

# Does Jesus Care?

*"Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you." 1 Peter 5:7*

The past two months have been challenging and painful for us. This is the year of the tear. In less than two months, we have painfully come face to face with the loss of three loved ones, my father, my mother-in-law, and my cousin, who was like a brother to me. The song "*Does Jesus Care*" hits home because it expresses our Lord's care for us during our times of pain, heavy burdens, and cares.

*"For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too." (2 Corinthians 1:5)*

In times of sadness, heartache, darkness, and the loss of loved ones, we can rest in the assurance that our Lord Jesus cares for us. He loves and cares for us His children and asks us to cast our burdens on Him.

*"Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved." (Psa. 55:22)*

He has promised us that He will give us rest from the cares of this life, and we must believe and trust Him (Matt. 11:28-30). When our hearts are filled with pain, we can confidently look to God for comfort (2 Cor. 1:5). Thus, the question is, *Does Jesus care?*

Our Lord Jesus also manifests His care toward us during our times of dread and fear. And though we may walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we have nothing to fear because He is with us (Psa. 23:4). God has given us the spirit of power, not of fear (2 Tim. 1:7). We need not live in fear, for perfect love casts out fear (1 Jn. 4:18).

*“For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.” (2 Tim. 1:7)*

*“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.” (1 John 4:18)*

Our Lord and Savior also cares for us amid our times of temptation and grief. Although no one can say we have no sin, we indeed fail at times to resist some temptation strong.

*“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” (1 John 1:8)*

Nevertheless, we must have a tender heart and be compelled to grieve or mourn for our sins.

*“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” (Matt. 5:4)*

We must weep with godly sorrow every time we fail our Lord and sin against Him. Our sin must cause our tears to flow all night long.

*“O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath. Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing; heal me, O LORD, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is greatly troubled. But you, O LORD—how long? Turn, O*

*LORD, deliver my life; save me for the sake of your steadfast love. For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who will give you praise? I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping.” (Psalm 6:1-6)*

Since our Lord Jesus experienced sadness at the loss of a dear and beloved friend, He understands and cares for us during those dark times (John 11:32-35). His words found in the Scriptures can comfort and encourage us in such circumstances.

*“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.” (1 Thes. 4:13-18)*

Since He suffered death, He is able to be our merciful and faithful High Priest to help us be free from the fear of death, bringing the comfort of hope into our lives.

*“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might*

*destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. 16 For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. 17 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” Heb. 2:14-18*

## **CONCLUSION:**

Our Lord cares during our times of pain, burdens, cares, dread and fear, temptation and grief, sadness, heartache, and the loss of loved ones.

*“O yes, He cares, I know He cares; His heart is  
touched with my grief;  
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary, I  
know my Savior cares.”*

Jesus not only demonstrated that He cares for us through His death but also that He continues to care for us. Thus, in times of darkness and sorrow, we can rest in the confident assurance that He cares and is willing to help us.

When life’s storms besiege our soul, God is always near us to prove that He cares for us. He is our Anchor. Our faith in God can help us bear the fiery furnace of our trials, keeping us from being burned. Our Lord gives us quiet and sweet rest when we are weary because of persecution, affliction, suffering, difficulties, adversities, and Satan’s buffeting. In Christ, we have such an abundance of precious promises that all things shall work together for good, in blessedness. He is our great Rock that shelters and sweetly refreshes us in our time of need.

Indeed, our most in-depth spiritual lessons come from trials, pain, and suffering. The deep waters, the hot fire, and the dark valleys teach us to walk the path of faith.

*“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.” (Isaiah 43:2)*

God walks with us through our darkest valleys, troubled waters, and hot fires. He never breaks His promises. Every time that we walk through the deep waters of difficulty and suffering, He is there with us to provide refuge and rest. And no matter how many fierce storms, challenges, and suffering come our way, God will be our refuge and the solid and sure anchor that we can hold on to. He is our source of protection or shield and rest during life’s storms. But we must learn to hide ourselves in Him alone.

*“You are my hiding place and my shield; I wait for Your word.” (Psalm 119:114)*

*“For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle; In the secret place of His tent He will hide me; He will lift me up on a rock.” (Psalm 27:5)*

*“Deliver me, O LORD, from my enemies; I take refuge in You.” (Psalm 143:9)*

He is our place of shelter and safety. He will carry us with loving and tender care in our times of fear and sorrow.

*“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and*

*foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Come, behold the works of the LORD, how he has brought desolations on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire. 'Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!' The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress." (Psalm 46)*

Our God shelters us like the wings of care and protection of a protective mother bird. In our times of trouble and sorrow, our merciful and loving God spreads His wings to guard His children so that no harm will overtake them.

*"Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by." (Psalm 57:1)*

*"He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler." (Psalm 91:4)*

*"No evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent." (Psalm 91:10)*

*"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together*

*as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (Matthew 23:37)*

May we all come to our place of refuge, strength, and defense, in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. May we find rest and quiet solitude in His arms where we can just drown out this world's cares. May we find hope and healing in Him alone amid our burdens and distress, for He cares and is touched by our sorrows and trials.

I hope the words of this lovely song stir your soul the way they do mine.

**"Does Jesus Care?"**

"Does Jesus care when my heart is pained Too  
deeply for mirth and song,  
As the burdens press, and the cares distress,  
And the way grows weary and long?"

"Does Jesus care when the way is dark With a  
nameless dread and fear?  
As the daylight fades into deep night shades,  
Does He care enough to be near?"

"Does Jesus care when I've tried and failed To  
resist some temptation strong,  
When for my deep grief I find no relief, Though  
my tears flow all the night long?"

Does Jesus care when I've said 'good-by' To the  
dearest on earth to me,  
And my sad heart aches till it nearly breaks—Is  
it aught to Him, does He see?

Chorus,

“O yes, He cares, I know He cares; His heart is  
touched with my grief; When the days are  
weary, the long nights dreary, I know my  
Savior cares.”



# **Be Still My Soul: Embracing God's Provision in Our Trials**

*"Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"  
The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."* Psalm 46:10-11

Most of us spend our lives in quiet desperation, wondering when the next calamity or disaster will strike us. We imagine that we are alone. In this context, the song *Be Still My Soul* has touched me and moved me to enter a very encouraging study of God's counsel for us in our trials. I invite you to join me as we ponder this life-transforming Bible message.

Psalm 46:10-11 was the inspiration for Katharina Von Schlegel's hymn, *"Be Still My Soul."*

In the Bible, *"be still"* means more than just being quiet. Rather it projects the idea of total relaxation, which produces that assurance that comes from our Lord since He is our refuge. Under His mighty hands, we are held firm. He watches carefully over us.

In this beautiful song, the author describes all the challenges or problems that cause us to be anxious. Indeed, when our lives are filled with chaos, pain, loss, and tribulations, we find it difficult to relax. In the song, she gives us many reasons

why we should be still since our God is on our side. He faithfully will remain. The song is very dear to my heart because it encourages and reminds me of God's precious assurances as found in His Word, that reassure me I have a supreme, omniscient, omnipresent, wise and magnificent God who loves, cares, and provides for me. He sympathizes with me and is trustworthy. He protects us. That is why I have great hope in Him.

I hope you will find great encouragement, assurance, and peace in the study, knowing that God is our refuge in time of need.

The winds of difficulty and suffering often threaten and render us weak. Such winds are usually cold and merciless, knocking us down. When they blow into our lives, they carry us away with a storm of questions, doubts, fears, discouragement, and disillusionment. At that moment, we must realize that we need the strength of God, secure and unmovable, to keep us from being swept away.

The Word of God warns us that "*evil days*" will come (Ecclesiastes 12:1; Matthew 6:34; Ephesians 5:16). Job observed, "*Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble*" (Job 14:1; cf. Psalm 73:14, 21). Sometimes events, situations, diagnoses, tragedies, and conditions in our lives do not make sense. The Psalmist pondered aloud, "*Why standest thou afar off, O LORD? Why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?*" (Psalm 10:1).

