

# *Suffering is for maturity in Christ*

We are to follow Jesus' example. Who is the always happy Christian who doesn't suffer when God's word says otherwise? From His word we see that God expects His children to suffer. *If indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.* Rom 8:17

*"Jesus was troubled in His spirit."* (John 13:21) The verb John uses for troubled in the Greek is *tarasso*, it means being agitated, disturbed, perplexed, or shaken up. "It is one of several terms the Gospel writers use to describe the turmoil Jesus experienced that night. It is a strong term, although not the strongest, for there is more to come."

Sinclair Ferguson

Although He was deeply troubled while looking forward to the suffering to be endured, He was also aware of the joy that was set before Him and He endured the cross. Heb 12:2

*We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.* Heb 4:15

Tempted. Greek. *πειράζω*: to make proof of, to attempt, test, tempt. From *peira*; to test (objectively), i.e. Endeavor, scrutinise, entice, discipline. Usage: assay, to examine, go about, prove, tempt(-er), try.

Jesus was tested in all things concerning faith in God as we are. "*Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.*" Isa 48:10

*Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.* James 1:2-4

In James 1:3 *testing of your faith*. Greek: *δοκίμιον*: a test, trial, what is genuine. In Heb 4:15 Greek. *Πειράζω*, tempted. But *Πειράζω* and *δοκίμιον* amount to the same thing, one comes as temptation from satan,

and the other as a test from God. Either way according to Martin Luthor “the devil is God’s devil.”

As a result of God’s testing, the Christian life is a life of a constant frustrating paradox. Death leads to life. Suffering results in joy. Humility brings godliness. If we want to grow in godliness, we must be willing to embrace the difficult path of the Lord Jesus Christ, who shows us the right way to glory. We have life in Christ by taking up our cross to follow Him. *We are to consider it all joy.* Trials are difficult, otherwise there would be no trial. At the time of our trials, we aren't full of joy for the trial, but we experience the result of joy in Christ that it brings about by faith through grace. The suffering is earthly, the joy is heavenly. *Consider it all Joy* means to consider suffering to be counted in our favour.

We may experience loss of some kind in the physical realm, but we have gained something more valuable in the spiritual realm. Consider it: GK *hégeomai*. to lead, to think, to be of opinion, to suppose, and consider. It is to see clearly, to evaluate or judge correctly. Joy, CK *chara*, means to be in our favour. This seeming paradox is just like GK *makarios*, Blessed, meaning happy. *"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."* Matt 5:10-12

No one is happy with persecution, ‘*makarios*’, but we can be happy because of the heavenly outcomes. When we are born to suffer with Christ, He ensures our joy will come with a deep conviction that everything will turn out for our good, no matter how bad things might get. Rom 8:28

### **Suffering joyfully is for maturity’s sake**

Believers will be able to count it all joy when their faith is tested because they know such tests will produce endurance. They will ask God for wisdom without doubting so that they will be able to pass through the

trials ordained by God for our good and receive the heavenly reward for a life of faithfulness. *'Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.'* James 1:12

*"Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."* Rev 2:10

*"This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life."* 1 John 2:25

*For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.* 1 John 5:4

The word used for "crown" is *stephanos*. In the original Greek Olympics, the winner of the sporting contests was awarded the *stephanos*, a laurel crown. The crown we look for may not be an actual crown or ring of leaves, but it will be some sort of special blessing, honour, privilege, or recognition in the future in the eternal reign of Jesus. By offering us this crown, Jesus encourages us to stay strong, keep the course, and remain faithful. Jesus gives the crown of life to those who persevere in faith through temptation, tribulation, and persecution. Therefore, the crown of life is a reward for a life well lived. It is an honour that Jesus bestows upon those who endure the trials and temptations of this life.

In James 1:12 the "*crown of life*" is given to the one who perseveres under trial, and in Rev 2:10 the "*crown of life*" is promised to those who overcome tribulation. In each instance the emphasis is on "*of life*." The crown or reward is in fact the life or the glory promised. *we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory.* 1 Cor 2:7

### **Suffering is multifaceted**

We suffer because we follow Christ. And we can suffer as a result of accidents, and from natural disaster and from opposition from

unbelievers. We can suffer when we see the devastation of sin in the lives of others. We suffer when we are misunderstood, or when we are falsely accused.

