

GOD'S HELP FOR HARD TIMES



BIBLICAL KEYS TO OVERCOME
PAIN, FEAR, AND HARDSHIP

James L. Morrisson
with Maria Kneas

God's Help for Hard Times
Biblical Keys to Overcome Pain, Fear, and Hardship

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We all need encouragement these days.

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Scripture quotations are from the
Holy Bible, King James Version.

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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.

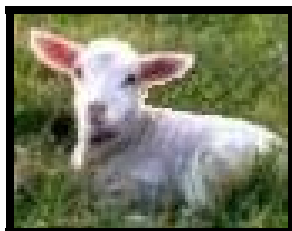
(Psalm 23)





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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.

(John 16:33)

Foreword

Surprising events have been happening in America, and things in which we used to trust no longer seem to be reliable. How can we find security, peace, and joy under such circumstances?

Only God has enough love, power, and faithfulness to be our Defense, our Rescuer, and our Refuge. He is the solid Rock on which we can safely stand (Psalm 62:5-7) Everything else is only “sinking sand.” It promises safety for a while, but sooner or later it fails us.

How can the believer apply these Scriptural principles to everyday life?

My Dad (James Morrisson) wrote a 314-page book about it titled *Standing Firm in the Faith: Finding God’s Strength for Today’s Challenging Times*. It has a wealth of Biblical insights about Scripture, foundational Christian beliefs, growing to Christian maturity, and standing firm in the faith.

Dad died of cancer in 2005. Because many Christians today are facing pain or hardship or difficult circumstances, Mom and I took excerpts from *Standing Firm in the Faith* in order to make a much smaller book focussed on Biblical ways to deal with pain, hardship, heartache, and difficulties.

The basic text is Dad’s, but I made some formatting changes in order to make it easier to read. For example, I took long paragraphs and broke them into two or three shorter ones. That book was titled *Dealing with Pain and Hardship*.

Dad’s writing reflects his rich and varied training and experience. It has the broad perspective of a student of history; the sharp reasoning of a lawyer; the practical, down-to-earth examples of a teacher; and the passion of a classical musician. It also reflects the love of a man who was “Dad” and “Grandpa” to many members of his church.

My Mom died in 2012. After her death, I made a second edition of the book, with a new title—*God’s Help for Hard*

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Times. In this edition, I changed all of the Scripture quotations to the King James Version, and I added some Christian poems, a “Notice,” a “Related Reading” section, and some more passages from Scripture. My brother Bob Morrisson did the website for the book, his wife Sue helped with the manuscript, and my friend Berit Kjos provided the photos of the sheep.

I also added a new chapter—“Facing the Unexpected.” This was taken from my book *Strength for Tough Times*. Lighthouse Trails Publishing kindly gave me permission to use it. You can read three chapters from *Strength for Tough Times* at:

www.StrengthForToughTimes.com

We created a website to enable people to download a free PDF file of *God's Help for Hard Times*. Please send it to your friends. We all need encouragement these days.

www.GodsHelpForHardTimes.com

We are living in troubled times, and our future is uncertain. I hope that *God's Help for Hard Times* will be a blessing for you.

May the Lord bless you and the people close to your heart. May He guard you and guide you. May He comfort you and encourage you. May He protect you and provide for you. And may He give you a deeper understanding of how much He loves you.

Maria Kneas
December 2012

Author's Preface

The purpose of *God's Help for Hard Times* is very practical—to let Scripture stir people into action. The Bible says that Scripture is living and active. It can profoundly impact our lives if we allow it to. It has impacted my life greatly. I hope that *God's Help for Hard Times* will encourage all of us to allow Scripture to affect the way we live our lives.

I have sought to keep my presentation simple and non-technical. My brother (an engineer) used to say that if he could not express his ideas in ordinary lay language, then he probably didn't understand them himself. I have tried to follow that example.

I have quoted and referred to a considerable amount of Scripture. I have several purposes in doing so.

- As a lawyer, I like to document what I say.
- I want to encourage my readers to read Scripture, and to read it in context.
- I want to encourage my readers to check Scripture for themselves to see whether these things are so. (See Acts 17:11.)
- I like to let Scripture speak for itself. The language of Scripture is far more powerful, and more capable of reaching people's hearts, than any words I could write.
- One of the things I enjoy about Scripture is the repeated discovery that different human authors, writing at very different times, have said essentially the same thing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. I delight in the way different parts of Scripture fit together.

I sometimes refer to personal events in my life. I do this, not out of any desire to call attention to myself, but in the hope that this may help bring Scriptural principles to life, and may demonstrate that God's principles work. Our God is a very practical God.

As a federal attorney, I attained some skill in interpreting a written text. Our understanding of Scripture must always be based on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Someone who does not have the Holy Spirit cannot understand spiritual things (1 Corinthians 2:14). But I believe my legal training can help me organize and present what the Holy Spirit has shown me in the Scriptures. As a student and performer of classical music, I had a different kind of experience in interpreting a written text in accordance with the intent of its author.

During much of my life I was a humanist, believing in the power of man to improve himself by his own efforts. I eventually found that this was false.

In seeking for a more spiritual dimension to my life, I joined a New Age organization. After a number of years I left it, because I concluded that its teachings were inconsistent with Scripture, and I decided to believe Scripture. I later earned a Master's Degree in Biblical Studies.

When I left the New Age organization, I adopted, as a description of my situation, the words of Psalm 40:2, "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings."

Ever since, I have taken my stand on the rock of Scripture. I find it a great comfort that, in a world in which so much seems like quicksand, there is a solid rock on which to stand.

Everything I have written is based on Scripture. Some may disagree with my interpretation of Scripture, or may feel that I have emphasized one aspect of it and given inadequate attention to other aspects. This is fine; I encourage my readers to check everything out for themselves. But I do claim that everything I say has Scriptural support, and for that reason deserves your serious consideration.

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The basic message of this book is both simple and Scriptural. Please don't allow differences of opinion over some details to detract from that basic message.

May God bless us all as we seek to know and understand him better!

James L. Morrisson

In God have I put my trust
I will not be afraid

(Psalm 56:11)

What shall we then say to these things?
If God be for us, who can be against us?

(Romans 8:31)

The LORD is on my side;
I will not fear:
what can man do unto me?

(Psalm 118:6)

Chapter 1

The Challenge

“Watch ye, stand fast in the faith... be strong.”
(*1 Corinthians 16:13*)

We live in challenging times. Ours is a fast-paced, stressful society where many people lack strong, long-term personal relationships. We are bombarded with so much secularism that Christian beliefs and values can become eroded. As a result, it is more difficult to deal with health problems, personal crises, and other hardships. Now, more than ever, Christians need to be solidly grounded in their faith so that they can stand firm in the face of difficulties.

What I am dealing with in this book is some changes that I believe need to occur in the minds and hearts of many Christians. These changes are necessary if we as individuals are to survive in this challenging world, and if we, and the church as a whole, are to play an effective part in stemming the tide of secularism in our nation.

I tend to emphasize the demands of Christianity because I feel that, in our affluent society, there is great danger that our faith will be flabby and apathetic. But I must also say two other things, which I hope you will keep in mind.

First, Christianity is tremendously rewarding. To those who truly believe in Jesus Christ, it promises eternal life in heaven with God. It promises forgiveness of our sins, and freedom from many things that have held us down. It promises an abundant life on earth, in which we can overcome every adversity. It promises peace, joy and true fulfillment. These are not empty promises. I have seen them realized, in greater or lesser degree, in my own life and the lives of others around me. Whatever Christianity may cost, the rewards are much greater.

Second, God expects us to change, but he also accepts us and loves us as we are. His love is not conditioned on our changing. We don't have to earn his love and acceptance. They are just there for us. Wherever we are in our Christian life, God is there for us.

We can stand firm on the words of the Bible. The Bible is true and reliable, and it can and should be the guide for everything we do.

Belief in the truth and reliability of Scripture underlies everything else I say. If we accept Scripture on its own terms, as an authoritative revelation from God, then we have a solid rock to stand on. If we do not accept it as authoritative, then it becomes merely one among many expressions of fallible human opinion. It is largely because many Christians, today, do not accept Scripture as authoritative that we find such wide divergences of opinion among those who call themselves Christians.

The Bible tells us very clearly certain things about God, about Jesus Christ, and about our relationship with God. These basics of our Christian faith are things we need to stand firm on and not compromise.

Then we need to be able to apply what we believe to what is happening in our lives. If we can't apply it to the life situations we face, it is probable that we either don't understand it, or don't really believe it, or both. It is in our actions that our faith becomes real.

Faith that does not result in action, that does not make a major difference in the way we view and respond to everything around us, is not real faith. The teachings of Scripture give us guidance, confidence and strength in dealing with many practical issues.

I want to say something about that word "believe." We Americans often use "believe" to mean intellectual assent. In Scripture it means much more than that. The Biblical words for "believe" and "faith" mean to put our entire trust in, and obey. They imply a total commitment. In the Biblical sense, belief is something we do, not just with our mind, but with all of us. Jesus told us,

The Challenge

“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.”
(Mark 12:30)

I think it fair to say that the whole Bible also tells us to **believe** “with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.” The belief that Scripture talks about is a belief that shows itself in action. It shows itself in your whole life.

One other thing about belief should be kept in mind. It is important for us to be clear, and Scripturally sound, about **what** we believe. It is even more important to know **whom** we believe. Paul wrote,

“...for I know **whom** I have believed” (2 Timothy 1:12, emphasis added)

Our Christian faith is not primarily a belief in doctrines. It is a belief in a person. It is a relationship with a person.

