

IN SILENCE, I CRY

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He also covets the understanding and forgiveness of those whom he may have quoted without giving due recognition as he could not recollect or trace all the sources he has taken from.

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Preface

We are like dwarfs, seated on the shoulders of giants. We see more things than the Ancients, things more distant, but it is due to neither the sharpness of our sight nor the greatness of our stature. It is simply because they have lent us their own. - Adapted

In this connection, the author wants to stress that the many thoughts in this book do not originate from him, but are drawn from the careful observations and rich experiences of these time-tested and trial-tested saints of old. If this book has been a blessing to you, it is largely due to their invaluable contributions which provided the 'hindsight, insight and foresight' to many of our perplexing problems. We are privileged to walk the path they have trodden and profit from their bittersweet experiences in the furnace of affliction.

This book would not have been possible without the sure guidance and grace of God. It never ceases to amaze the author how the materials for this book were 'dropped on his lap' by the unseen hand of God - a sermon he heard in time past, a book he 'happened' to get hold of, or a divine encounter he experienced which was eventually interwoven into its pages. The glory belongs to God, and the author is happy to be just 'being in the way' in organizing the vast materials available into a readable form.

The author is greatly indebted to the following people: Jubina Seah, Christina Tan, Ninfa Varona, Janet Wee, Greta Wee, Dr. Michael L. Marsh, Christine Margaret Marsh and Mrs. Joyce Comfort. Their timely advice, helpful contributions, and meticulous proofreading went a long way to help 'make a good book better'. He is also grateful to Pastor Jacob Tan, for the picture on the front cover; and Jenny Tan and Dolly Chua, for all the help they have rendered in the publication of this book.

Last, but not least, this book is a tribute to the Members of Shalom Baptist Church; for their love, vision and tremendous sacrifices, to free their pastor for a season, that this book may be written and that it may bring about a lasting comfort to those who, in the midst of their deep anguish and sorrows, become disconnected with the world.

The author does not necessarily agree with nor endorse all the doctrinal persuasion and teaching of those whom he has quoted. He is an Independent Baptist by conviction.

A Note on Discipleship

We think it cruel to leave a new-born baby out in the cold to die but we are just as cruel to leave a new-born baby in Christ “out in the cold” in the face of the ever-increasing trials, tribulation and temptations that will assuredly come his way - “... In the world ye shall have tribulation...” (Jn 16:33) Discipleship for new believers is not an option but a biblical commandment - “Go ye therefore, and teach (matheteusate - make disciples) all nations...” (Mt 28:19). Both the Lord Jesus, the Founder of the Church (Mt 16:18), and the Apostle Paul, the wise 'masterbuilder' (1 Cor 3:10), employed this time-proven method to perpetuate the gospel work in a consistent and stable manner. The Lord Jesus had His twelve apostles, while Paul had his Timothy and Titus. Besides ministering to the masses, these invested their lives in the lives of others in small groups through their teaching and living. They taught, trained and transferred all that they knew to faithful men and women who, in turn, went on to disciple others - “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” (2 Tim 2:2) Through this, numerous God-fearing and God-honoring churches have been carefully built and gloriously perpetuated down through the centuries.

Discipleship is a slow but dynamic process of raising believers who will be able to systematically understand the will of God, and to victoriously accomplish the work of the Lord in their lives. It nurtures and produces strong, spiritual, stable and sacrificial Christians for the gospel work of evangelism, discipleship and church planting.

An 'undisciplined' Christian tends to be weak, carnal, unmotivated, immature, confused and very prone to temptations and sins. Very often, such believers live a meaningless and defeated spiritual life, and many will eventually leave the church when the going gets tough. Many churches and pastors succumb to the temptation to build large churches without paying careful attention to the process of discipleship. It is like trying to build a skyscraper without laying the foundation - after reaching a certain height, the building will collapse, and the process will repeat itself until the fault is corrected. Such churches will witness a “regular blood transfusion” in their congregations - groups of previous converts leaving the church as quickly as new believers are added to it. It is also not uncommon that many of those who stay behind are easily “... tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine...” (Eph 4:14), and affected by every form of problem that besets them.

It is said to grow a vine, it takes only days; but to grow an oak, it takes years. A vine is vulnerable and is made to last for a little moment while an oak is hardy and is cultivated to last for generations. What do we want to “grow” in our churches? The Disciple's Notes Series is designed to give a new believer in Christ a good, systematic, solid grounding in the Word of God and to weather the storms of life till he reaches the “other shore”.

In Dedication

**To God Almighty
Without whose grace and blessings
This book would not have been possible;**

**To the Members of
Shalom Baptist Church, Singapore,
For their vision and sacrifices
To free their pastor for
The ministry of the printed page;**

**To Pastor Brad Carver
And Members of
Sonshine Baptist Church, Australia,
For their love and graciousness
In accommodating the author and his family
For the work of the Lord;**

**And to those who suffered in silence,
Trusting only in the Eternal and Living God
To lovingly purify and prepare them
Through the furnace of affliction
For their good and for
The Glory of God.**

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INTRODUCTION

In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer;
I have overcome the world. - Jn 16:33

Many young Christians often imagine that, after conversion, life will be much better for them. After all, doesn't God promise to watch over us, to preserve us and to provide for our needs as a Father would care for his own children? Doesn't the Bible tell us that God loves us so much that He sent His only begotten Son to die for us? But, in no time, the new believer in Christ will discover to his disappointment that, "things are no better". He continues to experience suffering. At times, his life is worse than before when he was an unbeliever. A child whom he loves may die before his eyes; he may continue to experience interpersonal problems with his colleagues at work or with his family at home; he may fail in his studies, relationship, business or career. Very often, there seems to be "no light at the end of the tunnel" with regard to the constant pressure and stress he has to endure day after day. Soon, many questions start to surface at the back of his mind: "Why are all these things happening to me? What wrongs have I done to deserve this? Does God really love and care for me? Or is believing in God just a figment of my imagination?" The truth of the matter is that God is more interested in the bigger picture of our lives. He wants to prove and perfect us, the objects of His supreme love and sacrifice, through suffering - "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 (lacking) nothing." (Jas 1:3-4) This imperfect world is the perfect place for God to try our hearts, mold us into His likeness, and bless us with the desires of our hearts as we trust and obey Him till the end.

Broadly speaking, there are two main reasons why we suffer. First, God is testing us for our good and growth; and secondly, He is chastising us for our sins and disobedience, to bring us back to Himself. Trial is necessary, but chastisement is optional.

Before every believer in Christ lies two approaches to suffering: one, to see nothing good in it and loathe it; and the other, to see beyond suffering the divine purpose of God and profit from it. The first will consign him to a life of endless misery and regret, while the latter will free him to grow and gain in his God-ordained tribulation which is designed for his good.

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THE PURPOSE OF SUFFERING

I. THE PURPOSE OF SUFFERING

A story was told of a man who once boarded a train and when the ticket inspector came to punch his ticket, he was frantically searching his bag for it. All the while, the ticket was safely secured on his lips. The inspector simply took it from his mouth and he gave a sheepish look. When he was asked as to whether he felt foolish at that incident, the passenger replied, "Not at all. I did that because I was trying to chew off the date of an outdated ticket. I didn't have a valid ticket." The onlookers thought that he was quite aimless in what he was doing, but he had a pre-determined purpose for doing what he was doing (although a bad one). Likewise, when we view our constant afflictions, very often, we think that they are quite meaningless and purposeless - what is God trying to do to us? The truth of the matter is that God has a specific, pre-determined and pre-ordained purpose in every turn and twist of event in our lives.

A. TO SEARCH US THAT WE MAY BE TESTED

"And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no." [Deut 8:2]
"The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the LORD trieth the hearts." [Pro 17:3]

1. THE MEANS OF TESTING

a. **GOD USES TRIAL TO TEST US:** "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; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." [1 Pet 4:12-13]

i. "Trial", in the Bible, generally means, "the act of testing someone or something for the purpose of approving it". It is like the passing of an examination to be proven of our abilities in our vocation. As such, we need not fear the trial of God

- “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice...”

- ii. The tests of life are to make, not break us. Trouble may demolish a man's business but build up his character. The blow at the outward man may be the greatest blessing to the inner man. If God, then puts or permits anything hard in our lives, be sure that the real peril, the real trouble, is what we shall lose if we flinch or rebel. - Maltbie D. Babcock
- iii. The meaning of trial is not only to test worthiness, but to increase it; as the oak is not only tested by the storms, but toughened by them. - Adapted

b. GOD USES TROUBLE TO TEST US: “Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.” [Job 14:1] “And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” [Psa 50:15]

- i. In God's mind, trouble is designed for our good - for us to be dependent upon Him, to experience Him, to be delivered by Him, and, in turn, to glorify Him. There is never a thought in God's mind that testing through troubles is aimed at destroying the believer's faith and life.
- ii. Whenever we think of trouble, we think of things happening contrary to our expectations; unforeseen happenings that upset our schedules; problems that ruin our plans; or pains that affect our health. The bottom line is that events are not happening and unfolding as we have planned. If we are observant enough, we will discover that life is “a series of interruptions interrupted by interruptions”.
- iii. It is a fundamental principle in the life and walk of faith that we must always be prepared for the unexpected when we are dealing with God. - D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
- iv. The only thing in life that is certain is that nothing is certain.

c. GOD USES TRIBULATION TO TEST US: “And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience.” [Rom 5:3]

i. The basic idea of the Hebrew word “tribulation” is “severe constriction”, “narrowing” or “pressing together” (as of grapes). When we are in tribulation, we often feel “squeezed together” by the pressures and stress we experience.

ii. The English word “tribulation” comes from the Latin word “tribulum”, which is an instrument used to beat and separate the wheat from the chaff. This is what tribulation is all about - to separate the unwholesome values and vices in our lives and develop godly virtues in us - “... tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope.” (Rom 5:3-4)

iii. 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

2. THE MANIFESTION IN TESTING

a. TO REVEAL OUR MOTIVES

i. **SATAN’S ACCUSATION:** “Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought (nothing)? 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. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.” [Job 1:9-11]

Satan insinuated that God had unfairly bribed Job with all the good things in life and, as a result, it was no wonder that Job had been faithful to Him.

- ii. **GOD'S ACKNOWLEDGMENT:** "And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand... So Satan went forth... and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown." [Job 1:12-2:7]

To prove Job's motive, the Lord allowed Satan to have a free hand in afflicting him with one of the most cruel trials a man can ever be subjected to - he lost all his wealth, his children and his health in quick succession.

- iii. **JOB'S ACCOMPLISHMENT:** "Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped. And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither (there): the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." [Job 1:20-22]

In spite of the pain, anguish and grief he experienced, Job still thanked and praised God. He loved God for Who He is and not for what He can give. He loved the Giver more than the gifts. It is only under intense sufferings that our true motives for seeking God will surface.

- iv. 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, *My Utmost for His Highest*, Discovery House Publishers.
- v. There is a good reason and a real reason in us following the Lord. Affliction will reveal the real reason.

b. TO REVEAL OUR SPIRITUALITY

- i. **THE FRUITFUL VINE:** "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth (prunes) it, that it may bring forth more fruit." [Jn 15:2]

Affliction will cause those who are spiritual to understand more, trust more and accomplish more. The more Joseph suffered, the more fruitful he became - "... For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction." (Gen 41:52)

As the wicked are hurt by the best things, so the godly are bettered by the worst. - William Jenkyn

- ii. **THE SHALLOW ROOTS:** "Some (seeds) fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away... for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended." [Mt 13:5-6, 21]

The seeds planted in shallow ground will flourish in good weather. But in prolonged periods of drought, they will die. Likewise, superficial or carnal Christians will be enthusiastic during the good times, and "dry up" when the going gets tough.

- iii. Whether we become better or bitter, or grow or groan under trial, depends on our character. Under the rays of the same sun, the ice will melt while the wet clay will be hardened.
- iv. Think a moment about a water-saturated sponge. If we push down with our finger even slightly, water runs out onto the table. We immediately know what fills the interior pockets of the sponge. The same is true of us. We can tell what fills us on the inside by what comes out under pressure. - Adapted
- v. I say that trials and tests 'locate' a person. In other words they determine where you are spiritually. They reveal the true condition of your heart. How you react under pressure is how the 'real you' reacts. - John Bevere
- vi. Crisis does not make or break a man; it reveals what is in the man.

c. TO REVEAL OUR ETERNITY

- i. **THE RIGHT FOUNDATION:** “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.” [Mt 7:24-25]
- ii. **THE WRONG FOUNDATION:** “And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.” [Mt 7:26-27]
- iii. Both houses looked the same during fair weather, but their true foundations were only discovered when the storms arrived. Likewise, very often possessing and professing Christians will look alike in good times, but their true characters will be revealed under intense sufferings. One will usually recover and grow, while the other will be hardened and go wayward.
- iv. There are hypocrites in the church, but there will be no hypocrites in heaven.

B. TO SOBER US THAT WE MAY BE FAITHFUL

- 1. **SUFFERING REMINDS:** “And unto Adam he (God) said... cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life... till thou return unto the ground...” [Gen 3:17-19]
 - a. God cursed the ground for Adam’s sake - to remind him of his need for God and to keep him faithful. A life of uninterrupted comfort and ease will prove too much for fallen mankind to handle. If we are discerning, we will discover that no one in life has everything. While we are blessed with some things, at the same time we are denied others.

- 2. SUFFERING RESTRAINS:** “And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.” [2 Cor 12:7]
- a. God, according to His foreknowledge, had anticipated that the Apostle Paul could be destroyed through his pride - “... lest I should be exalted above measure.” In His mercy, He gave Paul a “thorn in the flesh”, probably his failing eyesight, to keep him humble, faithful and useful (“Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand.” - Gal 6:11).
 - b. From God's viewpoint, there is no other way of keeping sinful mankind faithful apart from a regular dosage of affliction. If there were, God would have done it. Wise and wealthy Solomon fell; strong and mighty Samson faltered; and faithful and dependable David failed when everything was going well their way. Suffering is an act of mercy from God to restrain us from our foolishness and to keep us faithful in the perfect will of God.
 - c. A pastor's honest prayer, “Dear God, please comfort the troubled and trouble the comfortable.”
- 3. SUFFERING RESOLVES:** “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank...” [Dan 1:8]
- a. What caused Daniel to be so determined to obey God and not to defile himself with the Babylonian victuals was his witness of the fury and judgment of God upon the sins of Israel. He saw how men, women and children were mercilessly and brutally killed for their continuous disobedience towards God. Daniel feared God more than he feared man, and he was determined to obey God at all costs.
 - b. The best cure for double-mindedness is pain. Pain helps us to be single-minded in our service and obedience towards God.

C. TO SHAPE US THAT WE MAY BE PERFECTED

1. THE PERSON IN PERFECTION: “But 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 Pet 5:10] “The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me...” [Psa 138:8]

- a. It is not uncommon to, in the midst of our afflictions, wonder why God is not hearing our prayers to end our suffering quickly. Is He indifferent to our tears and pains? Has He forgotten and forsaken us? The truth is that God is more concerned with the bigger picture in our lives. He wants to change us and not our circumstances. It is only when we have changed, that our circumstances will change likewise (if the Lord will). If not, He will give us His all-sufficient grace to bear it - “... My grace is sufficient for thee...” (2 Cor 12:9) Humanly speaking, it is easier for God to perform a miracle, to remove an unmanageable problem, to provide a need ahead of time, or to prevent a tragedy which may devastate us than for Him to change and mold us to be like Him. Perfection of character through suffering is God's goal for us. He wants us to be like Him - “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” (Mt 5:48)
- b. The important thing in life is not what we can get but what we can become. 'Becoming' is more important than 'getting'. Character is more important than possessions. Our character determines the kind of life and possessions we will eventually have.
- c. It is strange that in our praying we seldom ask for a change of character, but always a change of circumstance. - Bits and Pieces
- d. God changes us through our unchanging circumstances.
- e. If thou, in vision,
 Could'st see thyself
 The man God meant
 Nevermore could'st thou be
 The man thou art - content.

2. THE PROCESS OF PERFECTION: “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 (lacking) nothing.” [Jas 1:3-4]

a. TEMPTATION IS DESIGNED TO DEVELOP HOLINESS

IN US: “... (Jesus) was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” [Heb 4:15] “... Be ye holy; for I am holy.” [1 Pet 1:16]

i. Temptations are everywhere, and so is the grace of God.

b. TEMPER (ANGER) IS DESIGNED TO DEVELOP LOVE

IN US: “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven... For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?... Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” [Mt 5:44-48]

c. TRIBULATION IS DESIGNED TO DEVELOP PATIENCE

IN US: “... we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience.” [Rom 5:3] “Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.” [Jas 1:3]

i. A young man once came to an elderly pastor and said, “Pastor, please pray for me that I may have more patience.” The pastor prayed, “Dear God, please send this young man tribulation in the morning, tribulation in the afternoon, and tribulation in the evening.” The young man stopped him in horror and said, “Pastor, I asked for patience, not tribulation.” The wise pastor replied, “Haven’t you read in Romans 5:3 that, ‘tribulation worketh patience?’” There is no way to develop patience without tribulation. Any attempt to develop patience without suffering would be like trying to fly an aeroplane by studying ‘flying’ and never having flown one.

- ii. Then there was the woman who prayed for patience and God sent her a poor cook. - Henry Ward Beecher
 - iii. The Greek word for “patience” literally means “an abiding under (pressure)”, and conveys the ideas of constancy, steadfastness and staying power.
 - iv. To become longsuffering one has to be long-bothered. - Manford George Gutzke
 - v. Patience is bitter but its fruit is sweet.
- d. Just as the master craftsman uses friction to polish the gems, so God uses the things which we humanly dread most to perfect us - afflictions, persecutions, deprivation and tribulations. Hatred is meant to develop love in us. Tribulation is aimed at cultivating patience in us. Failures are designed to gain experiences for us. Our lacks are intended to build up our faith in God’s faithfulness. Confusion in our situations teaches us confidence in God. Our weaknesses point us to our need for God. The list would go on and on. In short, all the wrongs around us are designed to make us right. God perfects us through our imperfect circumstances.
- e. When God wants to make a man He puts him into some storm. The history of manhood is always rough and rugged. No man is made until he has been out into the surge of the storm and found the sublime fulfillment of the prayer: “O God, take me, break me, make me.” - Mrs. Charles E. Cowman, *Streams in the Desert*, Cowman Publication Inc.
- f. Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved. - Helen Keller
- g. The Craftsman is our loving Father. We are the raw material. Suffering is the tool. Character is the product. - Warren Wiersbe
- h. The anvil, the fire and the hammer are the making of us. - C. H. Spurgeon

- 3. THE PICTURE OF PERFECTION:** “But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting (lacking) nothing.” [Jas 1:4]
- a. THE PERFECT MAN IS TOUGH:** “Therefore I (Paul) endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” [2 Tim 2:10]
- b. THE PERFECT MAN IS TRUSTING:** “He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD.” [Psa 112:7] “They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.” [Psa 125:1]
- c. THE PERFECT MAN IS THANKFUL:** “And said, Naked came I (Job) out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” [Job 1:21]
- d. THE PERFECT MAN IS TOLERANT (FORGIVING):** “Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do...” [Lk 23:34]
- e.** The perfect or mature man is one who lacks nothing and is not easily affected by anything. He knows that God has His reasons for allowing adversities to come into his life. He takes them calmly and graciously from the hands of God. He counts it a joy and privilege to be tested from high. He endures by the grace of God and rejoices in the hope of God. He thanks God for what he has and praises God for what He withholds. He knows that he will eventually be rewarded for his obedience in adversity. Instead of avoiding or hating afflictions, he learns to welcome them. Like Paul, he can confidently say, “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.” (2 Cor 12:10) This is the picture of the perfect man and this is what God desires to accomplish in us.
- f.** God has done a mighty work in our hearts when we can praise Him in every pain, bless Him for every burden, sing in every sorrow and delight in every discipline.

- g. Generally speaking, we go through three stages of spiritual maturity. First, we hate suffering; then we learn to bear it grudgingly; and in the final stage, we learn to welcome it, knowing that it is for our good and growth. At which stage are you now?
- h. Christian are like stained-glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out. But in the darkness, beauty is seen only if there is a light within. - Anon
- i. What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared with what lies within us. - Ralph Waldo
- j. The main end of life is not to do but to become. - F. B. Meyer
- k. Happiness is not the end of life; character is.

I. ARE YOU ABLE

Able to suffer without complaining,
 To be misunderstood without explaining?
 Able to endure without breaking,
 To be forsaken without forsaking?
 Able to give without receiving,
 Able to ask without commanding?
 To love despite misunderstanding,
 Able to turn to the Lord for guarding;
 Able to wait for his own rewarding?
 A clay pot in the sun will always be a clay pot.
 It has to go through the white heat of the furnace
 to become porcelain.

- Mildred White Stouven

m. HAVE THINE OWN WAY, LORD

Have thine own way, Lord!
 Have thine own way!
 Thou art the Potter, I am the clay:
 Mold me and make me,
 After thy will,
 While I am waiting, yielded and still.

- Adelaide A. Pollard

D. TO SECURE US THAT WE MAY BE REWARDED

1. OBEDIENCE IN SUFFERING GIVES US REWARDS ON EARTH

a. **GOD BLESSED JOB MATERIALLY FOR HIS SUFFERINGS:** “So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep... also seven sons and three daughters.”
[Job 42:12-13]

i. Job suffered much so that God could bless him much - “... also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.” (Job 42:10)

b. **GOD BLESSED ISRAEL MATERIALLY FOR HER SUFFERINGS:** “... that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end.”
[Deut 8:16]

i. Before the Promised Land is the Wilderness. Likewise, suffering must precede blessing. The trouble with many Christians is that they want the Promised Land without going through the Wilderness.

c. **GOD BLESSED JOSEPH MATERIALLY FOR HIS SUFFERINGS:** “And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt.” [Gen 41:41]

i. Joseph had to go through the pit and the prison before being promoted to be the prime minister in the palace.

ii. If Joseph had not been Egypt's prisoner, he never would have been Egypt's governor. The iron chain about his feet ushered in the golden chain about his neck. - Adapted

d. Many Christians look for blessings in the wrong places, away from afflictions and obedience. Real blessings and rewards are only found at the end of our willing and complete obedience in the midst of severe trials, and not before them - “For ye have need of patience, that,

after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.” (Heb 10:36)

- e. There are blessings we can never have unless we are ready to pay the price of pain. There is no way to reach them save through suffering. - Dr. Miller
- f. Afflictions are often God’s best blessings sent in disguise.
- g. In shunning a trial we are seeking to avoid a blessing. - C. H. Spurgeon
- h. Strange and difficult indeed
We may find it.
But the blessing that we need
Is behind it.

2. OBEDIENCE IN SUFFERING GIVES US REWARDS IN HEAVEN

- a. **OUR AFFLICTION IS LIGHT IN COMPARISON TO ETERNITY:** “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” [Rom 8:18] Paul wrote this in spite of the fact that he went through much suffering - beaten, stoned and shipwrecked (2 Cor 11:24-30).
 - i. Let us imagine a feather and an ingot of gold on each side of a weighing scale. That is the picture of our earthly suffering in comparison with the eternal and imperishable rewards awaiting us. Let us also remember that there is but one step between us and eternity - it takes only a moment for eternity to begin.
- b. **OUR AFFLICTION IS LIMITED IN COMPARISON TO ETERNITY:** “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” [2 Cor 4:17]
 - i. No matter how difficult or hard our earthly afflictions may be, they are limited in nature. However, the joy and the enjoyment of our heavenly rewards are forever. We will not only cease from our earthly

sufferings but we will also forget them in eternity -
“And 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.” (Rev 21:4)

- c. The things of earth will dim and lose their value
If we recall they're borrowed for awhile;
And things of earth that cause the heart to tremble,
Remembered there will only bring a smile.

- “Until Then”, Stuart Hamblen.
- d. Over the triple doorway of the Cathedral of Milan there
are three inscriptions spanning the splendid arches. Over
one is carved a beautiful wreath of roses, and
underneath is the legend, “All that pleases is but for a
moment.” Over the other is sculptured a cross, and these
are the words beneath: “All that troubles is but for a
moment.” But underneath the great central entrance in
the main aisle is the inscription, “That only is important
which is eternal.”

E. TO STIMULATE US THAT WE MAY BE FRUITFUL

1. SUFFERING CAUSES US TO BE ZEALOUS IN OUR OBEDIENCE: “Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.” [Psa 119:67]

- a. Many indifferent Christians become very different after
being afflicted. Pain is the best teacher. What preaching
and pleading cannot accomplish in a long time, pain
can do it in a short moment. It teaches us that the price
of falling into temptation is vastly not worth its pleasures;
the burden of being careless and doing nothing is too
heavy to carry; the Devil is, in reality, a deceiver and a
hard taskmaster; following God is easier than forsaking
God; obedience to the Word of God is for our protection
and not for our inconvenience; and it is far better to
learn from the warnings in the Bible than to pay the
price for our departure from them. Therefore, let us not
get too disheartened or disturbed when we or our fellow
brethren suffer. Affliction is sometimes needed to help
speed up our spiritual learning and growth.

- 2. SUFFERING CAUSES US TO BE ZEALOUS IN OUR SERVICE:** "... and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth (prunes) it, that it may bring forth more fruit." [Jn 15:2]
 "But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew..." [Exod 1:12]
- a. SUFFERING CAUSED THE EARLY CHRISTIANS TO EVANGELIZE MORE:** "As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word." [Acts 8:3-4]
- i. When Idi Amin was the dictator of Uganda, there was a general persecution against Christians. After his reign of terror was over, the persecution of Christians ceased. One unusual testimony was: "Before the persecution, the members of the church were constantly quarreling and bickering with each other. When the persecution was on, everyone was diligently witnessing for Christ. Now that the persecution is over, we are back to getting at each other again. Lord, please send us the persecution again!"
- b. SUFFERING CAUSED THE MACEDONIAN BELIEVERS TO GIVE MORE:** "Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; Praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints." [2 Cor 8:1-4]
3. Suffering is one of the greatest driving forces for man to get things done. He who suffers most tends to accomplish most. Suffering will rouse a nation to defend herself; suffering will make a man work hard for his survival; and suffering will cause a mother to go to great lengths to save the life of her child. In Christendom too, suffering caused the early church to evangelize more; the Macedonian believers to give more; the apostle Paul to achieve more; the careless

Christians to pray more; and the followers of Christ to sacrifice more. No wonder the Apostle Paul would conclude that, "... Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me... for when I am weak, then am I strong (Greek, 'dunatos' - from which we get the word 'dynamite')." (2 Cor 12:9-10)

4. As in metal, the greater the heat, the greater the expansion.

F. TO SOLACE US THAT WE MAY COMFORT OTHERS

"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God." [Isa 40:1]

"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." [2 Cor 1:3-4]

Sometimes God allows suffering to come upon us so that we are able to empathize with those who are hurting and "... weep with them that weep" (Rom 12:15). Our experience in the furnace of affliction and our witness of God's faithfulness and timely deliverances, are all designed to equip us to comfort and give hope to those who are suffering without hope. After all, it is difficult for us to help those who are in trouble if we have not 'been there before'. Our counsel may prove to be of little or no comfort to those whose hopes have been dashed time and time again.

The heart that has not suffered has little comfort to give to those who weep and suffer in a sorrowing world, because sympathy is born of experience. We are only capable of comforting one another, when individually, we know the joy of divine comfort. - Herbert Lockyer, *Dark Threads the Weaver Needs*, Old Tappan.

God, it has been said, does not comfort us to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters. Lighthouses are built by near-drowning sailors. Roads are widened by mangled motorists. Where nobody suffers, nobody cares. - W. T. Purkiser

To others we may give comfort or pain. Some of our natural characteristics are like thorns, and only the grace of God can remove these and polish the rough places so that we become helpful instead of irritating... Dr. Walter Wilson gives this illuminating note on the Greek word for "comfort". He writes: "In Colossians 4 Paul speaks of Tychicus, Onesimus, Marcus... In referring to them... he says, 'which have been a comfort to me.' This word 'comfort' is the word 'paragoria' in the Greek. From this we obtain our word 'paragoric', a remedy that stops pain. These men stopped the pain in Paul's heart. Some folks 'give us pain'. But these friends had the opposite effect." - Sunday School Times

1. IN RELATION TO OUR SALVATION

"If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone." [Jas 2:15-17]

"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye

took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.”
[Mt 25:34-46]

a. In the 'judgment of the living nations', when the Lord Jesus Christ returns after the Tribulation, He will separate the saved from the lost. One of the manifestations of the saved is their care for the people of God. These are not saved by their good works, but their labor of love reveals what is already in them - their genuine faith in Christ and their salvation.

2. IN RELATION TO OUR BLESSING: “When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy.” [Job 29:11-13]

a. While others saw the burden in helping the afflicted, Job saw the blessing in reaching out to them - “The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me...”. His sincere love and care for the poor was the reason for his bountiful blessings from the Lord.

3. IN RELATION TO OUR DELIVERANCE: “Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble.” [Psa 41:1] “Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.” [Pro 21:13]

a. If we have been caring for the needy, God promises to deliver us in trouble; if not, then that may well explain why He has not done so.

G. TO SAVE US THAT WE MAY BE DELIVERED FROM HELL

1. THE EXAMPLE OF THE PHILIPPIAN JAILOR: “And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one’s bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he... said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”
[Acts 16:26-31]

- a. Under normal circumstances, this probably hardened and indifferent Philippian jailor would not want to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. However, when he thought that his prisoners had escaped when the earthquake occurred, he attempted to kill himself before the Roman authority would make him take their places and pay for their crimes. When reassured by Paul that the prisoners had not escaped, the first thought on his mind was, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Intense suffering has a way of helping us to want to know about God’s salvation.
- b. In a similar manner, many of us came to know the Lord Jesus through the crisis of a broken relationship, the loss of wealth or health, or the loss of a loved one. When all is well, we tend to be too comfortable and contented to want to seek after God.

2. THE EXAMPLE OF THE SLEEPWALKER: Let us imagine a man who had a problem with sleep-walking. There came a night when he sleep-walked towards a nearby cliff. On the way to the cliff, he stepped into a stream. The cold water woke him up from his deadly slumber just in time to prevent him from going over the cliff. This is a picture of the amazing grace and goodness of God. In His mercy, He sometimes uses the traumas and tragedies of some great personal loss to shake us out of our complacency and indifference with regard to our eternal estate.

