

DOES GOD CARE?

by

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Author of His Cross and
Mine, Learn of Me, Life
of Victory, Lambs Among
Wolves, etc.

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Contents

1. Does God Care?.....
2. Is it Necessary
3. May We Benefit From It?.....
4. Shall We Seek to Escape It?
5. Victory Through Suffering.....
6. God Has A Purpose
7. The Way to Perfection
8. The Foundation of Character
9. The Secret of Victory.....
10. The Glorious Goal.....
11. Preparation For Service
12. He Shares Our Suffering.....
13. Where Suffering Is Unknown

*“Though He were a son,
Yet learned He obedience
By the things which He suffered.”
Hebrews 5:8*

1. Does God Care?

DAY by day we read of the tragedies in war-torn Europe and Asia—of famine, pestilence, suffering, and death. We hear over the radio of the calamities and disasters by land, sea, and air, and we become so accustomed to them that somehow they are soon forgotten. But someday, like lightning out of a clear sky, the hand of fate strikes one of our dearest friends or a member of our family. Then, someday, all the suffering and sorrow in the world become real to us.

Some years ago I picked up a newspaper and read an incident that impressed me deeply. A young man was standing at the end of a bridge crossing the river which flows between two cities. He was waiting for the interurban car to take him to his home, nearly an hour's distance away. It was a warm summer day, and many boys were swimming in the millpond far below the bridge. As the young man watched them, he noticed one of the smaller boys backing farther and farther from the shore. Suddenly the little fellow threw up his hands and disappeared under the water. The young man's first impulse was to run across the bridge and down the bank to rescue the boy. But, as he looked up, his car approached, and he decided that with so many good swimmers in the millpond, surely the little boy would be taken care of. So he boarded the car.

Arriving home, he went into the dining room, and there found his mother lying unconscious on the floor. He hastened to bathe her face and rub her hands. As she regained consciousness, she cried, "Oh, John, your brother Willie is drowned in the millpond!" Then from his lips came the agonizing cry, "If I had only known it was my brother!"

While I was attending a meeting recently a woman came to me and eagerly sought information about conditions in the countries of southern Europe, where I was working when the war began. After answering a number of her questions, which seemed to indicate an unusual knowledge of those countries, she asked, "did you meet A— B— over there?"

"Yes, indeed," I replied, "we had some wonderful experiences together."

Then she quietly said, "He is my brother."

Many of us have relatives and friends who are as dear to us as our own lives laboring among the millions of Asia and the Far East, or in war ravaged Europe. We listen to the reports of the sufferings wrought by the war, and its accompanying perils of famine, pestilence, and disease. We read letters from those dear ones, telling how they have fled from falling bombs, how they hid in thickets by the roadside or in the fields. We are told of others who, though desperately ill, must be carried night after night to the bombproof cellars. This tragedy all seems very real when it involves our own loved ones.

So the questions arise again and again, "Why does a loving, merciful God, whom we believe to be almighty, permit such conditions? Why does evil grow worse day by day?"

We do not ask these questions concerning all the suffering in the world, for there is much that does not seem difficult to explain. There is human suffering which is the result of man's refusal to obey the natural laws. A man stops at the roadhouse and takes several drinks of liquor, and then climbs into his car and speeds down the road. But he is driving too fast to make the next turn, and he goes over the bank and is picked up with body torn and bones broken. He spends long weeks in the hospital suffering for his folly. Others transgress the laws of health, and thus bring loathsome disease upon themselves. While still others, like the prodigal son, squander their money in riotous living, and come to poverty and want. Jesus taught that the father loved the prodigal son, but he could not interpose his authority to compel his son to do right.

But what appears a real problem to many is the fact that disaster, pain, and suffering overtake the good, the innocent, and the noble as well as those who live selfish, wicked lives. Millions of human beings are suffering today. Some of my dearest and most cherished friends who are endeavoring to follow Jesus Christ in every act of their life are suffering physical torture and mental anguish that seem almost unendurable. Physicians have exhausted their resources in seeking to alleviate the pain. Friends have done everything possible to lift the heavy burden of sorrow, yet weeks and months and years pass with little surcease from suffering.

I visited a woman whose Christian character is an example to the world. When a baby two months old she was terribly injured in a cyclone, and for sixty-eight years she has never taken a step. She has been confined continually to her bed or wheel chair, and she is seldom free from pain. Yet her smiling face, her enthusiastic words of courage and trust in God, reveal an inner source of peace and rest. We need not look long in any community to find these sufferers. My

heart aches and tears come to my eyes as I think of them; yet with all my sympathy and longing there seems to be little I can do to give them relief.

I know of but one place to go to find the solution of this awful mystery of suffering, and that is to the word of God. So I take up the Scriptures eagerly and prayerfully, longing to know what the great Master of the universe has revealed concerning human suffering.

Thy Will and Mine

Dear Lord, my will from Thine doth run
Too oft a different way;
I cannot say, "Thy will be done,"
In every darkened day.
My heart grows chill to see Thy will
Turn all life's gold to gray.

My will is set to gather flowers;
Thine blights them in my hand.
Mine reaches for life's sunny hours;
Thine leads through shadow land.
And all my days go on in ways
I cannot understand.

Yet more and more this truth doth dawn
Through failure and through loss:
The heart that beats transverse to Thine
Doth hereby make its cross.
Thine upright will buts straight and still
Through pride, and dream, and dross.

But if in parallel to Thine
My will doth meekly run,
All things in heaven and earth are mine;
My will is crossed by none:
Thou art in me, and I in Thee,
Thy will and mine are one.

—*Author unknown*

2. Is It Necessary?

THE Necessity of suffering in this world is clearly taught in the Scriptures, although this fact seems to be overlooked by many Christians. "Why does a loving God permit it?" How often this question is asked when some godly man or woman is suffering excruciating pain, or some innocent little child is crippled for life! The Father is almighty. It is written that "Jesus had compassion" on the people; His heart is

touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Why, then, does He not give relief to those who are tortured with pain?

As though anticipating such a question, the apostle Peter says, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings." 1 Peter 4:12, 13. Suffering is everywhere in our world of sin, and the Christian cannot escape it. Therefore we are not to think it strange when we must suffer. The experience of Job teaches us that the man who is living right before God is tested by pain and calamity. If the Christian were guaranteed freedom from suffering, then everyone would be a follower of God in order to escape the sorrow of the world. But the child of God has a source of strength to meet suffering which is not known to the world. His sorrow links him with Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul states: "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him: if we deny Him, He also will deny us." 2 Timothy 2:12.

In examining the record of the early disciples of Christ, we find that they did not shrink from suffering; rather, it is said, they rejoiced in affliction and persecution. We know that Christ loves us, for He gave His life on the cross to atone for our sins, and to open the way to heaven for us. He declared that all power was given to Him in heaven and in earth. Therefore it is evident that if there were no divine purpose to be accomplished by the suffering, He would not permit it to come to His children.

We know that as we near the end of the world and the coming of the Saviour, persecution and trial and increasing sufferings await the people of God. Is it possible to rise above the horror and dread of what is coming? The Scriptures speak of "men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth." Luke 21:26. But need God's children be tormented with this awful fear? We have read of the tortures inflicted on Christians in past ages, of the persecution and martyrdom that came to them. Yet in it all the heavenly Father gave them grace to endure for the truth's sake. In the final conflict, the enemy will work with greater intensity; but we can be assured that God will sustain those who are faithful to Him.

