



A
GREATER
GOOD



BY
KEVIN R. SCHMIDT

A DEVOTIONAL TO HELP YOU
DEAL WITH PAIN

A GREATER GOOD

BY KEVIN R.
SCHMIDT

A devotional to help you
deal with pain

CONTENTS

God Knows and Cares.....	Luke 12:6-7.....	1
He Is Creator.....	Gen. 1:1.....	2
He Is Very Near.....	John 14:23.....	3
Blessings in Disguise.....	Rom. 8:28.....	4
He Will Never Desert You.....	Heb. 13:5-6.....	5
A Proper Comparison.....	Rom. 8:18.....	6
Strengthen Your Soul.....	Acts 14:22.....	7
You Will Make It.....	James 1:12.....	8
Exult in Our Tribulations.....	Rom. 5:3-5.....	9
Consider It All Joy.....	James 1:2-4.....	10
Take Courage.....	John 16:33.....	11
Afflictions of Righteous.....	Ps. 34:18-19.....	12
Furnace of Affliction.....	Is. 48:10.....	13
Good Gifts.....	Matt. 7:11.....	14
Today's Trouble Only.....	Matt. 6:34.....	15
I Fear No Evil.....	Ps. 23:4.....	16
Perfect Peace.....	Is. 26:3.....	17
New Strength.....	Is. 40:29-31.....	18
Delight - Commit - Trust.....	Ps. 37:4-7.....	19
Do Not Fret.....	Ps. 37:8-9.....	20
Peace Can Be Yours.....	Phil. 4:6-7.....	21
Let Your Mind Dwell.....	Phil. 4:8.....	22
He Holds Your Hand.....	Is. 41:13.....	23
Be Thankful in This.....	I Thess. 5:16-18.....	24
He Will Have Compassion.....	Is. 55:6-7.....	25
His Ways Are Higher.....	Is. 55:8-9.....	26
No More Pain.....	Rev. 21:4-5.....	27
Be an Overcomer.....	Rev. 21:7.....	28
For Your Good.....	Deut. 10:12-13.....	29
How to Respond.....	Job 1:20-22.....	30
Hold Fast Your Integrity.....	Job 2:9-10.....	31
Heavenly Help.....	Rom. 8:26-27.....	32
We Overwhelmingly Conquer.....	Rom. 8:35-39.....	33
The Crown of Life.....	James 1:12.....	34
He Will Exalt You.....	James 4:7-10.....	35
Proven Character.....	Rom. 5:3-5.....	36
Tradition of Tribulation.....	I Thess. 1-6.....	37
Prepared for the Worst.....	Rev. 7:14.....	38
Living by Faith.....	Heb. 10:32-39.....	39
Suffering for Jesus.....	Acts 9:16.....	40
Heirs of Suffering.....	Rom. 8:16-17.....	41
For a Great Purpose.....	II Cor. 1:3-4.....	42
Abundant Comfort.....	II Cor. 1:5.....	43
Suffering for Others.....	II Cor. 1:6.....	44

A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

Kevin R. Schmidt

I am 48 years old, am happily married, and have three wonderful children. I live in Bend, Oregon, where my wife and I founded Morning Star Christian School.

I have been a Christian since I was four years old. Even at that early age I recognized my need for a Savior, so I asked Jesus to be my Lord. I dedicated my life to God and expected to go into the full-time ministry somewhere, somehow.

At the age of twelve I was diagnosed with incurable degenerative disc disease. In the years that followed I have undergone eight back surgeries, one knee surgery, and an appendectomy with a severe bout of infectious colitis. Pain—physical, mental, and emotional—has been a constant companion for most of my life. My pain was intensified because I did not understand how to respond to God in my hurting. My pain is always lessened when anxiety is reduced and I am responding to God in a proper, Biblical way.

When I was a child going through much physical pain, my parents were separated and eventually divorced. This added to my mental anguish. I felt the undeniable love of God in my heart. It was my anchor in turbulent seas. Life was not what many well-meaning Christians led me to believe it should be. I felt rejected and tortured. I set out on a quest to discover if the Bible had any practical application to my pain other than the promise of Heaven and an eternity of no more pain (Rev. 21:4). To my wonderment, I discovered that the written Word of God is alive and able to create an abundant life as I applied it in the proper way. It is immensely practical and desirable as a pattern for living.

