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You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink? Matthew 20:22 NLT.The back story of the above verse: then the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus with her sons. She knelt respectively to ask a favor. What is your request? He asked. She replied, In your kingdom, please let my two sons sit in places of honor next to you, one on your right and the other on your left. Matthew 20:20-21.NLT. What she was asking was for her two sons to take the second highest position under Jesus, in His Kingdom. It seems quite a presumptive question in our eyes. I don't think Mrs. Zebedee, James and John were expecting Jesus' response. None of us want to drink from the cup of bitter suffering, but as we go through life, it happens. As I was reading this short interaction between this loving and probably proud mother and Jesus, I thought how many times God's people ask similar things...not knowing the cost involved. I remember being all excited on my wedding day, vowing the regular vows: for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health as long as we both shall live. About two weeks later, my husband got the flu and I realized life wasn't always going to be perfect. He was a grumpy patient! I had about a 1/8 teaspoon of suffering to drink as we learned to accommodate each other during this brief illness. These vows were real. Little did I know that a bigger cup was waiting for us. 36 years later, he suffered a heart attack and severe stroke, and I really was tested as his caregiver for 2 1/2 years when he laid in a hospital bed unable to speak or move. My cup of suffering increased.In some ways, I am still drinking of that same cup of suffering as I walk the widow road. We had many other "bitter cups" along the way. Submitting to His will, not our will, always involves that bitter cup of suffering. My parents thought we were stupid and foolish to pioneer a church. In our plan it was going to grow big and "we would show them". That didn't happen. But through our willingness to touch the lives He brought our way, there are some wonderful believers who are still serving Jesus today. I think He often includes humbling opportunities in this cup.Death and grief are often part of the bitter cup of suffering. It can be the death of our dreams, in exchange for His plan and purpose. People who longed to be married, but ended up living the single life to pursue His Kingdom had to die to those hopes and desires. Struggles with infertility can be a very difficult cup of suffering to drink. Children with addiction issues, children walking away from the Lord or infidelity can be horrible cups to drink. There is often disappointment in the cup of suffering for us as well. Misplaced or wrong expectations can lead to an increase in the bitterness of our cups. In my own times of drinking the cup of suffering (I know mine are quite small compared to Jesus' cup), I have found the only solace is following Jesus' example. Getting alone and simply crying out to the Father all my heartache and seeking Him for His help relieves the bitterness of the cup. Jesus had to drink His cup of suffering alone. Even though He asked his disciples to wait and pray with Him, they fell asleep. Jesus voluntarily drank of His cup. He did it for us. Many of the testimonies of earlier saints that encourage us today are because they drank their own cup of suffering. Have you heard of Jim and Elizabeth Elliot? He and four others were killed in an attempt to evangelize the Hourani people of Ecuador, when he was just 28. After his death, his wife, Elizabeth and other missionaries began working among the Hourani tribe and eventually many turned to Christ. You can read about their story in the book Through the Gates of Splendor. It is such an inspiring story. What a cup Elizabeth Elliot chose to drink in returning to the very tribe that killed her young husband, but it was that very persistence and love that won that tribe to Jesus. We may never know what our choice of drinking our cup of bitter suffering will have on others. As we drink our cups, we must drink it with faith and trust that it will bring God the glory He deserves. Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as thought something strange were happening to you, But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. I Peter 4: 12-13. ESV. Not all suffering is godly suffering. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. I Peter 4:15. ESV. We must be careful not to blame our self-induced suffering on God. It won't help us or the Kingdom. Choosing to walk in His ways so we don't fulfill the lust of the flesh will help prevent this extra suffering. Jesus asked James and John if they were able to drink the cup of bitter suffering. They answered, we are able. According to tradition, James was either beheaded or stabbed with a sword by Herod Agrippa around 44 AD. John was exiled to the Isle of Patmos. None of us know what our cup of suffering may entail. What we do know is that we cannot drink it without God's help and strength. We cannot drink it for our own glory. It won't be easy, but we can know it will be worth it. Father, we know we can't drink any cup of bitter suffering without your courage and help. I thank you for helping us drink whatever cup we need for Your glory. We trust you. In Jesus' Name, amen. |