



SHIELD OF FAITH

"Take Up the Shield of Faith" - Paul

Monday, January 27, 2020

Try to exclude the possibility of suffering which the order of nature and the existence of free-wills involve, and you find that you have excluded life itself. — C. S. Lewis

A Weekend on Suffering

<https://michaelheath.org/shield-of-faith-column/a-weekend-on-suffering>

On Friday after I completed my morning Shield of Faith LIVE show I got in our old Nissan SUV and drove from North Carolina to my parents near Ocala, Florida. I walked into the hospital hallway as my 82 year old mother was exiting my father's hospital room. He had just been wheeled down to the surgery suite. After six months, six different hospitals in two states, steadily increasing pain, countless tests, loss of weight and energy ending in uncontrollable excruciating vomiting and a midnight ambulance ride we were both hopeful that the surgery would render a verdict. It now appears likely that is the case. And the verdict is that my nearly 86 year old father will continue to live and love among us. Thank God. I love my dad.

The surgeon removed a rancid gall bladder Friday night. It is likely my mom and I will bring dad home later today. He is feeling much better. I was so upset when I learned that the distended gall bladder was infected to the point of having become gangrenous that I called a lawyer. I don't suspect the doctors of gross negligence so there's nothing there. That left all of us with the reality of pain and suffering, and how to live with death as our uninvited dancing partner.

This thought always brings me back in my mind to the first book that Peter Kreeft wrote, "Love is Stronger than Death." The Boston College philosophy professor observed, "The greatest Christians in history seem to say that their sufferings ended up bringing them the closest to God - so this is the best thing that could happen, not the worst." And Lewis once more, "We were promised sufferings. They were part of the program. We were even told, 'Blessed are they that mourn.'"

Kreeft's insights made the untimely death of my wife's sister bearable. I finished reading "Love is Stronger than Death" to Paulie on the day that Betty died. We were in the car making our way to her hospital bed. Kreeft has managed to scribble over eighty books in his long life. He had a deep appreciation for the work of C.S. Lewis. What Christian doesn't?

Lewis said of old age, "How incessant and great are the ills with which a prolonged old age is replete." I'm learning that lesson first hand by choosing to love and honor my father. He has been dancing with death through old age for many years — since he was about my age. Diagnosed with cancer when he was just a few years older than I am now he has shown me in so many ways how to dance graciously and courageously.

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At church yesterday morning I learned something I didn't know about my father. I was talking with my mother about my baptism in the United Methodist Church. I thanked her for taking me to church when I was young. I thanked her for having me baptized. She told me that they decided to wait to have me baptized. United Methodist's baptize infants. My parents decided they wanted me to be baptized when I was old enough to make up my own mind. She then told me that it was my father who took my brother, me and my mom to church. He is not a complicated man when it comes to religion. Having been abandoned by his mother and father in childhood he wanted us to grow up in church. My parents celebrate sixty years of marriage this year.

A tear is forming in my eye as the profundity of this loving man's faith and dedication sinks into the depths of my 58 year old soul. I am drenched in the love, sacrifice, forgiveness and care of people over whom I had, and have, so little control. God's grace has been so strong in my life. I did worse than nothing to deserve it. I have not been grateful.

Kreeft admitted, "We are all insane." He explained, "That is what original sin means. Sin is insanity. It is preferring finite joy to infinite joy, creatures to the Creator, an unhappy, Godless self to a happy, God-filled self. Only God can save us from this disease. That is what the name 'Jesus' means: 'God saves!'" God is indeed saving me, through the six decade long married example of a loving father and mother. And gratitude is causing joy to well up in my heart. Kreeft admitted, "Gratitude is the seedbed of joy."

There are so many wrecked lives and marriages in the West today. The beauty of Christianity is that it is never too late for any of us to discover love, peace and salvation. Our example of marriage, family and love transcends our experience in this fallen world. The family of Jesus Christ is our example. If your example is compromised then focus on them.

Over time you will learn to love so much.

Amen.