This devotional is Biblical medicine for the relief of pain- that all people experience at some time in their lives. Each devotional starts with Scripture, the lively, creative, healing Word of God. Then thoughts are offered to guide in the understanding, evaluation, and application of the Scripture. Next an example of praise, worship, and prayer is given to help the reader internalize the powerful medicine before them. Each devotional is short, but meaty, uplifting, and encouraging. The focus of the devotions is on getting to know God—what He is like and how He deals with His children—in order that a loving, trusting relationship can grow and flourish. The devotions help the reader to understand the practicality of God's Word and give specific application to build and strengthen faith. They show us how to renew our

thinking so that we will cooperate with God, the Creator of our daily lives. This is, of course, the only way to achieve the promise of the abundant life that we are guaranteed through Jesus Christ. They promote peace in the midst of the storm, to comfort us and to keep us loving our wonderful, heavenly Father with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength.

In response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and with His help, I wrote *A GREATER GOOD* with the profound hope that God will be glorified and His Kingdom will be built in the hearts of men and in the realms of this earth.

I wrote *A GREATER GOOD* so that no one would have to suffer as I did in my thirty-year search to find answers and help in and through my pain. I wrote *A GREATER GOOD* so that my wonderful, loving, heavenly Father would receive the love, praise, and worship He so richly deserves. I wrote *A GREATER GOOD* so that Satan could not use doubt to cripple or destroy the faith of a believer.

I pray that no one will ever have to suffer needlessly as they seek to make practical sense of the Word of God—how God deals with His children and how we are to respond to Him.

INTRODUCTION

There can be only one conclusion. If God allows pain, it must be for A GREATER GOOD. The very nature of God cannot allow Him to act otherwise.

At the center of God's plan for us is the development of a personal love relationship with Him. He is preparing us for an eternity of service as a royal priesthood.

Our loving, heavenly Father is acting in His role as Creator. He is allowing the circumstances of our pain to create in us character qualities that can only be developed here, under these circumstances.

The only reason you would allow your children to suffer, if you had the power to stop their suffering, would be for A GREATER GOOD! God is much more loving than we are. He certainly does not torture His children to teach them lessons! Sin, not God, has brought pain and death into this world and into our lives.

God wants to develop love and faith in us. Without them, it is impossible to please Him. The love He wants is His kind of love. The faith He wants is not faith to manipulate Him, but faith to accept whatever cross we must bear. With this kind of faith, God's perfect plan to create A GREATER GOOD can be accomplished in us and through us. The hard part is keeping faith when circumstances are contrary to our understanding. Through testing of our beliefs, faith is born. The test is the critical juncture where belief is transformed into faith, if our response is a proper one.

Often our prayers destroy any hope of faith being nurtured and developed. Often we are impertinent, demanding, and selfish. We do not humble ourselves, and we put God to the test. Then we wonder why God does not give us what we want.

Through proper praise, worship, and prayer, our spiritual eyes are opened. Without this vital communication, we will never get what we truly want. When all is said and done, all that we truly want is God's best for our loved ones and for ourselves.

Those of us who endure much pain can expect much reward. We are chosen to *endure* such special circumstances because God has a special use for us. The fire of pain purifies and refines us if we cooperate with God. We are not necessarily better or worse people than others because we must endure such pain. We are His **special** creation being molded into the image of Jesus for a wonderful, eternal purpose!

This life and these circumstances are the only way that we can gain what we need

for our task of ruling and reigning with Christ for 1,000 years. By our proper responses to the trials and tribulations of this life, we qualify ourselves for a unique and special job. Obedience to the commands of God is essential! Our hearts must be engaged in the process in order for us to achieve the best results.

We must be transformed. The transformation process is as simple, and as difficult, as loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. By the renewing of our minds, according to the truth of God's Word, we gain understanding of the will of God and our place in His good and perfect plan (Romans 12:1-2).

This devotional is designed to help us with the process of **transformation** by mind renewal, so that we can respond to the painful circumstances of life in a way that is pleasing to God and most beneficial to others and to ourselves. It is tough medicine that will lead to spiritual growth, love beyond measure, peace that surpasses understanding, joy indescribable, and physical healing in God's perfect timing.

GOD KNOWS AND CARES

Luke 12:6-7 (Jesus said) *"Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? And yet not one of them is forgotten before God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows."*

How small and uncaring have you convinced yourself that God is? What are God's weaknesses? Does His character need improvement? Does His strength need to be increased? Of course not!

