

Amy Carmichael wrote about missionary sufferings including “the mundane of life, the total lack of privacy, strange foods, and the general loss of creature comforts...she spoke with stark candour about the challenges of ministry, including language barriers, disinterested hearers, and fruitless labours. She also pulled back the curtain on the reality of emotional anguish, the piercing loneliness of being a single missionary, sickness, corruption, and the dreadful effects of idolatry and sexual exploitation. But Amy Carmichael didn't record her struggles as a kind of holy grumbling. Nor was she pleading for sympathy. She simply thought people back home should know the truth. And she preferred to recruit new workers to the field with realism rather than romanticism.”¹

One of the forgotten and rarely understood sufferings of a missionary is that of constantly being on the move. Our paths are regularly redirected. Our lives are endlessly uprooted. We start out for one city only to end up in another. We feel led to one country only to be supplied a different assignment. We pray about reaching one people group only to be denied residency among them. We learn one language only to need a different dialect. We start a local business only to lose permits. We find the perfect apartment only to have our lease expire. We finally settle into effective ministry only to contract a virus. We plan our ways only to have God direct our steps.”¹

3. What motivates missionaries to suffer? Why would we encourage others to make choices for mission that could cost them and increase their suffering?

4. What stops you from taking risks for, sacrificing, and even suffering for Jesus now? What makes it hard for you to consider going?

¹ Excerpts from book | Elliot Clark: *Mission Affirmed*

5. What does 2 Timothy teach us about our suffering for God's global mission?

a. Who suffers?

b. What types of suffering are there?

c. Why does Paul suffer? Is it worth it?

d. What empowers Paul's sufferings?

(See page 5 for 2 Timothy excerpts)

6. Discuss:

Suffering is a difficult topic, both experientially and intellectually. But it is one of the most important topics when it comes to mission. Of course, our suffering for his mission is only ever a response made possible by the effect and example of his suffering (Revelation 5:9-10, 1 Peter 2:21-25).

But when it comes to our suffering, missiologist Elliot Clark argues that 'it would be hard to overstate the importance for missionaries to have a robust theology of suffering and glory.' On the one hand, without an accurate theology of suffering, either we won't get involved in mission—as senders or goers—or we will fail to leverage our lives as sacrificially as we otherwise could. On the other hand, even if we do go on mission, one of the greatest dangers for those we seek to evangelise and disciple is our under-preached and under-practiced theology of suffering. When it comes to suffering, watching our life and doctrine matters not only for us but also our hearers.

So, have you studied suffering? How many sermons or books have you studied about suffering? In Romans 5:3, Paul says, 'we rejoice in our sufferings knowing that...' What Paul knows about suffering has made a big difference to the way he relates to his sufferings. What do you know about suffering?

Second, how willing are you to suffer for the sake of others? Are you willing to make decisions which will cost you—time, money, energy, relationships, privileges, rights, comforts, desires, even needs—for the sake of the salvation of others? Will you say with Paul in 2 Timothy 2:10 that 'I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory'?

7. How can we prepare ourselves now to suffer for God's global mission?

Suffering in 2 Timothy (Excerpts)

1:4	As I remember your tears, I long to see you.
1:7-8	God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.
1:11-12	I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.
1:15-16	You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.
2:1-3	You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.
2:8-13	Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.
3:1	But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.
3:10-12	You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.
4:5-8	As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.
4:10-13	Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica...Luke alone is with me...when you come, bring the cloak that I left.
4:14-15	Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message.
4:16-18	At my first defence no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the nations might hear it. So I was delivered from the lion's mouth. The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.

Appendix 1: Resources

- (1) **Book:** Elliot Clark: *Mission Affirmed*
- (2) **Article:** S. Thomas (Gospel Coalition): *If I am happy in Jesus, why am I so sad?*
au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/if-i-am-happy-in-jesus-why-am-i-so-sad
- (3) **Further Suggestions - Any missionary biography:** e.g., Gates of Splendour, Hudson Taylor, Warriors of Ethiopia, When the Lights Go Out, Mountain Rain, etc
- (4) **Quotes and Excerpts:** (see below, pg. 6 & 7)

In the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, the only word used in connection with the entire span of Jesus' life is "suffered." "Born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried." Who, today, notices how extraordinary this is? What a way to describe the life and ministry of a man so famous for his teachings, parables, healings, exorcisms, and other works! None of these things are even mentioned in the creeds, and very little is said of them in the various New Testament epistles.

– **The Crucifixion by Fleming Rutledge**

"If Jesus is the perfect embodiment of the image of God—what God intends humanity to be—and Jesus' life was oriented toward a cross, and this cross was necessary for him and necessary for us, then it's a provocative question: what does the cross of Jesus have to tell us about what it means to be human? What does the cross tell us about the art of living?"

– **Union with Christ by Rankin Wilbourne**

We are often astonished at the heroism of the early missionaries who went so bravely, suffered in many ways and often died early. But life in 17th century England was also "poor, brutish and short". Britain's early missionaries did not have the average life expectancy of 85+ years we have today. It seems our Western culture is no longer able to face the prospect of dying: neither in the young, nor the old. Many of us do all we can to avoid pain, suffering and loss.

– **Janet Quarry**

I will never forget the day I said farewell to a mission worker in the late 1990s. "Take care," I said. "I don't take care," he said. "I take risks."

