

**Does God Care?**

A young woman with long, straight blonde hair is shown from the chest up, wearing a light blue denim button-down shirt. She is looking off to the right with a thoughtful and slightly somber expression. The background is dark and out of focus, with some vertical lines suggesting an indoor setting.

**Meade MacGuire**

# Does God Care?

*Meade MacGuire*

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## Chapter 1 – Does God Care?

Some years ago, I picked up a newspaper and read an incident that impressed me deeply. A young man was standing at the end of a bridge, crossing the river which flows between two cities. He was waiting for the bus to take him to his home, nearly an hour's distance away. It was a warm summer day, and many boys were swimming in the pond far below the bridge. As the young man watched them, he noticed one of the smaller boys backing farther and farther from the shore. Suddenly, the little fellow threw up his hands and disappeared under the water.

The young man's first impulse was to run across the bridge and down the bank to rescue the boy. But, as he looked up, his bus approached, and he decided that with so many good swimmers in the pond, surely the little boy would be taken care of. So he boarded the bus.

Arriving home, he went into the dining room, and there found his mother lying unconscious on the floor. He hurried to bathe her face and rub her hands. As she regained consciousness, she cried, "Oh, John, your brother William has drowned in the pond!"

Then from his lips came the agonizing cry, "If I had only known it was my brother!"

While I was attending a meeting recently, a woman came to me and eagerly sought information about conditions in the countries of southern Europe, where I was working when the war began. After answering a number of her questions, which seemed to indicate an unusual knowledge of those countries,

she asked, "Did you meet Andrew Billingsly over there?"

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

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

Many of us have relatives and friends who are as dear to us as our own lives laboring among the millions of Asia and the Far East, or in war-ravaged Europe. We listen to the reports of the sufferings caused by the war, and its accompanying perils of famine, pestilence, and disease. We read letters from those dear ones, telling how they have fled from falling bombs, how they hid in thickets by the roadside or in the fields.

We are told of others who, though desperately ill, must be carried night after night to the bombproof cellars. Such tragedy all seems very real when it involves our own loved ones.

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

We do not ask these questions concerning all the suffering in the world, for there is much that does not seem difficult to explain. There is human suffering which is the result of man's refusal to obey the natural laws.

A man stops at the bar and takes several drinks of liquor before climbing into his car. He then speeds down the road, but he is driving too fast to make the next turn, and he goes over the bank, and is picked up

with his body torn and bones broken. He spends long weeks in the hospital suffering for his foolish act.

Others transgress the laws of health, and thus bring loathsome disease upon themselves. While still others, like the prodigal son, squander their money in riotous living, and come to poverty and want. Jesus taught that the father loved the prodigal son, but he could not interpose his authority to compel his son to do right.

But what appears a real problem to many is the fact that disaster, pain, and suffering overtake the good, the innocent, and the noble, as well as those who live selfish, wicked lives.

Millions of human beings are suffering today. Some of my dearest and most cherished friends who are endeavoring to follow Jesus Christ in every act of their lives are suffering physical torture and mental anguish that seems almost unendurable. Physicians have exhausted their resources in seeking to alleviate the pain. Friends have done everything possible to lift the heavy burden of sorrow, yet weeks and months and years pass with little ease from suffering.

I visited a woman whose Christian character is an example to the world. When she was a baby, two months old, she was terribly injured in a cyclone, and for sixty-eight years, she has never taken a step. She has been confined continually to her bed or wheelchair, and is seldom free from pain, but her smiling face, her enthusiastic words of courage and trust in God, reveal an inner source of peace and rest.

We need not look long in any community to find these sufferers. My heart aches, and tears come

to my eyes as I think of them, yet with all my sympathy and longing, there seems to be little I can do to give them relief.

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

## Chapter 2 – Is It Necessary?

The necessity of suffering in this world is clearly taught in the Scriptures, although this fact seems to be overlooked by many Christians.

“Why does a loving God permit it?”

How often this question is asked when some godly man or woman is suffering excruciating pain, or some innocent little child is crippled for life! The Father is almighty. It is written that “Jesus had compassion” on the people; His heart is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Why, then, does He not give relief to those who are tortured with pain?

As though anticipating such a question, the apostle Peter says, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ’s sufferings.” 1 Peter 4:12, 13.

Suffering is everywhere in our world of sin, and the Christian cannot escape it. Therefore, we are not to think it strange when we must suffer. The

experience of Job teaches us that the man who is living right before God is tested by pain and calamity.