Are you of less value than a sparrow? Did God send His only begotten Son to die for a faceless humanity, or did He have you in mind? I am convinced that God would have sent Jesus to die even if you were the only one who would believe and accept His sacrifice as payment for your sins. You are of unimaginable value to God!

Have you truly given Him full authority over your life and death? There are no halfway measures in your relationship with your loving heavenly Father. Now is the time that your commitment is tested.

During this time of pain you will learn much about your wonderful Father. If you cooperate with Him, your love for Him will deepen beyond description.

You must accept the fact that God does know all things, even the smallest details of your life. Have you cared enough to number the hairs of your loved ones? Do you really doubt that God knows and cares about you just because He has allowed this pain into your life today? On the contrary, He loves you too much to take this pain away right now! He always has your best interests in mind!

Fear is the great crippler of faith. The remedy for fear is praise and worship. How could you possibly fear anything when you fully realize that the most wise, awesome, powerful, loving, kind and compassionate God has you, His child, held lovingly in the center of His mighty hand? Praise and worship increase your faith, thus strengthening and deepening your relationship with your loving heavenly Father. Without fear, peace has room to flourish.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I am more valuable to you than many sparrows. I believe you have numbered the hairs of my head. You know how much I am hurting. I know that you care. You are more wonderful than I can imagine, especially now in this fog of pain. I trust you because you are trustworthy. Please help my faith to rule the fear that destroys my faith in you.

HE IS CREATOR

Genesis 1:1 *"In the beginning God created. ..."*

The first thing we learn about God is that He existed before the creation. The next thing we learn is that He is the Creator.

If we take the time to meditate on this physical universe, the creation of God, our appreciation for God's character will blossom and set us in awe of our wonderful, magnificent God. We see that God is concerned with the smallest details. The variety seems to be limitless. His ingenuity is mind-boggling. Even His humor is apparent.

Paul says in Romans 1:20, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." The testimony of God's existence and character is so complete in nature that there is left no room for doubt.

He is the Master Creator of our lives. He specializes in turning nothing into something beautiful. He excels at turning bad into good. As we cooperate and humbly yield to His creativity in our lives, we will be witnesses of His awesome power, and, best of all, we will experience His wonderful, peace-generating love.

Our goal should not be to get out from under the pain, but to use the pain to help mold our character into that which is pleasing to God. We have been promised that eventually all tears and pain will be removed (Revelation 21:4), but right now they can be powerful allies if we keep in mind that God knows and cares and is allowing this pain for the good.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, you are the mighty Creator. I yield to your mighty, creative hand. I believe you are creating good through my pain. I know that you will remove it when the time is right. Please help me to use this pain to make me a better citizen of Heaven. Help me to take my eyes off myself so that I may see the needs of those around me.

HE IS VERY NEAR

John 14:23 *"Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him.'"*

Our love for our heavenly Father is not based on feelings. It is based on obedience.

During times of pain, our feelings of love may be totally drowned out. But feelings are too easily affected by chemical changes in our bodies. This is why obedience, commitment, and faith are vital to a healthy relationship with God.

As believers, our bodies actually become the temple of the Holy Spirit of God. Often, when pain is great, He seems so far away, but He is not. He is closer than a brother. He is the searcher of the thoughts and intents of men's hearts.

He feels our pain. Doesn't any good parent hurt when his child suffers? True love insists on the very best for the one loved. An immature view of love demands its own way. God's love transcends this temporal life and extends to our eternal life. God's love wants only the best for us. His all-knowing view of yesterday, today, and tomorrow makes it impossible for Him to make mistakes. If we could see what He sees, we too would shout with praise, "Truly, You do all things well!" If you want the peace that is the fuel for endurance, then by faith, you must believe and say this.

Do not rely on feelings to drive your love for your heavenly Father. Worship and praise will jump-start those buried feelings.

Praise, Worship and Prayer

Father, I am so glad to know that you are not as far away as you seem to be. I am afraid that my love for you has been weakened by disobedience. Please forgive me! I can see how knowing that you are near will help me. I love you even though, at this moment, I am not relying on feelings.

BLESSINGS IN DISGUISE

Romans 8:28 *"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."*

As our loving Creator, God has designed our lives with purpose and meaning. When we are hurting and our heavenly Father does not take away our pain, the quality of our love for Him is revealed to us. The destruction of the old nature and its way of thinking and the creation of the new often require painful circumstances. God has designed this world to provide blessings for our spiritual growth and development as well as for the physical.

