Afflictions-Suffering-Quotes, Devotionals, Illustrations

Affliction and suffering are a certainty in the life of a follower of Christ. In fact in Philippians 1:29 describes suffering as a "gift of grace!" As an aside it is clear that **trials** in the believer's life are intimately related to afflictions and sufferings so there is some overlap in the quotes and illustrations on this page between those three topics.

Here are just a few of the passages that speak of afflictions and sufferings in the life of those who belong to Christ

> Psalm 119:67+ Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word.
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> Psalm 119:71+ It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes.
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> Job 5:17 “Behold, how happy is the man whom God reproves, So do not despise the discipline of the Almighty.
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> Peter explains that disciples of Christ "have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps...and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously." (1 Peter 2:21, 23+)
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> John writes "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." (1 John 3:16)
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> Luke writes that the apostles "went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name." (Acts 5:41+)
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> Jesus speaking of Paul said "I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake." (Acts 9:16+)
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> And all believers are called to "Be imitators of (Paul), just as (He) also (was) of Christ. (1 Cor 11:1+) (See The Holy Spirit-Walking Like Jesus Walked!)
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> John writes "the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked." (1 John 2:6+)
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> Paul wrote "and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." (Ro 8:17-18+)
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> Speaking to the saints at Corinth Paul wrote " For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort." (2 Cor 1:5-7+)
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> Writing to the saints at Rome Paul declared "Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." (Ro 5:1-5+)
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> Writing to the saints at Thessalonica Paul said "This ("perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure" - 2 Th 1:4+) is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering." (2 Thes 1:5+)
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> In recording one of God's promises, Paul wrote " For to you it has been granted (charizomai from charis ~ "a gift of grace"!) for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake (Php 1:29+)
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> In Paul's last letter he exhorted Timothy and by way of application all believers - Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God....Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus..... And indeed, all who desire to

live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (2 Ti 1:8+, 2 Ti 2:3+, 2 Ti 3:12+)

The writer of Hebrews assures us that Jesus is there when we suffer writing "For since He Himself was tempted (tested) in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted (tested)." (Hebrews 2:18+)

Peter wrote a great deal about suffering - "For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God....But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED....For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.....Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.....but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God.....Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right....But resist him (devil 1 Pe 5:8), firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. (1 Peter 2:19-20+, 1Pe 3:14, 17+, 1 Peter 4:1+, 1Pe 13-16+, 1 Peter 4:19+, 1 Peter 5:9-10+)

In the Revelation John wrote to the church at Smyrna " 10 'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." (Rev 2:10+)

Indeed after being stoned in Lystra for the Gospel Paul declared "Through many tribulations (**thlipsis**) we must enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22+)

> Commenting on Acts 14:22 **Spurgeon** writes that "It is ordained of old that the cross of trouble should be engraved on every vessel of mercy, as the royal mark whereby the King's vessels of honour are distinguished. But although tribulation is thus the path of God's children, they have the comfort of knowing that their Master has traversed it before them; they have his presence and sympathy to cheer them, his grace to support them, and his example to teach them how to endure; and when they reach "the kingdom," it will more than make amends for the "much tribulation" through which they passed to enter it." (Morning and evening: Daily readings: Morning, March 8)

One of my favorite quotes regarding afflictions, suffering and trials is from Warren Wiersbe

When God puts His own people into the furnace, He keeps His eye on the clock and His hand on the thermostat. He knows how long and how much. (If we rebel, He may have to reset the clock; but if we submit, He will not permit us to suffer one minute too long. The important thing is that we learn the lesson He wants to teach us and that we bring glory to Him alone.) We may question why He does it to begin with, or why He doesn't turn down the heat or even turn it off; but our questions are only evidences of unbelief. (Job 23:10-note) is the answer: "But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come come forth as gold" (NKJV). Gold does not fear the fire. The furnace can only make the gold purer and brighter." (Borrow a copy of Be patient : Waiting on God in difficult times) (Here are two songs about Job - A Man Named Job and Though He Slay Me)

> A dark hour makes Jesus bright.
> --Robert Murray M'Cheyne

Gold is tested by fire
Man is tested by adversity

"The refiner is never very far from the mouth of the furnace
when his gold is in the fire."
-- C H Spurgeon

Related Resources:

- See commentary on Hebrews 12:5-11
- See commentary on 1 Peter 1:6-7
- The Refiner's Fire
- See commentary on James 1:2ff
- Why? Seeing God in our Pain
- Out of the Ashes
- What does the Bible say about suffering?
- Why do so many people have to experience terrible suffering before death?
- Why Would A Good God Allow Suffering? Finding goodness in trouble

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Dear tried and tested, suffering saint, beloved of God (1Jn 3:1+, 1Th 1:4+) consider praying this song to your loving Father...

Refiner's Fire

Purify my heart
Let me be as gold
And precious silver
Purify my heart
Let me be as gold
Pure gold
Refiner's fire
My heart's one desire
Is to be holy
Set apart for you Lord
I choose to be holy
Set apart for you my master
Ready to do your will

Purify my heart
Cleanse me from within
And make me holy
Purify my heart
Cleanse me from my sin
Deep within
Refiner's fire
My heart's one desire
Is to be holy
Set apart for you Lord
I choose to be holy
Set apart for you my master
Ready to do your will

Refiner's fire
My heart's one desire
Is to be holy
Set apart for you Lord
I choose to be holy
Set apart for you my master
Ready to do your will
And I am ready to do your will
Make me ready to do your will

NEW TESTAMENT WORDS
RELATED TO AFFLICTIONS/SUFFERINGS

THLIPSIS - Tribulation (2347) (**thlipsis** from **thlibo** = to crush, press together, squash, hem in, compress, squeeze in turn derived from **thláo** = to break) originally expressed sheer, physical pressure on a man. Thlipsis is a strong term which does not refer to minor inconveniences, but to real hardships.

Medically **thlipsis** was used of the pulse (pressure). It is a pressing together as of grapes. It conveys the idea of being squeezed or placed under pressure or crushed beneath a weight. When, according to the ancient law of England, those who willfully refused to plead guilty, had heavy weights placed on their breasts, and were pressed and crushed to death, this was literally **thlipsis**. The iron cage was **stenochoria** (see below). ***Thlipsis*** thus refers not to mild discomfort but to great difficulty.

> **Thlipsis** - 43 verses - Matt. 13:21; Matt. 24:9; Matt. 24:21; Matt. 24:29; Mk. 4:17; Mk. 13:19; Mk. 13:24; Jn. 16:21; Jn. 16:33; Acts 7:10; Acts 7:11; Acts 11:19; Acts 14:22; Acts 20:23; Rom. 2:9; Rom. 5:3; Rom. 8:35; Rom. 12:12; 1 Co. 7:28; 2 Co. 1:4; 2 Co. 1:8; 2 Co. 2:4; 2 Co. 4:17; 2 Co. 6:4; 2 Co. 7:4; 2 Co. 8:2; 2 Co. 8:13; Eph. 3:13; Phil. 1:17; Phil. 4:14; Col. 1:24; 1 Thess. 1:6; 1 Thess. 3:3; 1 Thess. 3:7; 2 Thess. 1:4; 2 Thess. 1:6; Heb. 10:33; Jas. 1:27; Rev. 1:9; Rev. 2:9; Rev. 2:10; Rev. 2:22; Rev. 7:14
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> **Thlipsis in Septuagint-** Gen. 35:3; Gen. 42:21; Exod. 4:31; Deut. 4:29; Deut. 28:53; Deut. 28:55; Deut. 28:57; Deut. 31:17; Jdg. 10:14; 1 Sam. 1:6; 1 Sam. 10:19; 1 Sam. 24:19; 1 Sam. 26:24; 2 Sam. 4:9; 2 Sam. 22:19; 1 Ki. 1:29; 1 Ki. 22:27; 2 Ki. 13:4; 2 Ki. 19:3; 2 Chr. 15:6; 2 Chr. 18:26; 2 Chr. 20:9; Neh. 9:27; Neh. 9:37; Est. 1:1; Est. 4:17; Est. 8:12; Job 15:24; Ps. 4:1; Ps. 9:9; Ps. 10:1; Ps. 20:1; Ps. 22:11; Ps. 25:17; Ps. 25:22; Ps. 32:7; Ps. 34:6; Ps. 34:17; Ps. 34:19; Ps. 37:39; Ps. 44:24; Ps. 46:1; Ps. 50:15; Ps. 54:7; Ps. 55:3; Ps. 59:16; Ps. 60:11; Ps. 66:11; Ps. 66:14; Ps. 71:20; Ps. 77:2; Ps. 78:49; Ps. 81:7; Ps. 86:7; Ps. 91:15; Ps. 107:39; Ps. 108:12; Ps. 116:3; Ps. 118:5; Ps. 119:143; Ps. 138:7; Ps. 142:2; Ps. 143:11; Prov. 1:27; Prov. 21:23; Prov. 24:10; Isa. 8:22; Isa. 10:3; Isa. 10:26; Isa. 26:16; Isa. 28:10; Isa. 28:13; Isa. 30:6; Isa. 30:20; Isa. 33:2; Isa. 37:3; Isa. 57:13; Isa. 63:9; Isa. 65:16; Jer. 6:24; Jer. 10:18; Jer. 11:16; Jer. 15:11; Jer. 50:43; Ezek. 12:18; Ezek. 18:18; Dan. 12:1; Hos. 5:15; Hos. 7:12; Obad. 1:12; Obad. 1:14; Jon. 2:2; Mic. 2:12; Nah. 1:7; Nah. 1:9; Nah. 2:1; Hab. 3:16; Zeph. 1:15; Zech. 8:10;

Morris rightly notes that "No one likes troubles of this kind, but they may be seen as difficulties to be overcome, as ways of opening up new possibilities. One who sees them in this light glories in them (Ibid)

Martin Luther wrote that "Whatever virtues tribulation finds us in, it develops more fully. If anyone is carnal, weak, blind, wicked, irascible, haughty, and so forth, tribulation will make him more carnal, weak, blind, wicked and irritable. On the other hand, if one is spiritual, strong, wise, pious, gentle and humble, he will become more spiritual, powerful, wise, pious, gentle and humble."

John MacArthur writes that "**Thlipsis** (tribulations) has the underlying meaning of being under pressure and was used of squeezing olives in a press in order to extract the oil and of squeezing grapes to extract the juice… In Scripture the word **thlipsis** is perhaps most often used of outward difficulties, but it is also used of emotional stress." (See Romans Commentary)

Figuratively **thlipsis** pictures one being "crushed" by intense pressure, difficult circumstances, suffering or trouble pressing upon them from without. Thus persecution, affliction, distress, opposition or tribulation, all press hard on one's soul. **Thlipsis** does not refer to mild discomfort but to great difficulty. In Scripture the **thlipsis** is most often used of outward difficulties, but it is also used of emotional stress and sorrows which "weighs down" a man's spirit like the sorrows and burden his heart. **Thlipsis** then includes the disappointments which can "crush the life" out of the one who is afflicted.

The English word "**tribulation**" is derived from the Latin word **tribulum** (literally a thing with teeth that tears), which was a heavy piece of timber with spikes in it, used for threshing the corn or grain. The **tribulum** was drawn over the grain and it separated the wheat from the chaff. As believers experience the "tribulum" of tribulations, and depend on God's grace, the trials purify us and rid us of the chaff.

Lawrence Richards writes that "**thlipsis** is used as a technical theological term for the **Great Tribulation** (see note below) of the end times. **Thlipsis** is also used in a non-theological, figurative way to convey the idea of the great emotional and spiritual stress that can be caused by external or internal pressures. Of the fifty-five uses of this root (thlipsis and thlibo) in the NT, fifty-three are **figurative** and correspond closely to the Hebrew words **tsarah** and **tsar**." (Borrow Expository Dictionary of Bible Words)

Marvin Vincent has the following note explaining that the root **thlibo** means "to press or squeeze. Tribulation is perhaps as accurate a rendering as is possible, being derived from tribulum, the threshing-roller of the Romans. In both the idea of pressure is dominant, though thlipsis does not convey the idea of separation (as of corn from husk) which is implied in tribulatio." (Vincent, M. R. Word studies in the New Testament Vol. 1, Page 3-80)

Vine writes that **thlipsis** "primarily means a pressure, that which weighs down the spirit. For the believer who is enabled to endure it, the affliction becomes a means of triumph… "afflictions" are the various forms of injury to body and mind suffered by those who

are persecuted… Thlipsis is the suffering which results from what presses hard on the soul." (Collected writings of W. E. Vine)

The **International Standard Bible Encyclopedia** adds that "**thlipsis** derives from roots that graphically portray the process in which a person is first limited, then walled in, and gradually squeezed until something must give. Sometimes the tribulation is seen as a punishment for sin (see note Romans 2:9), sometimes as a part of life to be expected and tolerated (Ro 12:2+) (Bromiley, G. W. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised. Wm. B. Eerdmans)

The picture of **thlipsis** is of one being squeezed. When you squeeze something, what comes out is what is on he inside. What comes out of you when you are experiencing "thlipsis"? Remember believers have Christ in them the hope of glory and therefore have the potential to exude the fragrance of His life when crushed.

William Barclay writes that **thlipsis** "In ordinary Greek always describes **actual physical pressure on a man**… Sometimes there falls upon a man's spirit the burden and the mystery of this unintelligible world. In the early years of Christianity the man who chose to become a Christian chose to face trouble. There might well come to him abandonment by his own family, hostility from his heathen neighbours, and persecution from the official powers. Samuel Rutherford wrote to one of his friends, "God has called you to Christ's side, and the wind is now in Christ's face in this land: and seeing ye are with him ye cannot expect the lee-side or the sunny side of the brae." It is always a costly thing to be a real Christian, for there can be no Christianity without its cross. (Ed note: i.e., thlipsis)" (Daily Study on 2 Corinthians 1 Commentary) (Bolding added)

In other notes **Barclay** writes that "**thlipsis** which originally expressed sheer, physical pressure on a man. There are things which weigh down a man's spirit like the sorrows which are a burden on his heart and the disappointments which are like to crush the life out of him… Originally **thlipsis** meant simply pressure and could, for instance, describe the pressure of a great stone on a man's body. At first it was used quite literally, but in the New Testament it has come to describe that pressure of events which is persecution. (Ibid)

Tribulation is the normal lot of Christians and is a fact repeatedly emphasized in the NT. In the first NT use, **Jesus** taught that **thlipsis** (affliction) comes because of the Word of God but that holding fast to the Word in the face of tribulation proves one to be genuine. "And the one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the Word, and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when **affliction** (**thlipsis**) or persecution arises **because of the word**, immediately he falls away." (Matthew 13:20-21)

From this discussion of **thlipsis**, it is clear that **tribulation** is the path believers are destined to tread in this present life. And remember that **thlipsis** in the NT does not refer to the normal pressures of every day life, but to the inevitable troubles that come upon all followers of Christ because of their relationship with Him and His Word. Jesus was very clear that "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. "But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me." (John 15:19-21)

In summary, the truth you need to remember regarding **tribulations (thlipsis)** is that

1. tribulations have a purpose
2. one's response to tribulations demonstrates the reality of one's faith
3. temporal tribulations produce inestimable future, eternal glory
4. God will avenge tribulations you have endured for His Name and Word

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THLIBO - Suffer affliction (2346) (**thlibo** from tribos = wear away, rub, break in pieces; NIDNTT says thlibo is from the root thlao = squash, crush) (See study of related word thlipsis) literally means to press, squeeze, crush, squash, hem in and then to be narrow. Thlibo used literally pictures putting pressure upon or pressing in upon or pressing hard upon a person as when when Jesus was forced to get in the boat to keep from crowding Him (Mark 3:9). While some uses of thlibo refers to physical affliction, other uses are figurative and refer to emotional or spiritual affliction (e.g., "conflicts without, fears within" in 2Cor 7:5) And so in Paul's letters thlibo usually refers to the hardships he and his fellow workers experienced during their missionary journeys (2Cor 1:6; 4:8; 7:5; 1Th 3:4; 2Th 1:1-7). Marvin Vincent explains that the root thlibo means "to press or squeeze. Tribulation is perhaps as accurate a rendering as is possible, being derived from tribulum, the threshing-roller of the Romans. In both the idea of pressure is dominant, though thlipsis does not convey the idea of separation (as of corn from husk) which is implied in tribulatio." (Vincent, M. R. Word studies in the New Testament Vol. 1, Page 3-80) To reiterate, the idea of thlibo is to press together, compress, squash, hem in. Figuratively thlibo refers to sufferings that arise from the pressure of circumstances or from the antagonism of persons and so means to afflict, to harass, to discomfit, to oppress, to vex. Philosophically, this word group (thlibo, thlipsis) is often used to describe life's afflictions. Thus thlibo means to trouble, to afflict, to distress, to oppress, to cause trouble. In the passive voice it means to be

the recipient of such trouble, to experience hardship or be afflicted (2Cor 1:6).

The basic idea of thlibo is 'severe constriction','narrowing' or 'pressing together' and thlibo is the verb used to describe the pressing of grapes to extract juice and make wine! What do pressing circumstances "extract" out of me… what kind of wine… sweet or bitter? God's trials are not meant to make us bitter but better! Similar notions underlie the Latin word tribulum (a threshing sledge), which is the source of the English word tribulation. Most biblical references to tribulation are to sufferings endured by the people of God. The central and dominating factor in the biblical understanding of such suffering however is the mystery of the the suffering Servant, the Messiah (Col 1:24-note; Rev 1:9-note; cf. Isa 63:9). All the tribulations of the children of God are to be viewed in the light of the Savior's Suffering.

Here are some phrases in which thlibo is found in ancient secular Greek writings: "tight quarters", "the city is jammed full with a multitude", "a tight place and full of bad snakes", "distressed by someone's scheming", "distressed soul". The figurative used in classic Greek use is common, both in the sense of oppress (external) and of grieve, vex (internal). Epictetus speaks of the *pressures of life* (ta thlibonta) which the true Stoic must and can overcome (Dissertationes, 4, 1, 45; cf. 1, 25, 17 and 28; 2, 27, 2 f.; 3, 13, 8).