If the Christian were guaranteed freedom from suffering, then everyone would be a follower of God in order to escape the sorrow of the world. But the child of God has a source of strength to meet suffering, which is not known to the world. His sorrow links him with Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul states, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him: if we deny Him, He also will deny us." 2 Timothy 2:12.

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

We know that as we near the end of the world and the coming of the Savior, persecution and trial and increasing sufferings await the people of God. Is it possible to rise above the horror and dread of what is coming? The Scriptures speak of "men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth." Luke 21:26.

But need God's children be tormented with this awful fear? We have read of the tortures inflicted on Christians in past ages, of the persecution and martyrdom that came to them. Yet in it all, the

heavenly Father gave them grace to endure for the truth's sake. In the final conflict, the enemy will work with greater intensity, but we can be assured that God will sustain those who are faithful to Him.

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

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

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

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

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

### Chapter 3 – May We Benefit From It?

A woman who had met sudden sorrow exclaimed bitterly, "I wish I had never been born!"

I replied, "My dear, you are in the process of being made—and this is how the Maker accomplishes the work."

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

As we study the writings of the apostle Paul, we are impressed with the fact that they often breathe an intense longing to know Jesus Christ better. He declares, "I have suffered the loss of all things...that I may win Christ." "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death." Philippians 3:8, 10.

Paul's longing to know Jesus was rewarded by such an intimate friendship with Him that few have ever known.

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

To the natural mind, it seems irrational that anyone would ever choose to suffer if he could avoid it. Yet Jesus Christ chose to leave His exalted position in heaven, came to this world, and died upon the cross to redeem lost men and women. Again and again, taunting voices flung the words at the dying Savior: "If You be Christ, save Yourself and us." Luke 23:39.

It was inconceivable to them that He should suffer and die in inexpressible agony if He were

innocent and could escape death. But in this, as in so many other matters, “the foolishness of God is wiser than men” (1 Corinthians 1:25), and Jesus chose the suffering because, according to a principle of the divine government, it was the only way sinners could be pardoned and restored to fellowship with God.

So often, when some terrible affliction or sorrow comes to us, we wonder and question why! Surely we may expect to find in the Scriptures an answer to this problem that perplexes many Christians. Let us first notice the life of the greatest character, aside from Christ, in the New Testament, and then study the life of the greatest character of the Old Testament. Both of these men deliberately chose the way of God, even though they knew it would bring experiences of privation and suffering. Could it be that their attitude toward trial and suffering has a direct relation to the greatness of their characters?

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

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

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

Every wave threatens to break his hold and carry him down to a watery grave. And yet this man is God's chosen vessel, the great apostle to the Gentiles. Doesn't God see him struggling to keep his head above the foam-capped billows? Has God forgotten His servant? Is He utterly indifferent to his agony? Has he no love, no pity, no sympathy? Why, then, does He permit this awful trial?

Before attempting to answer these questions, let us go back to the day when Saul, the persecutor, was on the way to Damascus. Suddenly, he was overwhelmed with a great light from heaven, and Jesus, whom he had been persecuting in the person of

His disciples, talked to Paul. In that hour, Paul volunteered for service in the cause of Christ.

He proceeded to Damascus, and after three days of fasting and prayer, he was visited by Ananias, a servant of the Lord. Paul had been blinded by the great light which shone from heaven. Now Ananias was instructed to lay his hands upon Paul that his sight might be restored, and the Lord added, "I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake." Acts 9:16.

After he was shown the persecution and suffering that awaited him as an apostle and missionary, Paul deliberately chose the way of sorrow and pain. He even went further in his devotion to his Master, praying that he might know Christ "and the fellowship of His sufferings." And years later, in the shipwreck experience, as on so many other occasions, God answered the prayer of His servant.

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

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

The apostle clearly teaches that God has a definite purpose in permitting these sorrows and trials; when we welcome, rather than shrink from them, the blessing and power of God are imparted to us. A child whose pathway had been rugged and thorny once remarked to me: “You know, Mr. MacGuire, the more trouble you have, the more real God is to you.”

## Chapter 4 – Victory Through Suffering

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

We are dealing with the problem of the pain and suffering that is experienced by those who love and fear God. The Christian’s chief concern is not merely to find an explanation for suffering, but to

learn God's purpose in permitting it, and to gain the experience and the victory it is designed to bring.

Adversity and suffering are a means of training and discipline in the development of Christian character. The Bible says, "You have forgotten the exhortation which speaks unto you as unto children, My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked of Him: For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chastens not? But if you be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are you...not sons." Hebrews 12:5-8.