Not all things are good. Sometimes this life is full of bad. Isn't it wonderful that our loving heavenly Father specializes in creating good out of bad?!

It is very difficult to humbly submit yourself to the loving hand of your heavenly Father and patiently wait for the good to be revealed. We must also actively cooperate with His efforts to develop in us godly character. The crucible of pain crushes the old form and prepares us to be molded into Jesus' image. The fiery pain allows the dross of the old nature to separate from the good. As bad attitudes flow to the surface, we must clean them out.

Faith, next to love, is the most important attribute we must develop. It requires testing to develop.

Our degree of commitment to "The Faith" is a crucial element in our ability to emerge from pain as a victor. Our attitude must be to use what life throws at us to become better citizens of Heaven. Pain and trials are nutrients which help us grow strong and healthy.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, it is a comfort to know that you cause all things to work together for good. I do love you, even though I do not feel it at times. I want your purposes for my life. I will cooperate with you in this.

HE WILL NEVER DESERT YOU

Hebrews 13:5B-6A *"for He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you nor will I ever forsake you', so that we confidently say, 'the Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid.'"*

When pain hits hard, we feel so alone and at times God seems so far away. This knowledge of His nearness is very comforting. But if He should choose to leave our pain and not take it away, doubt can become a real problem.

Some could doubt His love. **But** this is wrong because He is love. He is the definition and embodiment of love. Any different concept of God is inaccurate.

Some could doubt His ability to act on our behalf. But this is wrong also. He is not limited by anything. His power is neither small nor weak.

Some could doubt His knowledge of our situation. But this too is far from the truth. He hears all and knows all. He has the ability to be everywhere at once.

Some could doubt our own worthiness to receive the blessing of God's healing. What makes us think we are worthy to receive any of God's blessings? It is only by His marvelous grace that we receive anything from Him. God does discipline His children, but only out of love and for our own good. If He leaves pain in our lives, then we can be sure that it is good in an ugly wrapping.

Doubt is the destroyer of faith. Pain can be the birthplace of faith. Do you really want the good that He is trying to create in and through your life? Are you going to cooperate with His efforts? Are you going to trust Him, or are you going to tell Him that you know what is best for your life?

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, thank you for being my helper. I will not be afraid because I realize now, more than ever, that you know best. I believe that you care more for me than I do. You are wonderful! Help me push away the clouds of doubt with choruses of praise.

A PROPER COMPARISON

Romans 8:18 *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."*

We must have an eternal view of events in our lives. Knowledge of our wonderful God helps us to have the faith that generates eternal vision. The Bible, with the Old and New Testaments, acts as binoculars helping us to see beyond this temporal life.

This life is not simply to be endured until we are taken to Heaven. If it served no purpose, we would be immediately transported there when we accepted Jesus as our personal Savior.

The process of learning to have an eternal view is that of renewing our minds through conformity to God's eternal standards of life. "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:2)

Much of the mental transformation process involves praise and worship offered in love to our heavenly Father. The primary purpose of the Bible is to teach us about God. Through the Word we learn what He is like, what He has done, and what He is going to do. With this knowledge we learn to love Him as we should, with our entire being.

Through praise and worship we cause our mind to be transformed, and we gain eternal vision. Our whole perspective changes. Before, we looked at our pain with anger and frustration, feeling it was an enemy that was trying to destroy us. But after our mental transformation, we see pain's potential, the birth of God-like character qualities in us. By faith we then will see that the eternal glory makes this temporal pain worthwhile.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I need to see life from your perspective. You are the Creator and Crafter of my life. I believe you are making something beautiful out of me, and I love you for it. Please, help me transform my thinking so despair will not overcome me.

STRENGTHEN YOUR SOUL

Acts 14:22 ". . . *strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.'*"

These writings are all about encouragement. There is an old saying: "To be forewarned is to be forearmed." When we realize that tribulations are part of our spiritual growth and development, our attitude changes, and our response to the tribulations changes.

When pain hits us, we are tempted to give up our faith. When our preconceived ideas are proven to be shallow or false, we begin to doubt everything we believe.

Are you growing weary with the tremendous effort it takes just to remain on course in the midst of your storm? Don't give up now! Take encouragement in the knowledge that tribulation in itself is the proof that you are on your way to the kingdom of God. No, I don't mean that you are dying. Tribulations produce new quality of life that perfects us spiritually.