One of the most troublesome areas in our walk with the Lord is life's trials and tribulations. All those who want to live godly will suffer persecution from our persecutor, Satan. Satan is the author of much of our sufferings, tragedies, sickness, hurt and eventually death.

In Acts 14:22, Paul states:

*“Strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that **through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.**”*

Indeed, in this life, trouble is unavoidable:

*“Man, that is born of a woman, is of few days, and **full of trouble.**” (Job 14:1)*

*“When the righteous cry for help, **the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles.** The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.” (Psalm 34:17-19)*

*“For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also **suffer for his sake.**” (Philippians 1:29)*

*“Indeed, all who desire to **live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.**” (2 Timothy 3:12)*

*“And after **you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.**” (1 Peter 5:10)*

Let us consider God's point of view when He sees us suffering and how He expects us to respond:

## I. GOD'S PERSPECTIVE AND PURPOSE IN SUFFERING:

### *REJOICING WHILE SUFFERING:*

We live in a culture that ignores the suffering or sorrow that other societies before us had to undergo. As one reads their journals, he can obviously see that they understood the problem of suffering. They were never surprised by suffering. Amazingly, we are a culture that seems to be surprised by life's path of suffering. In the Bible, we can read from cover to cover of those who had to endure suffering. Notice what the apostle Paul said to the Christians of his day:

*"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 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)*

Paul speaks of suffering as a reality. Our bodies, as Paul said, are wearing away. Our bodies are like wind-up clocks that are just ticking away. We cannot stop our physical body from wearing out. Our relationships wear away also. *Isn't it something that time and circumstances pull us apart from each other?* Our skills and talents wear away. Our families are wearing away, dying off one by one. The truth is that everything is like a wave in the sand that cannot be pinned down because it recedes from us.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians about *"wasting away."* Some brethren may have suggested that he could not be trusted, and that God was not with him because of all his suf-

ferings and difficulties. Consider what Paul said about all the tragedies and challenges he had to experience.

*“Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.” (2 Cor. 11:24-28)*

Paul responded by saying that all his suffering and hardship were a confirmation of the glorious Gospel of Christ rather than a denial. Therefore, he writes:

*“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.” (2 Cor. 4:8-12)*

In these verses, Paul is speaking of the courage and long-suffering of the apostles. The apostles were great sufferers for preaching the Truth of the Gospel of Christ. They acknowledged how the Gospel helped and sustained them amid afflictions. Paul stated that just as Jesus' suffering and death led to a greater life, he can experience the same thing in his life. All his

sufferings led to a more excellent life as they heard the Gospel and experienced abundant life in Christ. When one chooses to die to self, he finds out that his death leads to a greater life for those around us.

Death to self can be accomplished only through suffering and trials. You see, when one dies to self, he can bear much fruit, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”* (John 12:24) Suffering leads to life, but that seed of grain must fall to the ground and die to bear life.

In Romans 5:3-5, Paul goes on to say:

*“Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”*

So, what is Paul trying to say here exactly? He is saying that his suffering not only leads to greater life in those around him but also to himself as well. The basis for Paul’s rejoicing was faith. Not only does our faith justify us, but it gives us peace with God. By faith, we can have access to God’s grace. But we must believe that God exists before we can believe in Him, Hebrews 11:6. There is no purpose in rejoicing while suffering if one removes God from the picture. Sadly, many keep God out of the picture when they suffer, assuming that God is not there. The truth is that without God, our suffering is meaningless and fruitless, causing us to despair. In Hebrews 11:6, we are told that God will reward those who diligently seek Him. This ties in well with Matthew 6:33.

### *Faith in God's Plan for our Suffering:*

Therefore, to rejoice while suffering, one must believe in the God who can provide and reward us if we seek Him and His kingdom of righteousness. Likewise, we must have strong faith, believing that He will not allow us to suffer beyond what we can handle. We must believe that He, by His grace, will provide a way of escape (I Cor. 10:13). We must believe that His discipline will train us and perfect our faith if we let Him. And finally, we must believe that He is with us no matter what we suffer (Hebrews 13:5).

We must believe firmly that He is working in us to accomplish His will (Phil. 2:12-13). Therefore, we can say with confidence that we can do all things through Him (Phil. 4:13). *Do you believe in that awesome God and all His promises?* You must believe that you might be able to rejoice when things are bad and ugly. You must believe in the God of Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Job, and Daniel. These are all witnesses who suffered but survived because of their faith in God. *More than surviving, they were rewarded!* (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Romans 4:12 speaks of walking in the footsteps of faith. Our God wants us to live our faith by our actions (James 2:18), only doing what He ordains. God's ways work. So, if we want to rejoice while suffering, we must start having faith, believe in Him, and surrender our lives to Him alone (Galatians 2:20).

### *Looking Forward to God's Goal in our Suffering:*

To understand our suffering, we must fix our eyes on Jesus. In the darkest hour of sorrow, one must reflect on the Truth. One's foundation of joy in suffering is based on his looking forward to God's goal. Suffering has a very particular place in God's plan. Without suffering, no one can go to heaven. Take for example, what Acts 14:22 has to say about tribulations getting us to the kingdom of God.

*“Strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying **that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.**”*

God allows suffering so that we can learn to be merciful to others. Romans 5:3-5 teaches us that suffering produces endurance, longsuffering, steadfastness, or perseverance. Patience helps us to make it through suffering. In other words, without suffering, we cannot learn endurance. It is weight training. Those who lift weights, push themselves. They challenge themselves, building themselves up. They have learned that if they only lift the easier weights, they will never develop the strength to lift the heavier ones. They push themselves beyond their limits, straining and struggling with much heavier weights, increasing the burden and pushing their muscles to their limits. By doing this, the fibers in their muscles rip and tear. The good news is that the healing process is what builds up those muscles that have been compromised, allowing them to handle more and more weight. The same process heals our souls. Our other burdens help us to endure the heavier loads. It is being pushed to our limits in our suffering that we learn strength and endurance. It allows us to remain faithful despite the wiles of Satan to stop us. Tolerance is our goal. The character of endurance or patience is priceless! God tests our faith so that we might build the quality of character in our lives. *“The more tests we pass, the tougher we become.”*

Our suffering produces proven character. Our endurance matures us and shapes us into the image of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13; Romans 8:28-29). It is in suffering that our God develops in us a godly and Christlike character so that we may bear good fruit, John 15:1-2.

The word that is translated “character” in Romans 5:4 is also found in I Peter 1:6-7. Peter speaks of the “genuineness” of our faith and how we ought to rejoice even in suffering be-



cause we know that trials test and prove our faith. Today many easily misunderstand this concept since they view the testing as an issue of pass or fail. They think testing is to see how faithful we are. The fact is that God does not allow us to suffer just to see how much faith we have. Rather the real picture of suffering and trials is that of gold being tested under fire. I am not going to deny that the testing can show how pure gold is. However, the testing causes the impurities to float on top of the molten rock so that it can be skimmed off in the process of purification.

Without suffering and tribulations, we might deceive ourselves thinking that we have strength when, in fact, we don't. The truth is that we gain strength by suffering. *Why do I say that?* Because it is the only way that we can see the weaknesses and work our hardest to remove them. *Do you know that we cannot enter the kingdom of God without suffering?* Suffering is permitted so that we can see our weaknesses and rely on the Lord to help us strengthen them. Suffering strengthens us by providing endurance. And as our tolerance increases, it helps us to remove our weaknesses as the suffering brings them to the surface. But that is not the end. Paul states that our proven character gives us hope. The hope the Bible speaks about is not wishful thinking like the hope of those who are not in Christ. True Bible hope is the hope of the glory of God (Romans 5:2). This is parallel with the hope mentioned in Romans 8:18-19 that is going to be revealed to us in eternity: *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God."*

A few verses later in verse 24, Paul says that *"in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?"* You see, when we endure suffering, we gain greater endurance, and our testing helps us remove the dross from our lives. Therefore, we have the hope of glory through

God in eternity. Our salvation is, therefore, the end and goal of suffering.