It is because we know who God is that we can put our trust in him. It is because we know who God is that we can say, with the Psalmist,

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear” (Psalm 46:1-2)

No matter what happens, we will not fear.

We are not victims of the circumstances. They are temporary and God is eternal. God is greater than the circumstances, he is faithful to his promises, and he wants what is best for us. He has promised us that, in him, we can be overcomers:

“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even

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our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4-5)

No matter what happens, we can depend on God.

The LORD is my rock and my fortress
and my deliverer;
my God, my strength,
in whom I will trust.

(Psalm 18:2)



Chapter 2

The Problem of Pain

“In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

One of the problems we all have to deal with is that of pain. Some even find that the existence of pain, to the degree that we see it in this world, causes them to doubt their faith in God. They say, “If God is both all-powerful and loving, how can he allow so much pain and suffering?”

Some conclude either that God is not all powerful (which means that he is not God), or that he is not loving (which is a denial of Scripture). Implicit in this kind of question is the assumption: “God, if I were in charge, I would not do it your way.” This is an assumption that we are not entitled to make.

Most people can handle a good deal of pain if they can see a reason for it. Athletes, mountain climbers and others who place great demands on their physical bodies willingly subject themselves to a great deal of pain. Soldiers accept suffering, hardship and death in the service of their country. Most women are able to accept the pain of childbirth because they love their baby. Many people will work very hard if they see their work as bringing a reward. But when suffering seems meaningless, it is hard to accept.

Scripture gives us some clear guidelines for dealing with pain, suffering, and hardship. These Biblical principles have practical applications for our daily lives.

In considering pain, it helps to remember that God is faithful and he loves us. No matter what happens to us, He is willing and able to make it work out 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.” (Romans 8:28)

“But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good” (Genesis 50:20)

God Strengthens and Empowers Us

Paul prayed that the Ephesians would have the eyes of their heart enlightened so that they might know “the exceeding greatness of his power” for believers. (Ephesians 1:19). (Also see Ephesians 3:20.) God’s incomparably great power is at work within us. We may not feel it, but Scripture says that it is there.

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.” (Ephesians 6:10)

God wants us to live every aspect of our life in his strength and his mighty power.

“For in him we live, and move, and have our being”
(Acts 17:28)

We should do everything in his great power. Apart from him, we can do nothing (John 15:5). In all things we can draw on the mighty power of the God who lives in us and in whom we have our being. Paul wrote,

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” (Philippians 4:13)

“Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”
(2 Corinthians 12:9)

He prayed that the Colossians would be “strengthened with all might, according to [God’s] glorious power” (Colossians 1:11). When David was greatly distressed, he “encouraged himself in the LORD his God” (1 Samuel 30:6). (Also see 2 Samuel 22:33; Psalms 28:7, 46:1, 119:28.)

While on earth, Jesus Christ ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:14). He told his disciples, “ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you” (Acts 1:8).

This includes the power to love people who seem unlovable, to forgive those who have wronged us deeply, and to get rid of all bitterness. God can make us willing and able to cast off everything that hinders (Hebrews 12:1) and to persevere in the face of great obstacles. He can enable us to live by the Spirit, to show the fruit of the Spirit, to minister in love to others, and much more. It is God’s power to become what we could never become on our own.

Grace came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17), and part of the definition of grace is God’s influence working in us. It is only by God’s power working in us that we can possibly hope to develop godly character qualities.

I find all this astonishing. Of ourselves we are weak and fallible. Of ourselves we can do nothing. But the Almighty God, who created and sustains the universe, has enabled us to be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

By the mighty power of God working in us, we can overcome the world’s temptations and pressures, and we can surmount every difficulty and problem we may face. Whatever our problems or difficulties may be, the one who lives in us is greater. We need to learn to believe this, to feel it, and to act on it.

We Have Hope

With God there is always hope. He is “the God of hope” (Romans 15:13). (Also see 1 Timothy 1:1, 4:10.) “Happy is he... whose hope is in the LORD his God” (Psalm 146:5). (Also see Psalms 33:20, 37:9, 39:7, 62:5, 130:7, 147:11; Jeremiah

14:22.) Those who believe in God will always have hope (Psalm 71:14). Part of standing firm in the faith is to “hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering” (Hebrews 10:23). We need to “continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel” (Colossians 1:23).

“Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast” (Hebrews 6:19)

God has given us new birth into a living hope because of the resurrection of Jesus (1 Peter 1:3). Peter is there talking about the hope of eternal life, but with God there is hope in this world also.

“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.” (Isaiah 40:31)

Abraham in hope believed God's promise that he and Sarah could have a son, and their hope was realized (Romans 4:18-22). The Psalmist wrote, “I hope in thy word” (Psalm 119:81). (Also see verse 147.) He wrote, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.” (Psalm 42:5). (Also see Psalms 42:11, 43:5.) Whenever we find ourselves getting discouraged, the answer is to put our hope in God.

Those who are without God are without hope (Ephesians 2:12). “[B]rethren... sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). (Also see Hebrews 2:15; Job 27:8; Proverbs 24:20.)

Christian hope is not wishful thinking. It is confident expectation. As Christians we can be sure of what we hope for (Hebrews 11:1). Those who hope in God will not be disappointed. “Hope maketh not ashamed” (Romans 5:5).

Our confidence is based on who God is. We know, without any doubt, that God is far greater than any problem or concern we may have, that he is a good and loving God, and that he is faithful to keep his promises. We know that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28).

One of the remarkable things about our position in Christ is that so often we find ourselves in a win-win situation. However it comes out, we will be winners. Paul gives us one example. He wrote that God’s power is made perfect in weakness, and therefore Paul delighted in his weaknesses, because when he is weak (in himself) then he is strong (in God’s power) (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). So whether Paul feels strong or weak, it all works out for good.

I can give an example in my own life. I am fighting advanced cancer. If I should die soon, then I will go to be with the Lord. That is a very good place to be! And if I go, I am sure that God will continue to take care of my family. On the other hand, if, as I hope and desire, God heals me of this cancer, then I will have more time to serve him here on earth. So I cannot lose. Whatever happens, God works it out for good.

Because of our position in Christ, we can know that, no matter how difficult the outward circumstances may seem, we can, in God’s strength, be overcomers. And so we can be “rejoicing in hope” (Romans 12:12).

We Can Overcome Any Adversity

God enables his people to overcome evil.

“...his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness.” (2 Peter 1:3)

Therefore, we can overcome trials and tribulations, and we can conquer the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil. Jesus said,

“In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

But then Scripture says that **we** can overcome the world.

“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4-5)

When Scripture says that we can overcome the world, I believe this means that no matter what our problem or difficulty, the power of God is greater.

Paul was an overcomer. He had learned how to be content in any and every situation (Philippians 4:11-13). He was no longer at the mercy of his circumstances.

We are more than conquerors because nothing can separate us from the love of Christ (Romans 8:35-39). We can see this with Stephen. An angry mob stoned him to death, but Stephen saw the glory of God and he died praying for his enemies. They conquered him physically, but Stephen was more than a conqueror. The mob couldn't destroy his relationship with Jesus Christ or his godly character. (See Acts 7:54-60.)

We have “power... to overcome all the power of the enemy” (Luke 10:19). We can overcome every evil influence because,

“...greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.” (1 John 4:4)

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.

(John 16:33)

Trust

(By Frances Morrisson)

Suddenly the Everyday
is wrenched away.

Lord, please guard and grow
the fullness of my love and trust in You.

When all I know
is set afloat today,
pilot my boat and nudge me to
the harbor of the Narrow Way.

There let me find a clearer, newer view
where all that's upside down
resolves; makes sense;
steady in the light of love and Trust in You.



Chapter 3

Pain and Hardship Are Part of Life

“Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” (Job 5:7)

I start with what may seem an obvious proposition. In this imperfect world, pain and hardship are a part of life. No one is immune from them. No one can claim any right to be free of them. Some suffer more than others, and that may be thought to raise a question of fairness, which I shall address later. But no one is exempt.

When we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, our sins are forgiven, we enter into eternal life, and we can look forward to spending eternity in heaven with God. We have the Holy Spirit living within us, we become adopted sons of God, and we are enabled to start a remarkable process of transformation in our lives.

These are tremendous gifts, which we do not deserve, and for which we should be very thankful. We receive them by the grace of God, and part of the definition of grace is “unmerited favor.” But I do not see anything in Scripture that says that we are exempt from pain and suffering.

Scripture says that we can expect difficulties, testing and suffering. One difference is that we are much better able to deal with them because of the power of God working in us, because of the hope that God always gives us, and because of the support and love of our fellow-believers.

God has many blessings for us. He is “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Ephesians 3:20). But blessings are gifts. No one is entitled to them. When we get them we give

thanks, but if we do not get all that we hoped for, we have no right to complain.

God does not owe us anything (Romans 11:35; Job 41:11). In the light of the tremendous blessing of forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation, everything else becomes relatively unimportant. (See 2 Corinthians 4:17.)

We Live in an Imperfect World

When God created the earth, put plants and animals on it, and created man, he looked at everything he had made and saw that it was very good (Genesis 1:31). There was no sin and no death. Eventually, there will be a world in which there is no sin, no death, no pain and no suffering. But for the present, pain and suffering are a part of our life. How did this come about?

The Fall in Eden

At the Creation, God put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. He gave them everything they needed. They had food, shelter, and dominion over the earth. They walked with God every afternoon. He put only one restriction on them. He told them not to eat the fruit of one tree. He did not want them to know (experience) evil.