We are all in the same boat. It is not easy, but the effort it takes to persevere holds great rewards.

Pain is an individual thing. We each have different responses to pain. The degree of pain we experience is relative to our own degree of tolerance. For example, the pain of a broken arm to one person may not be much, but to another person, it can be intense.

Notice the word "through" in the Scripture. There is an end to our pain. Furthermore, on the other side of our pain lies a great reward, blessings beyond description. Just don't give up. Join the rest of us who are fighting the good fight of allowing the old nature to die and the new nature to be born.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I don't understand why we must go through so many tribulations to enter your kingdom. I accept that they are needed and worthwhile. I trust you as much as I know how to. With you on my side I will emerge more than a conqueror.

YOU WILL MAKE IT

James 1:12 *"Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."*

The "I will make it" attitude comes from a deep love for God. It is the confidence that faith brings, the calm, heart-felt assurance that it will turn out all right.

Perseverance is different from endurance. Perseverance means keeping up the struggle rather than sitting back and simply waiting for the end of the trial.

In what way should we struggle? The struggle is a spiritual battle in which our efforts are directed toward development of godly character.

During trials we are forced to make decisions about our relationship with our heavenly Father. Our faith will either increase or decrease based on our response. Trials show others and us whether or not we truly believe in God and the sincerity of our love for Him.

The crown of life is a reward that starts now and extends into eternity. It is the abundant life that He has promised us, not abundance of goods or leisure. It is love that fills our lives and makes each moment precious. It is hope and faith that provides peace in the midst of the storm. It is a daily discovery of our wonderful God and Creator. It is excitement at seeing His transforming power change us from caterpillars into butterflies.

This is possible only when we make our first priority that of nurturing our love for Him.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I love you. You are wonderful. I am going to learn to love you more because you are the treasure of living.

EXULT IN OUR TRIBULATIONS

Romans 5:3-5 *"And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."*

Exult in our tribulations! You must be kidding! I cannot rejoice and leap for joy in these problems. No, absolutely not!

But the attitude of exulting in tribulation is the key to being a victor. The knowledge that proven character is the only treasure we can take with us into eternity can help us persevere. What else could Jesus have meant when He said, "Lay up for yourselves treasure in Heaven."? It is humanly impossible to develop this proven character apart from a vital love relationship with our heavenly Father. It is in our knowledge of Him that we discover hope—hope that does not disappoint. But knowledge of someone alone does not consummate a relationship. You must take that knowledge and do something with it. Love is action, not just feelings.

To love God, we love others as He does. To love God, we tell Him in praise how wonderful He is. To love God, we stand firm in our commitment, faithful despite circumstances and hopeful when there is no hope in sight.

As we cultivate our personal love relationship, we discover that we are not alone. The Holy Spirit is with us. His presence becomes so real to us that doubt is no longer even a fleeting thought.

Worship, in one way, is simply placing a value upon your relationship with your heavenly Father and acting upon it.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, it doesn't seem to be within my human abilities to exult in this pain. I am so glad that I can do all things through your strength. Help me to transform my love for you from thoughts to actions.

CONSIDER IT ALL JOY

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

Too many dismiss this as idealistic rhetoric and do not take it seriously. Or all too often they misapply it and say, "How can I be happy about this tragedy? It wouldn't be right!"

All too many Christians become religious because they are afraid of hell, not because they love God. They seem to tell God, "Give me peace, prosperity, and no trouble, and I will accept heaven."

Joy in trials cannot be contrived. James does not say that we should laugh through our tears. He means that we should be glad that God is working in our lives developing our faith, the blessings of which are eternal and go beyond earthly value.

We must believe that there is purpose to our pain. Only then can we begin to cooperate with God. Only then can our love for Him take flight. Only then can peace that surpasses understanding fill our hearts and lives.

It is not as hard as it may seem, but it does require loving Him with all your strength, mind, soul, spirit, and heart. The great thing about this kind of love is that it is your all today, no matter how short it may fall of your ideal.