3. THE EXAMPLE OF THE RATTLESNAKES: There was a farmer who had three sons: Jim, John and Sam. No one in the family ever attended church or had time for God. The pastor and the others in the church tried for years to interest the family in the things of God but to no avail. Then one day Sam was bitten by a rattlesnake. The doctor was called and he did all he could to help Sam, but the outlook for Sam's recovery was very dim indeed. So the pastor was called to appraise the situation. The pastor arrived, and began to pray as follows: "O wise and righteous Father, we thank Thee that in Thine wisdom thou didst send this rattlesnake to bite Sam. He has never been inside the church and it is doubtful that he has, in all this time, ever prayed or even acknowledged Thine existence. Now we trust that this experience will be a valuable lesson to him and will lead to his genuine repentance. And now, O Father, wilt thou send another rattlesnake to bite Jim, and another to bite John, and another really big one to bite the old man. For years we have done everything we know to get them to turn to Thee, but all in vain. It seems, therefore, that what all our combined efforts could not do, this rattlesnake has done. We thus conclude that the only thing that will do this family any real good is rattlesnake; so, Lord, send us bigger and better rattlesnakes. Amen."

H. TO SHOW US THAT WE MAY KNOW GOD INTIMATELY

- 1. SUFFERING REVEALS HIS PERSON:** "For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." [2 Tim 1:12]
 - a. When we learn to fully trust and obey God in all that He has permitted to come into our lives; to commit to Him each and every care; to witness and experience his love and timely deliverances - trial after trial, problem after problem, need after need - we will, like Paul, be fully persuaded of His power and paternal love for us, and to eventually know "whom we have believed". In the midst of our difficulties, God is constantly trying to persuade us to know and trust Him and have perfect rest in our soul - "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,

and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." (Mt 11:28-29)

- b. I am not a theologian or a scholar, but I am very aware of the fact that pain is necessary to all of us. In my own life, I think I can honestly say that out of the deepest pain has come the strongest conviction of the presence of God and the love of God. - Elisabeth Elliot
- c. Until I learned to trust, I never learned to pray;
And I did not fully learn to trust
Till sorrow came my way.
Who deepest drinks of sorrow,
Drinks deepest, too, of grace;
He sends the storm so He, Himself,
Can be our hiding place. - William G. Coltman

2. SUFFERING REVEALS HIS POWER: "Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?" [Jer 32:27] "For with God nothing shall be impossible." [Lk 1:37] "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." [Isa 40:29] "... for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few." [1 Sam 14:6]

- a. Does it occur to you that every miracle in the Bible begins with an impossibility? The next time you are in an inextricable situation, remember, God is about to perform a miracle in your life.
- b. When God is going to do something great, He starts with a difficulty. When He is about to do something truly magnificent, He starts with an impossibility. - Armin Gesswein
- c. It was well worth standing awhile in the fire, for such an opportunity of experiencing and exhibiting the power and faithfulness of God's promises. - John Newton
- d. Does all the world seem against you?
Are you in the battle alone?
It's often when you are helpless
That God's mighty power is shown. - Anon

3. SUFFERING REVEALS HIS PRESENCE: “Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.” [Psa 139:7-10]

a. C. G. Trumbull wrote of Dr. John Douglas Adam: “I learned from him that what he counted his greatest spiritual asset was his unvarying consciousness of the actual presence of Jesus. Nothing bore him up so as the realization that Jesus was always with him in actual presence; and that this was so independent of his own feelings, independent of his deserts, and independent of his own notions as to how Jesus would manifest His presence... Christ was the home of his thoughts. Whenever his mind was free from the other matters it would turn to Christ... So real to him was Jesus' actual presence.”

b. The question is not where is God, but where He is not?

c. Sometimes God calms the storm - and sometimes He lets the storms rage and calms His child. - Author Unknown

4. SUFFERING REVEALS HIS PATERNAL LOVE: “And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” [Rom 5:3-5] “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” [2 Tim 1:7] “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.” [1 Jn 4:18]

a. It is through tribulation that we acquire patience, experience and hope, and we will eventually comprehend and experience the unfailing love of God for us, as He faithfully sees us through each trial and tribulation that comes along our way - “And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” (Rom 5:5)

- b. As the saying goes, “In prosperity, your friends will know you. In adversity, you will know your friends.” Similarly, it is through adversity that we can know the reality and depth of God's love towards us - He will never fail nor forsake us - “... he loved them unto the end.” (Jn 13:1)
- 5. SUFFERING REVEALS HIS PERFECT WORKING:** “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” [Rom 8:28]
- a. A product in a factory has to go through the assembly line before being certified fit or ready for use or sale. Likewise, before a certain form of suffering gets to us, it has to go through “God's assembly line” - His power, wisdom and permission. By the time it reaches us, it has to be “good” for us - “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God...” (Rom 8:28) It is good for the soul, not necessarily the body; it is good for the future, not necessarily the present; it is good for the person, not necessarily the pocket; it is good for our spiritual learning and growth, not necessarily our physical comfort and happiness.
- b. Joseph was sent to be a slave in Egypt so that he could one day become her Prime Minister to save the family of Israel; Daniel was sent to the lion's den to receive his promotion in the Babylonian court; and the Lord Jesus went to Calvary to give us eternal life.
- c. All things are not necessarily good, but all things will eventually work together for good to them that love God. This verse is only true on one condition - for them that love God.
6. Knowing God intimately is the greatest achievement a mortal man can accomplish - “Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.” (Jer 9:23-24) The man who is truly acquainted with God will be at ease in adversity.

7. When you and I hurt deeply, what we really need is not an explanation from God but a revelation of God. We need to see how great God is; we need to recover our lost perspective on life. Things get out of proportion when we are suffering, and it takes a vision of something bigger than ourselves to get life's dimensions adjusted again. - Warren W. Wiersbe

I. TO SALVAGE US THAT WE MAY REPENT FROM OUR SINS

1. **THE PRODIGAL SON'S REBELLION:** "And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living." [Lk 15:12-13]

- a. If sin was not such a pleasure, it would not be such a problem.

2. **THE PRODIGAL SON'S RETRIBUTION:** "And when he had spent all there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want (lack). And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him." [Lk 15:14-16]

- a. God whispers to us in health and prosperity, but, being hard of hearing, we fail to hear God's voice in both. Whereupon God turns up the amplifier by means of suffering. Then his voice booms. - C. S. Lewis

3. **THE PRODIGAL SON'S REPENTANCE:** "And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." [Lk 15:17-19]

- a. By afflictions God is spoiling us of what otherwise might have spoiled us - when he makes the world too hot for us to hold, we let it go. - John Powell

b. If nothing else will do to sever me from my sins, Lord, send me such sore and trying calamities as shall awake me from my earthly slumbers. - Robert Murray M'Cheyne

4. THE PRODIGAL SON'S RESTORATION: "And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him... But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet..." [Lk 15:20-22]

a. 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 have I kept thy word." (Psa 119:67)
- Oswald Chambers

5. THE PRODIGAL SON'S REST: "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry." [Lk 15:24] "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law; That thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked." [Psa 94:12-13]

a. Those who have experienced the severe chastisement of God in a specific sin will be most fearful to walk down the same path of wickedness in the future. It is like putting your hand on the hot stove. You won't want to do it again.

6. The prodigal son probably broke the heart of his father by demanding his rights to his inheritance. He then left home for a life of debauchery. He was not moved by his father's pleadings nor tears. The heart-broken but wise father permitted his son to walk down the road of sin and learn for himself the consequences of a life given to foolishness. In no time, he had spent all of his money and a famine came upon the land. He was literally in danger of dying. Under such intense afflictions, he came to his senses, repented of his foolishness, and headed back to his father's home. Many Christians are too cold, hardened and indifferent to come back to God. At times, the Lord has to resort to such harsh means to help backsliding believers return to Him - "Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, To bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living." (Job 33:29-30)

J. TO SCHOOL US THAT WE MAY LEARN PRECIOUS LESSONS

“It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.” [Psa 119:71]

Suffering times are basically teaching times. It is not uncommon for one to aspire to attend some great university and graduate with great honors. Yet, many fail to see and learn the many precious lessons found in God’s school of higher learning - the greatest spiritual university in the world - the school of suffering. We often fail one course after another, and sometimes never graduate. If we are not discerning, we will end up “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 3:7) with regard to the spiritual lessons which God wants us to learn in suffering - patience, faith, trust, endurance, perseverance, love, etc. The next time we suffer, let us focus more on the spiritual lessons which God intends for us to learn, rather than on a quick removal of our afflictions.

1. JOB LEARNED TRUST THROUGH SUFFERING: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him...” [Job 13:15] “But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” [Job 23:10]

a. In the depth of Job’s misery and suffering in which he could not even feel the presence and love of God, he learned the eternal truth of trusting God completely in order to weather the storms of life. The writer of the hymn, “Trust and Obey” (John H. Sammis), expressed it aptly: “Trust and obey. For there is no other way. To be happy in Jesus. But to trust and obey.”

b. In order to make us trust Him, God works hard to make us lose trust in ourselves. - Dick Lucas

c. They who trust Him wholly
Find Him wholly true.

- “Like a River Glorious” (Frances R. Havergal)

2. THE LORD JESUS LEARNED OBEDIENCE THROUGH SUFFERING: “And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command

that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." [Mt 4:2-4]

- a. We cannot say that we have learned obedience until we have obeyed in suffering. Even the Lord Jesus was not spared from suffering in order to learn obedience - "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." (Heb 5:8) He too, like us, had to "live by every word of God". Will it work in times of suffering?
3. The average Christian will go through life without really believing five verses of the Bible. Very often, not even one... If they can whole-heartedly believe in Romans 8:28 (And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God...), they will be composed and restful when their world turns upside down. If they can completely grasp Matthew 6:25-33 (... Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they... But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.), they will not be so easily bothered or troubled by their occasional lack of material things in life. If they fully understand the heart of prayer in Matthew 7:7-11 (Ask, and it shall be given you... If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?), they will be able to have their needs met, their doubts cleared and their desires accomplished. At the end of the day, it is not how many times we have read our Bible but how much we truly believe in it.
 4. The question often comes, "Why didn't He help me sooner?" It is not His order. He must first adjust you to the trouble and cause you to learn your lesson from it. His promise is, "I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him." (Psa 91:15) He must be with you in the trouble first all day and all night. Then He will take you out of it. This will not come till you have stopped being restless and fretful about it and become calm and quiet. Then He will say, "It is enough." - Mrs. Charles E. Cowman, *Streams in the Desert*, Cowman Publication Inc.

5. A commonly-told story goes like this: Two teachers were applying for a more senior post in a school. One had about three years' experience, while the other had been teaching for about fifteen years. The post finally went to the newer teacher. The more senior teacher was visibly upset and demanded an explanation from the principal. "The difference between the newer teacher and you is that she has three years' experience while you have only one year's experience repeated fifteen times," retorted the principal. We need to ask ourselves an honest question, "Have I really believed, learned and grown spiritually all these years? Have I become more trusting, thankful and victorious in my walk of faith? Or am I just like this senior teacher, having "only one year's experience repeated fifteen times?" Growing older is not the same as growing wiser or more spiritual. Regrettably, many of us may be highly trained in the Bible but we are not particularly spiritual in our practice.
6. It is a shame for a person to have been a Christian for years but not to have advanced beyond the knowledge of his salvation. - Theodore Epp
7. Pain makes men think and forces them to ask questions. - William Bridge
8. I never knew the meaning of God's Word until I came into affliction. - Martin Luther
9. If you would not have affliction visit you twice, listen at once to what it teaches. - James Burgh
10. The life of a Christian is an education for higher service. - Corrie Ten Boom

11. SORROW, THE TEACHER

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. - Robert Hamilton

12. RULES FOR BEING HUMAN

- Rule 1: You will learn lessons.
- Rule 2: There are no mistakes - only lessons.
- Rule 3: A lesson is repeated until it is learned.
- Rule 4: If you don't learn the easy lessons, they get harder.
- Rule 5: You'll know you've learned a lesson when your actions change.

K. TO SHARPEN OUR FOCUS THAT WE MAY PERCEIVE RIGHTLY

1. **TO THE FRAILTY OF LIFE:** "LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am." [Psa 39:4]
 - a. Those who have suffered much and gone through near-death experiences see life differently. They are less confident in self and more confident in God. They tend not to take life for granted. One Jew who escaped the Holocaust in World War II said, "I should have died in the concentration camp but I survived. My birthday began from the day I was freed. Every day is an extra day given to me."
2. **TO THE NEED FOR GOD:** "That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments." [Psa 78:7]
 - a. "See, father," said a small boy who was walking with his father by the river, "they are knocking the props away from under the bridge. What are they doing that for? Won't the bridge fall?" "They are knocking them away," said the father, "that the timbers may rest more firmly upon the stone piers which are now finished." God often takes away our earthly things that we may rest more firmly on Him. - *Choice Gleanings Calendar*
 - b. The best place any Christian can ever be in is to be totally destitute and totally dependant upon God, and know it. - Alan Redpath
 - c. Sometimes God withdraws His gifts so that we may better know and love the Giver.

3. TO THE THINGS ABOVE: “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.” [Col 3:1-2]

a. What we see, we call reality. What we do not see (heaven or hell), we call a fable. The truth is that what we see is a “fable” (this is just a passing world), and what we do not see is “reality” (heaven or hell is eternal). Time here is like a drop of water in a mighty ocean in comparison to eternity and it will soon be gone - “... For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” (Jas 4:14)

b. Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.

- “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus”, Helen H. Lemmel.

4. LET ME HOLD LIGHTLY

Let me hold lightly Things of this earth;
Transient treasures, What are they worth?
Moths can corrupt them, Rust can decay;
All their bright beauty, Fades in a day.

Let me hold lightly
Temporal things - I, who am deathless,
I, who wear wings!
Let me hold fast, Lord, Things of the skies;

Quicken my vision, Open my eyes!
Show me Thy riches, glory, and grace,
Boundless as time is,
Endless as space...

Let me hold lightly,
Things that were mine.
Lord, Thou dost give me,
All that is Thine!

- Martha Snell Nicholson

6. Without a regular dose of suffering, life can be out of focus - like a short-sighted person, we get caught up with the things of this world and forget God and His work for us, and lose sight of the things of eternal value.

L. TO STRETCH US THAT WE MAY HAVE A GREATER MINISTRY

“He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.”
[Lk 16:10]

Sometimes, it can be a maddening process as we are pushed to our limits - to the point where we lose or nearly lose our temper, direction, patience and even sanity in the never-ending trials that come our way. Yet, what God is doing during those difficult times is stretching our patience, trust, dependence and faith because some days down the road, we are going to need them as we serve Him in a greater capacity.

1. **JESUS:** “Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread...” [Mt 4:1-4]
 - a. Before Christ's public ministry was His private misery - the Lord Jesus Christ was subjected to prolonged periods of hunger and weakness. In His most vulnerable moments, the Devil came and tempted Him severely to sin. If the Lord Jesus Christ had succumbed to those trying temptations, He would never have had a blazing, glorious, public ministry.
2. **MOSES:** “And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush.” [Acts 7:30]
 - a. Moses had to undergo forty years of God's special training in patience, dependence, humility and trust, in the land of Midian, to last forty years of leading the Israelites through the Wilderness. Most of us, in Moses' shoes, would probably not last more than four weeks with an unbelieving, difficult and complaining congregation.

- 3. JOSEPH:** "... and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt." [Gen 37:28] "And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison..." [Gen 39:20] "Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him." [Gen 40:23]
- a. God prepared Joseph for the high post of prime minister in Egypt by subjecting him to many trials and moments of deep anguish. From being the beloved son, he became the forgotten slave; and from the forgotten slave, he became the forsaken prisoner. Every delay, every step down, everything that went wrong was a step in the right direction for God to groom and prepare him for his new role. Joseph was not ready until he finished his last course on suffering in the dungeon. Joseph's dungeon was the way to Joseph's throne.
 - b. First, He brought me here, it is by His will I am in this strait place; in that fact I will rejoice. Next, He will keep me here in His love, and give me grace as His child. Then He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He intends for me to learn and working in me the grace He meant to bestow. Last, in His good time He can bring me out again - how and when He knows. Thus: I am (1) here by God's appointment, (2) in His keeping, (3) under His training, and (4) for His time.
- Andrew Murray

M. TO SANCTIFY US THAT WE MAY BE PURIFIED

"But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." [Job 23:10] "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:" [1 Pet 1:7]

In medieval times, the goldsmiths had a unique method to determine when the refining fire had purged away all extraneous matter from the precious metal. They would stand patiently and peer intently into the seething, molten mass, meantime making the fire hotter and hotter. At last, a smile of satisfaction would lighten up the perspiring face of the goldsmith. He could see his face reflected in the molten mass

of gold. Seeing his face mirrored there, he knew that the refining fire had wrought its purifying purpose. Of the heavenly Father, the Bible says: "And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver..." (Mal 3:3) Peter admonished: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you..." (1 Pet 4:12) When God sees the image of His dear Son reflected in our lives, He knows that His purifying fires have wrought their intended purpose. - R. E. Neighbour

1. **THE PROCESS OF PURIFICATION**

- a. **IT INVOLVES FIRE:** "Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place." [Psa 66:12]
- i. As fire burns and hurts so does our trial - it causes us to want to scream, cry out or give up. It shatters our peace; confuses our thoughts; plunges us into despair; and, at times, drives us to near insanity.
 - ii. **JOB:** "So am I made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me. When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day... My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope... When I say, My bed shall comfort me, my couch shall ease my complaint; Then thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me through visions: So that my soul chooseth strangling, and death rather than my life." [Job 7:3-15]
 - iii. Sometimes we are helped by being hurt. A skilled physician about to perform a delicate operation upon the ear said reassuringly, "I may hurt you, but I will not injure you." How often the great Physician speaks to us the same message if we would only listen! - Adapted
 - iv. 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

- b. IT INVOLVES GREAT INTENSITY:** “Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.” [Isa 48:10] “... and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated.” [Dan 3:19]
- i. As the fire in the furnace gets hotter, so our afflictions will get worse; our pains will increase and, at times, our sorrows will be multiplied beyond all human comprehension. When we are going through our God-ordained trials, we will discover that things will generally get worse before they get better.
 - ii. After Job lost all his wealth in one go, God “turned up the heat” and caused him to lose all his seven sons. And if seven heart-breaking funerals in one day were not “hot enough”, God “turned up the heat further” by allowing Job to lose his health and wish that he could die. To “heat up the furnace even hotter”, God allowed his three friends to torment him with a constant barrage of, “The reason why you are suffering so terribly is because of your secret sins”.
 - iii. A saint’s life is in the hands of God like a bow and arrow in the hands of an archer. God is aiming at something the saint cannot see, and He stretches and strains, and every now and again the saint says - ‘I cannot stand any more.’ God does not heed, He goes on stretching till His purpose is in sight, then He lets fly. - Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, Discovery House Publishers.
 - iv. “Cheer up,” urged a friend of mine, “things could be worse.” So I cheered up and, sure enough, they got worse. - E. Wilson Wahl
- c. IT INVOLVES LONG DURATION:** “My desire is that Job may be tried unto the end...” [Job 34:36] “And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.” [Deut 8:2]

- i. The longer the purification process, the purer the gold. God too, is putting us through His “fire” for long periods of time, to bring to perfection those godly qualities He so desires in us - “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” (Gal 5:22-23)

2. THE PURPOSE IN PURIFICATION

a. TO REMOVE THE DROSS

“If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work.” [2 Tim 2:21]

- i. Spend a moment in solemn reflection. What is the “dross” in your life that needs to be purged? It may be arrogance, pride, love of praise, love of attention, self-will, stubbornness, an unteachable spirit, peevishness, immaturity, jealousy, anger, impatience, love of money, selfishness, or an unforgiving spirit. All such “dross” grieves the Holy Spirit who dwells within us and so we must be “refined” and “purged”. This means we must pass “through the fire,” but there's some comfort for you here. The refiner has a purpose - it is not to destroy his precious gold and silver, but to consume the “dross” and bring out the beauty and purity of the gold. Fire cannot destroy the gold; it only melts it. Oh, how we need to be melted before God! When the gold is melted, the dross floats on the top and it is easy for the refiner to skim it off. How long since you have been melted... The next time you feel the heat from the fire of affliction thank God that He is consuming not you, but the “dross” out of your life and you shall come “through the fire” purified and cleansed. - J. C. Brumfield, *Comfort for Troubled Christians*, Moody Press, Chicago.
- ii. If through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace all sufficient shall be thy supply,
The flame will not hurt thee, I only design,
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

b. TO REVEAL THE GOLD

“That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” [1 Pet 1:7]

- i. The very fact of trial proves that there is something in us very precious to our Lord; else He would not spend so much pains and time on us. Christ would not test us if He did not see the precious ore of faith mingled in the rocky matrix of our nature; and it is to bring this out into purity and beauty that He forces us through the fiery ordeal. Be patient, O sufferer! The result will more than compensate for all our trials, when we see how they wrought out the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. To have one word of God's commendation; to be honored before the holy angels; to be glorified in Christ... will more than repay for all. - *Tried by Fire*

- ii. When the fire is hottest, hold still, for there will be a blessed “afterward”; and with Job we may be able to say, “When he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold.” - Adapted

- iii. The “fire” of human hatred will produce the “gold” of divine love; the “fire” of earthly sorrows will produce the “gold” of enduring trust; the “fire” of persistent problems will produce the “gold” of prevailing patience; and the “fire” of unending troubles will produce the “gold” of indestructible faith.

- iv. The dark brown mould's upturned
By the sharp-pointed plow;
And I've a lesson learned.

My life is but a field,
Stretched out beneath God's sky,
Some harvest rich to yield.

Where grows the golden grain?
Where faith? Where sympathy?
In a furrow cut by pain. - Maltbie D. Babcock

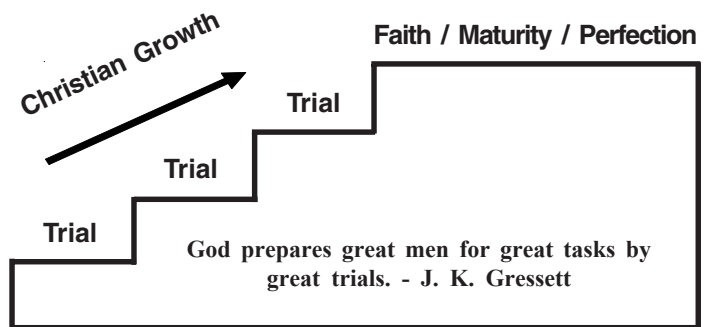
N. TO 'STABLISH' US THAT WE MAY BE FIRMLY GROUNDED IN OUR FAITH

1. THE PROGRESSION OF OUR FAITH: “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith...” [Col 2:6-7] “... Lord, Increase our faith.” [Lk 17:5]

a. FOR FAITH TO GROW, IT MUST BE TRIED: “Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.” [Jas 1:3]

i. Trials should not surprise us, or cause us to doubt God’s faithfulness. Rather, we should actually be glad for them. God sends trials to strengthen our trust in him so that our faith will not fail. Our trials keep us trusting; they burn away our self confidence and drive us to our Saviour. - Edmund Clowney

ii. I remember kneeling one day in my study and praying earnestly that God would teach me to live by faith. I guess I thought God would wave a wand over my head, put a holy zap on me, and suddenly I would be a giant of faith, waiting for a vacancy in Hebrews 11. Instead, everything came unglued. Financial problems, ministerial difficulties, family crises - somebody was definitely out to get me. I went to my knees, begging God to help me, asking what was happening and why. “I am just answering your prayer,” He seemed to say. “Prayer? What prayer? I don’t remember praying for disaster.” Your prayer for faith,” He said. - Ronald Dunn, *The Faith Crisis*, Tyndale House Publisher, Inc.



- iii. You will never learn faith in comfortable surroundings. God gives us the promises in a quiet hour; God seals our covenants with great and gracious words, then He steps back and waits to see how much we believe; then He lets the tempter come, and the test seems to contradict all that He has spoken. It is then that faith wins its crown. That is the time to look up through the storm, and among the trembling, frightened seamen cry, "I believe in God that it shall be even as it was told me."
- Mrs. Charles E. Cowman, *Streams in the Desert*, Cowman Publication Inc.

b. FOR FAITH TO GROW, IT MUST BE REINFORCED:

"So Moses brought Israel from the Red sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water."
[Exod 15:22] "And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the LORD, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink." [Exod 17:1]

- i. Whether it is a matter of faith, trust or patience, God will repeat His trial in different ways and in different forms, until we learn to walk confidently and comfortably by faith instead of by sight. Although the piling work in the laying of the foundation of skyscrapers appears to be mundane, monotonous and repetitious, it is most necessary; the higher the building, the deeper the piling. The greater the development of our trust, faith and spirituality, the longer and the more intense will our suffering be.
- ii. I recall more than one occasion when, having been delivered by God's grace at the eleventh hour, I declared, "I'll never doubt God again!" But in a few weeks - or days - when another seemingly impossible situation loomed on the horizon, I found myself cowering in the corner of self-pity, whimpering because God had abandoned me. Forgetfulness is definitely hazardous to your faith. - Ronald Dunn, *The Faith Crisis*, Tyndale House Publisher.

- 2. THE PERFECTION OF OUR FAITH:** “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.” [Jas 1:3-4]

The word “let”, in Greek, is in the imperative mood, denoting a command to do it. It is not a suggestion or a hint to do it. It is an order for us to “let patience have her perfect work...” God strongly urges us to learn to accept, trust, believe, obey and experience Him in the midst of our trials, and grow into the mature man and receive the riches of His intended blessings.

a. THE TRIALS OF LIFE WILL INCREASE

- i. Abraham had to leave his homeland, wander in the Land of Canaan and remain childless for a hundred years. When he was finally given a child, he was told to sacrifice him to prove his love and trust in God.
- ii. The trial of life is like, when after climbing a mountain, we discover another higher one awaiting us.

b. THE BELIEVER'S FAITH MUST INCREASE

- i. Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up. It knows that it must run faster than the fastest lion or it will be killed. Every morning, a lion wakes up. It knows that it must run faster than the slowest gazelle or it will starve to death. In a similar manner, either the believer will grow fast in his faith or he will “die” under the ever-increasing trials and temptations that will surely come his way - “... In the world ye shall (not maybe) have tribulation...” (Jn 16:33) If we are discerning, we will see countless Christians who had a good beginning in their Christian faith and ended up shipwrecked in their latter days, because their faith was not grounded firmly in the Lord and their “roots” never grew deep into His Word.
- ii. Neil Orchard writes: I was talking with a farmer about his soybean and corn crops. Rain had been abundant, and the results were evident. So his comment surprised me: “My crops are especially vulnerable. Even a short drought could have a

devastating effect.” “Why?” I asked. He explained that while we see the frequent rains as a benefit, during that time the plants are not required to push their roots deeper in search of water. The roots remain near the surface. A drought would find the plants unprepared and quickly kill them. Some Christians receive abundant “rains” of worship, fellowship, and teaching. Yet when stress enters their lives, many suddenly abandon God or think Him unfaithful. Their roots have never pushed much below the surface. Only roots grown deep into God (Col 2:6-7) will help us endure times of drought in our lives. - Michael P. Green, *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, Baker Book House.

iii. **THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITH**

God is looking for faith - “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” [Heb 11:6] The Devil is seeking to destroy our faith - “And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.” [Lk 22:31-32] We are saved by faith - “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” [Eph 2:8-9] Answered prayer is hinged upon faith - “But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.” [Jas 1:6-7] A life of fear is attributed to a lack of faith - “And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith...” [Mt 8:26] Faith is indispensable to all our victories in life - “... and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” [1 Jn 5:4]

- iv. Jesus promised his disciples three things - that they would be completely fearless, absurdly happy and in constant trouble. - F. R. Maltby

O. TO SETTLE US THAT WE MAY BE PERFECTLY AT REST IN SUFFERING

“But 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 Pet 5:10]

The early days of our Christian life are often colored by many moments of “drama”, uncertainty and confusion. We doubt, question and vacillate in the vicissitudes of life. One moment, we are praising God for His rich blessings; the next, questioning Him for His wise withholding. Often, we balk at, murmur, get upset, become bitter and “quarrel with the process” of His molding us into His image. We question: “Why are all these problems happening to me? Why can't I lead a normal life like others? Why are my struggles unending? When will my miseries be over or will they ever be over? Where is God? Or as Gideon of old observed: “... if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us...” (Jud 6:13) In this infantile stage of our Christian life, defeat, discouragement and disillusion, tend to be the order of the day.

If we are faithful, discerning and growing in the Lord, we will fare much better in the latter part of our Christian walk. We will begin to recognize a consistent, undeviating, divine pattern of God's dealings and deliverances in suffering. There will be tribulation as promised in the Scriptures; periods of anxiety and searching; times of prayer and the committing of our problems to the Lord; the crowning moments of trusting in Him; and the sure, marvelous and even miraculous deliverances of God. After one trial is over, the Lord will prepare the next, and the process will repeat itself until we become accustomed to the ever-changing landscapes of suffering designed by an unchanging God who is, “... the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” (Heb 13:8)

1. God wants us to “overcome suffering through suffering”; that is, through suffering we are enabled and empowered, by His providential grace, to “rejoice in affliction” (1 Pet 4:13), “count it all joy in testing” (Jas 1:2-4), “be of good cheer in tribulation” (Jn 16:33), “think it not strange concerning the fiery trials” (1 Pet 4:12), and “be thankful for all things” (1 Thess 5:18). Through affliction God wants to “perfect,

stablish, strengthen, settle us” to the point where we will “suffer no more”; in the sense of not fearing but understanding, accepting and cheerfully overcoming our pre-ordained sufferings which are designed for our good.