They disobeyed and were driven out of Eden. Adam and Eve, who knew God intimately, chose to believe the serpent (satan) rather than God. They chose to do things their way rather than God's way.

The result was that sin and death came into the world for the first time.

“...by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin”
(Romans 5:12)

“...by man came death.” (1Corinthians 15:21)

God's Help for Hard Times

Pain is mentioned for the first time. God told Eve, “in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children” (Genesis 3:16). He told Adam that he would have sorrow and would have to struggle against thorns and thistles (Genesis 3:17-18). Pain and suffering came into the world as a result of the wrong decision Adam and Eve made.

Since the Fall in Eden, the earth has been under a curse.

“For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” (Romans 8:22)

Why did God allow this to happen? Because he wanted men and women to have free will, to have genuine freedom of choice. He wanted them to serve him and love him by their own free choice, and not because they were incapable of doing anything else.

Having free will means that you can choose wrongly. The price for giving man free will was that man, in the persons of Adam and Eve, made a terrible mistake, which had profound consequences.

Some might question God's decision to give man free will. But God is God, and we cannot change him, nor should we want to.

“Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?” (Romans 9:20)

God said to Job, “Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?” (Job 40:8). We have to accept God as he is, and give thanks that he is such a wonderful God.

If we want to blame someone for our suffering, we should not blame God. If anyone is to blame, it is Adam and Eve.

There Will Be a World Without Pain and Suffering

At some time in the future, there will be a world without pain and suffering for those who are righteous and follow God.

“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.” (Revelation 21:4)

“...the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.” (Isaiah 65:19)

There will be “everlasting joy” and “they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isaiah 35:10). (Also see Isaiah 51:11.) “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain” (Isaiah 11:9; 65:25). “And there shall be no more curse” (Revelation 22:3).

Our bodies now are perishable, dishonorable and weak; but we shall eventually have bodies that are imperishable, glorious, and powerful (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). Even animals will no longer eat each other (Isaiah 11:6-9, 65:25).

The present world is not the way God finally wants it. But for the present, we have to deal with the world as it now is.

The LORD will give strength
unto his people.

(Psalm 29:11)

Nay, in all these things
we are more than conquerors
through him that loved us.

(Romans 8:37)



Chapter 4

God Can Bring Good Out of Pain

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17)

In the present imperfect world, pain and hardship serve a useful, and even necessary, function. Let me illustrate this in several ways:

The Physical Body

For our physical bodies, pain serves as a necessary warning system. We put our hand on a hot burner and instantly snatch it away. We cut or scratch ourselves and react instantly to get away from whatever is causing the injury and to deal with the injured tissue. We feel an internal pain which gets us to the doctor, who tells us that our appendix is inflamed, we have kidney stones, or whatever else is wrong, and we get it attended to.

Pain is like the warning lights on a car, which alert us to things that need attention. Our pain system is carefully designed and adapted to our bodies' needs.

For instance, the pain sensors are much more strongly concentrated in some areas than in others. Some areas are very sensitive to pressure but less so to pricks or scratches; etc. The system is carefully and specifically designed. Interestingly, the same nerves that transmit pain, also transmit pleasurable sensations.

There are some who are unable to feel pain, such as lepers, advanced diabetics, and some others. They can injure themselves and not know it. Their life is full of hazards and very difficult. They would give much to be able to feel pain.

Study with these people, including unsuccessful attempts to create a workable man-made warning system, has made it clear that any warning system must give a strong enough signal so that we cannot ignore it. Physical pain cannot be turned off, and it is so insistent that we cannot ignore it. It's a good thing that the signal is strong and unpleasant.

Does pain also serve a function in our spiritual life? I think it does.

Responsibility for our Choices

There are many “natural laws.” Ignoring them often results in pain. If we try to walk off a rooftop, we will fall and hurt ourselves. Foolish, dare-devil actions can produce painful consequences. If we touch a hot thing, we will get burned. If we smoke heavily, we have a greater likelihood of getting cancer or respiratory illness. Drinking heavily, overeating, and using “recreational” drugs can all have painful consequences. If we were to be relieved from all pain and suffering, we would never have to face the consequences of our actions.

The same is true with spiritual laws. There is a spiritual principle called sowing and reaping.

“Do not be deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”
(Galatians 6:7)

If we sow anger, hatred, hostility, bitterness, unforgiveness, ingratitude, selfishness and the like, we shall receive the same from others. If we choose to cause harm to others, we can expect to receive harm. By the same principle, if we are giving, loving, considerate, thoughtful, and unselfish towards others, we shall receive many blessings.

“Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.” (Luke 6:38)

This principle does not work perfectly. Nothing does in this imperfect world. But it still is true, in my experience and that of many others, that those who choose to be giving and loving usually receive love and generosity, while those who choose to give anger and hatred receive anger and hatred.

If there were no painful consequences to our negative actions, would we ever learn to give them up? Would we perceive them as harmful and spiritually dangerous if we did not have a pain mechanism to warn us? If there were no unpleasant consequences from violating them, could these even be said to be laws?

The principle applies more broadly. God has given us certain commandments and laws. For them to be meaningful, there need to be consequences from following them or violating them.

In many places, Scripture sets forth blessings and curses. God says, behave in this way and you will be blessed; behave in that way and you will be cursed.

In Deuteronomy, chapter 28, for example, God set forth a series of blessings and curses. If his people obey his law and commands, they will be blessed with prosperity, military success, and honor and recognition. If they disobey, God will send on them plagues, wasting diseases, military defeats, oppression, madness, blindness, confusion of mind, and much more. Then in Deuteronomy 30:19 God says,

“I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19)

God Can Bring Good Out of Pain

God uses the possibility of intense suffering as a way of bringing his people into obedience.

In the New Testament, Paul contrasts two ways of life: living by the flesh and living by the Holy Spirit. Living by the flesh results in sexual impurity, idolatry, hatred, discord, jealousy, dissensions, drunkenness, and the like.

“...they which do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Galatians 5:21)

“Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.” (Ephesians 5:6)

In contrast, those who live by the Spirit receive the “fruit of the Spirit,” which is “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Galatians 5:22-23). One group is miserable and suffers; the other group is blessed. Paul expresses the difference as that between life and death (Romans 8:5-17).

God has declared that those who believe in Jesus Christ will have eternal life, while those who do not believe in him are condemned already (John 3:16, 18). He has established a judgment in which the righteous go to “life eternal” and the unrighteous to “everlasting punishment” (Matthew 25:46). The righteous will “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father,” while the wicked will be thrown into a “furnace of fire” (Matthew 13:42-43, 50). (Also see John 5:29.)

In all of these, we see the use of pain and suffering as a means of enforcing the laws God has established, and as a consequence of violating those laws.

God Uses Pain and Hardship to Train and Strengthen Us

God's priorities are not our priorities. We tend to want physical health, freedom from physical and emotional pain, and enough material possessions to live comfortably. We may feel deprived and unjustly treated if we do not have these. God wants us to have "good" things. (Psalm 84:11) However, his primary concern is not with our physical circumstances. I believe his primary concerns are:

- Our eternal salvation
- Our growth into Christian maturity and character
- Our usefulness ("fruitfulness") in the kingdom of God

The early Christians endured a great deal of suffering. They were a persecuted church. What was their reaction to hardship and suffering? The record of Scripture is absolutely amazing! They did not complain about it, or say that it was more than they could bear. They welcomed it as something that taught them and strengthened them! Look at what they said about it:

"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." (James 1:2-4)

"...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." (Romans 5:3-5)

God Can Bring Good Out of Pain

“...though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: 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 Peter 1:6-7)

“For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he [God] for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees” (Hebrews 12:10-12)

The unanimous voice of the New Testament writers is that pain and suffering teach us and strengthen us and help us to become mature. These were writers who had, themselves, experienced considerable suffering.

There is a principle in athletic training that says, “No pain, no gain.” I suggest that the same principle applies to our growth into spiritual maturity. Quite often it seems that we grow only in the presence of discomfort or pain that makes us feel the need for change, and forces us to cry out to God.

I want to make one thing clear. These New Testament writers did not seek out pain. They did not deliberately inflict it on themselves. But when it came, they welcomed it as an opportunity to grow and to learn.

There have been, and still are, some people who deliberately inflict pain on themselves as a way of showing devotion to God or attempting to achieve holiness. I find no support for such a view in Scripture. This kind of self-inflicted pain is not what I am talking about.

God Uses Hardship and Pain to Get us to Depend on Him

God can also use hardship, pain and suffering to get us to depend on him rather than ourselves. Paul refers to the great pressure he was under in the province of Asia, which was so great that he despaired of life, and then says,

“...that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead” (2 Corinthians 1:9)

Paul asked God to take away his “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7-8). God replied,

“My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Paul added,

“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 Corinthians 12:10)

Paul's weakness made him strong in the sense that it caused him to rely to a greater degree on God's incomparably great strength. God used this “thorn in the flesh” (which evidently bothered Paul quite a bit, whatever it was), to cause Paul to depend on God at a deeper level.

This is an important principle. We see it illustrated in a number of ways. For example, Jesus said that it is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 19:23-24). One reason is that a rich person tends to rely on his own riches rather than on God. More generally, those who are comfortably off, and successful by this world's standards, often feel that they do not need God.

God Can Bring Good Out of Pain

Those who are in very difficult situations, and do not see how they can get through them, may be much readier to turn to God for help. When things are going well, we can easily believe that we are self-sufficient. In the face of hardship and suffering, the myth of self-sufficiency loses credibility.