Why are trials and afflictions necessary? Such experiences endured in God's power and for His glory prepare us to be able to comfort others also. In addition, trials serve to purify our faith, Peter exhorting his readers "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. (See **notes** 1Peter 4:12; 4:13) (**Comment**: Remember beloved that your trials are not sent to break you irreparably [although brokenness is often a "benefit" of trials - see Psalm 51:17 - Spurgeon's Note] but to reveal what is really inside and ultimately to conform you to the image of God's Son.)

Jon Courson commenting on afflictions wrote that…

> **A. W. Tozer** was right when he said, "Before God can use a person greatly, He must allow that person to be hurt deeply." This isn't because God is mean, but because He knows we can't comfort others unless we've been comforted ourselves.
>
> Trials not only enable us to comfort others, but they purify our own faith. That's why Peter said, "Don't think it strange concerning the fiery trials that come your way. They are sent to test and purify your faith" (1Peter 4:12-note).
>
> What happens when you are in a fiery trial? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego will tell you: Jesus shows up (Da 3:25). That's why James tells us to count it all joy when we fall into trials (Jas 1:2-note).
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> "Whoopee! A trial! How wonderful!" Crazy? Not really, because if you have this mind-set in your difficult times, you will see Jesus in a way that will blow your mind, warm your heart, and bless your socks off!
>
> Trials don't make or break us, gang. They simply reveal what's inside. When I'm driving and hit a bump, the tea that splashes out of the mug on my dashboard was there before the bump. The bump doesn't put the tea in. It just shows what was already in the cup. That's what trials do. (Jon Courson's Application Commentary: NT. Nelson. 2004)

Grant Richison comments on **affliction** writing that…

> This pressure from without hems the believer in a situation like a mountain gorge. God puts conditions in our narrow way and presses us into distressing problems.
>
> > We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair… (2Corinthians 4:8)
>
> God puts us into a squeeze play. Compression produces gold and compression produces character in the Christian life.
>
> Christian suffering is inseparable from the Christian life. Christians face different kinds of affliction: persecution (1Th 1:6-note), imprisonment (Acts 20:23), derision (He 10:33-note), poverty (2Corinthians 5:13), sickness (Re 2:22-note), and inner distress (Php 1:17-note; 2Corinthians 7:5).
>
> Tribulation tests whether we will spread the gospel at the risk of life or limb and whether we will claim the promises of God (2Corinthians 1:8, 9). Faith accepts God's discipline and patiently endures trial (2Thessalonians 1:4). A Christian has the assurance that the coming glory far overshadows present suffering (2Corinthians 4:17, 18). God's promises give us hope in the face of suffering.

The church popular is the church polluted.

The church persecuted is the church purified.

Afflictions and trials are the norm in the "victorious" Christian life, but we can rest assured that the Refiner's hand is always on the thermostat. Trials for believers prove the reality of our faith, and weed out those who are mere professors (1Pe 1:7-note), enable us to comfort and encourage others who are going through trials (2Co 1:4), develop endurance in our character (Rom. 5:3), make us more zealous in spreading the gospel (Acts 4:29; 5:27, 28, 29: 8:3, 4) and help to remove the dross from our lives (Job 23:10-note;)

Discipline is often closely related to affliction.

Discipline (3809) paideia from **paideuo** = instruct in turn from **país** = child) means to provide instruction, with the intent of forming proper habits of behavior, of providing guidance for responsible living, of rearing and guiding a child toward maturity. **Paideia** is a broad term, signifying whatever parents and teachers do to train, correct, cultivate, and educate children in order to help them develop and mature as they ought. **Paideia** has particular reference to child-training, carried out with both firmness and gentleness as needed in each particular case. The Greek word group is reflected in several English terms such as pedagogy, the science of teaching, while a pedagogue (Greek paidagogos, one in charge of boys, custodian, tutor) is a schoolteacher, or literally one who leads children. In a negative sense a pedant is one who overrates his educational importance. **Paideia** originally referred to instruction of children and evolved to mean chastening because all effectual instruction for the sinful children of men includes and implies chastening. correction. A father should guide and correct his child. As a ship's captain keeps his vessel on course, so a father is charged to keep his son on course.

Detzler writes that paideia (and paideuo)...moves from education to correction and finally embraces the concept of punishment. This idea is quite unpopular, because many Christians confuse salvation with sentimentality. God does not tolerate sin among Christians, but rather disciplines them as a good father would (Heb. 12:5-11). In fact, if a Christian is comfortable and undisciplined, there is cause to doubt that he truly is a believer. (Detzler, Wayne E: New Testament Words in Today's Language. Victor. 1986)

Webster says that the English word **discipline** describes training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character

Thayer says **paideia** describes...the whole training and education of children (which relates to the cultivation of mind and morals, and employs for this purpose now commands and admonitions, now reproof and punishment). In Greek writings from Aeschylus on, it includes also the care and training of the body. Whatever in adults also cultivates the soul, especially by correcting mistakes and curbing the passions hence, a. instruction which aims at the increase of virtue: b. according to Biblical usage chastisement, chastening (of the evils with which God visits men for their amendment)

TDNT writes that...**Paideia** from **pais** a child. In classical usage, that which is applied to train and educate a child. So Plato: Education (**Paideia**) is the constraining and directing of youth toward that right reason which the law affirms, and which the experience of the best of our elders has agreed to be truly right (“Laws,” 659). (Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Eerdmans)

Vincent adds that...In scriptural usage another meaning has come into it and its kindred verb paideuein, which recognizes the necessity of correction or chastisement to thorough discipline. So Lev 26:18; Ps 6:1; Isa. 53:5; Heb 12:5-8. In Acts 7:22 **paideuo** occurs in the original classical sense: “Moses was instructed (epaideuthe) in all the wisdom,” etc. The term here covers all the agencies which contribute to moral and spiritual training. (Vincent, M. R. Word Studies in the New Testament 3:404).

John MacArthur has a helpful note on **paideia** writing that it refers to...

> the systematic training of children. It includes the idea of correction for wrongdoing, as seen in the well–known proverb,
>
> > He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently (Pr. 13:24).
>
> In the several uses of the term in Hebrews 12:5-11, the translators of the Authorized Version rendered it “chastening,” which is clearly the emphasis of that context. Paul’s meaning here is expressed even more fully, however, in the proverb
>
> > “Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it (Pr 22:6).
>
> Discipline has to do with the overall training of children, including punishment.

Susannah Wesley, the mother of John and Charles Wesley, raised seventeen children and had these words to say about raising children:

> "The parent who studies to subdue [self–will] in his child works together with God in the renewing and saving a soul. The parent who indulges it does the devil's work, makes religion impracticable, salvation unattainable, and does all that in him lies to damn his child, soul and body forever" (cited in The Journal of John Wesley [Chicago: Moody, n.d.], p. 106).

Paideia is used 50 times in the **Septuagint (LXX)** Deut. 11:2; Ezra 7:26; Job 20:3; 37:13; Ps. 2:12; 18:35; 50:17; 119:66; Pr. 1:2, 7f; 3:11; 4:1, 13; 5:12; 6:23; 8:10; 10:17; 12:1; 13:18; 15:5, 10, 32f; 16:17, 22; 17:8; 19:20, 27; 22:15; 23:12; 24:32; 25:1; Isa. 26:16; 50:4f; 53:5; Jer. 2:30; 5:3; 7:27; 17:23; 30:14; 32:33; 35:13; Ezek. 13:9; Dan. 1:20; Amos 3:7; Hab. 1:12; Zeph. 3:2, 7

Hebrew words related to affliction

Distress (verb) (06887) tsarar means to be narrow, to be cramped, to be straitened, to be constricted, to hem or be hemmed in. Tsarar may refer to anything which is confining and in the context of Isa 8:16 it means to bind up, to tie or wrap up so as to safeguard from tampering (cf binding up in Pr 26:8, Ex 12:34, Joshua 9:4). This action refers most likely to the scribes binding the document into a sealed scroll for safekeeping. In Hos 13:12, **tsarar** figuratively depicts the record of Israel's sins being written down and permanently bound in a sealed scroll for safekeeping, thus assuring the that their sin would be retained.

Figuratively **tsarar** means to oppress or harass and thus to be hostile or be an adversary or enemy, the best known use being Ps 23:5 "in the presence of my **enemies** (**tsarar**)." (Ex 23:22; Nu 10:9; 25:17-18 Esther 3:10; 8:1; 9:10, 24; Ps 6:7; 7:4, 6; 8:2; 10:5; 23:5; 31:11; 42:10; 69:19; 74:4, 23; 129:1-2; 143:12; Isa 11:13; Amos 5:12).

Figuratively **tsarar** also means to feel hard pressed and thus to be **distressed** (13/36 uses), troubled, oppressed, cramped, anxious or worried. In contrast, that which is wide-open or broad gives a picture of freedom and/or deliverance. In Job 20:22 the idea is to be in narrow straits, to be in a bind, connoting the idea of pressure, stress or trouble.

To "bind up" a city is to besiege it (Dt 28:52, two uses, first use in Lxx **extribo** = to cause removal by irritation, to rub out, the second use in Lxx = **thlipsis** = press upon, make narrow, cause something to be constricted - the following passages translate **tsarar** in the Lxx with **thlipsis** - De 28:52; Jdg 10:9; 1Sa 28:15; 30:6; 2Sa 13:2; 1Kgs 8:37; 2Chr 6:28; 22; 33:12; Neh 9:27; Job 20:22; Ps 31:9; 69:17; La 1:20).

Tsarar means to keep out, shut out a person (2Sa 20:3).

Tsarar indicates something being cramped, shortened, cut back as in Job 18:7, where the trouble has hemmed him in, so that he cannot walk with full, vigorous steps as he had before.

John Hartley - ārar may refer to anything which is narrow or confining. A place may become too small for people to inhabit when they increase in number (2Kgs 6:1; Isa 49:19f.). Isaiah speaks of a blanket too narrow to wrap oneself (Isa 28:20). It also refers to being restricted (2Sa 20:3), and it may signify "to hamper something" (Pr 4:12). ārar means "to bind up" or "to tie." It is used for binding a stone in a sling (Pr 26:8), tying a kneading trough to a mantle (Ex 12:34), or mending an old torn wine skin (Josh 9:4, Pual). God is said to bind up the water in thick clouds (Job 26:8; cf. Hos 4:19). Hosea describes the sin of Ephraim as bound up; i.e. it was kept in store for the time of judgment (Hos 13:12). Since the people reject his message, Isaiah exhorts his disciples to preserve his teaching among themselves saying, "Bind up the testimony, seal the teaching among my disciples" (Hos 8:16). It further is used for preserving one's life (1Sa 25:29); "the life of my Lord will be bound in the bundle of the living." It also may refer to the strong emotional response that one experiences when pressed externally by enemies or internally by wrong decisions or passions; e.g. Jacob's confrontation with Esau (Ge 32:7). Israel was frequently placed in sore distress by her enemies during the period of the Judges (Jdg 2:15; 10:9). Even a great leader may be distressed by reaction to controversial decisions (cf. 1Sa 30:6). One can be obsessed with a passion and be so bound up emotionally that he becomes ill; e.g. (Amnon's distorted desire for his sister (2Sa 13:2). One curse for violating the covenant states that enemies will besiege Israel's towns (Dt 28:52). Similarly God brings distress on any who have sinned (Zeph 1:17; Jer 10:18). Some under such distress become more faithless, as did Ahaz (2Chr 28:22), while others humble themselves and seek Yahweh, as did Manasseh (2Chr 33:12; cf. Dt 4:30f.).

> **Tsarar** - 37x in 36v - afflicted(1), besiege(3), besieges(1), bind(1), binds(1), bound(3), bring distress(1), cause them distress(1), cramped(2), **distress**(6), **distressed**(6), frustrated(1), impeded(1), mended(1), oppressed(1), shortened(1), shut(1), small(1), trouble(1), wrapped(1), wraps(2). Ge 32:7; Ex 12:34; Deut 28:52; Josh 9:4; Jdg 2:15; 10:9; 11:7; 1 Sam 25:29; 28:15; 30:6; 2 Sam 1:26; 13:2; 20:3; 1Kgs 8:37; 1Chr 21:13; 2Chr 6:28; 28:20, 22; 33:12; Neh 9:27; Job 18:7; 20:22; 26:8; Ps 31:9; 69:17; Pr 4:12; 26:8; 30:4; Isa

8:16; 28:20; 49:19; Jer 10:18; Lam 1:20; Hos 4:19; 13:12; Zeph 1:17

Note there are > 20 more uses of this Strong's number 06887 in the KJV, primarily in those passages translated as **adversary or enemy** - Ex 23:22; Nu 10:9; 25:17-18; 33:55; Esther 3:10; 8:1; 9:10, 24; Ps 6:7; 7:4, 6; 8:2; 10:5; 23:5; 31:11; 42:10; 69:19; 74:4, 23; 129:1-2; 143:12; Isa 11:13; Amos 5:12)

Distress (trouble) (noun) (06869) **tsarah** from **tsar** = literally a narrow, confining space, figuratively dire straits from which escape is difficult) is a noun which depicts tightness (figuratively trouble) and implies great strain or stress psychologically and spiritually (as in Ge 42:21). The root word deals with harassment and torment engendered by an enemy and thus speaks of adversity, affliction, tribulation, trouble. Tsarah is used to describe the cursing to Israel for disobedience (Dt 31:17, 21 = troubles).

The **Lxx** translates **tsarah** with **thlipsis** which literally means a pressing together and figuratively speaks of suffering brought on by outside circumstances. **Thlipsis** is a strong term which does not refer to minor inconveniences, but to real hardships. Medically **thlipsis** was used of the pulse (pressure). Thlipsis described the pressing together of grapes. It conveyed the idea of being squeezed or placed under pressure or crushed beneath a weight. When, according to the ancient law of England, those who willfully refused to plead guilty, had heavy weights placed on their breasts, and were pressed and crushed to death, this was literally thlipsis. Thlipsis thus refers not to mild discomfort but to great difficulty. That is the "fruit" these men will reap for rejecting God's gracious gesture of stretching out His hand (Pr 1:24).

One of most famous uses is the "**time of Jacob's distress**" (Jer 30:7KJV = the time of Jacob's trouble; Lxx = thlipsis). Both Jeremiah and Daniel are alluding to the last 3.5 yrs of Daniel's 70th week which will be for Israel (and the world) a "time of distress (trouble; Lxx = thlipsis)"

Jonah calling out from stomach of fish Jonah 2:2. God is to be cried out to in distress (2Chr 20:9, cp Neh 9:27). God delivers His people from **tsarah** (Ge 35:3; 1Sa 10:19, 26:24, 2Sa 4:9, 1Ki 1:29, Job 5:19; Ps. 9:9).

Gilbrant - Meaning "affliction" or "distress," tsārāh is used seventy times in Scripture. The noun is used to denote the general distress of numerous different peoples. In Genesis, after hearing of the rape of his daughter Dinah and of his sons' retaliation against Shechem, Jacob builds an altar to God at Bethel thanking God for delivering him from his distress. The Psalms characterize God as a help and refuge during times of distress, and Isaiah consistently prophesied that distress would come upon Israel. In each case, it is clear that the focus of tsārāh rests on the events that are occurring in these individuals' lives as distress or afflictions. (Complete Biblical Library)

Tsarah - 71x70v - affliction(1), anguish(2), distress(34), distresses(1), trouble(22), troubles(11). Gen. 35:3; Gen. 42:21; Deut. 31:17; Deut. 31:21; Jdg. 10:14; 1 Sam. 10:19; 1 Sam. 26:24; 2 Sam. 4:9; 1 Ki. 1:29; 2 Ki. 19:3; 2 Chr. 15:6; 2 Chr. 20:9; Neh. 9:27; Neh. 9:37; Job 5:19; Job 27:9; Ps. 9:9; Ps. 10:1; Ps. 20:1; Ps. 22:11; Ps. 25:17; Ps. 25:22; Ps. 31:7; Ps. 34:6; Ps. 34:17; Ps. 37:39; Ps. 46:1; Ps. 50:15; Ps. 54:7; Ps. 71:20; Ps. 77:2; Ps. 78:49; Ps. 81:7; Ps. 86:7; Ps. 91:15; Ps. 116:3; Ps. 120:1; Ps. 138:7; Ps. 142:2; Ps. 143:11; Prov. 1:27; Prov. 11:8; Prov. 12:13; Prov. 21:23; Prov. 24:10; Prov. 25:19; Isa. 8:22; Isa. 30:6; Isa. 33:2; Isa. 37:3; Isa. 46:7; Isa. 63:9; Isa. 65:16; Jer. 4:31; Jer. 6:24; Jer. 14:8; Jer. 15:11; Jer. 16:19; Jer. 30:7; Jer. 49:24; Jer. 50:43; Dan. 12:1; Obad. 1:12; Obad. 1:14; Jon. 2:2; Nah. 1:7; Nah. 1:9; Hab. 3:16; Zeph. 1:15; Zech. 10:11

QUOTES ON AFFLICTIONS

Gilt looks very much like gold but it will not stand the fire. It curls and disappears. Oh! to be solid gold through and through. If so, you need not mind the trials of to-day, since they will only prepare you for the glories eternal at the appearing of Jesus Christ. - Spurgeon in 1 Peter 1- Commentary

Some of life's greatest lessons are learned in the school of affliction.

A gem cannot be polished without friction, nor a man perfected without adversity.

Someone once wisely said that adversity introduces a man to himself or herself.

God uses the afflictions as His sheep dogs to drive us back to the fold.

Adversity does not make us frail; it only shows us how frail we are.