2. There is a divine mystery in suffering, a strange and supernatural power in it, which has never been fathomed by the human reason... When the suffering soul reaches a calm, sweet carelessness, when it can inwardly smile at its own suffering, and does not even ask God to deliver it from suffering, then it has wrought its blessed ministry; then patience has its perfect work; then the crucifixion begins to weave itself into a crown. It is in this state of the perfection of suffering that the Holy Spirit works many marvelous things in our souls. In such a condition, our whole being lies perfectly still under the hand of God; every faculty of the mind and will and heart are at last subdued; a quietness of eternity settles down into the whole being; the tongue grows still and has but few words to say; it stops asking God questions; it stops crying, “Why has thou forsaken me?”... it has no choice in anything but the purpose of God... it is so dead that nothing can hurt it, nothing can offend it, nothing can hinder it, nothing can get in its way; for let the circumstances be what they may, it seeks only for God and His will, and it feels assured that God is making everything in the universe, good or bad, past or present, work together for its good... - *Soul Food*

3. “... Thou hast enlarged me when I was distress...” [Psa 4:1]

This is one of the grandest testimonies ever given by man to the moral government of God. It is not a man's thanksgiving that he has been set free from suffering. It is a thanksgiving that he has been set free through suffering: “Thou hast enlarged me when I was distress.” He declares the sorrows of life to have been themselves the source of life's enlargement. - George Matheson

4. The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the place where sorrow is unknown.
- William Cowper

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THE COMFORT IN SUFFERING**III. THE COMFORT IN SUFFERING**

The greatest comfort in affliction is to know that it is a Friend and not a Foe who is behind all the suffering we are experiencing. Behind the people and problems we are confronting each day is the God who loves us and permits those calamities to come to us for our good. Not only does He love us dearly but He is also an all-powerful and all-knowing God who knows the depths of our hearts and the limits of our strength to withstand the trials in our lives. With a love far greater than that of a mother's love and a skill that far exceeds that of the greatest surgeon, He dishes out our trials as carefully as a physician prescribes his medicine to his patients. On the one hand, like an athletic coach, He pushes us to our limits to excel to perfection - "For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried. Thou broughtest us into the net; thou laidst affliction upon our loins. Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place." (Psa 66:10-12) On the other hand, like a conscientious and endearing mother, He will never allow us to be afflicted beyond our abilities - "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." (1 Cor 10:13) Let us not be afraid of the unfamiliar trials in the hands of a Familiar Friend who "... only doeth wondrous things" (Psa 72:18) for us.

A. GOD AFFLICTS US FAITHFULLY

"I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." [Psa 119:75] "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light... It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness." [Lam 3:1-23]

1. **HE WILL NEVER FORGET US:** "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." [Isa 49:15]

- a. A story was told of a man who was convicted of some heinous crimes. The court broke into cheers as the sentence for him to be hanged was announced. They believed he deserved it, but among the crowd was a woman in tears, and that woman was his mother - "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb..." (Isa 49:15) No matter how bad or down we are, God will never forget us.
- b. This is the fundamental thing, the most serious thing of all, that we are always in the presence of God.
- Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
- 2. HE WILL NEVER FORSAKE US:** "... for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." [Heb 13:5-6] "For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee." [Psa 31:22]
- a. In the Greek language, it is literally, "He Himself hath said, I will not, I will not, I will not forsake thee." It is a triple assurance that God Himself will not forsake us. In addition, the word "forsake" is a composite of three words, "to leave", "down", and "in". The first has the idea of forsaking one. The second suggests rejection, defeat and helplessness. The third refers to some place or circumstance in which a person may find himself helpless and forsaken. The meaning of the word is that of forsaking someone in a state of defeat or helplessness in the midst of hostile circumstances. This is something God Himself will not allow to happen to us. - adapted from Kenneth S. Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament, Vol III, pg 25*, Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- b. When circumstances seem impossible, when all signs of grace in you seem at their lowest ebb, when temptation is fiercest, when love and joy and hope seem well-nigh extinguished in your heart, then rest, without feeling and without emotion, in the Father's faithfulness. - D. Tryon

3. **HE WILL NEVER FAIL US**

- a. **THE HUMAN LOOK:** “And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do?” [2 kings 6:15]
- b. **THE DIVINE LOOK:** “And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.” [2 Kings 6:16-17]
- c. Elisha's servant saw the Syrian army and was in great fear and agitation; but Elisha saw a greater army, the angels of God protecting him, and was at ease. It is said that God will not deliver us 'from trouble', but He will deliver us 'in trouble' - “He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.” (Psa 91:15) Not only will God deliver us in trouble, but He will deliver us in all of our troubles - “Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.” (Psa 34:19)

B. **GOD AFFLICTS US KNOWINGLY**

1. **HE KNOWS OUR SITUATION:** “Behold, I go forward, but he is not there: and backward, but I cannot perceive him... But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” [Job 23:8-10]
 - a. During the blitz, an old London lady refused to move from the top front room, where she had lived for twenty years, to a safer place. Her explanation was: “I say my prayers to God every night and I go to sleep. There's no need for us both to keep awake.” - *World Christian Digest*. “He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.” (Psa 121:3)
 - b. When you have accomplished your daily task, go to sleep in peace; God is awake. - Victor Hugo

2. HE KNOWS OUR SUFFERING: “O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.” [Psa 139:1-4] “Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?” [Psa 56:8]

- a. If our sins cannot escape the knowledge of God neither can our sorrows.
- b. God is before me, He will be my Guide,
God is behind me, no ill can betide,
God is beside me, to comfort and cheer,
God is around me, so why should I fear?

c. MY FATHER KNOWS

So often in a time of stress,
In hours of trial and unrest,
This thought comes like a sweet caress,
“My Father knows.”

And often in a time of pain,
When I am tempted to complain,
This tender thought comes back again,
“My Father knows.”

And then in times of fear and doubt,
Of storms within and clouds without,
This thought has turned me face about,
“My Father knows.”

My Father knows and cares for me,
His Word can still the troubled sea,
This thought brings peace and victory,
“My Father knows.”

My Father knows what perfect bliss,
How real, how sweet a love like this,
No greater cure for all my woes, than simply this,
“My Father knows.” - Selected

3. **HE KNOWS OUR SALVATION (DELIVERANCE)**: “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.” [Jer 29:11] “... but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” [1 Cor 10:13]
 - a. Christ sometimes delays His help that He may try our faith and quicken our prayers. The boat may be covered with the waves, and He sleeps on; but He will wake up before it sinks. He sleeps, but He never oversleeps; and there are no “too lates” with Him. - Alexander Maclaren
 - b. Premature deliverance may frustrate God's work of grace in your life. - *Still, Small Voice.*

C. GOD AFFLICTS US PERSONALLY

1. **HE TRIES US PERSONALLY**: “For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried. Thou broughtest us into the net; thou laidst affliction upon our loins. Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.” [Psa 66:10-12]
2. **HE COMFORTS US PERSONALLY**: “I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; And forgettest the LORD thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth...” [Isa 51:12-13]
3. **HE ACCOMPANIES US PERSONALLY**: “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.” [Isa 41:10]
 - a. **GOD ACCOMPANIED JOSEPH PERSONALLY IN THE PRISON**: “And Joseph’s master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king’s prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison. But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.” [Gen 39:20-21]

- b. **GOD ACCOMPANIED PAUL PERSONALLY IN THE SHIPWRECK:** “And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.” [Acts 27:22-26]
- c. God has never promised to solve our problems. He has not promised to answer our questions... He has promised to go with us. - Elisabeth Elliot
4. **HE SUFFERS WITH US PERSONALLY:** “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.” [Isa 63:9]
- a. A General once confided sadly in one of his officers, “The enemy shot through my heart.” “But,” protested his puzzled subordinate, “you are all right.” The General then showed him the corpse of his son who was shot and killed in the battle. When we suffer, God suffers with us in a similar manner - like a mother feeling the pains of a stricken child in her heart.
5. It is for all these reasons that Job could confidently say, “... the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21), when he lost his health, wealth and children. He did not blame anyone or anything for his calamities. He recognized that all these afflictions came solely from the hands of God. There were no secondary causes period.
6. My child, I have a message for you today; let me whisper it in your ear, that it may gild with glory any storm clouds which may arise, and smooth the rough places upon which you have to tread. It is short, only five words, but let them sink into your innermost soul; use them as a pillow upon which to rest your weary head... **THIS THING IS FROM ME.**
- Laura Barker Snow

7. FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND

One night I had a dream -
I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord and
Across the sky flashed scenes from my life.
For each scene I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand,
One belonged to me and the other to the Lord.
When the last scene of my life flashed before me,
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.
I noticed that many times along the path of my life,
There was only one set of footprints.
I also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and
saddest times in my life.
This really bothered me and I questioned the Lord about it.
“Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you,
You would walk with me all the way,
But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times
in my life
There is only one set of footprints.
I don’t understand why in times when I needed you most,
you should leave me.”
The Lord replied, “My precious, precious child, I love you
and I would never, never leave you during your times of
trial and suffering.
When you saw only one set of footprints,
It was then that I carried you.”

D. GOD AFFLICTS US NECESSARILY

“For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of
men... To turn aside the right of a man before the face of the
most High, To subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth
not.” [Lam 3:33-36]

1. TO KEEP US FAITHFUL

- a. When the load of suffering is gone, man tends to drift
away from God. Noah became drunk after the Flood,
David committed adultery and murder after the
persecution from King Saul was over, King Solomon went
after many strange women when his kingdom was
comfortably established, and many Christians become

lukewarm and backslidden when they have everything in life. Sad to say, spiritual truths can be “unlearned”. Affliction, contrary to our thinking, actually strengthens us to be faithful and to remain faithful - “... for when I am weak, then am I strong.” (2 Cor 12:10)

- b. The author had a lady Sunday School teacher in his church who spent the best eight years of her life looking after a bedridden mother. There was a time when she asked in tears a poignant, heart-breaking question, “Why does God allow me to be in this situation and miss out on the many good things in life?” The author had no answers then to her soul-searching question. Not long after, her bedridden mother died. Since that time, she has not come to church again. The author now knows why God willed to give her a bedridden mother to look after all those years - to keep her faithful in the perfect will of God. As the saying goes, “Troubles over, God is forgotten.”
- c. Dr. Lambie, medical missionary, formerly of Abyssinia, has forded many swift and bridgeless streams in Africa. The danger in crossing such a stream lies in being swept off one’s feet and carried down the stream to greater depths or hurled to death against the hidden rocks. Dr. Lambie learned from the natives the best way to make such a hazardous crossing. The man about to cross finds a large stone, the heavier the better, lifts it to his shoulder, and carries it across the stream as “ballast.” The extra weight of the stone keeps his feet solid on the bed of the stream and he can cross safely without being swept away. Dr. Lambie drew this application: While crossing the dangerous stream of life, enemies constantly seek to overthrow us and rush us down to ruin. We need the ballast of burden-bearing, a load of affliction, to keep us from being swept off our feet.
- Christian Victory
- d. The calm which puts us to sleep may be more fatal than the storm which keeps us wide awake. - William S. Plummer
- e. One is never more on trial than in the unlimited moment of excessive good fortune.

2. TO MAKE US FRUITFUL

- a. "... and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." [Jn 15:5]
 - b. If we have been discerning, we will realize that it is in times of suffering that we are most fruitful in the work of the Lord. It is in times of comfort that we tend to be lazy, slothful and unproductive in fulfilling His urgent bidding.
 - c. "Why did you take away my weight?" asked the clock. The old man answered, "To lighten your load." "Please," said the clock, "put it back." "That is what keeps me going."
 - d. Better to be pruned to grow, than cut up to burn. - John Trapp
3. Let us settle it firmly in our minds that there is a meaning, a need-be and a message from God in every sorrow that falls upon us. - J. C. Ryle
 4. Who can estimate how much we owe to suffering and pain? But for them we should have little scope for many of the chief virtues of the Christian life. Where was faith, without trial to test it; or patience, with nothing to bear; or experience, without tribulation to develop it? - Selected
 5. In eternity, we will realize that every one of those trials which we dreaded so much on earth was both necessary and instrumental in keeping us faithful and fruitful.

E. GOD AFFLICTS US PURPOSEFULLY

1. **HE AFFLICTS US FOR OUR GOOD:** "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." [Rom 8:28]
 - a. Flour, artificial coloring, sugar and raw eggs, when eaten separately will be most unpalatable. But when we combine them together and bake the mixture, it becomes

a delicious cake. All the individual moments of suffering may not look good but someday down the road, when we piece them together, we will find that they all work together for good.

- b. In China, a story was told of a man whose horse was lost. His neighbor commented, "Bad luck." The man said, "How do you know? The story has not ended." The next day his horse brought back several wild horses. The neighbor said, "Good luck." Again the man whose horse was lost replied, "How do you know? The story has not ended." Sometime later, the man's son fell and broke his leg while trying to tame the wild horses. The neighbor said, "Bad luck." Once again, the man replied, "How do you know? The story has not ended." About that time, the military was rounding up young men to be sent to the war front and they spared the man's son because of his broken leg...
- c. All things work together, not separately or independently, not each thing in itself, but "together." This is the key to the test... Many people pick out one experience in life and wave it in the face of God and challenge, "I don't see any good in that." No, and God doesn't say there is, but it is a part of the "all things," a part of the divine pattern. The separate events of life may seem to be disastrous, but "together" they "work for good." It takes a blending of the experiences in life to make the "together." When we are living in submission and obedience to His will, every event has a definite place in the plan and pattern of God. Each thing is a part of the "all things" and "all things together work for good." - J. C. Brumfield, *Comfort for Troubled Christians*, Moody Press.
- d. God will never permit any trouble to come upon us unless he has a specific plan by which great blessing can come out of the difficulty. - Peter Marshall
- e. There is no such thing as good weather or bad weather. There are just different kinds of good weather. We need sunshine as well as rain.
- f. All sunshine and no rain makes a desert. - Arabic Proverb

2. HE AFFLICTS US FOR OUR GROWTH: “And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope.” [Rom 5:3-4]

- a. The moment a baby giraffe is born, the mother does a seemingly unkind thing - she starts to kick the young giraffe to get it up to stand on its feet. After it finally stands on its feet, the mother kicks her young again to make it fall, and then the whole process starts again. To the untrained eye this seems to be a cruel thing to do, but what the mother giraffe is trying to do is to get her young to know how to stand up and get going as soon as it is born. The reason: baby giraffes are very prone to fall prey to lions and other roaming predators. God sometimes appears to be cruel to us by allowing so many afflictions to come into our lives and before we barely recover from one, He permits another to come upon us. What He is aiming to do is equip us to recognize the wiles of the Devil in the midst of our sufferings - “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” (1 Pet 5:8) Without a strong and tried faith, and a sharp, discerning, tested, spiritual mind, we will eventually give in to the sins that so easily beset us.
- b. Sometimes God interrupts my health and happiness and seems to say, “It is growing time.” Then I am faced with a choice: welcome the trials and get better, or resent them and get bitter. The bottom line is a choice between these two: a comfortable life or conformity to Christ. - Junita Purcell, *Trials, Don't Resent Them as Intrusion*, Regular Baptist Press.
- c. We fail to see the place of suffering in the broader scheme of things. We fail to see that suffering is an inevitable dimension of life. Because we have lost perspective, we fail to see that unless one is willing to accept suffering properly, he or she is really refusing to continue in the quest for maturity. To refuse suffering is to refuse personal growth. - Adapted

3. HE AFFLICTS US FOR OUR GLORIFICATION: “But 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 Pet 5:10]

- a. It is said that when Michelangelo, the great artist and sculptor, saw a block of white marble, he could visualize the statue of David in it. From there, he eventually carved out his masterpiece. God too, is carving out His “masterpiece” in us by chipping away the “unwanted parts” of unbelief, impatience and selfishness through the painful process of affliction so that we will be like Him - “The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me...” (Psa 138:8)

b. REJOICE IN THE LORD

God never moves without purpose or plan
When trying His servant and molding a man.
Give thanks to the Lord though your testing seems long;
In darkness He giveth a song.

O rejoice in the Lord. He makes no mistake.
He knoweth the end of each path that I take.
For when I am tried and purified,
I shall come forth as gold.

- Ron Hamilton

F. GOD AFFLICTS US MYSTERIOUSLY

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” [Isa 55:8-9] “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” [Rom 11:33] “Which doeth great things past finding out; yea, and wonders without number.” [Job 9:10] “Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.” [Jn 13:7]

God knows what He is doing and he is not under any obligation to give us any explanation. - Elisabeth Elliot

1. THE PREDICAMENT OF JACOB

- a. **JACOB'S PERPLEXITY:** “And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me.” [Gen 42:36]
- b. **GOD'S PERFECT PLAN:** “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.” [Gen 50:20]
- c. Jacob, who had years earlier lost his favorite son Joseph, then saw another of his sons Simeon, being held hostage in Egypt, and was now about to lose his beloved son Benjamin, thought that everything was against him. However, “everything that was against him”, was actually designed “to be for him” - God was sending ahead Joseph to Egypt to preserve his (Jacob's) family.
- d. A sermon's title by Pastor Clarence Sexton, “You Sold Me, but God Sent Me” encapsulates this whole mysterious but wonderful dealing of God with man - it is always intended for his good even though it often appears contrariwise.

2. THE PREDICAMENT OF PAUL

- a. **PAUL'S PERPLEXITY:** “But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.” [Phil 1:12-14]
- b. **GOD'S PERFECT PLAN:** The Apostle Paul, after his third missionary journey, was imprisoned in Rome. To many, this seemed like a big drawback to God's plan in the propagation of the gospel - God's best missionary was incarcerated. However, the gospel actually spread faster and further when the inactive believers were made ashamed and galvanized into action, and many were won to the Lord through Paul's evangelistic zeal in prison.

3. God's providence is powerful... It is so powerful that it even brings good out of evil; making bad men and fallen angels to serve God's design, while they intend no such thing: giving the greatest efficiency to cause apparently the most contemptible; and infallibly securing the very best ends... All conspiracies and combinations against providence are vain... He who rejects the mystery of providence must ever be in perplexity. - William S. Plumer
4. A man once sought help from a friend to check on his car's signal lights. When the signal lights flashed intermittently, his friend's playful responses were "working", "not working", "working", "not working"... We tend to think that, when everything is going our way, then God is "working", and when anything goes wrong with us, then God is "not working" in our lives. The truth of the matter is that God is actively working in us all the time - like the signal lights, they are meant to be that way - moments of joy will alternate with moments of sorrow to keep us focused and dependent on Him. "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven... A time to weep, and a time to laugh..." (Eccl 3:1-4)
5. Wallace Johnson, builder of numerous Holiday Inn motels, said, "When I was forty years old I worked in a sawmill. One morning the boss told me I was fired. Depressed and discouraged, I felt like the world had caved in. When I told my wife what had happened, she asked me what I was going to do. I replied, "I am going to mortgage our little home and go into the building business." My first venture was the construction of two small buildings. Within five years I was a multimillionaire! At the time it happened, I didn't understand why I was fired. Later, I saw that it was God's unerring and wondrous plan to get me into the way of His choosing."
6. I have been reflecting on the inestimable value of "broken things." Broken pitchers gave ample light for victory (Jud 7:19-21); broken bread was more than enough for all the hungry (Mt 14:19-21); a broken box gave fragrance to all the world (Mk 14:3); and a broken body is salvation to all who believe and receive the Saviour (Isa 53:5-6). And what cannot the Broken One do with our broken plans, projects and hearts? - V. Raymond Edman

7. HE MAKETH NO MISTAKE

My Father's way may twist and turn,
My heart may throb and ache.
But in my soul I'm glad I know,
He maketh no mistake.

My cherished plans may go astray,
My hopes may fade away.
But still I'll trust my Lord to lead,
For He doeth know the way.

Tho' night be dark and it may seem
That day will never break;
I'll pin by faith, my all in Him,
He maketh no mistake.

There's so much now I cannot see,
My eyesight's far too dim;
But come what may, I'll simply trust
And leave it all to Him.

For by and by the mist will lift
And plain it all He'll make.
Through all the way, tho' dark to me,
He made not one mistake.

- A. M. Overton

8. MY WEB OF LIFE

No chance has brought this ill to me;
'Tis God's sweet will, so let it be,
He seeth what I cannot see.
There is a need-be for each pain;
And He will one day make it plain
That earthly loss is heavenly gain.
Like a piece of tapestry
Viewed from the back appears to be
But tangled threads mixed hopelessly;
But in the front of it a picture fair
Rewards the worker for his care,
Proving his skill and patience rare.
Thou art the workman, I the frame;
Lord, for the glory of thy name
Perfect Thine image on the same. - Adapted

9. THE WEAVER

My life is but a weaving
 Between my Lord and I.
 I cannot choose the colors
 He works so steadily.

Off'times He weaves in sorrow
 And I, in foolish pride,
 Forget He sees the upper
 And I, the underside.

The dark threads are as needful
 In the weaver's skillful hand,
 As the threads of gold and silver
 In the pattern He has planned.

Not till the loom is silent
 And the shuttles cease to fly,
 Shall God unroll the canvas
 And explain the reason why. - Kristone

10. "UNANSWERED PRAYERS"

I asked God for strength, that I might achieve,
 I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.

I asked for health, that I might do greater things,
 I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.

I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men,
 I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.

I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life,
 I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.

I got nothing that I asked for -
 But everything I had hoped for,

Almost despite myself,
 My unspoken prayers were answered.
 I am among all men most richly blessed.

- An Unknown Confederate Soldier

G. GOD AFFLICTS US CONTROLLABLY

1. **HE CONTROLS SATAN:** “And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life. So went Satan forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown.” [Job 2:4-7]
 - a. Even a mighty Satan has to get an Almighty God’s permission to afflict Job.

2. **HE CONTROLS SITUATION:** “Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?” [Lam 3:37] “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” [1 Cor 10:13]
 - a. The God of circumstances will not place one upon us that is heavier than we can bear.
 - b. By the time a problem gets to us, it has to be God’s will.

3. **HE CONTROLS SUFFERING:** “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.” [2 Cor 4:7-9]
 - a. God not only allows troubles and afflictions to come into our lives but He also gives added grace, strength and joy to bear with them.
 - b. Let God lay on a burden, he will be sure to strengthen the back. - Thomas Lye

4. A fictitious story is told of a young man who was at the end of his rope and seeing no way out, he dropped to his knees in prayer, “Lord, I can’t go on,” he said. “I have too heavy a

cross to bear.” The Lord replied, “My son, if you can’t bear its weight, just place your cross inside this room. Then, open that other door and pick out any cross you wish.” The man was filled with relief and said, “Thank you Lord,” and he did as he was told. Upon entering the other room, he saw many crosses; some so large the tops were not visible. Then, he spotted a tiny cross leaning against a far wall. “I’ll take that one, Lord,” he whispered. The Lord replied, “My son, that is the cross you just brought in.”

5. The Oriental shepherd was always ahead of his sheep. He was down in front. Any attack upon them had to take him into account. Now God is down in front. He is in the tomorrows. It is tomorrow that fills men with dread. God is there already. All the tomorrows of our life have to pass Him before they can get to us. - F. B. Meyer
6. When we learn to lean back on God's sovereignty... we can experience great inner peace. Our troubles may not change. Our pain may not diminish. Our loss may not be restored... But the power of those things to harm us is broken as we rest in the fact that God is in control. - Joni Eareckson Tada, *One Step Further*, Zondervan Publishing House.

H. GOD AFFLICTS US PROVIDENTIALLY

Before the first Adam sinned, God had already prepared the Second Adam (Jesus Christ) to die on Calvary to save us - “... the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” (Rev 13:8) God does not have to see our problems first and then think of a solution. He has the solutions long before our problems ever existed.

1. **HIS GRACE IS SUFFICIENT IN SUFFERING:** “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...” [2 Cor 12:8-9]
 - a. A story was told of two Christian martyrs who lived during the Reformation. One was a veteran saint, Latimer, and the other was a young believer, Riley. They were both condemned to be burnt at the stake. The night before the execution, young Riley was highly

nervous and agitated. He looked through the iron bars of their dungeon prison and saw them preparing the stakes. In his panic he tried to light a candle and in the process burned his finger. His burn impressed upon him the greater agony of the fate that awaited him and he cried out, "I can't stand it, I can't stand it." His seasoned companion gently laid his hand upon his shoulder and said, "My friend, God didn't ask you to burn your finger, so He didn't give grace to stand it tonight, but tomorrow, when the time comes, God will give sufficient grace." The next morning the two men were led to the stakes each with a triumphant smile and perfect peace in his heart. As the flames surrounded their bodies, out of the midst came their vibrant voices united in a victorious song of praise. Yes, my friend, God gives grace for everything He calls upon you to bear. - David Kirk's, *The Mystery of Divine Chastening*.

b. HE GIVETH MORE GRACE

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

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources
Our Father's full giving is only begun.

His love has no limit, His grace has no measure,
His power no boundary known unto men;
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth and giveth and giveth again.

- Annie Johnson Flint.

c. God has a thousand ways
Where I can see not one.
When all my means
Have reached their end
Then His has just begun.

- Adapted

2. HIS STRENGTH IS SUFFICIENT IN SUFFERING: “Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.” [Deut 33:25] “He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.” [Isa 40:29]

a. **A DIVINE STRENGTH:** “Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee (God); in whose heart are the ways of them.” [Psa 84:5] “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” [Phil 4:13]

b. **A RENEWED STRENGTH:** “But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” [Isa 40:31]

c. **AN ENDLESS STRENGTH:** “Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength.” [Isa 26:4]

d. The Christian has to live in the world, but he must draw all his resources from outside of the world. - Donald Grey Barnhouse

e. A saint's prayer: “Dear Lord, I am weak and you are strong. Together, we make a great team.”

3. HIS PROVISION IS SUFFICIENT IN SUFFERING: “... for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself...” [Mt 6:32-34]

a. He who feeds the sparrows will feed you - “Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?” (Mt 6:26)

b. God has promised to meet all our needs but not all our “wants”.

c. If your desires be endless, your cares and fears will be so too. - Thomas Fuller

- 4. HIS PEACE IS SUFFICIENT IN SUFFERING:** “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” [Phil 4:7] “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.” [Isa 26:3] “He maketh the storm a calm...” [Psa 107:29] “When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble...” [Job 34:29]
- a. The phrase “shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” is likened to a garrison of soldiers guarding over our hearts to keep the enemies out.
 - b. Under intense sufferings, the world looks for understanding in order to have peace, but the Christian can have the perfect, undisturbed peace of God that surpasses all human understanding as well as misunderstanding.
 - c. Quiet minds cannot be perplexed or frightened, but go on in fortune or misfortune at their own private pace, like a clock during a thunderstorm. - Robert Louis Stevenson
 - d. Let us imagine before us a picture of a sparrow quietly perching on a branch next to a torrential waterfall. This beautifully represents the abiding peace of a believer in the midst of a troublous world, a peace that is not dependent on outward circumstances and will not be unduly affected by them. His peace is from above and in Christ - “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (Jn 14:27) On the contrary, the peace of the world depends on happenings - whenever their health, wealth or security is affected, they will be affected too.
 - e. Before Jesus died, He willed us His Peace. But we forfeit His gift through strife. God’s desire for us is that we live in peace with Him, with ourselves and with our fellowman. He wants us to have peace in the midst of our current circumstances - peace in the morning, at night and all times in between. Peace is our inheritance! And it is a wonderful possession. - Joyce Meyer
 - f. Peace comes not from the absence of trouble, but from the presence of God.

I. **GOD AFFLICTS US COMPASSIONATELY**

1. **HIS LOVE IS BEHIND OUR TRIALS:** “Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” [Jas 5:11] “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.” [Psa 103:13-14]
 - a. It is a fact of Christian experience that life is a series of troughs and peaks. In His efforts to get permanent possession of a soul, God relies on the troughs more than the peaks. And some of his special favorites have gone through longer and deeper troughs than anyone else. - Peter Marshall, Sr.
 - b. 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. - Elisabeth Elliot
 - c. Pain and suffering are not necessarily signs of God’s anger; they may be exactly the opposite.

2. **HIS LOVE IS BEHIND OUR CHASTISEMENT:** “For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.” [Pro 3:12] “Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the LORD.” [Jer 31:20]
 - a. Ephraim denotes the northern kingdom of Israel to which God sent the Assyrians to destroy them for their disobedience. In spite of the harsh chastisement of God upon Ephraim, He still loved His people dearly.
 - b. We should take comfort in the chastisement of God because it shows that we belong to Him - “But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.” (1 Cor 11:32)

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THE RESPONSE TO SUFFERING

IV. THE RESPONSE TO SUFFERING

We usually have little or no control over our circumstances and afflictions. However, we have total control of our perception, attitude and response to them. We can, by God's grace, determine, in our most trying moments, to believe or doubt; to trust or worry; to obey or disobey; to rejoice or regret; and to be victorious or defeated.

We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedom - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way. - Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*.

You and I cannot change or control the world around us, but we can change and control the world within us. It has often been said that what life does to us depends on what life finds in us. - Warren Wiersbe

A. NEGATIVELY: TO BE OVERWHELMED IN SUFFERING

1. **TO DOUBT:** "And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" [Mt 14:29-31]
 - a. Peter, for a while, was doing the impossible thing by walking on the water. However, when he turned his eyes from the Lord and focused on the storm, he started to doubt and sink. In suffering, if we take our eyes off the Lord and focus on the "waves of afflictions", we too, will doubt and sink. Whether we are victorious or defeated depends on what we are constantly focusing on - faith focuses on the "promises" while sight focuses on the "problems"; and faith sees the "Savior" while sight sees the "situation".
 - b. If we keep focusing on our situation, we tend to lose focus because our situation changes all the time. Our standing before God does not depend on our changeable circumstances but on an immutable God whose love for us never changes.

2. TO ERR: “Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I sware in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest. Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.” [Heb 3:10-12] “But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought...” [2 Kings 5:11]

a. In the final analysis, the real reason that the Israelites failed to enter the Promised Land was because of their faulty understanding of God's dealings and working in their lives - “They do alway err in their heart...” They tended to reason in this humanistic way: if God truly loved us, then we would have a good, comfortable life without all these meaningless problems and endless heartaches. They just could not see that suffering was as much a part of God's plan to nurture, perfect and reward them as were the other blessings of God. Instead, they chose to reject and hate it - they could not trust God and see things from His perspective.

b. As we probe further, we will discover the root cause of their “erring heart” was not the external problems but the unbelief in their hearts - “And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.” (Heb 3:18-19) If we cannot trust God in the midst of our affliction, then we will have no real peace, joy or rest in our souls, but an endless and repetitive cycle of regret, misery and bitterness.

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

- William Cowper

3. TO MURMUR: “And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?” [Exod 15:24]

a. The faint murmurings of the Israelite under Moses soon ripened into open rebellion against God. In the Wilderness, they murmured; towards the Promise Land, they openly rebelled.