When we have a heart from God, we will grieve over our personal sin. (Ezek 36:31) We will grieve over the lives of our family who deny Christ. We will grieve for those who experience the impact of natural disaster, both the environmental disasters and illness. We will suffer daily if we are lifting up our sin, (Psalm 51:3) and for the sins of those who are lost.

We will suffer daily when we become aware of shortcomings in the church that is to reflect the life of the One who is its Head. We are not instructed to pretend that the pain we experience in suffering should be some imagined delight. We are not to pretend that trials are enjoyable and easy to endure. Endurance is needed because it's not easy.

At the time of our suffering, we need to see God is working for our good. (Rom 8:28) And we are not to assume that our experience is the same for all. Everyone in Christ suffers according to the preordained plan of God for them, so all do not suffer in the same way, or to the same extent.

There will be trials of various kinds. We will be grieved by various trials. We will go through many tribulations. But we have God. *then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials.* 2 Pet 2:9

### **Suffering is universal**

*For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.' Rom 8:22-25*

### **Suffering is a grace from God**

*For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are*

*beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps.* 1 Pet 2:19-21

*But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.* Heb 10:32-33

*For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.* Heb 10:36

### **Suffering follows the example of the Lord**

*“let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by Him. For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives.”*

Heb 12:1-6

### **Suffering is for our training in righteousness**

When we meet up with trials of various kinds, our faith testing calls on us to trust God when there doesn't seem to be any way out. We need to learn that God always has a way to overcome our indifference to sanctification. *For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.* Heb 12:11

Overcoming means looking to Jesus as our example. *fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him*

*endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* Heb 12:2

It is hypocrisy to pretend we are rejoicing when we feel we are being squeezed in on all sides. Our joy is often only realised only with 20/20 hindsight after suffering. *You have taken account of my wanderings; Put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book? In God I have put my trust, I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?* Psalm 56:8

Joy is also the eagerly looked for reality we will know when we go home to God. Because the outcome of joyfully accepting suffering is that we are made mature in the image of Christ.

### **Suffering is commanded**

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.* Rom 12:1

*“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.”* Luke 9:23

Self sacrifice as a ‘must’ but it’s not something we eagerly embrace, but without it we die. We crucify our former ways so that the life of Christ can shine in us. *For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*

Rom 8:13

In this world God's children suffer and struggle as they are tested to prove their faith to be most the valuable gift from God. Suffering is for our spiritual maturity and is therefore indispensable for the children of God.

*So that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

1 Pet 1:7-9

## **Suffering means blessing in glory**

*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.*

Rom 8:16-17

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Rom 8:35-39

## **Suffering trials may be close to home**

*For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; and A MAN’S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD.”*

Matt 10:35-36

When we are wounded by others speaking to us as if we are flesh, it is because we have not completely died to our former life in the flesh. We have not believed enough that Jesus has cleansed us from all sin. We have not fully believed He has set us free by paying the full price for our sin. We have not completely believed there is no condemnation for those in Christ. We have not yet accepted we are a new creation in the image of God's Son. We are in effect living in the past, so that all things concerning us are not new. Our minds have not been fully renewed.

Our suffering may be self inflicted. When we react with indignation and complain, it is often that we go on rehashing and wallowing in the past as if Christ has been ineffective in our salvation. We may even believe we are a special case because no one else has suffered exactly like us. We don't need others to condemn us in the flesh because we condemn ourselves. But all these trials are for our edification.

Our suffering can be because we are too busy crying foul, and we are too busy wanting to defend ourselves and claiming our rights to be loved. All because we haven't really believed we are loved by God as His own possession. And we haven't believed we are honoured and adopted into God's family by the Spirit of God. We haven't really believed we are clean, having been washed by the blood of Christ sacrificed in our place.