We are all at school, and our great Teacher writes many a bright lesson on the black-board of affliction. --Spurgeon

Affliction is a stern schoolmaster, but a good instructor. - Spurgeon

Afflictions are sent for this end, to bring us to the throne of grace, to teach us to pray and to make the word of God's grace precious to us… Many are taught with the briars and thorns of affliction that would not learn otherwise. - Matthew Henry

This school of trial best discloses the hidden vileness of the heart and the vast riches of a Saviour's grace. - Henry Law

Christian people are generally at their best when they are in the furnace of affliction and being persecuted and tried… Trials and tribulations are very good for us in that they help us to know ourselves better than we knew ourselves before. - D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Faith is a furnace grace. 'Though it is tried with fire, it is found unto praise and honor' (1 Peter 1:7). Faith, like Hercules' club, beats down all oppositions. By faith we resist the devil (1Peter 5:9). By faith we resist unto blood (Heb 11:34). -Thomas Watson in Beatitudes

Oh, when we are journeying through the murky night and the dark woods of affliction and sorrow, it is something to find here and there a spray broken, or a leafy stem bent down with the tread of His foot and the brush of His hand as He passed; and to remember that the path He trod He has hallowed, and thus to find lingering fragrance and hidden strength in the remembrance of Him as "in all points tempted like as we are," bearing grief for us, bearing grief with us, bearing grief like us. - Alexander Maclaren

A believer may pass through much affliction, and yet secure very little blessing from it all. Abiding in Christ is the secret of securing all that the Father meant the chastisement to bring us. - Andrew Murray

Pour not on the comforts you want, but upon the mercies you have. Look rather at God's ending in afflicting, than to the measure and degree of your affliction.- Christopher Love

Vanity of science. Knowledge of physical science will not console me for ignorance of morality in time of affliction, but knowledge of morality will always console me for ignorance of physical science. - Blaise Pascal

The Lord gets his best soldiers out of the highlands of affliction. - Charles Spurgeon

As sure as God puts His children in the furnace of affliction, He will be with them in it. - Charles Spurgeon

It seems to me that doubt is worse than trial. I had sooner suffer any affliction than be left to question the gospel or my own interest in it.-Charles Spurgeon

Most of the grand truths of God have to be learned by trouble; they must be burned into us with the hot iron of affliction, otherwise we shall not truly receive them. - Charles Spurgeon

Providence is wonderfully intricate. Ah! You want always to see through Providence, do you not? You never will, I assure you. You have not eyes good enough. You want to see what good that affliction was to you; you must believe it. You want to see how it can bring good to the soul; you may be enabled in a little time; but you cannot see it now; you must believe it. Honor God by trusting Him. - Charles Spurgeon

The furnace of affliction is a good place for you, Christian; it benefits you; it helps you to become more like Christ, and it is fitting you for heaven. - Charles Spurgeon

Those who dive in the sea of affliction bring up rare pearls. - Charles Spurgeon

We can stand affliction better than we can prosperity, for in prosperity we forget God. - D.L. Moody

A great many people wonder why it was that Christ did not come at once to Martha and Mary, whom He loved, whenever He heard of their affliction. It was to try them, and it is the same with His dealings toward us. If He seems not to come to us in our affliction, it is only to test us. - D.L. Moody

Affliction is then come to the height and its complete measure, when the sinner is made sensible of his own weakness, and doth see there is no help for him, save in God alone. - David Dickson

Afflictions that have been predicted, and that take place in accordance with this prediction, serve to strengthen faith. - William Hendricksen

Nothing unites people as sharing the same affliction. - Jack Hyles

As every mercy is a drop obtained from the ocean of God's goodness, so every affliction is a drachm weighed out in the wisdom of

God's providence. - James H. Aughey

Hope is the last lingering light of the human heart. It shines when every other is put out. Extinguish it, and the gloom of affliction becomes the very blackness of darkness - cheerless and impenetrable. - James H. Aughey

It is not affliction itself, but affliction rightly borne, that does us good. - James H. Aughey

Afflictions, they are but our Father's goldsmiths who are working to add pearls to our crowns.--Thomas Brooks

In times of affliction we commonly meet with the sweetest experiences of the love of God. - John Bunyan

A measure of trials is necessary for the exercise and manifestation of your graces; to give you a more convincing proof of the truth and sweetness of the promises made to a time of affliction; to mortify the body of sin; and to wean you more effectually from the world. - John Newton

If we suffer persecution and affliction in a right manner, we attain a larger measure of conformity to Christ, by a due improvement of one of these occasions, than we could have done merely by imitating his mercy, in abundance of good works. - John Wesley

The readiest way which God takes to draw a man to himself is, to afflict him in that he loves most, and with good reason; and to cause this affliction to arise from some good action done with a single eye; because nothing can more clearly show him the emptiness of what is most lovely and desirable in the world. - John Wesley

If the sun of God's countenance shine upon me, I may well be content to be wet with the rain of affliction. - Joseph Hall

(Commenting on Mt 13:20-21) The shallow earth yields a shallow profession; there is no depth to the root. But when his profession is tested by the scorching sun of tribulation or persecution, he decides it isn't worth it and abandons any profession of subjection to Christ. - William MacDonald

Why should I ever resist any delay or disapointment, any affliction or oppression or humiliation - when I know God will use it in my life to make me like Jesus and to prepare me for heaven? - Kay Arthur

The agony of man's affliction is often necessary to put him into the right mood to face the fundamental things of life. The Psalmist says. Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I have kept Thy Word. - Oswald Chambers

God's way of answering the Christian's prayer for more patience, experience, hope and love often is to put him into the furnace of affliction. - Richard Cecil

Faith makes all evil good to us, and all good better; unbelief makes all good evil, and all evil worse. Faith laughs at the shaking of the spear; unbelief trembles at the shaking of a leaf, unbelief starves the soul; faith finds food in famine, and a table in the wilderness. In the greatest danger, faith says, "I have a great God." When outward strength is broken, faith rests on the promises. In the midst of sorrow, faith draws the sting out of every trouble, and takes out the bitterness from every affliction. - Richard Cecil

We often learn more under the rod that strikes us, than under the staff that comforts us. - Stephen Charnock

Fiery trials make golden Christians. - William Dyer

Eminent virtue always shows brightest in the fire. Pure gold shows its purity chiefly in the furnace. - Jonathan Edwards

Poverty and affliction take away the fuel that feeds pride. - Richard Sibbes

Affliction brings out graces that cannot be seen in a time of health. It is the treading of the grapes that brings out the sweet juices of the vine; so it is affliction that draws forth submission, weanedness from the world, and complete rest in God. Use afflictions while you have them. - Robert Murray McCheyne

Affliction shows the power of Christ's blood, when it gives peace in an hour of trouble, when it can make happy in sickness, poverty, persecution and death. Do not be surprised if you suffer, but glorify God.- Robert Murray McCheyne

When old companions, old lusts, and sins crowd in upon you, and when you feel that you are ready to sink, what can save you, sinking sinner? This alone - I have a high priest in heaven, and he can support in the hour of affliction. This alone can give you peace - I have a high priest in heaven. When you are dying - when friends can do you no good - when sins rise up like specters around your bed - what can give you peace? This - "I have a high priest in heaven" - Robert Murray McCheyne

When I am in the cellar of affliction, I look for the Lord's choicest wines. - Samuel Rutherford

Affliction doth not rise out of the dust or come to men by chance; but it is the Lord that sends it, and we should own and reverence

His hand in it. - Thomas Boston

God intermixeth mercy with affliction: he steeps his sword of justice in the oil of mercy; there was no night so dark, but Israel had a pillar of fire in it; there is no condition so dismal, but we may see a pillar of fire to give light. If the body be in pain, conscience is in peace, --there is mercy: affliction is for the prevention of sin, --there is mercy. In the ark there was a rod and a pot of manna, the emblem of a Christian's condition, mercy interlined with judgment. - Thomas Watson

Affliction may be lasting, but it is not everlasting. Affliction was a sting, but withal a wing: sorrow shall soon fly away. - Thomas Watson

Oh, it is sad for a poor Christian to stand at the door of the promise, in the dark night of affliction, afraid to draw the latch, whereas he should then come boldly for shelter as a child into his father's house. - William Gurnall

There are some things good but not pleasant, as sorrow and affliction. Sin is pleasant, but unprofitable; and sorrow is profitable, but unpleasant. As waters are purest when they are in motion, so saints are generally holiest when in affliction. - William Secker

Afflictions are light when compared with what we really deserve. They are light when compared with the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. But perhaps their real lightness is best seen by comparing them with the weight of glory which is awaiting us. - A.W. Pink

What fools are we, then, to frown upon our afflictions! These, how crabbed soever, are our best friends. They are not indeed for our pleasure, they are for our profit. - Abraham Wright

Sanctified afflictions are like so many artificers working on a pious man's crown to make it more bright and massive.- Ralph Cudworth

The sorest afflictions never appear intolerable, but when we see them in the wrong light; when we see them in the hand of God, who dispenses them; when we know that it is our loving Father who abases and distresses us; our sufferings will lose their bitterness and become even a matter of consolation. - Brother Lawrence

Some people feel guilty about their anxieties and regard them as a defect of faith but they are afflictions, not sins. Like all afflictions, they are, if we can so take them, our share in the passion of Christ. - C.S. Lewis

God often puts us in situations that are too much for us so that we will learn that no situation is too much for Him. - Erwin Lutzer

You will not get leave to steal quietly to heaven without a conflict and a cross. - Samuel Rutherford

Every cross is a message from God and intended to do us good in the end. - J C Ryle

There is no attribute of God more comforting to His children than the doctrine of Divine Sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe troubles, they believe that Sovereignty hath ordained their afflictions, that Sovereignty overrules them, and that Sovereignty will sanctify them all. - Charles Spurgeon

I have learned, dear friends, that at the Red Sea of affliction we see most of the right arm of God. - Spurgeon

"How can I look to be at home in the enemy's country, joyful while in exile, or comfortable in a wilderness? This is not my rest. This is the place of the furnace and the forge and the hammer. - Charles Spurgeon

The north wind finds out the cracks in the (wall of the) house. Affliction tests our religion, and lets us see our failures of faith, patience, and temper. Blame not the wind, but the wall. - Spurgeon

Affliction is the shadow of God's wings. Affliction scours the rust from faith. Afflictions are flails to thresh off our husks. - Spurgeon

Be it ours, when we cannot see the face of God, to trust under the shadow of His wings. - Spurgeon

The highest honor that God can confer upon his children is the blood-red crown of martyrdom. The jewels of a Christian are his afflictions. The regalia of the kings that God has made, are their troubles, their sorrows, and their griefs. Griefs exalt us, and troubles lift us. - Charles Spurgeon

Afflictions by God's grace set our graces going. - Spurgeon

Afflictions are but the shadows of God's wings. - George Macdonald

Let your heart feel for the afflictions and distress of everyone, and let your hand give in proportion to your purse. - George Washington

Afflictions are but conductors to immortal life and glory. - James H. Aughey

The wisdom of God appears in afflictions. By these He separates the sin which He hates, from the son whom He loves. By these thorns He keeps him from breaking over into Satan's pleasant pastures, which would fatten him indeed, but only to the slaughter. - James H. Aughey

Afflictions make the heart more deep, more experimental, more knowing and profound, and so, more able to hold, to contain, and beat more. - John Bunyan

Trials "are not afflicted by chance, but through the infallible providence of God." - John Calvin

Afflictions have the same use and end to our souls, that frosty weather hath upon those clothes that are laid and bleaching, they alter the hue and make them white. - John Flavel

The more afflictions you have been under, the more assistance you have had for this life of holiness. - John Flavel

Do not be despondent when fighting against the incorporeal enemy, but even in the midst of your afflictions and oppression praise the Lord, Who has found you worthy to suffer for Him, by struggling against the subtlety of the serpent, and to be wounded for Him at every hour; for had you not lived piously, and endeavored to become united to God, the enemy would not have attacked and tormented you. - John of Kronstadt

Labour to grow better under all your afflictions, lest your afflictions grow worse, lest God mingle them with more darkness, bitterness and terror. - John Owen

One of the greatest evidences of God's love to those that love him is, to send them afflictions, with grace to bear them. - John Wesley

Even in the greatest afflictions, we ought to testify to God, that, in receiving them from his hand, we feel pleasure in the midst of the pain, from being afflicted by Him who loves us, and whom we love. - John Wesley

The most generous vine, if not pruned, runs out into many superfluous stems and grows at last weak and fruitless: so doth the best man if he be not cut short in his desires, and pruned with afflictions. - Joseph Hall

There is no enemy can hurt us but by our own hands. Satan could not hurt us, if our own corruption betrayed us not. Afflictions cannot hurt us without our own impatience. Temptations cannot hurt us, without our own yieldance. Death could not hurt us, without the sting of our own sins. Sins could not hurt us, without our own impenitence. - Joseph Hall

The godly man contrarily is afraid of nothing; not of God, because he knows Him his best friend, and will not hurt him; not of Satan, because he cannot hurt him; not of afflictions, because he knows they come from a loving God, and end in his good; not of the creatures, since "the very stones in the field are in league with Him;" not of himself, since his conscience is at peace. - Joseph Hall

No marvel if the worldling escape earthly afflictions. God corrects him not. He is base born and begot. God will not do him the favour to whip him. The world afflicts him not, because it loves him: for each man is indulgent to his own. God uses not the rod where He means to use the Word. The pillory or scourge is for those malefactors that shall escape execution. - Joseph Hall

Extraordinary afflictions are not always the punishment of extraordinary sins, but sometimes the trial of extraordinary graces. Sanctified afflictions are spiritual promotions. - Matthew Henry

These troubles, that lie heavy, never come upon us but when we have need, and never stay any longer than needs must.- Matthew Henry

God's design in afflicting his people is their probation (the act of proving or testing), not their destruction; their advantage, not their ruin. - Matthew Henry

The winter prepares the earth for the spring, so do afflictions sanctified prepare the soul for glory. - Richard Sibbes

Your afflictions may only prove that you are more immediately under the Father's hand. There is no time that the patient is such an object of tender interest to the surgeon, as when he is bleeding beneath his knife. So you may be sure if you are suffering from the hand of a reconciled God, that His eye is all the more bent on you. - Robert Murray McCheyne

God often lays the sum of His amazing providences in very dismal afflictions; as the limner first puts on the dusky colors, on which he intends to draw the portraiture of some illustrious beauty. - Stephen Charnock

Whoever be the instruments of any good to us, of whatever sort, we must look above them, and eye the hand and counsel of God in it, which is the first spring, and be duly thankful to God for it. And whatever evil of crosses or afflictions befalls us, we must look

above the instruments of it to God. - Thomas Boston

Afflictions are but as a dark entry into our Father's house. - Thomas Brooks

What if we have more of the rough file, if we have less rust! Afflictions carry away nothing but the dross of sin. - Thomas Watson

Afflictions add to the saints' glory. The more the diamond is cut, the more it sparkles; the heavier the saints' cross is, the heavier will be their crown. - Thomas Watson

Knowing the truth concerning the deep workings of the evil spirit helps the individual not only to overcome sins but to eliminate unnecessary afflictions as well. - Watchman Nee

Few are made better by prosperity, whom afflictions make worse. - William Gurnall

Praise God for the hammer, the file and the furnace! --Samuel Rutherford

God promises no immunity from crosses. God in His perfect wisdom knows that there are special times when we need to go through trials. But oh, the glories to follow, for as Spurgeon aptly puts it "There are no crown-wearers in heaven that were not cross-bearers here below." Richard Sibbes

Afflictions when sanctified make us grateful for mercies which aforetime we treated with indifference. We sat for half-an-hour in a calf's shed the other day, quite grateful for the shelter from the driving rain, yet at no other time would we have entered such a hovel. Discontented persons need a course of the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, to cure them of the wretched habit of murmuring. Even things which we loathed before, we shall learn to prize when in troublous circumstances. We are no lovers of lizards, and yet at Pont St. Martin, in the Val D'Aosta, where the mosquitoes, flies, and insects of all sorts drove us nearly to distraction, we prized the little green fellows, and felt quite an attachment to them as they darted out their tongues and devoured our worrying enemies. Sweet are the uses of adversity, and this among them—that it brings into proper estimation mercies aforetime lightly esteemed. - Spurgeon

What sorrow, troubles, and afflictions attend all the followers of the Lamb! - William Tiptaft

Guzik notes that tribulation is the Christian's lot in this life much as "A runner must be stressed to gain endurance. Sailors must go to sea. Soldiers go to battle. For the Christian, tribulation is just part of our Christian life. We should not desire or hope for a tribulation-free Christian life, especially because God uses tribulation wonderfully in our life, God knows how much tribulation we can take, and He carefully measures the tribulation we face and those who are not Christians face tribulation also." (Romans 5)

Spurgeon adds that "A Christian man should be willing to be tried; he should be pleased to let his religion be put to the test. ‘There,’ says he, ‘hammer away if you like.’ Do you want to be carried to heaven on a feather bed?"

S Lewis Johnson explains that "Knowledge is the ground of faith in Paul's mind, and in this case it is the knowledge of a spiritual process. Tribulation introduces a pattern of growth in the believer's life that concludes with the possession of what we had before it began and an approved character. Tribulations really strengthen us, contrary to what one might think."

Ironside writes that "ere we reach the glory we must tread the sands of the wilderness. This is the place of testing. Here we learn the infinite resources of our wonderful God. So we are enabled to glory in tribulations, contrary though these may be to all that the natural man rejoices in. Tribulation is the divinely appointed flail to separate the wheat from the chaff. In suffering and sorrow we learn our own nothingness and the greatness of the power that has undertaken to carry us through. These are lessons we could never learn in Heaven. (Romans Commentary)

Thomas Watson quotes on affliction...