- b. All murmurings about people and problems will eventually end up as murmurings against God - He allows and uses difficulties to mold and perfect us. To murmur means, "I could have managed this thing better than God."
- c. A man complained to his friend, "My son costs me so much to maintain." "My son costs me nothing," replied his friend. "Why?" the man inquired in surprise. "Because he passed away last month," came the sad reply.
- d. A Jewish man once went to his rabbi to complain about his circumstances. "My home is terrible. There are eight of us living in one room. Can you help me?" he lamented. The rabbi instructed him to bring home a goat for a week. After the week was up, he came back to the rabbi and moaned about his new plight, "It is horrible. Not only are there eight of us, but we have to bear with the awful smell and the noisy bleating of the goat day after day." The rabbi then told him to remove the goat and come back the following week. The next time he came, he was beaming with joy and remarked, "There is no more smell and bleating of the goat. It is like heaven now." The moral of the story is: we do not realize and appreciate what blessings we have and we tend to focus on what we lack. Things could have been very much worse.
- e. When any calamity has been suffered, the first thing to be remembered is how much has been escaped.
- Samuel Johnson
- f. I wept because I had no shoes, until I saw a man who had no feet. - Ancient Persian saying

g. HIDDEN BLESSINGS

We always seem to find the time
To grumble and complain,
To think of all our troubles,
Our sorrows and our pains.

Yet if we would but stop and think,
I'm sure we would be glad
If we counted all the troubles
That we never had to face. - Author Unknown

h. I'LL HOLD YOU CLOSE

Solomon Rosenberg and his family were placed in one of the Nazi work camps where every person who could no longer work was taken to the gas ovens. The first in his family to be gassed were his aged parents - who were well into their 80s and very soon broke under the inhumane conditions of long hours, lack of decent food and miserable hygienic conditions.

Solomon knew that the next to go in his family would probably be their youngest son David, who was slightly crippled and was able to work less and less. Each morning, the family was separated for their work assignments. At night, the father would return with fear and trembling, wondering whether this might be the day that David would be taken. As he entered the barracks his eyes would quickly seek out his little boy David, his oldest boy Jacob and then the mother of his children.

At last, the night came that he had feared. As he walked into the barracks, he could see none of his family and he became frantic. His eyes searched again for the precious faces of his family and then at last he saw the figure of his oldest boy Jacob, huddled over and weeping. But he still could not see little David or his wife. He hurried to Jacob and said, "Son, tell me it isn't so. Did they take David today?" "Yes, Papa, they came to take David. They said he could no longer do his work." "But Mama, where is Mama? She is still strong. Surely they wouldn't take Mama, too?"

And Jacob looked at his father through tearful eyes and said, "Papa, Papa. When they came to take David, he was afraid. And he cried. And so Mama said to David, 'Don't cry David. I will go with you and hold you close.' And so Mama went with David to the death chamber so he wouldn't be afraid." - Jim Burns and Greg Mckinnon, *Illustrations, Stories and Quotes*, Gospel Light.

i. And we think we have problems? Solomon Rosenberg and his family would have been more than glad to trade places with us.

i. GOD, FORGIVE ME WHEN I WHINE

Today upon the bus I saw a lovely maiden
with golden hair;
I envied her because she looked so fine
and wished I was as fair.
And suddenly as she rose to leave
I watched her hobble down the aisle.
She had one leg and wore a brace,
but as she passed, a smile.
O God, forgive me when I whine. I've got two legs,
The world is mine.

And then I stopped to buy some sweets,
The boy who sold them was so fine.
I talked with him, and he said to me,
"You know, it's good to talk with folks like you.
You see," he said, "I'm blind."
O God, forgive me when I whine. I have two eyes,
The world is mine.

Then walking down the street
I saw a lad with eyes of blue.
He stood and watched the others play
But seemed he did not know what to do.
So I watched him for a moment and then I said:
"Hey, don't you know the others here?"
He looked ahead without a word
and then I knew he could not hear.
O God, forgive me when I whine. I have two ears,
The world is mine.

With feet to take me where I go,
With eyes to see the sunset glow,
With ears to hear what I need to know,
O God, forgive me when I whine.
I'm blessed indeed, the world is mine.

- Jim Burns and Greg Mckinnon, *Illustrations, Stories and Quotes*, Gospel Light.

4. **TO WORRY:** “Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?” [Mt 6:25] “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication...” [Phil 4::6]

The Greek word used commonly for “worry” or “anxiety” is “merimnao” which means, “to draw in different directions or distract”. When we worry, we feel we are being pulled apart in different directions. In addition, the English word “worry” is derived from an old Anglo-Saxon word meaning to strangle or to choke. Isn’t that how we feel when we are anxious?

The reason our problems often seem overwhelming is [that] we allow the things of time to loom larger in our gaze than the things of eternity. The tiniest of coins, when held close to the eyes, can blot out the sun. - Selwyn Hughes, *Every Day Light*.

Worry is a potent combination of “the fear of failure” and believing that “God is helpless”. It is to view life as out of control and we must save ourselves or nobody will save us. It is to see life as without God or think that He is helpless or indifferent to our problems or pains. It taunts and tortures us in our minds over and over again screaming, “There is no way out. It is just gloom and doom all the way down.”

If God has commanded us not to worry about the future, then it becomes a sin whenever we get anxious. Each time we worry, we are calling Him a liar because we do not believe His promises regarding our wellbeing. The only thing that we should be most concerned about is to do what is right in our trying moments, and not to sin against God - “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness...” When we are diligent in obeying God, He will take care of all our earthly needs - “... and all these things shall be added unto you.”

- a. **THE UTILITY OF CONCERN:** “For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.” [Lk 14:28-30] “Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.” [Prov 6:6-8]
- i. We are called to be responsible, to plan ahead, to save for the future, to be concerned about what we are doing and where we are heading in life. We are not called to be anxious or to worry about these things. We are responsible for what we are supposed to do and God will be responsible for what is beyond us. This is where our part ends and God's part begins. This is where our faith in God comes in and the providence of God is manifested - “And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” (Psa 50:15)
 - ii. God will not do for us what we can do ourselves and He cannot do for us what we keep doing ourselves.
 - iii. Concern draws us to God. Worry pulls us away from Him. - Joanna Weaver
 - iv. There is a great difference between worry and concern. A worried person sees a problem, and the concerned person solves a problem. - Harold Stephens
- b. **THE FUTILITY OF WORRY:** “Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?” [Mt 6:27]
- i. **WE ARE COMMANDED:** “Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?... But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” [Mt 6:25-33]

To be perfectly at peace amid the hurly-burly of daily life is a secret worth knowing. What is the use of worrying? It never made anybody strong; never helped anybody to do God's will; never made a way of escape for anyone out of perplexity. Worry spoils lives which would otherwise be useful and beautiful. Restlessness, anxiety, and care are absolutely forbidden by our Lord, who said: "Take no thought, that is, no anxious thought, 'saying what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed?'" - Darlow Sargeant

Fussing always ends in sin. We imagine that a little anxiety and worry are an indication of how really wise we are; it is much more an indication of how really wicked we are. Fretting springs from a determination to get our own way. Our Lord never worried and He was never anxious, because He was not "out" to realize His own ideas; He was "out" to realize God's ideas. Fretting is wicked if you are a child of God... All our fret and worry is caused by calculating without God. - Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, Discovery House Publishers.

Anxiety is the natural result when our hopes are centered in anything short of God and His will for us.

They that live in a worry invite death in a hurry.

- ii. **WE ARE COMFORTED:** "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they... And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" [Mt 6:26-30]

THE ROBIN AND THE SPARROW

Said the Robin to the Sparrow,
 "I would really like to know
 Why these anxious human beings
 Rush about and worry so."

Said the Sparrow to the Robin,
 "Friend, I think that it must be
 That they have no heavenly Father
 Such as cares for you and me."

- Elizabeth Cheney

I KNOW WHO HOLDS TOMORROW

I don't know about tomorrow,
 I just live from day to day,
 I don't borrow from its sunshine,
 For its skies may turn to gray.
 I don't worry o'er the future
 For I know what Jesus said,
 And today I'll walk beside Him,
 For He knows what is ahead.

Many things about tomorrow,
 I don't seem to understand,
 But I know Who holds tomorrow,
 And I know Who holds my hand!

- Ira Stanphill

- iii. **WE ARE CONTRADICTED:** "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?"
 [Mt 6:27]

We cannot add one inch to our height by worrying. In addition, worrying is like a rocking chair - it gives you plenty to do but gets you nowhere.

If I can do something about it, I don't worry. If I cannot do anything about it, I don't worry, because I cannot do anything about it. - One man's philosophy about worry.

- iv. **WE ARE CONTROLLED:** “Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.” [Mt 6:31-32]

I have nothing to do with tomorrow,
My Saviour will make that His care.
Should He fill it with trouble and sorrow,
He'll help me to suffer and bear.

I have nothing to do with tomorrow,
Its burdens then why should I share?
Its grace and its faith I can't borrow,
Then why should I borrow its care? - Selected

Anxious care rests upon a basis of heathen worldly-mindedness and of heathen misunderstanding of the character of God. - Alexander Maclaren

The poor man worries about his next meal and the rich man worries about his last.

So much depends on perspective. If my God isn't bigger than life, then my life is bigger than God - and that's where anxiety takes over. - Joanna Weaver, *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World*, Waterbrook Press.

Some people go back into the past and rake up all the troubles they ever had, and then they look into the future and anticipate that they will have still more trouble, and then they go reeling and staggering all through in life. - D. L. Moody

The beginning of trust is the end of anxiety and the beginning of anxiety is the end of trust. Why don't you just trust the Lord for once without worrying and see the difference? “O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.” (Psa 34:8)

- v. **WE ARE CONVICTED:** “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” [Phi 4:19] “Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.” [Psa 37:5]

IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM: Three problems which we cannot identify will appear to be like thirty problems in our mind. It is good for us to write them down and see them in the right perspective and in the light of God’s purpose in suffering. Also, a problem identified is half solved.

IDENTIFY THE PERPLEXITY: What is the worst thing that could happen to me? Suppose that I were to die. In dying, I would be with the Lord Jesus and suffering would be history, and eternity would have begun. And that is not too bad after all. However, most of the problems we face in life are seldom life-threatening.

IDENTIFY THE POSSIBILITY: The root problem with the habitual worrier is not the external problems but the lack of a complete trust in God. He wants to walk by sight instead of faith, and to be in control of situations instead of in constant dependence on God.

IDENTIFY THE POTENTIAL: After praying and committing his burdens to the Lord, the chronic worrier should get himself occupied with the immediate tasks he can do. The accomplishment of one thing will give him the strength, satisfaction and motivation to go on to the next.

One of Cromwell's officers was given to the sin of anxious care. One day his godly servant who knew how to live in the today and leave the tomorrow to the care of his Lord said to his worrisome master, “Master, the Lord ran this world before you came into it?” to which his master quickly assented. “You expect Him to run it after you leave it, do you not?” Again the master nodded assent. “Then how would it do to let Him run it while you are in it?” - James McConkey

5. TO GIVE UP: “If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.” [Prov 24:10] “If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses...” [Jer 12:5]

- a. Whatever “reasons” that caused us to leave church, quit the ministry, disobey God and hate others, they are the very “reasons” why we followed God in the first place - and they are the wrong reasons - the assurance of a trouble-free life, a good job, a wonderful family, or that nobody should upset me. Whenever such problems arise, we call it quits. We were not truly serving Christ but our own interests - “... whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.” (Phil 3:19) For others, they may have failed to understand the high price of true discipleship - “... If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” (Mt 16:24)
- b. Quitting is usually a long-term solution to a short-term problem. - Author Unknown

6. TO BE BITTER: “Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.” [Heb 12:15]

It is called the root of bitterness because of its potential to grow out of sight, silently and steadily, to be deeply entrenched in our hearts, and to harden and blind us to the real purpose of suffering. Instead of trusting and submitting to God, we often blame Him and others for our miseries.

- a. **BITTERNESS AGAINST GOD:** “And Satan answered the LORD... But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face.” [Job 2:4-5] “Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die.” [Job 2:9]
 - i. It is very easy for us to get angry and be bitter against God: If He is so great, why then did He allow me to lose my job? If He is so mighty, why did He permit my baby to die? If He is so loving, why am I hurting so badly? He could have prevented all these catastrophes from happening to

me. Why didn't He? This is what Satan desires us to do - to fail to understand the divine purpose of God in suffering and to curse Him to the face.

- ii. The one misery of man is self-will. The one secret of blessedness is the conquest over our own wills. To yield them up to God is rest and peace. What disturbs us in this world is not "trouble", but our opposition to trouble. The true source of all that frets and irritates, and wears away our lives, is not in external things, but in the resistance of our wills to the will of God expressed by external things.
- Alexander Maclaren
- iii. Anger at God is a symptom. The basic problem is unbelief. - Gladys Hunt

- b. **BITTERNESS AGAINST MAN:** "But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." [Mat 6:15]

We live in a world of people, and where there are people, there will be problems. It is said that the church that has no problems will also have no people. And don't worry about the hypocrites in the church, there will always be room enough for one more. Also, never attempt to find the "perfect church" - if you join it, you are going to ruin it. There will be times when others will offend us and there will be times when we will offend others. It is never a question as to whether we are going to be hurt by others but rather when it is going to happen. This is why the Bible commands us to have a big heart in understanding and forgiving those who may have, intentionally or unintentionally, wronged us, whether in words or in deeds. A "thick skin" is a gift from God.

- i. **THE WICKED SERVANT:** "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which

owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt... Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." [Mt 18:21-35]

If we cannot forgive those who have wronged us, then we are just like this wicked servant who, though was forgiven much himself, yet would not freely forgive his fellow servant who owed him "pennies".

- ii. One of the Greek words for "forgive" is "apoluo" (Lk 6:37), which means "to let loose from, to release" as of setting a person free. In "releasing others", we free ourselves from the torments of replaying over and over again in our minds all the hurts we were subjected to. Why should we be hurt twice? Let us be reminded that, "... Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." (Rom 12:19)
- iii. Doing an injury puts you below your enemy; revenging one makes you but even with him; forgiving it sets you above him. - Benjamin Franklin

7. TO ACT HASTILY

- a. **SAUL'S PREDICAMENT:** “And the Philistines gathered themselves together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude... When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait, (for the people were distressed,) then the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks... and all the people followed him trembling.” [1 Sam 13:5-7]
- b. **SAUL'S PRESUMPTION:** “And he tarried seven days according to the set time that Samuel had appointed: but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering. And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came...” [1 Sam 13:8-10]
- c. **SAUL'S PUNISHMENT:** “And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart...” [1 Sam 13:13-14]
- d. King Saul was instructed specifically to patiently wait for the prophet Samuel to come and bring about deliverance from the Philistines. However, in his anxiety and fear, he usurped the office of the priesthood by offering the burnt offerings to God, something he should not have done. The result was that he would eventually lose his throne to David. God was testing Saul concerning his patience and obedience, but Saul was impatient with God and did things his way. He could not see that his obedience in his most trying moments was tied to all his future blessings and rewards - “... for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever...” Our worst moments are our best opportunities for the greatest possible rewards from God. As the saying goes, “The opportunity lies in the crisis.”
- e. God's time tends to be a little later than our time.

8. TO BE DEPRESSED AND SUICIDAL: “Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; Which long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures; Which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find the grave?” [Job 3:20-22]

a. THE PEOPLE CONTEMPLATING SUICIDE

- i. **MOSES:** “And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.” [Num 11:15]
- ii. **ELIJAH:** “But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.” [1 Kings 19:4]
- iii. **JONAH:** “Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.” [Jonah 4:3]
- iv. If these “giants of the faith” could come to the point where they became suicidal, so can we. We can be tried to the extent where we become so discouraged, disillusioned, disappointed and depressed that we too would rather choose death than life. In fact, many of us, at one point or another, do contemplate suicide, especially in those trying moments when we feel overwhelmed by the calamities of life.

b. THE PROBLEM CONCERNING SUICIDE

i. THE SYMPTOM

A SENSE OF HOPELESSNESS: “My days are past, my purposes are broken off... And where is now my hope? as for my hope, who shall see it?” [Job 17:11,15]

First, they (the depressed) view the world and life experiences negatively. Life is seen as a succession of burdens, obstacles, and defeats in a world that is “going down the drain.” Second, many depressed people have a negative view of themselves. They feel deficient, inadequate, unworthy, and incapable of performing adequately. This in turn can lead to self-blame and self-pity. Third, some people view the future in a negative way. Looking ahead they see continuing hardship, frustration, and hopelessness.
- Aaron Beck

A SENSE OF HELPLESSNESS: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?”
[Psa 22:1]

People who are depressed and have suicidal tendencies will generally find themselves “feeling trapped”, “banging their heads against the wall”, “seeing no light at the end of the tunnel”, “tired and weary of trying anymore”, “thinking nobody will ever understand or help me” and very often, “dominated by a sense of despair, emptiness or fear that just does not go away”. Finally, they give up any hope of seeing any possible change in their circumstances and see suicide as the only way out of their seemingly unending miseries and pains.

A SENSE OF LONELINESS: “I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.” [Psa 142:4]

Those who are predisposed to suicide usually have communication problems - they lack the courage or skill to convey clearly their needs or difficulties to those who may be able to help them. These will very often drop hints here and there about their unmanageable problems and hope that someone will pick up their “distress signals” and help them. Sometimes, they will mention “suicide” in passing

and wish that someone would take them seriously. But, very often, the people around them cannot identify with the depth of their problems through their sketchy disclosure. As the saying goes, "Ask generally, and you will get general answers; ask specifically, and you will get specific answers." The next natural step is a sense of loneliness and despair - nobody understands or cares for me. At this juncture, the suicidal person is in a state of ambivalence - on one hand, he wants to live but, on the other hand, he does not see how by living he can solve his problems. This is why some attempted suicides are done near where help is possible - an overdose of drugs at home and not in some isolated place.

ii. **THE SINFULNESS**

THE SELFISHNESS IN SUICIDE: Many who commit suicide are primarily concerned about their own misery and how to end it all. They may not fully realize the devastating impact on their loved ones. Those left behind will experience guilt, pain and emptiness for years to come. Some common remarks of parents who lost their children are: "My daughter meant so much to me. Without her, I cannot go on in life." "There is really no meaning in living since my son died. I would give anything to have him back."

THE SHORTSIGHTEDNESS IN SUICIDE: People who are suicidal tend to be preoccupied with the present rather than the future. They fail to see that life can be different and better than what they were before by the grace of God and with the help of man.

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT IN SUICIDE: "Thou shalt not kill." [Exod 20:13]

Whether we kill someone else or ourselves is the same - it is the taking of a life, and that is a sin before God.

c. THE PRACTICAL SOLUTION TO SUICIDE

- i. TO TALK:** “Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.” [Eccl 4:9-10]

The person with suicidal tendencies should find someone in whom he can confide and share accurately his predicaments and fears. He should not be embarrassed to reveal his problems. Every one of us, from time to time, will falter and fail, and will need help from another. We are made of flesh and blood, not bricks and mortar. We all have our breaking points somewhere along the way. The author too, in his younger days, had his moments where he thought of ending it all. He had the privilege of a concerned neighbor whom God used to help him cross over those lonely, torturous, nightmarish days.

- ii. TO THINK:** “I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.” [Psa 27:13]

There is no denial of the excruciating pains and heartaches we can be subjected to when we experience the loss of a loved one, the breaking up of a relationship or the heart-rending aftermath of a bitter marital quarrel. However, we need to differentiate the following:

FACTS AND OPINIONS: It is a fact that I may lose my job but it is an opinion that my family will die of hunger. It is a fact that I am in pain now, but it is an opinion that I will always be like that. Never confuse fact and opinion.

GOD AND MAN: If we keep looking to ourselves to get out of our difficulties, we will fail. It is only through God that we can do all things, including overcoming depression and suicidal tendencies. We cannot overcome our problems by ourselves, God has to help us, and He will - “I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD.” (Psa 118:17)

9. TO SIN MORE AND MORE

a. **AHAZ:** “And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the LORD: this is that king Ahaz. For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him... But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel.” [2 Chron 28:22-23]

i. Sometimes, in the midst of our anguish and affliction, we blame God (if He is so great and loving, why did my son die?); others (if not for the wicked things he did or said to me, my life would have been so much more pleasant); or our circumstances (if only I were healthy and normal like others, I would be the happiest person in the world). Instead of trusting and submitting to God, we forsake Him and go after the sinful pleasures of this world. We reason: “If the wicked can prosper, why can't I? If they can sin and get away with it, why can't I? If they can forsake God and yet seem so happy, why can't I?”

b. **ASAPH:** “For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men... Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning. If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors.” [Psa 73:3-19]

i. The inaction of God is to see how far the wicked will go to fulfill their evil design and, at the same time, to prove the faithfulness of the saints.

ii. Sometimes, those whom God wants to destroy, He leaves them alone.

B. POSITIVELY: TO OVERCOME IN SUFFERING

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.” [Rom 8:35-37]

MADE OF THE RIGHT STUFF

A little brown cork
Fell in the path of a whale
Who lashed it down
With his angry tail.

But in spite of its blows
It quickly arose,
And floated serenely
Before his nose.

Said the cork to the whale:
“You may flap and sputter and frown,
But you never, never, can keep me down;
For I'm made of the stuff

That is buoyant enough
To float instead of to drown.”

--- Pameii ---

In a similar vein, every Christian who is consistently looking to the Lord and conscientiously depending on Him is potentially “unsinkable” in the face of the ever-increasing adversities that attempt to destroy him - “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ...” (2 Cor 2:14)

What are you afraid of? Let God act. Abandon yourself to Him. You will suffer, but you will suffer with love, peace and consolation. You will fight, but you can carry off the victory, and God Himself, after having fought with you, will crown you with His own hand. You will weep, but your tears will be sweet, and God Himself will come with satisfaction to dry them... and you will enter into a new liberty unknown to the world, in which you will do nothing except for love. - Adapted

1. **TO PREVAIL BY PRAYING**

“Is any among you afflicted? let him pray...” [Jas 5:13] “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” [Phil 4:6]

When we go to the Lord in prayer, it is like going to the mountaintop. The views at the mountaintop are different from that of the foothills. Besides being fabulous and exhilarating, we see farther and more. Likewise at the “mountaintop” of prayer, our understanding and perspective of suffering will be very different - we will see that they have been prepared from eternity past to benefit us in every way. In addition, time with God will give us the inner strength, joy and conviction to face our calamities calmly and confidently.

a. **PRAYER FOR UNDERSTANDING:** “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.” [Eph 5:17] “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all man liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” [Jas 1:5] “And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation: the fear of the LORD is his treasure.” [Isa 33:6] “When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I...” [Psa 73:16-17]

i. **IS IT A TRIAL?**

If we have been faithfully following the Lord; if we have patterned our lives according to the Word of God; if we have a clear conscience in what we are doing; if we have the peace of God ruling in our hearts; then we can be assured that our affliction is a trial from the Lord. Then, we can have confidence and rejoice in the Lord for counting us worthy to suffer for Him. As the saying goes, “A clear conscience is a fortress in the face of suffering.”

“But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled.” [1 Pet 3:14]

ii. **IS IT A CHASTISEMENT?**

We need to prayerfully differentiate between trial and chastisement, and not to confuse the two in affliction. Let us not suffer in vain. Many Christians today are suffering more for their foolishness than for their faithfulness - husbands who are not actively loving their wives; wives who are not willing to respectfully submit themselves to their husbands; children who are not obedient to their parents in the fear of the Lord; church members who are reluctant to spend time with God, tithe or serve Him; and generally believers who are not willing to forsake the world and to follow the Word. And yet, these afflicted believers will blatantly proclaim that they are suffering for Christ! In reality, they are suffering for their sins of omission - the things they ought but failed to do - "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." (Jas 4:17)

b. **PRAYER FOR UNDERTAKING:** "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." [Phil 4:13]

i. **FOR SUBMISSION:** "Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." [Lk 22:42]

Don't pray to escape trouble. Don't pray to be comfortable in our emotions. Pray to do the will of God in every situation. Nothing else is worth praying for. - Sam Shoemaker

In her book, *Beyond Our Selves*, Catherine Marshall wrote about learning to surrender her entire life to God through a "prayer of relinquishment". When she encountered situations she feared, she often panicked and exhibited a demanding spirit in prayer: "God, I must have thus and so." God seemed remote. But when she surrendered the dreaded situation to Him to do with it exactly as He pleased, fear left and peace returned. From that moment on, God began working things out. - *Our Daily Bread*.

- ii. **FOR SALVATION (DELIVERANCE):** “And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” [Psa 50:15]

PRAY RIGHTEOUSLY: “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.” [1 Jn 3:22]

If we are not interested in obeying God, what makes us think that He is interested in hearing our prayers?

We cannot expect to live defectively and pray effectively.

We must hear Jesus speak if we expect Him to hear us speak. - C. H. Spurgeon

PRAY DEPENDABLY: “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” [Rom 8:26]

Prayer is not one man's sole attempt to seek after God, but a partnership between the Holy Spirit and us. When left to ourselves, we are weak, our minds wander, our faith wavers, and our prayers are ineffective. The Holy Spirit, the Comforter, desires to come alongside us to fill and empower us with passion, power and conviction to pray in accordance to the perfect will of God for us in suffering.

There are times when the Spirit of God, praying through us, lifts us until we share in the very presence of the Son of God, who is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. At such times we have unusual boldness and authority in our prayers. - Cameron V. Thompson, *Master Secret of Prayer*, Source of Light Schools International.

Nothing lies outside the reach of prayer except that which lies outside the will of God. God answers only what he inspires. - Adapted

PRAY BELIEVABLY: “But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.” [Jas 1:6-7]

If we cast our burdens upon another, can they continue to press upon us? If we bring them away with us from the Throne of Grace, it is evident we do not leave them there. With respect to myself, I have made this one test of my prayers: if after committing anything to God, I can, like Hannah, come away and have my mind no more sad, my heart no more pained or anxious, I look upon it as one proof that I have prayed in faith; but, if I bring away my burden, I conclude that faith was not in exercise. - Dr. Payson

The prayer that is faithless is fruitless. - Thomas Watson

When we shoot an arrow, we look to the fall of it; when we send a ship to sea, we look for the return of it; and when we sow seed, we look for a harvest; and so when we sow our prayers into God's bosom, shall we not look for an answer? - Richard Sibbes

PRAY PERSISTENTLY: “And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” [Lk 18:1-8]

No temptation in the life of intercession is more common than that of failure to persevere. We begin to pray for a certain thing; we put up our petitions for a day, a week, a month; and then, receiving as yet no definite answer, straightway we faint, and cease altogether from prayer concerning it. This is a deadly fault. It is simply the snare of many beginnings with no completions. It is ruinous in all spheres of life. - *The Practice of Prayer*.

To learn of those who persisted patiently and relentlessly in prayer, turn to your Bible to read of the man who would not give up at midnight (Lk 11:5-8); the man who refused to stop crying (Mk 10:46-52); the widow who wore out a judge with her pleading (Lk 18:1-8); and the woman who had an answer for every objection of God and man (Mt 15:21-28). - Cameron V. Thompson, *Master Secrets of Prayer*, Source of Light Schools International.

Prayer is not conquering God's reluctance, but taking hold of God's willingness - "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." (Mt 7:7-8)

- iii. It is through the peace of God as we seek Him, that we will be assured of that for which we should pray - submission or salvation (deliverance). And it is only through our persistent prayers that we will be able to outlast our sufferings or be delivered from them.

2. TO PREVAIL BY PRAISING

- a. **TO PRAISE:** "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise." [Psa 57:7] "And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison... And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God..." [Acts 16:23-25]

- i. Although harshly mistreated and badly beaten, both Paul and Silas could praise God because His grace, comfort and love indwelling them were far greater than the physical pains they had to endure. Besides, they knew it would eventually turn out for good to further the gospel. The subsequent verses show the conversion of the Philippian jailor and his family.
 - ii. Bad situations don't have to make us bitter - they can make us better! God can use the good, the bad, the happy, the sad to mold us into the people He wants us to be. Our goal should be to focus not on what man does to us but what God will do through us. Rest assured, what man may intend for evil, God will use for good. - Skip Heitzig
 - iii. Things that hurt and things that mar
Shape the man for perfect praise;
Shock and strain and ruin are
Friendlier than the smiling days. - Adapted
- b. TO REJOICE:** "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice." [Phil 4:4] "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; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." [1 Pet 4:12-13] "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing..." [2 Cor 6:10]
- i. We can rejoice always in suffering because it reveals who we are; keeps us faithful; perfects us; secures untold blessings for us; makes us fruitful; helps us comfort others in affliction; reveals the person, power, presence, paternal love and perfect working of God; delivers us from besetting sins; imparts spiritual lessons; turns our thoughts towards eternity; prepares us for a greater ministry; purifies us of our sinful ways; and contributes to the growth of our spirituality.
 - ii. The joy of the Lord is an unquenchable thing. It does not depend upon circumstances, or upon place, or upon health (though health is a tremendous help

to joy), or upon our being able to do what we want to do. It is like a river. It has its source high up among the mountains, and the little happenings down in the riverbed do not affect it. - Carmichael

- iii. A well-known worker among sailors, the late Thomas Boue, once told his hearers of three good cheers, each of which was enjoined by the Lord Jesus Christ. The first is the cheer of forgiveness, as our Savior said, "Be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee." The second is the cheer of companionship, as Jesus said, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." And the third is the cheer of victory, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." These three cheers cover the whole of life, for it is a striking fact that they deal with our past, present, and future. The sin of the past is blotted out for the Christian, the continual fellowship of Christ is offered for the present, and the future will reveal Christ as the conqueror over the world. - *Toronto Globe*
- c. **TO GLORY:** "... Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong." [2 Cor 12:9-10]
- i. The Apostle Paul took comfort in his afflictions in that it was through them that he could be strong in the power of the Lord to overcome his temptations and to serve the Lord with a far greater zeal, power and effectiveness. This is something he could not accomplish while he was living in comfort.
 - ii. Oh, yes, there is a 'glory side' to every problem, affliction, perplexity, misunderstanding and loss. It is God's point of view. When we look at things the way He does, our suffering becomes a servant, our trials become treasure, our loss becomes gain, and our pain becomes blessing. - Matilda Nordtvedt, *Living Beyond Depression*, Bethany House Publisher.

