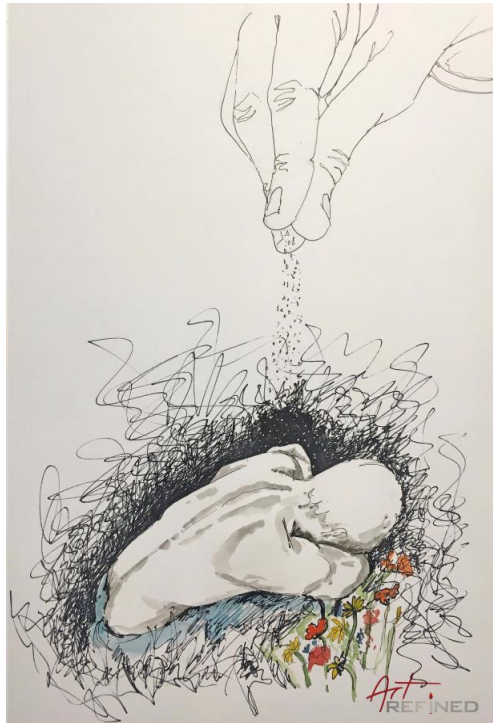


WHY DO I HAVE TO SUFFER?



There are many of us who once had a burning vision of God's Kingdom, a zeal to do His will, a joy which greeted us every morning when we got up. But somewhere since that moment when we first saw God's glory in the face of His Son, a shadow fell across our lives which seems to have robbed us of our zeal -

-The shadow of suffering.

For most of us it has not been acute suffering, like violent persecution.

It's the nagging kind. That dull pain that seems to grab hold of our life, and won't let go, and keeps sapping our strength.

A woman in an unhappy marriage after the first glow of faith has faded, sinks once more into boredom, discontent, self-pity. She says to herself, "If only I had a little satisfaction in my home I might be able to rise up and serve God with joy. But how can I serve God in this prison?"

A man who has a miserable job and, as far as he can see, no chance of switching into something else: every morning when he goes to work he feels sick in the stomach. And when the day is over he's so emotionally drained, there's no strength left to serve God in his home.

Or a woman who prepared herself to spend her life in the kind of work where she has real gifts, but somehow the door of opportunity always seemed to open at the wrong time or in the wrong place.

A man who feels he has talent, yet every time he approaches an opportunity where he can use his talent, he's rejected; his high hopes are met with slammed doors, until the root of bitterness in his soul becomes a mammoth tree.

It's like trying to sleep in a bed that's too short; every time you stretch out you crash against the head-board. It's like trying to sleep in a blanket that's too small. Every time you pull it up over your shoulders your feet freeze.

We point to our unhappy situation convinced that "if this thing were removed then I could serve God." Whereas the truth, if we'd only face it, is that this thing we're complaining about, this circumstance we blame for our fruitless life....

**Is actually God-sent.
It's the doorway to reality.**

The door keeps pursuing us and saying, "Here, walk through me into life," and we keep running away from it, blaming it for all our woes.

...When we cry, "Aba, Father!" it is the Spirit him-self bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Romans 8:15b-18

Suffering — why is it always there?

Why does our Lord say that in this world we will have tribulation?

Why does Jesus add to every promise of blessing this side of glory, the promise that there will also be a cross to carry?

Why does Paul tell us that through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God?

Why do the apostles encourage us to glory in our trials, to rejoice at the fiery ordeal which comes to prove us?

We need to see our suffering, our dull path, this weary pain, this affliction for what it really is-

-The doorway to life.

Oswald Chambers in his rich little book, *So Send I You*, expounds on a teaching which he calls Vision, Valley, Verity.

First, God takes us up on the mountain and gives us the vision of what we are to be by His grace.

Then God takes us down into the valley and starts hammering us into shape. He puts us into the furnace and heats us. Then He pulls us out and, while we're still malleable, hammers on us; puts us back in the heat, pulls us out and hammers some more until

....Finally the vision we saw on the mountain becomes verity, irrefutable truth in us.

Now we are in fact sons of God formed in the very image of Jesus.

God didn't bring you into this world to give you some fleeting days of shallow happiness. He isn't your "Uncle in the Furniture Business" whose only purpose is to give you bargains galore.

God is forming you into an eternal son/daughter.

He is making you into a creation of such splendor you'd die on the spot right now if you could but see a glimpse of what you will some day be---

---provided you let God form, mold, grind, chip and buff you.



God is going to work on you until you are perfected in the image of Jesus, or until it's clear that you will never let Him do it, giving Him no choice but to allow you to fly off forever into a self-chosen, self-made hell.

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...

Romans 8:18-19

Before the sons of God can be revealed they have to be made, they have to be formed.

And this cannot be done without pain.

If there's any lesson that needs to be learned by us, it's to take our sufferings, whatever they are, dull and un-dramatic as they may be, and let them accomplish their purpose in God---for us.

Instead of endlessly running from our sufferings, kicking against them, complaining about them....



We need to learn to turn around and walk through them *into* life.