If you truly love someone, you do what makes him or her happy, without hesitation. Your ability to obey God's commandments is, to a great extent, a measurement of the degree of your love for Him. If you are struggling with obedience, you need to work on your love for Him.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I want to love you more! I want victory in this pain, and I know it can be found in loving you. You are my peace. In You I find all the pleasures of life. Thank you for working in me, for making me perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

TAKE COURAGE

John 16:33 (Jesus said) *"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world. "*

It is possible to have courage when faced with tribulation. Courage comes from true knowledge of the power and protection we have at our disposal. Courage comes from the knowledge that God has a great and wonderful purpose in and through our tribulation. Courage comes from knowing what our heavenly Father is like and how He works in our lives.

Jesus spoke many troubling things to His disciples. This was to prepare them so that they could have peace in the midst of the troubles to come. His words were recorded for us. If we believe and act upon what we read in the Bible, then we too can have the same peace He promised His disciples.

We are given the example of Jesus overcoming the world. Notice that He proclaimed victory before the horrible crucifixion. Jesus was armed with an unshakable love relationship with His heavenly Father. He put words to His faith. His focus was on the outcome of the crucifixion. Focusing on the outcome of our tribulation is the best preparation we can make for the pain we are facing.

When we are in the midst of our pain, correct habits must already be established. Our thought patterns must be properly set. In times of pain we tend to react mostly by instinct. The nature, whether the old or the new, that has received the most nourishment and practice will be the dominant, influencing factor in our reaction to pain.

Just as Jesus felt the deep aloneness of His torturous ordeal and cried out, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34B), so may we. At this point our love relationship will pass the test also if we say, as Jesus did, "Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit." (John 23:46).

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, how wonderful, strong and trustworthy your hands are. You are worthy to be trusted, and I trust you. Thank You for helping me to have courage. Your peace is precious to me. I also will overcome the world!

AFFLICTIONS OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Psalm 34:18-19 *"The Lord is near to the broken-hearted, and saves those who are crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivers him out of them all."*

It is comforting to realize that the righteous have many afflictions. All too often we look at afflictions as punishment for our sins. Though afflictions may be related to discipline, often they are the result of evil in general. There is a certain amount of randomness to the events of life that surround us. Afflictions of the Righteous fall into this category. Your own personal sin may not have brought this affliction upon you.

On the other hand it is probably not an attack of Satan either. There are a lot of people who believe that we are cannon fodder for Satan's big guns. These people leave the impression that we are little more than human targets for Satan to shoot. We are left feeling helpless and unprotected and even neglected by our heavenly Father.

Our loving Father will not allow anything to come into our lives that will destroy us. He is in the business of protecting, building up, nourishing, and instructing His children.

We must look at our afflictions through His eyes. They are opportunities and possibilities rather than surprise attacks of Satan. It is Satan's ultimate defeat to turn all that is evil into good.

Our Lord will deliver us out of all our afflictions, but we need to cooperate with Him. We must not expect to be passive recipients of God's rescue.

We should never cry, "Take this away," without a sincere effort to find the good it would produce in our lives, for we may ultimately be rejecting an eternal blessing of God.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, it is good to know that I can be righteous and still suffer. It is good to trust you. It is good to know that you are making something beautiful out of my life, and that in your perfect timing; all my affliction will be gone.

FURNACE OF AFFLICTION

Isaiah 48:10 (God says) *"Behold I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction."*

The testing by affliction accomplishes many things. It reveals to us the depth of our faith and the degree of our commitment. It forces us to consummate our belief by making us act according to our beliefs. It requires us to get serious about our relationship with our heavenly Father. It refines our spiritual character with proper responses.

It is of utmost importance that we realize who is doing the refining in our lives. Usually our first response to affliction is to pray to God to take it away. We cry to God, informing Him about what is happening and what to do about it. We thrust the credit for our affliction upon Satan.

When our first response is to ask God to take away our affliction, we tend to assume several incorrect things. We assume that God does not know what is going on in our lives. We assume that this "attack of Satan" somehow caught God unaware. We assume primary control over our lives, leaving little room for God to work.

Probably the touchiest area is who gets the credit or glory for what goes on in our lives. If our focus is on the bad of our affliction, the good may never be seen. If we demand that our affliction be removed, we may be rejecting a blessing sent by God. Too often we want immediate gratification rather than eternal blessings.

God allowing an event, no matter how painful, is not the same as Him torturing us. He does not bring affliction; He allows it. He does not torture us into obedience and love. He lovingly disciplines us, molding our spiritual character for our eternal good.