- d. **TO BE THANKFUL:** “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”
[1 Thess 5:18]
- i. The man who is thankful for his sufferings is firstly spiritual, because he has fully trusted in the working of the Lord; secondly, he is victorious in that he has overcome his difficulties in sweet surrender to the will of God; and finally, he is mature in that he is able to comprehend the whole purpose of suffering.
 - ii. Let us imagine that some kind soul comes along and gives you a hundred dollars every day for years, and then suddenly he stops giving you the money. How should you respond to that? Should you be thankful for those years he gave you the money or should you be upset that he stopped giving to you? The same applies with our jobs, loved ones or the good health which God has freely given us all these years. If He sees fit to remove them from us, we need to be thankful for those blessings He has graciously given us in time past and not begrudge Him for taking them away from us - “... the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” (Job 1:21)
 - iii. Matthew Henry, the famous Bible scholar, was once accosted by thieves and robbed of his purse. He wrote these words in his diary: “Let me be thankful first because I was never robbed before; second, although they took my purse, they did not take my life; third, because, although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, and not someone else.”
 - iv. I had received sad news from home, and deep shadows had covered my soul. I prayed, but the darkness did not vanish. I summoned myself to endure, but the darkness only deepened. Then I went to an inland station and saw on the wall of the mission home these words: **TRY THANKSGIVING**. I did, and in a moment, every shadow was gone, not to return. Yes, the psalmist was right. 'It is good to give thanks to the LORD.' - Henry W. Frost, veteran missionary to China.

v. There is a legend of a man who found the barn where Satan kept his seeds ready to be sown in the human heart, and on finding the seeds of discouragement more numerous than others, learned that those seeds could be made to grow almost anywhere. When Satan was questioned he reluctantly admitted that there was one place in which he could never get them to thrive. "And where is that?" asked the man. Satan replied sadly, "In the heart of a grateful man." - Adapted

vi. I thank God for the bitter things;
They've been a "friend to grace";
They've driven me from the paths of ease
To storm the secret place.

I thank Him for the friends who failed
To fill my heart's deep need;
They've driven me to the Saviour's feet,
Upon His love to feed.

I'm grateful too, through all life's way
No one could satisfy,
And so I've found in God alone
My rich, my full supply! - Florence White Willett

e. **TO COUNT IT A JOY:** "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience... that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." [Jas 1:2-4]

i. The word "count" here is a monetary term and it implies that it is to our gain in every way to be tested from on high. We gain patience, understanding, experience, love and maturity; and we will eventually be rewarded with the desires of our hearts, both on earth and in heaven.

ii. We are not called to enjoy affliction but to count it a joy in affliction.

iii. A happy person is not a person in a certain set of circumstances, but rather a person with a certain set of attitudes. - Hugh Downs

- iv. Happiness is caused by things which happen around me, and circumstances will mar it, but joy flows right on through trouble; joy flows on through the dark; joy flows in the night as well as in the day; joy flows all through persecution and opposition; it is an unceasing fountain bubbling up in the heart; a secret spring which the world can't see and doesn't know anything about. The Lord gives His people perpetual joy when they walk in obedience to Him. - Emma Moody, *Daily Gems*, Moody Press.
- v. The Rev. John Newton one day called to visit a Christian family that had suffered the loss of all they possessed by fire. He found the pious mistress and said: "I give you joy, Madam." Surprised, and ready to be offended, she exclaimed: "What! joy that all my property is consumed?" "Oh, no," he answered, "but joy that you have so much property that fire cannot touch." - D. L. Moody
- vi. **UNTIL THEN**

My heart can sing when I pause to remember
 A heartache here is but a stepping stone
 Along a trail that's winding always upward,
 This troubled world is not my final home.

But until then my heart will go on singing,
 Until then with joy I'll carry on,
 Until the day my eyes behold the city,
 Until the day God calls me home.

The things of earth will dim and lose their value
 If we recall they're borrowed for awhile;
 And things of earth that cause the heart to tremble,
 Remembered there will only bring a smile.

This weary world with all its toil and struggle
 May take its toll of misery and strife;
 The soul of man is like a waiting falcon;
 When it's released, it's destined for the skies.

- Stuart Hamblen

vii. Happiness has no reason. It is not to be found in the facts of our lives, but in the color of the light by which we look at the facts. - Adapted

viii. After all, it is not what is around us, but what is in us; not what we have, but what we are, that makes us really happy. - Geike

3. TO PREVAIL BY REPENTING: “Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” [Isa 55:6-7] “Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls...” [Jer 6:16] “Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD.” [Lam 3:40]

a. THE PRECEPT OF REPENTANCE

i. **A CHANGE OF MIND:** “And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.” [Lk 15:17-19]

Repentance is, first and foremost, a change of mind or thinking. Before, we condoned sin, but now, we condemn it. Once, we loved it, but now we hate it.

ii. **A CHANGE OF WAY:** “I will arise and go to my father... And he arose, and came to his father...” [Lk 15:18, 20]

A Sunday School teacher once asked a class what was meant by the word “repentance.” A little boy put up his hand and said, “It is being sorry for your sins.” A little girl also raised her hand and said, “Please, it is being sorry enough to quit.” - Donald Grey Barnhouse

The teaching of forgiveness without any turning from sin is a great error and it has filled the churches with deceived members and helped to fill hell with deceived souls. - A. W. Tozer

The difference between true and false repentance lies in this: the man who truly repents cries out against his heart; but the other, as Eve, against the serpent, or something else. - John Bunyan

b. THE PEACE OF REPENTANCE

- i. **THE PROMISE OF PARDON:** “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” [1 Jn 1:9]
- ii. **THE PROMISE OF PEACE:** “O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea.” [Isa 48:18]
- iii. **THE PROMISE OF PLEASURE:** “The haters of the LORD should have submitted themselves unto him: but their time should have endured for ever. He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee.” [Psa 81:15-16]

“And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found...” [Lk 15:21-24]

“Well, Jack, old fellow,” said one who met a man who had lately been converted, “I hear that you have given up all your pleasures.” “No! no!” said the friend, “the fact lies all the other way, I have just found all my pleasures and have given up only all my follies.”

c. THE PERIL OF UNREPENTANCE

i. THE SURETY OF CHASTISEMENT

BECAUSE OF THE LOVE OF GOD: “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” [Heb 12:6]

BECAUSE OF THE LAW OF HARVEST: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption...” [Gal 6:7-8]

BECAUSE OF THE LIVING RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD: “If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” [Heb 12:7]

As believers, we sometimes think that we can escape the scrutiny and chastisement of God when we wilfully sin against Him. The truth is that we can't - He who made our hearts knows what is in our thoughts. As one man puts it aptly, “A secret sin on earth is an open scandal in heaven.”

We take a long time to learn that sin and suffering will forever go hand in hand - if we sin, we will suffer.

To pray against temptation, and yet to rush into occasion, is to thrust your fingers into the fire, and then pray they might not be burnt.

Most of us spend the first six days of each week sowing wild oats; then we go to church on Sunday and pray for a crop failure. - Fred Allen

If we cry to God for the removal of the oppression and affliction we are under and it is not removed, the reason is not because the Lord's hand is shortened or his ear heavy, but because the affliction has not done its work. - Matthew Henry

ii. THE SEVERITY OF CHASTISEMENT

THE SINNING BELIEVER CAN BE DENIED:

“Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes... Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.” [Hag 1:6-9]

The Jews, after returning from the seventy-year captivity in Babylon, refused to build God’s temple. Instead, they were selfishly preoccupied with the building of their homes. As a result, they were denied the blessings of God - on one hand, they labored hard to get wealth and happiness, but, on the other hand, God simply removed them away mysteriously.

THE SINNING BELIEVER CAN BE DISEASED:

“If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; Then the LORD will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance... until thou be destroyed.” [Deut 28:58-61]

THE SINNING BELIEVER CAN BE DERANGED

(MAD): “The LORD shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart... and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways: and thou shalt be only oppressed and spoiled evermore, and no man shall save thee. Thou shalt betroth a wife, and another man shall lie with her... Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people, and thine eyes shall look, and fail with longing for them all the day long: and there shall be no might in thine hand... So that thou shalt be mad for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see... Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things.” [Deut 28:28-47]

THE SINNING BELIEVER CAN BE DENOUNCED

(CURSED): “But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee... Cursed shalt be the fruit of thine body, and the fruit of thy land... Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The LORD shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly; because of the wickedness of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me.”
[Deut 28:15-20]

THE SINNING BELIEVER CAN BE DESTROYED:

“If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.”
[1 Jn 5:16]

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA LIED TO THE HOLY GHOST AND DIED PREMATURELY:

“But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost... And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost...” [Acts 5:3-5]

THE CORINTHIANS ABUSED THE LORD'S SUPPER AND MANY DIED PREMATURELY:

“For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily (with regard to the Lord's Supper), eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep (died).” [1 Cor 11:29-30]

Some believers overly emphasize the love of God at the expense of the justice of God. They think that God loves us so much that He will never punish us harshly for our sins. They perceive God to be more of a heavenly Grandfather than a Father - Someone who is excessively tolerant of our sins, always

excusing them - like a grandpa excusing the mischievous behaviors of his grandchildren. However, in the Scriptures, we see the severe judgment of God upon the sinning believer. He chastises through suffering, sicknesses and even premature deaths. We need to have a balanced view regarding the love and justice of God.

All the “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not” in the Bible, when translated mean, “do thyself no harm”.

An old shepherd offered prayer in a Welsh revival meeting. He put it rightly when he lamented his backsliding in these words: “Lord, I got among the thorns and briars, and was scratched and torn and bleeding. But, Lord, it is only fair to say that it was not in Thy pasture!” - W. B. Knight

There is a debt I pay.
Just for one riotous day;
Years of regrets and grief,
Sorrow without relief. - Paul Laurence Dunbar

- 4. TO PREVAIL BY WAITING:** “It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation (deliverance) of the LORD.” [Lam 3:26] “... for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.” [Isa 49:23]
- a. One of the most common mistakes we make in suffering is to act impulsively to get away from our problems as soon as possible without seeking the Lord and His will for us. We change jobs, churches, friends or circumstances, thinking that things will get better in the process. What usually happens is that we merely get ourselves out of the frying pan and into the fire. Every new job, church or circumstance has its own set of problems. We should instead, seek the Lord as to whether He wants us to weather the storms and come out victorious or to move on elsewhere in His time.
 - i. We should be more anxious that our afflictions should benefit us than that they should be speedily removed from us. - Robert Hall

- b. The Psalmist tells us that waiting for the Lord is like waiting for the sunrise (Psalm 130:6). In waiting for the sunrise you can always count on two things: one, you can't rush it. Nothing you can do will hurry it; setting your clock ahead won't cause it to rise ahead of schedule. You must wait for it to rise in its own time. Two, the sun does rise. It always has and it always will. Those who wait for the morning are never disappointed. Neither are those who wait for the Lord. - Ronald Dunn, *The Faith Crisis*, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
- c. Cast not away your confidence because God defers his performances. That which does not come in your time, will be hastened in his time, which is always the more convenient season. God will work when he pleases, how he pleases, and by what means he pleases. He is not bound to keep our time, but he will perform his word, honor our faith, and reward them that diligently seek him. - Matthew Henry
- d. In times of uncertainty, wait. Always, if you have any doubt, wait. Do not force yourself into any action. If you have a restraint in your spirit, wait until all is clear, and do not go against it. - Adapted
- e. Second only to suffering, waiting may be the greatest teacher and trainer in godliness, maturity, and genuine spirituality most of us ever encounter. - Richard Hendrix
- f. God's Word often refers to the Christian experience as a walk, seldom as a run, and never as a mad dash. - Steven J. Cole
- g. It is safe to trust in God's methods and to go by His clock. - George MacDonald
- h. There is no time lost if you are waiting upon the Lord.
- i. Beware of desperate steps;
The darkest day
Lived till tomorrow
Will have passed away. - William Cowper

- 5. TO PREVAIL BY TRUSTING:** “Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us. Selah.” [Psa 62:8] “Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay (rest) upon his God.” [Isa 50:10] “In the LORD put I my trust: how say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain?” [Psa 11:1]
- a. A man once fell into a big hole in an open field at night. As he fell, he managed to cling on to the edge of the pit and screamed for his dear life. No one came along and finally, in exhaustion, he let loose his grip and was prepared to free fall into what he thought was a very deep hole. However, he fell only about six inches and hit the bottom. In retrospect, he felt very foolish about all the hollering and screaming for help. If only we will “let go and let God”, and trust Him to handle the things which we cannot do, we will find the “bottom of the pit” is not as deep as we imagine it to be.
 - b. When we have determined in our hearts to completely surrender to the will of God and wholly trust in His perfect working in our lives, then we will discover much to our surprise that, our darkness will turn to light; our anxieties to serenity; our sorrows to joy; our perplexities to peace; our confusion to confidence and our fears to courage - “They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.” (Psa 125:1)
 - c. Dwight L. Moody's favorite verse was Isaiah 12:2: “I will trust, and not be afraid.” He used to say: ‘You can travel first-class or second-class to heaven. Second class is, “What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.” (Psa 56:3) First class is, “I will trust, and not be afraid.” That is the better way. Why not buy a first-class ticket?
 - d. The Bible teaches only two positions with regard to trusting God - not “more trust” or “less trust”, but “complete trust” or “no trust”. In short, either we trust Him one hundred percent or we don't - “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.” (Pro 3:5)

- e. Trusting God is like an electrical circuit - the bulb will light up only when the two terminals of the switch touch each other and the circuit is completed. It is only when we have wholeheartedly trusted in God that our world will “light up” and we will witness the reality and faithfulness of God towards us. Until we learn to unreservedly trust God, we will always be in a constant state of doubt, tension, anxiety and fear - “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.” (Jas 1:8)

- f. Once, there was a mother and daughter who were on the brink of starvation. The mother, in comforting her child, said, “Darling, let us trust God. I am sure that He will provide us with the necessary food on time.” The little girl's childish but apt reply was, “Mother, let us trust God even if we have to starve to death.” This is the kind of trust that God is looking for and this is the kind of trust that will bring us victoriously through our most difficult and confusing moments - “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him...” (Job 13:15)

- g. A father once put his son on top of a cupboard and coaxed him to jump. Initially, the son was apprehensive and, after a few persuasions, he finally jumped. The father caught him safely in mid air. He then put his son back on top of the cupboard and encouraged him to jump again. This time around, with his previous experience, he jumped more confidently into the arms of his father. After a few more attempts, the son jumped cheerfully into his father's arms. God too, is coaxing us to trust and “jump” into His everlasting arms (Deut 33:27) in the midst of our perplexing difficulties until we can do it comfortably and confidently. He wants us to trust Him for each trial that comes along our way - “Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.” (Psa 37:5)

- h. A traveler crossed a frozen stream
In trembling fear one day,
Later a teamster drove across,
And whistled all the way.
Great faith and little faith alike,
Were granted safe convoy,
But one had pangs of needless fear,
The other all the joy! - Adapted

6. TO PREVAIL BY ENDURING: “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” [2 Tim 2:3]

Sometimes, the only way out of our afflictions is the way through them - “... we went through fire and through water...” (Psa 66:12) At times, we have to go through days of pain, sorrow and heartache... until the storm passes by. Let us keep in mind why we are called to endure the trials of God - it is for our good as well as for those around us. Only eternity will reveal how many people were encouraged and blessed by our perseverance and faithfulness in tribulation.

- a. **THE LORD JESUS:** The Lord Jesus Christ had to endure the death of the Cross to give us eternal life - “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; 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.” (Heb 12:2)
- b. **THE APOSTLE PAUL:** Paul had to endure the hardship and persecutions from the lost to give the world the gospel of Jesus Christ - “Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” (2 Tim 2:10)

c. **WHEN THE DAY IS DARK**

When the day is dark and gloomy
 And the fog obscures your view,
 And you feel there is no challenge
 Waiting anywhere for you;
 When it's routine you must follow
 Through a dreary weather chart,
 And you feel the hand of duty
 Like a millstone on your heart;
 Face the skies however darkened,
 When you ache to turn away
 Do the job that lies before you,
 Keep your courage one more day.
 You can never guess how often
 You affect another's life
 By the fact you are a doer
 And not a quitter. - Adapted

- d. When you are going through tribulation, just “tribulate”.
- e. He who can't endure the bad will not live to see the good. - Yiddish proverb

7. TO PREVAIL BY REMEMBERING: “Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.” [Psa 119:92]

“Blessed be the LORD, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant.” [1 Kings 8:56]

“The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.” [Psa 12:6]

a. GOD’S WORD GIVES US JOY IN AFFLICTION:
“Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me: yet thy commandments are my delights.” [Psa 119:143]

b. GOD’S WORD GIVES US PEACE IN AFFLICTION:
“Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.” [Psa 119:165]

c. GOD’S WORD GIVES US COMFORT IN AFFLICTION:
“This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me.” [Psa 119:50]

d. Whenever a pilot flies into the clouds, he has two options - either to fly by his instincts or by his instruments. Likewise, whenever a Christian hits into the “clouds of confusion” he can either “fly” by his gut feeling or, like the Lord Jesus in His hour of weakness, be guided by the proven Word of God. Three times when He was sorely tempted by the Devil to give in, He quoted and held on tenaciously to the Scriptures and came out victorious - “But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” (Mt 4:4) There are literally hundreds of promises of God in the Bible to comfort and guide us in our hour of spiritual darkness, and if we were to hold on to any one of them, we would come forth victorious.

- e. The acid test of our faith in the promises of God is never found in the easy-going, comfortable ways of life, but in the great emergencies, the times of storm and of stress, the days of adversity, when all human aid fails.
- Ethel Bell
- f. “And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee... And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.” [Gen 32:9-12]
- i. There are many healthy symptoms in that prayer. In some respects it may serve as a mold into which our own spirits may pour themselves, when melted in the fiery furnace of sorrow. He began by quoting God’s promise: “Thou saidst.” He did so twice (vs 9 & 12). Ah, he has got God in his power then! God puts Himself within our reach in His promises; and when we say to Him, “Thou saidst,” He cannot say nay. He must do as He has said. If Herod was so particular for his oath’s sake (Mk 6:21-28), what will not our God be? Be sure in prayer, to get your feet well on a promise; it will give you purchase enough to force open the gates of heaven, and to take it by force. - *Practical Portions for the Prayer-Life*.
- g. Every year, I might almost say every day, that I live, I seem to see more clearly how all the rest and gladness and power of our Christian life hinges on one thing; and that is, taking God at His word, believing that He really means exactly what He says, and accepting the very words in which He reveals His goodness and grace, without substituting others or altering the precise modes and tenses which He has seen fit to use. - Francis R. Havergal
- h. Tarry at the promises till God meets you there. He always returns by way of His promises. - Selected
- i. God’s promises are like the stars; the darker the night the brighter they shine. - David Nicholas

- 8. TO PREVAIL BY RESOLVING:** “Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him...” [Mt 5:23-25]

a. THE PERSISTENCE OF UNRESOLVED PROBLEMS

Whenever we offend someone or someone has offended us, we ought to settle it personally, tactfully and biblically with the individual concerned. Unresolved interpersonal issues constitute the bulk of the reasons why people leave the church. These people are unhappy, discouraged, disillusioned, and usually end up very bitter over Christianity as a whole.

- i. Unresolved problems, be it interpersonal conflicts, a bad habit, irresponsibility or unrepentant sins will result in repetitive and unnecessary sufferings until such problems are settled.
- ii. Sometimes, leaving a problem alone does not solve it. Like a dead fish, the longer it is left alone, the more it stinks. This is why the Bible always advocates a quick response to resolving problems - “... Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him...” (Mt 5:25)
- iii. If you do what you have been doing, then you will get what you have been getting.

b. THE PEACE OF RESOLVED PROBLEMS

“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.” [Mt 18:15]

- i. The softest pillow is a clear conscience.
- ii. If the medicine is bitter, swallow it quickly.

- 9. TO PREVAIL BY SUBMITTING:** “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” [Phil 1:29]
- a. **MOSES CHOSE AFFLICTION:** “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.” [Heb 11:24-25]
- b. **THE LORD JESUS SUBMITTED TO AFFLICTION:** “... O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.” [Mt 26:39] “Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” [Jn 18:11]
- c. **THE APOSTLE PAUL WELCOMED AFFLICTION:** “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.” [2 Cor 12:10]
- d. **THE EARLY CHRISTIANS WERE RELUCTANT TO BE DELIVERED FROM AFFLICTION:** “... and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection.” [Heb 11:35]
- e. Jonah ran away from what he thought was the unbearable suffering he had to endure when he was called to proclaim judgment to the Assyrians in the city of Nineveh. Instead of a life of comfort and ease, his was a life of a painful downward spiral - he went down to Joppa, down into the ship, down into the sea, down into the fish’s belly and down into the depth of the sea (Jonah 1:1-17). It would have been much easier if he had preached to the cruel Assyrians and entrusted the consequences to God. What God had called him to do, He would also provide the grace to do, as Jonah found out when he finally obeyed. When you run from God you run into trouble.
- f. It costs much to follow Christ, but it costs more not to.

- g. The truth that many people never understand, until it is too late, is that the more that you try to avoid suffering, the more you suffer, because smaller and more insignificant things begin to torture you in proportion to your fear of being hurt. - Adapted
- h. At a meeting of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Bobby Richardson, former New York Yankee second baseman, offered a prayer that is a classic in brevity and poignancy: “Dear God, Your will, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. Amen” - *Biblical Recorder*
- i. Submission to God in suffering is like being in the “eye” of the hurricane - the center is calm and serene while the outside is turbulent and violent. Let us look beyond the “turbulence” of adversity and strive to be in the “eye of the hurricane” - God's perfect will in temporal suffering.
- j. There are two ways of getting out of a trial. One is simply to try to get rid of the trial, and be thankful when it is over. The other is to recognize the trial as a challenge from God to claim a larger blessing than we have ever had, and to hail it with delight as an opportunity of obtaining a larger measure of divine grace. - A. B. Simpson
- k. God has his best things for the few
That dare to stand the test.
He has his second choice for those
Who will not have his best.
It is not always open ill
That risks the promised rest.
The better often is the foe
That keeps us from the best.
Give me, O Lord, thy highest choice;
Let others take the rest.
Their good things have no charm for me
For I have got thy best.

- A. B. Simpson

10. TO PREVAIL BY BELIEVING: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” [Heb 11:1] “Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again...” [Heb 11:33-35]

a. **FAITH SEES:** “By faith he (Moses) forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.” [Heb 11:27] “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” [2 Cor 5:7]

- i. In the realm of the natural, seeing is believing. In the realm of the spiritual, believing is seeing. Jesus said, “if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God.” (Jn 11:40) - W. B. Knight
- ii. When we scan the horizon of life with our human sight, it can be depressing. Looking ahead, we usually see the “fog” of human sufferings, the “mist” of unforeseen tragedy, or the “dark cloud” of untimely death. We feel unsure and insecure about the future. However, when we look ahead with the undimmed “eyes” of faith, we see the smile of God in every trial; the love of God in every sorrow; the comfort of God in every tear; the deliverance of God in every tribulation; and above all, the divine purpose of God in every detour of our lives.
- iii. Faith in God is like the radar that pierces the distant skies; or the sonar that probes the depths of the oceans; or the night-vision binoculars that “illuminate” the darkness. When we fully believe and trust God, we see beyond the people and problems, beyond the suffering and sorrow, beyond the trials and tribulations, beyond the confusion and consternation, to a loving God, His perfect plans, His all-sufficient grace, and His tender care for us in everything that befalls us. Faith is never a blind leap into the dark but a sure walk into the light.

- iv. I hear men praying everywhere for more faith, but when I listen to them carefully, and get at the real heart of their prayer, very often it is not more faith at all that they are wanting, but a change from faith to sight.

Faith says not, "I see that it is good for me, so God must have sent it," but, "God sent it, and so it must be good for me." - Mrs. Charles E. Cowman, *Streams in the Desert*, Cowman Publication Inc.

- v. "See God in everything, and God will calm and color all that thou dost see!" It may be that the circumstances of our sorrows will not be removed, their condition will remain unchanged; but if Christ, as Lord and Master of our life, is brought into our grief and gloom, "He will compass us about with songs of deliverance." To see Him, and to be sure that His wisdom cannot err, His power cannot fail, His love can never change; to know that even His direst dealings with us are for our deepest spiritual gain, is to be able to say, in the midst of bereavement, sorrow, pain, and loss, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Nothing else but seeing God in everything will make us loving and patient with those who annoy and trouble us. They will be to us then only instruments for accomplishing His tender and wise purposes toward us, and we shall even find ourselves at the last inwardly thanking them for the blessings they bring us. Nothing else will completely put an end to all murmuring or rebelling thoughts. - Hannah Whitall Smith

- vi. The carnal mind sees God in nothing, not even in spiritual things. The spiritual mind sees him in everything, even in natural things. - Robert Leighton
- vii. Faith is to believe what we do not see, and the reward of faith is to see what we believe. - Augustine

- viii. Doubt sees the obstacles,
 Faith sees the way!
 Doubt sees the darkest night,
 Faith sees the day!
 Doubt dreads to take a step,
 Faith soars on high!
 Doubt questions, "Who believe?"
 Faith answers, "I!"
 - Gospel Banner

b. **FAITH SUBMITS:** "Who through faith subdued kingdoms... And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented." [Heb 11:33-37]

- i. Many of us are familiar with the glorious achievements of faith in the earlier part of Hebrews 11; of the great accomplishments of faith in Abraham, Noah, Moses, Gideon or Samson. But we are puzzled by the latter part of the same chapter - "they were stoned, they were sawn asunder... afflicted, tormented." Did someone make a mistake here? Obviously not! Our problem is that we tend to have a lop-sided view of faith. We often focus only on the "faith" that will overcome and free us from every imaginable suffering. We like to think of the "faith" that will conquer our fears, that will heal our sicknesses, that will deliver us from all of our afflictions. There is also the other side of faith: the "faith" that is willing to submit to the perfect will of God in suffering; that refuses deliverance; that laughs in the face of difficulties; and that is willing even to die for what it believes and for the glory of God. This "rarer part" of faith is much needed for the most parts of our lives - to be able to suffer willingly, to endure patiently, to remain sick cheerfully, and to lose thankfully, if that be the will of God for us "for a season" or for the rest of our earthly existence as in Paul's "thorn in the flesh".

- ii. The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it? (Jn 18:11)

This was a greater thing to say and do than to calm the seas or raise the dead. Prophets and apostles could work wondrous miracles, but they could not always do and suffer the will of God. To do and suffer God's will is still the highest form of faith, the most sublime Christian achievement. To have the bright aspirations of a young life forever blasted; to bear a daily burden never congenial and to see no relief; to be pinched by poverty when you only desire a competency for the good and comfort of loved ones; to be fettered by some incurable physical disability; to be stripped bare of loved ones until you stand alone to meet the shocks of life - to be able to say in such a school of discipline, "The cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?" - this is faith at its highest and spiritual success at the crowning point. Great faith is exhibited not so much in ability to do as to suffer. - Dr. Charles Parkhurst

- iii. A visitor at a school for the deaf and dumb was writing questions on the blackboard for the children. By and by he wrote this sentence: "Why has God made me to hear and speak, and made you deaf and dumb?" The awful sentence fell upon the little ones like a fierce blow in the face. They sat palsied before that dreadful "Why?" And then a little girl arose. Her lip was trembling. Her eyes were swimming with tears. Straight to the board she walked, and, picking up the crayon, wrote with firm hand these precious words: "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight!" What a reply! - Arthur Christopher Bacon
- iv. When Lord Nelson reported to the British admiralty his great victory over the French fleet in the Battle of the Nile, he said that "victory" was not a large enough word to describe what had taken place. When Paul spoke of the victory which, through Jesus Christ, he had won over all the ills and adversaries

and temptations and woes of life, that greatest of all words, “conqueror,” was not sufficient to describe it. Therefore, Paul said “more than conqueror.” “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us.” (Rom 8:37) - Adapted

- v. Passive faith but praises in the light,
When sun doth shine.
Active faith will praise in the darkest night -
Which faith is thine?

- Adapted

- vi. Afflictions cannot injure when blended with submission.

- c. **FAITH SURMOUNTS:** “Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong...” [Heb 11:33-34]

“Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.” [Mk 9:23]

“... and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” [1 Jn 5:4]

- i. **THE NEEDY WERE DELIVERED BY FAITH:** “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” [Mt 21:22] “He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer.” [Psa 102:17]

- ii. **THE DISEASED WERE DELIVERED BY FAITH:** “Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened...” [Mt 9:29-30]

- iii. **THE RESTLESS WERE DELIVERED BY FAITH:** “... For we which have believed do enter into rest... although the works were finished from the foundation of the world...” [Heb 4:3-11]

“Here is a passenger on a great ocean liner. He lies in the deck chair and rests. The great engines and the mighty propellers drive him across the ocean. When he arrives a friend says, 'How did you get here?' He can honestly answer, 'I rested.' Did he have to struggle? Did he have to fret? Did he have to worry? No. He just rested and trusted the ship to take him across.” - Dr. Morsey

- iv. The sight of any trouble strikes terror into the heart of those who do not have faith, but those who trust Him say, “Here comes my food!” - Watchman Nee
 - v. There are degrees to faith... The first phase of faith believes when there are favorable emotions, the second believes when there is the absence of feeling, but this third form of faith believes God and His Word when circumstances, emotions, appearances, people, and human reason all urge to the contrary. Paul exercised this faith in Acts 27:20, 25, “And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.” Notwithstanding all this Paul said, “Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer, for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.” - Dr. Charles Parkhurst
 - vi. Have you ever thought of the life of a child? Why, the life of a child is a perfect life of faith. That little child - what can that little child do? Why, that little child could not find its way to the street-end, and back again. He would be lost if you trusted him alone. That little child could not find the next meal. That little child could not furnish a shelter for its own head tonight. And yet has that little child become alarmed about it? Not at all! How come that little child's life is the happy life? Because, instinctively and beautifully, it is a life of faith. - S. Coley
- d. Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man's power ends. - George Mueller

- e. The Christian life isn't difficult - it is impossible. If we don't know that, we will try to do things ourselves. Faith is not necessary when we think we can do it ourselves. Faith comes along when we realize that we cannot do it on our own. - Joseph Garlingen
- f. I prayed for faith and thought that some day faith would come down and strike me like lightning. But faith did not seem to come. One day I read in the tenth chapter of Romans, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." I had up to this time closed my Bible and prayed for faith. I now opened my Bible and began to study, and faith has been growing ever since. - D. L. Moody

g. **AUTUMN LEAVES**

Upon the breeze, the autumn leaves
 Are carried thither, yon;
 They rest at last, upon the grass,
 One moment, then they're gone.
 They're tossed about, and in and out,
 They fly across the way;
 And up and down, they sail around -
 The wind they must obey.