We see this in another way. In the relatively affluent West, the Christian church has tended to be weak. Not only are its numbers declining, but many individuals and churches seem to be lacking in strong commitment to God.

In other parts of the world, such as Africa, where many people face hardships, the Christian church is growing and strong. It is striking that in China, where the independent Christian church faces severe persecution, the church has been growing rapidly. The rate of growth has been far greater under Communist persecution than it ever was before.

I have seen this operate in my own life. The experience of having to deal with advanced cancer has not been easy. But I can see that it has done several things for me.

It has increased my faith. I have been put in a position where I had only God to depend on, and I have become willing to depend on God. I have identified and gotten rid of a number of things that had been weakening my faith. I have been praying more consistently and more effectively. I have gained a greater appreciation and thankfulness for the many blessings God has given me.

I believe that this difficult experience has helped me to get my knowledge and understanding of God beyond the intellectual, head level, to a level that reaches the heart. My wife and I were commenting the other day that, on the whole, this has been a good experience.

Light After Darkness

(By Francis Ridley Havergal)

Light after darkness, gain after loss,
Strength after suffering, crown after cross.
Sweet after bitter, song after sigh,
Home after wandering, praise after cry.

Sheaves after sowing, sun after rain,
Sight after mystery, peace after pain.
Joy after sorrow, calm after blast,
Rest after weariness, sweet rest at last.

Near after distant, gleam after gloom,
Love after loneliness, life after tomb.
After long agony, rapture of bliss!
Right was the pathway leading to this!

(Public domain)

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.

(Romans 8:28)



Chapter 5

Loving God for Who He Is

“Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.” (Matthew 22:37)

God wants us to love him for who he is, and not just for what he does for us. This is the issue in the Book of Job.

Job was a wealthy man, with a large family; “the greatest of all the men of the east” (Job 1:3). Satan said to God, “Doth Job fear God for naught?... But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face” (Job 1:9,11). But Job remained faithful to God.

Then satan said, “But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face.” (Job 2:5). But no matter what happened to him, Job did not “sin with his lips.” (Job 2:10)

Job’s wife told him to “curse God, and die” (Job 2:9). But Job replied,

“Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” (Job 2:10)

Job complained to God, he demanded explanations, he showed anger at God, but he never turned away from God. At the end, when God gave him no explanations, he was content with the fact that “now my eyes have seen you” (Job 42:5).

He remained faithful to God for who God was, even though God had allowed satan to take away his family and wealth, and to inflict on him a painful disease. He served God for who he was and not for what he had bestowed on Job.

David wrote,

“Delight thyself also in the LORD: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.”
(Psalm 37:4-5)

Often, before God is ready to give us the desires of our heart, he may test us to see whether we have truly committed our ways to him and are willing to trust him. It is when things are going “badly” that we have to trust in God because we have nowhere else to turn. Just as he did with Job, God may test us with troubles so that he, and we, can know whether we are really committed to him and trust in him.

When the three young Hebrews refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar’s statue, he threatened to throw them into a very hot furnace. They replied,

“If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.”
(Daniel 3:17-18)

They believed that God would save them from suffering. But even if he did not, they would serve him. Their serving God did not depend on what he did or did not do for them, but on who he is.

If God always blessed us with good things, and rescued us from suffering, then we would be tempted to love and serve him just for what he does for us. Our faith in him would be based on greed and self-advantage.

God does not want that kind of faith. He wants us to believe in him, and to love and serve him, for who he is, and not just for what he does for us.

There are many reasons for loving God for who he is. These include his character and his greatness.

God's Character

The important thing to remember about God's character is that it has many aspects. God is loving, compassionate, merciful, forgiving, and kind. He is amazingly patient with us. He also disciplines those he loves. He is holy, righteous, and just. He cannot tolerate evil. He is a God of judgment.

God has all wisdom and all knowledge. He is faithful; he keeps his promises. He reaches out to us and desires our companionship. He wants us to know him personally. But he is also a great and powerful God. He is awesome in the original and true meaning of that word.

I could go on and list many more aspects of God's character. It would take a whole book to begin to deal with them adequately. But the point I want to emphasize is that we need to deal with every aspect of God's character.

One of the great sources of error in our thinking about God is that we sometimes put so much emphasis on certain aspects of his character that we neglect the others and arrive at a distorted picture. We need to know and follow the whole teaching of Scripture about God, and not just parts of it. Let me illustrate this by just one example.

Paul wrote, "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God" (Romans 11:22).

God is a loving God. "God is love" (1 John 4:16). "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" (John 3:16).

God is merciful and patient with us. The Lord longs to be gracious to us (Isaiah 30:18). He lavishes his grace (his unmerited favor) on those who love him.

But he is also a just God and a holy God. He will not forever tolerate evil and sin. He is a God of judgment. "...we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Romans 14:10). (Also see John 5:28-29.)

Scripture tells us to love God, and also to fear God. How can we do both? How can we both love God and fear him? A

simple example may help. A young child loves his daddy. But he also fears him, especially when his daddy finds it necessary to discipline him physically.

We need always to be aware of these two aspects of God.

In the past, there have been those who put such emphasis on God's severity that we tended to lose sight of his love and mercy. Today there are some who put such emphasis on God's love and mercy that we tend to lose sight of his wrath and judgment. Either view is incomplete. Either view, without the other, is a distortion of God's character.

The Greatness of God

God has all wisdom and all knowledge. He is faithful; he keeps his promises. He reaches out to us and desires our companionship. He wants us to know him personally. But he is also a great and powerful God.

“O LORD my God, thou are very great; thou are clothed with honour and majesty” (Psalm 104:1)

“For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also. The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land. O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.” (Psalm 95:3-7)

“Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable.” (Psalm 145:3)

“Behold, God is mighty... he is mighty in strength and wisdom.” (Job 36:5)

To get some sense of God's greatness, I suggest reading Isaiah, chapter 40, and Revelation, chapters 4 and 5. Even they do not give the whole picture.

Loving God for Who He Is

God created the earth, the sun, the moon, our solar system, and millions upon millions of stars, most of which are larger than our sun. He created a physical universe that extends, so our scientists tell us, for a huge number of light years—distances that most of us cannot begin to grasp. And he is greater than his creation!

We cannot begin to conceive the full measure of God's greatness, his splendor, his majesty, his power. He has given us, in his Scriptures, some remarkable visions of him; but they are incomplete and partial. God lives "in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see" (1 Timothy 6:16).

Part of God's greatness is that he is all-powerful. God is the Almighty. That is his nature. That is what it is to be God. God's power is incomparably great (Ephesians 1:19). He can do all things.

"For with God nothing shall be impossible." (Luke 1:37)

"Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." (Genesis 18:14)

"I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee." (Job 42:2)

"But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26)

God's purpose and plans will prevail. Nothing can thwart or defeat them.

"The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations." (Psalm 33:11)

"The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand" (Isaiah 14:24)

The Fear of the Lord

Because God is so great, we should fear him.

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom”
(Psalm 111:10)

“The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.” (Psalm 19:9)

“O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him.” (Psalm 34:9)

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge”
(Proverbs 1:7)

What does it mean, to fear God? I think it means that we recognize God's tremendous power, and his potential for wrath against things that are ungodly. God is not mocked. We need constantly to keep watch over how we live.

It means that we do not presume on God. “Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins... and I shall be innocent from the great transgression” (Psalm 19:13).

What are presumptuous sins? We presume on God when we take him for granted, or seek to manipulate him. We presume on God when we put him to the test. (See Matthew 4:7.) Jesus would have presumed on God if he had thrown himself from the Temple when God did not tell him to do so. (See Matthew 4:6-7.)

We presume on God whenever we think we can obligate him to give us something or to do something on our behalf. God does not owe anything to anybody. He is not obligated to anybody. (See Romans 11:35.)

God is not a heavenly vending machine in which you put in a prayer and get whatever you have asked for. God is sovereign.

And note that the Psalmist refers to presumptuous sins as “great transgression.”

It means that we recognize that we cannot hide anything from God. God knows us completely (Psalm 139:1-6). He knows our every thought and action. And we cannot escape from him (Psalm 139:7-12). Even those who deny the existence of God will ultimately have to deal with him.

It means that we are serious about our faith. God wants a total commitment of our lives to him.

It means that we take his Scriptures seriously. We don't just ignore them, or give them lip service, or construe them in a way that waters down their clear meaning. It means that we act on them and live by them.

Some do not like to consider God's greatness because it makes them feel small. That is where God wants us. Scripture tells us to humble ourselves before God (1 Peter 5:6; James 4:10). This is part of the fear of God, that we recognize how much greater he is than we are.

Confidence in God

God's greatness also means that, by his incomparably great power working within us, we can conquer whatever problems and difficulties we may have to face. God is bigger. He is bigger than anything we have to deal with.

Nothing is impossible for him. In him we can overcome trials and difficulties. It is wonderful to be able to trust in such a great God.

Freedom From Fear

To put it another way, if we fear God, we do not need to fear anything else. If we do not fear God, then we will fear everything else.

Be careful [anxious] 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.

(Philippians 4:6-7)



Chapter 6

The Issue of Fairness

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:9)

When we encounter suffering we often ask, “Why me? What have I done to deserve this?” Our sense is that it is unfair for us to have to suffer.

However, when “good” things happen, we seldom ask, “Why me? What have I done to deserve this?” Perhaps we should. But let’s look at this issue of “fairness” in a little more depth.

