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Devotion and Suffering in the Life of Johannes Kepler

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Abstract

Various heroes of Christianity have been celebrated by Protestants for centuries. From followers to devout disciples, Christians have recognized certain individuals as being role models. These people have stood as leaders of the faith and spanned from tax collectors, to fishermen, and even to government authorities. Often overlooked, though, were those who made advancements in the sciences, philosophy, mathematics, and other scholarly fields. In certain professions and studies, Protestants were persecuted and forced to deny their beliefs. Some chose to make what they believed as the center of their motivation which would lead to even greater achievements. Of those people, Johannes Kepler certainly impacted the world with his laws and even when he faced adversity, Kepler held on to his faith and progressed further!

Suffering is a concept that every human that has ever lived can relate to. Taking things a step further, every living thing in the history of the world has suffered in some way. Even in the smallest amount or to the smallest degree, the commonality of suffering is ever so obvious in the present world. History textbooks are tattooed with events in which people suffered in the past. It can even be reasonable to infer that the suffering of the past and present will outlive any individual lifetime, into the near or distant future. Suffering is talked about in many great and intellectual works of literature, one of which is Hamlet, written by William Shakespeare, but also in more recent work of animation like The Lion King. Both can be compared, and both show clear suffering of multiple characters. Suffering appears in so many other great works. The reason for this has already been stated. Every living thing can relate to it.

One of the most cliché but true statements ever spoken is “life isn’t easy”. In the midst of life’s troubles, many people have worked, with passion and determination, to achieve greatness. Others use justice as their motivation. In countries like America, those people are idolized. Still, some have other motivation to endure suffering and persecution, like love. The most famous example of suffering for love is formed in Christianity. The very fabric in which the religion is woven with is the passion of Jesus Christ. In this context, the word passion means suffering. He suffered because he loved all. Because of the sacrifice of his life and all of the other works he did for people, he was and is still followed by many to this day. One thing Jesus made clear during his time on Earth was that those who follow him will suffer. They will be persecuted. They will have very tough lives. Clearly he was correct because those who followed him the most, within the documentation of The Bible, were more severely mistreated and

abused after openly displaying their commitment and faith in Jesus Christ. Men like John the Baptist, Peter, Stephen, and Paul all endured severe hardships for their faith. That didn't stop in biblical days. It continued. It continued for hundreds of years. It affected the lives of many average people and also many famous people. One, Johannes Kepler, suffered his entire life yet maintained his faith, proving that through the struggles in life, clinging to Christ is a deep enrichment and motivation to go on.

Johannes Kepler struggled through an enormous amount of adversity. Born in Weil der Stadt, a town close to Stuttgart, Germany, Kepler saw challenges early. He saw his father, Heinrich Kepler, put an end to a protestant rebellion or uprising, even though Heinrich was, himself, a protestant. That type of inconsistency from the leader of a family could have very well had a dangerous effect on the mental/emotional health of a young Johannes. Many times, Heinrich left his family to fight in battles. Growing up without the presence of a father-figure would have been very rough on any child. Johannes Kepler's family lineage was not the purest to begin with, though. His grandparents had 12 children. Heinrich was the oldest living child during the childhood of Johannes. Heinrich's wife, Kathrine, Johannes's mother, had an aunt burned at the stake because she was accused of being a witch. Heinrich's absence was an embarrassment to the Kepler family, especially with their protestant roots. The impact of Heinrich's frequent departures was very significant on Johannes.

Johannes was a very sick child growing up. With all of the difficulties that came with illness, the fact that he was still a very good student was remarkable. Heinrich left the family during Johannes's childhood, abandoning Kathrine and her children. Johannes had 6 siblings but, unfortunately, half of them died during childhood. Two of the siblings that lived became

normal adults in society. One other, Johannes's brother, Heinrich, was very regularly sick or in trouble. He was said to have epilepsy. He abandoned home after his father threatened to sell him off, prior to either of their departures.

An older Johannes Kepler would document various details of his life. He would address everything from the times around his birth to how he felt about different family members. He would even go on to give opinions of himself.

As years went by, Kepler grew in his studies. He attended college at Tübingen University, where he studied mathematical-sciences, Hebrew, and Greek. Kepler has very high grades in everything except for astronomy. His astronomy teacher, Michael Mästlin, was harder on Johannes because he saw great potential in the young man. Mästlin even chose to give Kepler advanced lessons. Things seemed to be going well but soon conflicts between Kepler's religious beliefs and those of the university would become increasingly frequent. The problems would come to a point where Kepler was excommunicated, eventually, yet he continued to study and learn. As his education grew, Kepler began to question what was thought of as true and pushed the boundaries in astronomy, most notably. At the time, Nicolaus Copernicus ruled the science world in terms of models of the solar system. He accepted that the earth was the center of the solar system. This would be a geocentric model. Kepler would challenge the model with a heliocentric model. This type of model shows the sun at the center of our solar system. This was groundbreaking! Continuing his studies, Kepler was determined to find out what God intended for the universe. Kepler's protestant background showed in all of his pursuits. He was very much convinced that God placed every element of the universe in a specific spot for a reason. The very same religious belief that got Kepler in a lot of trouble over the many years of

his life was also a driving force for his work and advancements. These advancements gave way to Kepler's Laws of Planetary Motion, what Kepler may be most famous for. Kepler's first law, which came from his studies of the motion of the planet Mars across the sky with Tycho Brahe, states that planets orbit the sun in an elliptical motion. This is in contrast to the circular motion that was previously and commonly thought. Kepler's second law deals with planetary speeds as they get closer to and farther away from the sun. He found that as planets get closer to the sun, in their orbits, they speed up. Kepler determined that a line from a planet to the sun creates an equal area of space in equal intervals of time. Finally, Kepler's third law used the logic from the first two laws to show that planets that are farther away from the sun move slower. He also found that the proportion of the planets orbit period to its semi-major axis of its orbit can be found by squaring the orbit period and cubing the semi-major axis of orbit and setting that as a proportion. With all of the trials of his childhood and the backlash in his adulthood, Kepler managed to succeed anyway! Because of Kepler's success, science today has seen many advancements. We have sent people to the moon, we have sent objects to Mars, we can track objects in space, and many other things!

It is apparent that Johannes Kepler's faith was very much vital in his studies and success. He attributed his devotion in his work to his devotion to God. His determination to seek God's purpose in creation drove him to further the understanding of the world, the solar system, and the universe. With perseverance through persecution, Kepler was rewarded with knowledge and information. God revealed himself to Kepler through creation in a way no one had yet seen because of Kepler's great devotion. None of the immense persecution, illness, abandonment,

death, sorrow, pain, and challenges could stand up to the power of God in mankind. Great devotion and a hunger for the truth outlast and suffering.

I plan on holding on to the truths God shares, and has shared for many years, with his people. I will use all of the troubles and difficulties Johannes Kepler endured throughout his life, as well as the great victories, as a great example of what can happen when anyone devotes their life and time to the plans God has and not the sorrows we may feel. Kepler showed who he worshiped by his actions and I want to do so as well with my actions every day.

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