- Consider that there is a necessity for affliction. 1Peter 1:6. It is needful that some things are kept in brine. Afflictions are needful to keep us humble. Often there is no other way to have the heart low—but by being brought low. When king Manasseh "was in affliction, he humbled himself greatly." Corrections are corrosives to eat out the proud flesh. "Remembering my misery,the wormwood and the gall; my soul is humbled in me." Lamentations 3:19, 20. Shall not we quietly submit, and say, "Lord, I see there is a necessity for it. May Your will be done!" (Lords Prayer)
- God's children may sometimes be under sore afflictions. They have no charter of exemption from trouble, in this life. While the wicked are kept in sugar—the godly are often kept in brine.
- And, indeed, how could God's power be seen in bringing them out of trouble—if He did not sometimes bring them into it? How could God wipe away the tears from their eyes in heaven—if on earth they shed none?
- Doubtless, God sees there is need that His children should be sometimes in the house of bondage. "If need be, you are in heaviness." 1 Peter 1:6. The body sometimes needs a bitter portion—more than a sweet one.

- "You refined us like silver. You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs." Psalm 66:10, 11
- Why does God bring His people into an afflicted state? God gives affliction—to purge our corruption. The eye, though a tender part—yet when infected, we put sharp medicines into it, to purge out the disease. Just so, though the people of God are dear to Him as the apple of His eye—yet, when corruption begins to grow in them, He will apply the sharp medicine of affliction—to purge out the disease.
- Though Christ died to take away the curse from us, yet not to take away the cross from us.
- Affliction is God's flail to beat off our husks. Affliction is a means God uses to purge out sloth, luxury, pride, and love of the world. God's furnace is not to consume—but to refine. God gives us more affliction—that we may have less sin!
- God also gives affliction to increase our graces. Grace thrives most in the iron furnace. Grace in the saints is often as fire hidden in the embers; affliction is the bellows to blow it up into a flame!
- God sanctifies all our afflictions. They shall not be destructive punishments—but medicines! They shall corrode and eat out the venom of sin! They shall polish and refine our grace! The more the diamond is cut—the more it sparkles. The more God afflicts us—the more our graces cast a sparkling luster!
- The stones which are cut out for a building, are first hewn and squared. The godly are called "living stones." 1Peter 2:5. God hews and polishes them by affliction, that they may be fit for the heavenly building.

QUOTES ON SUFFERING

Behind a Frowning Providence - Why Christians Suffer by John A Murray

See short study on "The Refiner's Fire"

God will not permit any troubles to come upon us, unless He has a specific plan by which great blessing can come out of the difficulty. -- Peter Marshall

Afflictions are but the shadow of God's wings. -- George MacDonald

Fire is the test of gold, adversity of strong men.

Our great Teacher writes many a bright lesson on the blackboard of affliction.

As in nature and in the arts, so in grace: it is rough treatment that gives souls, as well as stones, their luster. The more the diamond is cut, the brighter it sparkles, and in what seems hard dealings God has no end in view but to perfect our graces. -- Thomas Guthrie

When I am in the cellar of affliction, I look for the Lord’s choicest wines. -- Samuel Rutherford

If God has made your cup sweet, drink it with grace. If he has made it bitter; drink it in communion with him. -- Oswald Chambers

Some hearts, like evening primroses, open more beautifully in the shadows of life.

Affliction is the school of faith and trial is the school of trust.

The Lord gets his best soldiers out of the highlands of affliction. -- C H Spurgeon

Stars may be seen from the bottom of a deep well, when they cannot be discerned from the top of a mountain. So are many things learned in adversity which the prosperous man dreams not of. --C. H. Spurgeon

Nothing can render affliction so insupportable as the load of sin. Would you then be fitted for afflictions? Be sure to get the burden of your sins laid aside, and then what affliction soever you may meet with will be very easy to you. -- John Bunyan.

It takes the grindstone to sharpen the axe. -- Vance Havner

Though poor in this world's goods, though grieving the loss of loved ones, though suffering pain of body, though harassed by sin and Satan, though hated and persecuted by worldlings, whatever be the case and lot of the Christian, it is both his privilege and duty to rejoice in the Lord. - A.W. Pink

The tears of Christ are the pity of God. The gentleness of Jesus is the long-suffering of God. The tenderness of Jesus is the love of God. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father. - Alexander MacLaren

Christ wrought out His perfect obedience as a man, through temptation, and by suffering. - Alexander MacLaren

Duty does not consist in suffering everything, but in suffering everything for duty. Sometimes, indeed, it is our duty not to suffer. - Alexandre Vinet

There is no mystery in heaven or earth so great as this - a suffering Deity, an almighty Saviour nailed to a Cross.- Sameul M. Zwemer

God had one son on earth without sin, but never one without suffering. - Augustine

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

In Gods case, if He had said in the infinite sovereignty of His absolute will, "I will have no substitute, but each man shall suffer for himself, he who sinneth shall die," none could have murmured. It was grace, and only grace which led the divine mind to say, "I will accept of a substitute. There shall be a vicarious suffering; and My vengeance shall be content, and My mercy shall be gratified." - Charles Spurgeon

When you suffer and lose, that does not mean you are being disobedient to God. In fact, it might mean you're right in the centre of His will. The path of obedience is often marked by times of suffering and loss. - Chuck Swindoll

Joy is love exalted; peace is love in repose; long-suffering is love enduring; gentleness is love in society; goodness is love in action; faith is love on the battlefield; meekness is love in school; and temperance is love in training. - D.L. Moody

To endure the cross is not tragedy; it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ. - Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Time is lost when we have not lived a full human life, time unenriched by experience, creative endeavor, enjoyment, and suffering. - Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The work of spirituality is to recognize where we are - the particular circumstances of our lives - to recognize grace and say, "Do you suppose God wants to be with me in a way that does not involve changing my spouse or getting rid of my spouse or my kids, but in changing me, and doing something in my life that maybe I could never experience without this pain and this suffering? - Edmund Clowney

Our vision is so limited we can hardly imagine a love that does not show itself in protection from suffering… The love of God did not protect His own Son… He will not necessarily protect us - not from anything it takes to make us like His Son. A lot of hammering and chiseling and purifying by fire will have to go into the process. - Elisabeth Elliot

We want to avoid suffering, death, sin, ashes. But we live in a world crushed and broken and torn, a world God Himself visited to redeem. We receive his poured-out life, and being allowed the high privilege of suffering with Him, may then pour ourselves out for others. - Elisabeth Elliot

Be indifferent to emotion. If it is there, be thankful; if it is absent, go on doing the will of God, reckoning on Him, speaking well of Him behind His back, and, above all, giving no signs of what you are suffering, lest you be a stumbling block to others. - F.B. Meyer

The church for too long has followed Casper, the friendly ghost instead of seeking the fire of the Holy Spirit. We have turned limp at the thought of our own cross; we faint when we think of suffering or sacrifice. Beloved, it is time to embrace the fire of God's Presence. It is the fire that purifies our sacrifice. - Francis Frangipane

Peace does not dwell in outward things, but within the soul; we may preserve it in the midst of the bitterest pain, if our will remains firm and submissive. Peace in this life springs from acquiescence to, not in an exemption from, suffering. - Francois Fenelon

Romantic love is blind to everything except what is lovable and lovely, but Christ's love sees us with terrible clarity and sees us whole. Christ's love so wishes our joy that it is ruthless against everything in us that diminishes our joy. The worst sentence Love can pass is that we behold the suffering which Love has endured for our sake, and that is also our acquittal. The justice and mercy of the judge are ultimately one. - Frederick Buechner

"Out, damned spot!" That is the true cry of human nature. That stain cannot be removed without blood, and that which is infinitely more, and deeper, and profounder, and more terrible than blood, of which blood is but the symbol - the suffering of Deity. - G. Campbell Morgan

If you and I have taken the place of owning Christ as Lord, we shall be sure to have a little bit of suffering. If He is Lord over me, I must do everything to please Him, and I shall be sure to displease friends. I must give up this thing and not do the other, cost what it may, if He is Master. - G.V. Wigram

Have you known fellowship in suffering with Christ? known deep waters? You will have to go down to them. If you do not get sorrow in fellowship with Christ, you will get it in discipline. - G.V. Wigram

All the world is full of suffering. It is also full of overcoming. - Helen Keller

Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved. - Helen Keller

Suffering is part of the divine idea. - Henry Ward Beecher

The whole extent of hell, the present suffering, the bitter recollection of the past, the hopeless prospect of the future, will never be thoroughly known except by those who go there. - J.C. Ryle

Suffering is the strongest and closest fellowship in the world. - Jack Hyles

The chief secret of comfort lies in not suffering trifles to vex us, and in prudently cultivating an undergrowth of small pleasures, since very few great ones are let on long leases. - James H. Aughey

This is one of the sad conditions of life, that experience is not transmissible. No man will learn from the suffering of another; he must suffer himself. - James H. Aughey

You must submit to supreme suffering in order to discover the completion of joy. - John Calvin

The Scriptures teach us the best way of living, the noblest way of suffering and the most comfortable way of dying. - John Flavel

The Lord afflicts us at times; but it is always a thousand times less than we deserve, and much less than many of our fellow-creatures are suffering around us. Let us therefore pray for grace to be humble, thankful, and patient. - John Newton

Newton describes these trials as like "medicines which our gracious and wise Physician prescribes, because we need them; and He proportions the frequency and weight of them to what the case requires."

Preachers must have a passion to produce people whose satisfaction in God is so solid, so deep, and so unshakable that suffering and death - losing everything this world can give - will not make people murmur or curse God, but rest in the promise, "In His presence is fullness of joy, at His right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11). - John Piper

This is God's universal purpose for all Christian suffering: more contentment in God and less satisfaction in the world. - John Piper

A Christian's freedom from anxiety is not due to some guaranteed freedom from trouble, but to the folly of worry and especially to the confidence that God is our Father, that even permitted suffering is within the orbit of His care. - John Stott

These then are the marks of the ideal Church - love, suffering, holiness, sound doctrine, genuineness, evangelism and humility. They are what Christ desires to find in His churches as He walks among them. - John Stott

Humility alone unites patience with love; without which it is impossible to draw profit from suffering; or indeed, to avoid complaint, especially when we think we have given no occasion for what men make us suffer. - John Wesley

The greatest good suffering can do for me is to increase my capacity for God. - Joni Eareckson Tada

Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals. - Martin Luther King, Jr.

We all know people who have been made much meaner and more irritable and more intolerable to live with by suffering: it is not right to say that all suffering perfects. It only perfects one type of person - the one who accepts the call of God in Christ Jesus. - Oswald Chambers

Suffering is the heritage of the bad, of the penitent, and of the Son of God. Each one ends in the cross. The

bad thief is crucified, the penitent thief is crucified, and the Son of God is crucified. By these signs we know the widespread heritage of suffering.- Oswald Chambers

To choose to suffer means that there is something wrong; to choose God's will even if it means suffering is a very different thing. No healthy saint ever chooses suffering; he chooses God's will, as Jesus did, whether it means suffering or not. - Oswald Chambers

Often, we endure trials seeking God's deliverance from them. Suffering is painful for us to endure or to see those we love endure. While our instinct is to flee trials, remember that even in the midst of suffering, God's will is being done. - Paul Chappell

Simply put, I believe suffering is compatible with Gods love if it is medicinal, remedial, and necessary; that is, if we are sick and desperately need a cure. And that's our situation, Jesus said "It is not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick … I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." - Peter Kreeft

Any discussion of how pain and suffering fit into God's scheme ultimately leads back to the cross. - Philip Yancey

Power, no matter how well-intentioned, tends to cause suffering. Love, being vulnerable, absorbs it. In a point of convergence on a hill called Calvary, God renounced the one for the sake of the other. - Philip Yancey

We are puzzled and bewildered whenever we see suffering in this world because we have become accustomed to the mercy and the long-suffering of God. Amazing grace is no longer amazing to us. - R. C. Sproul

Your afflictions may only prove that you are more immediately under the Father's hand. There is no time that the patient is such an object of tender interest to the surgeon, as when he is bleeding beneath his knife. So you may be sure if you are suffering from the hand of a reconciled God, that His eye is all the more bent on you. - Robert Murray McCheyne

The purest joy in the world is joy in Christ Jesus. When the Spirit is poured down, His people get very near and clear views of the Lord Jesus. They eat His flesh and drink His blood. They come to a personal cleaving to the Lord. They taste that the Lord is gracious. His blood and righteousness appear infinitely perfect, full, and free to their souls. They sit under His shadow with great delight. They rest in the cleft of the rock. Their defense is the munitions of rocks. They lean on the Beloved. They find infinite strength in Him for the use of their soul - grace for grace - all they can need in any hour of trial and suffering to the very end. - Robert Murray McCheyne

Should pain and suffering, sorrow, and grief, rise up like clouds and overshadow for a time the Sun of Righteousness and hide Him from your view, do not be dismayed, for in the end this cloud of woe will descend in showers of blessing on your head, and the Sun of Righteousness rise upon you to set no more for ever. - Sadhu Sundar Singh

A doctor once told me of a child who could not breathe when it was born. In order to make it breathe doctor gave it a slight blow… he was really doing the kindest thing possible. As with newborn children the lungs are contracted, so are our spiritual lungs. But through suffering God strikes us in love. Then our lungs expand and we can breathe and pray. - Sadhu Sundar Singh

During an earthquake it sometimes happens that fresh springs break out in dry places which water and quicken the land so that plants can grow. In the same way the shattering experiences of suffering can cause the living water to well up in a human heart. - Sadhu Sundar Singh

One day after a long journey, I rested in front of a house. Suddenly a sparrow came towards me blown helplessly by a strong wind. From another direction, an eagle dived to catch the panicky sparrow. Threatened from different directions, the sparrow flew into my lap. By choice, it would not normally do that. However, the little bird was seeking for a refuge from a great danger. Likewise, the violent winds of suffering and trouble blow us into the Lord's protective hands. - Sadhu Sundar Singh

God hasn't completely eliminated suffering from anyone's life. Jesus, who is both God and the perfect, sinless Man, nevertheless suffered as a man on this earth. - T.A. McMahon

For those who have not yet turned to the Lord for His salvation, their condition of suffering often creates compelling opportunities for them to cry out to God for His help. To those who do so in truth, He shows His mercy for their temporal plight and provides grace for their new life in Christ and their eternal destiny. - T.A. McMahon

For the believer in Jesus, every trial of suffering is an opportunity to grow in the faith, to grow in our relationship with the Lord, and to see Him work in our lives in a uniquely personal way that demonstrates His compassion, His comfort, His tender mercies, His loving kindnesses, His grace, and His endless love. Only God knows what each of us needs to experience and learn in order to be "conformed to the image of his Son". - T.A. McMahon

Oh, is the Lord Jesus Christ a believer's life? Why, then, let no believer be disquieted, nor overwhelmed and dejected, for any loss or for any sorrow or suffering that he meets with for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake. Oh, what should a man then do for Jesus Christ, who is his life! - Thomas Brooks

Suffering times are sealing times. The primitive Christians found them so, and the suffering saints in Mary's days found them so. When the furnace is seven times hotter than ordinary, the Spirit of the Lord comes and seals up a man's pardon in his bosom, his peace with God, and his title to heaven. Blessed Bradford looked upon his sufferings as an evidence to him that he was on the right way to heaven. - Thomas Brooks

We are suffering today from a species of Christianity as dry as dust, as cold as ice, as pale as a corpse, and as dead as King Tut. We are suffering not from a lack of correct heads but of consumed hearts. - Vance Havner

Beloved, have you ever thought that someday you will not have anything to try you, or anyone to vex you again? There will be no opportunity in heaven to learn or to show the spirit of patience, forbearance, and longsuffering. If you are to practice these things, it must be now. - A.B. Simpson

Afflictions are light when compared with what we really deserve. They are light when compared with the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. But perhaps their real lightness is best seen by comparing them with the weight of glory which is awaiting us. - A.W. Pink

We understand and acknowledge that the Resurrection has placed a glorious crown upon all of Christ's sufferings! - A.W. Tozer

If I had not felt certain that every additional trial was ordered by infinite love and mercy, I could not have survived my accumulated sufferings. - Adoniram Judson

… I have now to ask whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world? Whether you can consent to see her departure to a heathen land, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of a missionary life? Whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean; to the fatal influence of the southern climate of India; to every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death? Can you consent to all this, for the sake of perishing immortal souls; for the sake of Zion and the glory of God? Can you consent to all this, in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with a crown of righteousness brightened by the acclamations of praise which shall redound to her Saviour from heathens saved, through her means, from eternal woe and despair? - Adoniram Judson

The Bible says the fruit of the spirit is longsuffering. I'll tell you one thing about fruit: you will never see a fruit factory. Isn't that right? You see a shirt factory, but you see a fruit orchard. You see, there is no fruit without life. You cannot manufacture patience. The fruit of the Spirit is patience. - Adrian Rogers

Sufferings will be sweet and pleasant to us while we are with Him; and the greatest pleasures will be, without Him, a cruel punishment to us. - Brother Lawrence

The sorest afflictions never appear intolerable, but when we see them in the wrong light; when we see them in the hand of God, who dispenses them; when we know that it is our loving Father who abases and distresses us; our sufferings will lose their bitterness and become even a matter of consolation. - Brother Lawrence

The Jews were slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had spoken concerning the sufferings of their Messiah; we are slow of heart to believe all that they have spoken concerning His glory. - C.I. Scofield

We were promised sufferings. They were part of the program. We were even told, 'Blessed are they that mourn.' - C.S. Lewis

Keep your eye simply on Him; let His death, His sufferings, His merits, His glories, His intercession, be fresh upon thy mind; when you wake in the morning look to Him; when thou lie down at night look to Him. Oh! let not your hopes or fears come between thee and Jesus; follow hard after Him, and He will never fail you. - Charles Spurgeon

You may suffer and yet be un-Christlike, but no man can be Christlike and fail to suffer. If you ever, by the grace of God, become a partaker of the divine nature you must also inevitably become a partaker of His sufferings. - Clovis G. Chappell

A Christian is someone who shares the sufferings of God in the world. - Dietrich Bonhoeffer

That cross inmate of your household, who has hitherto made life a burden to you, and who has been the Juggernaut car to crush your soul into the dust, may henceforth be a glorious chariot to carry you to the heights of heavenly patience and long-suffering. - Hannah Whitall Smith