God loves and sympathizes with His people today as deeply and as tenderly as did Jesus during His earthly ministry. The faith that enabled the early disciples to rejoice in tribulation will enable us to endure hardship as good soldiers of the cross.

As we prayerfully study the Scriptures, we shall discover God's purpose in permitting His children to endure trial and affliction.

Since all suffering is in the world as the result of sin, it helps us to understand the deadly, malignant nature of sin and to long for deliverance from it.

And since Jesus took our humanity with its sorrow and suffering in order that he might sympathize with us and help us, it awakens in us a living response and a greater confidence in His faithfulness and care.

It is also one of God's methods of discipline and training by which we are to develop a Christ-like character and be fitted for His kingdom.

3. May We Benefit From It?

A WOMAN who had met sudden sorrow exclaimed bitterly, "I wish I had never been made!"

"My dear, you're only being made — and this is the Maker's process."

Here, then, we begin to see the truth that in the experience of suffering we may learn some of life's deepest and most valuable lessons.

As we study the writings of the apostle Paul we are impressed with the fact that they often breathe an intense longing to know Jesus Christ better. He declares: "I have suffered the loss of all things, . . . that I may win Christ: . . . that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death." Philippians 3:8-10. Paul's longing to know Jesus was rewarded by such an intimate friendship with Him as few men have ever known.

Many of us, like the great apostle, long to know Jesus better. Our hearts cry out for more of His power—"the power of His resurrection." We earnestly desire to enter into the fellowship of His peace, His joy, His love; but we do not penetrate deeply enough into the meaning of the Inspired Word to understand that "the fellowship of His sufferings" is the secret of that higher relationship with Him.

To the natural mind it seems irrational that anyone would ever choose to suffer if he could avoid it. Yet Jesus Christ chose to leave His exalted position in heaven, coming to this world and dying upon the cross to redeem lost men and women. Again and again taunting voices flung the words at the dying Saviour: "If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us." Luke 23:39. It was inconceivable to them that He should suffer and die in inexpressible agony if He were innocent, and could escape death. But in this, as in so many other matters, "the foolishness of God is wiser than men," and Jesus chose the suffering because, according to a principle of the divine government, it was the only way sinners could be pardoned and restored to fellowship with God.

How often when some terrible affliction or sorrow comes to us, we wonder and question why! Surely we may expect to find in the Scriptures an answer to this problem that perplexes many Christians. Let us first notice the life of the greatest character, except Christ, in the New Testament, and then study the life of the greatest character of the Old Testament. Both of these men deliberately chose the way of God even though they knew it would bring them experiences of privation and suffering. May it not be that their attitude toward trial and suffering has a definite relation to the greatness of their characters?

Among the many thrilling experiences recounted by the apostle Paul he mentions some of his sufferings: "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." 2 Corinthians 11:24-27.

One of the experiences of being shipwrecked is described fully in the twenty-seventh chapter of the book of Acts. Of the other two we know nothing except this brief mention.

Let us picture the great apostle, his heart filled with love for Christ and a passion for lost souls, as he sets out on a new journey to carry the gospel to people who still live in heathenism. A terrible storm arises, the ship is beaten and broken by the mighty waves, and perhaps all on board are lost except the apostle. As he is thrown into the raging sea he seizes a piece of floating timber and begins a struggle for life. All day long he watches and prays as he clings desperately to the plank, hoping against hope that a ship may appear or that he may come in sight of land. Night closes in and the fury of the storm increases. Chilled to the bone, his hands and arms benumbed by the strain, he asks himself, "Can I hold out until morning?" Every wave threatens to break his hold and carry him down to a watery grave.

And yet this man is God's chosen vessel, the great apostle to the Gentiles. Does not God see him struggling to keep his head above the foam capped billows? Has God forgotten His devoted servant? Is He utterly indifferent to his agony? Has he no love, no pity, no sympathy? Why, then, does he permit this awful trial?

Before attempting to answer these questions, let us go back to the day when Saul, the persecutor, was on the way to Damascus. Suddenly he was overwhelmed with a great light from heaven, and Jesus, whom he had been persecuting in the person of His disciples, talked to Paul. In that hour Paul volunteered for service in the cause of Christ. He proceeded to Damascus, and after three days of fasting and prayer, he was visited by Ananias, a servant of the Lord. Paul had been blinded by the great light which shone from heaven. Now Ananias was instructed to lay his hands upon Paul that his sight might be restored, and the Lord added: "I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake." Acts 9:16.

After he had been shown the terrible persecution and suffering awaiting him as an apostle and a missionary, Paul deliberately chose the way of sorrow and pain. He even went further in his devotion to his Master, for as he entered more fully into the divine plan, he prayed that he might know Christ "and the fellowship of His sufferings." And years later, in the shipwreck experience, as on so many other occasions, God answered the prayer of His servant.

There is deep meaning in the word "fellowship." It includes association, companionship, partnership. Our closest and most cherished friends are our companions in suffering. We may have many loved ones, but those who share in our afflictions and sorrows, those who make our sufferings their own, are the nearest and most precious companions. Nothing in this world draws men and women into close fellowship as do the bonds of suffering. This explains why the apostle Paul in his longing to know Jesus better, prayed to "know the fellowship of His sufferings."

On another occasion he says: "There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan of buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." 2 Corinthians 12:7-9.

The apostle clearly teaches that God has a definite purpose in permitting these sorrows and trials; when we welcome rather than shrink from them, the blessing and power of God are imparted to us.

A child whose pathway had been a rugged and thorny once remarked to me: "You know, Mr. MacGuire, the more trouble you have, the more real God is to you."

The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown;
No soul will ever reach that blest abode
Who finds not thorns and briers on his road.

4. Shall We Seek To Escape It?

LET us now glance for a moment at the greatest of the Old Testament characters. "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season: esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." Hebrews 11:24-26.

Here was a noble and talented young man who had been lifted by fortunate circumstances from a hovel of a slave to the palace of the king. He was given the highest education, the finest military training, and every other advantage which might fit him for the throne. In every way he seemed well qualified for the honor of ruling a mighty nation. But when the moment of decision came he refused it all! He chose rather to suffer. How incomprehensible it must have been to his associates, and what a terrible mistake! What a fool he was to choose to suffer rather than to sit on the throne of Egypt!

All this came to me forcibly as I entered a large room in the Turkish national Museum in Istanbul. Leaning against the walls were many open sarcophagi containing the mummies of famous pharaohs of old. The body of Moses might have been among them had he not chosen to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than be a pharaoh. When his splendid service for God was finished on earth, he went up to the top of Mount Pisgah and died, but Christ raised him from that lonely grave and took him to the heavenly mansions. Fifteen centuries later, accompanied by Elijah, he had the exalted privilege of coming down from the courts of heaven with a message of comfort and sympathy for the Saviour, who was about to face Calvary.

No, he was not a fool; he was wise when he chose to suffer affliction with the people of God. After forty years in the wilderness caring for the sheep, the call of God came to him to go back to Egypt and lead His people out of bondage. He realized something of the responsibility that went with such a task—the heavy burdens, the problems, the weakness of friends and the betrayal of enemies, the care and sorrow and suffering involved. But he also knew his God, and "endured, as seeing Him who is invisible." Hebrews 11:27.

Had Moses failed to go; had God
Granted his prayer, there would have been

For him no leadership to win;
No pillared fire; no magic rod;
No wonders in the land of Zin;
No smiting of the sea; no tears
Ecstatic shed on Sinai's steep;
No Nebo, with a God to keep
His burial. Only forty years
Of desert, watching with his sheep.