Now, if you please, the autumn leaves
 Are much like most of us;
 We're tossed about, by fear and doubt,
 And things we rare discuss.
 This need not be, for you or me -
 There is a surer way;
 The solid Rock, will bear the shock,
 No matter what the fray.

He who believes, is not like leaves,
 That drift with every wind;
 His faith is fixed in God,
 Unmixed with doubts that Satan sends.
 He walks with God, while earth he trods -
 He's led by pow'r Divine;
 When life is through, beyond the blue,
 He'll dwell in lands sublime.

- C. Carl Williams

11. TO PREVAIL BY HOPING: “Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is.” [Jer 17:7] “Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast...” [Heb 6:19] “It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.” [Lam 3:26]

a. HOPE IS CONFIDENT IN GOD ALONE AND NOT IN SELF: “Who against hope believed in hope... And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah’s womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God.” [Rom 4:18-20]

i. If you have been reduced to God being your only hope, you are in a good place. - Jim Laffoon

b. HOPE IS CONFIDENT IN ALLOWING SUFFERING TO RUN ITS COURSE: “And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” [Rom 5:3-5]

i. Like someone who is on a roller-coaster ride, hope will not hold back from the ups and downs of life, but will confidently go along with it knowing that all things will eventually work together for good to them that love God. When life gets too comfortable, be ready for the coming 'plunge' into suffering; and when the 'night' of sorrow seems unbearably dark, be assured that dawn is just around the corner.

ii. Sorrows and joys alike are temporary. In a moment all may be changed. Therefore to one who judges rightly, earthly grief is not over grievous and earthly joy not over joyous. - J. B. Lightfoot

iii. A young man inquired of an elderly saint as to how he managed to handle the adversity of life so calmly. With a twinkle in his eyes, he replied, “I have learned to cooperate with the “divine inevitables”.

c. HOPE IS CONFIDENT IN THE “SILENCE AND ABSENCE” OF GOD:

“For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?” [Rom 8:24] “... blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” [Jn 20:29]

- i. When a mother is out of sight, her baby will feel insecure and cry for her thinking that she is gone forever. However, as the child grows up, he knows that his mother is still around even though he cannot see her. Similarly, hope is confident in the “silence and absence” of God - it can see the reassuring smile of God through the “storm clouds” of affliction.
- ii. Our circumstances are not an accurate reflection of God’s goodness. Whether life is good or bad, God’s goodness, rooted in His character, is the same.
- Helen Grace Lescheid

d. HOPE IS CONFIDENT THAT THERE WILL BE AN EXPECTED END:

“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.” [Psa 42:11]

- i. The Greek concept of the word “hope” is not the English idea of “hope so”, but rather, “hope with favorable and confident expectation”.
- ii. Biblical hope is like reading the happy ending of a book first before reading the beginning or the middle portion. It knows that it will eventually have a “happy ending” despite what happens. With that in mind, hope can quietly and confidently endure the tears and pains of each trial as they come along its way.
- iii. Perhaps you began to question God’s love or His wisdom. Maybe you were afraid to say that He was wrong, but you sort of said, “God, you deceived me in letting me believe that this was the right thing to do. Why didn’t you stop me?” A whole lot of wrong things can happen if you try to look at God from the middle of circumstances. - Henry Blackaby

- iv. Hope, like faith, trust and patience, does not sit by idly or passively, waiting for the storm to pass. But it can look ahead to the future with confidence and in anticipation of a sure deliverance in suffering - like the blazing sun coming up in its glory and the night sky helpless to prevent it.
- v. God does not mock His children with a night that has no ending; and to every man who stands resolute while the darkness lasts there comes at length the vindication of faith and the breaking of the day. - James S. Stewart
- vi. Out of the lowest depths there is a path to the loftiest heights. - Carlyle
- vii. Hope fills the afflicted soul with such inward joy and consolation, that it can laugh while tears are in the eye, sigh and sing all in a breath; it is called “the rejoicing of hope” (Heb 3:6). - William Gurnall

12. TO PREVAIL BY SEEKING: “And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.” [Jer 29:13]

a. THE COUNSEL AND HELP OF GOD ALLEVIATE OUR SUFFERINGS: “Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.” [Jer 33:3] “And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” [Psa 50:15]

- i. Frequently, in the midst of our sufferings, we resort to all kinds of help, except the help that is from the Lord. We only come to him as a last resort. However, seeking God should be our first recourse and not the last resort - “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Phil 4:6-7) After we have sought the Lord, then let us seek the help that He bids us to seek.

- ii. Years ago I was troubled with tonsillitis. Every winter I had a wretched time with sore throat and fever. One can feel so much like dying with tonsillitis, and not be very sick! The family doctor insisted that I should have my tonsils removed, and at last, reluctantly, I consented. A certain day was set for the operation. That morning in my devotional reading I read 2 Chronicles 16. How startled I was to read in verses 12 and 13, “And Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great: yet in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians. And Asa slept with his fathers, and died in the one and fortieth year of his reign.” I was not ready to 'sleep with my fathers' so decided I should seek God first, before the physicians. Immediately I told my wife that I had sinned in settling any matter about my health without a season of prayer. I postponed the tonsillectomy, I went to the Lord in earnest prayer for my throat. Soon thereafter I had occasion to talk to a doctor who was an earnest Christian. He said to me that if I would take his counsel, I would never need to have my tonsils removed. He gave me a diet list; I left off fried foods, fats and sweets and began to use more fruit juices and eat more green vegetables, and I have never had tonsillitis from that day to this! - Dr. John R. Rice, *Prayer - Asking and Receiving*, The Sword of the Lord Publisher.

b. THE COUNSEL AND HELP OF GODLY MEN

ALLEVIATE OUR SUFFERINGS: “Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.” [Pro 11:14]

- i. Often, God also uses godly people to provide the answers to our troubles. It is not uncommon that we, because of our pride or fear, do not disclose our problems to others and solicit their assistance. As a result, we end up suffering alone. Like a frog in a well, our vision is limited and our mind is “one-tracked” - either this works or nothing will. Yet, seeking help from others is a biblical way of alleviating our burdens as we are made aware of

other God-given solutions to our problems. The only precaution is not to share problems with the “town gossip” who cannot keep things in confidence.

- ii. A joke was told of a man who was caught in a rising flood. Perched precariously on top of his roof, a man came by in a boat and offered to rescue him. “No thanks,” he said, “the Lord will save me.” Shortly, a police patrol boat came by and sought to help him. Once again, he declined with the same answer, “No thanks. The Lord will save me.” Lastly, a helicopter came by and attempted to save him from the fast rising waters. With the same air of confidence he responded, “No thanks. The Lord will save me.” Thereafter, the flood swept the man away and he drowned. Appearing before God, he asked, “Lord, why didn’t you save me.” The Lord replied, “I tried three times to save you but you would not accept my help.”

- iii. Some of the common problems which we may need help from others are:

Anger	Homosexuality
Anxiety	Infidelity
Alcoholism	In-law problems
Adolescence	Inferiority complex
Child-raising	Interpersonal conflicts
Childlessness	Lust
Drugs	Loneliness
Dating	Mental disorder
Divorce	Marital conflicts
Disillusion	Purposelessness
Depression	Psychosomatic illnesses
Doctrinal issues	Stress
Decision making	Studies
Fear of failure	Suicide
Financial hardship	Sicknesses
Guilt	Singleness

- iv Knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information upon it. - Samuel Johnson

13. TO PREVAIL BY DEPENDING: “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” [Phil 4:13]

a. NO CONFIDENCE IN SELF: “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.” [Jn 15:5]

i. It is said that a man once told his pastor that he could not forgive his wife for having an affair with another man. His pastor's reply was, “You are right, you cannot forgive her.” The man was taken aback. “But, I thought you are going to say that I can,” he blurted out in surprise. “If you look to yourself, you can't. It is only through Christ that you can,” the pastor gently replied. This man saw the point and instead of trying or striving to forgive his wife through his own strength, he surrendered to let Christ take over his life and eventually he was able to forgive her.

ii. Where the human spirit fails, the Holy Spirit fills.

b. ALL CONFIDENCE IN GOD: “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.” [2 Cor 2:14] “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.” [Rom 8:37]

i. The real Christian life is a Person living in a person (Christ liveth in me... - Gal 2:20) to overcome all things. It is to allow God to accomplish His purpose in and through us. What Christ can do, I can also do because He lives in me. We are just His instruments - the more we let Him, the more He has the liberty to work in and through us to overcome our fears and sufferings, and to enjoy the abundant life He has promised us - “... I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (Jn 10:10) - a life of inexplicable peace, joy and confidence in the midst of our difficulties.

- ii. Very often, the real reason why we break down in the heat of our testing is because we are “too strong” for the Lord to help us. We strive instead of surrender, worry instead of worship, labor instead of listen, misunderstand instead of understand, and demand instead of trust. In short, we want God to fit into our thinking and timing in deliverance from our afflictions instead of we submitting to His plans in developing us. We end up enduring instead of appreciating and despairing instead of benefiting from the repetitive trials that come our way for our own good.
 - iii. Someone once asked a person noted for great faith, “Are you the man of great faith?” “No, I am the man of little faith in a great God”, he humbly replied.
- c. Real faith never looks inwards to our “faith” or “feeling” but to God - “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith...” (Heb 12:2) Whenever we look inward, we end up depending on ourselves instead of God. The Devil desires that we keep our eyes on ourselves - our abilities, determination, willpower, wisdom and strength so that we will fail miserably time and again.
- d. There are three ways in which a skier can get to the top of the ski slope. He can try to walk up on his own, or be pulled up as he holds on to a strap, or he can ride up in the chair lift. This illustration vividly depicts the various ways Christians try to live the victorious Christian life. Some try completely in their own strength; others try to combine their own effort with some degree of dependence on God. But the only way to know true victory in every situation is total dependence on the Holy Spirit. - Adapted

14. TO PREVAIL BY COMMITTING

- a. **TO COMMIT:** “Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.” [Psa 37:5]
 - i. To “commit thy way unto the Lord” is to “roll thy way upon the Lord”. The idea is that of rolling a heavy burden from ourselves on another, or laying

it upon him, so that he may bear it... The term “way” means... a course of life... the reference here is to the whole course of life, or all that can affect life; all our plans or conduct; all the issues or results of those plans. It is equivalent here to lot or destiny. Everything, in regard to the manner in which we live, and all its results, are to be committed to the Lord... And he shall bring it to pass... He will secure a happy result. He will take care of your interests... - *Barnes' Notes*, Baker Book House.

- b. **TO CAST:** “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.” [1 Pet 5:7]
- i. The word “care” is the translation of a Greek word which means “anxiety” or “worry”. The word “all” in the Greek text has the idea, not of every worry that comes along, but the whole of their worries... The word “cast” is the translation of a word that means “having deposited with.” It refers here to a direct and once-for-all committal to God of all that would give us concern. The words “for he careth for you” can be translated literally, “for it is a care to Him concerning you,” or “for you are His concern.” - Kenneth S. Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament, Vol II, pg 128-129*, Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- ii. **THE TURNING OF WATER INTO WINE:** “And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted (lacked) wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it... Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it... the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the

water knew;)... This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.” [Jn 2:1-11]

When Mary realized that the marriage feast had run out of wine (grape juice), she handed the problem to the Lord Jesus and left it there with Him. Although the Lord Jesus protested that His time for miracles had not arrived, Mary, if we were to stretch our imagination a little, probably said, “I am sorry, Son, but it is beyond me. You have to do something about it.” Through this God-honoring act of faith on her part, the Lord Jesus was “encouraged” to perform His first miracle of turning the water into wine (grape juice). What Mary did was a classic example of, “casting all your care upon him”, and then, leaving it there.

- iii. Too often, we are in the habit of handing our problems to God and then taking them back to worry ourselves sick again. God wants us to commit once and for all our impossible-to-work-out burdens to Him. We do what we can and what we cannot, we leave with God to “open up the Red Sea” for us to “cross over” in His time.
- iv. We often pray for things we should be doing, and do the things for which we should be praying.
- v. A commonly-told story speaks of a man with a knapsack on his back hitching a ride from a gracious driver. Upon getting up onto his truck, the hitchhiker continued carrying his knapsack. The helpful driver encouraged him to put down his bag on the seat but he politely declined as he felt that he had already bothered the driver enough for the ride. Ridiculous as it may sound, that is true of many of us who “do not want to trouble the Lord any further” with our burdens in our journey of life. The Lord has to constantly and gently remind us to cast “... all your care upon him; for he careth for you.” (1 Pet 5:7)

vi. It is His will that I should cast
My care on Him each day;
He also bids me not to cast
My confidence away.

But Oh! how foolish I act
When taken unaware,
I cast away my confidence
And carry all my care! - James Seward

vii. **WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS**

O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry,
Everything to God in prayer.

- Joseph M. Scriven

15. **TO PREVAIL BY DYING:** “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”
[Gal 2:20]

- a. **DEATH TO SIN:** “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” [Rom 6:11]
- b. **DEATH TO SELF:** “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me...”
[Gal 2:20]
- c. **DEATH TO SUFFERING:** “But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy...” [Acts 20:24]
- d. A dead person is not going anywhere, is not hurt by anything, has no ambitions, desires or expectations. Likewise, a person who is dead in Christ has no will but God's will; no ambitions but God's ambitions; and no plans but God's plans. He is not adversely affected by the good things which are denied to him nor by the adversities which come upon him.

- e. One of the methods used to contain forest fires is to burn the grounds controllably before the wild fires get to them. After the grounds are burnt, the fires cannot burn them again. We who are “dead” cannot “die” any more. Similarly, if we are dead in Christ, we cannot be badly hurt by the adversity of life prepared for us in the perfect will of God. Instead, we will discover a new dimension in victorious living - “... nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me...” and “... none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself...”
- f. When James Calvert went out as a missionary to the cannibals of the Fiji Islands, the captain of the ship sought to turn him back. “You will lose your life and the lives of those with you if you go among such savages,” he cried. Calvert only replied, “We died before we came here.”
- David Augsburg, *Sticking My Neck Out*.
- g. An older missionary said something to Amy Carmichael when she was a young missionary that stayed with her for life. She had spoken of something which was not to her liking. His reply was, “See in it a chance to die.”
- Elisabeth Elliot, *A Lamp unto My Feet*.
- h. In the Christian life we must lose to gain; we must give to obtain; we must be last to be first; we must be humble to be exalted; we must be least to be greatest; we must die to live. - E. H. Blake
- i. He who is without expectation cannot fret if nothing comes to him. The lowly man and the meek man dominate the world because they do not care for it.
- Henry Drummond
- j. There are no disappointments to those whose wills are buried in the will of God. - Frederick W. Faber
- k. If men are prepared to die they are ready for anything.
- Joseph Addison Alexander
- l. To the lost, we say, “Look (to Jesus) and live”.
To the saved, we say, “Look (to Jesus) and die”.

m. Many of us are familiar with George Mueller, a man who was greatly used by God to raise great sums of money for orphanages and the Lord's works through prayer alone. When someone inquired of the secret of his success, he replied, "There was a day when I died... died to George Mueller, his opinions, preferences, tastes, and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame even of brethren or friends..."

- 16. TO PREVAIL BY OBEYING:** "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it." [Mt 7:24-27] "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him." [Isa 3:10-11]

Obedience to the Word of God is the best guarantee for us to survive the incessant trials and temptations that relentlessly assail us. The Lord Jesus likened it to a "house built on rock" which the rending storms were helpless to destroy. When we "hear and do not" the commandments of God, we are like the "house built on sand", waiting for the coming "storms of suffering" to level it. This explains why some tenaciously endure to the end while others fall by the wayside.

- a. **OBEDIENCE WITH A CLEAR CONSCIENCE:** "Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck." [1 Tim 1:19] "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." [Acts 24:16] "Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned." [1 Tim 1:5]

- i. Many Christians, although faithful in church and in their service to the Lord, are rather lacking in this aspect. They may have the right doctrine and faith, but they have also allowed the sin and filth of the world to pollute their minds and defile their consciences. One common example is the uncontrolled watching of television and movies. We bring in the nightclubs, pubs, whorehouses, the shameless immoralities, senseless violence, abominable occults and a host of forbidden things into our living rooms. Instead of hating such sinful and ungodly programs, we have become insensitive to them. We then wonder why our Christian walk is so listless and lukewarm; our children turn out carnal and worldly; and our influence on the lost is pathetic. The Bible cautions us that our conscience can be tampered with. If we are not watchful, we can end up with a “conscience seared with a hot iron” (1 Tim 4:2), a “defiled conscience” (Tit 1:15), or an “evil conscience” (Heb 10:22). If we continue unrestrained to violate our God-given conscience, we will eventually end up “shipwrecked” on the “rocks” of trouble and temptation. No one falls into temptation overnight, they usually get there “inch by inch”, silencing the warnings of the conscience along the way.
 - ii. “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” [2 Cor 6:17-18]
 - iii. No torment in the world is comparable to an accusing conscience. - William Gurnall
- b. OBEDIENCE WITH A CLEAR CONVICTION:** “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.” [Dan 1:8]

- i. Out of his personal conviction to please only God, Daniel requested a change of his diet - “he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor with the wine which he drank”. He did not want to sin against God with wine and the food that was unclean according to the dietary restrictions laid down in the Levitical Laws or possibly with the food offered to the Babylonian idols. Daniel's consistent, unwavering conviction and obedience to God laid the foundation for him to overcome trial after trial, and eventually the most severe trial of his life - his stand and survival in the lion's den (Dan 6).
 - ii. Preferences are what we stand for in favorable circumstances while convictions are what we are willing to die for in any circumstance.
- c. **OBEDIENCE TO THE CLEAR COMMANDMENTS:**
 “I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.” [Psa 119:60] “With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments.” [Psa 119:10]
- i. **THE PRECEPT:** “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” [Isa 8:20]

Many of the commandments in the Bible are so clear or explicit that we need not ask whether we should obey them or not. Christians sometimes ask questions like, “Should I get baptized?” or “Should I give my tithes?” or “Should I attend church?” And yet the Scripture is explicit in such matters.

On baptism: “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ...” (Acts 2:38) On tithing: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment,

mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.” (Mt 23:23)
On church attendance: “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” (Heb 10:25)

- ii. **THE PRINCIPLE:** “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” [1 Cor 3:16-17] “Abstain from all appearance of evil.” [1 Thess 5:22]

We may not find “thou shalt not smoke” or “thou shalt not take drugs” in the Bible, but there are principles laid down in the Scriptures that forbid the act of destroying our body which is the temple of God. Besides, all these indulgences give us the “appearance of evil” or an identification with the wickedness of this evil world.

- iii. **THE PERSONAL COMMANDMENT:** “Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa...” [Jon 1:1-3]

God gave Jonah a personal commandment to warn the people of Nineveh of the coming judgment. When Jonah refused and ran away from the Lord, he sinned against Him. Jonah's contemporaries were not judged for not pronouncing judgment on Nineveh. God did not call them. Only Jonah was judged and punished for his disobedience to the personal call of God.

We may not have violated the clear commandments or principles of God's Word, but we can still sin against Him in the things He has commanded us individually to do. For some, it may be the call to

the mission field; for others, it may be the call to certain ministries within the local church - teaching in the Sunday School, doing the bus routes, visiting the sick or giving sacrificially to the work of the Lord. When we refuse the personal leading of the Lord for us, we sin against Him.

- d. **OBEDIENCE WITH A CLEAR COMMITMENT:** “And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth.” [Deut 28:1] “But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee.” [Deut 28:15]
- i. In the area of obedience towards God, we often obey like we are having a buffet spread - we pick and choose what we like to eat and leave out what we dislike. We don't mind “thou shalt not kill” or “thou shalt not steal” but we tend to avoid those commandments that are closer to our hearts - like giving for example.
 - ii. A preacher once proclaimed, “Thou shalt not kill”, and the whole congregation chorused “Amen!” He then went on to admonish, “Thou shalt not steal”, and again the congregation responded with a hearty “Amen!” As he proceeded on with the challenge, “Thou shalt give thy tithes”, the “Amen” became softer. And then he went on further to exhort the church to, “Give not only your tithes but also your offerings”, the congregation became very quiet. The moral of the story: we do not mind obeying the easier or more convenient of God's commandments but not the difficult.
 - iii. Selective obedience is disobedience.

e. **THE 'PRAYER OF JABEZ':** “And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren: and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow. And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested.”
[1 Chron 4:9-10]

- i. Jabez was raised under a sorrowful circumstance and his mother aptly called him 'Jabez', which literally means, 'sorrow-maker or one who causes sorrow or pain'. However, he was determined not to remain in that state of affairs, and he pleaded with God to free him from a life of perpetual sorrow. God heard his prayers and elevated him from the pit of continuous suffering to the place of considerable success. The key ingredient in the 'Prayer of Jabez', in which God granted him the desires of his heart, was his conviction and commitment to fear God and depart from evil - “that thou wouldest keep me from evil”. Jabez knew that blessings and sins could never co-exist; just as water could not be mixed with oil. The only way for him to have this largely uninterrupted blessings of the Lord was to stay far, far away from the 'edge' of temptation and sin; for sin will surely bring about the judgment of God - “that it may not grieve me!” His determined obedience, coupled with his persistent prayers, were the grounds for his blessed release from much of his earthly sorrows.
- ii. It is the author's conviction that many of our afflictions are the result of our inability to restrain our wicked inclinations or predisposition to sins. If, by God's grace and as a matter of daily habits, we are able to keep His commandments, there will not be the necessity to experience so much unnecessary sufferings to keep us faithful. This “part” of suffering is definitely avoidable if we take heed to obey and follow God diligently - “For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.” (1 Cor 11:31)

- 17. TO PREVAIL BY GETTING OVER:** “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” [Phil 3:13-14]

Too often, we get so bogged down by our sins and mistakes that our world comes to a stand still as our mind keeps constantly revolving around the “inextricable problems”. God wants us to “cross over” and get on with our lives for His work and glory. He does not want us to be a prisoner of the past.

- a. **TO GET OVER OUR SINFULNESS:** “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” [1 Jn 1:8-9]

- i. **DAVID’S FOOLISHNESS:** “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” [Psa 51:1-5]

David, in his moment of fleshly weakness, committed adultery with Bathsheba, and to cover his sins, he hatched a plan to have her husband, Uriah, killed in the battle front. When his heinous crimes were finally exposed by the prophet Nathan, David must have felt so despicable and filthy inside at his horrendous sins - the champion of morality fell where he was supposed to be strong.

Some of our sins behind “closed doors” are too sordid and shameful to mention - fornication, homosexuality, promiscuity, unwed pregnancy, lies, cheating or the using of those who trusted us. We feel like we can never be forgiven by God or man. Friends despise us and foes rejoice over our downfall. Our condemned conscience screams at us incessantly. Satan gloats over sins and laughs at our pitiful attempts to recover ourselves. Our world caves in and we feel so alone and hopeless - like a spent force - with no testimony, no usefulness, and above all, no future. Only God knows the unbearable weight of the grief and guilt that gives us no rest day and night. How we wish that we could either go back in time and undo our wrongs or have the bountiful forgiveness of God that will cleanse us of our past. This must have been the cries of David after his sins of adultery and murder - “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.” (Psa 51:7-12) God did forgive David and He will forgive us too. No matter how filthy or shameful our past may be, our future is still untainted and untarnished.

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”
[Psa 51:17]

Wounds cannot be healed until they are revealed,
and sins cannot be forgiven until they are confessed.
- Martin Luther

God can do wonders with a broken heart if you give
him all the pieces. - Victor Alfsen

ii. **DAVID'S FORGIVENESS:** "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. 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." [Psa 103:8-14]

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." [Isa 1:18]

"For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." [Psa 30:5]

"Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." [Rom 8:33-34]

"... Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." (Jn 8:10-11) This passage reveals the depth of God's heart and love for those who sincerely repent of their sins.

Nobody forgives like God forgives. He not only forgives us but puts our sins behind His back - "for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." (Isa 38:17) He consigns our sins to oblivion; removes them as far as the east is from the west; and forgets, as what is cast behind the back is seen and remembered no more. - Adapted

- iii. Some asked Luther, “Do you feel that you have been forgiven?” He answered, “No! but I’m as sure [*that I am forgiven*] as there is a God in heaven.

- iv. For feelings come and feelings go,
And feelings are deceiving;
My warrant is the Word of God,
Nought else is worth believing.
Though all my heart should feel condemned
For want of some sweet token,
There is One greater than my heart
Whose Word cannot be broken.
I’ll trust in God’s unchanging Word
Till soul and body sever;
For though all things shall pass away
His Word shall stand forever.” - Moody Monthly

- v. Release! Signed in tears, sealed in blood, written on heavenly parchment, recorded in eternal archives. The black ink of the indictment is written all over with the red ink of the cross: “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin.” - T. De Witt Talmage

- vi. True repentance has a double aspect; it looks upon things past with a weeping eye, and upon the future with a watchful eye. - Robert Smith

- vii. For each of us who have traveled the road
Of sorrow, misfortune and sins,
There’s a wonderful place of courage and hope
Called the Land of Beginning Again! - Adapted

- b. TO GET OVER OUR SILLINESS (MISTAKE):**
“... forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” [Phil 3:13-14]

- i. A young man once interviewed a successful businessman: “Sir, what is the secret of your success?” “Right decisions,” said the businessman.

“Sir, from where did you get that?” inquired the young interviewer. “From experience,” he replied. “And Sir, from where did you get your experience?” queried the young man again. “From wrong decisions,” came the humble reply. As this wise businessman benefited much from his failures, so can we. Our minds can be sharper, our convictions clearer, our love stronger and our zeal greater through the many mistakes we make in the course of our life. Our wisdom usually comes from our experience, and our experience comes largely from our foolishness. We need not be a prisoner of our past, but the learning from our past will help us to be a better person in the future.

- ii. A fellow bumped into his old friend whom he hadn't seen in many years. He asked, “How's your wife?” He replied, “She's in heaven.” Without thinking, he responded, “Oh, I'm sorry.” Then, realizing that was not the best phrase to use, he said, “I mean, I'm glad... well, what I really mean is, I'm surprised.” - James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited*, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Wheaton, Illinois.

In life, we will make many such blunders unintentionally. Let us get on with our life and not be too bothered by such mistakes.

- iii. Lord, when we are wrong, make us willing to change. And when we are right, make us easy to live with. - Peter Marshall, Sr.
- iv. An incident was told of a lady who could not get over the loss of a valuable watch. A friend who observed this remarked, “Would you like to lose another \$1,000?” “Of course not,” she replied. “Then don't keep brooding over your loss,” he added. She saw the point.
- v. Have patience with all things, but chiefly have patience with yourself. Do not lose courage in considering your own imperfections but instantly set about remedying them - every day begins the task anew. - Adapted

- 18. TO PREVAIL BY SURRENDERING:** “Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.” [Lk 22:42]

As believers in Christ, there is no true rest or peace in the midst of our confusing trials and tribulations until we have completely yielded ourselves to God, committed our souls to His safe-keeping and left the outcome of our testing to His all-wise discretion. Only then, we can understand the full import of the phrase, “a sweet surrender” - “... yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet.” (Pro 3:24)

- a. TO GIVE UP OUR PRESUPPOSITION:** “And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another... Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.” [Lk 7:19-23]

- i. Even the greatest man who ever lived besides the Lord Jesus, was confused and perplexed. John the Baptist, like many others in his day, thought the Messiah would come and establish His kingdom. John was the forerunner, the “voice of one crying in the wilderness” (Mt 3:3), the one who would “turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers” (Mal 4:6), to prepare the nation for this great event. But after a brief ministry, he found himself in prison. The Romans were still in power; Israel was not liberated; the Messiah was not enthroned; and he was incarcerated with no help in sight. John the Baptist was confused. Yet, this was the perfect plan of God for him. God, in His foreknowledge, had anticipated that the nation of Israel would reject His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, as their Messiah. They would crucify Him and thus fulfill God's eternal plan for Christ to die for the sins of the world.

- ii. What are our plans for ourselves, our family, or our future? We will be in an advantageous position if we are prepared for the unexpected when we are relating to God who always has a better plan for us. It will be less disappointing when our world turns upside-down as He tries us for our good.

b. TO GIVE UP OUR PREDISPOSITION: “... Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” [Acts 9:6]

- i. In Acts 10:14 we read, “Peter said, not so, Lord.” Have you ever thought of what a contradiction in terms we have there? You have either to drop the words “Not so” or you have got to drop the word “Lord”. - W. Graham Scroggie
- ii. We said to a physician friend one day, “Doctor, what is the exact significance of God's touching Jacob upon the sinew of his thigh?” He replied, “The sinew of the thigh is the strongest in the human body. A horse could scarcely tear it apart.” God has to break us down at the strongest part of our self-life before He can have His own way of blessing with us. - J. H. McConkey
- iii. The readiest way to escape from our sufferings is, to be willing they should endure as long as God pleases. - John Wesley

iv. LESSON FROM THE STONE CUTTER

We were visiting the stone cutter in a great granite shed the other day and learned a lesson from this wise workman. The great block of polished granite was painted over with a thin coating of some rubber combination. The design for the engraving was penciled on the rubber and the workman was cutting away the rubber, leaving the stone exposed... With rubber cut away and the granite exposed, the sand was blown on the granite until the design was perfectly etched in the stone. But the rubber was untouched.

