

Constrained (Margaret Shalm Funeral)

Personal remarks & illustration ...

Erwin McManus, a pastor from Los Angeles, was in a board meeting at a well-known Christian University when the counseling department enthusiastically presented a plan for serving missionary personnel around the world. They were going to provide access to counseling and mental health services to all those working overseas. McManus knew he should remain silent, but finally he just couldn't help himself. Before he knew it, he blurted out, "Don't do it. Please don't do it." The other board members looked at him in total confusion as he explained.

"Don't go around the world and make our missionaries 'mentally healthy.' You'll ruin everything. You'll totally mess up the cause of Christ. Let's say you have a husband and wife and three kids and they believe God has called them to an obscure city in central Asia. Suddenly they find themselves in the middle of millions of people who don't speak a word of English, and they don't speak a word of any tribal dialect. They are in the middle of hostile religious forces, and their funds are severely limited. But each morning they wake up excited and confident that somehow they're going to bring that entire city to faith in Jesus Christ. If you go and make them 'normal,' they'll be on a plane back home the very next day!"

Acts 15:26 Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To the entire Shalm family – a “dynasty” in missionary work – THANKS!

Margaret Shalm loved to travel and GO, and her world was wide throughout her life. She knew people from basically every continent on the globe, and she was loved by everyone who knew her. Her influence on her sons and their families alone would have been enough to impact cities and nations for the gospel, but it didn't stop there. Today, there are literally thousands of people who have been touched by a preacher, a missionary, an evangelist, or a gospel worker who was first impacted by the testimony, the ministry, or the prayer life of Margaret Shalm.

But the last few years were difficult for Sis. Shalm. **2002** brought heart surgery, and her many friends rallied around her until she was back on her feet. **2003** brought a difficult but necessary move from the home on Smythe Street that she had shared for so many years with George during their ministry in Fredericton (I still remember those yard sales!). **2004** brought the dreaded diagnosis of cancer into her life, and she faced it head on as her body grew weaker. Then **2005** brought literal confinement, first to her home and then to a 3' x 7' hospital bed.

Sis. Shalm was demoted from traveling around the world to laying basically immobile on a mattress; her classy poise and tasteful style in clothes was reduced to a pair of pajamas; her fierce independence was diminished to others taking care of her basic needs; her hearty laugh eventually shrank to just a brave little grin. But as her outer world continued to shrivel, her faith in God just grew stronger. She faced her imminent death with a calm confidence and strong faith that anyone would envy. She hated to leave us, but she was anticipating seeing Jesus – and her beloved George.

Very often, the Lord drops a verse of Scripture in my heart almost immediately when I hear about the passing of someone I am privileged to pastor. This past Friday morning was no exception. This time, the verse involves a unique word that occurs just 10X in the New Testament.

The word in Greek is SUNECHO, and it means “to hold” – as in situations beyond our control that press in on us.

- It is used to describe those who are afflicted with great sickness in Matthew 4:24 and Luke 4:38.
- It is used to describe those who are plagued by paralyzing fear in Luke 8:37.
- It is used to describe the men who violently pressed their hands to their ears in Acts 7:57 rather than listen to the testimony of Stephen.
- It is used to describe Paul's desperate but vain attempts to persuade the Jews in the city of Corinth in Acts 18:5.
- It is used to describe the suffocating crowds that pressed in on Jesus in Luke 8:45, the day He healed the woman with the issue of blood.
- It is used to describe a city locked down under siege by enemy armies in Luke 19:43.
- It is used as a synonym for “arrest” in Luke 22:63, the night Jesus was taken by his enemies in the dark hours of His betrayal.

The word is normally used in the negative sense in the New Testament, until this curious verse from the pen of Paul:

2 Corinthians 5:14 For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:

In this verse, the word still means “held, pressed, arrested, afflicted, compressed, preoccupied, or kept in” – but (can you believe it?) the sense here is POSITIVE, for it is the love of God that holds us and will not let go – even through great trials!

It is impossible for me to consider my dear missionary friend Margaret Shalm and not remember the words and life of this other great missionary, the Apostle Paul.

Paul had always wanted to go to Rome to preach the gospel; however, he expected to go as a PREACHER, not a PRISONER. But life doesn't always give us what we expect!