Would to God that thousands of young men and young women today might have wisdom and courage to make such a choice!

There are compensations that attend suffering with the people of God which far outweigh the pleasures of this world. There is a divine purpose in all the suffering that God permits to come to His children, and those who understand His plan will not shrink from the trials. They will not doubt nor be despondent, but will welcome that which is working for them the highest good.

The apostle Paul; says: "We glory in tribulations also;" and again, "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake." Romans 5:3; 2 Corinthians 12:10. It was because he understood the loving purpose of God in permitting these experiences that he did not seek to escape them. Instead he rejoiced in them and prayed that he might know Christ and "the fellowship of His sufferings."

"God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led if they could see the end from the beginning and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him. Not Enoch who was translated to heaven, not Elijah who ascended in a chariot of fire, was greater or more honored than John the Baptist who perished alone in the dungeon. 'Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake.' Philippians 1:29. And of all the gifts that heaven can bestow upon men, fellowship with Christ in His sufferings is the most weighty trust and the highest honor."—*The Desire of Ages*, pages 224, 225.

5. Victory Through Suffering

SUFFERING does not necessarily bring benefit or blessing to the individual. Our attitude toward the trial or affliction is the key to the result that comes. Millions of people today are suffering as a result of following their selfish desires and appetites. They know the pain that comes from indulgence in vice and sin, which brings a harvest of disease. They have no comfort, consolation, or hope in God.

We are dealing with the problem of the pain and suffering that is experienced by those who love and fear God. The Christian's chief concern is not merely to find an explanation for suffering, but to learn God's purpose in permitting it, and to gain the experience and the victory it is designed to bring.

Adversity and suffering are a means of training and discipline in the development of Christian character. "Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: for

whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye . . . not sons." Hebrews 12:5-8.

How reasonable it seems for God to deal with His children as sensible and loving parents do with their little ones! It is sometimes necessary to reprove and to chastise a child to save him from the consequence of his own folly. How many children have been cruelly maimed or burned to death as a result of playing with matches! Their parents may have forbidden the practice, but they may not have enforced their commands. Many children, like their parents, refuse to learn obedience without suffering. Other children have been protected and saved from disaster by discipline and punishment. In like manner we who are older are often deceived and enticed into playing with sin because we refuse to recognize its deadly nature. A loving and merciful heavenly Father scourges and chastens us in order that we may learn to love righteousness and hate iniquity, and so become partakers of His character and life.

"Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness." Hebrews 12:9, 10.

According to this scripture, there are trials and sufferings to be endured that are the evidence of our sonship; they reveal that our heavenly Father is molding and fashioning us for a place in His kingdom. When this lesson is learned, we shall say with the inspired psalmist: "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept Thy word." "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes." "Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." Psalm 119:67, 71, 75.

Paul believed that God used the trials and adversities that came to him to reveal His love. His unwavering faith in this truth enabled him to rejoice even in the cruel punishment and imprisonment that fell to his lot.

You and I can take what seems to be an ugly instrument of destruction, and by the grace of God transform it into a weapon with which to wage the good fight of faith. We can bring sweetness and light from the darkest and bitterest experiences of life, if, like the apostle James, we "count it all joy." See James 1:2.

"There is a lesson for us in this experience of Paul's, for it reveals God's way of working. The Lord can bring victory out of that which may seem to us discomfiture and defeat. We are in danger of forgetting God, of looking at the things which are seen, instead of beholding by the eye of faith the things which are unseen. When misfortune or calamity comes, we are ready to charge God with neglect or cruelty. If He sees fit to cut off our usefulness in some line, we mourn, not stopping to think that thus God may be working for our good. We need to learn that chastisement is a part of His great plan, and that under the rod of affliction the Christian may sometimes do more for the master than when engaged in active service."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, page 481.

Someday

Someday all doubt and mystery will be made clear;
The threat'ning clouds, which now we see, will disappear.
Someday what seems a punishment, or loss, or pain,
Will prove to be God's blessing, sent for very gain.

Someday our weary feet will rest in sweet content,
And we shall know how we were blest by what was sent;
And looking back with clearer eyes, o'er life's short span,
Shall see with wondering, glad surprise, God's perfect plan.

And knowing that the way we went was God's own way,
Shall understand His wise intent, someday, someday.

6. God Has a Purpose

OF all the lessons that erring, sinful men must learn none is of greater importance than the lesson of obedience. Without obedience there is no hope of salvation, for there is no promise of eternal life to those who rebel against God. But obedience is difficult to learn, and we overlook the fundamental principle that every lesson is to be mastered, and we shall never reach the goal until our characters reflect Christ's image. That is to say, we have not learned obedience until we have learned His obedience. We must learn it from Him, and as He learned it, for He is our example. God has told us in His word the precise method by which Jesus learned obedience, and we need to give the most careful heed to this instruction.

It is said of Jesus that "in the days of his flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that he feared; though He were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." Hebrews 5:7, 8.

Was it necessary for God's Son to learn obedience? Weymouth's translation gives special emphasis to this thought: "Although He was God's Son, yet He learned obedience from the sufferings which He endured." We need to be deeply impressed by this principle that molded the life of our Saviour. "He learned obedience from the sufferings which He endured."

When Adam was placed in the Eden home God had prepared for him, he was put on probation. Everything depended upon his allegiance to God. It was the Father's purpose to teach the human family obedience through Adam, the head of the race; but Adam failed when he disobeyed the divine command.

In fulfilling the plan of redemption, Jesus came to earth and took upon Himself the same flesh and blood in which Adam failed. Being born of a woman centuries after the fall of man, Jesus inherited all the tendencies to sin inherent in our weak, frail humanity. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same."
"When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made

under the law.” Hebrews 2:14; Galatians 4:4. So Jesus, taking this burden of weak, fallen humanity upon Himself, undertook to do what Adam had failed to do in his original perfection. Thus humanity learned obedience by the crucifixion of that fallen, disobedient nature which the Son of God took, and His victory made the development of an obedient, sinless character possible. It is this holy life that he offers to us, but it can come to us only through the same process by which Jesus obtained it. Self, the old fallen, sinful Adam nature, must be crucified and die. “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lust.” Galatians 5:24.

It was the union of His divinity with humanity that enabled Jesus to endure the temptations and suffering where Adam failed. And Christ came to make us “partakers of the divine nature,” that by following His example we may triumph as he did.

Now if Jesus could learn obedience only through suffering, can we expect to learn the same lesson without it? How often we declare our earnest desire and determination to be obedient! Yet we shrink from the method God provides by which we are to learn this truth. It is hard to learn our lesson, because we refuse to suffer.

“Study Christ’s definition of a true missionary, ‘Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.’ Mark 8:34. Following Christ, as spoken of in these words, is not a pretense, a farce. Jesus expects His disciples to follow closely in His footsteps, enduring what he endured, suffering what he suffered, overcoming as he overcame.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol.8, p. 209.

“Through trials and persecution, the glory— character—of God is revealed in His chosen ones. The church of God, hated and persecuted by the world, are educated and disciplined in the school of Christ. They walk in narrow paths on earth; they are purified in the furnace of affliction. They follow Christ through sore conflicts; they endure self-denial, and experience bitter disappointments; but their painful experience teaches them the guilt and woe of sin, and they look upon it with abhorrence. Being partakers of Christ’s sufferings, they are destined to be partakers of His glory. . . . ‘These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’ ”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pages 50, 51.