How reasonable it seems for God to deal with His children as sensible and loving parents deal with their little ones! It is sometimes necessary to reprove and punish a child to save him from the consequence of his own foolish behavior. How many children have been cruelly maimed or burned to death as a result of playing with matches! Their parents may have forbidden the practice, but they may not have enforced their commands. Many children, like their parents, refuse to learn obedience without suffering.

Other children have been protected and saved from disaster by discipline and punishment. In the same way, we who are older are often deceived and enticed into playing with sin because we refuse to recognize its deadly nature. A loving and merciful heavenly Father scourges and chastens us in order that we may learn to love righteousness and hate sin, and so become partakers of His character and life.

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

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

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

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

“There is a lesson for us in this experience of Paul’s, for it reveals God’s way of working. The Lord can bring victory out of that which may seem to us

discomfiture and defeat. We are in danger of forgetting God, of looking at the things which are seen, instead of beholding by the eye of faith the things which are unseen. When misfortune or calamity comes, we are ready to charge God with neglect or cruelty. If He sees fit to cut off our usefulness in some line, we mourn, not stopping to think that thus God may be working for our good. We need to learn that chastisement is a part of His great plan, and that under the rod of affliction the Christian may sometimes do more for the Master than when engaged in active service.” — *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 481.

## Chapter 5 – God Has a Purpose

Of all the lessons that erring, sinful men must learn, none is of greater importance than the lesson of obedience. Without obedience, there is no hope of salvation, for there is no promise of eternal life to those who rebel against God.

But obedience is difficult to learn, and we overlook the fundamental principle that every lesson is to be mastered, and we shall never reach the goal until our characters reflect Christ’s image. That is to say; we have not learned obedience until we have learned *His* obedience. We must learn it from Him, and as He learned it, for He is our example.

God has told us in His word the precise method by which Jesus learned obedience, and we need to give the most careful heed to this instruction. It is said of Jesus that “in the days of his flesh, when He

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

Was it necessary for God’s Son to learn obedience? Weymouth’s translation gives special emphasis to this thought. “Although He was God’s Son, yet He learned obedience from the sufferings which He endured.”

We need to be deeply impressed by this principle that molded the life of our Savior. “He learned obedience from the sufferings which He endured.”

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

In fulfilling the plan of redemption, Jesus came to earth and took upon Himself the same flesh and blood in which Adam failed. Being born of a woman centuries after the fall of man, Jesus inherited all the tendencies to sin inherent in our weak, frail humanity.

Hebrews tells us, “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same.” Hebrews 2:14. Paul adds, “When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law.” Galatians 4:4.

So Jesus, taking this burden of weak, fallen humanity upon Himself, undertook to do what Adam had failed to do in his original perfection. Thus, humanity learned obedience by the crucifixion of that fallen, disobedient nature which the Son of God took, and His victory made the development of an obedient, sinless character possible.

It is this holy life that He offers to us, but it can come to us only through the same process by which Jesus obtained it. Self, the old fallen, sinful Adam nature, must be crucified and die, for “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lust.” Galatians 5:24. It was the union of His divinity with humanity that enabled Jesus to endure the temptations and suffering where Adam failed. And Christ came to make us “partakers of the divine nature,” that by following His example, we may triumph as He did. Now, if Jesus could learn obedience only through suffering, can we expect to learn the same lesson without it? We often declare our earnest desire and determination to be obedient, yet we shrink from the method God provides by which we are to learn this truth. It is hard to learn our lesson, because we refuse to suffer.

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

He overcame.” — *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 209.

“Through trials and persecution, the glory—character—of God is revealed in His chosen ones. The church of God, hated and persecuted by the world, are educated and disciplined in the school of Christ. They walk in narrow paths on earth; they are purified in the furnace of affliction. They follow Christ through sore conflicts; they endure self-denial, and experience bitter disappointments; but their painful experience teaches them the guilt and woe of sin, and they look upon it with abhorrence. Being partakers of Christ’s sufferings, they are destined to be partakers of His glory.... ‘These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’” — *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 31.

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

## Chapter 6 – The Way to Perfection

When one becomes acquainted with God, the soul develops a love for righteousness and a corresponding hatred for sin. There is an increasing longing in the heart for complete victory over sin, for a pure and holy life like that of the Master.