Faith is vital to rejoice amid our sufferings. It is through suffering that we will enter the kingdom of heaven. In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, we read of Paul's thorn in the flesh. Paul acknowledged that he needed to rely more on God. Such discipline helped keep Paul from becoming conceited and kept him on his path to heaven. This is precisely what God wants for us.

*We Must Look Back to God's Love:*

We tend to put our hope in things that disappoint and put us to shame. Our hope is in earthly things. We fail to acknowledge that our hope comes to us because of God's love that has been poured into our hearts as revealed to us by the Spirit (Romans 5:5). This is not in any way a miraculous operation of the Spirit working in our hearts. Rather, God's love is poured into our hearts because of Jesus' sacrifice.

In Romans 5:11, Paul states that *"we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."* So, when we are suffering and tempted to believe that God has forsaken us, *why not look back to God's love that He has poured out into our hearts through His Son's death for our sins? **What an amazing love that is!*** To send His only begotten Son to die for our sins that we might be saved even though we were not worthy of such love and sacrifice. After all, *"one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die"* (Romans 5:7). And though we were sinners, unrighteous, unholy, and not worthy of such love, He sent our Lord Jesus to die for us. *That is hard for me to fathom!*

Therefore, we must realize whatever the trials, they have all been resolved at the cross. God loved us so much that He

took our sins away through His Son. Our faith and His love ought to help us to overcome any suffering, whether it is persecution, sickness, financial crisis, national crisis, or whatever we are going through. We must know in our heart that in the end, this shall pass, and that God's love will never fail us. In the end, if we remain faithful, we will be saved and go to heaven.

If God has loved us enough to reconcile us to Himself through His Son, then He will still love us enough to help us get through whatever suffering or trials that we may face if we hang on to our faith. *You can be sure of that!* You must believe in His promises. He said He will not allow us to endure more than we are able (1 Corinthians 10:13). *What a great and loving God we serve!*

#### **THE BLESSINGS OF SUFFERING AND PAIN:**

*"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us... For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now." (Romans 8:18, 22)*

Pain is usually defined as "unpleasantness." Just as physical pain is an early warning system to the brain, so it is a warning system to our souls. Pain reminds us that something is wrong. But pain itself, the hurt of pain, is a blessing. There are so many lessons we can learn from suffering. It is vital to experience pain that we may learn the blessings that spring out of it. So often, we miss out on such blessings because we do not learn the spiritual lessons it can bring us. Sadly, pain drives many away from their faith. Pain causes many to blame God for allowing misery. On the other hand, it turns others to God alone.

Many times, when pain strikes us, we get upset, angry, and frustrated. Most of us have been there! But it is faith in our God that has always brought us back to the fact that He is still in control and holds the future and that we must trust in Him. He has many times brought me down from the clouds with trying times. I have learned to trust Him. Prayer, God's Word, and singing songs of praise have helped me find my way back to hope and faith even when I could not see a way out. In all these, I have seen God's beauty. I thank Him for being faithful and lifting me when I am struggling. I am determined to see the good in it and the blessings God is bestowing upon me through pain. He has shown me over and over how much He is mindful of me. So, I have purposed in my heart to keep my eyes open to see the blessings He has provided for me. I want to put on my blessing lens that I may see His hand and mindfulness in my troubled times.

Consider the following ways in which pain or suffering help our Christian walk with our Lord and Savior:

*It draws us closer to Christ:*

When we experience pain, whether it is inflicted or afflicted, we are forced to choose whether we are going to run away so the pain will subside or cling to Jesus tightly. It is so much easier to run away from pain. But we must choose to hang tightly to Him and draw all the strength we need from Him to face our suffering. Whatever pain we go through; it is very present. Pain is good for us Christians because the more we learn how to draw strength from our Lord Jesus Christ, the higher our tolerance for pain and its challenges. Yes, this is where we can be blessed, learning tolerance under any circumstance.

*It helps us focus on what is truly important:*

Pain and suffering teach us that although we experience them at many different levels, our Lord gives us a tremendous opportunity to recommit ourselves to our walk with Him and know the value of such a walk. There is victory in all this. It boils down to our perspective. The choice is ours to allow ourselves to refocus on what is truly important, the healing. We must remember that this world with all its suffering and ugliness is not our home. We are pilgrims and sojourners. We await something better, heaven (I Peter 2:11; Hebrews 13:14). The Word of God is crystal clear on this. We long for our home in heaven and the new body that will never have to suffer or die again. *Such beautiful and comforting promises!*

*Without suffering, who would want to leave this our temporary tabernacle? Who would desire heaven as our eternal home? Therefore, we must prepare ourselves to go there. Yes, suffering keeps this world from becoming too attractive to us.*

***It strengthens our character:***

Our faith is always stretched to the limits. So, what do you do when troubles, trials, and tribulations come your way? Consider James' exhortation:

*"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness." (James 1:2-3)*

It is so much easier to give up and run away when we are in pain and suffering. Losing our faith is easy. But it is here that we must rely on our Lord Jesus to carry us through our clouds and challenges. It is here that our character is strengthened.

***It deepens our Faith:***

We must force ourselves to open our Bibles, pray fervently, and sing songs of praise when we find ourselves amid pain and suffering. In doing all these things, we will find rest for our souls, trust God and His promises to be with us, and provide for our needs. It is here that we must believe in Him, go back to Him, and wait on Him. It will be great gain, and victory, the highest prize.

***It purifies us:***

*“Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction.” (Isaiah 48:10)*

*“And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘They are my people’; and they will say, ‘The Lord is my God.’” (Zechariah 13:9)*

*“He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord.” (Malachi 3:3)*

We are all aware of Job’s fiery trials and how he was put through the fire of such trials but remained faithful, trusting, and hoping in God. He humbly accepted that all his trials had a purpose. Job did not give up even when his wife rejected him, and his friends discouraged him. He did not give up even in the greatest weaknesses! He knew well his furnace of affliction would be good for him. He was aware that he would be refined as pure gold after being tested and tried by fire. We need to have Job’s attitude of heart.

*“But He knows the way I take; when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” (Job 23:10)*

Like Job, we all go through our valleys of trials, tears, sorrows, and afflictions. We must trust in God and the beautiful work He is doing in us. *It is all for our good!*

God has told us that He will take us through the fire so that we might be refined like silver. He does this to purify us like gold! Being the Creator of these precious metals, He knows that such metals must be heated to extremely high temperatures before being molded and shaped. He also knows that the heart of man is stubborn and hard to change. Yet, as a loving Father, He desires to guide us through that fire so that we may be modified. In like manner, the goldsmith or silversmith never leaves his crucible once it is on fire. Our loving God sits as a refiner and purifier of silver. He has His eye on us and will keep watching over us until He sees His image in us (Romans 8:29; 1 Peter 1:6-7). *Thank God for the furnace!*

***It teaches us compassion:***

*Is it not something that the people who have suffered the most are usually the most compassionate ones?* The more struggles, sufferings, and challenges a person has had to endure, the more efficient they become in being compassionate toward others. The more they uplift, encourage, and help those who are struggling. They seem to have a heart for others and feel their pain.

***It makes us supportive:***

Pain teaches us to support those who need relief from their pain and suffering. Compassion is the fruit of pain, and it is manifested when we lift and help those in pain.

***It gives us understanding:***

It is a fact that no one can understand pain better than someone who has already been through it. Understanding is

such a great blessing to those who struggle with either chronic illness, invisible illness, or any other source of pain, spiritual or emotional. This understanding of those who are struggling with pain is priceless.