When we are easily wounded by the accusations of others it is because we still identify with the past and are not focused on the present life we have received from God in Christ. The past can have more power over us than the word of God. We cannot let the condemning words from others go because we still condemn ourselves. We need the renewing of our minds. Every need we have to defend ourselves, every wrong we take personally, are but a reminder that we have more of the flesh to put to death in ourselves. Our minds are not on the Spirit but on the flesh.

The world is a mirror for what remains in our concept of ourselves in the world. When we are offended by the inability of others to be true to God, we have been reminded by God as to what our options really are. In that we are not to return evil for evil, but respond as Christ who lives in us.

### **Suffering trials changes our mind**

When we are confronted by the accusations of others because we don't measure up to their expectations, we have the opportunity to make progress by living by faith and applying the love of Christ that covers a multitude of sin. We can overcome the test from God through trust and obedience. For us to overcome, we must believe God, we must believe His word, we must believe in His Son who is our life. *So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

John 8:31-32

When we suffer, God has not failed us. He is working out all this confusion together for our good. This struggle with the flesh of our unbelief is the work of our personal sanctification. We need the motivation of suffering to change our minds to reflect the mind of Christ.

Jesus has suffered in our place so that we can live the divine nature we have received from God. But, in order to be true to God who is at work in us, we must believe in the work of Jesus Christ, and give the flesh and the devil no more opportunity to go on deceiving us

When Jesus was wrongfully accused, He didn't open His mouth to complain, because He knew who He was as the Son of God, and He steadfastly trusted in the Father even though He lived in the valley of death for us

How easily do we say: *I have died, and I no longer live because Christ lives in me, and, Christ is our life*; and in complaining we show we haven't really believed this at all. Lord, help us in our unbelief.

### **Suffering trials litter the path to glory**

This path of suffering is also the preordained plan of God who never stops working out our salvation in the darkness of the world, as we work out the life of Christ that He is working in us, because we revere Him and want to honour Him because we love Him. And in all this work of God, He has assured us we are not alone. He dwells in us by His Spirit.

The Spirit has made us part of the body of Christ called the church. The Spirit has gifted everyone in the church with ability to build up one another in Christ, so that we can all do the work of God in relation to each other and those who are lost in the world. We need to look on other believers as the dwelling place of God.

We have Christ in us for the hope of glory. Oh Lord, may we remember this tomorrow. If the Lord Jesus was tested through trials for obedience, and Paul was constantly tested, why should we not be tested to prove our faithful obedience in trusting in God? In afflictions, hardships, distresses, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labours, sleeplessness, hunger, patience, by evil report, regarded as deceivers, unknown, dying, punished, sorrowful, poor, having nothing. All these are possibilities in the world that despises the Lord Jesus.

We can count all our trials to be leading to joy because of the hope set before us that we will be like Christ. *Beloved, now we are children of*

*God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.*

1 John 3:2

*and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,*

1 Pet 1:8

### **Suffering is God's Sovereign servant for our good**

Divinely appointed suffering hurts, even while we may be trusting God to manage all things well according to His wisdom, which will ultimately bring lasting peace. In Christ Jesus, suffering equals glory. On the one hand, if we think God didn't plan for us to suffer, then we have a weak God who is without power to overcome evil, and unable to keep us in the way of Jesus that He desires. Even a blind man can see that suffering is everywhere and unavoidable; so therefore, if God isn't in control of our suffering, then the God of the Bible isn't Sovereign over all the world.

On the other hand, the Sovereign God of the Bible knows all things and uses the suffering that comes as the result of sin to punish the sinner, and at the same time, to purify those He has chosen to rule one day with His Son in glory. Either way, Saint or sinner, suffering is inevitable because God is Sovereign.

*In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.*

Heb 6:17-18

The cause of our suffering is not simply the result of our circumstances, but what God in His wisdom has especially predestined for us personally before the foundation of the world. God is in our circumstances they are the means God uses to reveal the sinful ways we have stored in our hearts and minds through unbelief and disobedience. What upsets us most is what we think we have lost or don't have in the world, and that is a world that is passing away.

But we would never get upset when we know that we have received the Lord of the Universe, who Rules His eternal kingdom that will never pass away. Faith trusts in our King to always do what is right. So, we *“Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”* Matt 6:33-34

According to the life of the flesh we have a habit of worrying. But God commands that His people are not to worry or be anxious about anything.