– **ibid**

Western missionaries themselves—even the best of them—carry the virus of prosperity theology latent within them. And we easily transmit it to others wherever we serve. This can happen simply by our observable lifestyle, as we instinctively gravitate toward comfort and ease in seemingly innocuous decisions about housing and entertainment, education and healthcare. Like it or not, local believers will interpret from us a Christian perspective of suffering and glory whether we overtly teach it or not. I've known Western missionaries, working in countries with moderate persecution, who were sometimes mystified by the inability of new believers to endure hardship. Expat workers expressed frustration with locals who shied away from suffering or ran away from pain. They also wondered why those who claimed to follow Jesus would prefer to remain secret, never telling their family members or friends about the Saviour. But the sad irony I observed was that sometimes—-in those very circumstances—the missionaries themselves had modelled the same secretive identity, the same avoidance of suffering, and the same inability to endure. Sadly, their new disciples weren't diverting from the path. They were simply following their lead. As a result, I've come to consider some of the ways Western missionary colonization still happens. Sure, we're no longer exporting pews and pipe organs. We're beyond that. But we do import our comforts and our fears. We implicitly inculcate others with our timidity, secrecy, contingency and luxury. The great danger of cultural colonization isn't gone; it's only changed. We're still making disciples in our image. Anna Hampton, an American who's spent nearly a decade living and working in Afghanistan, sees this as a real problem for the West. Her book *Facing Danger: A Guide through Risk* discusses the challenges for cross-cultural workers who leave comfortable, affluent, and "safe" countries to go to difficult regions. She notes how Westerners come from risk-averse and litigious societies with insurance policies and contingencies for everything. But Christian missionaries must be those who demonstrate courage and resilience in times of distress and danger. They must portray the cross, not only by witnessing to the sufferings of Christ, but also by their willingness to suffer with him. According to Scott Sunquist, "Much is communicated about the gospel of salvation through a weak, poor, and suffering servant. Less is communicated about the gospel through a comfortable and wealthy short-term visitor. The call to missionary service is a call to come and die."

– **Mission Affirmed by Elliot Clark**

Loneliness (Chapter 34 of 'When the Lights go out' by Ruth Myors)

As I meditated, my mind drifted to Jesus' time on earth, and I began to think about how lonely he would have been. It was not until after the resurrection and Pentecost that his closest friends really began to understand who he was and the inner meaning of his message. I let my mind dwell on those 33 years - how he must have longed for his Father and the fellowship he had enjoyed through all eternity. Jesus regarded his body as given to him in order to carry out his Father's will. How painful it must have been for him when his closest companions argued over who would have the best places in the coming Kingdom. Even the three in the inner circle were unable to stay awake in the Garden of Gethsemane. I realised how pathetic my grumbling was in the light of his experience.

I was also reminded in one of my devotional books that it is only in this life that we have the privilege of suffering with Jesus. In heaven we will serve him more perfectly and will have unbroken fellowship with him, but we won't be called to suffer with him. We will never be lonely; we will be surrounded by love. As I contemplated these things, I prayed that I would not waste this precious opportunity and that I would learn all he wanted to teach me. In an act of worship, like the woman with the alabaster jar (Mark 14:3), I offered my loneliness to God and accepted his will for me at that time. There were other times when I really longed for a companion, but the bitter struggle was over. On another occasion I was struck by Ephesians 1:11-12, which reminded me, with fresh impact, that our appointment is to live to the praise of God's glory.

Excerpt from a sermon on suffering

Jeremy Bentham, a 16th century philosopher who helped invent the ethical theory of utilitarianism, wrote that "Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do." Hedonism has been around a long time.

But David Williams, who heads up the missionary training for CMS, he's quite convincing when he argues that pain and pleasure have become the dominant way our Aussie culture makes its decisions. It used to be that Westerners had an inner lawyer who said: "Do that, that's right. Don't do that, that's wrong." Those of Asian descent had, maybe, an inner Confucius who said: "do that, it will bring honour on you and your family." Or, an inner Mushu from Mulan: "don't do that! Dishonour on your whole family, dishonour on you." But now, modern Australian culture has an inner therapist who says: "Do that, it'll make you feel good. Don't do that, it'll make you feel bad." Should I eat ice-cream? Obviously, yes. What about porn? The lawyer says no, Confucius definitely says no, but the therapist...well, it doesn't bring anyone else pain, does it? And it brings you pleasure. Should I abort this baby? It could avoid a whole lot of pain. Should I spend as much time as I can playing video games? No brainer. It's the message of almost every ad, it is the driving force of our culture's decisions. Avoid pain, pursue pleasure and whatever makes you happy. Now, do you reckon this pain/pleasure worldview might make it hard to make difficult decisions, to take painful, costly actions? I'm not sure if hedonist snowflakes make the best missionaries.

I wonder if you've heard Christians you know using pain/pleasure language in their decision making? I've heard it come out in the language of calling. I've heard people say: I don't feel called. Now, using the word 'feeling' there wasn't a good start, but then what follows isn't much better. I don't feel called to 'insert painful, hard thing that I don't really want to do'. Instead, I'm called to 'insert pleasurable, easier thing that I or my parents do want me to do.' Maybe I'm being a little cynical, but sometimes I wonder whether the language of calling is used to justify doing what we want, taking God's name in vain to justify us seeking our kingdom first.