***It makes us good servants:***

Pain teaches us to be more compassionate, supportive, and understanding in helping others bear their pain. Those who have gone through pain have learned to be hospitable and attentive servants even when they are in pain. They bestow blessings upon others who are suffering and struggling with life's toil, difficulties, and storms.

***It helps us to be more sympathetic toward others:***

Pain and suffering teach us to say the right words in a spirit of sympathy, which is so necessary for those who are struggling and suffering. Because we have experienced pain and suffering, we can sympathize and understand the hurts of others. When one has experienced pain, it makes him more likely to “weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15). Moreover, it enables us better to comfort others when they are suffering. Personally, I did not know this until I experienced the loss of a loved one, my mother.

***It teaches us empathy:***

Empathy is a more robust support than sympathy. It is a blessing to know someone who has been through the exact struggle you have been through, who can share with you and help you to understand. It is more than a blessing. It is a blessing to be a blessing to others. To return blessings for blessings.

***It teaches us to appreciate and be more grateful:***



Pain and suffering teach us to appreciate the little things. There is so much joy in seeing God's beauty amid our suffering. It is this appreciation for God's beauty that gives us hope and more hope. We are learning to be grateful to God and grateful to others for their help in getting us through the tough times. We learn the depths of sorrow. Managing to be grateful helps us to find joy even during much pain and suffering.

***Pain teaches us to be warriors:***

It deepens our faith and strengthens our character. It draws us closer to God with hope and joy. Pain teaches us perseverance, tolerance, and longsuffering, which are necessary to have victory in our walk with Christ.

***It helps to appreciate and pay more attention to what really matters:***

I have learned some good lessons through pain and failure. *Isn't it something, that so many times we don't learn the value of something until we lose it?! Suffering helps us change our ways. It gets our attention like nothing else! "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes" (Psalm 119:71). "Blows that wound cleanse away evil; strokes make clean the innermost parts" (Proverbs 20:30).*

**FAITH TRIED AND PROVED:**

***The Potter and the Clay:***

*"The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 'Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words.'" So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do.*

*Then the word of the Lord came to me: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? declares the Lord. Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel." (Jeremiah 18:1-6)*

*Have you ever seen a potter at his wheel?* After the clay is molded and worked on the potter's wheel, a vessel takes shape as the potter's hands mold and direct the upward flow of clay. When the vessel meets with the potter's approval (allowing the potter to redesign and reshaped its flaws perhaps because of bubbles in the clay), the final product is beautiful, usable, and designed by the potter. The potter's purpose is to make a perfect work, a masterpiece. He is not trying to destroy his work. In the same way, God has promised us a place of rich fulfillment and abundant living only after He has led us, guided us, shaped us, fashioned us, and changed us into something more beautiful and more functional for His purposes. The following is one of my all-time favorite verses:

*"But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand" (Isaiah 64:8).*

God, like the Potter with the clay, is at work in our lives. He is shaping and making us into His image that we might glorify Him and be of great use in His kingdom of righteousness. But He will use many things such as pain and suffering to shape and mature us.

After all, it is God's riches that are worth fighting for and pursuing in this life. They lead us to eternal life, peace, refinement and shaping that only our loving God can do. In the end, it is that trial by fire that gives us richness and abundance and ultimately, eternal life.

As Christians, we need the rod. Our faith must be proved under trial. It is more precious than gold which perishes, though it is tried by fire. Our faith endures the fire and is kept by God's power when we cling to Him alone. Our trials and sufferings are like fire. They burn up nothing in us but the dross. It makes gold much purer. It does the same thing to our faith.

***Choosing to Trust in God:***

*"In God I trust; I shall not be afraid"* (Psalm 56:11)

David wrote this beautiful Psalm when the Philistines seized him in Gath (I Samuel 21:12). In David's Psalms, we see David's great determination to trust His God Jehovah. He chose to trust Him despite all his sufferings or circumstances. He always trusted God (Psalm 23:4; Psalm 16:8). We must learn to trust God and depend on Him to help us through His Word and prayer (Psalm 34:4). We must trust God in times of adversity. Trusting in God is a powerful weapon. It will help us to lay hold on His promises and cling to them despite our troubles that so often overwhelm us. Trust is the mark of a Christian's maturity. *"When I am afraid, I will trust in You."*

We can trust God in the dark. Someone once said, *"When a train goes through a tunnel, and it gets dark, you don't throw away the ticket and jump off. You sit still and trust the engineer."* So, it is in life. We can trust God farther than we can "see." Solomon wrote, *"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding; in all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He will make thy paths straight"* (Proverbs 3:5-6).

When we hurt, and life does not make any sense, we have only two choices:

1. We can hurt with God, or
2. We can hurt without Him.

When we are suffering, we need God more than ever before. Losing faith will not remove our pain. It rather adds a second problem as a greater consequence, “unfaithfulness.”

In the Old Testament, we read of a great man named Job who was righteous and feared God. A man who trusted in God despite much suffering. When all his children died, he lost all his possessions, and resources. He simply said, *“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord-gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord”* (Job 1:21). He soon also lost his health and suffered months of agony. He remained unfazed: *“Though he slay me, I will hope in him”* (Job 13:15). *Such powerful words of hope and trust came from the suffering Job!*

Suffering makes us depend on God more, hope, and trust in Him more. It makes us more desperate for Him and His Word to find rest, confidence, joy, strength, faith, and perseverance. Everything we need! In our weaknesses, God’s power is made perfect. Christ is with us to comfort us in our darkest moments (Psalm 23:4). He has been with me, providing everything I needed. He has also been my solid foundation amid the storms of suffering and sorrow. Unless we are convinced that the Bible is true and we can trust its message, there is nowhere to go for any meaningful resolution. We will fall into the devil’s trap of doubt. I hope that He will provide all you need to shape your thinking and still your soul.

*When we don’t know the answers to our why’s, why not trust God, Who knows why:*

When everything that you have worked so hard for is gone: your family, house, car, savings, health, everything. When you are just barely hanging onto life. In those moments,

when we are bitter, we ask the question: *God, why is this happening to me?*

When we look at the enormous problem of pain and suffering, we are compelled to ask the question: *Where is God when it hurts, and that hurt does not stop?* The Bible gives us ample information, but we must search for the answers. God does not always explain the why. It is a fact that God allows suffering for various reasons, maybe as a warning or perhaps as a chance calamity that is a part of life here on the earth. Of course, sometimes, Satan is the author of our sufferings.

Suffering is the most severe trial of faith that a Christian must face. It raises many sharp, insistent, and damaging questions that test our faith. *Can faith bear the pain and still trust in God? Can we trust God, acknowledging that He cares for us and knows best? Or will our pain be so massive as to endure our judgments? Can we catch a glimpse of God's glorious ways and allow ourselves to draw true conclusions about what He is doing and why? Would it not be a good idea to resist jumping to the wrong conclusions which might misrepresent God and sow doubt? Can we not say in our heart, "Father, I do not understand, but I trust You?"* Failing to grasp that will keep us from trusting God.

The test of our suffering reveals our "knowing why" since our conviction is grounded in the Word of God. It shows that our faith is resting on solid ground rather than sand. When we ask the "why's" (*Where is God? Why is He avoiding us? Why won't He answer? Why, if He is all-powerful, doesn't He remove all suffering from this world?*), we are assuming that He hasn't done anything at all. The truth is that He has, is, and will. Jesus our Lord, as man, came into this world of pain, sorrow, and lawlessness and He lived here. Our Savior was well acquainted with suffering. He knew poverty, thirst, hunger, injustice, physical abuse, heartbreak, and ultimately betrayal. *He died a cruel death of excruciating pain!*

So, if anyone truly understands pain, it is our God. He understands our condition. Our Lord personally experienced it, Isaiah 52:14. It is amazing to me that Jesus would leave heaven and choose to suffer for us. The fact that God sent His only begotten Son to die that cruel death for our sins is enough proof that our God cares about our suffering and pain. *Don't ever forget that!*

Our Lord as High Priest can hear each one of our prayers. He is also grieved by everything bad that happens to us. So, for us to clearly see the picture of pain and sufferings the way it must be, we have to hear the whole story of Jesus. *Remember that our suffering is just temporary. It will come to an end!* (2 Cor. 4:16-18; Revelation 2:14).