Scripture speaks much about God’s grace, the unmerited favor he bestows on us. Would we want to receive only what we deserve and never receive God’s grace, his unmerited favor? Would we want to deny ourselves the “exceeding riches of his [God’s] grace” (Ephesians 2:7) by insisting that we receive only what we deserve?

Scripture warns us to be “diligent” not to miss the grace of God (Hebrews 12:15) Would we want to miss the grace of God by insisting on a principle that we receive only what we deserve?

If we received only what we deserved, none of us could be saved! We are saved by grace, by God’s unmerited favor (Ephesians 2:8). Whatever may happen to us in this life is minor compared to the suffering of spending eternity in hell separated from God.

If we complain about suffering here on earth, are we not a little bit in the position of someone who receives an unmerited gift of \$1,000 and complains because it is in \$20 bills rather than \$100 bills? So long as we have the unmerited gift of

eternal salvation, should we complain to God because our life on this earth is relatively more or less difficult? This idea of asking God only to let us have what we deserve cuts two ways, and I suggest we should not want to have him establish such a principle.

“He [God] hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.” (Psalm 103:10)

So let us not complain that sometimes we may have to undergo suffering that we think we do not deserve.

People also say, “Why is this happening to me and not to this other person?” Would we want to have God make things “fair” by making the other person suffer as much as we suffer?

Jesus predicted to Peter how Peter would die. When Peter saw John he asked, “Lord, what about him?” And Jesus answered,

“If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.” (John 21:22)

It is none of our concern how God treats somebody else. We need to focus on **our** relationship with him.

Jesus told a parable about workers in a vineyard. Some came to work in the beginning of the day, and agreed to receive one denarius (“penny”) as a wage. Others started work at the third, the sixth, the ninth and the eleventh hour. The owner of the vineyard paid each of them the same wage. Those who had worked the longest complained that this was not fair, and the master (God) replied,

“But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?” (Matthew 20:13-15)

Scripture tells us not to compare ourselves with others (Galatians 6:4). One reason this principle is applicable here is that we cannot know fully what the other person may be going through.

Often others, who seem outwardly to be doing well, may be struggling with difficulties we know nothing of. Or they may have come through periods of severe pain in the past.

How are we to measure pain? How do we compare the pain of arthritis or cancer with the pain of a marriage that is breaking up, or a rebellious child? It is better to stay with Jesus' "What is that to you?" (John 21:22).

Examples of Dealing with Pain and Hardship

Scripture gives a number of examples of those who dealt with suffering. Above all, there is Jesus, "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Hebrews 12:2).

Whenever we feel overwhelmed by the pain we have to endure, we can consider the agony that Jesus voluntarily suffered for us. Whenever we complain about what we consider to be the unfairness of our suffering, we can consider the injustice that Jesus willingly suffered.

There is also Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his brothers, unjustly accused by his master's wife and thrown into prison, and forgotten by those who promised to help him. So far as Scripture records, he never complained. Eventually he became one of the rulers of Egypt and was able to save his family from starvation. He told his brothers,

"But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good" (Genesis 50:20)

There is David, who for years was running for his life, just a step away from death. His Psalms are full of words of pain and agony, physical and spiritual. (See, for example, Psalms 6:1-3,

13:1-3, 38:68, 55:4-5, 69:1-3.) Yet David always sensed that God was with him. David said,

“Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me” (Psalm 138:7)

“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.” (Psalm 23:4)

One of the noteworthy things about the psalms is that, while they often start in despair, they usually end in affirmation, as David turns his eyes from his own suffering to the greatness of God.

“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.” (Psalm 42:5, 11)

But I want to talk about Paul. When Paul accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior, God said, “For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake” (Acts 9:16). Paul later said,

“...we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22)

And suffer he did. Read this recital and think what each phrase of it must have meant:

“Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils

of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.” (2 Corinthians 11:23-28)

Even this list may not be complete, for elsewhere he speaks of fighting wild beasts (1 Corinthians 15:32), and of encountering such hardships in the province of Asia (part of modern Turkey) that he despaired of his life (2 Corinthians 1:8).

What would five whippings, three beatings with rods, and a stoning do to a man's back? I expect that Paul was in almost constant pain. This may be why he said, “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection” (1 Corinthians 9:27). (The Greek word translated “keep under” can mean to “subdue.”) Yet Paul, writing from a Roman jail, could say,

“Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.”
(Philippians 4:4)

He wrote,

“Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

He could say,

“...I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” (Philippians 4:11)

How did Paul achieve this? I think we can see some keys.

- Paul took his eyes off of the circumstances and focussed them on eternal things (2 Corinthians 4:18). This is also

what David did. He took his eyes off his problems and put them on God. We generally cannot control what happens to us. If we see ourselves as “victims” of circumstances we cannot control, then we feel helpless and abused. If we focus on God, on his almighty power, and the security of our relationship with him, then we can see ourselves as overcomers.

- He looked to see what he could learn from difficult experiences. “[W]e glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope” (Romans 5:3-4).
- He understood that he did not have to deal with difficulties, danger and suffering in his own strength. He could call upon God’s great power (Ephesians 1:19, 6:10). “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13). He even rejoiced in his own weakness, because in it God’s power was made greater (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

I want also to mention one fairly contemporary example, from among a great many. The terrible suffering of the Nazi Holocaust has been hard for many to accept and understand. Yet there are those who overcame it. One such was Corrie ten Boom. During the Nazi occupation of Holland, her family hid a number of Jews in their home and enabled many of them to get out of Holland, knowing the great risks of doing so.

They were betrayed, and imprisoned by the Nazis. Corrie’s father died in prison. Corrie and her sister Betsy were sent to one of the Nazi death camps, Ravensbruck. Betsy died there.

Corrie, by what may have been a clerical error, was released just before she was scheduled to be gassed. She spent the rest of her life ministering to others, telling them of God’s greatness, his love, his tender mercy, his goodness. She was even able to forgive one of the Nazi guards who had mistreated her and her sister, and to bring to Christ the man who had betrayed her family. She lived a life of joy and gave great joy to many.

God's Help for Hard Times

Despite the terrible things she endured, Corrie was an overcomer. She kept her eyes on the greatness of God, rather than the terrible circumstances in which she had found herself.

Blessed in the Crucible

(By Frances Morrisson)

O be blessed, by our Creator:

The One who stretched out the heavens by the breath of His mouth;
and declared out of nothingness LIGHT! And all forms of LIFE!
the One who woos us beyond the Curse and our resistance;
the One who gives each life a glorious purpose.

O Lord:

You gave us hearts, and breath, minds and limbs
to welcome, and be nourished, by Your Love and Word;
to seek Your Wisdom, strength and Ways;
to carry Faith in Hope, to Your gates of Justice:
washed in Your Love, strengthened by Your Mercy.

O Lord:

How can we utter our praise high enough,
deep enough, with fullest joy in harmony?
How can we murmur our love beautifully enough?
How can we bask peacefully enough in Your Presence?
How can we spread Your message clearly enough?

But these we try, blessed in the crucible of living Life.

Trust in the LORD
with all thine heart;
and lean not unto
thine own understanding.
In all thy ways acknowledge him,
and he shall direct thy paths.

(Proverbs 3:5-6)

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 Corinthians 2:9)



Chapter 7

Renewing Our Minds

*“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind”
(Romans 12:2)*

In order to deal with pain and hardship, we must think Scripturally instead of thinking the way that the world does. The theme of transformation runs throughout the New Testament. God does not want us to stay where we are. He wants us to change—radically. Change is often difficult and can be painful. But it is what God wants and expects of us.

A Radical Transformation

God expects that, when we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we will be radically changed, transformed. The Greek word is *metamorphoo*. This transformation is to be a metamorphosis, of a magnitude at least comparable to that by which a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. God expects us to become totally different.

Scripture uses many different images to express the change that should occur:

- We become “a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). We really become a new species. Scripture speaks of the first Adam who was earthly and fell into sin, and the second Adam (Jesus Christ) who was sinless and holy (1 Corinthians 15:44-49). (Also see Romans 5:12-19.) It says that we will bear the likeness of the second Adam.

Renewing Our Minds

- “But we all, with open [unveiled] face beholding as in a glass [mirror] the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 3:18).
- We are to be “renewed in the spirit of [our] mind” (Ephesians 4:23).
- We “put off... the old man” and “put on the new man” (Ephesians 4:22, 24). (Also see Colossians 3:9-10.)
- We live by the Spirit and not by the flesh (Galatians 5:16; Romans 8:13).
- We become “instruments of righteousness” rather than “instruments of unrighteousness” (Romans 6:13).
- We have “been buried with him by baptism into death” so that we may “walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).
- “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20).
- We have “been made free from sin” and have “become servants to God” (Romans 6:22). We are no longer servants “of sin unto death,” but have become servants “of obedience unto righteousness” (Romans 6:16).
- God has “delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Colossians 1:13). Our citizenship and our allegiance have been changed.
- We have become adopted children of God (John 1:12-13; Romans 8:15-16).
- We are born again (John 3:3, 5); born from above, of the spirit and not the flesh.

Each of these images, in a different way, emphasizes the magnitude of the change that is expected. Each is dramatic and astonishing in itself. Their cumulative effect is even more powerful. We are talking about a tremendous transformation. It should be visible to others, but its internal effect should be far greater than what others can perceive.

If a person is not significantly changed by their salvation, then we are entitled to wonder whether their salvation was genuine.

We are supposed to be salt and light to the world, and to let our light shine before men (Matthew 5:13-16). We need to so live that the difference between Christians and non-Christians is inescapable. We need to stand, boldly and clearly, for what we believe.