When we are anxious and worrying, we must be disobeying God because we do not trust in Him who is Sovereign over all things, and has power over every circumstance to carry out His divine purpose, even the things I choose to worry about.

If we choose to follow our earthly feelings and worry, we place ourselves over God. When we worry, we declare God is without power and the world needs to be feared, so Jesus' words that He has overcome the world are untrue in us. John 16:33

Has God got authority over the fleshly habits that defy His will? "Yes" Then we must repent and surrender to His will and give up living according to the flesh so that we can live in peace in the kingdom of God.

*Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counsellor? Or who has first given to Him, that it would be paid back to him?*

Rom 11:33-35

In our ignorance the Lord is our helper. *“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.* 2 Cor 12:9

If we have been blessed with salvation and a new heart, we still need to undergo the painful transformation of our minds through God's selective pruning away that which contains sinful disease. Divinely appointed

suffering has the potential to bring us to repentance, and ultimately to complete the purification process leading to our glory.

If we have been chosen by God, we can take confidence from the fact that the suffering Lamb of God has prepared our way of redemption through divinely appointed suffering, and now reigns as King in heaven, even as He superintends our suffering by His Spirit living in us. The answer to our suffering is God Himself who lives in us by the Spirit.

### **Suffering is the evidence we are in the battle against darkness**

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armour of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armour of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.*

Eph 6:10-13

Everything in the world will be used by the devil to attempt to blind us to the glory of God in Christ, so that we don't trust in Him. We battle against darkness in service to the Lord of Light. If we are not aware of what is not like the light of Christ in us on a daily basis, we need to hand in our leave pass and man the ramparts and battlements. A good soldier doesn't enmesh himself in the affairs of the world. Our transformation into the image of Christ doesn't enjoy a leave pass.

We lose sight of the goal of the joy that is Christ when we make ourselves familiar with, and comfortable in the world. Christ is our joy and suffering is the means to enjoy Him more. So there is no spiritual joy without earthly suffering in dealing with what is fleshly in us. *For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.*

Gal 5:17

Walking by the Spirit is not just for Sunday, it is something we need to do daily, for it is only by the Spirit that we can put to death that which is

earthly in us. And the Spirit uses the corruption of the world as the crucible for our perception. As an unbeliever there was no war between the flesh and the spirit, for we were not then interested in being transformed into the image of Christ. We didn't suffer from the normal corruption of the world because we hardened our hearts, we only suffered when unexpected calamity came our way.

We once gave into temptation in our inner being, now we are confronted with temptation to give way to the same in all things fleshly. The closer we get to know Christ the greater and more intense is the battle.

Even the course of natural events and random circumstances is enlisted to challenge our faith. Once we were unaware of how often we were unloving, lacking in compassion and mercy. Now we are to become more aware of our every careless word that is not fitting for someone made alive in the image of Christ.

Suffering is the agent for our transformation, joy is the remembrance of God and what He has done for us in Christ while we suffer. Both suffering and joy come from the hand of God for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. Suffering means the battle continues so we need to have courage and endurance.

The world is our battlefield. Everyone called by God is a soldier of the cross, no battle, no calling. Everyone born of God is born into spiritual warfare, no exception. We are in a battle to live by the leading of the Spirit. *'For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons and daughters of God.'*  
Rom 8:14

If we don't fight and stand firm in the faith we succumb to the leading of the mind of the flesh that remains from the world. *"For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live."*  
Rom 8:13

The devil is constantly encouraging us to live for the flesh of self and deny the salvation of God. *'Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.'*  
1 Pet 5:8

The devil will use every resource he can muster in this battle to convince us that we are still living under condemnation and our sin remains. The deceits of the devil are clever schemes to ensnare us through temptation, threat, or intimidation. He would have us believe that faith in God is a farce. He will even use the scripture coming from people we know to attempt to get us to deny our need for obedience and trust in God; in the same way he used God's word out of context to attempt to deceive Jesus in His temptation ordained by God.