*"Though he slay me, I will hope in him."* (Job 13:15)

Such powerful words of hope!

### ***Job's Suffering:***

Throughout history, God has used pain and suffering to correct, discipline, and perfect our faith. In Job's case, Satan was the one responsible for what happened to Job, and God allowed it to happen. Job did not understand the whys of his sufferings and complained to God about it (Job 10:1-3):

*"I loathe my life; I will give free utterance to my complaint; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say to God, **Do not condemn me; let me know why you contend against me.** Does it seem good to you to oppress to despise the work of your hands and favor the designs of the wicked?"*

*"Your hands fashioned and made me, **and now you have destroyed me altogether**" (Job 10:8).*

*“Why did you bring me out from the womb? **Would that I had died before any eye had seen me**” (Job 10:18).*

Consider some of the crucial lessons we can learn from the book of Job. These lessons are priceless and worthy of reflection. They are God's truths that will help us to reflect on Him and His faithfulness to remain faithful to Him. Though we understand many of these points, it is easier to forget them as we are suffering. I hope you find them helpful and encouraging.

***God cares about each of one of us and is involved in our lives:***

We often forget or refuse to believe this truth when we are suffering. When God told Satan, *“Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?”* He knew there was none like Job since he knew Job, and He still knows all mankind. We see God's caring and compassionate interest in the soul of mankind in 2 Peter 3:9: *“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”* Our God desires all men (human beings) to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). *Yes, He is interested in you!* Even when it seems that the whole world is collapsing all around you. *What an awesome God we serve!*

***God is worthy of all praise because of Who He is, apart from all the blessings He imparts to us:***

Indeed, this was a lesson Satan needed to learn.

*“Then Satan answered the Lord and said, “Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on*

*every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face” (Job 1:9-11).*

You see, Satan was mistaken! After Job had lost everything, wealth, and family, he “*arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. And he said, ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord’”* (Job 1:20-21). Job likewise had to remind his wife of this big truth when she tried to discourage him saying he should curse God and die. But he said to her, “*You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?’ In all this Job did not sin with his lips”* (Job 2:10). Notice what the Lord commands us to do even during difficulties and adversities when blessings seem to be few: “*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice”* (Philippians 4:4). Our God in heaven is worthy of worship and praise, even amid our valleys of suffering.

***The temporal things of this world (money, possessions, food, clothing, houses, health, etc.) do not really matter, and we should not be concerned about them:***

This is a truthful statement connected to my 2nd point. It leads me to this question: *Do we praise our God for Who He is only for the physical blessings He bestows on us?* Remember what Job declared “*Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return.*” He acknowledged how we all would end our lives. Accepting this great truth will help us to minimize or avoid our so-called “attachment” to the things of this world as well as our sorrow that so often is a consequence of it. You see, Job’s wife did not recognize this truth. Why? Because if she did, she wouldn’t have encouraged her husband to sin against God.



Throughout the New Testament, we are exhorted about the emptiness and fruitlessness of material riches or possessions. Jesus warned us about this in Matthew 6:19-24. Notice what John says:

*“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).*

Paul also said,

*“for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world... As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:7, 17).*

Since everything will be destroyed on the Day of Judgment, every physical thing (2 Peter 3:10-13), except God (as Job did), then one must realize that having God is all we need! The temporal things of this life don't really matter after all.

***God is to be trusted even when we don't understand the whys of our questions:***

Even when we yearn for and wish to have all the answers to our whys, we must trust God. Job understood this well. God has the absolute right to give and take away (Job 1:21). Job even worshiped God when his heart ached with pain, and he lacked understanding. His words were: “Though he slay me, I will hope (trust) in him” (Job 13:15). You see, Job did not lean on his own understanding. Instead, he acknowledged His Creator in all his ways, allowing His LORD to direct his paths. Therefore, we must trust Him as well as His Word, regardless of our circumstances.

***Suffering is not always the result of personal sin:***

This was a typical theology of Job's days as well as in the days of Jesus and for many today. Suffering is not always the consequence of personal sins. Many talk that way incorrectly. Consider the life of Jesus, who indeed was sinless, yet He suffered greatly (1 Peter 2:21-24).

***Suffering is no excuse to commit sin:***

Job endured all his calamities without sinning. He maintained his integrity all the way to the end (Job 1:22; 2:10; 42:7-9). We must remember the promises made in 1 Cor. 10:13 that God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can endure. Indeed, suffering is one of the biggest tools in Satan's toolbox to pull us away from the Truth. Alas, we have all seen this happen! Satan is persistent and will try at all costs to lead us away. Don't be deceived when one falls into sin. Adversities are not the cause. It is still our fault when we sin.

***Suffering will either be a stumbling block or a stepping-stone in our spiritual walk:***

Job's wife evidently found a stumbling block when they lost their wealth and children. Instead, Job responded differently to his tragedy. He stepped up and allowed it to grow him spiritually. Like Job, we must acknowledge that our faith will be tested by fire (1 Peter 1:6-9). Will we pass the test or fail like Job's wife?! We must approach our problems and sufferings with a positive attitude of heart, realizing that many great things will result from them. But we must focus on maturing and pleasing our Creator, no matter how bad we think our circumstances are. Let us take refuge in the example of the apostles who used suffering as a steppingstone to grow (Acts 5:40-42). They refused to let it become a stumbling block.

***It is absurd to think that one can live godly and not experience suffering:***

Yes! We should not be surprised when suffering knocks on our door (Job 2:10). We are reminded of this in 2 Timothy 3:12. Another reminder is found in Romans 8:18 that tells us that the sufferings of the present world are not worthy of being compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. *Indeed, we will suffer!* It is just an ugly truth of when and why, and we must embrace it (1 Peter 2:20). Remember that Christ our Savior suffered, the apostles suffered, Job suffered, Joseph suffered, Jacob suffered and many other faithful ones. This is a reality, no matter how terrible the circumstances. So, who are we, to think for a second that we are exempt from suffering and that we will avoid it as well (John 15:18-20)? As long as we are in this earthly tabernacle, suffering is inevitable. We must remain faithful no matter our adversity or pain.

***Though Satan uses suffering to tempt us to sin against God, his power is limited by God and by us as well:***

The fact that Satan must have permission from God to afflict us, like in the case of Job, it should comfort us. It implies that Satan is not all-powerful. He is allowed to do only what God permits him to do. That is, God is in control (Job 1:12;2:6)! He will flee from us when we resist him and submit to God (James 4:7). And though he is very crafty, we can defeat him victoriously when we put on the whole armor of God against him (Eph. 6:11). *You can be sure of that!*

***Silence is often better than words:***

*Don't we all need to learn this?* Job's wife and his friends needed to learn this as well. They like us would do much better to say less. *Alas, how often are we guilty of saying too much, too many words?* We must learn to cherish silence and measure our words with caution when we speak. In Ecclesiastes 5:2 we

have a warning: *“Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few.”* Again in Matthew 12:36-37: *“I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words, you will be condemned.”* *“When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent”* (Proverbs 10:19). Consider other passages concerning the power of our words (James 3:5-8; Proverbs 18:21; Matthew 12:33-35; Ephesians 4:29; Proverbs 12:18; Proverbs 13:3). We will be condemned or justified by our words. Likewise, we will give an account of each idle word we speak. *Let us develop better listening skills!*

***Man needs God; man alone is not enough:***

Job acknowledged this great truth in Job 10:12. Paul also affirmed this truth in 2 Corinthians 3:5. *“Our sufficiency is from God.”* We are what we are through God’s grace (1 Cor. 15:10). When we become aware of our own weaknesses, ignorance, flaws, etc., it will be much easier to acknowledge God and submit to His will.