We are not forced to learn obedience in our suffering; when suffering comes, if we will welcome it as God’s discipline to perfect our character for the home above, then we are learning obedience as Jesus learned it.

I Understand

Hast thou been hungry, child of Mine?
I, too, have needed bread;
For forty days I tasted nought
Till by the angels fed.
Hast thou been thirsty? On the cross
I suffered thirst for thee;
I’ve promised to supply thy need.

My child, come unto Me.

Perhaps thy way is weary oft,
Thy feet grow tired and lame;
I wearied when I reached the well,
I suffered just the same;
And when I bore the heavy cross,
I fainted 'neath the load;
And so I've promised rest to all
Who walk the weary road.

Doth Satan sometimes buffet thee,
And tempt thy soul to sin?
Do faith and hope and love grow weak?
Are doubts and fears within?
Remember, I was tempted thrice
By this same foe of thine;
But he could not resist the word,
Nor conquer power divine.

When thou art sad and tears fall fast,
My heart goes out to thee;
For I wept o'er Jerusalem—
The place so dear to Me.
And when I came to Lazarus' tomb,
I wept—My heart was sore;
I'll comfort thee when thou dost weep,
Till sorrows all are o'er.

Do hearts prove false when thine is true?
I know the bitter dart;
I was betrayed by one I loved—
I died of broken heart.
I loved My own, they loved Me not,
My heart was lonely, too;
I'll never leave thee, child of Mine,
My loving heart is true.

Art thou discouraged in thy work?
Doth ministry seem vain?
I ministered midst unbelief,
Midst those with greed of gain.
They would not hearken to My voice,
But scoffed with one accord.

Your labor never is in vain
If done unto the Lord.

Have courage, then, My faithful one,
I suffered all the way;
Thy sensitive and loving heart
I understand today.
Whate'er thy grief, whate'er thy care,
Just bring it unto Me;
Yea, in thy day of trouble, call,
I will deliver thee.
—*Anonymous.*

7. The Way to Perfection

WHEN one becomes acquainted with God, the soul develops a love for righteousness and a corresponding hatred for iniquity. There is an increasing longing in the heart for complete victory over sin, for a pure and holy life like that of the Master. To attain this Christlike life we must comply with the conditions set forth in the Scriptures—behold Him, follow Him, abide in Him. By beholding Him we are changed. This is not a passive experience, for as we yield to Him and co-operate with Him, He leads us along the path He trod while here on earth. “It became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering.” Hebrews 2:10.

Now if the best way and the only way to make the Captain of our salvation perfect was through sufferings, we cannot expect to be made perfect in any other way, for Jesus plainly stated, “The disciple is not above his master; but everyone that is perfect shall be as his Master.” Luke 6:40.

Would you not choose suffering and rejoice in affliction if you were convinced that there was no other pathway by which the goal of Christian perfection could be reached? The fiery trials are likened to the furnace that purifies and refines gold and silver; “Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.” Isaiah 48:10.

Job, the man who knew unparalleled sorrow and suffering, declared: “He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” Job 23:10.

Christ, the Captain of our salvation, took upon Himself our weak, fallen humanity, and, through the suffering and death of the cross, exalted human beings to be heirs of God. The Scriptures speak of Christ as the head, and His people as his body. The apostle Paul intimates that the experience that was necessary for the head is also necessary for the body. He says: “I Paul . . . now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body’s sake, which is the church.” Colossians 1:23, 24. Christ bore all the anguish and suffering necessary as the head and captain of our salvation; now it is the privilege of each member of the body to “fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ,” that the entire body may be perfected as the Head is perfect.

“Trial is part of the education given in the school of Christ, to purify God’s children from the dross of earthliness. It is because God is leading His children, that trying experiences come to them. Trials and obstacles are His chosen methods of discipline, and his appointed conditions of success. He who reads the hearts of men know their weaknesses better than they themselves can know them. He sees that some have qualifications which, if rightly directed, could be used in the advancement of His work. In His providence he brings these souls into different positions and varied circumstances, that they may discover the defects that are concealed from their own knowledge. He gives them opportunity to overcome these defects, and to fit themselves for service. Often He permits the fires of affliction to burn, that they may be purified.

“God’s care for His heritage is unceasing. He suffers no affliction to come upon His children but such as is essential for their present and eternal good. He will purify His church, even as Christ purified the temple during His ministry on earth. All that He brings upon His people in test and trial comes that they may gain deeper piety and greater strength to carry forward the triumphs of the cross.” —*The Acts of the Apostles*, pages 524, 525.

Lean Hard

Child of My love, lean hard!
And let Me feel the pressure of thy care.
I know thy burden, for I fashioned it,
Poised it in My own hand and made its weight
Precisely that which I saw best for thee;
And when I placed it on thy shrinking form,
I said: "I shall be near, and while thou leanest
On Me, this burden shall be Mine, not thine."
So shall I keep within My circling arms
The child of My own love; here lay it down
Nor fear to weary Him who made, upholds,
And guides the universe. Yet closer come;
Thou art not near enough. Thy care, thyself,
Lay both on Me, that I may feel My child
Reposing on My heart. Thou lovest Me?
I doubt it not; then, loving Me, lean hard!
—*M.E. Pearce*

8. The Foundation of Character

THE building of a noble character may be compared in some respects to the erection of a magnificent temple. The first essential is an adequate foundation. A man was passing down the street of a city when he observed a crew of men excavating a large and unusually deep hole in the earth. His curiosity was aroused, and he approached the overseer with the question, “What are you going to do here?”

“We are going to erect an office building,” the man replied.

“But why are you going down so deep?”

“Because we are going up so high,” was the answer.

This illustrates what I believe to be a fundamental principle in the development of a noble character. There must be a proper balance between the foundation and the superstructure. A noble character is not erected upon a shallow, flimsy foundation. Emotions that have never been deeply stirred by sorrow would be correspondingly insensible to exquisite joy.

A famous professor of music in Vienna once said of a gifted pupil: “She is a magnificent singer; and yet there is something lacking in her singing. Life has been too kind to her. But if it happened that someone broke her heart, she would be the finest singer in Europe.”

We look forward to the indescribable glories of heaven, and anticipate an experience of joy and happiness beyond anything we know here. But our experience of trials and sorrows here will immeasurably increase our appreciation of the unbroken peace and happiness of that holy land. After I had endured a few weeks in war-torn Europe, the peace and freedom of America seemed more wonderful to me than ever before.

As we glance at the lives of some of the noblest characters in history, we see that hardship, trial, and suffering contributed much to the foundation of their lives. We think of Joseph, who as a youth was sold into slavery by his own brothers. All his pitiful pleadings and entreaties were met with heartless cruelty. In a few hours his situation changed from that of a tenderly cherished son to a despised and helpless slave. Although he was filled with grief and terror, he resolved to serve God with all his heart, and be true to Him at any cost. And so that tragic day’s experience became the turning point in Joseph’s life. “Its terrible calamity had transformed him from a petted child to a man, thoughtful, courageous, and self-possessed.” Other trials and sorrows awaited him but they proved to be steppingstones to greater usefulness and a more exalted position.

God permitted Daniel to be cast into the lions’ den, and He allowed the three Hebrew worthies to go into the fiery furnace; but their steadfastness and loyalty to the right brought them through the ordeal, and they left a noble example for the youth of all succeeding ages.