By friendship you mean the greatest love, the greatest usefulness, the most open communication, the noblest sufferings, the severest truth, the heartiest counsel, and the greatest union of minds of which brave men and women are capable. - Jeremy Taylor

If ever you wish to see how great and horrid and evil sin is, measure it in your thoughts, either by the infinite holiness and excellency of God, who is wronged by it; or by the infinite sufferings of Christ, who died to satisfy for it; and then you will have deeper apprehensions of its enormity. - John Flavel

Oh cursed sin! It was you who slew my dear Lord! For your sake He underwent all this! If your vileness had not been so great, His sufferings had not been so many. Cursed sin! You were the knife which stabbed Him! You the sword which pierced Him! - John Flavel

Faith upholds a Christian under all trials, by assuring him that every painful dispensation is under the direction of his Lord; that chastisements are a token of His love; that the season, measure, and continuance of his sufferings, are appointed by Infinite Wisdom, and designed to work for his everlasting good; and that grace and strength shall be afforded him, according to his need. - John Newton

The readiest way to escape from our sufferings is, to be willing they should endure as long as God pleases. - John Wesley

The best we can hope for in this life is a knothole peek at the shining realities ahead. Yet a glimpse is enough. It's enough to convince our hearts that whatever sufferings and sorrows currently assail us aren't worthy of comparison to that which waits over the horizon. - Joni Eareckson Tada

Come, and see the victories of the cross. Christ's wounds are thy healings, His agonies thy repose, His conflicts thy conquests, His groans thy songs, His pains thine ease, His shame thy glory, His death thy life, His sufferings thy salvation. - Matthew Henry

If there be anything that can render the soul calm, dissipate its scruples and dispel its fears, sweeten its sufferings by the anointing of love, impart strength to all its actions, and spread abroad the joy of the Holy Spirit in its countenance and words, it is this simple and childlike repose in the arms of God. - S.D. Gordon

Keep God's covenant in your trials; hold you by His blessed word, and sin not; flee anger, wrath, grudging, envying, fretting; forgive a hundred pence to your fellow-servant, because your Lord hath forgiven you ten thousand talents: for, I assure you by the Lord, your adversaries shall get no advantage against you, except you sin, and offend your Lord, in your sufferings. - Samuel Rutherford

Love is swift, sincere, pious, pleasant, gentle, strong, patient, faithful, prudent, long-suffering, manly and never seeking her own; for whosoever a man seeketh his own, there he falleth from love. - Thomas a Kempis

Our sins are debts that none can pay but Christ. It is not our tears, but His blood; it is not our sighs, but His sufferings, that can testify for our sins. Christ must pay all, or we are prisoners forever. - Thomas Brooks

If thou desirest ease, in the first place take care of the ease of thy mind; for that will make all other sufferings easy. But nothing can support a man whose mind is wounded. - Thomas Fuller

To suggest that the merciful, longsuffering, gracious and loving God of the Bible would invent a dreadful doctrine like Calvinism, which would have us believe it is an act of 'grace' to select only certain people for heaven and, by exclusion, others for hell, comes perilously close to blasphemy. - Tim LaHaye

Bid faith look through the key-hole of the promise, and tell thee what it sees there laid up for him that overcomes; bid it listen and tell thee whether it cannot hear the shout of those crowned saints, as of those that are dividing the spoil, and receiving the reward of all their services and sufferings here on earth. - William Gurnall

We must keep in mind that all God plans and performs here is preparation for what He has in store for us in

heaven. He is preparing us for the life and service yet to come. Nobody yet knows all that is in store for us in heaven, but we do know that life on earth is a school in which God trains us for our future ministry in eternity. This explains the presence of trials in our lives for they are some of God's tools and textbooks in the school of Christian experience. - Warren Wiersbe

If to be feelingly alive to the sufferings of my fellow-creatures is to be a fanatic, I am one of the most incurable fanatics ever permitted to be at large. - William Wilberforce

Africa, your sufferings have been the theme that has arrested and engaged my heart. Your sufferings no tongue can express, no language impart. - William Wilberforce

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These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have**tribulation** (**thlipsis**), but take courage; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) **C H Spurgeon** has the following devotional on this verse…

Art thou asking the reason of this, believer?

Look upward to thy heavenly Father, and behold him pure and holy. Dost thou know that thou art one day to be like Him? Wilt thou easily be conformed to His image? Wilt thou not require much refining in the furnace of affliction to purify thee? (1Pet 1:6, 7- see notes 1Pe1:6; 1:7) Will it be an easy thing to get rid of thy corruptions, and make thee perfect even as thy Father which is in heaven is perfect? (Mt 5:48 - notes)

Next, Christian, turn thine eye downward. Dost thou know what foes thou hast beneath thy feet? Thou wast once a servant of Satan, and no king will willingly lose his subjects. Dost thou think that Satan will let thee alone? No, he will be always at thee, for he "goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." (1Pe 5:8-note) Expect trouble, therefore, Christian, when thou lookest beneath thee.

Then look around thee. Where art thou? Thou art in an enemy's country, a stranger and a sojourner (1Pe 1:1-note; 1Pe 2:11-note). The world is not thy friend. If it be, then thou art not God's friend, for he who is the friend of the world is the enemy of God (Jas 4:4). Be assured that thou shalt find foe-men everywhere. When thou sleepest, think that thou art resting on the battlefield; when thou walkest, suspect an ambush in every hedge. As mosquitoes are said to bite strangers more than natives, so will the trials of earth be sharpest to you.

Lastly, look within thee, into thine own heart and observe what is there. Sin and self are still within (Ro 7:18-note). Ah! if thou hadst no devil to tempt thee, no enemies to fight thee, and no world to ensnare thee, thou wouldst still find in thyself evil enough to be a sore trouble to thee, for "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." (Jeremiah 17:9)

Expect trouble then, but despond not on account of it, for God is with thee to help and to strengthen thee. He hath said, "I will be with thee in trouble; I will deliver thee and honour thee." (Ps 91:15 - see "Heirs of heaven are conscious of a special divine presence in times of severe trial. God is always near in sympathy and in power to help his tried ones. The man honors God, and God honors him. Believers are not delivered or preserved in a way which lowers them, and makes them feel themselves degraded; far from it, the Lord's salvation bestows honour upon those it delivers. God first gives us conquering grace, and then rewards us for it. Spurgeon's Note)

Spurgeon addresses the relationship of **trials** and a believer's **faith** explaining that…

Faith untried may be true faith, but it is sure to be little faith, and it is likely to remain dwarfish so long as it is without trials. Faith never prospers so well as when all things are against her: tempests are her trainers, and lightnings are her illuminators.

When a calm reigns on the sea, spread the sails as you will, the ship moves not to its harbour; for on a slumbering ocean the keel sleeps too. Let the winds rush howling forth, and let the waters lift up themselves, then, though the vessel may rock, and her deck may be washed with waves, and her mast may creak under the pressure of the full and swelling sail, it is then that she makes headway towards her desired haven.

No flowers wear so lovely a blue as those which grow at the foot of the frozen glacier

No stars gleam so brightly as those which glisten in the polar sky

No water tastes so sweet as that which springs amid the desert sand

And no faith is so precious as that which lives and triumphs in adversity.

Tried faith brings experience. You could not have believed your own weakness had you not been compelled to pass through the rivers; and you would never have known God's strength had you not been supported amid the water-floods.

Faith increases in solidity, assurance, and intensity, the more it is exercised with tribulation.

Faith is precious, and its trial is precious too.

Let not this, however, discourage those who are young in faith. You will have trials enough without seeking them: the full portion will be measured out to you in due season. Meanwhile, if you cannot yet claim the result of long experience, thank God for what grace you have; praise Him for that degree of holy confidence whereunto you have attained: walk according to that rule, and you shall yet have more and more of the blessing of God, till your faith shall remove mountains and conquer impossibilities. (Spurgeon, C. H. Morning and evening : Daily readings November 12 AM)

The gem cannot be polished without friction,
nor man perfected without trials.

The touch that heals the broken heart
Is never felt above;
His angels know His blessedness,
His wayworn saints His love.

Day by day and with each passing moment,
Strength I find to meet my trials here;
Trusting in my Father's wise bestowment,
I've no cause for worry or for fear.
—Berg

God takes us into His darkroom to develop our character.

Thomas Watson writing on 1 Peter 1:2 says "True grace will make us willing to suffer for Christ. Grace is like gold: it will abide the fiery trial (1Peter 1:7). And if, upon a serious scrutiny and trial, we find that we have the right jewel, the grace of God in truth (Colossians 1:6), this will be a deathbed cordial. We may, with Simeon, depart in peace, being assured that though we cannot resist death—yet we shall overcome it. (The Beauty of Grace)

C H Spurgeon - "I had," said Latimer, describing the way in which his father trained him as a yeoman's son, "my bows bought me according to my age and strength; as I increased in them so my bows were made bigger and bigger." Thus boys grew into crossbowmen, and by a similar increase in the force of their trials, Christians become veterans in the Lord's host. The affliction which is suitable for a babe in grace would little serve the young man, and even the well-developed man needs severer trials as his strength increases. God, like a wise father, trains us wisely, and as we are able to bear it he makes our service and our suffering more arduous. As boys rejoice to be treated like men, so will we rejoice in our greater tribulations, for here is man's work for us, and by God's help we will not flinch from doing it.

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Our afflictions are like weights, and have a tendency to bow us to the dust, but there is a way of arranging weights by means of wheels and pulleys, so that they will even lift us up. Grace, by its matchless art, has often turned the heaviest of our trials into occasions for heavenly joy. "We glory in tribulations also." We gather honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock.

><>><>><>

When the green leaves bedeck the trees and all is fair, one cannot readily find the birds' nests, but when the winter lays bare the trees, anyone, with half-an-eye, may see them. Thus amid the press of business and prosperity the Christian may scarcely be discerned, his hidden life is concealed amid the thick and throng of the things of earth; but let affliction come, a general sickness, or severe losses in the family, and you shall see the Christian man plainly enough in the gracious patience by which he rises superior to trial. The sick bed reveals the man; the burning house, the sinking ship, the panic on the exchange, all these make manifest the hidden ones. In many a true believer, true piety is like a drum which nobody hears of unless it be beaten.

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Our crosses are not made of iron, though painted sometimes with iron colors; they are formed of nothing heavier than wood. Yet they are not made of pasteboard, and will never be light in themselves, though our Lord can lighten them by his presence. The Papists foolishly worship pieces of wood supposed to be parts of the true cross; but he who has borne the really true cross, and known its sanctifying power, will value every sliver of it, counting his trials to be his treasures, his afflictions argosies of wealth, and his losses his best gains.

><>><>><>

Your affliction quickened your prayers. There is a man trying to write with a quill pen; it will not make anything but a thick stroke; but he takes a knife and cuts fiercely at the quill till it marks admirably. So we have to be cut with the sharp knife of affliction, for only then can the Lord make use of us. See how sharply gardeners trim their vines, they take off every shoot, till the vine looks like a dry stick. There will be no grapes in the spring, if there is not this cutting away in the autumn and winter. God quickens us in our afflictions through His Word. (Barbed Arrows from the Quiver of C. H. Spurgeon)

C H Spurgeon - How different are summer storms from winter ones! In winter they rush over the earth with their violence; and if any poor remnants of foliage or flowers have lingered behind, these are swept along at one gust. Nothing is left but desolation; and long after the rain has ceased, pools of water and mud bear tokens of what has been. But when the clouds have poured out their torrents in summer, when the winds have spent their fury, and the sun breaks forth again in glory, all things seem to rise with renewed loveliness from their refreshing bath. The flowers, glistening with rainbows, smell sweeter than before; the grass seems to have gained another brighter shade of green; and the young plants which had hardly come into sight, have taken, their place among their fellows in the borders, so quickly have they sprung among the showers. The air, too, which may previously have been oppressive, is become clear, and soft, and fresh. Such, too, is the difference when the storms of affliction fall on hearts unrenewed by Christian faith, and on those who abide in Christ. In the former they bring out the dreariness and desolation which may before have been unapparent. The gloom is not relieved by the prospect of any cheering ray to follow it; of any flowers or fruits to show its beneficence. But in the true Christian soul, 'though weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning.' A sweet smile of hope and love follows every tear; and tribulation itself is turned into the chief of blessings.

John MacDuff…

> Now **affliction is a school**, under the blessing of God, to ripen us for an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. And vain as is the common imagination that those who are tried here are saved from all sorrow hereafter, be they united to Christ or not, it is yet a true doctrine, that, as there are degrees of glory, so the most severely-afflicted ones, who are also believers in Jesus, will shine the brightest in that glory—not so much because of their suffering, as of the grace wrought to purification in their souls, by the Spirit of God, through the agency of suffering.
>
> Take courage, then, sons and daughters of tribulation; if united to Jesus by a living faith, you are training, through your very afflictions, for superior glory! The clouds that now darken your horizon will soon disappear before the brightness of the sun, and your spirit of heaviness shall be exchanged for the garments of joy. Be resting on Jesus for all your strength, hope, and deliverance. Ask of Him in every fresh trial, and under every circumstance of the trial, "Lord, what would You have me to do?" Beg of Him increasing submission and thankfulness of spirit. Pray that He may be pleased to lighten your affliction; but beg Him not to withhold chastisement—"if need be."
>
> Be assured, if you are of Christ's flock, that all shall be well with you. You will enter a land where there is no pain, no suffering; sorrow and sighing shall cease, and God shall wipe away all tears from all eyes. Yet a little more toil, a little more labor, a little more endurance, and your probation state will finish, and that Savior, whom you are now delighting to serve, "will come again, and receive you unto Himself, that where He is, there you may be also." (IF NEED BE)

J H Jowett explains that "The purpose of God’s chastening is not punitive but creative. He chastens “that we may share His holiness. (cp He 12:10-note, He 12:11-note)

Thomas Watson - Another heart quieting consideration is—that afflictions work for good. "I have sent them into captivity for their own good." (Jer. 24:6). Judah's captivity in Babylon was for their good. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" (Psalm 119:71). This text, like Moses' tree cast into the bitter waters of affliction, may make them sweet and wholesome to drink. Afflictions to the godly are medicinal. Out of the most poisonous drugs God extracts our salvation. Afflictions are as needful as ordinances (1Peter 1:6). No vessel can be made of gold without fire; so it is impossible that we should be made vessels of honor, unless we are melted

and refined in the furnace of affliction. "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth" (Psalm 35:10). As the painter intermixes bright colors with dark shadows; so the wise God mixes mercy with judgment. Those afflictive providences which seem to be harmful, are beneficial. Let us take some instances in Scripture. (The WORST things)

Thomas Brooks…

> Grace and glory differ in degree, not in kind. Grace differs very little from glory. The one is the seed, the other the flower. Grace is glory militant, and glory is grace triumphant. Grace is a beginning of glory. It may be compared to the golden chain in Homer, whose top was fastened to the chair of Jupiter. Grace and glory are individual, yet inseparable. The psalmist joins them together, "The Lord will give grace and glory," Psalm 84:11. Grace is a living spring which never fails, a seed which never dies, a jewel which never consumes, a sun which never sets. All other gifts of whatever kind, worth, or excellency, are but like a cloud soon dispelled, a vessel of clay soon broken, a sandy foundation soon sunk.
>
> **Grace is more excellent than gold. Gold draws the heart from God, grace draws the heart to God; gold does but enrich the mortal part, the ignoble part—but grace enriches the angelical part, the noble part; gold perishes—but grace perseveres**, 1Peter 1:7. If grace were not permanent, it could not be excellent; if grace were not durable, it could not be pleasurable; if grace were not lasting, yes everlasting, it could not be a Christian's comfort in life, his support in death, and his glorious crown in the great day of account. Grace in itself is permanent, incorruptible; it never fades away; it is a birth which shall never die; it is a plant of renown which shall never wither—but grow up more and more until grace is turned into glory. Upon which account, Jerome would rather have Paul's poor coat with his heavenly graces—than the purple of kings with their kingdoms. No troubles, no distresses, no dangers can deprive us of our graces, can rob us of our spiritual treasure. (Suffering)

I'm reminded of Joseph's response to his brothers who had sold him into slavery. They feared that he would seek revenge, but he said, "You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good" (Ge 50:20).

What a comfort to know that nothing happens apart from the will of our heavenly Father! He is all-wise, all-knowing, all-powerful. Under God's sovereign control, evil can be turned around to accomplish His good purposes.

There is a certainty of love
That sets my heart at rest,
A calm assurance for today
That what God does is best.
–Anon.

God can bring showers of blessing out of storms of adversity.

Why should I complain
Of want or distress,
Temptation or pain?
He told me no less;

The heirs of salvation,
I know from his Word,
Through much tribulation
Must follow their Lord.
--John Newton

Matthew Henry - Gold is the most valuable, pure, useful, and durable, of all the metals; so is faith among the Christian virtues; it lasts till it brings the soul to heaven, and then it issues in the glorious fruition of God for ever. The trial of faith is much more precious than the trial of gold; in both there is a purification, a separation of the dross, and a discovery of the soundness and goodness of the things. Gold does not increase and multiply by trial in the fire, it rather grows less; but faith is established, improved, and multiplied, by the oppositions and afflictions that it meets with.

Our Daily Bread Devotional - The abrasive experiences we encounter each day help to prepare us for heaven. God uses all of

life's troubles to polish and perfect our character. If we accept our trials with the right attitude and recognize that the heavenly Father is working through them, we will someday shine with splendor before Him.

In the rough, a diamond looks like a common pebble, but after it is cut, its hidden beauty begins to emerge. The stone then undergoes a finishing process to bring out its full radiance. A skilled craftsman holds the gem against the surface of a large grinding wheel. No other substance is hard enough to polish the stone, so the wheel is covered with diamond dust. This process may take a long time, depending on the quality desired by the one who will buy it.