***Our friends may disappoint us, but our God will never forsake us:***

Job called his friends *“miserable comforters”* (Job 16:2). They evidently had let him down; did more harm than good to him. But such is never the case with our God. He will never leave us nor forsake us when we need Him (Hebrews 13:5-6). *He is faithful! Let this sink deeply into your hearts!*

***Prosperity is not a sign of spiritual standing:***

Job addresses this well for us in chapter 21. Jesus acknowledge that also. *“It is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 19:23). Therefore, we must pray harder,

work harder, and trust God more than ever despite how much or little we have been blessed physically.

***We must be concerned for the well-being of others:***

Even though Job's friends were so cruel to him, he prayed for them in chapter 42:10. Moreover, the apostle Paul commanded us in Philippians 2:3-4 to "*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*" Such powerful exhortation!

Learn from Job who showed great care for those who abused him with their words (Gal. 6:10; Matt. 7:12).

***Finally, all things work together for good for those who remain faithful to God and develop longsuffering amid their fiery trials:***

Toward the end of the book of Job, this is well demonstrated (Job 42:10-17). Job was blessed again physically. Romans 8:28 is a great reminder: "*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*" Remember that although each day we live is not filled with rainbows and sunshine or free of adversity, God will bless those who love Him and do His will, even when it seems difficult to grasp the many blessings.

My fervent prayer is that you may be encouraged with these lessons from Job amid your sufferings.

**II. GOD'S PROVISION IN OUR SUFFERINGS:**

*"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar*

*as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you" (1 Peter 4:12-14).*

## **DARK VALLEYS**

Our Father in heaven knows well when we are going to need His strength and provision. He will supply the strength we so desperately need, just in time. David acknowledged that though he walked through the valley of the shadow of death, he will fear no evil (Psalm 23:4). He knew what it was like to be in the dark valley of mourning. For many of us, the darkest valley of all is the one we dread the most to cross. David describes this valley as one of deep darkness. It speaks of our dark experiences in life.

In Psalm 23, David speaks of his world as not being ideal, but rather one full of dark valleys (verse 4); with the presence of evil enemies (verse 5). David did not feel safe in this environment. He feels marred, spiritually scarred, and in danger. And although he had struggled through many difficulties, he remained faithful and confident that God was going to be with him in the many shadows of darkness. David applied the Word of God in his own life. *Did you know the words "The LORD is my Shepherd" were spoken by Jacob first?* Toward the end of his life, Jacob gives his patriarchal blessing to Joseph's sons, Ephraim, and Manasseh, saying:

*"The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the boys; and in them let my name be carried on, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth" (Genesis 48:15-16).*

Indeed, Jacob was a man who walked through many dark valleys, both morally, spiritually, emotionally, and physically. He was brought up in a family where there was favoritism (Isaac loved Esau and Rebekah loved Jacob more, Genesis 25:28). He likewise had plotted with his mother to cheat his foolish brother Esau of his birthright (Genesis 25:29-34). He deceived his father (Genesis 27). In a similar twist, he found himself betrayed by his uncle, Laban. He found himself married to the wrong woman, Leah, rather than Rachel, the one he loved (Genesis 29:15-30). David had known fear and loneliness, but God's grace met him at Jabbok, where he wrestled with Him and whom God fashioned and modeled into a great man, a prince (Gen. 32:22-32; Hos. 12:4).

Though God had fashioned Jacob into a great man when He was broken, Jacob still made mistakes later in his life. Mistakes he apparently imitated from his own parents: *"Now Israel (Jacob) loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors"* (Genesis 37:3).

Jacob had struggled with God and with men (Genesis 32:28). But toward the end of his life, Jacob could look back and rejoice that His Jehovah God had been his Shepherd, seeking him like a lost sheep, rescuing him, healing him, and providing for him. *It is beautiful beyond words!*

Like Jacob, David shared the same experiences. He, too, wandered in the darkness. He also discovered that *"the LORD is my Shepherd. I shall not be in want."* God had been with him and was still with him. David acknowledged that God shepherded him through the darkest valleys of his life with His presence and strength and that all was sufficient to keep him strong and firm. God's presence and power can free us from our fears: *"For you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."* *Such precious words of comfort!* Our Shepherd uses the staff of His hand to work with us, His sheep. He directs, re-

trieves, and disciplines us. His rod or cudgel hangs from His belt and is ready to defend us when the enemy attacks. We, the sheep, look on these things to remind ourselves that the Shepherd will protect us well.

David experienced God's presence in his life as He shepherded, protected, and saved him. Yet David's view of God cannot compare with the revelation of the Lord as our Shepherd:

*"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (John 10:11)*

*"Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen" (Hebrews 13:20-21).*

*"For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (Revelation 7:17)*

We Christians have enough reasons to rejoice. *Why?*

1. Because Christ is our Shepherd, who died for our sins.
2. Our Shepherd became our sacrificial Lamb, accepted by God that we may be made alive (Luke 24:46; 1 Cor. 15:20-22; Romans 6:3-4; Gal. 3:13).
3. Our Shepherd brought peace and reconciliation to God by taking the guilt of sin away.
4. We, Christians, have been raised from death because of sin to newness of life in the Spirit of Christ.



In Christ, we have abundant life, which He shares with His flock (John 10:10).

5. Our Shepherd came to this world that we may go to heaven. What an incredible hope! Deity left heaven and came to this ugly world so that mankind might have the chance to go to heaven. This is beyond our comprehension! This beautiful story of redemption shows God's love for us (1 Timothy 1:15). *"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost."* Jesus, our Lord, was born of a woman that we may be born of God (Galatians 4:4-5; Isaiah 7:14; 1 John 5:4; John 3:3-5; 2 Cor. 5:17; 1 John 3:1).
6. Jesus was rejected as our Shepherd that we might be accepted of God (John 1:11-12). We know that Jesus was despised by men during His ministry here on earth. So much so, that He was nailed to a cross! According to God, the Father's plan (Colossians 1:19-21; Acts 10:35).
7. Jesus, our Shepherd, became the Man of sorrows that we might rejoice and be glad (Isaiah 53:3).
8. Our Shepherd accepted sorrow and sadness that we might have a reason to rejoice. We have so much to be thankful for! We were like lost sheep without a Shepherd. Let us keep in mind that His sorrow and grief make our joy and gladness possible.
9. Our Shepherd accepted poverty that we might enjoy riches in heaven (2 Cor. 8:9; Luke 9:58; Eph. 2:6-7). *Jesus became poor so that we might be able to inherit eternal riches!*
10. Jesus, our Shepherd, made sin for us that we might be the righteousness of God, meaning that He became the sacrifice for our sins (2 Cor. 5:21, Isa. 53:6; 1 Peter 2:22-24). Jesus suffered great pain and suffering because of our sins, He "bore" our "iniquities" in that sense. As Jehovah was pained because

of the sins of His people, so was Jesus also pained in that same way. He bore the burden, suffering both in soul and body (Matthew 23:37). It does not mean our sins, guilt, penalty, or punishment were transferred to Him, that is, imputed to Him. Through His blood, we are justified and made righteous.

Like David, we must realize that our God is with us at every stage of our life, in every circumstance, there and then, in glory, but also here and now. His “goodness and love” will follow us throughout our lives.