To attain this Christ-like life, we must comply with the conditions set forth in the Scriptures—behold Him, follow Him, abide in Him. By beholding Him, we are changed. This is not a passive experience, for as we yield to Him and co-operate with Him, He leads us along the path He trod while here on earth. “It became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering.” Hebrews 2:10.

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

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

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

Christ, the Captain of our salvation, took upon Himself our weak, fallen humanity and, through the suffering and death of the cross, exalted human beings to be heirs of God. The Scriptures speak of

Christ as the head, and His people as His body. The apostle Paul intimates that the experience that was necessary for the head is also necessary for the body. He says, "I Paul...now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the church." Colossians 1:23, 24.

Christ bore all the anguish and suffering necessary as the head and captain of our salvation; now it is the privilege of each member of the body to "fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ," that the entire body may be perfected as the Head is perfect.

"Trial is part of the education given in the school of Christ, to purify God's children from the dross of earthliness. It is because God is leading His children that trying experiences come to them. Trials and obstacles are His chosen methods of discipline, and his appointed conditions of success.... In His providence He brings these souls into different positions and varied circumstances, that they may discover the defects that are concealed from their own knowledge. He gives them opportunity to overcome these defects, and to fit themselves for service. Often He permits the fires of affliction to burn, that they may be purified. God's care for His heritage is unceasing. He suffers no affliction to come upon His children but such as is essential for their present and eternal good. He will purify His church, even as Christ purified the temple during His ministry on earth." — *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 524-525.

## Chapter 7 – The Foundation of Character

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

The man replied, “We are going to construct an office building.”

When asked why he was digging down so deep, the man answered, “Because we are going up so high.”

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

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

We look forward to the indescribable glories of heaven, and anticipate an experience of joy and

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

As we glance at the lives of some of the noblest characters in history, we see that hardship, trial, and suffering contributed much to the foundation of their lives. We think of Joseph, who, as a youth, was sold into slavery by his own brothers. All his pitiful pleadings and entreaties were met with heartless cruelty. In a few hours, his situation changed from that of a tenderly cherished son to a despised and helpless slave. Although he was filled with grief and terror, he resolved to serve God with all his heart, and be true to Him at any cost. And so, that tragic day's experience became the turning point in Joseph's life. "Its terrible calamity had transformed him from a petted child to a man, thoughtful, courageous, and self-possessed." — *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 214.

Other trials and sorrows awaited him, but they proved to be steppingstones to greater usefulness and a more exalted position.

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

A fundamental quality of a noble character is patience. Paul says, “We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation works patience.” Romans 5:3.

James admonishes, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” James 1:2-4. I think the most patient, gentle, sympathetic people I have ever known have developed these traits of character through trial and suffering.

Many people always seem happy and joyful while they possess everything they desire—friends, money, and the pleasures of the world. But they are inclined to be despondent, gloomy, and discouraged when hardship, loss, and suffering come. It is God’s purpose that His children shall learn to clasp the hand of Christ, and trust Him in the darkness as well as in the light.

They know that He loves them and permits only those experiences to come which will broaden and deepen their lives and make them a greater blessing to the world, if they will accept them through faith, and win a spiritual victory over them.

We may be certain that one who has sounded the depths of sorrow and suffering here on earth will have developed a capacity for corresponding heights of heavenly joy and happiness in the world to come. A noble man who lay on his bed racked with pain declared, “I have known more of God since I came to this bed than through all the rest of my life.”

In describing how he felt at the thought of going blind, Kagawa of Japan said, “The darkness is a holy of holies of which no one can rob me. In the darkness, I meet God face to face.” The sorrow and pain endured with patience and fortitude born of trust in God will prepare us to understand and appreciate the joy and glory of heaven’s reward. And so of Jesus, it is written, “He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.” Isaiah 53:11.

## Chapter 8 – The Secret of Victory

Our heavenly Father will never be satisfied with anything short of perfection. He made man perfect in the beginning, and His plan of redemption is designed to restore His children to that original perfection where they will again reflect His image. He promises this in the beautiful words of the apostle, “Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son.” Romans 8:29.

This restoration, which begins with the new birth, is a purifying, refining process that God can accomplish only when He has the confidence and cooperation of the individual.

A person is afflicted with a serious illness. He becomes conscious of an abnormal growth in his body, which his physician declares is malignant. There is only one way to save the patient’s life, and that is to remove the deadly growth by means of the surgeon’s knife. It means pain and suffering, but it is the only hope for recovery from the disease. Much of

the success of the operation depends upon the sick man's confidence in the surgeon, and his determination to co-operate in an endeavor to regain his health.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Here are the wonderful words of inspiration. After suffering will come victory, perfection, and glory. What an inspiration it is to keep this goal ever before us as we follow in the footsteps of our Master!