Then we learned our lesson. The workman told us that the sand could be blown upon the rubber for an hour without effect, but that when blown upon the stone it would cut a hole through the hardest granite. His explanation was easy - the stone resists stubbornly and is worn away, but the rubber is resilient and receives the shock without damage. Then said the worker, "That's a good deal like life. The man who is always resisting is the man who is worn out first. The one who is always looking for trouble is always finding it. The stubborn man is always getting harder knocks than the one who accepts his troubles with resiliency of temper. The hot-headed man has a harder time of it than the flexible man." We took our lesson from the stone cutter. We purposed by the grace of God never to allow the flint to enter our souls. - Northwestern Christian Advocate

- v. It is wonderful what miracles God works in wills that are utterly surrendered to Him. He turns hard things into easy, and bitter things into sweet. It is not that He puts easy things in the place of the hard, but He actually changes the hard thing into an easy one, and makes us love to do the thing we before so hated. While we rebel against the yoke, and try to avoid it, we find it hard and galling. But when we 'take the yoke upon us' with a consenting will, we find it easy and comfortable. - Hannah Whitall Smith

- vi. Those whom God has called to suffer,
Know the agony of pain.
Yet when they yield all to Him,
They find in it great gain. - Hess

vii. **CHOOSE THOU FOR ME**

Thy way, not mine, O Lord, however dark it be!
Lead me by Thine own hand,
Choose out my path for me.
I dare not choose my lot; I would not, if I might;
Choose Thou for me, my God, so shall I walk aright.
- Horatius Bonar

viii. I longed to walk along an easy road,
 And leave behind the dull routine of home,
 Thinking in other fields to serve my God;
 But Jesus said, "My time has not yet come."

I longed to leave the round of daily toil,
 Where no one seemed to understand or care;
 But Jesus said, "I choose for thee this soil,
 That thou might'st raise for Me some blossoms rare."

And now I have no longing but to do
 At home, or else afar, His blessed will,
 To work amid the many or the few;
 Thus, "choosing not to choose," my heart is still.

ix. **EMPTY OR FULL**

I gave them to Him,
 All the things I'd valued so
 Until I stood there empty-handed.
 Every glittering toy did go.

And I walked earth's lonely highways
 In my rags and poverty;
 Till I heard His voice entreating,
 "Lift your empty hands to Me."

Empty hands I lifted to Him,
 And He filled them with a store
 Of His own transcendent riches
 Till my hands could hold no more.

And at last I comprehended,
 With my mind so slow and dull,
 That God could not pour His riches
 Into hands already full.

- Adapted

x. 'Tis far, far better to let Him choose the way
 That we should take,
 If only we thus leave our life with Him,
 He will guide without mistake.

- Adapted

- x. Three drunken sailors were attempting to get back to their ship in a little rowboat tied to the wharf. But try as they would, they could not do it. At last, one of them sobered up to realize that they had not untied the rope. Upon releasing the rope, they were finally on their way back to their ship.

In life, we usually try all kinds of ways to free ourselves from our inextricable sufferings except by surrendering completely to the wise leading of the Lord. What the Lord desires in those crucial moments is for us to abandon ourselves to His unerring wisdom and working. He wants us to unreservedly believe, trust and surrender to Him. Until that is achieved, we have not “untied the rope” and all our “rowing” and striving to work things out on our own will be in vain. We labor to be happy, and happiness eludes us. We seek help from trouble, and help is nowhere in sight. It is only when we have yielded ourselves wholly to God, to commit each and every care to Him, to leave our future in His hands, then we will be unshackled from the bondage of the habitual fear and anxiety that so easily beset us. He owns us and He is at liberty to do what He pleases with us. And what He does, it will always be for our ultimate good, like a father who knows what is best for his child. When we are totally surrendered to His loving care, then we will be free to enjoy His presence and appreciate His purpose in our preordained tribulation.

- xii. The abandoned life is truly the abundant life - “... I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” (Jn 10:10) “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (Jn 8:32)
- xiii. There will be some who will say to God, “Thy will be done.” And then there will be others to whom God will say, “Thy will be done.” - Adapted
- xiv. Nothing good comes except from God, and nothing except good comes from God.

19. TO PREVAIL BY BEING COURAGEOUS: “Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.” [Josh 1:9] “Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD.” [Psa 31:24]

He is the Black Bart of the soul. He doesn't want your money. He doesn't want your diamonds. He won't go after your car. He wants something far more precious. He wants your peace of mind - your joy. His name? Fear... He doesn't want you to make the journey to the mountain. He figures if he can rattle you enough, you will take your eyes off the peaks and settle for a dull existence in the flatlands. - Max Lucado, *The Applause of Heaven*, Dallas: Word Publishing.

An oriental legend tells of the desert traveler, who, one night met Fear and Plague, going to Baghdad where they expected to kill 10,000 persons. The traveler asked Plague if he would do all the killing and Plague answered, “Oh, no, I shall kill only a few hundred and my friend Fear will kill the others.” - *R and R Magazine*.

To many, this world is such a fearful place to be in. We fear people; we fear problems; we fear conflicts; we fear heights; we fear death; we fear sicknesses; we fear failures; we fear the dark; we fear fear itself. Fear torments us; it tortures us; it cripples us emotionally; it hinders us spiritually; it stresses us mentally; it weakens us physically. Fear prevents us from being the person that God wants us to be and enjoying the life He wants us to have. It robs us of our joy; it shatters our peace; it keeps us awake all night; it takes away the zest of living; and above all, it makes us miserable. What a dreadful world we live in when fear reins in our lives!

However, there is also the healthy side of fear. We should fear God and fear doing the things that will grieve Him. Fear is also necessary to keep us away from dangers and from doing the foolish things that will harm us. The Bible has plenty to say about the fear that is negative, that is destructive to our quest to know God and do His will; the fear that causes us to doubt, to be anxious, to deny and disobey Him.

- a. **THE DELIVERANCE FROM FEAR:** “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” [2 Tim 1:7] “Be not afraid of sudden fear... when it cometh.” [Pro 3:25]
- i. **THROUGH THE FEAR OF GOD:** “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” [Mt 10:28]

In life, we have only One Person to fear, and that is God. He alone has the power to bless or curse, to heal or kill, to bestow happiness or send judgment, and to give us everlasting life or consign us to eternal damnation. We are called to fear Him and nothing else.

The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else.
- Oswald Chambers

In World War II, the Germans launched a surprise attack on Russia and came close to destroying Moscow. The Russians lost city after city and division after division of their military until winter set in which slowed down the German's onslaught. The infuriated Joseph Stalin issued an ultimatum to his people: there will be no more retreats. Machine guns were placed behind Moscow and the other Russian cities, and orders were issued to kill any Russian who attempted to flee them. The people stayed and fought. They overcame fear through fear. They had only one option left - to fight the Germans to the death. And they did just that and turned the tide of the battle to their favor, and Germany was eventually defeated.

Courage is a special kind of knowledge: the knowledge of how to fear what ought to be feared and how not to fear what ought not to be feared.
- David Ben-Gurion

ii. THROUGH THE FAVOR (LOVE) OF GOD:

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.” [1 Jn 4:18]

“And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” [1 Jn 4:16]

If a cup is completely filled with water, there will be no room for air to be in it. If our life is saturated with God's love for us, there will be no place for the crippling fear that seeks to ruin our lives - “perfect love casteth out fear”. We fear so much because we identify so little with the the love of God for us.

Let us take time to reflect and ponder the greatness of His love for us and be filled with a renewed sense of confidence and assurance to face our trials cheerfully. If we truly comprehend the enduring, lasting love relationship that exists between God and us - He loves us and we love Him, we will be at rest with the outward turmoil around us.

THE LOVE OF GOD: “The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” [Jer 31:3]

HE LOVED US WHILE WE WERE IN SIN: “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” [Rom 5:8]

HE LOVED US WHILE WE WERE IN SORROW: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” [Rom 8:35-39]

A gentleman who was a professed Christian was taken seriously ill. He became troubled about the little love he felt in his heart for God, and spoke of his experience to a friend. This is how the friend answered him: "When I go home from here, I expect to take my baby on my knee, look into her sweet eyes, listen to her charming prattle, and tired as I am, her presence will rest me; for I love that child with unutterable tenderness. But she loves me little. If my heart were breaking it would not disturb her sleep. If my body were racked with pain, it would not interrupt her play. If I were dead, she would forget me in a few days. Besides this, she had never brought me a penny, but was a constant expense to me. I am not rich, but there is not money enough in the world to buy my baby. How is it? Does she love me, or do I love her? Do I withhold my love until I know she loves me? Am I waiting for her to do something worthy of my love before extending it?"

This practical illustration of the love of God for His children caused the tears to roll down the sick man's face. "Oh, I see," he exclaimed, "it is not my love to God, but God's love for me, that I should be thinking of. And I do love Him now as I never loved Him before." "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us..." (1 Jn 4:10) - Gospel Herald

THE LOVE OF GOD

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above,
Would drain the ocean dry.
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.

O love of God, how rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure
The saints' and angels' song. - Frederick M. Lehman

THE LOVE FOR GOD: “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.” [Mk 12:30] “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” [Jn 14:15]

Don't confuse every warm fuzzy feeling with love for God. God says, “The one who loves me is the one who keeps my commandments.” - Adapted

He who loveth God with all his heart feareth not death, nor punishment, nor judgment, nor hell, because perfect love giveth sure access to God. But he who still delighteth in sin, no marvel if he is afraid of death and judgment. - Thomas à Kempis

Some people want to see God with their eyes as they see a cow, and to love Him as they love their cow - for the milk and cheese and profit it brings them. This is how it is with people who love God for the sake of outward wealth or inward comfort. They do not rightly love God, when they love Him for their own advantage. Indeed, I tell you the truth, any object you have in your mind, however good, will be a barrier between you and the inmost Truth. - Meister Eckhart

b. THE DOMAIN OF FEAR

i. COURAGE TO OVERCOME DIFFICULTY

When I was a Boy Scout, we played a game when new Scouts joined the troop. We lined up chairs in a pattern, creating an obstacle course through which the new Scouts, blindfolded, were supposed to maneuver. The Scoutmaster gave them a few moments to study the pattern before our adventure began. But, as soon as the victims were blindfolded, the rest of us quietly removed the chairs. I think life is like this game. Perhaps we spend our lives avoiding obstacles we have created for ourselves and which, in reality, exist only in our minds. - Pierce Vincent Eckhart

When the Israelites compared themselves to the Canaanites, they felt like grasshoppers in their sight (Num 13:33). But when Joshua compared the Canaanites to God, they (the Canaanites) were just “bread for us” (Num 14:9).

God's promise to the Israelites with regard to the Promised Land was: “Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea shall your coast be.” (Deut 11:24) Spiritually, that is His promise to us too. God intends that we should overcome our fear and possess our possessions.

The wise man in a storm prays to God,
Not for safety from danger,
But for deliverance from fear. - Adapted

Strange to say, besides fearing God, the Scriptures forbid us from fearing anything else. In fact, fearing any other thing becomes a sin.

“After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.”
[Gen 15:1]

“And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.”
[2 Kings 6:16]

“And said, O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong. And when he had spoken unto me, I was strengthened...”
[Dan 10:19]

“But when Jesus heard it, he answered him, saying, Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole.” [Lk 8:50]

He who is not everyday conquering some fear has not learned the secret of life. - Ralph Waldo Emerson

ii. COURAGE TO OVERCOME DEATH

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.” [Psa 23:1-6]

The story is told by William H. Ridgeway that when a boy, he with other boys would go pick berries, and, having filled their baskets, would wait beside the railroad track, as the sun was dipping toward the west, and have the train “run over them.” But the train didn’t run over them at all. It was only the shadow that enveloped them. There they sat, knowing they were in no danger but keyed up to the highest pitch in anticipation of the oncoming of the thundering locomotive and the long passenger cars. As it swept by them, they were in the shadow for just a few split seconds, and then the shadow was gone. I know of no better illustration of the meaning of death to the Christian. - Western Recorder

Death in its substance has been removed, and only the shadow of it remains... Nobody is afraid of a shadow, for a shadow cannot block a man’s pathway for even a moment. The shadow of a dog can’t bite; the shadow of a sword can’t kill.
- C. H. Spurgeon

“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” [1 Cor 15:55]

Adoniram Judson: "I am not tired of my work, neither am I tired of the world; yet when Christ calls me home, I shall go with the gladness of a boy bounding away from school."

C. H. Spurgeon: "I am tranquil and happy, though very weak. My theology now is very simple. I can express it in four words... Jesus died for me."

Lady Glenorchy: "If this is dying, it is the pleasantest thing imaginable."

We go to the grave of a friend saying, "A man is dead"; but angels throng about him, saying, "A man is born." - Henry Ward Beecher

"And 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." [Rev 21:4]

If we are true believers in the Lord, having been saved by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we need not fear death. However, if we are still lost in our sins, then we have every reason to fear death and hell. All the sufferings in this world cannot be compared to the torment in hell where "there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Mt 13:50) and where "their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." (Mk 9:44)

Heard at a funeral service in Winona Lake, Indiana:
"We are not in the land of the living, but in the land of the dying. Someday we shall be in the Land of the Living."

Death is not extinguishing the light; it is only putting out the lamp because the Dawn has come.
- Rabindranath Tagore

What the caterpillar calls the end, God calls a butterfly.

Why be afraid of death,
 As though your life were breath?
 Death but anoints your eyes
 With clay. O glad surprise.
 Why should you be forlorn?
 Death only husks the corn.
 Why should you fear meet
 The thresher of the wheat?
 Is sleep a thing to dread?
 Yet sleeping you are dead
 Till you awake and rise,
 Here, or beyond the skies.
 Why should it be a wrench
 To leave your wooden bench!
 Why not, with happy shout,
 Run home when school is out!
 The dear ones left behind?
 Oh, foolish one and blind!
 A day and you will meet -
 A night and you will greet.
 This is the death of death
 To breathe away a breath
 And know the end of strife,
 And taste the deathless life,
 And joy without a fear,
 And smile without a tear;
 And work, nor care to rest,
 And find the last the best.

- Maltbie D. Babcock

iii. **COURAGE TO OVERCOME DEMANDING PEOPLE**

“... for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.” [Heb 13:5-6]

“I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass.” [Isa 51:12]

SAUL'S FEAR: "And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice." [1 Sam 15:24]

King Saul was commanded to destroy the Amalekites as well as the sheep and oxen. However, he spared Agag, the King of the Amalekites, and the choicest of the sheep and oxen, because of the fear of the people. In so doing, he sinned against God and eventually lost his kingdom to David.

One of the greatest areas of stress in life is the fear of people. We fear what they say about us; what they think of us; and what they expect from us. On one hand, we are called to be responsible and to respect others, but, on the other hand, we do not need to be a slave to their opinions or expectations of us. We need to, within the bounds of reason and the injunctions of the Scriptures, live as individuals before the Lord, doing His will. Life becomes simpler when we realize that we have only one Person to please which is the Lord. When we try to please everybody, we end up pleasing nobody. People are "glorified mud balls", just like you and I. They are made of dust and someday, they will go back to dust.

Humble yourself and cease to care what men think. A meek man is not a human mouse afflicted with a sense of his own inferiority. Rather... he has stopped being fooled about himself. He knows well that the world will never see him as God sees him and he has stopped caring. He has obtained a place of soul rest. The old struggle to defend himself is over.
- A. W. Tozer

They say, what they say, let them say. - C. H. Spurgeon

We probably wouldn't worry about what people think of us if we could know how seldom they do.
- Olin Miller

In the final analysis, life is not about them and us, or them or us, but God and us.

20. TO PREVAIL BY BEING IN SOLITUDE

“And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.” [Mt 14:23]

Our Lord Jesus longed for the unhurried time to be alone with the Father, to enjoy the intimate walk, fellowship and communion with Him, and to work with His power divine. If our Lord Jesus in the flesh needed the solitude of the soul, to be away from the crowd, and be alone with His Father, how much more shall we need to be alone with God. We need to quieten our souls and listen to His still, small voice that seeks to calm our anxious hearts and guide us through life's perplexing maze of trial and tribulation? We are often preoccupied with the “worldly rush” instead of desiring the “holy hush” where God seeks to be alone with His children, to put His loving arms around them, to gently instruct them, to allay their unfounded fears, and to “lead them besides the still waters” (Psa 23:2). This is our blessed privilege, a privilege we so often forfeit because we understand so little of His Fatherly love, His sure guidance, and His power that will enable us to “mount up with eagle's wings” (Isa 40:31) and soar gloriously above life's tempestuous seas of sorrow and suffering.

The solitude of the soul is likened to “a shelter from the storm”, “the haven of rest”, “a table in the wilderness”, “sitting in heavenly places”, “being in the presence of God”, and “a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen” (Job 28:7). The Lord invites us to such a place of silence, stillness and serenity, where all our strivings cease, our worldly cares abandoned, and where only God and the things of eternal value matter. We are just a prayer away from such a place, a place of eternal calm, of undisturbed quietude, of rest, tranquility, peace and joy unspeakable, amidst this troubled world.

Are you weak? Weary? Confused? Troubled? Pressured? How is your relationship with God? Is it held in its place of priority? I believe the greater the pressure, the greater your need for time alone with Him. - Kay Arthur

a. THE STILLNESS IN SOLITUDE

“Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.”
[Psa 46:10] “... stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God.” [Job 37:14]

Sitting in silence with God, listening for whatever He may want to say. Simply enjoy the fact that He is, and you are, and you have a relationship with Him. These special moments with God are when His fresh breezes can enter your heart and refresh you. - Anon

In order to really know God, inward stillness is absolutely necessary. I remember when I first learned this. A time of great emergency had risen in my life, when every part of my being seemed to throb with anxiety, and when the necessity for immediate and vigorous action seemed overpowering; and yet circumstances were such that I could do nothing, and the person who could, would not stir.

For a little while it seemed as if I must fly to pieces with the inward turmoil, when suddenly the still, small voice whispered in the depths of my soul, “Be still, and know that I am God.” The word was with power, and I hearkened. I composed my body to perfect stillness, and I constrained my troubled spirit into quietness, and looked up and waited; and then I did “know” that it was God, God even in the very emergency and in my helplessness to meet it; and I rested in Him. It was an experience that I would not have missed for worlds; and I may add also, that out of this stillness seemed to arise a power to deal with the emergency, that my “strength was to sit still.” - Hannah Whitall Smith

Silence is not native to my world. Silence, more than likely, is a stranger to your world, too. If you and I ever have silence in our noisy heart, we are going to have to grow it... You can nurture silence in your noisy heart if you value it, cherish it, and are eager to nourish it.
- Wayne E. Oats, *Nurturing Silence in a Noisy Heart*, Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday.

i. A TIME OF LISTENING

“And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given.”
[Mk 4:24]

If we have been anxious and doubting in times of difficulty, we were not listening; if we had been listening, we would not be unduly troubled - “with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you”. If our response to suffering is negative, it is because our reception to God's voice is defective. We may be listening but we are not hearing much. Our wellbeing in the midst of our afflictions depends largely on our ability to hear well.

ELIJAH: “And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice... Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room... Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.”
[1 Kings 19:9-18]

At Mount Carmel, Elijah called down fires from above to consume the sacrifices. This was intended to prove to the backslidden Israelites that Jehovah is truly God. He did what the false prophets of Baal could not do. After which, he sincerely believed that God was going to send a revival to the nation of Israel. However, no such revival came. Instead, he found himself running from the wicked queen, Jezebel, who sought to kill him. Elijah was disillusioned, depressed and suicidal. He had great plans for Israel, but they were not God's plans. He had many preconceived ideas of how things should be done, but they were not part of the divine blueprint of God. He finally ended up in Horeb, the mount of God, having a "pity party", sorry that he was the last "specimen" of the "godly human species" heading for extinction. He thought that God's world was out of control - evil seemed to prevail over good. And above all, he had failed God.

God had to first demonstrate His awesome power by sending 'a strong wind that shattered a mountain', an earth-shaking tremor, and a terrifying fire storm. He could have used all these elements to destroy the wicked and accomplish His work, but instead, He chose to use the 'still, small voice' to teach His children precious lessons, navigate them through life's "unchartered waters", and guide them to fulfill His eternal purpose - "and after the fire a still small voice... Go... anoint Hazael to be king over Syria... and Elisha... shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room..." God foreknew the nation of Israel would not repent; His other works must go on. Besides, He had His other seven thousand faithful followers - "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal..." God's foundation stands sure even in the most difficult times - "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his..." (2 Tim 2:19) We tend to imagine the deliverances of God in times of trouble are through some extraordinary, dramatic interventions, but, more often than not, the way out is

through our taking heed to the “still, small, but sure voice” of God. He will guide us through our trials, troubles, tribulations, and bring us to our safe haven, if we choose to listen, and to listen carefully - “And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.” (Isa 30:21)

Experience has taught me that the Shepherd is far more willing to show His sheep the path than the sheep are to follow. He is endlessly merciful, patient, tender, and loving. If we... really want to be led, we will without fail be led. Of that I am sure. - Elisabeth Elliot

One of the most difficult tasks for us to do is to listen. Husbands don't listen to their wives; children don't pay attention to their parents; and believers are nearly deaf to the pleadings of the Lord. Our greatest obstacle to receiving the divine instruction and comfort of God in affliction is ourselves - our preconceived ideas, our deep-seated, fixed mindset. God wants to help us, but very often He cannot because we do not allow Him to do so. It is said that our skull is about a quarter inch thick, but it is difficult for God's words to get through it. We can listen to preaching on the purpose of suffering a hundred times but, more often than not, we are not hearing anything. If we are, then why are we so anxious, upset and troubled when things turn out otherwise? God can try us countless times and we will still doubt His love, worry ourselves sick, and behave like the lost who have no heavenly Father to care for them. Look at the multitudes of believers who are living in constant fear and insecurity when their world caves in. How many trusting believers are there who can handle their calamities calmly and manifest an unwavering faith in an unchanging God? Our quality of life in affliction depends on our ability to hear well the voice of God amidst the clamoring voices of defeat and despair.

In a seminar, the speaker was trying to impress upon the crowd how we generally see better than we can hear. He asked the people to follow his actions by first waving one of their hands in the air, and then, with the same hand, touch their chin. However, as he was asking them to touch their chins, he deliberately moved his hand to touch his own cheek instead. The crowd ended up touching their cheeks instead of their chins as they followed him visually, but not audibly. They were not paying much attention to the word “chin”. We tend to see better than we can hear. We often see the problems of the world, but it is hard for us to hear the promises of God.

LISTENING WITHOUT PREOCCUPATION

“Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.” [Eccl 5:1]

“Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth...” [1 Sam 3:9]

Sad to say, many would prefer to say, “Hear, Lord; thy servant speaketh,” instead of, “Speak, Lord; thy servant heareth.” Then they wonder why God is not speaking to them. It is hard to listen to God when we are doing all the talking.

Lord, teach me to listen. The times are noisy and my ears are weary with the thousand raucous sounds which continuously assault them. Give me the spirit of the boy Samuel when he said to Thee, “Speak, for Thy servant heareth.” Let me hear Thee speaking in my heart. Let me get used to the sound of Thy voice, that its tones may be familiar when the sounds of earth die away and the only sound will be the music of Thy speaking. Amen. - A. W. Tozer

There is hardly ever a complete silence in our soul. God is whispering to us well-nigh incessantly. Whenever the sounds of the world die out in the soul, or sink low, then we hear these whisperings of God. He is always whispering to us, only we do not always hear, because of the noise, hurry, and distraction which life causes as it rushes on. - Frederick W. Faber

God sometimes shuts the door and shuts us in, that He may speak, perchance through grief or pain, and softly, heart to heart, above the din, may tell some precious thought to us again. - Anon

There was a wise old owl.
The more he heard, the less he spoke.
The less he spoke, the more he heard.

LISTENING WITHOUT PREJUDICE

MOSES: “And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you... Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them... I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites... unto a land flowing with milk and honey... And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand. And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go.” [Exod 3:14-20]

“And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? why is it that thou hast sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast thou delivered thy people at all. Then the LORD said unto Moses, Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh: for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land.” [Exod 5:22-6:1]

At the burning bush, God commissioned Moses to free the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage. At the same time, He reminded Moses that Pharaoh would not let Israel go until He had sent His plagues upon the Egyptians. When Moses announced to Pharaoh God's intention to free His people, Pharaoh doubled their labors and made life even more unbearable for them. The Israelites complained to Moses, and Moses complained to God. Moses' trouble was that he was not listening - God had already forewarned him of Pharaoh's stubbornness and initial refusal to free the Israelites. If he had been paying careful attention to God, he would not be anxious and troubled when Pharaoh refused to release the Jews. Instead, he would probably have "taken a day off and gone fishing", until Pharaoh was ready to obey God. Imagine what a care-free life we could have if we were to just listen!

NAMAAN: "So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean. But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." [2 Kings 5:9-11]

Namaan, the Syrian general, was a leper seeking to be healed of his leprosy through the prophet Elisha. When told the way of God's healing would be to dip himself seven times in the river Jordan, he was terribly upset. He had his own ideas as to what Elisha should do to heal him. He expected Elisha to call on the name of God and strike his hand on the place where the leprosy was and heal it. But God's solution to his impossible situation was just too simple. He was to dip himself seven times in the river Jordan. Namaan's prejudice or his "behold, I thought" was his greatest obstacle to God's healing him of his

leprosy. It was only when he got over his preconceived notion of how things should be done that he was healed - "Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." (2 Kings 5:14)

God's help and solution to our complex problems are sometimes just too simple to believe - salvation by faith, instead of work; surrendering, instead of striving; trusting, instead of trying; and simple obedience, instead of endless questioning.

A lot of marital problems are irresolvable because we just cannot get over our prejudices of how they can be overcome. Tell a lady God's way to have her husband love her more is to be submissive to him and she will give you an incredulous look. "Me! Submitting to my husband in all things! You've got to be kidding! Why, I will be treated like a doormat!" will be the usual reply to God's simple but workable solution to the many marital conflicts in our homes. The reason why most men find it hard to love their wives is because their wives have made themselves unlovable by their over-bearing and domineering spirit. Likewise, most men find it unbelievable that their sincere, creative, loving care for their wives will make a difference in their marriage. Yet, these are the two main pillars in the Christian home which are designed to give us a blessed family: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." (Eph 5:22-25) Most of our marital problems are rerun because we just can't get over our prejudices as to how they should be resolved.

Once, we were on the island of Tioman, Malaysia, reputed to be one of the world's ten most beautiful islands. While playing in the water near the seashore, one of our young men accidentally stepped on a sea urchin. While he was grimacing in pain, we were all anxiously putting our heads together as to how we were going to get those spines out of his sole. In the end, a frail, elderly Malay lady from the village came by and offered her help. Her solution: to use a little piece of wood to get those spines out. To us, this seemed far-fetched. Undaunted, she used the stick to gently tap on the skin beside where the spines went in, and incredibly as it may sound, those embedded spines came out one by one. The tapping on the sole beside where the spines went in actually pushed them out. It looked impossible, but it worked! We were glad we put away our prejudices and skepticism. And above all, we need to put away our preconception concerning God's way to the healing of our hurts - "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isa 55:8-9)

In the midst of our dark and foggy times, all sorts of voices are shouting orders into the night, telling us what to do, how to adjust our lives. Out of the darkness, one voice signals something quite opposite to the rest - something almost absurd. But the voice happens to be the Light of the World, and we ignore it at our peril. - Paul Aiello, Jr.

LISTENING WITHOUT PRETENCE

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." [Jas 1:22]

"And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness." [Ezek 33:31]

Why is God silent to us? Sometimes, it is because He wants to try our faith and teach us to trust where we are not permitted to see. But there is also the other possibility that He is not speaking to us - we are not prepared to obey Him whatever His will for us may be in affliction. To those who seek to listen and follow Him, even the silence of God speaks volumes.

Once there was a preacher who began his sermon by giving an invitation first. The altar call was: "If you are willing to do all that God asks you to do today, whatever that may be, will you please indicate by an uplifted hand." Very few hands were raised. That spoke volumes. Most of us want to hear God's Word to consider it, not necessarily to do it. And then we wonder why there are no permanent solutions to our perennial problems.

ii. **A TIME OF LEARNING**

"... and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples." [Mk 4:34]

"But as it is written, 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 Cor 2:9]

"The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant." [Psa 25:14]

Time alone with God is class time. It is a time of learning under the greatest Teacher of all time, God. The Lord has so much in store for us if we are willing to slow down and learn in the midst of our suffering. He greatly desires to burn those invaluable, precious lessons deep into our hearts as He teaches us in the quietness of the spirit "precept upon precept; line upon line" the "things prepared from eternity past" for those who love Him.

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

Knowledge and experiences are accumulative. Every lesson learned, every skill mastered, and every experience gleaned will prepare us to better handle the next trial, the next setback. We grow in confidence and restfulness as we learn to accept those “divine inevitables” as from a Father’s hand, knowing that they are uniquely designed for our ultimate good. A well-prepared Daniel feared God more than he feared the lions; a thoroughly-trained Job saw God in all things; a long-instructed Paul could not be dissuaded by “stripes, slanders or shipwrecks” to preach the gospel to the known world. All these men of God had spent long hours in the Lord’s presence and had such deep experiences with Him that the problems of the world pale into insignificance in comparison to what He intended to do through each one of them. These suffered gainfully in the furnace of affliction, grew mightily through each successive trial, and accomplished much in troublous times.

It can be a nerve-wrecking experience when we first learn how to drive. We have to grapple with the mechanisms of the vehicle - the accelerator, brakes, signal lights - as well as to navigate through the maze of unfamiliar roads and the numerous traffic lights. On top of that, we are expected to recognize the roads and landmarks, and be familiar with the shortest route to our destination. I am sure all of us can remember how difficult it was when we first learned to drive. But after we got the hang of it, driving became a breeze.

When we have mastered the lessons of faith, trust and patience in the midst of suffering, we will find handling life’s adversity less stressful and more manageable. We learn to slow down at God’s “amber light”; to stop when He says, “stop”; and to move on when He gives us the “green light”. When maneuvering through the places of sadness and sorrow, we are not too bothered by the occasional

“heavy traffic”, “detours” and “delays”, knowing that it is a matter of time before we get out of the “divine congestion” which is designed for the trying of our faith.

We learn to follow God's “speed limits” - to move along slowly in the “built-up areas” of tears and troubles, and to speed away happily in the “freeways” of His blessings and favors. In the journey of life, we learn to take breaks at God's “rest points”, and appreciate the picturesque, breathtaking sceneries of His timely comfort and marvelous deliverances. Every “pothole” of sin we run into teaches us to avoid it the next time round. Every journey through a particular route makes the next trip easier. When we are lost, we turn to God's “map” or His Word, to get our bearings again. And above all, He is with us all the time to show us the way to our divine destinations: the maturing of our thoughts in trouble, the development of our character in affliction, and the ordering of our inner life when our outer world doesn't make sense at all.