### ***GOD’S PROMISES WILL SUSTAIN US:***

God’s children live by the promises He has made to us. Promises that will sustain us when life does not make sense. We have the assurance of His presence. God has never promised us a life free of problems or a bed of roses. But He did promise us that He will be with us, His children (Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5; Psalm 46:5-7). God was with David in the valley of the shadow of death (Psalm 23). He was with the three Hebrew men in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3) and with Daniel in the lion’s den (Daniel 6). God sent an angel to the garden to strengthen Jesus (Luke 22:43). God is not a disinterested spectator in our lives. He is neither distant nor disengaged. He does care (1 Peter 5:7). Even when we are afraid, through faith, we can sing, *“What a fellowship, what a joy divine, safe and secure from all alarms.”*

Our God in His infinite lovingkindness has given us the assurance of His peace (John 14:27; 16:33; 20:19-21; Ephesians 2:12-14; 1 Peter 5:14). The assurance of His providence (Romans 8:28). So rather than asking, *“Where is God?”* or *“Why me?”* why not ask, *“What can I learn from this?”* and *“Who can I help because of this?”* (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). Life’s problems and

sufferings are not easy, but they qualify us to serve in ways we never could otherwise.

### ***GOD'S POWER IN OUR WEAKNESSES:***

As we humble ourselves in our weaknesses, we experience the fullness of God's strength. God draws near to us when we humbly draw near to Him. He is near to those who run to Him for refuge and strength. When God is our refuge, we are free from fear. As we grow in our love for Him and His love for us, this mature love casts our fear, 1 John 4:18.

In 2 Corinthians 12:9, we read. *"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me."* So what are the weaknesses Paul is talking about in these verses? Insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities (distresses, difficulties, troubles). Our weaknesses are our circumstances, situations, experiences, and wounds.

- If we were strong, we might return insults.
- If we were strong, we might turn back the emerging hardship and change our circumstances that they might go away and not give us discomfort.
- If we were strong, we might turn back persecution.
- If we were strong, we might take charge of our calamity or distress as fast as possible to minimize its pressure.

Weaknesses are not sins but rather experiences, situations, circumstances, and wounds that are hard to bear and remove because they are beyond our control. Our love demands that we not return evil for evil but good, that is, blessings.

*So, what is the source of our weaknesses? Do they come from Satan or God? Or both? Paul calls it a "messenger of Satan,"*

verse 7. It was given to Paul to harass him. Satan afflicts God's children through his angels or messengers. His goal is to destroy us! But Satan is not the only one at work either. God is at work too. Paul's thorn in the flesh was not just the work of Satan to destroy him. It was the work of God to save him. We know this because Paul describes the purpose of his thorn in terms of pride. But Satan's goal is to produce pride rather than preventing it. That is how he destroys us, either with pride or despair. God uses Satan's hostile intentions for our good and our holiness. Satan wanted to turn Paul away from the faith and his ministry, perhaps because of the value of his visions revealed to him. God wanted Paul to humble himself and turn away from self-exaltation. So, God assigned Satan's thorn for salvation.

Just like it was with Job, God allows Satan to afflict his righteous servants. He turns the affliction for His good purposes (Luke 22:31-32). So, the answer to the second question is that the source of our weaknesses may sometimes be Satan to destroy us, or perhaps our weaknesses are turned by God for our good, to perfect us.

- *So, what is the purpose of our weaknesses (insults, hardships, persecutions, calamities, troubles)?*
- *Why can't I find a job?*
- *Why am I trapped in this awful marriage?*
- *Why did my loved one die?*
- *Why can't I have children?*
- *Why do I feel so lonesome and have no friends?*
- *Why is nothing working in my life?*
- *Why, why-why?*

Paul briefly gives us answers to these questions:

Satan's purpose is to buffet or harass us, verse 7: Here is where we must pray fervently for God's help. Paul did that.

God does not delight in our sufferings. *Satan does! Satan must be resisted!*

God's overriding purpose for Satan's harassment is our humility. God took steps to keep Paul humble when he was in danger of pride. Humility is of greater value to God than comfort. Humility is more important than freedom from pain. God will give us mountain tops to climb and then bring us down through pain or suffering, lest we think we have risen above the need of total dependence on His grace. So, God's purpose in our weaknesses is humility, lowliness, and complete reliance on Him (2 Cor. 1:9; 4:7).

Finally, God's purpose in our weaknesses is to glorify Him: This is the focal point of 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. "*But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'*" God wants to exhibit His Son's power, not by freeing us from our weaknesses but rather by giving us the strength necessary to endure and rejoice in tribulations. God shows His Son's power in our weaknesses, not necessarily to help us escape from our weaknesses. Hebrews 11 is a perfect example. It speaks of the faith of God's heroes who by faith escaped the edge of the sword (verse 34); by faith, some were killed (verse 37); by faith, some stopped the mouths of lions; by faith, some were sawn asunder; by faith, some were mighty warriors; and by faith, some suffered chains and imprisonment (Phil. 4:11-13).

So, God's ultimate purpose in our weaknesses is to glorify His Son, who went to the cross through love until His work of love was done. Paul said that Christ crucified was foolishness to the Greeks, a stumbling block to the Jews, but to us who are called, it is the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:23). Therefore, the purpose of our weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities is to glorify our Lord.

**WE MUST SUFFER AS CHRIST DID:**

*“When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23).*

Our Lord and Savior has left us a perfect example of long-suffering under intense suffering like no other in the world. The Son of God suffered in the most undignified, humiliating manner, extreme torture, pain, and anguish in both body and soul. Something intolerable to any human being. And He did this for us, knowing that He was innocent but condemned for us, sinners. He suffered for the sins of strangers. *“WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH.”*

*Then why did the Jews persecute and crucify Him and put Him to death? Because of envy and evil hatred. Christ was under no obligation to endure disgrace and ill-treatment (being disgracefully hung up nude between two murderers, being lifted up as unworthy to touch the earth and live among men). Yet, He did not hate the Jews! Even in His sufferings upon the cross, He prayed for His enemies with mercy. He had all authority on earth and in heaven. He had all power and would have been justified. He could have had revenge on His enemies, cursed them, and reproved them as they deserved. But He did none of these things! Even in His pinnacle of anguish, He willingly interceded for them to His Father in heaven (Isaiah 53). Jesus, our Lord, is our perfect example of calm and endurance. Let us imitate His example!*

The Son of God bore patiently and submissively and much more, He even prayed for those who were causing Him so much agony. Instead of being angry, reviling, and hating when suspended from the cross, He endured the most shameful slanders and defamation. He prayed with strong cries and

tears, "Father forgive them." It was indeed an act of unfathomable love amid severe suffering. *He had compassion on His persecutors and blessed them in great measure. It moves me! So, what did our Lord do instead? He "committed himself to him that judgeth righteously."*

Peter declares that Christ committed the matter to God, Who judges righteously. So as Christ did, so should we conduct ourselves in our sufferings. *If Christ, my Lord, suffered with meekness and patience for me, how much more do I have to submit to suffering?! What harm can come to me if I suffer when I know it is for my own good or perhaps God's will? Would I be willing to suffer, knowing that it is going to perfect and mature me or because He died and suffered for me? Let this sink deeply into your hearts!* The exercise of faith in what Christ endured is the only way to bring contentment in our suffering and pain.

#### **REFUGE AND REST IN CHRIST:**

*"Each will be like a hiding place from the wind, a shelter from the storm, like streams of water in a dry place, like the shade of a great rock in a weary land" (Isaiah 32:2).*

Our Lord gives quiet and sweet rest to us when we are weary because of persecution, affliction, difficulties, adversities, and the buffeting of Satan. In Christ, we have such an abundance of precious promises that all things shall work together for good, in blessedness. He is the great Rock that shelters and sweetly refreshes us in our time of need.

Our God in His infinite mercy has provided His children something stable, solid, and secure, "*an anchor of the soul*" to hold on to. Such an anchor sustains us and gives us rest and hope so that we might not be blown down by the powerful winds that threaten us. Such hope set before us can fasten us securely to God's promises.

