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By Sergio Fortes

Choosing - Or Refusing - To 'Drink The Cup'

Whether in our personal or professional lives, there are certain times when it seems that nothing works. No matter what we do, everything goes wrong. We feel like the end has come, whether it is our career, striving toward an important goal, or saving a valued relationship. Our minds become overwhelmed with negative thoughts. Friends and close relatives seem distant, leaving us surrounded by lonely feelings. The anticipated shipwreck seems just a matter of time.

All that matters, we believe, whether in the corporate world, personal pursuits, or even our spiritual lives, is success. If our story is not successful one, it can only be one thing: a failure. Unfortunately, no one has interest in failure.

In his book, *Here and Now*, author Henri Nouwen, a foremost exponent of spirituality during the last century, reminds us that the episodes of life alternate, having a natural ebb and flow: joy and sadness; success and failure; health and illness; similar to the seasons of a calendar year. The Bible can tell us much about these seasons. In fact, the Old Testament says, *"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die...a time to tear down and a time to build..." (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8).*

During His time on earth, Jesus Christ of Nazareth regarded moments of pain and failure as integral parts of his life. Speaking to Peter, one of his closest followers (and the most impulsive), He rebuked him the night when He was betrayed. Jesus said, *"Put your sword into away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" (John 18.11).* He understood this was a trial He could not avoid.

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Peter thought this was unacceptable, refusing to tolerate what he perceived as failure. He preferred to draw his sword, which he had skillfully camouflaged, and fight against Jesus' accusers. Attack the attackers. Cut off an ear. He was willing to do anything but "drink the cup."

We all desire our own "swords" to ward off the assaults of life. These seemingly protective weapons can look like a fat bank checking account, gold-credit card, large savings account, a wealthy friend we can call upon in a crisis, or material goods we can easily liquidate if needed. But are they really effective, or just walking sticks that delay the inevitable "drinking the cup" process?

Distinguishing between when to fight and when to drink the cup requires spiritual discernment. Surrounded by angry, armed and violent soldiers, Jesus saw beyond the siege. He understood it was not a time to fight, but rather to accept God's will, even if it meant bitter suffering, pain and death. It was necessary for Him to drink the cup. His purpose was to atone for the sins of mankind.

This is not just a spiritual illustration. For each of us laboring in the business and professional world, sometimes the "cup" is inevitable. Maybe you are in one of those moments of your life today. You are being asked to drink the cup, but do not like it one bit. Who prefers pain and bitterness over success?

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In these circumstances, we need wisdom to understand what is happening. And it will happen. But the Scriptures offer us consolation. As the psalmist David wrote, *"His anger lasts only a moment, but his goodness is for life. The weeping may last all night long, but joy comes in the morning"* (Psalm 30:5). Then, in *verse 11*, David wrote, *"You have changed my weeping into joyful dancing, you have removed my sorrow from me, and have girded me with joy."* He had confidence God could use even the worst times for good.

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Reflection/Discussion Question

1. When was the last time you experienced a time when nothing seemed to be working, when no matter what you tried, it turned out wrong? How did you respond to that?
2. Do you agree with the writer who said there are inevitable seasons in life, times to succeed and times to fail, times to advance and times to pause, or even have to retreat? Explain your answer.
3. What do you think Jesus Christ meant when He said He must "drink the cup" God had given to Him?
4. How does faith help in being able to endure times when everything seems to have gone wrong, and there is no immediate evidence that things will soon change?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15; Romans 5:3-5; Hebrews 11:1,39-40; James 1:2-8; 1 Peter 1:6-7

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