STORY: illegal arrest in the temple in Jerusalem; prisoner in Caesarea for two years; appealed to Caesar; shipwreck on way to Rome; three months of waiting on Island of Malta; under house arrest in Rome

Paul knows that the Lord has allowed this situation, and he is still content in the middle of it! Several times (Ephesians 3:1, 4:1; 2 Timothy 1:8; Philemon 1, 9) he describes himself as “the prisoner of Jesus Christ” – his jail term has come through the hand of the Lord, not through the will of Rome! In Ephesians 6:20, he calls himself “an ambassador in bonds” and in Colossians 4:18 you can almost hear the wistful loneliness in his voice when he writes, “Remember my bonds.” But he never complains!

You might think that Paul's constant imprisonment was a depressing thing for him. It certainly could have been. To the human spirit, there is nothing worse than bonds. Bonds alter your perception of how powerful, intelligent and good you are; they make you feel helpless, dependent and conscious of your weaknesses.

- In his first epistle (Galatians 1:1), Paul introduced himself as “**Paul, an apostle**”
- After some suffering (1 Corinthians 15:9), he said that he was “**the least of the apostles**”
- After more suffering (Ephesians 3:8), he felt that he was “**less than the least of all saints**”
- After years in prison (1 Timothy 1:15), Paul declared “Christ Jesus came into the world to save **sinners; of whom I am chief**”

Do you see what was happening in Paul's life? It was the same thing that happened over the last few months in Sis. Shalm's life. Paul kept getting smaller and Jesus kept getting bigger. He decreased, Jesus increased.

John 3:30 He must increase, but I must decrease.

There wasn't very much left of Margaret by the time she left this world, but there was a whole lot of Jesus. Even as her life got smaller, her Lord got bigger. Scriptures like this one became exceedingly precious:

Psalms 23:4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Matthew 18:20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

It is a common misconception among Christians that trials prevent effective work for the Lord, and that the slightest difficulty in circumstances or drop in privileges is reason enough to simply quit trying. Paul proved from his experience that this is simply not true, for while he was imprisoned in Rome he produced some of his best epistles, he preached and prayed, witnessed and worshipped while chained to an unbelieving Roman guard.

Philippians 4:11 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

Paul's description of himself as “an ambassador in bonds” could apply to most of God's servants. We all have constraints of some kind, whether they be bonds of physical affliction, shackles of circumstance, or the fetters of a fiery trial. **The question is, will we still continue to trust God even when we don't understand the bonds?** Sis. Shalm did!

Here is what Paul – and Margaret Shalm – knew beyond doubt ...

2 Timothy 2:9 Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; **but the word of God is not bound.**

Her prayers and influence went around the world – from a hospital bed!

Acts 20:24 But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

The love of Christ constrained Margaret Shalm; she literally gave her life, her family and her possessions to reaching others with the gospel. She never lost that intensity. One of her favorite songs was “I Have Hope” ...

Lamentations 3:21-23 This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

Psalms 34:19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.

There is one final time that Paul uses the word SUNECHO in the NT ...

Philippians 1:23 For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:

(It's so hard to leave you behind, but it's so hard not to want to go!)

Several years ago, an old missionary couple who had been working in Africa for years were returning to New York to retire. They had no pension; their health was broken; they were defeated, discouraged, and afraid. They discovered they were booked on the same ship as President Teddy Roosevelt, who was returning from one of his big-game hunting expeditions.

No one paid any attention to them. They watched the fanfare that accompanied the President's entourage, with passengers trying to catch a glimpse of the great man. As the ship moved across the ocean, the old missionary said to his wife, "This is wrong. Why should we have given our lives in faithful service for God in Africa all these many years and have no one care a thing about us? Here this man comes back from a hunting trip and everybody makes much over him, but nobody gives two hoots about us." "Dear, you shouldn't feel that way", his wife said. He replied, "I can't help it; it doesn't seem right."

When the ship docked in New York, a band was waiting to greet the President. The mayor and other dignitaries were there. The papers were full of the President's arrival. No one noticed this missionary couple. They slipped off the ship and found a cheap flat on the East Side, hoping the next day to see what they could do to make a living in the city. That night the man's spirit broke. He said to his wife, "I can't take this; God is not treating us fairly." His wife replied, "Why don't you go in the bedroom and tell that to the Lord?"

A short time later he came out from the bedroom, but now his face was completely different. His wife asked, "Dear, what happened?" "The Lord settled it with me," he said. "I told Him how bitter I was that the President should receive this tremendous homecoming, when no one met us as we returned home. And when I finished, it seemed as though the Lord put His hand on my shoulder and simply said ... but, you're not home yet!"