*“Wherein God, being minded to show more abundantly unto the heirs of the promise the immutability of his counsel, interposed with an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have a strong encouragement, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us: which we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and stedfast and entering into that which is within the veil.” (Hebrews 6:17-19)*

When our souls fly to Jesus, our Rock, they find rest. He will come to our rescue. He has promised it, and we must believe it. So, let us resort unto Jesus for refuge and rest. The purpose of our struggles is to teach us not to trust in ourselves but in God alone. The good news is that God provides us a special shelter. May we all come to our place of refuge, strength, and defense, in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Truly, our most in-depth spiritual lessons come from trials, pain, and suffering. The deep waters, the hot fire, and the dark valleys teach us to walk the path of faith (Isaiah 43:2). God has been with me through the darkest valleys, troubled waters, and hot fires. He has never broken His promises. God has been there for me, every time I have walked through the deep waters of difficulty and suffering. I know in my heart that no matter how many fierce storms, challenges, and suffering come our way, God will be our refuge and our solid and sure anchor that we can hold on to. He is our foundation of comfort, Psalm 46. He is our source of protection, shield, and rest amid life’s storms. But we must learn to hide ourselves in Him alone (Psalm 143:9).

## **CONCLUSION:**

Times of crisis prove our friendship with God and declare the authenticity of our faith. *Do we love God because He provides gifts? Do we love those gifts more than we love the Giver?* This was



Satan's accusation against Job (Job 1:8-12; cf. 1 Peter 1:6-9). All the things we cling to in this world will eventually disappear. But the One, who gives them all to us, is the One that will ultimately remain.

We must learn to seek strength, peace, and rest in God and His promises. Even as our souls are wrestling with pain and hurt deep inside. Our merciful God is the only One who can meet our deepest needs. In His Word, He has taught us through His promises to trust Him. God will nurture us if we trust Him through life's trials. He is our place of shelter and safety. He will carry us with loving and tender care in our times of fear and sorrow. *You may rest assured!* (Psalm 46). Our God shelters us like the wings of care and protection of a protective mother bird. In our times of trouble and sorrow, our merciful and loving God spreads His wings to guard us so that no harm will overtake us (Psalm 57:1; 91:4; 91:10; Matthew 23:37).

As children of God, we must sink the teeth of our faith into God's faithfulness when we are undergoing trials, pain, and suffering. He is utterly faithful to His promises (Hebrews 6:17-20). Our hope, even amid intense suffering, is in our Lord's ceaseless loving kindness. In His never-failing ways, there is new compassion.

We have a cloud of witnesses who had to endure a tsunami of insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities (distresses, difficulties, troubles) and yet remained faithful and rejoiced while they suffered. *We have the example of the apostles who had to suffer significantly but were thrilled that they were able to suffer for doing what was right!* They were thrilled to be able to endure hardship for the cause of Christ. *What an example of true faith and love for the Lord!* An excellent attitude to have and worthy of our imitation. True faith does not cower in fear or fall apart when challenged and attacked. It maintains a joyful attitude and continues doing what is right and good regardless of our

circumstances. It requires a pleasant disposition. Suffering and pain did not deter them. They continued sharing the Gospel of Christ both publicly and privately.

When life is difficult and filled with pain, let us resolve in our hearts not to quit or go any other way than God's ways, even when it hurts deeply. *Can your faith remain steadfast and unyielding? What better way to refresh our frame of mind or attitude and strength than to go to Gethsemane and Calvary as portrayed in Matthew 26 & 27?* Those events unfolded almost 2,000 years ago. Our Lord and Savior suffered enormously and voluntarily on our behalf. He agonized in the garden as His hour was approaching. Not wanting to die but knowing it was His Father's will for mankind to be redeemed by His shed blood at Calvary. Therefore, let us strengthen our weak hearts and run with endurance the race that is set before us.

*"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1-2).*

Our God is aware of our sufferings and permits it to happen that we might serve Him better. Take, for example, Job, who had to endure intense suffering but grew through them and turned out to be better in the end. As James says, *"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness"* (James 1:2-3). Our sufferings are sometimes because of our poor choices, and other times for no reason that we might understand.

As in Job's case, he did not understand, at the time of his suffering, the reason behind it but learned a great lesson that we all must learn. He learned that God's ways and thoughts are beyond our own (Isaiah 55:8-9). Thus, let us trust our God and believe that He will work things out for our good, for those who love Him (Romans 8:28). Job's story reminds us that there are no easy answers to the questions about why God allows bad things to happen to us, losses, and even pain. Job's example reveals that this kind of questions miss the point of what truly is going on. Of course, when we find ourselves amid our long-term suffering, we tend to react this way, missing out on the importance of our suffering. Job did not need to learn any lesson when he was chosen to suffer, though he surely learned some valuable lessons along the way. God was not trying to correct any flaw or sin, leading Job to repent. It was God's testimony about His heavenly rule. It was about silencing Satan.

If God allows Satan to tempt us, all that Satan does will be calculated for our own good, Rom. 8:28. It will work out for our good. We must learn like Job our own insignificance compared to God, the Great I AM. Remember, God never answers Job's questions. Instead, He questions Job. But Job does not complain. He repents. Job admits his failure in speaking of things he could not know. In the same way, we must acknowledge that God is God, and we are not. We must learn with God's help that we cannot fathom all His ways, but we can trust Him, even when nothing makes sense.

Finally, Paul reminds us that we must learn to rejoice even while we suffer. So, if you find yourself going through persecution, rejection, suffering, pain, hurt, financial struggles, family struggles, illness, loss of a loved one, *why not look up in faith to God, to His purpose for your sufferings, looking back in memory of His love? Why not pray fervently to the God of compassion and mercy? Why not pour out your heart to Him, asking Him for His help and strength (1 Peter 5:6-7, Phil. 4:6-7)?*

He understands well what we are going through: our sufferings, grief, anxiety, pain, everything. He was well acquainted with sorrow and grief. He knows better than anyone how to heal us. *Why not renew your faith in God and His promises? We can do all through Christ who strengthens us! Paul believed this great truth, and so should we!* God is working all things out in our best interest. *But we must trust Him!* Read and reflect upon His precious Word during your most difficult times. God is in control and loves us. *Don't ever forget that!* Moreover, seek encouragement and fellowship from other Christians, our brethren of the same precious faith, to help you bear your suffering and hardship. God expects us to support one another (1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 3:13; 10:24-25).

May we trust in our Lord with all our heart, mind, and soul who loves us enough to let us face our challenges so that we may grow and enter His kingdom. May we find rest and quiet solitude in His arms where we can just drown out the cares of this world. May we find refreshment and fresh perspective for our weariness. May we find hope and healing in Him alone. May we turn our afflictions into mercies and darkness into light. And finally, may we find contentment, acting out our faith in all the pains and sufferings that Jesus our Lord suffered.

I leave you with the beautiful words of this poem, written from the Lord's perspective:

**"The Savior's Words"**

If you never felt pain, how would you know  
I'm a healer?

If you never experienced difficulty, how would  
you know I'm a deliverer?

If you never endured a trial, how could you be  
one who overcomes?

If you never felt sadness, how would you know  
I'm a comforter?

If you never made a mistake, how would you  
know I'm forgiving?

If you never were in trouble, how would you  
know I came to rescue you?

If you never were broken, how would you  
know I can make you whole?

If you never had a problem, how would you  
know I can solve them?

If you never had any suffering, how would you  
know what I went through?

If you never went through the fire, how would  
you know you become pure?

If I gave you all things, how would you appreciate them?

If I never corrected you, how would you know I  
love you?

If you had all power, how would you learn to  
depend on Me?

If your life was perfect, what would you need  
Me for?

This is a sample of the material contained in  
*Be Still My Soul: A Collection of Essays about Finding Hope and  
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Thank you!