In no time we will be familiar with landmarks like: “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.” (Pro 3:5); “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.” (1 Pet 5:7); “... I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” (Heb 13:5); “In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” (Pro 3:6); “... let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” (Jas 1:4); and “... all things work together for good to them that love God...” (Rom 8:28)

And by and by, “negotiating through” God's appointed afflictions for our good will be more pleasurable and less stressful - “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.” (2 Cor 12:10)

b. THE SANCTUARY IN SOLITUDE

“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.”
[Psa 91:1-16]

In the secret of God’s tabernacle no enemy can find us, and no troubles can reach us. The pride of man and the strife of tongues find no entrance into the pavilion of God. The secret of his presence is a more secure refuge than a thousand Gibaltars. I do not mean that no trials come. They may come in abundance, but they cannot penetrate into the sanctuary of the soul, and we may dwell in perfect peace even in the midst of life’s fiercest storms. - Hannah Whitall Smith, *The God of all Comfort*, Whitaker House.

I. LIKE A RIVER GLORIOUS

Hidden in the hollow of His blessed hand,
 Never foe can follow, never traitor stand;
 Not a surge of worry, not a shade of care,
 Not a blast of hurry touch the spirit there.

Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are fully blest
 Finding, as He promised, perfect peace and rest.

- Frances R. Havergal

- ii. "In the shadow of his hand hath he hid me..." (Isa 49:2)
 What a beautiful picture of the loving, nurturing care with which God surrounds His children. It is as though the hand of God were cupped over each of us, forming its protective shield against all danger, affording us shelter from the blazing heat of adversity. Because we are hidden in the shadow of His hand, no foe can alarm us, no harm can befall us. Under His protecting hand we are safe from every evil that would assail us. The shadow of His hand affords peace and rest... removes from us our every burden of guilt and shame... restores our souls and renews our hearts. - Anon
- iii. There is what is called the "cushion of the sea". Down beneath the surface that is agitated by storms, and driven about with winds, there is a part of the sea that is never stirred... The peace of God is that eternal calm which, like the cushion of the sea, lies far too deep down to be reached by any external trouble or disturbance; and he who enters into the presence of God becomes partaker of that undisturbed and 'undisturbable' calm. - Dr. A. T. Pierson
- iv. Katherine Bevis tells how among the students at a well-known college there was a young man who had to get about on crutches. He had an unusual talent for friendliness and optimism and so won the deep respect of his classmates. One day a student asked him what had caused his deformity. "Infantile paralysis," he replied briefly, not wishing to elaborate on his difficulties. "With a misfortune like that, how can you face the world so?" inquired his classmate. "Oh", replied the young Christian, smiling, "the disease never touched my heart."

- v. There is an inner world and an outer world. If our inner world is in order, our outer world will be well managed. If our inner world is in chaos, our outer world will be a mess. Our problems in life are never on the outside, but always on the inside. The reason why we are easily anxious, fearful or troubled when difficulty looms on the horizon is because our inner life has never been in order. We “lost the battle before the battle”. Spiritually, mentally, emotionally, we are bankrupt - we are not ready for the trials, traumas and tribulation that will surely come our way. Our best defense mechanism is usually “hoping against hope” that nothing untoward will happen to us in this earthly life; but that is just wishful thinking. And when they do happen, our minds are often in turmoil, our hearts restless, and our spirits crushed. Our Lord Jesus, on numerous occasions, bemoaned the shallowness of the inner life of His disciples in the face of trouble: “Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?” (Mk 4:40) “Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?” (Lk 24:38) If we have been in constant fellowship with the Lord, our thoughts will be clear, our convictions strengthen, our love deepens, our faith grows, and we will be better prepared for the eventualities that will come to try our hearts. All our problems will come from the outer world to our inner world; and all our solutions will move from our inner world to the outer world. It is in our inner world that the battle is won or lost. As the saying goes, “Crisis does not make or break a man; it reveals what is in the man.” What we are in private is what we are in public - “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.” (Pro 23:7)
- vi. Finally, some people are simply raised in an environment where drivenness is a way of life... They only knew how to win, how to accumulate... To such people an ordered private world has little meaning. The only thing worth giving attention to is the public world, where things can be measured, admired, and used... But one thing is sure in all cases: driven people will never enjoy the tranquility of an ordered private world. Their prime targets are all external, material, and measurable. Nothing else seems real; nothing else makes much sense. And it all must be held onto... - Gordon MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World*, Moody Press.

vii. Not in the tumult of the rending storm,
 Not in the earthquake or devouring flame;
 But in the hush that could all fear transform,
 The still, small whisper to the prophet came.

O Soul, keep silence on the mount of God,
 Though cares and needs throb around thee like a sea;
 From supplications and desires unshod,
 Be still, and hear what God shall say to thee.

O rest, in utter quietude of soul,
 Abandon words, leave prayer and praise awhile;
 Let thy whole being, hushed in His control,
 Learn the full meaning of His voice and smile.

Not as an athlete wrestling for a crown,
 Not taking Heaven by violence of will;
 But with thy Father as a child sit down,
 And know the bliss that follows His "Be Still!"

- Mary Rowles Jarvis

viii. There's a pause that is better than onward rush,
 Better than hewing or mightiest doing;
 'Tis the standing still at Sovereign will.

There's a hush that is better than ardent speech,
 Better than sighing or wilderness crying;
 'Tis the being still at Sovereign will.

The pause and the hush sing a double song
 In unison low and oft' all time long.
 O human soul, God's working plan
 Goes on, nor needs the aid of man!
 Stand still, and see!
 Be still, and know!

- V. Raymond Edman, *The Disciplines of Life*, Wheaton,
 IL: Scripture Press.

ix. I think the devil has made it his business to monopolize
 on three elements: noise, hurry, crowds... Satan is quite
 aware of the power of silence. - Jim Elliot

c. THE SIGHT IN SOLITUDE

“When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.” [Psa 73:16-17]

i. IN UNDERSTANDING INACTION

“But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked... They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men... Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches... Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning. If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors.” [Psa 73:2-19]

Asaph was puzzled as to why the wicked prospered and the righteous suffered. Wickedness seemed to triumph over good. We too, have witnessed some of our unbelieving friends having it good. They drank, smoked, cursed, swore and did all kinds of ungodly things, and yet they were not punished. Suddenly, the Word of God did not seem to match up with reality. Is God real? Is the Bible true? Then why were there no retribution for sins?

Asaph was terribly confused until he entered the sanctuary of God. In his quiet time, he understood it all. God was sealing the destiny of the ungodly by intoxicating them with uninterrupted comfort, success and pleasures until the judgment day when, like finishing a game of Monopoly, they have to

'pack up' all their 'temporal assets' and head for a Christless eternity. These "untroubled sinners" will suddenly awake in terror and slip straight into the jaws of hell where their souls will be tormented day and night forever and ever: "But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." (Lk 16:25) In eternity, all wrongs will be made right - "Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not." (Mal 3:18)

ii. IN UNDERSTANDING INJUSTICE

"So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power..." [Ecc 4:1]

One of the nagging thoughts in the deep recesses of our minds and an inevitable question that will frequently be raised when we are witnessing to the lost is: "If God is all-powerful and all-loving, then why is there so much suffering in the world?" Such thinking, especially by the lost, can be summed up this way:

1. Evil and suffering exist in the world.
2. If God were all-powerful and all-loving, He could have prevented evil and suffering.
3. If there were an all-powerful, all-loving God, there would be no evil and suffering in the world.
4. God is therefore powerless, loveless or non-existent.
5. There is no God; and evil and suffering prove it. - Adapted

The implicit assumption in the minds of many is: If God is both powerful and good, why is there so much suffering, so much pain, so much heartache in the world? God is either good and not all-powerful, or He is powerful and not all good. You can't have it both ways. - Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God*, Navpress.

During the Second World War the British novelist, H. G. Wells, wrote, "If I felt there was an omnipotent God who looked down on battles and deaths and all the waste and horror of this war - able to prevent these things - doing them to amuse himself, I would spit in his empty face."

The Jewish author Elie Wiesel survived the Holocaust and in his deeply, moving book, *Night*, he told of some of its horrors - babies pitchforked as if they were bales of straw, children watching other children being hanged, and his mother and other members of his family thrown into a furnace fuelled by human bodies, while prisoners groaned, "Where is God? Where is he? Where can he be now?" When it was all over, Wiesel said that his experience 'murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust'.

In a wider context, the British art critic, Brian Sewell, confessed, "After watching a world gone mad with greed and aggression... I ceased to believe in God and abandoned faith and its observance." - John Blanchard, *Where is God when Things go Wrong?*, Evangelical Press.

Asking and answering these questions points us to what some will find the strangest of conclusions: the existence of evil points towards the existence of God, not away from it! Getting rid of God does not solve the problem of evil and suffering; it merely leaves us trapped in what someone has called it "that hopeless encounter between human questioning and the silence of the universe". - John Blanchard, *Where is God when Things go Wrong?*, Evangelical Press.

If there is no God, then we are just the random chance of the gathering together of atoms and molecules, and that begs the question: where did these groups of molecules get their moral values from? How can these inorganic, mindless molecules be able to distinguish right from wrong? How can a bunch of atoms acquire the ability to know what is wrong or sinful in the first place? Our innate, moral consciousness points to a Moral Being, God, and not away from Him. And some day, we have to give an account to Him for the things we do or not do.

If we are nothing but atoms and molecules organized in a particular way through the chance processes of evolution, then love, beauty, good and evil, free will, reason itself - indeed all that makes us human, raises us above the rest of the created order - lose their objectivity. Why should I love my neighbour, or go out of my way to help him? Rather, why should I not get everything I can for myself, trampling on whoever gets in my way? - Rodney Holder

How can we jump from atoms to ethics and from molecules to morality? If we are merely genetically programmed machines, how can we condemn anything as being 'evil', or commend anything as being 'good'? Why should we be concerned over issues of justice or fairness, or feel any obligation to treat other 'machines' with dignity or respect? When people respond to tragedy by asking, "How can there be a just God?" their question is logically flawed, as without Him words like 'just' and 'unjust' are purely matters of personal opinion. - John Blanchard, *Where is God when Things go Wrong?*, Evangelical Press.

**GOD IS NOT INDIFERENT TO OUR SUFFERING;
HE SUFFERS WITH US.**

At the end of time, billions of people were scattered on a great plain before God's throne. Most shrank from the brilliant light before them. But some groups near

the front talked heatedly - not with cringing shame but with belligerence. "Can God judge us?" "How can he know about suffering?" snapped a pert young brunette. She ripped open a sleeve to reveal a tattooed number from a Nazi concentration camp. "We endured terror... beating... torture... death!" In another group a black man lowered his collar. "What about this?" he demanded, showing an ugly rope burn. "Lynched for no crime but being black!" In another crowd, a pregnant school girl with sullen eyes murmured, "Why should I suffer? It wasn't my fault." Far out across the plain were hundreds of such groups. Each had a complaint against God for the evil and suffering he had permitted in his world. How lucky God was to live in heaven where all was sweetness and light, where there was no weeping or fear, no hunger or hatred! What did God know of all that men had been forced to endure in this world? "God leads a pretty sheltered life," they said. So each of these groups sent forth their leader, chosen because he had suffered the most - a Jew, a black, a person from Hiroshima, a horribly disabled arthritic, a thalidomide child. In the centre of the plain they consulted with each other. At last they were ready to present their case. It was rather clever. Before God could be qualified to be their Judge, he must endure what they had endured. Their verdict was that God should be sentenced to live on earth - as man! Let him be born a Jew. Let the legitimacy of his birth be doubted. Give him a work so difficult that even his family will think him out of his mind when he tries to do it. Let him be betrayed by his closest friends. Let him face false charges, be tried by a prejudiced jury and convicted by a cowardly judge. Let him die in agony. Let him die so that there can be no doubt that he died. Let there be a host of witnesses to verify it. As each leader announced the portion of his sentence, a loud murmur of approval went up from the throng of people assembled. When the last had finished pronouncing sentence there was a long silence. No one uttered another word. No one moved. For suddenly all knew that God had already served his sentence. - Adapted

THE LORD JESUS CHRIST: “As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men.” [Isa 52:14]

“... he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.” [Isa 53:1-7]

Christ died a horrendous death in the hands of sinful, wicked mankind for the crimes He did not commit; the sins He did not perpetuate; and the murders He did not enact. This He did out of a divine, fathomless love to save lost sinners from hell. He came to “taste death for every man” (Heb 2:9).

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” [Jn 3:16]

NOT TILL THEN

When this passing world is done,
 When has sunk yon glowing sun,
 When we stand with Christ in glory,
 Looking o'er life's finished story,
 Then, Lord, shall I fully know -
 Not till then - how much I owe. - Robert McCheyne

d. THE STRENGTH IN SOLITUDE

“... Their strength is to sit still.” [Isa 30:7]

“He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” [Isa 40:29-31]

- i. I do not believe that we have begun to understand the marvelous power there is in stillness. We are in such a hurry - we must be doing - so that we are in danger of not giving God a chance to work. You may depend upon it; God never says to us, “Stand still,” or “Sit still,” or “Be still,” unless He is going to do something. - *Crumbs*
- ii. There is immense power in stillness. A great saint once said, “All things come to him who knows how to trust and be silent.” The words are pregnant with meaning. A knowledge of this fact would immensely change our ways of working. Instead of restless struggles, we would “sit down” inwardly before the Lord, and would let the divine forces of His Spirit work out in silence the ends to which we aspire. You may not see or feel the operations of this silent force, but be assured it is always working mightily, and will work for you, if you only get your spirit still enough to be carried along by the currents of its power. - Hannah Whitall Smith
- iii. We all know how impossible it is to rescue a drowning man who tries to help his rescuer, and it is equally impossible for the Lord to fight our battles for us when we insist upon trying to fight them ourselves. It is not that He will not, but He cannot. Our interference hinders His working. - Adapted
- iv. It is said that if a nuclear submarine were to spring a leak in the bottom of the ocean, the tremendous water pressure would crush its hull like a tin can. At the same time, we will find all kinds of fishes and

sea creatures swimming happily alongside the submarine. Why? The reason is that the pressure inside these sea creatures is equal to that on the outside. Whenever we feel overwhelmed by the tribulations of this world, the 'stress' without is greater than the 'strength' within. In times like these, we need to slow down, spend time with God, turn our eyes heavenwards to Him, be filled with His Spirit, and experience His all-sufficient grace to withstand the storms of life that seek to tear us apart and drown us in sorrow and despair. That 'divine strength' inside us is both promised and available if we are willing to move over into 'the inner chamber', 'the sanctuary of our soul', 'the divine center' - the place of solitude with God where we become "one with Him". In that blissful, restful union with the Lord, there is no burden we cannot carry, no sorrow we cannot bear, and no grief we cannot endure because, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." (Phil 4:13)

- v. "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." [2 Cor 4:7-10]
- vi. Is there not something captivating in the sight of a man or a woman burdened with many tribulations and yet carrying a heart as sound as a bell? Is there not something contagiously valorous in the vision of one who is greatly tempted, but is more than conqueror? Is it not heartening to see some pilgrim who is broken in body, but who retains the splendor of an unbroken patience? What a witness all this offers to the enduement of His grace! - Dr. John H. Jowett
- vii. In solitude, on wings of prayer
My soul ascends before the throne;
My only hope of strength is where
My heart and God's meet all alone. - Anon

e. THE SERENITY IN SOLITUDE

Some of the disturbing questions in the midst of our sufferings are: “Why is God not real to me?” “Where are the joy, peace and rest promised in the Bible?” “How is it that I do not experience it’s reality when I need it most?” No matter how much we know or how long we have been a Christian, we need to spend time with God or we will never taste the promise of comfort in the Scriptures - the serenity in the storms.

i. THE JOY IN SADNESS: “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing...” [2 Cor 6:10]

Our human minds can only perceive joy that comes from some sort of accomplishment or the accumulation of great wealth. We find happiness in a fat bank account or the sudden promotion in a job. It is almost inconceivable that joy can be found in the soil of hardship and suffering. Yet, in the Christian context, such unspeakable joy exists when we, by “choice or chance”, find ourselves in the perfect will of God in affliction where the presence and joy of the Lord in us far outweighs the loads we are called to carry. We can be in a strange state of mind where sorrow and joy coexist side by side, or as Paul put it, “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing”.

When I first entered the fulltime ministry, the circumstance was such that I did not have regular support but had to 'live by faith'. I witnessed the little saving I had dwindled down to almost nothing. There came a day when all I had was just a twenty-cent coin in my pocket. Instead of being depressed, I was in an exalted state of unexplainable joy and lightness of heart. In the place of the usual worrying, I found myself rejoicing and praising God for my dire needs. That was over some thirty years back. Today, I am blessed with a family of four children with all my needs taken care of till this day. I must confess that some of my greatest moments of experiencing the special, divine joy from above came from my “hours

of need” rather than from “times of comfort”. That wonderful joy in affliction is found only in our solitude with God where the Bible becomes alive - “Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” (Psa 16:11)

- ii. **THE REST IN HEAVINESS:** “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” [Mt 11:28-30]

I wonder why the easiest thing in the Christian life is the most difficult? I wonder why I work by a guttering candle when there is an electric light switch within easy reach of my hand? The answer, of course, is that I don't. I am not so foolish - except in one direction, and that is Godward. In our spiritual life many of us seem to be content struggling along with all the poor primitive resources of a weak, human nature, while all the infinite power of the Godhead is at our disposal. There is no condition of human nature, no circumstance of human life, that is not completely provided for in the all-embracing love of our Father God; yet the vast majority of His children struggle along life's road, bearing burdens that He is eager to carry, and has urged them to entrust to Him. I wonder why?

It should be an easy thing, an alluring thing, a thrilling thing to talk to God, to hold converse with Christ. Yet, strange to relate, prayer is the most neglected of all the Christian ministries. The most perfunctory, abbreviated and oftentimes omitted exercise of many a Christian's life is the prayer-time. I wonder why?

Perhaps the difficulty lies in its very ease, its utter simplicity. Just to kneel at your bedside, and with the old abandon of childhood and the same

unquestioning faith, leave all burdens and cares and needs with the Father! How childlike, but how difficult! How hard to relax; to spare an hour or even half that time out of our busy, rushing, worried lives, and go quietly to our room, shut the door and be still in His presence! How hard to divest ourselves of our sophistication, of our self-consciousness and self-centeredness, and ever-present feeling that I have to face and meet and shoulder all these cares and responsibilities! How hard just to be a child again, and with a great, happy sigh, settle down carefree at His feet, perfectly assured that He careth; that the government is upon His shoulder. - A. Stuart M'Nairn

To every toiling, heavy-laden sinner, Jesus says, "Come to me and rest". But there are many toiling, heavy-laden believers, too. For them this same invitation is meant. Note well the words of Jesus, if you are heavy-laden with your service, and do not mistake it. It is not, "Go, labor on," as perhaps you imagine. On the contrary, it is stop, turn back, "Come to me and rest." Never, never did Christ send a heavy laden one to work; never, never did He send a hungry one, a weary one, a sick or sorrowing one, away on any service. For such the Bible only says, "Come, come, come." - James Hudson Taylor

In the quietness of the soul, we will find the much-needed rest we are seeking for as we learn to look at things 'in totality' and not 'in parts'. Whatever we fear, whatever we are unsure of, they have been taken care of from eternity past. The God of details has not left out anything. Every sparrow of the sky and every lily in the field testify of his faithfulness and care. He foresees what we need and He provides ahead of time - "For we which have believed do enter into rest... the works were finished from the foundation of the world." (Heb 4:3)

When filled with holy truth the mind rests. - C. H. Spurgeon

- iii. **THE PEACE IN TRIBULATION:** "... in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation..." [Jn 16:33] "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee." [Isa 26:3] "LORD, thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us." [Isa 26:12]

Life is meant to be lived from a Center, a divine Center. Each one of us can live such a life of amazing power and peace and serenity, of integration and confidence and simplified multiplicity, on one condition - that is, if we really want it. - Thomas Kelly

All of our unrest comes from our "going against the grain" and wanting things our way. Only time alone with God will help us to 'let go' and desire only what God wants in our lives - "Or let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me." (Isa 27:5) It is only when we desire what God desires every moment of our lives and in every thing that befalls us that we will have the perfect peace of God in the midst of the 'perfect storm' of life.

Knowing that we are fulfilling God's purpose is the only thing that really gives rest to the restless human heart. - Charles Colson

SWEET HOUR OF PRAYER

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
That calls me from a world of care,
And bids me at my Father's throne
Make all my wants and wishes known.
In seasons of distress and grief,
My soul has often found relief
And oft escaped the tempter's snare
By thy return, sweet hour of prayer!

- William Walford

THE CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER

John Foster Dulles asked Charles de Gaulle, “What are your plans for solving the Algerian problem?” Replied de Gaulle, “One doesn’t solve problems. One learns to live with them.”

The Scriptures gives us similar instruction. There will be no end to the troubles in this sin-cursed world. As long as we are living, we will experience suffering. We do not “solve problems”, we learn instead to live victoriously amidst the tribulation of this world. The Lord Jesus admonished us in like manner, “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33).

The key to overcoming our earthly suffering is a paradigm shift. We need to move over from one extreme to the other: from fearing suffering to favoring it; from avoiding affliction to welcoming it; and from hating tribulation to accepting it, knowing that it is always intended for our good. Until that transformation is complete, we will have no true rest or victory in our lives.

A PARADIGM SHIFT IN PRIORITY

A preacher once said, “Life is not about me, but about God.” That statement sums up in a nutshell the premise of our happiness or misery in affliction. We suffer so much from our troubles because we think that life is all about us. To many, life revolves around us - what we can gain or what we will lose. If life is just one consistent attempt to please the One who saved us, to desire to do nothing less than His perfect will, and to exalt only His wonderful Name, then what happens to us is inconsequential. Sad to say, to many, life is just one big miserable 'ALL ABOUT ME!' Much of our unhappiness in suffering can be inevitably traced to this self-centeredness. In the face of death, our Lord Jesus' concern was: “... not my will, but thine, be done.” (Lk 22:42) His courage and accomplishment in affliction was born out of a love to please the One who loved Him. Or as like one soldier's response to certain death in battle: “It is necessary for me to go; it is not necessary for me to live.” Strange to say, we stand to gain the most when our focus is to glorify God in the midst of our suffering - “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Mt 6:33)

A PARADIGM SHIFT IN PERCEPTION

Why is a problem a problem? A problem is a problem because we see it as a problem and nothing more. A problem will cease to be a problem if we can look at it from a totally different angle - to be able to see beyond the heartaches, miseries, pains... to a loving God, His perfect plans, and the bountiful 'treasures of darkness' (Isa 45:3) awaiting those who will faithfully 'trust and obey' till the end. The key is our perception of suffering. If we see it 'rightly', we will respond 'rightly'; if we perceive it 'wrongly', we will react 'wrongly'. Our perception is crucial to our acceptance or rejection of suffering.

If we can see the bigger picture and comprehend the higher purpose of God in suffering, we will be at rest with all the trials and tribulations that have been carefully placed along our way for our good. If we cannot see beyond that, we will be of all men most miserable. Our minds cannot think 'out of the box' in affliction. For the most part, we are 'trapped' in our fallacious expectation of what life should be: life has to be good and affliction is definitely bad. We tend to see things, not as they are, but as we are.

What a transformation it will be if we can see that suffering is: a chosen tool in the hands of God to fashion and perfect us; a rare moment to be educated in God's school of higher learning; a means to obtain the desires of our hearts; a stepping stone to a higher and happier life; and a path to a deeper experience with God. If we can see suffering in that light, see it as a divine blessing in disguise, it will cease to be a problem but become a welcome opportunity to be all that God wants us to be and be blessed with all that He desires us to have. If we cannot see suffering in that light, then the trials of life will be just one unwelcome misery after another. The secret is not to 'look at', but to 'look beyond' suffering to the blessed 'afterwards' - "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; 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." (Heb 12:2)

Life is what we make it,
Always has been,
Always will be. - Grandma Moses

THE TRUTH ABOUT TROUBLE

Every suffering is for a season,
And every affliction has a reason.
Trouble is designed to perfect
The lack in every man.
Misery is reward unrecognized,
And earthly losses are heavenly gains.
Adversity is in reality, God's perfect plan,
To mold and bless, the man He made.
To give to him, who in distress,
His very best.

So let us trust and be at rest,
With the test, which God intends to bless.
Lest we miss His very best.

--- Yan T. Wee ---

A PARADIGM SHIFT IN PREDISPOSITION

The intended goal of this book is to help us confidently face and overcome suffering in the way that God wants us to. Instead of timidly fearing it, we learn to boldly face it; and instead of inwardly hating it, we look forward to profit from it. Our approach is not one of 'looking for trouble', but one where the believer is more than willing to receive the trials of life as gifts from a Father's hands. We know that it is in love that He tries us and we, in turn, with love, desire to glorify Him even in the most severe trials He sends along our way. We are not called to be on the defensive in suffering, but rather to be on the offensive. Such convictions are only found in the solitude of the soul and forged in the furnace of affliction; and if we have them, we can look forward to a great life in Christ despite the tribulations of this world. It is then that we can live in total abandonment to the perfect will of God for us in suffering, always trusting in His unerring wisdom and guidance. Come what may and we can, as the Scriptures has commanded us, be of good courage as well as of good cheer. As with Paul, we can boldly proclaim, "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy..." (Acts 20:24). "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions..." (2 Cor 12:10)

A church secretary was once diagnosed with a fatal illness. At the same time, her husband lost his job. The pastor of the church came by to lovingly reassure her of his concerns and constant prayers for her. In the ensuing conversation, she inquired of him, "Pastor, how are you praying for me?" "I am praying that God will give you the strength to go through all this," replied the pastor. "Please pray that I will not foul up the trial of God," she added. This godly lady was devastated but not defeated. She recognized that her ordeal, like Job's, was no accident, but a crucial moment for her to prove herself and exercise her faith in God. May her sincere request be our prayer in the midst of our perplexing trials - **"Pray that I will not foul up the trial of God"**.

A ROSEBUD

It is only a tiny rosebud,
A flower of God's design.
But I cannot unfold the petals,
With the clumsy hands of mine.

The secret of unfolding flowers,
Is not known to such as I.
God opens His flowers so sweetly,
When in my hands they fade and die.

If I cannot unfold a rosebud,
This flower of God's design.
Then how can I think I have wisdom,
To unfold this life of mine.

So I'll trust Him for His leading,
Each moment of the day.
I'll look to Him for His guidance,
Each step of this pilgrim's way.

The pathway that lies before me,
Only my heavenly Father knows.
I'll trust Him to unfold the moments,
Just as He unfolds the rose.

--- Author Unknown ---

Black Hen Lays White Egg

The egg is white enough, though the hen is black as a coal. This is a simple thing but it can cheer us when things have gone hard with us. Out of evil comes good, through the great goodness of God.

From threatening clouds we get refreshing showers; in dark mines men find bright jewels and so from our worst troubles come our best blessings. The rough winds fasten the roots of the old oaks. God sends us letters of love in envelopes with black borders.

Many a time have I plucked sweet fruit from bramble-bushes, and taken lovely roses from among prickly thorns. Trouble is to believing men and women as sweetbrier in our hedges, and where it grows there is a delicious smell all around, if the dew but falls upon it from above.

Cheer up, mates, all will come right in the end. The darkest night will turn to a fair morning in due time. Only let us trust in God, and keep our heads above the waves of fear. When our hearts are right with God everything is right. Let us look for the silver which lines every cloud, and when we do not see it, believe that it is there. We are all at school, and our great Teacher writes many a bright lesson on the blackboard of affliction.

Scant fare teaches us to live on heavenly bread, sickness bids us send off for the good Physician, loss of friends makes Jesus more precious, and even the sinking of our spirits brings us to live more entirely upon God. All things are working together for the good of those who love God, and even death itself will bring them their highest gain. Thus the black hen lays a white egg.

--- Charles Haddon Spurgeon ---

A PERSONAL NOTE

All the suffering of this world put together is nothing compared to the suffering in hell for all eternity. It is said that he who provides for this life, but takes no care for eternity, is wise for a moment, but a fool forever. Are you ready for eternity?

The Bible declares that we are sinners before a Holy God - "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Rom 3:23) In the eyes of God, there is none righteous or good - "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one." (Rom 3:10) "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags..." (Isa 64:6) Every man, like the moon, has a dark side which no one has seen, and which he hopes no one will ever see, especially God. If God exists, he is in trouble. For this reason, he subconsciously rejects God and labors to explain away His existence - "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." (Jn 3:19-20)

With sin comes the judgment of God - "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." (Heb 9:27) And with the judgment of God comes the revelation of all our sins - "... for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known." (Mt 10:26) The more righteous we are, the more we hate sins. God is absolutely righteous and He hates sins thoroughly - "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." (Psa 9:17) Pause for a moment and think of spending eternity in hell where there is no turning back, and no second chance. And hell is a prepared place for the unprepared - "And it came to pass, that... the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments... And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." (Lk 16:22-24)

As much as God is a God of justice, He is also a God of compassion and love. He wants to save us - "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (2 Pet 3:9) But the price of our salvation is the blood of the His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son..." (Jn 3:16) "But God commendeth his love toward us, in

that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom 5:8) Jesus Christ, the Son of God and God, the Son, came into this world some 2,000 years ago to die and pay for our sins. He died, was buried, and rose again bodily on the third day.

God has ordained a way for us to be saved, and that way is through our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ - “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Eph 2:8-9) “Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” (Acts 16:30-31)

Won't you repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ today? “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mk 8:36-37)

May I have the privilege to lead you to the Lord?

“Dear God, I know that I am a sinner. Please forgive me of all my sins and help me to forsake them. I thank you for sending the Lord Jesus Christ who died for my sins and rose again the third day. Now, I believe and accept the Lord Jesus Christ to be my Savior. Please help me to love and obey you from this day onwards. I thank you for saving me. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.”

“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” (Jn 1:12) “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” (Rom 10:9) There is no purgatory - “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.” (2 Cor 5:8)

It is not the magic of the words of this prayer, but the decision of your heart, that is going to save you. And if this decision of yours is sincere, you will grow to know the Lord, love Him more, and follow Him. We will eventually do what we truly believe in our hearts. Faith and works are like the light and heat of a candle; they cannot be separated.

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” (2 Cor 5:17)