The Fruit of Transformation

What is the result of this metamorphosis? Scripture states it in a number of different ways, which overlap and can be seen as different ways of expressing the same basic concept. Scripture often does this, because our minds are inadequate to comprehend—and our language inadequate to express—the full scope of God's revelation to us.

Developing Godly Character

The whole concept can be summed up by saying that our character is to become more and more like God's character. We are to “put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24).

“...ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Colossians 3:9-10)

God intends us “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29). We are supposed to think more and more like Jesus Christ does (1 Corinthians 2:16). (Also see Philippians 2:5.)

Let us look at some other ways of expressing the same concept.

Living for the Things that are Unseen

Two of the great statements about this transformation are:

- “But we all, with open [unveiled] face beholding as in a glass [mirror] the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 3:18)
- “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

A look at what is said between those two statements tells us a good deal about the nature of this transformation.

In 2 Corinthians, chapters 4 and 5, Paul repeatedly contrasts the material world in which our bodies now live, and the spiritual world. He tells us that the spiritual world is the real one, on which we should focus. He says that we should not regard people from a worldly point of view (“after the flesh”) (2 Corinthians 5:16). And he points out that the man without the Spirit cannot understand spiritual things. Paul said,

“...the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Corinthians 4:4)

“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither

can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Corinthians 2:14)

“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:18)

“For we walk by faith, not by sight.” (2 Corinthians 5:7)

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1)

“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” (Colossians 3:1-2)

God is spirit and he lives primarily in the realm of the spirit. He lived in that realm before there was any physical universe, and he will live in it even though heaven and earth pass away. (See Isaiah 51:6.)

We need to learn to see things from God's perspective. This results in a wholly different order of priorities.

First, the natural person, the untransformed person, lives primarily for material things. His priorities are those of the material world.

In contrast, the transformed person lives primarily in a spiritual world. He lives primarily by faith in God and in God's word, rather than by his physical senses. He regards the unseen things of faith as more real and more lasting than the material things which surround him. The transformed person is living primarily in a different world, a world in which spiritual rather than material things have primary importance.

Second, where the natural person lives only for this life, the transformed person is already living in eternity. Paul speaks of this in many ways. For Paul, tribulations and difficulties of this

world become minor when compared to the glory to come. Paul says,

“For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” (2 Corinthians 4:16-17)

“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 Peter 4:12-13)

Paul says, “Therefore we are always confident” (2 Corinthians 5:6), because we know that when we leave this earthly body we will be with the Lord, which is better. (Also see Philippians 1:21.)

Jesus told those who believed in him that in this world they will have tribulation (John 16:33). Paul said that “We must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22), and that “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12).

However, we should rejoice in our troubles, because we learn and grow from them (James 1:2-4; Romans 5:3-5), and because the glory that is to come is far greater than our troubles are. As believers, “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

Third, those who live should no longer live for themselves, but “unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:15). Hence, we should make it our goal to please him (2 Corinthians 5:9). We should not be like those who “loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:43). (Also see Isaiah 51:12-13.) Jesus has told us,

“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” (John 15:18-19)

These are all major shifts in our attitudes and priorities. Truly they require a renewing of the mind.

Living by the Spirit

When we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, God sends us the Holy Spirit to live with us and be in us (John 14:16). It is because we have the Holy Spirit living in us, and his power working in us, that we are able to be transformed. But the process is not instantaneous. The Holy Spirit inhabits our spirit, but our soul and body need to be brought under the Spirit's control.

Becoming Yielded to God

Part of what living by the Spirit means is that we are wholly yielded to God. We are no longer servants of sin, but servants of obedience and righteousness (Romans 6:16). We submit ourselves to God (James 4:7).

The Process of Transformation

This transformation is a process. It does not happen all at once. We are transformed into his likeness with glory that keeps increasing (2 Corinthians 3:18).

We spend a lifetime learning how to live by the Spirit, to live a new life. We must keep making every effort to be holy (Hebrews 12:14). We must submit, and keep on submitting, to God. Over and over and over we must take our thoughts captive to obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). Near the end of his life, Paul did not consider that he had arrived (Philippians 3:12).

One aspect of this transformation is showing the “fruit of the spirit.” A farmer cannot cause fruit to grow. However, he can create conditions that are favorable to its growth.

In somewhat the same way, we cannot cause God’s character to grow within us. Only God can do that. But we can create favorable conditions for its growth—by faith, prayer, Bible study, and guarding our thoughts.

Believe

We need to believe that God can, and will, transform us into his image—that this astonishing metamorphosis can, and will, occur. We need to consider him faithful who has made the promise (Hebrews 11:11).

Choose

We must make an act of the will. We must choose to be transformed, choose to put off the old self and put on the new self, choose to live by the Spirit, choose to submit to God, choose to be weapons of righteousness, etc.

Stay in God’s Word

The agent that renews our mind is the word of God. It is not enough just to read Scripture. We need to believe it, take it seriously, and follow it. We need to let it dwell in us, work in us, become engrafted in us, become a part of us.

Scripture speaks often about the importance of meditating on the word of God (Joshua 1:8; Psalms 1:2, 119:78). The Hebrew word for “meditate” suggests a cow chewing its cud, working the material over and over to extract all the good from it.

Guard Our Thoughts

If we would be transformed by the renewing of our mind—be made new in the attitude of our mind—we need to guard carefully what goes into our mind. We need to think on those things that are true, noble, right, pure, etc. (Philippians 4:8). Even more important, we need to guard against our own wrong thoughts—the thoughts that come from the flesh and not the spirit.

We need to take our thoughts captive to obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). We need to do this, not just daily, but moment by moment. Whenever we find ourselves thinking unscriptural thoughts, we need to repudiate them, renounce them, and replace them with thoughts that are Scripturally true.

Pray

We need to pray for wisdom and for any other quality that we lack.

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” (James 1:5)

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Matthew 7:7)

The form of the verbs means “keep on asking,” “keep on seeking,” “keep on knocking.” When we keep asking God to change us into his likeness, we unite our will with his and cooperate with his work in our lives.

Persevere

Jesus told his disciples to persist in prayer (Luke 18:1-7, 11:5-10). We are to “run with patience the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1). (Also see Hebrews 6:11.)

Renewing Our Minds

Scripture is full of words telling us to apply ourselves diligently to the task before us. We need to keep pursuing, making every effort, pressing on, continuing, standing, etc.

If ye then be risen with Christ,
seek those things which are above,
where Christ sitteth
on the right hand of God.
Set your affection on things above,
not on things on the earth.

(Colossians 3:1-2)



Chapter 8

How Can We Deal with Pain and Hardship?

“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.” (Romans 8:28)

There are no easy answers, no formulas. Everyone has to work it out for themselves. Dealing with suffering can be extremely difficult, but with God’s help, it is possible.

We need to be wary of the pat answers that are sometimes given. They usually do not work. Job’s “comforters” gave him pat answers, and God said of them, “You have not spoken of me the thing which is right” (Job 42:8).

One pat answer is that suffering is always the result of sin, so the way to deal with it is to discover and get rid of the sin. It is well to examine ourselves and see if there is sin that needs to be dealt with. But suffering is not always caused by sin.

Jesus was sinless; yet he suffered terribly. Paul suffered much. Can we say that this was because of sin he had not dealt with?

Christians have been persecuted and martyred from the First Century until today. Would anyone suggest that this is because of sin?

Another pat answer is that, if our prayer to be relieved of suffering is not answered, it must be because of lack of faith. We do need to pray, believing (James 1:6). There have been times in my present illness when I realized that I lacked faith, and was able to do something about it. But lack of faith is not the only reason why men endure suffering.

The prophets who suffered in terrible ways were commended for their faith (Hebrews 11:32-40). When God

refused to heal Paul's "thorn in the flesh," he said nothing about a lack of faith. Rather, he said,

"My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

God did not answer Jesus' prayer that he not have to endure the Crucifixion (Matthew 26:36-42). Would anyone suggest that it was because of a lack of faith?

Let me suggest a few Scriptural principles that may be helpful.

Have the Right Attitude

Underlying everything else is the attitude with which we deal with pain, suffering and difficulties when they come, as they will to most of us. I can identify three general kinds of attitudes.

First, when suffering, difficulties, or hardships come, we say, "Why me?" We dwell on the seeming injustice and unfairness of it. This easily leads to self-pity, to feeling sorry for ourselves, which is one of the devil's most effective schemes for making a Christian ineffective. From there it can go on to blaming God for allowing the suffering, and to anger and bitterness at God. Ultimately, this can in some cases lead to a total turning away from God, a total rejection of God.

This approach can be very damaging, very destructive. It does nothing to relieve the suffering or make it easier to bear.

Many of us go through the early stages of this approach for a while when suffering or difficulties come. But if we stay there, and do not move on, the result can be very destructive to us.

Second, we can decide to take a constructive attitude. We can say, "God, this suffering, this difficulty, is here. I don't like it but I need to accept it. What are you trying to teach me by it? How can I use it to grow? How can I bring good out of it?"

With this approach, we can turn the suffering, the difficulty, to our good. We can use it to increase in maturity and strength.

We get our mind off our suffering and onto God and what he is doing in our lives. If we can see some good purpose in the suffering, it becomes easier to handle.

There is a third approach which builds on the second and is even better. Paul asked that he might “know him [Jesus], and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings” (Philippians 3:10).

What does this mean? I am not sure. I am not there and have not experienced what Paul is talking about. But I suggest that Paul is saying that, when suffering comes, we can see it as a means of drawing closer to Jesus.