When pain is great, the potential benefit is also great. God's love for us is too powerful to allow any affliction that is not for our ultimate good. His power is not weak because our pain is not removed. On the contrary, it demonstrates how strong He is to withhold relief for a greater benefit.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I want to change the way I think about affliction. You are in charge of my life. Nothing surprises you. I want to see my testing through to its ultimate reward. I love you more each day as I get to know You better.

GOOD GIFTS

Matthew 7:11 (Jesus said) *"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"*

Do you see God as less compassionate than you are? How powerful and loving is God?

In our spiritual immaturity and from the depths of our pain we begin to doubt. We ask for what we perceive as good and do not even stop to think of what we have as potential good.

With the wrong attitude toward our pain, we reinforce improper concepts of God. We may doubt His ability to hear us. We may doubt His love for us. All such doubt destroys faith and weakens our love for Him. With the correct attitude, faith grows, and our love for Him blossoms. Then we will produce good fruit.

It takes more love for God to withhold relief than to give it. How would you feel if you had the abilities of God, yet felt it was best to allow your child to suffer? Only the purest love could withstand the pain of such a decision.

The works that we do in this life are not as important to God as the development of our love relationship with Him. Loving Him with all our strength, mind, and heart is our purpose and aim in this life.

Next to love, faith is the most important characteristic we must develop. Faith is the fertile ground that will allow love to grow and flourish.

The testing of our faith and love is an essential element for their growth and development. Pain, by its very nature, demands that our love grow either hot or cold.

The height of our joy is directly proportional to the depth of our sorrow. The more suffering one endures the greater his capacity to experience and enjoy the awesome depths of God's love.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I don't want pain, but I do want to be all I can be for eternity. Help me to endure with positive results both now and in Heaven. May you be glorified in my life!

TODAY'S TROUBLE ONLY

Matthew 6:34 (Jesus said) *"Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."*

The human imagination is a powerful thing, capable of producing very realistic images of totally unreal thoughts. Those images are able to generate powerful emotions such as anxiety and fear. Our imagination can produce such awful images of the future that we can even despair of life itself.

The problem with tomorrow is that it never really comes. Today is all we really have, and today is the only day we can do anything about. God works in the reality of our lives today. Is there any such thing as imaginary answers to imaginary problems?

We must take captive every thought, shine the light of reality on them, and add to them the truth of God's Word. Here in the real world there are real solutions to real problems.

Through praise we can transform an ugly field of mud into a field of spring flowers. We have spent too much time worrying. The thoughts of our old nature are self-destructive, but the thoughts of our new spiritual life produce beauty.

The thoughts of the Spirit of God are based in His very nature. They are capable of producing only life and goodness.

If we begin to accept **all** of life as a precious gift from a loving heavenly Father, then we possess the power over anxiety and fear. The hopeless muddy field of despair will blossom with flowers of hope.

God has help for the very real problems of today, not for the imaginary problems of the nonexistent tomorrow.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, it is so neat to see how you have provided help for all of my real problems. I will focus on today and let you handle tomorrow. I am going to fill my today so full of praise that there will be no room for anxious thoughts of tomorrow.

I FEAR NO EVIL

Psalm 23:4 *"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."*

The confidence we can have while walking through the valley of the shadow of death comes from a vibrant relationship with our heavenly Father. All too often we start cultivating our relationship with our heavenly Father only when troubles surround us. The problem with this is that our relationship becomes crisis-oriented. We then view God as our bail bondsman.

But God does not always bail us out of our problems. When we don't get our way, we often react like spoiled children and reject God altogether.

A crisis relationship may be the start of a relationship, but it cannot be all there is, or our relationship will lack depth and quality. If that is the case, without a problem, there will be no relationship. It is our relationship prior to a problem that equips us to be over comers, for it is very difficult to think clearly when pain clouds our thinking.

We fear evil when we are not sure if God is master of our lives. We tend to trust God while everything is going well, but we doubt Him when our cozy world is disturbed by trouble.

If we accept blessings of good times from our heavenly Father, then we must accept blessings of troublesome times also. It is during the trial of pain that we discover the quality of our love for God. We discover if we are sincere about our commitment to love Him.

It is during times of pain that our relationship with God deepens. We learn aspects of His nature that we never understood before, and we also see aspects of our own nature that we may not have realized before.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I choose to trust you in the good and bad of my life. I want my love for you to deepen and be more vibrant. You are worthy of my trust, for you do all things well.

