third of our race?
- Where was God when Americans drove three trillion accident free miles?
- Where was God when over three million healthy babies were born in America?²

That is a definitive change in perspective but resurrection math is much more radical than this. Resurrection math results in a change in your eternal perspective. Paul took all of those prior gains and counted them as losses. So again, they were not just the absence of something positive. What he used to count as gains he now counted as losses. He moved them from the positive ledger to the debt column. resurrection math made Paul realize that being a Pharisee and a zealous persecutor of the church was not only not a positive thing, it was negative. Such things did earn him eternal dividends but they were all negative eternal dividends. they were losses and therefore were counted as such. He called them rubbish. They were nothing but a pile of dung and waste.

So all of the gains were counted as losses but what's most important here is what Paul listed in the gain column. The last three verses spell it out clearly for us.

in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Here's how they look in a list format.

- I may gain Christ
- be found in him with righteousness that depends on faith
- I may know him
- I may know the power of his resurrection
- may share in his sufferings
- becoming like him in his death
- I may attain to the resurrection from the dead

I like the first four on the list. Paul wanted to gain Christ. He was willing and did give up everything to know Christ. Jesus said you could gain the whole world yet lose your soul. That's where Paul had been but he left that all behind to gain Christ. And Paul knew that he did have a righteousness that was based on faith. Human efforts count for nothing. All that matters is faith.

Paul had found Christ, he had gained Christ, yet he wanted more. The word 'know' here is a personal, intimate kind of knowing. We had a little fun in the men's study on Wednesday. We were in 1 Thessalonians 2 and as always, got a lot of meat and depth from the passage. But there was one verse that we really didn't care for. It was verse 8 where Paul wrote, "So, being affectionately desirous of you..." There is something a little too intimate about that phrase- affectionately desirous. We know that Paul meant what he wrote but we also knew that this was a phrase we would never use for one another. The guys in the study really like each other. I would say we even have love for one another, but you won't catch us saying that we "affectionately desire" one another.

But this is the type of longing that Paul had for Jesus and what we should long for. As one commentator put it, what Paul wanted was "a knowledge so transcendent in value it compensates for the loss of everything else."³ There was a real sense that Paul was not satisfied with his knowledge of Christ. he was content. he knew Christ. he had gained Christ but he knew there was more to be had. He was content but not satisfied. One commentator said that Paul had "found in Christ an inexhaustible fullness of knowledge."⁴ You can go deep with Christ but you can always go deeper still.

Part of that deeper experience was to know the power of Christ's resurrection. Now what did Paul mean by that. The resurrection of Jesus, which we are especially celebrating today, is the penultimate part of Christianity. If Christ has not been raised, then our faith is futile and we are still dead in our sins. But Christ was raised. His resurrection proved that he was God. His resurrection defeated death and sin and guarantees our future inheritance.

But the resurrection does not end there. it doesn't merely get us into heaven. Resurrection power is available for every believer right now. Paul said this very clearly in Ephesians 1, praying that we might know *the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places* (Ephesians 1:18-19). Do you see that? The exact same power of God that raised Jesus from the dead is available for us. Resurrection power is available to us. When was the last time you looked into the life of another and said to yourself, that guy really has resurrection power. There is something supernatural about his life, a deep trust that does not come from within him or within her.

Why is this kind of Christina so rare? I think part of the reason this person is so uncommon is because we don't like the rest of the verse. Paul wanted to know Christ and *the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death*. I really think that resurrection power only comes when we also seek to share in Christ' sufferings and become like him in his death.

All Christians love Romans 8:18. *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us*. We believe that eternity is so much better than our suffering today. We are convinced of it. There is no comparison between the two. We love this verse and we get that, but do we also get that suffering itself is a path toward knowing Christ more deeply?

Now I am not saying that you should seek suffering in order to know Christ better. This was a mistake of some in the early church. There was a movement for a while that actively sought out martyrdom. It was not quite like jihad in Islam where you die as a martyr by killing other people. Except perhaps for some in the Crusades, it was never like that. And Paul is certainly not glorifying suffering here. Even given the opportunity, Paul would often go out of his way to avoid trouble and difficulty. He was never afraid to proclaim the gospel, no matter the level of persecution, but even Paul allowed himself to be let down in a basket from the walls in Damascus. He could have marched right back in a faced his persecutors but he chose not to. He pulled out his "Roman Citizenship Card" on more thna one occasion to get himself out of trouble.

Suffering comes all by itself without us seeking it out. Again some of it we unintentionally bring upon ourselves through poor choices and the consequences of sin, but even that kind of suffering is redemptive. God never intends an ounce of pain to be wasted but wants to use it to conform us to himself, even if it conforms us to his death.

Exactly two weeks ago, Kara Tippetts went home to be with the Lord. You may not have heard of Kara Tippetts but you probably heard of Brittany Maynard. She was the young newlywed from Oregon who developed brain cancer and opted for physician assisted suicide. Brittany garnered lots of national coverage in the media because she was so young, so beautiful and newly married. What the media did not tell us was that Kara wrote a letter to Brittany last year pleading with her to reconsider her decision and consider the claims of Christ. Here is a portion of that letter.



Knowing Jesus, knowing that He understands my hard goodbye, He walks with me in my dying. My heart longs for you to know Him in your dying. Because in His dying, He protected my living. My living beyond this place.

More importantly, will you hear from my heart that Jesus loves you. He loves you. He loves you. He died an awful death upon a cross so that you would know Him today that we would no longer live separate from Him and in our death. He died and His death happened, it is not simply a story.

He died and He overcame death three days later, and in that overcoming of death He overcame the death you and I are facing in our cancer. He longs to know you, to shepherd you in your dying, and to give you life and give you life abundant- eternal life.

For everyone living knowing death is imminent- that we all will one day face this it – the question that is most important. Who is this Jesus, and what does He have to do with my dying? Please do not take that pill before you ask yourself that question.⁵



Last year Kara and her husband were on the Focus on the Family broadcast. I read through all of the transcripts and picked out my favorite part of the interview. She was talking about her natural desire to want to live longer but also her desire to seek Jesus first.

And my heart is to be here. And I think part of it is, because we have a weak imagination for heaven. I think if I really knew what heaven was, I would say "Take me tomorrow." But I look at my little faces and I want to be the one that gets to shepherd them. I want to be the one to tell them about the glory of God and explain dating and how to shave your legs and I mean, I ... the big things and the little things I want to be here for. And yet, first I seek His kingdom. And then we'll see what He does, you know.⁶

That's resurrection math. Resurrection math takes gains and turns them into losses and it takes losses and turns them into gains. Resurrection math is not just for eternity but it gives you an eternal perspective now. Resurrection math takes all of your suffering and redeems it for God's glory and our benefit.

Rich Maurer
April 5, 2015

¹ <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/mar/10/steven-fields-convicted-for-spending-30000-mistake/>

² <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/where-was-god-in-all-the-goodness-of-2012>

³ O'Brien, p. 388.

⁴ O'Brien, p. 402.

⁵ <http://www.aholyexperience.com/2014/10/dear-brittany-why-we-dont-have-to-be-so-afraid-of-dying-suffering-that-we-choose-suicide/>

⁶ <http://www.focusonthefamily.com/media/daily-broadcast/living-faithfully-with-cancer-pt1>