As we suffer, we can begin to understand better what Jesus voluntarily suffered for us, and appreciate more fully what he did for us. As we are unjustly treated, we can begin to understand more fully the rejection, injustice and false accusations that Jesus continually suffered. We can become more like Jesus, which is the goal of our transformation.

A related concept is found in 2 Corinthians 1:4-5, where Paul says that God “comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.”

Those who have lost a spouse can understand what others are going through who have lost a spouse; they can speak to them in a way that others cannot. Those who have been physically or sexually abused can understand what others are going through who have suffered abuse. Those who have endured physical pain can understand what others are going through who have to deal with physical pain. And so on.

Our own suffering enables us to minister more effectively to others who are suffering. Thus our suffering helps to bring us together more closely as the body of Christ. It helps us comfort and encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ, and to “edify one another” (build each other up) (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Once we have taken care of our attitude, there are some other specific things we can do.

Accept Hardship

Pain and hardship occur. They are part of this world. No one is immune or exempt from them. There is no guarantee that they will not occur. When they come in our life, we need to be able to accept them. As Peter wrote,

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you” (1 Peter 4:12)

This is not easy, but it is essential.

Scripture tells us to go further, and to “count it all joy” when trials come (James 1:2). I confess that I am not yet at this point! But if we can see pain and suffering as experiences from which we can learn and grow, then perhaps we can begin to see them as things that God is using for our good, and be able to rejoice in them.

Decide to Overcome

Scripture says that, in God’s power, we can be overcomers. We need to come to a decision to believe those Scriptures. We need to make a conscious decision that, with God’s help, we can and will overcome the pain and suffering. We need to decide that we will not allow it to undermine our faith in God, our joy, our peace, or our ability to function.

Do What You Can

Paul wrote, “Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and **having done all**, to stand” (Ephesians 6:13, emphasis added). He was talking about facing the devil, but I think the principle applies to every kind of adversity. God wants us to do everything we can.

In the case of pain and suffering, this means to get all the help you can. Medical science knows quite a lot about pain management. What they have to offer does not always work, does not always work fully, and sometimes has side effects we prefer to avoid, but we might as well use it when we can.

Having a prayer partner, or a close friend in whom you can confide, can be very helpful. Prayer is always helpful. So is reading, studying, and reflecting on Scripture.

My point is, avail yourself of anything that will be genuinely helpful in relieving your pain. There is no virtue in unnecessary suffering.

There are, however, some techniques of pain relief that Christians should avoid. Two examples are hypnosis (which involves allowing someone else to manipulate your mind while you are not aware of what he is doing) and New Age forms of meditation (which originate in pagan religions). Anything that derives from, or involves, a pagan religion should be avoided by Christians. There is little sense in relieving physical pain at the cost of spiritual harm to yourself!

Pray

One of the things we can always do, and one of the first things we should do, is to pray.

“Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray.” (James 5:13)

Prayer brings us in touch with the almighty power of God. God does not always take us out of difficult circumstances. But he is with us in them. He is “a very present help **in** trouble” (Psalm 46:1, emphasis added).

“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.” (Psalm 23:4)

Prayer also takes our mind off of our circumstances and puts it on God.

Focus on God and Not Your Circumstances

Paul, who went through a remarkable amount of suffering, wrote that in all circumstances we should give thanks (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Our thanks do not depend on the circumstances. Our thanks depend on who God is, on the salvation he has so freely given us, and on the relationship we have with him. As Paul wrote,

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)

To Paul, five whippings, three beatings with rods, stoning, and many other hardships were a “light affliction,” which was just for a moment! This seems amazing. But when we compare all that Paul suffered during some 60 years on earth to the joy of spending eternity in heaven with God, it becomes quite minor.

Because our thanksgiving does not depend on the circumstances, we are not at the mercy of the circumstances. I think this is what Paul was talking about when he said that he had learned how to be content in every situation (Philippians 4:12). You don’t look at the situation—you look at God. It is by this, also, that we can achieve “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding” (Philippians 4:7).

Our faith and hope also need to rise above our circumstances. Abraham “believed in hope” (Romans 4:18). All the circumstances gave Abraham reason to believe that he and Sarah could not have a child. But against that expectation based on his situation, Abraham set his hope, his confident

expectation, based on God's promise to him. He went past all the natural circumstances to believe God's promise.

Whatever our situation, we need to believe that God is bigger than anything that we face, that he will enable us to bear it, and that he will bring us through it. Whatever our circumstances, we need to believe that God will strengthen us with all power according to his glorious might, so that we may have great endurance and patience (Colossians 1:11).

In painful situations, many have found that it helps to focus on God. Jesus endured the Cross "for the joy that was set before him" (Hebrews 12:2). He looked at God's power and his promise rather than looking at his own physical agony.

Stephen, while being stoned, had a vision of heaven with Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55-56). After Paul and Silas were beaten with rods and put in stocks in the inner prison, they prayed and sang hymns to God, and God moved mightily on their behalf (Acts 16:25).

The Christian martyrs in the Roman arena sang hymns as they faced the wild beasts who were about to eat them. Many other martyrs have faced their martyrdom with praise to God.

Let God Bring Good Out of the Situation

There is a further reason to focus on God rather than the circumstances. God works for good in all things, even in the most unlikely situations (Romans 8:28). Use praise, prayer, Scripture reading, reflecting on Scripture—whatever works for you—to draw closer to God and see things more from his perspective. Turn your situation over to him in prayer. Ask him to deal with you and to show you anything he wants to show you about it.

"Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you."
(James 4:8)

How Can We Deal with Pain and Hardship?

Be honest with God. He can handle anger, frustration, and even discouragement and despair. Job complained and got angry at God. And God spoke to him at length, revealed himself to him, and said that Job had “spoken of me [God] the thing which is right” (Job 42:8).

David often complained and poured out his heart to God. And God called him “a man after mine own heart” (Acts 13:22). God does not mind hearing the distress and even anger of one who is genuinely seeking after him.

Remain Faithful to God

Job asked the question that many of us ask when suffering comes. He said,

“...shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” (Job 2:10)

Do we love God for what he gives us, or for who he is? Can we love him and serve him even in suffering? Even if he seems to have deserted us? Even if he seems not to answer our prayers?

In his great end-time prophecy, Jesus told the disciples that they would be persecuted and put to death. He said that many people would turn away from the faith, and the love of many would grow cold. (See Matthew 24:3-14.) Jesus ended by saying,

“But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.” (Matthew 24:13)

In each of the letters to the churches in the Book of Revelation, there is a promise of blessings to the one who overcomes. God has promised that we can be more than conquerors (Romans 8:37). “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world” (1 John 5:4)

God's Help for Hard Times

God has made it possible to overcome pain and suffering, no matter how severe and prolonged.

May God bless us all as we seek to live according to His Word!

Faithful Friend

(By Maria Kneas)

Jesus, You're the friend who'll never leave me.
You're the friend who'll always understand.
You will not forsake me or deceive me.
You'll stay by my side until the end.

When I'm afraid, You'll put Your arm around me.
You're the faithful friend who's tried and true.
No matter what the troubles that surround me
You will find a way to get me through.

Your love is strong, it's deeper than the ocean.
It's higher than the moon and stars above.
When earth and stars are gone and time has ended,
I'll still live, rejoicing in Your love.

Who shall separate us
from the love of Christ?
Shall tribulation, or distress,
or persecution, or famine,
or nakedness, or peril, or sword?
As it is written,
For thy sake we are killed all the day long;
we are accounted as
sheep for the slaughter.
Nay, in all these things
we are more than conquerors
through him that loved us.

(Romans 8:35-37)

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.

(Romans 8:38-39)



Chapter 9

Facing the Unexpected

(By Maria Kneas)

“And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.” (Matthew 11:6)

The Apostle Paul wrote nearly a fourth of the New Testament. He had amazing revelations about God. Much of our theology is based on his writings. Yet he said:

“For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.” (1 Corinthians 13:9)

Paul includes himself among those who only know “in part.” If the Apostle Paul only knew in part, then no church, no denomination, and no individual has all the answers. All of us have areas where our understanding is limited.

What will we do if things don’t make sense to us? Will we become offended with God and abandon our faith? There was a time when many of Jesus’ followers became offended with Him and left Him. The twelve Apostles were troubled, but they were loyal and remained:

“From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.” (John 6:66-69)

There was a time when King Nebuchadnezzar commanded Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to bow down and worship a

huge golden idol. If they refused, then they would be thrown into a fiery furnace. They answered the king:

“If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.”
(Daniel 3:17-18)

What will we do if the unthinkable happens? Will we be faithful to God no matter what, or will we only be faithful if things work out the way that we think they should? The apostle Paul said:

“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 Timothy 1:12, emphasis added)

Notice that Paul said “whom” (a person), not “what” (theology, understanding, Scripture interpretation, etc.) Paul’s primary confidence was in the person, Jesus Christ. And that is where our primary confidence needs to be. The Bible says:

“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.” (Ephesians 6:13)

This says that we can expect to have to face at least one “evil day.” You may know people who have had to face a number of them. But even though that time may be incredibly difficult, God will enable us to stand if we cooperate with Him. The apostle Paul said:

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” (Philippians 4:13)

God's Help for Hard Times

According to Jesus, tribulation is a normal part of life. It is to be expected. The important thing is that we can trust Jesus to get us through it. The Bible tells us:

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes; fear the Lord, and depart from evil.”
(Proverbs 3:5-7)

What if something happens to us which doesn't make sense to us? What if it seems to be contrary to what we were taught by our teachers, or pastor, or our Study Bible notes? What will we do?