A fundamental quality of a noble character is patience. Paul says: “We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience.” Romans 5:3. James admonishes: “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” James 1:2-4. I think the most patient, gentle, sympathetic people I have ever known have developed these traits of character through trial and suffering.

Many people always seem happy and joyful while they possess everything they desire—friends, money, and the pleasures of the world. But they are inclined to be despondent, gloomy, and discouraged when hardship, loss, and suffering come. It is God’s purpose that his children shall learn to “clasp the hand of Christ, and trust Him in the darkness as well as in the light.” They know that He loves them and permits only those experiences to come which will broaden and deepen their lives and make them a greater blessing to the world if they will accept them through faith, and win a spiritual victory over them.

We may be certain that one who has sounded the depths of sorrow and suffering here on earth will have developed a capacity for corresponding heights of heavenly joy and happiness in the world to come. A noble man who lay on his bed, racked with pain, declared: "I have known more of God since I came to this bed than through all the rest of my life." Kagawa of Japan thus described how he felt at the thought of going blind: "The darkness is a holy of holies of which no one can rob me. In the darkness I meet God face to face."

The sorrow and pain endured with patience and fortitude born of trust in God will prepare us to understand and appreciate the joy and glory of heaven's reward. And so of Jesus it is written: "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." Isaiah 53:11.

Confidence

I know not if the dark or bright
Shall be my lot;
If that wherein my hopes delight
Be blest or not.
It may be mine to drag for years
Toil's heavy chain,
Or day and night my meat be tears
On bed of pain.
Dear faces may surround my hearth
With smiles and glee,
Or I may dwell alone, and mirth
Be strange to me.

My bark is wafted to the strand,
By breath divine,
And on the helm there rests a hand
Other than mine.
One who has known in storms to sail
I have on board;
Above the raging of the gale
I hear my Lord.

He holds me when the billows smite—
I shall not fall.
If sharp, 'tis short; if long, 'tis light—
He tempers all.
Safe to the land! Safe to the land!
The end is this;
And then with Him go hand in hand
Far into bliss.
—Henry Alford.

9. The Secret of Victory

OUR heavenly Father will never be satisfied with anything short of perfection. He made man perfect in the beginning, and his plan of redemption is designed to restore his children to that original perfection where they will again reflect His image. He promises this in the beautiful words of the apostle: "Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." Romans 8:29. This restoration, which begins with the new birth, is a purifying, refining process that God can accomplish only when He has the confidence and co-operation of the individual.

A person is afflicted with a serious malady. He becomes conscious of an abnormal growth in his body, which his physician declares is malignant. There is only one way to save the patient's life, and that is to remove the deadly growth by means of the surgeon's knife. It means pain and suffering, but it is the only hope for recovery from the disease. Much of the success of the operation depends upon the sick man's confidence in the surgeon, and his determination to cooperate in an endeavor to regain his health.

In like manner sin can never be removed by wishing or by our weak efforts. The only remedy is the knife in the hands of the divine Physician. We need to have confidence in His love, His power, His skill, and in the remedy He offers for our healing. "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh." 1 Peter 4:1,2.

It is possible to stop sinning; but not without suffering and dying to self, which is the sinful nature. If we really long to be rid of every vestige of sin, shall we not welcome suffering if it is the necessary discipline God must use to set us free and make us perfect in Christ?

The cry of earth's anguish went up unto God:

"Lord, take away pain—

The shadow that darkens the world Thou hast made,

The close-coiling chain

That strangles the heart, the burden that weighs

On the wings that would soar.

Lord, take away pain from the world Thou hast made

That it love Thee the more."

Then answered the Lord to the world He had made:

"Shall I take away pain?

And with it the power of the soul to endure

Made strong by the strain?

Shall I take away pity that knits heart to heart

And sacrifice high?

Will ye lose all your heroes who lift from the flame

White brows to the sky?

Shall I take away love that redeems with a price

And smiles through the loss?

Can ye spare, from the lives that would climb,

The Christ on His cross?"

God's way is best, and the trusting disciple does not look upon suffering and sorrow with an attitude of self-pity or resentment. He faces life's conflicts as God-given opportunities to grow in grace, and he wears the thorns as a crown.

I do not mean to suggest that Christian perfection may be attained merely through sorrow and suffering. What I mean to say is that since we come into the world with a fallen, selfish, sinful nature, the process by which we are restored to intimate fellowship with God requires the death of our very nature.

A sinful nature cannot cease sinning; consequently God's provision for victory over sin is a transformation of nature. The apostle Peter states "that He has granted us His precious and wondrous promises, in order that through them you may, one and all, become sharers in the very nature of God, having completely escaped the corruption which exists in the world through earthly cravings." 2 Peter 1:4, Weymouth.

In order to possess the divine nature we are required to "crucify the flesh," or the sin nature, and this is a more serious and painful process than many realize.

The apostle Paul says, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Galatians 2:20. "Crucify" means "to put to a violent and painful death." To say "I am crucified," means far more than to assent to a theory or a creed. Here is where our divine Teacher and Master has shown us the way, for He was made "perfect through sufferings." If we have faith in Him, and co-operate with Him, we shall be elevated into a higher, purer atmosphere, where we shall love righteousness and hate iniquity. This brings a peace and happiness, even in the midst of suffering, that the world cannot know.

"The God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." 1 Peter 5:10.

Here are the wonderful words of Inspiration. After suffering will come victory, perfection, and glory. What an inspiration it is to keep this goal ever before us as we follow in the footsteps of our Master! But it is plain that if we shrink from trial, if we murmur and complain at our lot, and long for ease and pleasure, we reject the only pathway to the glorious heights and depths of a Christlike character.

"With more than a father's affection, with more than a mother's love, God sends pain to men," says N.D. Hillis. "Carefully He chooses the tests. Suffering comes under divine commission. Sorrows do not riot through life. Men are not atoms buffeted hither and thither. Troubles are appointed to refine away our grossness; to transmute selfishness into self-sacrifice; to destroy vice, to transfigure all our life. Refused, troubles bruise without softening; they crush without maturing. Accepted and rightly used, they change their nature and become joys. Tears are seeds; planted, they blossom into joy and gladness."

God places a hedge about His children. No one can pass this hedge without God's permission, and he allows only those experiences to come that will "work together for good" to those that love him. Romans 8:28. Thus it is recorded of Job: "Hast not Thou made an hedge about him,

and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.” Job 1:10.

Job was a noble, upright man, possessing wealth, friends, and honor among his people. God permitted Satan to visit terrible calamities upon him in rapid succession, depriving him of his children, his property, and his health. Those whom he had known as his friends criticized and condemned him, and his wife counseled him to “curse God, and die.” Yet the record says that “in all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.” Job 2:9; 1:22.

What a sublime example of faith that trusts God in the darkness as well as in the light! His unwavering confidence enabled him to declare: “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.” Job 13:15. Job was certain that God had a divine purpose in all his tribulation, and that in the end there would be victory for him. Thus he submitted to the will of God, even though he cried out in terrible anguish and sorrow. With implicit trust in his Maker he could declare: “He knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” Job 23:10.

Job gained the victory over Satan and over self, and the ordeal of suffering brought to him such a revelation of God and of himself that he could say: “I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” Job 42:5, 6. Then the blessing of God was poured out upon him in double measure, not only in family and friends and property, but in new spiritual power.