This is similar to the way God works with us. The procedure is not pleasant, nor is it intended to be. The Divine Workman, however, has our final glory in view. We may be "grieved by various trials," as Peter said, but when we understand what is behind them we can rejoice even in adversity. God has one goal in mind during the refining process: that our faith "may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Knowing this enables us to look beyond the unpleasantness of "polishing" to see the outcome. P. R. Van Gorder (Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

Polycarp, venerable bishop of Smyrna was a personal friend and pupil of John the Apostle. When he was age 86, he was urged by the Roman proconsul to reproach Christ and be set free. “Eighty and six years have I served Him and He never did me any injury. How then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?” The proconsul said: “I have respect for your age. Simply say, “Away with the Atheists” and be set free.” Polycarp solemnly said, “Away with the Atheists”—pointing to the pagan crowd. He joyfully went to the stake, thanking God for counting him worthy to be numbered among the martyrs.

John Huss, the courageous pastor of Prague, was arrested, condemned, and sentenced to be burned by a church council in 1415. When Huss heard his sentence pronounced, he fell to his knees and prayed, “Lord Jesus, forgive my enemies.” Then when he was chained to the stake, he prayed, “In Thee, O Lord, do I put my TRUST; let me never be ashamed.” Then flames snuffed out the life of “The Morning Star of the Reformation.”

On July 1st, 1555, **John Bradford** was burned to death. He was chaplain to King Edward Sixth of England, and was one of the most popular preachers of his day. But he was a martyr to his faith. As he was being driven out to Newgate to be burned, permission was given him to speak, and from the wagon in which he rode to his death the entire way out from West London to Newgate he shouted: “Christ, Christ, none but Christ!”

Having been banished, **Cyprian** suffered martyrdom in Carthage in 258. When the sentence of death was read to him he said, “I heartily thank Almighty God who is pleased to set me free from the chains of the body.”

More Last Words Of Martyrs

> Henry Vos—“If I had twin heads, they should all be off for Christ.”
>
> Castilla Rupea—“Though you throw my body down off this steep hill, yet will my soul mount upwards again.”
>
> John Buisson—“I shall have a double jail delivery: out of my sinful flesh and out of the loathsome dungeon I have long lain in.”
>
> Taylor—“Now lack I but two steps, and I am even at my Father’s house.”
>
> Carpenter—“All Bavaria is not as dear to me as my wife and children, but, for Christ’s sake, I gladly forsake them.”

During the terrible Boxer Rebellion in China the insurgents captured a mission station, blocked all the gates but one, and before this placed a cross flat on the ground. Then the word was passed to those inside that any who trampled the cross underfoot (cp He 10:29-note) would be permitted their freedom and life, but that any refusing would be shot to death. Terribly frightened, the first seven students trampled the cross under their feet and were allowed to go free. But the eighth student, a young girl, refused to commit the sacrilegious act. Kneeling beside the cross in prayer for strength, she arose, and moved carefully around the cross and went out to face the firing squad. Strengthened by her example, every one of the remaining ninety-two students followed her to death.

Forty Wrestlers For Christ - In the days of the Roman Emperor Nero, there lived and served him a band of soldiers known as the “Emperor’s Wrestlers.” Fine, stalwart men they were, picked from the best and the bravest of the land, recruited from the great athletes of the Roman amphitheater.

In the great amphitheater they upheld the arms of the emperor against all challengers. Before each contest they stood before the

emperor's throne. Then through the courts of Rome rang the cry: "We, the wrestlers, wrestling for thee, O Emperor, to win for thee the victory and from thee, the victor's crown."

When the great Roman army was sent to fight in far-away Gaul, no soldiers were braver or more loyal than this band of wrestlers led by their centurion Vespasian. But news reached Nero that many Roman soldiers had accepted the Christian faith. Therefore, this decree was dispatched to the centurion Vespasian: "If there be any among your soldiers who cling to the faith of the Christian, they must die!"

The decree was received in the dead of winter. The soldiers were camped on the shore of a frozen inland lake. It was with sinking heart that Vespasian, the centurion, read the emperor's message.

Vespasian called the soldiers together and asked the question: "Are there any among you who cling to the faith of the Christian? If so, let him step forward!" Forty wrestlers instantly stepped forward two paces, respectfully saluted, and stood at attention. Vespasian paused. He had not expected so many, nor such select ones. "Until sundown I shall await your answer," said Vespasian. Sundown came. Again the question was asked. Again the forty wrestlers stepped forward.

Vespasian pleaded with them long and earnestly without prevailing upon a single man to deny his Lord. Finally he said, "The decree of the emperor must be obeyed, but I am not willing that your comrades should shed your blood. I am going to order that you march out upon the lake of ice, and I shall leave you there to the mercy of the elements."

The forty wrestlers were stripped and then, falling into columns of four, marched toward the center of the lake of ice. As they marched they broke into the chant of the arena: "Forty wrestlers, wrestling for Thee, O Christ, to win for Thee the victory and from Thee, the victor's crown!" Through the long hours of the night Vespasian stood by his campfire and watched. As he waited through the long night, there came to him fainter and fainter the wrestlers' song.

As morning drew near one figure, overcome by exposure, crept quietly toward the fire; in the extremity of his suffering he had renounced his Lord. Faintly but clearly from the darkness came the song: "Thirty-nine wrestlers, wrestling for Thee, O Christ, to win for Thee the victory and from Thee, the victor's crown!"

Vespasian looked at the figure drawing close to the fire. Perhaps he saw eternal light shining there toward the center of the lake. Who can say? But off came his helmet and clothing, and he sprang upon the ice, crying, "Forty wrestlers, wrestling for Thee, O Christ, to win for Thee the victory" and from Thee, the victor's crown! (Source Unknown)

The Builder Of Coliseum - Years ago, a Roman emperor said to a Greek architect: "Build me a Coliseum, and when it is done, I will crown you, and I will make your name famous through all the world." The work was done. The emperor said: "Now, we will crown that architect. We will have a grand celebration."

The Coliseum was crowded with a great host. The emperor was there and the Greek architect, who was to be crowned for putting up this building. And they brought out some Christians, who were ready to die for the truth and from the doors underneath were let out the hungry lions.

The emperor arose amid the shouting assemblage and said: "The Coliseum is done, and we have Christians at the mouth of these lions, and we have come here to honour the architect who has constructed this wonderful building. The time has come for me to honour him, and we further celebrate his triumph by the slaying of these Christians." Whereupon, the Greek architect sprang to his feet and shouted: "I also am a Christian." And they flung him to the wild beasts, and his body, bleeding and dead, was trumpled into the dust of the amphitheatre.

Last Martyr Of Coliseum - After three centuries, notwithstanding the spread of Christianity, gladiatorial combats continued to be the favorite pastime of a large proportion of the Roman citizens. Constantine prohibited them. The populace persisted. To avoid an insurrection they were allowed to have their will. Honorious re-enacted the prohibition. It was also in vain.

One day, as the gladiatorial fight was about to commence, Telemachus rushed down into the arena and separated the combatants. Then the spectators, indignant at this interruption, tore up the marble benches and hurled them down upon him "from the amphitheatre, which seemed crowded with so many demons raging for human blood." But on his death the benevolent monk Telemachus was victorious—rage yielded to admiration—and gladiatorial combats ceased for ever. He became the last martyr of the Coliseum. (Source Unknown)

"Though He slay me, I will trust Him,"
Said the sainted Job of old;

"Though He try me in the furnace,
I shall then come forth as gold.

"Though the 'worms of deep affliction'
Cause this body to decay,
In my flesh I shall behold Him--
My Redeemer--some glad day."

"Though He slay me"--can I say it
When I feel the searing fire,
When my fondest dreams lie shattered--
Gone my hope and fond desire?

"Though He slay me, I will trust Him,"
For He knows just how to mold,
How to melt and shape my spirit--
I shall then come forth as gold!
-Mary Kimbrough

Crucible Steel- Frank has a toolbox full of knives and chisels that are designed for his woodcarving hobby. His favorite is a German-made, all-purpose carving knife. He has honed it repeatedly, and it still holds an edge. "I'm going to be sad," Frank said, looking fondly at his knife, "when this blade gets too thin to sharpen."

Like all reliable carving tools, that knife is constructed of "crucible steel." To produce this durable metal, raw material is placed in a crucible where it is subjected to intense heat. Once it is glowing with molten brightness, the white-hot metal is maintained at precisely the right temperature until it qualifies as crucible steel. When it cools, it is neither so soft that it won't hold an edge nor so hard that it is brittle.

Christians, as the handiwork of God, are shaped and formed by His will. Sometimes He places us in a crucible of affliction. Peter wrote about the faith of Christians and said that it may be "tested by fire" (1Pe 1:7). That testing may come in the form of "various trials" to refine our faith (1Pe 1:6).

If you're in a crucible of testing right now, don't be discouraged. God knows what He is doing. He has promised to stay with you and help you to become a useful tool in His strong, loving hands. —David C. Egner (Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

All things work out for good we know--
Such is God's great design;
He orders all our steps below
For purposes divine. --Peterson © 1961 Singspiration, Inc.

Gold is tested by fire;
man is tested by adversity

While the fire is hot,
keep conversing with the Refiner.
--F. B. Meyer

Bless God for your afflictions, and your afflictions will be your greatest blessings.

Invisible Gold - In the 1980s, Northern Nevada was the site of a gold strike. The discovery would have been beyond the imagination of 19th-century prospectors, for the gold in those western hills is virtually invisible. Even after being magnified 1,500 times, most of the particles remain imperceptible. Modern technology, however, has found a way to extract the gold. First, tons of ore are crushed to the consistency of fine sand. Then cyanide is added to dissolve the granules into a clear solution. When zinc dust is blended in, the gold separates from the mixture. The gold was there all the time, but it couldn't be seen. There's a similarity here to Peter's explanation of suffering in his first New Testament letter. He saw great potential in the mountains of adversity & affliction that faced the Lord's people. So he encouraged them to look beyond the heat and pressure produced by their suffering to the precious faith the Lord was developing from it (1Pe 1:6, 7). He showed them that the "faith processing" experience was of great

value to their spiritual lives. Therefore, they could actually rejoice in it (1Pe 1:8).

Don't give in to life's troubles. You may not see in them the rich potential of a strong faith, but it's there. To have it developed is much more precious than gold! --M R De Haan II (Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

God watches us with patient eye,
With love that's strong and sure:
His gold endures the fervent heat
Required to make it pure. --Anonymous

Faith-testing times can be faith-strengthening times.

Jesus said that we'd have trouble
In this world so filled with sin,
But we need not be discouraged–
He'll give peace and joy within.
–Sper

GOD MOVES IN A MYSTERIOUS WAY
by William Cowper
(Piper's discussion of his life)

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.

Even though you may be fearful and discouraged, you can find reason for cheer if you look to the heavenly Father. Remember what the psalmist advised, "Hope in God," (Ps 42:11) and then say with the apostle Paul, "I believe God." (Acts 27:23-25)

The next time you're down, remember to look up! –R W De Haan

Lift up your eyes, discouraged one,
The Lord your help will be;
New strength will come from Him who said,
"For rest, come unto Me."
–Anon.

When you can't find a way out, look up!

O Lord, I would not ask You why
These trials must come my way,
But what is there for me to learn
Of Your great love, I pray.
--D J DeHaan

There is no education like adversity.

When problems seem impossible
And we can't face another day,
The Lord extends His helping hand
And shows us how to make a way.
--Sper

Problems are opportunities
to discover God's solutions.

On the old Happy Days television show, Richie Cunningham had just been "grounded for life" by his father, Howard, for misbehavior. As they talked about it, Howard asked his son, "Did you know that there is a lesson in this for you?" Richie's response was priceless: "I figured anything with this much pain had to have a lesson in it somewhere."

We do not learn character in times of ease and properity but in times of difficulty.

His point is simple--God doesn't waste anything! Everything happens in our lives for a reason, and a great part of that reason is to help us grow in our faith.

It has been said that life has to be lived in a forward motion but can only be understood by looking back. This demands that we trust in the loving purposes of a sovereign God. We must trust that He is in control--especially when life seems to be out of control.

This is what Paul referred to as walking by faith (2Cor. 5:7). It goes against every element of self-preservation that is ingrained in us. We want to take charge, manipulate, and control. But God wants us to trust in the love of a Father who makes no mistakes. He wants us to rely on the One who makes us "more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Ro 8:37).

To say that life is filled with trials and temptations is, as sportscaster Howard Cosell used to say, to have "a marvelous grasp of the obvious." To realize, however, that these trials often come on the heels of our greatest successes may be to understand the very essence of what makes life so hard.

It's probably true that how we handle success says as much if not more about us as how we handle failure.

Life in a fallen world seldom rewards right (-eous) living. Often life isn't fair--but our responsibility is to do right and leave the consequences to God.

Joseph's character was under construction as he was shaped by adversity, punished by men, and honored by God. Genesis 39 ends the way it began--with Joseph in bondage. Yet through it all, his solid faith in God's control had helped him overcome.

Vertical--he didn't allow his circumstances to disrupt his relationship with God.

Horizontal--he didn't allow his hurt to prevent him from caring about the hurts of others.
For example, a missionary couple in India saw their six children killed, so they raised 300 foster children. Following the tragic flood at Toccoa Falls, Georgia, a man whose wife and two children had died in the flood said, "Every time I wanted to cry, someone else needed help and I felt compelled to offer. I was so consumed with helping others that I had no time to worry about myself."

Is that how you respond to adversity and disappointment? Or do you become so consumed with your own pain that you are blind to the pain of others? Sensitivity to the needs of others can be deadened by preoccupation with personal disappointment. But that wasn't true of Joseph. He not only noticed and cared--he got involved.

The ultimate lesson Joseph had learned through slavery, imprisonment, and mistreatment was that God is in control. He will do what He says, for He is in charge.

James teaches that without patience there will be no maturity, and without trials, delays, and disappointments there will be no patience. It has been said that a man is not a hero because he is braver than anyone else but because he is brave longer.

Psalm 26:2 (David's incredible plea to God) **Examine** (Lxx = dokimazo = present imperative) me, O LORD, and **try** (Lxx = **peirazo** = present imperative) me; Test (Lxx = **puroo** [heating precious metals red hot in order to refine them] = aorist imperative) my mind and my heart. (**Ed**: Do we dare pray this prayer? Considering the gold that comes from the furnace of affliction, do we dare not?)

Spurgeon comments on this Psalm:

> There are three modes of trial here challenged, which are said in the original to refer to trial by touch, trial by smell, and trial by fire. The psalmist was so clear from the charge laid against him, that he submitted himself unconditionally to any form of examination which the Lord might see fit to employ. **Examine me, O Lord**. Look me through and through; make a minute survey; put me to the question, cross examine my evidence. **And prove me**. Put me again to trial; and see if I would follow such wicked designs as my enemies impute to me. **Try my reins and my heart**. Assay me as metals are assayed in the furnace, and do this to my most secret parts, where my affections hold their court; see, O God, whether or no I love murder, and treason, and deceit. All this is a very bold appeal, and made by a man like David, who feared the Lord exceedingly, it manifests a most solemn and complete conviction of innocence. The expressions here used should teach us the thoroughness of the divine judgment, and the necessity of being in all things profoundly sincere, lest we be found wanting at the last. Our enemies are severe with us with the severity of spite, and this a brave man endures without fear; but God's severity is that of unswerving right. Who shall stand against such a trial? The sweet singer says "Who can stand before his cold?" and we may well enquire, "Who can stand before the heat of his justice?"
>
> These words are designed to include all the modes in which the reality of anything is tested; and they imply together that he wished the most thorough investigation to be made; he did not shrink from any test. Albert Barnes.
>
> As gold, by fire, is severed and parted from dross, so singleness of heart and true Christian simplicity is best seen and made most evident in troubles and afflictions. In prosperity every man will seem godly, but afflictions do draw out of the heart whatsoever is there, whether it be good or bad. Robert Cawdray.
>
> When your life is whole before God and others, when you're practicing integrity, when you have a good conscience, you don't have to be afraid of the battle or the furnace or the X ray or the testing. God will see you through. When you walk with integrity, you walk on solid ground. Never try to serve two masters. Always keep your heart undivided before the Lord -- Warren Wiersbe. Borrow Prayer, praise & promises : a daily walk through the Psalms

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Pride--J. Oswald Sanders wrote, "Not every man can carry a full cup. Sudden elevation frequently leads to pride and a fall. The most exacting test of all is to survive prosperity."

Celebrate bankruptcy? How foolish that seems to us! Yet author Leo Buscaglia's mother did just that. Her husband came home one evening and sadly told the family that his business partner had stolen the assets of the firm. Bankruptcy was unavoidable.

Instead of despairing, Leo's mother went out, pawned some jewelry, and prepared a delectable dinner. When family members protested, she replied, "The time for joy is now when we need it most, not next week."

Mrs. Buscaglia's response to her family's financial crisis reminds me of a New Testament directive: "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials" (James 1:2).

Have you run into difficult circumstances recently? Has some calamity gripped your heart with fear and sorrow? God doesn't want you to wear a hypocritical, smiling face. But He does want you to trust Him through all your circumstances -- including calamities! He wants you to accept failure, sickness, and loss as opportunities for growth in faith and obedience.

Our wise and loving heavenly Father longs for us to submit to His sovereign control. Only as we do that can we agree with James and rejoice even in calamity.-- V C Grounds (Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

Though times be dark, the struggles grim,
And cares rise like a flood,
This sweet assurance holds to Him:
My God is near and good.-- Hager

Life's trials should make us better - not bitter.

A young Christian man asked an elderly believer to pray that he would have more patience. The older man got down on his knees and began, "Lord, send this young man tribulation in the morning; send this young man tribulation in the afternoon; send this young man--" At that point the young Christian blurted out, "No, no, I didn't ask you to pray for tribulation. I wanted you to pray for patience." "Ah," responded the wise Christian, "it's through tribulation that we learn patience."

Perseverance means "steadfastness, the ability to remain under difficulties without giving in." That was certainly true in Paul's life and ministry. He had suffered beating, whipping, stoning, and shipwreck, yet he remained steadfast in the faith and did not shrink from his calling (2 Co11:23-33). Are you facing a difficult test? Then praise God! Under His wise control, everything that happens to you, whether enjoyable or painful, is designed to develop perseverance. That's why suffering saints can glory in tribulation.