At all times this battle will be painful, there is no victory without suffering. *'And if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.'*  
Rom 8:17

We need to be vigilant because we can be deceived momentarily by the flesh so we live in the past we once desired in the world. *'If we endure, we will also reign with Him.'*  
2 Tim 2:12

Sometimes the battle is intense and seems as if the darkness has victory and God has abandoned us. Sometimes the powers of darkness encourage us to believe the lies of the devil that we are alone. Sometimes the devil employs everyone to bring accusations of failure so we give up hope. Jesus is organising the battle according to His plan for Victory.

### **The battle is won in Christ but the skirmishes continue**

God allows this battle so that we can learn to put to death that which is earthly in us in order that we can mature in the image of Christ. But we cannot put away what we don't see, and suffering the grief of the Spirit will open our eyes to our flesh that must go to the cross.

Therefore, regardless of the appearance of evils victory, the Spirit of God has sealed everyone in God who lives for Christ so that eternal security is never in doubt. Because of the power of God, the Spirit will restore the mind of God's children through repentance so we can continue to grow in the knowledge of God our Father.

Growth in the holiness of God can only take place in the battle to overcome the flesh by taking up our cross daily, and continuing to witness to Christ our Lord.

In this battle for our hearts and minds, God's word commands that we don't look too intently at the darkness, but that we look up to where Christ sits, Ruling on His throne; this reminds us of all He has done to deliver us from the darkness and into the light of His kingdom.

### **We can be blindsided**

If we are not aware we are in a daily battle; we will have the problem of believing in the darkness we see and allowing our feelings to affect our judgement.

We can be blind to God's reality. We may have seen that darkness is real, and tasted the tears of purification, but we often forget that God has restored us into His light so that we can rejoice in Christ. The way up to heaven is first down in surrender to the Sovereign Rule of the King of Glory. When we seek prosperity and a world without suffering, we can become blind to the reality we are still at war, and our minds are more vulnerable to deception.

The only way upward in the kingdom is by ruling all things by the measure of His word. The world says everyone has an opinion, but the children of God have no other option but God's word. Rejecting God's word as the only way to measure our lives is to sever ourselves from God.

And while we battle Jesus battles for us in Heaven. *And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins.* 1 John 2:1

*"I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth."*

John 17:15-19

We need to look to Jesus Christ seated on His throne and trust in Him who Works in us to will and to do according to His good pleasure, while we work out His plan for our holiness if we are to overcome the attractions of the sinful world. We need to thank God that He has chosen us to be ultimately worthy of suffering with His Son, the reigning King of kings, and the Lord of lords. *'And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.'*

Rom 9:23-24

We must look to Christ. Whatever we lack in the world through suffering, Jesus makes up for with His loving presence, if we abide in Him. We often struggle because we take our eyes off Him by looking to the world. The correction of our sight from the world to Christ is all a necessary part of our sanctification, going from one degree of glory to another.

The ongoing process to abide in Christ means we need to be aware of our dissatisfaction with the world we see, and be desperate for life we don't see. We need to be willing die to the natural self we see, and be delivered in Christ we don't see. In order that we can be worship God in the spirit with complete devotion.

Unfortunately, there is more world left in us than we realise, so our Father uses trials to move us to greater repentance, deliverance and devotion.

John Calvin (The Institutes of the Christian Religion [Westminster Press], 3.7.4) writes with penetrating insight of the inherent sinfulness that clings to us all:...For, such is the blindness with which we all rush into self-love that each one of us seems to himself to have just cause to be proud of himself and to despise all others in comparison.....But there is no one who does not cherish within himself some opinion of his own pre-eminence.

If we are not aware we retain weakness in our understanding, we will not be dependent on God's grace to give us strength to overcome, and we will not stand in righteousness, but give in to the world and self interest.