“God leads His children by a way that they know not; but He does not forget or cast off those who put their trust in Him. He permitted affliction to come upon Job, but He did not forsake him. He allowed the beloved John to be exiled to lonely Patmos, but the Son of God met him there, and his vision was filled with scenes of immortal glory. God permits trials to assail His people, that by their constancy and obedience they themselves may be spiritually enriched, and that their example may be a source of strength to others. . . . The very trials that task our faith most severely, and make it seem that God has forsaken us, are to lead us closer to Christ, that we may lay all our burdens at His feet, and experience the peace which He will give us in exchange.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 129.

10. The Glorious Goal

WE are in a world that has fallen under the tragic curse because of disobedience. A war for supremacy is being waged between two mighty, invisible forces. Until the war is won, those who stand loyal to Christ must be subject to the malignant hatred and bitter assaults of the adversary.

“The same enmity is manifested toward Christ’s followers was manifested toward their Master. Whoever sees the repulsive character of sin, and, in strength from above resists temptation, will assuredly arouse the wrath of Satan and his subjects. Hatred of the pure principles of truth, and reproach and persecution of its advocates, will exist as long as sin and sinners remain. The followers of Christ and the servants of Satan cannot harmonize. The offense of the cross has not ceased. ‘All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.’ ”—*The Great Controversy*, page 507.

“ ‘The Lord is not slack concerning His promise.’ He does not forget or neglect His children; but He permits the wicked to reveal their true character, that none who desire to do His will may be deceived concerning them. Again, the righteous are placed in the furnace of affliction, that they themselves may be purified; that their example may convince others of the reality of faith and godliness; and also that their consistent course may condemn the ungodly and unbelieving.” — *Ibid.*, page 48.

Jesus never promised His people a life of ease and freedom from sorrow and suffering; but He does promise peace and consolation in the midst of adversity. He offers the assurance, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” 2 Corinthians 12:9. He comforts us with the words: “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness.” Isaiah 41:10. And, in addition to this, He promises a glorious reward after the discipline of this life is past. “If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him: if we deny Him, He also will deny us.” 2 Timothy 2:12.

Of course, we shall not suffer over there; so, if we suffer, it must be here. We can never reign with Him over there unless we suffer with Him here. Therefore he says, “Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.” 1 Peter 4:13.

“Our master was a man of sorrows; He was acquainted with grief; and those who suffer with Him will reign with Him. When the Lord appeared to Saul in his conversion, He did not purpose to show him how much good he should enjoy, but what great things he should suffer for His name. Suffering has been the portion of the people of God from the days of the martyr Abel. The patriarchs suffered for being true to God and obedient to His commandments. The great Head of the church suffered for our sake; His first apostles and the primitive church suffered; the millions of martyrs suffered, and the Reformers suffered. And why should we, who have the blessed hope of immortality, to be consummated at the soon appearing of Christ, shrink from a life of suffering?

“Were it possible to reach the tree of life in the midst of the Paradise of God without suffering, we would not enjoy so rich a reward for which we had not suffered. We would shrink back from the glory; shame would seize us in the presence of those who had fought the good fight, had run the race with patience, and had laid hold on eternal life. But none will be there who have not, like Moses, chosen to suffer affliction with the people of God. The prophet Johns saw the multitude of the redeemed, and inquired who they were. The prompt answer came: ‘These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb.’ ” — *Testimonies for the Church*, vol.1, p.78.

“Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” Philippians 1:29.

Suffering and glory are associated together many times in the Scriptures. “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together.” Romans 8:16, 17.

How different suffering becomes when we see how it links us with our Lord! "Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" asked Nebuchadnezzar. "Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." Daniel 3:24, 25. Out of the darkness of suffering comes the glorious light of fellowship and final glory with our God.

We cannot hope to be glorified with Jesus unless we have first suffered with Him. We are told that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." 1 Corinthians 2:9. Our imagination may picture a thousand joys and privileges of that better land; but nothing can be more wonderful or more thrilling than to be glorified with Jesus, our Redeemer and King. But let us not overlook the fact that there is a positive relationship between the suffering here and the glory over there. Paul says: "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Romans 8:18.

I knew a noble, godly woman who lay paralyzed and helpless, unable to speak a word for thirteen years. She saw her husband go to his work day by day to provide for the family; but she could not bid him farewell when he left nor welcome him on his return. She saw her son grow to manhood, and her daughter to womanhood, but she could never speak a word to them.

Day after day through the long months and years she suffered excruciating pain, while by her countenance and every means possible to her she demonstrated a sublime patience, and a supreme confidence in her Lord. It was a marvelous demonstration of the reality of God's promise, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness." 2 Corinthians 12:9. We may never understand why such an experience comes, but we can thank God for the power to endure such suffering and for the hope of final triumph. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." 2 Corinthians 4:17. "Rejoice," therefore, "inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." 1 Peter 4:13.

Thy Grace Is Sufficient for Me

In tenderest tones they were spoken,
Divine words of comfort to me:
"Let not your heart be troubled—
My grace is sufficient for thee."

This promise each day I am trusting;
Believing Thee, Lord, I am free
Thou art able to keep me from falling;
Thy grace is sufficient for me.

In hardship and trial I glory,
His cross ne'er a burden shall be;

His strength is made perfect in weakness;
His grace is sufficient for me.

I will sing through eternity's ages
The song that is dearest to me:
"All praise to my Lord and Redeemer;
His grace is sufficient for me.

11. Preparation for Service

THERE is another answer that God gives us to the problem of human suffering. Jesus invites everyone to come to Him, not only to secure pardon and eternal life, but in order that he may have a part in loving service for others. Jesus announced His mission to this world in the words: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." Luke 4:18, 19.

Today, as in the days of Christ, wherever we go we find the poor, the brokenhearted, the blind, and those who are enslaved by sin. No joy in this world surpasses that of participation with Jesus in bringing relief to those in need. Many do not know the sin-pardoning Saviour who longs to lift the burden and set the captives free. It is our privilege as Christians to help those who are in trouble; but we cannot impart anything to them that we do not possess. A blind man does not look for healing from one who is also without sight.

When we learn to look to God in our trials and afflictions, when we seek Him for comfort, courage, and rest, we shall find our source of love, sympathy, and strength with which to help others who are in trouble. "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ." 2 Corinthians 1:3-5.

What a glorious ministry is opened before those who, having known sorrow and suffering, have found the inexpressible peace and joy of the Father's love!

In Hebrews 11 Inspiration has set forth a glorious list of God's heroes and heroines of the past. Among them are mighty leaders who profoundly impressed the world in their day. Others were humble men and women who are mentioned primarily not because of their riches, or education, or brilliant achievements, but because they suffered nobly and bravely for God. In a world where sin reigns and evil is forever warring against good, they stood loyally for the right, refusing the path of ease and selfish gratification. Like Moses, they chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." They "endured, as seeing Him who is invisible."

"Others were put to death with torture, refusing the deliverance offered to them—that they might secure a better resurrection." Verse 35, Weymouth.

They were offered deliverance if they would renounce their faith. They might have saved their lives and property, and had the honor and praise of men. But they would have come up in the final resurrection to receive their just desert for the rejection of the redemption purchased for them on the cross of Calvary. They would say an eternal farewell to their sainted friends, and go away into everlasting darkness in the lake of fire. But they chose the suffering with Him, and soon they will come up in the first resurrection, clothed with immortality, and heirs to the eternal reward in the new earth.

“Others again were tested by cruel mockery and by scourging; yes, and by chains and imprisonment.” Verse 36, Weymouth.