Looking back, it seems to me
All the grief which had to be
Left me, when the pain was o'er,
Richer than I'd been before.
--Anon.

They who wait on the Lord can bear the weight of adversity.

William Cowper, a 19th-century English poet and hymn writer, struggled with recurring bouts of depression throughout his life. Perhaps that's why his hymns still touch us deeply during times when our lives seem to be spinning out of control and we desperately want to trust God. One of Cowper's best-known hymns, "God Moves In A Mysterious Way," contains these encouraging words:

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.
(Play God Moves in a Mysterious Way)

Douglas Burton-Christie decided to walk the last few miles to his spiritual retreat at an Egyptian monastery. He stepped off the bus in a small village and confidently set out across the desert. A few hours later, he realized that he was lost. Instead of arriving at the monastery self-assured and proud, he eventually found his way there humbled and grateful to be alive.

He said, "I gradually came to understand one of the most important things the desert had to teach me: To enter the desert is to relinquish the illusion of control."

Being in charge of our own destiny is a fantasy we cling to. But when God takes us through a "desert experience," we learn that our only hope rests in Him.

After 40 years in the wilderness, with the Promised Land finally in sight, Moses challenged God's people to remember a lesson from

those years: "He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna … , that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord" (Dt. 8:3+).

If you're in a desert today, take heart. God is still in control. He's teaching you to depend on Him. --D C McCasland (Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

I strode into the desert of my will,
Obsessed with each mirage that I could chase;
God let me wander aimlessly until
I cried for the oasis of His grace.
--Gustafson

In every desert of trial God has an oasis of comfort.

Warren Wiersbe says that where you turn when you're in trouble reveals your character. Life's challenges are designed not to break us but to bend us toward God.

It shouldn't surprise us, therefore, that God permits the added trials of being ridiculed and hated because we follow Christ (1Pet. 4:12). But trouble, whether it is common to man or unique to Christians, can reveal to us the moral fiber of our soul.

I have never seen a golf course without hazards. They are part of the game. Golfers speak of the courses with the most hazards as the most challenging, and they will travel a long way to test their skill against the most demanding 18 holes.

Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "If I had a formula for bypassing trouble, I wouldn't pass it around. I wouldn't be doing anyone a favor. Trouble creates a capacity to handle it… Meet it as a friend, for you'll see a lot of it and you had better be on speaking terms with it."

A Chinese scholar who converted to Christ told this parable: "A man fell into a dark, dirty pit, and he tried to climb out but he couldn't. Confucius came along. He saw the man in the pit and said, 'Poor fellow. If he had listened to me, he never would have fallen in.' And he left. Buddha came along and saw the man in the pit and said, 'Poor fellow. If he can climb up here, I'll help him.' And he too left. Then Christ came and said, 'Poor fellow!' And He jumped into the pit and helped him out."

God's dawn of deliverance
often comes when the hour of trial is darkest.

Like all reliable carving tools, that knife is constructed of "crucible steel." To produce this durable metal, raw material is placed in a crucible where it is subjected to intense heat. Once it is glowing with molten brightness, the white-hot metal is maintained at precisely the right temperature until it qualifies as crucible steel. When it cools, it is neither so soft that it won't hold an edge nor so hard that it is brittle.

Christians, as the handiwork of God, are shaped and formed by His will. Sometimes He places us in a crucible of affliction. Peter wrote about the faith of Christians and said that it may be "tested by fire" (1 Pet. 1:7+). That testing may come in the form of "various trials" to refine our faith (1Pe 1:6).

If you're in a crucible of testing right now, don't be discouraged. God knows what He is doing. He has promised to stay with you and help you to become a useful tool in His strong, loving hands.

Gold is tested by fire
Man is tested by adversity.

Dave Dravecky had pitched with remarkable success for the San Diego Padres and the San Francisco Giants baseball teams. But his pitching arm developed an unusual soreness. Medical tests identified the problem--cancer. Surgery and months of rehabilitation followed.

Then, after pitching for a time in the minor leagues, Dave made a widely applauded comeback to the majors. But in Montreal, as he was delivering a pitch, his arm snapped.

The cancer had not gone away. To save his life, doctors removed his arm and much of his shoulder. A committed Christian, Dave

didn't wallow in self-pity. He said, "There is no struggle about feeling sorry for myself. The question is not, 'Why me, God?' The question is, 'What is Your plan for me?' " Then he said, "I see this as God giving me the opportunity to share the gospel with a lot of people."

Just as Paul saw how adversity could lead to opportunity (Phil. 1:12), Dave has seen God open doors to speak about his faith in Christ. Audiences are willing to listen because he is a living testimony of human grit and divine grace.

When trouble strikes, destroying our dreams or crippling our bodies, do we react with self-pity? Or do we see an opportunity to demonstrate the sufficiency of God's grace? --V C Grounds (Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength when the labors increase;
To added affliction He addeth His mercy,
To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.
--Flint

Trouble and the grace to bear it come in the same package

Great Preachers - The greatest sermons I have ever heard were not preached from pulpits but from sickbeds. The deepest truths of God's Word have often been taught by those humble souls who have gone through the seminary of affliction.

The most cheerful people I have met, with few exceptions, have been those who've had the least sunshine and the most pain and suffering in their lives. The most grateful people I have ever known were not those who had traveled a pathway of roses all their lives, but those who were confined to their homes, some to their beds, and had learned to depend on God.

The gripers, on the other hand, are usually those who have the least to complain about. The men and women who are the most cheerful and the most grateful for the blessings of Almighty God are often those who have gone through the greatest trials.

The Bible tells us that if we respond properly to the trials of life, we will develop patience and godly maturity (Romans 5:3, 4, 5-note; James 1:3, 4-note). We must keep in mind that our present sufferings are "but for a moment" and that they are being used by God for our eternal good (2Co 4:17,18).

So take heart, suffering one. Someday you too will realize that it was worth it all (1Pe 1:7). —M R De Haan (Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

It will be worth it all when we see Jesus,
Life's trials will seem so small when we see Christ;
One glimpse of His dear face all sorrow will erase,
So bravely run the race till we see Christ. — Esther Kerr Rusthoi
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A soldier on the battlefield hadn't received any mail for weeks. During a break in the fighting, he was handed an envelope. Inside was a bill for $3.52. A note read: "If this bill isn't paid in 5 days, you will be in serious trouble!" I wonder if that soldier smiled over the irony.
Troubles come in all sizes, from small irritants to life-threatening crises, from the loss of a $20 bill to the loss of a loved one, from the breakdown of our car to the breakdown of our health. When troubles begin to add up, they can push us to the breaking point.

So it was with Job. He said, "If now I hold my tongue, I perish" (13:19). Job felt he was a righteous man. Why did he lose all his oxen, donkeys, sheep, and camels? Why were his servants and 10 children killed? Why was he afflicted with excruciating pain?

Job began to contend with God. He accused Him of destroying man's hope (Job 14:18-22). When God finally answered him, He didn't give the reason for Job's suffering. Instead, the Lord challenged him to provide explanations for the mysteries of nature. Job quickly got the point and reached the humble conclusion that he must let God be God (38-42). In all our troubles, may God help us to do the same. --D J DeHaan

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,

That Christ has regarded my helpless estate
And has shed His own blood for my soul.
--Horatio Spafford

God may not always give us answers,
but He always gives us grace.

Behind a Frowning Providence
By John J. Murray

Introduction

One of the best known hymns is William Cowper's "GOD MOVES IN A MYSTERIOUS WAY, HIS WONDERS TO PERFORM". Cowper was subject to melancholy and knew more about the darker side of Christian experience than the brighter. It was out of heart-felt experience that he composed his hymn and presented in it so many precious gems of truth such as the oft-quoted lines,

> Behind a frowning providence
> He hides a smiling face.

What is meant by a "frowning providence"? Is this something that we are to expect in the Christian life? If so, how do we cope with it?

Like you, I have sought answers to these questions. Some of them I hope to share in the following.

1. There is a Providence

Providence is an old fashioned word and has a strange ring to modern ears. Yet when we break it down into its parts the meaning becomes clear. It comes from the Latin video 'to see' and pro 'before', meaning 'to see beforehand'. In our lives we plan beforehand but we do not see what is going to happen. God has planned everything for His creation and because He is the sovereign God everything will come to pass as He purposed. Providence is that marvelous working of God by which all the events and happenings in His universe accomplish the purpose He has in mind.

The Scriptural doctrine that God 'works all things according to the counsel of his will' is clearly set out in the Westminster Confession of Faith's definition of God's Eternal Decree:

> God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second cause taken away, but rather established. (Chap III, 1)

The Shorter Catechism asks the question: 'How does God execute his decrees? And answers 'God executes his decrees in the works of creation and providence' (Q. 8). What about redemption? It is included in the work of providence! It is the supreme work of providence.

In it God sent His Son into this world for the purpose of redeeming a people. He set His love on hell-deserving sinners and chose them in Christ before the foundation of the world. Those He foreknew He predestined that they might be 'conformed to the image of his Son' (Romans 8:29). God has a plan for His Church that stretches from eternity to eternity.

In relation to that grand purpose, 'God has', according to Thomas Boston, 'by an eternal decree, immovable as mountains of brass (Zechariah 6:1), appointed the whole of every one's lot, the crooked parts thereof, as well as the straight.' As Job said in the midst of his sufferings: 'He performeth the thing that is appointed for me' (Job 23:14)

The plan of God extends to every detail in my life. There are several important things that can be said of it:

1 The plan is perfect. Everything that God does is perfect. It may not appear to me at times to be perfect but it is, because it will ultimately lead to the greater glory of God.

2 The plan is exhaustive. It includes everything. It is worked out in a situation where everything is under the control of God. It extends to the smallest and most casual things. 'The very hairs of your head are all numbered' (Matthew 10: 30).

3 The plan is for my ultimate good. Everyone who loves God has the assurance that 'all things work together for

good' (Romans 8:28). If God is for me who can be against me? The opposition does not count. The gracious purpose of God will certainly be accomplished in my life.

4 The plan is secret. God alone knows what is going to happen in advance because He has purposed it all. Every detail is fixed before I was born. God hides it from me until it happens. I discover it day by day as the plan unfolds. This is the unfolding of His secret will for my life.

Although God has only one will we often speak about His secret will and His revealed will. The latter is made known in the Scriptures and is the rule of our duty. The former is made known in His providence and is to be submitted to and observed.

This teaching is clearly set out in the words of Thomas Boston:

Whoever would walk with God must be due observers of the Word and Providence of God for by these in a special manner He manifests himself to His people. In the one we see what He says; in the other what He does. These are the two books that every student of holiness ought to be much conversant in. They are both written with the one hand and they should both be carefully read by those who would have not only the name of religion but the thing. They should be studied together if we would profit by either for being taken together they give light one to the other; and as it is our duty to read the Word, so also it is our duty to observe the work of God.

These words are taken from a sermon on Psalm 107:43: 'Whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord'. If we are to fulfill the duty of observing 'these things' the qualification required is wisdom but the benefit is that we will understand the loving-kindness of the Lord. We know how a human being stands related to us by his or her behavior. If we study God's behavior towards His children we will see His love. Providence has its own language.

We need to observe the different kinds of providences. There are uncommon providences, such as miracles, and there are what might be called common providences, like the refreshing rain. There are great providences, like the crossing of the Red Sea and there are what seem small providences, like a king not being able to sleep at night. There are favorable or smiling providences and there are what appear to be dark, cross or frowning providences.

If, as we believe, a frowning providence comes from the hand of the same Father as a smiling providence, how can we reconcile these things? How can we justify the ways of God with us?

2. There are Dark Providences

It is the presence of the dark providences in the universe and in our lives that go a long way to make up what John Flavel called 'the mystery of providence'. Thomas Boston addressed himself to the same problem in a series of sermons on Ecclesiastes 7:13: 'Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight which he hath made crooked'. They were published after his death under the title The Crook in the Lot.

When adversity comes into our lives we tend to react in one of two ways. We may say that it is from a source other than God and He has not power to stop it; or we may say it is an evidence of God's anger against us. Either way we are guilty of casting aspersions on the character of our Father and consequently of perverting our attitude to Him. 'A just (right) view of afflicting incidents', says Boston in the opening sentence of his work, 'is altogether necessary to a Christian deportment under them'. He continues: 'That view is to be obtained only by faith, not by sense; for it is the light of the Word alone that represents them justly, discerning in them the work of God, and consequently designs becoming the Divine perfections'.

The Christian, although he is justified, remains a sinner in the midst of a fallen world. He is subject to 'all the ills that flesh is heir to'. Some of the consequences of his past sins affect his life. He is subject to the discipline of his Heavenly Father. Satan concentrates his attack on him. The world under the control of the evil one is hostile to him. His sufferings are compounded because he is a Christian. 'In the world', our Lord warned his disciples, 'you will have tribulation'. (John 16:33)

The Bible leaves us in no doubt that suffering is a normal part of the true Christian life. Hebrews chapter 11 portrays the suffering witnesses of the Old Testament. The New Testament presents us with our great Example who was 'made perfect through sufferings' (Hebrews 2:10), and also with the many followers who 'became partakers' in His sufferings (1 Peter 4:13). The whole emphasis in the teaching of the early church was on 'rejoicing in the midst of sufferings.' It is 'through much tribulation' that we enter the kingdom. (Acts 14:22)

The Westminster Confession of Faith contains in its chapter on Providence this judiciously-worded paragraph on God's dealings with His own children:

The most wise, righteous and gracious God, doth oftentimes leave for a season his own children to manifold temptations, and the corruption of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of

corruption and deceitfulness of their own hearts, that they may be humbled; and to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their upon himself, and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for sundry other just and holy ends.

Sadly such teaching seems far removed from the outlook that prevails in large parts of the Church today. The impression is given that the purpose of the Christian life is enjoyment. Everything that stands in the way of that is to be eliminated. People are looking for a problem-free Christianity. The health, wealth and success gospel is having a field day. Purveyors of such a gospel look the part. Unfortunately, the hollowness of such views becomes apparent when suffering sorrow or disappointment comes. Then it becomes clear that we need a faith that is grounded in God's Word.

3. God's Designs in Dark Providences

Having seen that trials or dark providences are part of the Christian way we must now inquire into their purpose. While it is always wrong to react in rebellion and anger against God's dealings with us, it is right to consider why they are part of our lot. There is a right and wrong way of asking 'Why?' We must reflect on what God is doing. What is the Lord seeking to teach us through these unpleasant experiences? Here are some of the designs that God has in our sufferings:

1. SUFFERINGS ARE TO TRY US

'The crook in the lot', says Boston, 'is the great engine of providence for making men appear in their true colors'. C. S. Lewis once referred to sufferings as 'blockades on the road to hell'. The same sun that melts the ice also hardens the clay. Says Andrew Fuller, 'Afflictions refine some, they consume others'. The test of a person's Christianity is what happens in the storm, when the house is battered in the winds of affliction.

The faith of the Christian is tried and tested, wrote Simon Peter (I Peter 1: 3-7). It is the trial that determines the authenticity of our faith. Peter reminds the Christians to whom he writes of the great hope they have, although for the present they are grieved by the many trials. The reason for this is that God is sitting as a refiner of gold. He wants to bring out the pure gold of naked trust in Himself. When all the dross of self-trust is purged out then faith will be to the praise, honor and glory of Jesus Christ.

Abraham was a man of faith and he endured the trial of faith. God commanded him to leave his comfortable life in Ur and go out on the strength of a promise that he would give him a land and a seed. But the promise never seemed to be fulfilled. There was no sign of an heir. In the impatience of unbelief Abraham tried to do it his way. Hagar's son Ishmael was the result, but God will have none of it. Ishmael must go. Another eleven years later and the son of promise is born. But Isaac must be laid on the altar. Until God had Isaac He did not have all of Abraham that there was. God speaks as if He had newly discovered the faith of Abraham: 'Now I know that you fear God' (Genesis 22:12). Abraham had come through the test. His faith was pure gold.

> When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
> My grace all-sufficient shall be thy supply;
> The flame shall not hurt they; I only design
> Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

2. SUFFERINGS ARE TO EXPOSE OUR SINS

When we set off on the Christian pathway we do not know much about our true selves. It is even possible to enter the Christian ministry without much knowledge of the deceitfulness of the heart. 'We are on too good terms with ourselves', said Dr. Lloyd-Jones. 'We don't know much about dust and ashes'. We pray sincerely for growth in grace, for increase in faith, but the answer comes in a way we did not expect. John Newton was the one who made the painful discovery:

> I asked the Lord that I might grow
> In faith and love and every grace,
> Might more of his salvation know,
> And seek more earnestly his face.
>
> 'Twas he who taught me thus to pray;
> And he, I trust, has answered prayer;
> But it has been in such a way
> As almost drove me to despair.
>
> I hoped that, in some favored hour,
> At once he'd answer my request,
> And by his love's constraining power
> Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

Instead of this, he made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart,
And let the angry powers of hell
Assault my soul in every part.

Robert Murray M'Cheyne confessed that the seed of every known sin was to found in his heart. What latent corruption there is within! We are like a petro-chemical plant. It takes only a spark to set us alight. Think of the break-out of sin in the lives of so many of the saints. Abraham with his deceit; Job with his rash words; Moses with his anger; Asaph with his murmuring; Paul with his pride. Job could say, 'I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes' (Job 42:6). Asaph had to say, 'I was foolish and ignorant, I was as a beast before thee' (Psalm 73:22).

Such discoveries make us think less of ourselves and therefore lead us to think more of the Lord Jesus Christ. They bring new depths of repentance and a recovery of a true sense of our own sinfulness.

3. SUFFERINGS ARE TO BUILD CHARACTER

Whatever else we may have, if we do not have character we have nothing. It is character that determines destiny. The only failure that matters in the end is the failure to build character. In ordinary life character is formed by overcoming difficulties. The state of our society today militates against character building. Even in the church young people are not exposed to the influences that will build character. No wonder so many remain spiritual babes.