Our problem isn't with our circumstances, but our attachment to the world. Our treasurer is where the desires of our heart hope to be satisfied. *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* Matt 6:21

Our problem is us, and our moment-by-moment need is to look to Christ as we deny our self and take up our cross to follow the example of Christ who was dependent on the Father for all things as He lived in the darkness of the world. *“Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in the same way.”*

John 5:19

A lack of spiritual sight is a world of pain and futility. A lack of light means we are living as if God is dead in a world of darkness. When we feel alone and helpless, God has given us a sign so we can see the blindness of the flesh. The sign from God is that when we are believing in the darkness of the world and suffer anxiety and fear, we have forgotten all the previous and magnificent promises of God who lives in us by the Spirit. And we still live in the world under the power of the prince of darkness, who is doing his best to get us to forget the light so we are of no use in the Kingdom of God.

*Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.*

1 Cor 10:12

Through many tribulations we enter the kingdom of God and learn that pain is still pain, but Jesus's loving presence is power to endure.

God has given us His Precious magnificent promises so we can keep our eyes on Him. *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.*

2 Peter 1:3-4

These are Promises of faith in the living God for those who walk by faith. The promises are to keep us in the love of God whom we cannot see. We

need the light of the promises giving in the word of God to keep our focus on Jesus Christ. We need each other to help us stay the course God has mapped out for each of us. We need the testimony of our friends to build us up so we can endure by putting on the full armour of God, and wielding the sword of the Spirit.

If we are in Christ, we are one body, His body. We are made to be dependent on Him and each other. And we will know we are not alone as long as we walk by the Spirit in faith by living in the light.

### **Sufferings answer is God's presence**

*"I am with you always, to the end of the age."* Matt 28-20

The only remedy for our problems, fears and anxiety, is trusting in the Lord who is working His plan out in us for our holiness in the image of Christ. *'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to desire and to work for His good pleasure. Do all things without complaining or arguments.'*

Phil 2:12-14

That means He is working all the things that happen to us together to be for our good so that we are transformed into the image of Christ. *'And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.'*

Rom 8:28-29

We need to see what our Father is doing. God is pruning us away from the world for our future glory. Attachment to the world is fleshliness that leads to death and separation from God. So, suffering God's pruning should be welcomed as necessary treatment leading to godliness.

*"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit."* John 15:1-2

Pruning is painful, but if we are anxious and fearful, we need to undergo more of the suffering of God's pruning to free us from the world, in order

for us to live for the kingdom of God. Therefore, all our complaining about our circumstances and what displeases us as not acceptable for our life in the world is actually complaining about God who has not pleased us, for it is He who works all things in heaven and earth.

When we should be looking inwardly to see what God is doing for our transformation, we are often looking outwardly to see what we want in the world and complain bitterly. *“For the mouth speaks from that which fills the heart.”* Matt 12:34

### **Suffering and joy can be experienced at the same time**

The Bible tells us that Christian suffering is not without joy. *In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.* 1 Pet 1:6

*You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,* 1 Thess 1:6

*Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,* James 1:2

*that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.* 2 Cor 8:2

*But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.* Phil 2:17-19

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* Gal 5:22

The fruit of the Spirit is needed because we suffer many temptations to live according to the flesh and lose sight of the joy that is Christ.

Sometimes suffering overshadows joy for a time, especially when we are transfixed by the darkness, but God will bring light out of darkness, and after a long night of tears, joy will return in the morning as we are led by the Spirit to remember our relationship with Christ who is the light of the world. In Christ we begin to experience joy in His presence, but the fullness of joy is to come when He returns for us.

Christian Joy is happiness with God and what He has done and is doing for us in Christ. And even now God is using suffering to enhance our Joy. We enjoy the knowledge of the truth of Jesus Christ through the deliverance of God. Once we were darkness but now, we are light in the Lord.

“If it's clear that tribulations work toward our salvation, shouldn't we accept them with a grateful and calm spirit? In bearing them with endurance, we're not yielding to necessity, but we're assenting to our own good.

Such considerations will bear this fruit: However much our spirits might shrink beneath the cross, naturally adverse to its bitterness, they will expand in equal measure with spiritual joy. And this will give rise to thanksgiving, which cannot exist without joy, thanksgiving and praise of our Lord can only spring from a glad and joyful heart. If there's nothing that can stop such thanksgiving and praise in us, then it's clear that the bitterness of the cross must be tempered with spiritual joy.”

John Calvin 'A little book on the Christian life'

*For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. 1 John 5:4*

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