But it is plain that if we shrink from trial, if we murmur and complain at our lot, and long for ease and pleasure, we reject the only pathway to the glorious heights and depths of a Christ-like character.

“With more than a father’s affection, with more than a mother’s love, God sends pain to men. Carefully He chooses the tests... Accepted and rightly used, they change their nature and become joys. Tears are seeds; planted, they blossom into joy and gladness.” (Rev. N.D. Hillis, *Ladies Home Journal*).

God places a hedge about His children. No one can pass this hedge without God’s permission, and He allows only those experiences to come that will “work together for good” to those that love Him (Romans 8:28). This is recorded in Job, which says, “Have You not made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.” Job 1:10.

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

What an inspiring example of faith that trusts God in the darkness as well as in the light! His unwavering confidence enabled him to say, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.” Job 13:15.

Job was certain that God had a divine purpose in all his tribulation, and that in the end, there would be victory for him. Thus, he submitted to the will of God, even though he cried out in terrible anguish and sorrow. With implicit trust in his Maker, he could declare, "He knows the way that I take; when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold." Job 23:10.

Job gained the victory over Satan and over self, and the ordeal of suffering brought to him such a revelation of God and of himself that he could say, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear: but now my eye sees You. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Job 42:5, 6.

Then the blessing of God was poured out upon him in double measure, not only in family and friends and property, but in new spiritual power.

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

## Chapter 9 – The Glorious Goal

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

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

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

Jesus never promised His people a life of ease and freedom from sorrow and suffering, but He does

promise peace and consolation in the midst of adversity. He offers the assurance, "My grace is sufficient for you: for My strength is made perfect in weakness." 2 Corinthians 12:9. He comforts us with the words, "Fear not; for I am with you: be not dismayed; for I am your God: I will strengthen you; yes, I will help you; yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of My righteousness." Isaiah 41:10.

And, in addition to this, He promises a glorious reward after the discipline of this life is past. "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him: if we deny Him, He also will deny us." 2 Timothy 2:12.

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

Our Master was a man of sorrows; He was acquainted with grief, and those who suffer with Him will reign with Him. When the Lord appeared to Saul in his conversion, He did not purpose to show him how much good he should enjoy, but what great things he should suffer for His name. Suffering has been the portion of the people of God from the days of the martyr Abel. Why should we, who have the blessed hope of immortality, shrink from a life of suffering? Were it possible to reach the tree of life in the midst of the Paradise of God without suffering, we would not enjoy so rich a reward for which we had not suffered. We would shrink back from the

glory; shame would seize us in the presence of those who had fought the good fight, had run the race with patience, and had laid hold on eternal life. But none will be there who have not, like Moses, chosen to suffer affliction with the people of God. The prophet John saw the multitude of the redeemed, and inquired who they were. The prompt answer came: "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb." — *Testimonies for the Church*, v. 1, p. 78.

"Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake." Philippians 1:29. Suffering and glory are associated together many times in the Scriptures. Romans 8:17 tells us, "We suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together." How different suffering becomes when we see how it links us with our Lord!

We cannot hope to be glorified with Jesus unless we have first suffered with Him. We are told that "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him." 1 Corinthians 2:9.

Our imagination may picture a thousand joys and privileges of that better land, but nothing can be more wonderful or more thrilling than to be glorified with Jesus, our Redeemer, and King. But let us not overlook the fact that there is a positive relationship between the suffering here and the glory over there. Paul says, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present

time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” Romans 8:18.

I knew a noble, godly woman who lay paralyzed and helpless, unable to speak a word for thirteen years. She saw her husband go to his work, day by day, to provide for the family, but she could not bid him farewell when he left, nor welcome him on his return. She saw her son grow to manhood and her daughter to womanhood, but she could never speak a word to them. Day after day through the long months and years she suffered excruciating pain, while by her countenance and every means possible to her, she demonstrated a sublime patience, and a supreme confidence in her Lord. It was a marvelous demonstration of the reality of God’s promise, “My grace is sufficient for you; for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” 2 Corinthians 12:9.

We may never understand why such an experience comes, but we can thank God for the power to endure such suffering and for the hope of final triumph. “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” 2 Corinthians 4:17. Therefore, “Rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy.” 1 Peter 4:13.

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