We see a renowned athlete winning a gold medal. He may make it look easy on the day, but victory could not have been achieved without painstaking training and meeting increasing tough opposition. The process by which God builds character is outlined in Romans 5: 1-5. Paul says that 'We glory in tribulation'. The Greek word translated 'tribulation' comes from the verb 'to press'. The word is used to describe the crushing of the grapes and olives. The figure suggests the heavy pressures of outward trouble or inward anguish. Tribulation produces 'patient endurance' – the ability to stay with it and not fall apart. This brave endurance in turn produces what the Authorized (King James) Version translates a experience but which is more accurately translated as 'character' – the character which results from a process of trial.

We might be tempted to ask whether God can build character without suffering. That is a hypothetical question. He has not chosen to do so. Young Joseph gave every indication that he was spoiled. He was not fit to be a leader. It took the pit and the prison and twenty-two years of preparation before he was ready to do the work God intended him to do. In the prison he was laid in irons (Psalm 105:18). Variant readings are 'the iron entered into his soul' and 'his soul entered into iron'. It was more than Joseph's flesh that felt the iron.

God prepares us as if there were no one else to prepare. A sculptor working at a piece of marble when asked: 'what are you doing?' replied, 'I am chipping away everything that does not look like a horse'.

4. SUFFERINGS BRING US TO KNOW GOD BETTER

Sufferings teach us lessons that we cannot learn in College. We may have been to College or Seminary and have a string of letters after our name; we may have read all the great classics in theology and be able to argue on the finer points of divinity; and yet our knowledge may be largely theoretical. It is one thing to know about God; it is another thing to know God. The essence of eternal life is 'that they may know thee the only true God' (John 17:3). Paul's ambition was 'that I may know Him' (Philippians 3:10).

Many Christians can testify that they have learned more about God in the furnace of affliction than in all their previous experiences. Job is a classic example. The Lord said of him, 'There is none like him on earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil' (Job 1:8), so God put on display one of the trophies of His grace. Satan is given leave to afflict Job. The real question is: What kind of a person is Job? Does he fear God for nothing? (Job 1:9). Is his religion only one of self-interest? Ignorant of the battle going on in the heavenly realms Job has many questions to ask. The interesting thing is that he does not get specific answers. What he gets is a revelation of God which at length brings him to confess, 'I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear but now my eye sees thee. Therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes' (Job 42: 5-6).

There are areas of the Word of God that we cannot comprehend until we have experienced suffering. For thirty years of my Christian life I neither understood nor was particularly drawn to the book of Job. Along with a particular time of suffering came the help to understanding it. Martin Luther had a similar testimony: 'Affliction is the Christian's theologian'; 'I never knew the meaning of God's Word until I came into affliction'; 'My temptations have been my masters in divinity'; 'No man, without trials and temptations, can attain a true understanding of the Holy Scriptures'.

I walked a mile with pleasure,
She chatted all the way,

But left me none the wiser
For all she had to say.

I walked a mile with sorrow
And ne'er a word said she,
But oh the things I learned from her,
When sorrow walked with me.

5. SUFFERINGS PRODUCE FRUIT IN OUR LIVES AND PREPARE US FOR USEFULNESS

In John 15 our Lord compares Christians to branches in a vine. He is the vine and His Father is the vinedresser. The Father looks for fruit from the branches in the vine. Such fruit is dependent on union with Christ but its quality is also related to the Father's pruning. Sometimes the pruning can be drastic. The cutting knife can be sharp. But the whole purpose is spiritual fruit for the glory of God.

No doubt there will be many humble believers in 'glory' whose names were hardly known on earth but who will be laden with fruit. Perhaps they carried such sorrows in this world that they could not share with others and persevered at God's throne of grace where they became mighty warriors for the kingdom. Said Phillips Brooks, 'Wherever souls are being tried and ripened in whatever commonplace and homely way, there God is hewing out the pillars of his temple'. Thomas Boston reminds us, 'There is never an act of resignations to the will of God under the cross, nor an act of trust in Him for His help, but they will be recorded in heaven's register as good works.'

Sufferings can bring a new dimension of fruitfulness into our lives. It can produce a new gentleness and a tenderness. This was evident in the life of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones and never more so than in his later years. During his own sufferings he remembered others who suffered. In the last year of his life our daughter became seriously ill and died at the age of thirteen. As soon as he heard he wrote us a most comforting letter. Within three months he himself entered glory. Mrs. Lloyd-Jones later shared with us the tenderness of his concern: 'I wish you could have heard his prayers for your little daughter's illness and death. He never forgot and had such tender concern for her and for you all in your sorrow and mourning. It is a glorious thing to belong to the family of God. We really feel for each other.'

We often see sorrows leading to increased usefulness in the lives of God's servants. 'God', says Spurgeon, 'gets his best soldiers out of the highlands of affliction'. He was an outstanding example of this himself. He says: 'I do not know whether my experience is that of all God's people; but I am afraid that all the grace I have got at any of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours might almost be on a penny. But the good I have received from my sorrows, and pains and griefs is altogether incalculable'. Thomas Boston who had an abundant share of sorrows remarked, 'It is the usual way of providence with me that blessing comes through several iron gates'. 'The tools the great Architect intends to use much', J. C. Ryle wrote in the same vein, 'are often kept long in the fire to temper them and fit them for the work'.

Examples of this truth abound in Scripture and in Church history and are too numerous to mention. We may think of Paul and his painful affliction, 'a thorn in the flesh', and the purpose for which it was sent: Most gladly will I glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest on me' (II Corinthians 12:7-9). We may think of Rutherford banished to the cold – physical and spiritual – of Aberdeen where

... in my sea-beat prison
My lord and I held tryst.

From that place of affliction there poured forth the Letters full of the fragrance of Christ that have enriched the Church down the centuries. We may think of John Bunyan cast into prison for refusing to keep silence, his usefulness seemingly curtailed. But God multiplied his usefulness through his pen in the writing of Pilgrim's Progress. Then we have Thomas Boston suffering from poor health, with his children sick and dying, his wife crippled by mental illness, dealing difficult parishioners, engaged in ecclesiastical wrangles, laboring in relative obscurity; yet out of it all have come writings that have brought untold blessing to multitudes. No wonder John Flavel wrote: 'Oh the blessed chemistry of heaven to extract such mercies out of such miseries!'

6. SUFFERINGS LEAD US TO MAKE GOD OUR ALL AND TO PREPARE US FOR GLORY

Sufferings drive us to God. We set out in service thinking God needs us. We soon find out that we need Him. 'When God lays men on their backs, then they look up to heaven', says Thomas Watson. We cry to God for blessings but we do not really want Him. He has to teach us that He is the greatest blessing of all.

This was the discovery made by John Newton in his hymn 'Prayer Answered by Crosses', already quoted. He goes on:

Yea, more, with his own hand he seemed

Intent to aggravate my woe,
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.

Lord, why is this? I trembling cried;
Wilt thou pursue this worm to death?
This is the way, the Lord replied
I answer prayer for grace and faith.

These inward trials I now employ
From self and pride to see thee free,
And break thy schemes of earthly joy,
That thou may'st seek thy all in me.

In Psalm 73 Asaph recounts his experience of nearly falling: 'my steps had nearly slipped' (Psalm 73:2). While the wicked were prospering he was being plagued and chastened. He was perplexed and baffled until he went into the sanctuary of God. There he saw things in their true light. The outcome was that he confessed: 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee' (Psalm 73:25). God had become the all-sufficient portion of his soul.

In this way God prepares us for glory. If we lived for nothing but a life of comfort and ease here there would be no desire for the blessedness to come. 'God will have his people sigh and groan on the way to glory,' writes Maurice Roberts. Thomas Watson emphasizes the same lesson: 'The vessels of mercy are first seasoned with affliction and then the wine of glory is poured in'.

4. Our Comfort in Dark Providences

1. THERE IS ALWAYS A PURPOSE OF LOVE BEHIND DARK PROVIDENCES

One of the most difficult things to do when the road is rough or when the billows are passing over us is to feel that God still loves us. It is the last thing we can accept. But we are not called to feel; we are called to believe. In his book, In All Their Afflictions, Murdoch Campbell tells of a minister in the North of Scotland who suddenly lost his spiritually-minded wife. As he prayed that night in the presence of friends he said, 'If an angel from heaven told me that this would work my good I would not believe him but because thy Word says it I must believe it.'

We are to measure God's love not by His providence but by His promise. 'When we cannot trace God's hand we can trust God's heart', says C. H. Spurgeon. When providences are dark it is difficult to read them. It is the Word that tells us how to view them.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

By faith we have to trace it all to the hand of our Father. The 'crook in the lot' is all of God's making. We are prone to stop at second causes. We may look at doctors who may have been negligent. We may think of drivers who have been careless. We may feel bitterness over 'what might have been'.

Joseph after suffering the greatest indignities at the hand of his brothers traced it all to the hand of God: 'But as for you, you meant evil against me but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save people alive' (Genesis 15:20). Job suffered at the hands of the Chaldeans and Sabeans yet when he came to speak of his loss he was able to say, 'The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord' (Job 1:21). Joseph left his cause in the hand of God and he was vindicated. Job did the same. Says Samuel Rutherford, 'It is impossible to be submissive and religiously patient if you stay your thoughts down among the confused rollings and wheels of second causes, O, the place! O, the time! O, if this had been this had not followed!'

2. THERE IS MUCH THAT REMAINS A MYSTERY AND FOR WHICH THERE IS NO IMMEDIATE ANSWER

This lies at the very crux of the matter. It may seem a strange paradox but it was when Job was willing not to understand that he began to understand.

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm,

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-ending skill
He treasures up his bright designs,
And works his sovereign will.

And why should this not be so? God is God and man is man. It is in keeping with the greatness of God. In a sermon on John 13:7 entitled 'Dark Providences Made Clear in Due Time', Ralph Erskine explains God's purpose in dark providences thus:

It is to discover Himself in a way suitable to Himself and His glorious perfections and to show that His thoughts are not our thoughts nor His ways our ways. If He should work according to our thoughts and imaginations, how would it appear that He is Jehovah, a sovereign God that acts like Himself?' God owes us no explanations. We owe Him implicit trust and obedience. It is not easy to trust God when He appears to be silent, as He was with Job, but trust we must.

Dr. Ronald Dunn has these wise words to say on the problem of the silence of God in suffering:

I think this is the hardest part of all. You can take just about anything, if you know why. Everywhere I go, every meeting, I'm asked – 'Why?...I'm going to tell you something: God will very seldom answer your question of Why. It is not that there are no answers, it's just that you and I probably wouldn't be able to comprehend the answer if God were to tell us, and besides that, we have to learn to trust Him without knowing why. We ask Him questions. What we're usually doing is saying, 'Lord explain yourself', call God into account (Walking with the King, p. 173.)

There appears to be an obsession today with 'Why me?' Books which claim to have an answer to all our problems top the Christian best-sellers lists. One book that enjoyed a wide circulation, especially in the United States, Rabbi Harold Kushner's When Bad Things Happen to Good People, gave this answer to the problem of suffering; God is a limited God. 'God would like people to get what they deserve in life but he cannot always arrange it'. A reply to this came from the pen of Warren Wiersbe in his book, Why Us? And sub-titled 'When bad things happen to God's people'.

Wiersbe also has some most helpful insights from the sufferings of Job. He writes:

One of the reasons God did not answer Job's cries for justice was because He wanted to continue His relationship with Job on the basis of grace. God didn't want Job to have 'commercial faith' based on a celestial contract. He wanted Job to have faith in a God with such richness of character – love mercy, grace, goodness, kindness – that nothing could interfere with their relationship. Because the key question is not 'Why do the righteous suffer?' but 'Do we worship a God who is worthy of our suffering?'

So much of our thinking is self-centered. As Dr. Dunn points out, the major theme of the book of Job is not 'Why to Christians suffer?' but 'Why do men serve God?' If God were to strip us of everything would we still love and worship Him? If we can do so, like Job, we are giving the lie to the devil and we are glorifying God.

3. THE ONLY ULTIMATE SOLUTION IS TO CULTIVATE NEARNESS TO GOD

Far more important than any explanation for our suffering is nearness to God in our experience: 'I had a million questions to ask God; but when I met Him they all fled my mind and it didn't seem to matter' (Christopher Morley). This is the only way to get things into perspective. That is what happened to Asaph. As he saw the wicked prosper and experienced the chastening of the Lord the whole thing was too painful for him until he went into the sanctuary of God. He came into the presence of God. He listened to God's Word. 'Then' he says 'I understood their end' (Psalm 73:17). He did not just feel good. He had an understanding.

Thomas Boston speaks of communion with God in providence. It is the Word that interprets providence. Providence is the outworking of the will of God in my life. It is because the psalmist was out of fellowship with God that he was in the condition he was in. He had things out of perspective. 'I was a beast before thee'. When things were back in perspective he could say, 'It is good for me to draw near to God.'

Our responsibility whatever our circumstances is to keep on the path of duty:

Put thou thy trust in God
In duty's path go on.

People are usually more anxious to get rid of the problem than they are to find the purpose of God in it. 'Afflictions', says Matthew Henry 'are continued no longer than till they have done their work'. It is also our responsibility to pray that our afflictions will be sanctified to us. In his book Why Us? Warren Wiersbe speaks of a friend who found herself in a sea of troubles. Attempting to encourage her one day he said 'I want you to know that we are praying for you'. 'I appreciate that', she replied, 'What are you praying God to do?' Wiersbe found himself struggling for an answer and mentioned some things. 'Thank you', she said, 'but please pray for one more request. Pray that I won't waste all this suffering'.

4. WE CAN BE ASSURED THAT THE OUTCOME WILL BE 'BIG WITH MERCY'

'Every work of Christ toward His people', said Ralph Erskine, 'carries something more great and precious in the bosom of it than we are capable at the time of understanding.' William Cowper says something similar in the well-known words

> Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
> The clouds ye so much dread
> Are big with mercy, and shall break
> In blessings on your head.
>
> His purposes will ripen fast,
> Unfolding every hour;
> The bud may have bitter taste,
> But sweet will be the flower.

We see this frequently in the lives of God's saints. Think of Joseph and his long night of suffering. What a contrast between the prison and palace! 'They hurt his feet with fetters. He was laid in irons. Until the time that his word came to pass, the word of the Lord tested him'. And then the deliverance: 'The king sent and released him. The ruler of the people let him go free. He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his possessions. To bind his princes at his pleasure, and teach his elders wisdom' (Psalm 105: 18-22). It is the timing of providence that is often so wonderful. It is the seasonableness of a mercy that gives such value to it. The engine of God's providence can bring in such a train of happy consequences.

We may not be able to understand our present condition or sufferings because God's providence works on a grand scale. Job had no idea that he was the focus of a battle between God and Satan. God was, as it were, showing off a trophy of His grace. Job thought that his life was useless. At the very moment when he thought all was lost he was doing the greatest thing of all – he was glorifying God, he was giving the lie to the devil. It was twenty-two years after he was thrown into the pit that Joseph discovered the reason why.

Thomas Boston was not able to understand the purpose behind his 'sea of troubles' in Ettrick. He was daily exercised about God's providential dealings. It is there on almost every page of his Memoirs. Many would conclude that he was prone to morbid introspection. Whatever tendency to melancholy he may have had he was above all a deeply-exercised saint. The load of suffering he endured has surely an explanation in the abundant fruit that has come from his labors. While men who occupied prominent positions in the Church in his day are largely forgotten the Works of Boston are read all over the world.

Our lives resemble the making of a tapestry. The back of it seems to be a mass of tangled and purposeless threads while on the front a beautiful picture is taking shape.

> Not till the loom is silent
> And the shuttles cease to fly
> Shall God unroll the canvas
> And explain the reason why.
>
> The dark threads are as needful
> In the weaver's skilful hand
> As the threads of gold and silver
> In the pattern he has planned.

We must look to the end of everything. 'Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the patience of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord – that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful' (James 5:11)

CONCLUSION -

God has forged an inseparable link between sufferings and glory. That was the road that Christ took. He was made complete as our Savior 'through sufferings'. He endured. He was without sin.

How much more is suffering part of the road that leads sinners to perfection and glory! What abundant cause we have to be reconciled to our sufferings! 'I always feel much need of God's afflicting hand', wrote Robert Murray M'Cheyne. Said Rutherford: 'Praise God for the hammer, the file and the furnace' and, in similar vein, C. H. Spurgeon wrote, 'This is the place of the furnace, the forge and the hammer'.

We must not be deceived by the current view that invites us to get rid of our troubles and sicknesses and then rejoice. The New Testament calls on us to rejoice in the midst of sufferings. Indeed we ought to be alarmed if we have no experience of suffering, for

we suffer with Him that we may be glorified together. There is no glory without suffering.

Sinclair Ferguson in his work Add to you Faith recalls seeing a poster on the notice board of a church which read

> WORKSHOP – INSIDE
>
> SHOWROOM – UPSTAIRS

Our lives on earth resemble the workshop. We are in the place of preparation. My life has the chisel of God upon it. Our English word 'character' comes from a Greek word which means an engraving tool, a die for stamping an image. The trials of life can be God's tool for engraving the image of his Son on our character. The experiences may not be enjoyable but they are profitable. Upstairs in the glory God will display the finished articles. They will be like His Son.

God's people never sacrifice or suffer in vain. Our present suffering is an investment in future glory. The sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory. 'How soon you will find', says M'Cheyne again, 'that everything in your history, except sin, has been for you. Every wave of trouble has been wafting you to the sunny shores of a sinless eternity'.

> Deep waters cross'd life's pathway;
> The hedge of thorns was sharp;
> Now these lie all behind me;
> Oh! for a well-tuned harp!
>
> Soon shall the cup of blessing
> Wash down earth's bitterest woes;
> Soon shall the desert brier
> Break into Eden's rose.