Will we call God a liar? Or will we say that evidently our teachers didn't fully understand (or adequately explain) that issue?

Will we become bitter against God? Or will we choose to trust Him? Will we turn away from God? Or will we turn **to** Him for strength and comfort and wisdom?

God promised to make everything work out for our good if we love Him (Romans 8:28). When the pain and the tears come, will we trust God to bring good out of our situation?

We can ask God to increase our trust in Him and our love for Him. We can ask Him to make us faithful. We can ask Him to enable us to stand with Shadrach, Mesach, and Abednego—to be determined to be faithful to our God no matter what happens to us and the people we love.

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For which cause we faint not;
but though our outward man perish,
yet the inward man
is renewed day by day.
For our light affliction,
which is but for a moment,
worketh for us
a far more exceeding and
eternal weight of glory;
While we look not at
the things which are seen,
but at the things which are not seen;
for the things which are seen are temporal,
but the things which are not seen
are eternal.

(2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

Blest

(By Frances Morrisson)

O be blessed,
unruffled by clamorings of the past,
by fears for what we hold most dear.

O be blessed,
flowing by His spirit
toward His image;
flexing to His plans —
whether shadowy or clear.

Be blessed this very moment,
the only time of touch or blessing:
for the past has fled;
but the future is not here.



God Makes All Things New

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth,
for the first heaven and the first earth
had passed away.

(Revelation 21:1)

And God will wipe away
every tear from their eyes;
there shall be no more death,
nor sorrow, nor crying.
There shall be no more pain,
for the former things
have passed away.

(Revelation 21:4)

Then He who sat on the throne said,
“Behold, I make all things new.”

(Revelation 21:5)

Great and marvellous are thy works
Lord God Almighty;
just and true are thy ways

(Revelation 15:3)

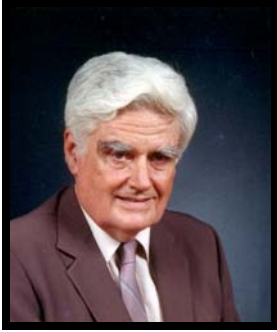
Blessing, and glory, and wisdom,
and thanksgiving, and honour,
and power, and might,
be unto our God
for ever and ever.

(Revelation 7:12)

Blessed be his glorious name for ever:
and let the whole earth
be filled with his glory;
Amen, and Amen.

(Psalm 72:19)





About the Author

James Lord Morrisson was born in Chicago in 1917. He graduated from Harvard University with high honors; attended Columbia University Law School, was editor-in-chief of the *Columbia Law Review*, and graduated with honors.

He then was law clerk to Chief Justice Stone of the U.S. Supreme Court. Justice Stone recommended him for the Operations Analysis Section of the Office of Strategic Services; and he served in the OSS in High Wycombe, England during World War II under the Eighth Air Force. While overseas he got to know some of the local people and played string quartets with them on a borrowed cello.

After the war, he served in the U.S. Office of the Solicitor General. He argued a number of cases in the United States Supreme Court and dealt with issues of major constitutional significance. As a federal attorney, he served in several other capacities, including working directly with U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy.

He took early retirement from the U.S. Government and taught a college course in government.

From his university years and on, he also pursued interests in music. As a baritone, he sang in operas, oratorios and song recitals in five languages; he also directed a choir and taught singing. As a cellist, he played string quartets informally with three other attorneys for many years and also played in a community symphony orchestra for several years.

In his sixties, he became a Christian and earned an M.A. in Biblical Studies. Scripture then became the focus of his studies.

God's Help for Hard Times

He lived in Richmond, Virginia with his wife Frances. James died in April 2005 at age 88, shortly before their 64th anniversary. He finished writing his book *Standing Firm in the Faith* shortly before his death.

His wife Frances died in September 2012 at age 94. She wrote a book of poetry, *Glimpses of Life and Eternity*, and recorded the poems so that people could listen to them in addition to reading them. She finished the recording project shortly before her death.

They have three children (Maria, Robert and Douglas); two grandsons (Matthew and Michael); and four great grandchildren.

Notice

My Dad had a lot of valuable and practical Scriptural insights, and these days, many people need my father's Biblical encouragement. Dad had advanced cancer when he wrote his book, so it is based on much prayer, and on things that he learned "in the trenches" when he had an urgent need to trust God and apply Scriptural principles to his own life.

The purpose of *God's Help for Hard Times* is to help "strengthen the brethren." That is always needed, because trials and tribulations are a normal part of human life. However, in these troubled times, the need is even greater.

We are living in increasingly turbulent times. Bad things have suddenly come upon us, such as the slaughter of innocent young children in a Connecticut elementary school. Our economy is uncertain, Europe and the Middle East are in turmoil, and the threat of terrorist attacks hangs over our heads. In addition, many individuals struggle with health problems, financial difficulties, or family problems.

Therefore, we want to get this book out to as many people as possible—as quickly as possible. Please feel free to make copies of it, to quote extensively from it, and to translate it into other languages.

You can download a free PDF file of *God's Help for Hard Times* at a website created specifically for that purpose:

www.GodsHelpForHardTimes.com

Please download the book and email it to your friends. If you have a website, feel free to post the PDF file of the book there so that your readers can download it.

The book is being published as a paperback, and it should be available in early January 2013. You will be able to get it at online bookstores or order it through regular bookstores.

God's Help for Hard Times

May the Lord give all of us the grace to be faithful to Him and to one another, no matter what happens.



Related Reading

Strength for Tough Times: Encouragement from God's Word (by Maria Kneas)

This book was written in order to help strengthen and encourage fellow believers in today's difficult times. I know something about affliction, because I watched my husband die, and I am a cancer survivor. I can testify that God is faithful. He loves us, and He promises to bring good out of everything that happens to those who love Him (Romans 8:28).

The last chapter of *God's Help for Hard Times* was taken from this book. You can read three chapters of *Strength for Tough Times* online.

www.StrengthForToughTimes.com

Standing Firm in the Faith: Finding God's Strength for Today's Challenging Times (by James L. Morrisson)

This is a comprehensive, 314-page book. Most of the text of *God's Help for Hard Times* was excerpted from it. You can read the entire book online.

www.StandingFirmInTheFaith.com

Glimpses of Life and Eternity: Christian Reflections for Whosoever (by Frances Morrisson)

This book contains many of my Mom's poems. (You got a sample of them in *God's Help for Hard Times*.) You can read the entire book online. You can also listen to the poems. If you go to a poem, you will see an icon that you can click on in order to hear Mom read it.

www.GlimpsesOfLifeAndEternity.com

In My Father's House (by Corrie ten Boom)

This is the story of Corrie's life with her mother, father, and the rest of her family before they began hiding Jewish people in their home during the Nazi occupation of Holland. It is a testament to how God prepared one family through a father's faithfulness to his Savior and the Word of God for the most sacrificial service a family could do. Beginning in the years before Corrie was born, it tells the story of Corrie's father, who was a loving husband to Corrie's mother, and no ordinary man. He was determined to raise his children in the ways of the Lord. The book describes the extension of her father's devotion to God as Corrie herself becomes committed to the ministry of young people throughout her young adult life. All of this prepared her for her role in helping to save the lives of hundreds of Jews.

A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23 (by W. Phillip Keller)

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.” Travel the shepherd’s path to the green pastures and cool, refreshing waters of Psalm 23. As a shepherd, Phillip Keller shares his insights into the life and character of sheep—and of the Good Shepherd who loves and cares for them. This beloved classic will give new meaning to the ageless Shepherd Psalm, enriching your trust in and love for the Lord who watches closely over you.

The Hiding Place (by Corrie ten Boom)

Corrie ten Boom was a woman admired the world over for her courage, her forgiveness, and her memorable faith. In World War II, she and her family risked their lives to help Jews escape the Nazis, and their reward was a trip to Hitler’s concentration camps. But she survived and was released—as a result of a clerical error—and now shares the story of how faith triumphs over evil.

For thirty-five years Corrie’s dramatic life story, full of timeless virtues, has prepared readers to face their own futures with faith, relying on God’s love to overcome, heal, and restore. *The Hiding Place* tells the riveting story of how a middle-aged Dutch watchmaker became a heroine of the Resistance, a survivor of Hitler’s death camps, and one of the most remarkable evangelists of the twentieth century.

I will love thee, O LORD,
my strength.
The LORD is my rock,
and my fortress
and my deliverer;
my God,
my strength,
in whom I will trust;
my buckler,
and the horn of my salvation,
and my high tower.
I will call upon the LORD,
who is worthy to be praised:
so shall I be saved from mine enemies.

(Psalm 18:1-3)



After many years of secular humanism, at age 67, James Morrisson became a Christian. He quickly developed a deep love for the life-giving truth of Scripture, and got an M.A. in Biblical Studies.

"God's Help for Hard Times" includes lessons that James learned "in the trenches." He had advanced cancer, and therefore had an urgent need to trust God and apply Scriptural principles to his own life.

The book reflects his rich and varied training and experience. It has the broad perspective of a student of history; the sharp reasoning of a lawyer; the practical, down-to-earth examples of a teacher; and the passion of a classical musician. It also reflects the love of a man who was "Dad" and "Grandpa" to many members of his church.

The purpose of this book is very practical--to let Scripture stir people into action. Whether you are a new believer or a seasoned Christian, it will give you a solid, Biblical foundation for being an overcomer, so that you can stand your ground in these challenging times.

This is more than a discussion of important Biblical principles. It is also a personal testimony of how the life-giving, mind-transforming power of Scripture can change our lives.