Think of the cruel mockings and scourging that Jesus endured for us. Millions have languished in prison cells, their hands and feet bound with heavy chains. I am always thrilled when I clasp the hand of a man who has suffered torture for Christ. There is something about “fellowship of His sufferings” that enlarges and ennobles the character.

“They were stoned.” Verse 37.

Scores of innocent men and women, and even children, among the Indians of the Andes have been scourged with the cruel, braided lash of the herder’s whip. I think of a group I saw a few years ago who had been beaten with clubs and stoned until their faces were swollen and bleeding, and their garments were soaked with blood. It seemed a miracle that they were alive. How my heart thrilled as those humble souls, persecuted for their faith, stood with uplifted faces and sang:

I must have the Saviour with me,
For I dare not walk alone:
I must feel His presence near me,
And His arm around me thrown.

Then my soul shall fear no ill.
Let Him lead me where He will,
I will go without a murmur,
And His footsteps follow still.

So it was with the first Christian martyr. When being tried by the Sanhedrin, the members of that tribunal “looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.” But because he told them of their fearful condition and need, “they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him.” Acts 6:15; 7:57, 58.

But a young man named Saul witnessed the cruel scene, and heard the dying prayer of Stephen that God would pardon his murderers. Like a sharp arrow it pierced his heart, and the pain never ceased until he let the Saviour in. Then he was transformed into the mighty apostle Paul. Surely the suffering of Stephen was not in vain, for the fruit of that suffering will be a part of his eternal reward.

Jesus will look upon the redeemed in His kingdom with infinite joy, because He will see in them the result and the reward of His sacrifice on Calvary. Surely in some degree this is the experience of his faithful witnesses here.

I think of a dear brother I met but a few months ago in one of the countries of Europe where men still suffer and die for their faith. His countenance was lighted up with such an expression of serenity and joy that I was curious to know his secret. One day I heard of his earnest, untiring efforts to win souls to Christ. On one occasion he visited a home, and was telling the family of the Lamb of God, when He was taken by priest and police. He was thrown upon his face and beaten cruelly with a club. As the blows fell, he began to count, "one, two, three," when a sudden inspiration turned his thoughts from his own physical anguish. He began to ask God earnestly to help him win a sinner to Christ for every blow he received. He testified that from the instant he began to pray, he scarcely felt the blows any more. He received forty-five strokes with the club, and by the grace of God he won forty-five souls to Christ in that town after he was released.

There are many servants of God who have toiled long and faithfully in the Master's vineyard, and have found their chief joy in winning souls. One source of the keenest sorrow and anguish of spirit to such a one is to be laid low by sickness, and to spend weeks and months, or even years, in helplessness and pain. As he lies bedfast, he longs to be busy once more in the master's service. The enemy may tempt him to fear that his work has not been all that God desired; he may feel that the Lord has rejected him and cast him off. How comforting it is to know that God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, and that "Christ's true witnesses are never laid aside."

"Patience as well as courage has its victories. By meekness under trial, no less than by boldness in enterprise, souls may be won to Christ. The Christian who manifests patience and cheerfulness under bereavement and suffering, who meets even death itself with the peace and calmness of an unwavering faith, may accomplish for the gospel more than he could have effected by a long life of faithful labor. Often when the servant of God is withdrawn from active duty, the mysterious providence which our shortsighted vision would lament, is designed by God to accomplish a work that otherwise would never have been done.

"Let not the follower of Christ think, when he is no longer able to labor openly and actively for God and his truth, that he has no service to render, no reward to secure. Christ's true witnesses are never laid aside. In health and sickness, in life and death, God uses them still."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, page 465.

Faith

I will not doubt, though all my ships at sea
Come drifting home with broken masts and sails;
I shall believe the hand which never fails,
From seeming evil worketh good to me;
And, though I weep because those sails are battered,
Still will I cry, while my best hopes lie shattered,
"I trust in Thee."

I will not doubt, though all my prayers return
Unanswered from the still, white realm above;
I shall believe it is an all-wise Love
Which has refused those things for which I yearn;
And though, at times, I cannot keep from grieving,
Yet the pure ardor of my fixed believing
Undimmed shall burn.

I will not doubt, though sorrows fall like rain,
And troubles swarm like bees about a hive;
I shall believe the heights for which I strive
Are only reached by anguish and by pain;
And, though I groan and tremble with my crosses,
I yet shall see, through my severest losses,
The greater gain.

I will not doubt; well anchored in the faith,
Like some staunch ship, my soul braves every gale,
So strong its courage that it will not fail
To breast the mighty, unknown sea of death.
Oh, may I cry when body parts with spirit,
"I do not doubt," so listening worlds may hear it,
With my last breath.
—*Ella Wheeler Wilcox*
("Faith," from *Poems of Pleasure*, used by permission
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12. He Shares Our Suffering

THE announcement of the angel to Joseph was: "She shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save his people from their sins." Matthew 1:21. We know Jesus, first of all, as the One who saves us from our sins. This is not to be merely a theory or a doctrine, but an actual experience. Centuries before that announcement was made to Joseph, the inspired prophet had written: They shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23.

It is not enough to know Jesus as the one who died to atone for our sins, the one who ascended to heaven to be our high priest and advocate at the throne of grace. We need to know him as the ever-present, almighty Saviour—God with us. To many who profess to be Christians, God seems far away and unreal, and so they have nothing to sustain them in times of sorrow and affliction. What we need is a fuller revelation of God.

God seeks to make plain in His word that His relation to His children is very close and personal. "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old." Isaiah 63:9. God illustrates his tender love for His children by comparing them to "the apple of His eye."

I think of the experience of the parents whose little girl found a vial of laudanum and drank it. As soon as it was discovered, the doctor was called, and every measure was taken to save her life. Finally the doctor said: "There is nothing more to be done but to keep her awake. If she once goes to sleep, she will probably never waken." He went out to a tree and broke off some small switches, and told the father to whip her bare limbs whenever she grew sleepy. The father applied the switch for a time, but finally, bursting into tears, he cried: "I cannot endure this torture any longer," and he fled from the house. Then the mother took up the task, and carried out the doctor's instruction until the effect of the drug wore away, and the child was safe.

We cannot deny that the love of that mother exceeded that of the father, enabling her to persevere in the severe treatment necessary to save the child's life, though she doubtless suffered more than the child. Can we not believe that God loves his children for whom He gave His Son on Calvary? Can we not trust Him when He administers the only remedy for sinful natures and defective characters—sorrow, affliction, and pain? We can know that in the ordeal He suffers more than do His children.

Not long ago I was talking with a man who was facing a serious problem. For months he had been out of work and had seen his family reduced to such poverty and want that he had grown desperate. He finally found a position with a good salary; but, in accepting it, he was required to transgress the command of God to keep the Sabbath holy.

I suggested that there must be a better solution to the problem.

He said: "I believe God holds me responsible for my children, and would condemn me if I let them starve."

"Don't you think God loves those dear children as much as you do?" I asked. "Their very life depends upon His love and care every moment. It may be that God wants to make something out of them which He can never do if you are determined to have your way. God gives you life and strength even though you are disobeying Him every week. Do you think that if you determined to obey Him at any cost He would forsake you and let your children starve? If your family suffers, God suffers with them."

Such experiences not only reveal a sad lack of confidence in God, they also reveal that we do not understand that God suffers when his children suffer. It will mean much more to us if we look at this question from God's viewpoint. If we believe that God loves and sympathizes with the children of men, then no human mind can conceive of the suffering God has endured through the ages as he has witnessed millions of human beings reject His offers of pardon.