If you don't like that situation you're in, pray about it. Tell God you can't stand it. Ask Him to remove it. But if God tells you what He told Paul about his thorn in the flesh, do what Paul did.

Submit to it. Glory in it!

And every time the thought comes back to your mind, "Why must I suffer like this?" consider these facts:

Chastening

First, there are certain lessons we only seem to learn the hard way. Much of our suffering is not a cross at all but a chastening which became necessary because we refused to listen to what we know very well God told us countless times. You keep abusing your body. You never get enough sleep, chain smoke, you have careless eating habits. God keeps warn-ing you, and you don't listen. Then one day you're sick. Or perhaps your favorite hobby is to play games with other people's lives. And now you've found a way to do it "in the name of the Lord." The Spirit counsels you that you're putting your hands on the holy ark of another man's soul - to quit it! But you don't listen. Suddenly you find yourself rejected for the fiftieth time by the people you're trying to manipulate.

Don't call it persecution, learn your lesson, or it will happen again.

Or perhaps you've made an idol out of your ministry. Your particular work for the Lord has become far more important to you than the Lord Himself. The Spirit calls you to repentance, warns you to put your heart into God's Kingdom.... not your kingdom, but you don't seem to listen until your kingdom blows up in your face.

But learning the hard way is not the only reason why we suffer.

Suffering with Christ

There's another kind of suffering which comes for a much more wonderful reason. It's called in scripture suffering with Christ.

...and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Romans 8:17

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's suffering, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

1 Peter 4:12-13

The Spirit of God leads us down a road where we begin to experience the very things Jesus went through for our redemption.

He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

Isaiah 53:3a

Now God allows us to taste the pain our Lord felt as He walked that road of sorrows for us. And as we taste that pain, three wonderful things begin to happen to us.

1. As we taste the pain, we experience fellowship with Jesus on a level we never knew existed. Suddenly we have the awareness that we're not alone in this valley, we have a companion at our side.... who not only understands each and every thing we're going through but shares the burden with us. Pretty soon we find that Jesus is not merely sharing our burden but in a wonderful mystery is giving us the privilege of sharing His burden.



Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church...

Colossians 1:24

We are coming to know Jesus, not only in the power of His resurrection but also in the fellowship of His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death.

2. As we taste the pain of our Lord's cross in our bodies and circumstances, His death is working in us, transforming us into agents of life. As His death works in us, His life flows out of us to others. The thing that causes us to have the aroma of life as we travel through this world, the thing that enables us to reach out and touch others with the life of God, to heal the brokenhearted and to set the captives free is the suffering of Jesus which is now at work in our very flesh. There has never been a man or woman of God who conveyed authentic healing whose own life was not imprinted with the marks of Jesus' suffering and death.



3. As we share in our Lord's suffering we are perfected by it. It was His suffering that atoned for our sins, and it is the fellowship of His sufferings that cleanses our hearts and minds and bodies from their bent to sin. If our Lord was made perfect through suffering, the sons/daughters He brings to glory are also made perfect through suffering. If the Son of God learned obedience through the things which He suffered, you can be sure that He is now teaching us obedience as He leads us through this valley. And, praise God, the valley has an end.

The instant we are finally formed in the image of the Son of God, the fire is withdrawn and the hammering stops and we find ourselves standing before the Lamb surrounded by countless others who have come through this valley....

**.... and we know that not one pain we ever felt,
not one hurt that ever came our way was wasted.**

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Romans 8:18

Meanwhile, our journey through the valley is itself a blessed thing.



Even as we suffer, the Spirit of glory and of God anoints us.

May God help us to glory in our sufferings, our trials, our weakness, so that the power of His Son may rest upon us.

Message: Richard E. Bieber 1975

Featured Art: Courtesy of Neil Breebaart (South Africa) at Art Refined

Prayer- Yes, Lord, as we live under the shadow of suffering, may our trials, weaknesses, disappointments, fear, and pain draw us into your very heart, becoming a doorway to life for us. When you call us to this door, help us to stop running. Help us, help us not to be overwhelmed by this suffering, help us not to embrace despair and hopelessness in it. Help us to enter knowing you are taking us into glory, a splendor we can't even imagine. And Lord if our suffering is actually a chastening...open our eyes to it so we can turn from our destructive, life-sucking ways. And instead, if our suffering is meant to draw us into fellowship with you...May we find you in our sufferings...knowing you are at our side, sharing our burden, giving us your easy burden. May this give us hope and vision. And yes, may our suffering transform us into agents of life, vessels that have been broken to be like you. Oh to know, that our sadness, our loss, our failures, our pain and our brokenness can bring healing to others. What a gift. And yes, Lord keep perfecting us, keep making us like you. Help us to see this as a gift of love and life. And Lord, please anoint us, cover us with your presence so that we are not overwhelmed with despair, so that we can experience life, hope, and joy even as we travel this dark valley. Amen.

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Maranatha Mirror Messages

mmirror.net

maranathamirror18@gmail.com

586-530-6983



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WHO WAS SLAIN
HAS BEGUN HIS REIGN