"Those who think of the result of hastening or hindering the gospel think of it in relation to themselves and to the world. Few think of its relation to God. Few give thought to the suffering

that sin has caused our Creator. All heaven suffered in Christ's agony; but that suffering did not begin or end with His manifestation in humanity. The cross is a revelation to our dull senses of the pain that, from its very inception, sin has brought to the heart of God. Every departure from the right, every deed of cruelty, every failure of humanity to reach his ideal, brings grief to Him."—*Education*, page 263.

Towering out of the darkness stands the cross of Christ—God's everlasting answer to the question of suffering. It reveals that God is with us in the sufferings of this world; He is not outside the tears and tragedy of life. When we come to know Jesus as "God with us," and realize His motive of love in all that is permitted to come to us, we can "count it all joy," and "let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." James 1:2,4.

Dr. A.T. Pierson tells this inspiring story of Dr. William Moon, of Brighton:

When twenty-three years of age, he was struck with total blindness. He besought God, when the symptoms were coming on, that he would deliver him from this calamity. He was an educated, cultivated man at the beginning of his service to God and man. But the blindness continued. What did he do? It is one of the sublime things in history. He looked up to God and said: "My heavenly Father, I thank Thee for the talent of blindness. May I so invest that talent that the coming of the Lord Jesus, he may receive his own with usury."

The Lord soon taught him that he had permitted the blindness that he might minister to the millions of blind people in the world; and Dr. Moon used his inventive faculties, and devised a system of reading for the blind containing only a very few characters in combination. According to recent accounts, that system has been utilized in nearly five hundred languages and dialects. By taking blindness as a talent from God, he has accomplished far more for God and man than he ever could have done if he had followed out the desires of his own heart.

We are told that if we cherish the spirit of Christ in our hearts, he abides with us and surrounds us with His presence. The blow intended for us first falls upon our Saviour. "the hand of Jesus reaches over every one of His sincere followers, and every blow that is aimed at you to injure you wounds the hand of Jesus that covers you."—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, March 20, 1887. Therefore, whatever comes to us is permitted by Him, and is for our good. We can see the truth that "all things work together for good to them that love God." Romans 8:28.

In view of these principles of truth, and all the precious promises of God, can we not face the sorrow and suffering that may come to us with courage and fortitude, and even with gratitude and praise, knowing that in it all God is with us, and that he is working out His own loving purpose for us?

The Christ

I saw Him there—the lowly Christ!
The One who left His home of light
And came to earth in darkest night
Was in a lowly stable born
Midst jeers and scoffs and mocking scorn—
Born there in all humility,
Born there for souls—like you and me!

I saw Him then—weeping Christ!
His heart of love with grief was bruised
As on Mount Olive's brow He mused.
He wept for those so deep in sin,
He wept for those He came to win.
'Twas there in bitterest agony
He wept for souls—like you and me!

I saw Him too—the praying Christ!
His weary form on bended knee
Was often in Gethsemane.
Away from all earth's strife and care,
He found a hallowed place of prayer.
'Twas in that spot on bended knee
He prayed for souls—like you and me!

I saw Him still—the suffering Christ!
His kingly form with pain was bent
As to Golgotha's hill He went.
His body weary with the load
Fell fainting on that dusty road.
That wondrous love—how can it be?
He fainted there—for you and me

I saw Him next—the loving Christ!
His bleeding heart in grief was stirred;
He uttered there no unkind word,
But to the Father raised the cry,
God, forgive them, lest they die.
That anguished prayer—can you not see,
He prayed that prayer for you and me?

I saw Him then—the dying Christ!
His gasping words with love were filled,

And there His precious blood He spilled.
'Twas there His cup filled to the brim
When Heaven turned away from Him.
The death He bore on that cruel tree,
He bore for souls like you and me.

I'll see Him then—the kingly Christ!
The brow that wore those thorns of shame
Will wear the crown; blest be His name!
The king that died on Calvary
Will reign through all eternity.
His ransomed ones in heaven will be
Those saved from sin—like you and me!
—*Mabel B. Nielsen.*

13. Where Suffering Is Unknown

ALL through the ages God has held out a glorious prospect to his children: “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.” Isaiah 65:17. As suffering, sorrow, and death are the result of sin, so when God finally destroys evil, banishing it from the universe, it will mean the end of pain and suffering.

Before Jesus left His disciples, He encouraged them with the promise that he would come again: “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye maybe also.” John 14:2, 3.

The Saviour did not leave His children in doubt and uncertainty regarding the future. He promised that He would return. True, He did not set the day and the hour, but he did describe the conditions in the world that would exist just before his second advent. On one occasion the disciples came to Him with the question, “Tell us, . . . what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?” Matthew 24:3. It would seem that Jesus welcomed this request, for in response He told them of sign which would appear in the heavens, on earth, and in the political, social, financial, and religious realms. After outlining the coming events he said: “When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.” Luke 21:28.

The conditions Jesus described we may now see all about us. The greatest wars, pestilences, famines, and earthquakes the world has ever known have come in this generation. Now Jesus bids us look up and lift up our heads. Like the apostle we can say, “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” 2 Peter 3:13.

The Lord assures us that in that new earth sorrow will be unknown. “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” Revelation 21:4.

Our heavenly Father reveals the joys awaiting us in that better land in order to cheer us in the Christian way. Jesus looked beyond the cross, for we read: "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Hebrews 12:2.

The joy of the triumphant soldier is in proportion to the price he has paid to gain the victory; our eternal reward is also dependent upon the victory we gain. Jesus commanded His beloved disciple to write: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne." Revelation 3:21.

We may have endured pain, disappointment, and sorrow; we may have been deprived of our most valued possessions, or bereaved of those dearest to our hearts; we may have spent long months or years on beds of pain, but now Jesus bids us take courage for we are almost home! Jesus is coming to take His people to that home where the inhabitants shall never say, "I am sick." Isaiah 33:24.

God reveals His infinite love and grace by granting pardon and mercy to sinners, and restoring in them His likeness. Above all, He is preparing them for a home in the new earth.

When the apostle John saw in vision the redeemed standing in the presence of God, clothed in robes of spotless white, he was told: "these are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Revelation 7:14-17.

How can we doubt that our loving Father is looking forward with far greater longing than we are for the time when all who have renounced sin will be ready for His coming? "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God: . . . then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17.

While we remain here in this world we shall be subject to disappointment, affliction, and suffering; but the Christian possesses a comfort and a hope that no one else knows. God is with him in the hours of suffering, and his love will never fail; "like as a father pitieth his children, so the lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust." Psalm 103:13, 14. We can rely upon His never-failing love and care, looking forward by faith to the goal of our existence—eternal life. With the heroic Paul we can testify of victory by declaring: "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." Romans 8:37. Amid all the heart-breaking experiences—the physical pain, the mental anguish, the spiritual agonizing—we are more than conquerors. But the victory comes through Jesus Christ who "loved us." "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." Colossians 3:1,2.

“The triumph of Christian faith is to suffer, and be strong; to submit, and thus conquer; to be killed all the day long, and yet to live; to bear the cross, and thus win the crown of immortal glory.”—*Sketches From the Life of Paul*, page 300.

“God has a song to teach us, and when we have learned it amid the shadows of affliction, we can sing it ever afterward.”—Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Nov. 25, 1884.

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