PERFECT PEACE-TRUSTING GOD

Isaiah 26:3 *"The steadfast of mind Thou wilt keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in Thee."*

Life blows its winds of adversity against us at unknown intervals. At times there is little we can do about it. You would be strange if pain did not bring a certain amount of frustration and anxiety with it. The important thing is how we respond to it.

When we do not have steadfastness of mind, our suffering is compounded. This steadfastness is a commitment to faith in God, based in our love for Him. Our love does not find its foundation in feelings, but in knowledge of Him and in dedication to Him.

Love that endures is actions based on commitment. Commitment is based upon our understanding of the value of our relationship with our heavenly Father. In contrast, feelings are simply the result of a kaleidoscope of events brought upon us by internal and external sources. Therefore, feelings are fickle and cannot be trusted as the measure of our relationship.

When pain only serves to enhance our relationship, then we have perfect peace. This peace is anchored in our trust in our heavenly Father. Trust comes from the knowledge that God is taking good care of you. Trust means that you believe He knows what you are going through and that He is working to create good out of the bad in your life.

The hard part is knowing what our role is in all of this. There is a tendency to sit back and do nothing, believing that it is God's will and nothing we do will make any difference. Although there are times when there is very little we can do but ride out the storm, most of the time we are to be active participants in affecting change in our lives.

God has granted us a free will, and He expects us to develop our lives in accordance with the principles of His Word. Doing nothing is like a captain letting his ship drift aimlessly, simply hoping for the best.

When the fog of pain comes, you will feel like you are blindfolded, trying to navigate your ship, but it is in this time that one of heaven's most valuable commodities is granted — faith.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I love you. The peace you provide is more valuable than gold. I will do all I know how to do to love you. Help me to remember what I am learning.

NEW STRENGTH

Isaiah 40:29-31 *"He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary."*

Pain saps your strength and seems to fight every effort you make to recover and press on with living. It is so hard for most people to roll with the punches and simply wait for the Lord.

I believe that waiting for the Lord in this case means to patiently cease the struggle for an immediate solution, and relax and wait for the solution that the Lord will bring into your life.

When you relax and cease the struggle, giving up the worry, fear, and anxiety, the focus of your attention must be placed somewhere else. That focus should be on developing spiritual character qualities, thus deepening your love relationship with your heavenly Father. He is the source of new strength. He alone has the power to grant flight into new realms.

We must somehow learn the delicate balance between fighting for the purposes of God in the pain of life and fighting against His plan.

We must constantly remember that we have sold ourselves, willingly, as slaves to serve our heavenly Father as He sees fit. We are as sheep to the slaughter, daily giving up our rights to the sovereign will of our wonderful, loving God.

The new strength is spiritual in nature. Our purpose for living is to grow and develop as an eternal, heaven-bound being. When our focus is set on this, the natural result of our lives will be good works that glorify our heavenly Father and thus lead others to eternal salvation.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, sometimes it takes great effort of my will to simply relax and wait for you to accomplish your purposes through this pain. Please help me to focus on my relationship with you during this time.

DELIGHT COMMIT - TRUST - REST - WAIT

Psalm 37:4-7A *"Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will do it. And He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday. Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him."*

These verses hold a tremendous amount of good advice. First of all the Psalmist says that we should **delight** ourselves in the Lord. This, I believe, is the key to a vibrant, living relationship with Him. It is also the hardest to accomplish.

You must have made a genuine **commitment** of your life's direction to His guidance. Once your commitment is sound, it will be tested.

That is when **trust** comes into play. Are you going to trust God in spite of the pain you are experiencing? This trust involves accepting the trials of life with a humble attitude. These trials force us to know our heavenly Father in a more intimate way.

When you know of His love and abilities, it becomes possible to **rest** in Him. This resting is a cessation of worry, fretting, and anxiety. It doesn't necessarily mean stopping all activity rather it means cooperating with the adverse winds, using them to your advantage.

Then the **waiting** becomes important. Patience is indeed a virtue. Patience is possible when you realize that, in God's perfect timing, He makes all things beautiful.

Now we are back to **delight**. This process is a circle that begins over and over again with delight. Worship and praise release our ability to delight in the Lord.

Our God is so wonderful! Commitment and trust in Him are the wisest of investments. Though He may delay relief, He will never disappoint us.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, it is so hard to do all of this. I know you are helping me in ways I don't understand. I am now renewing my commitment to trust you, for you are indeed trustworthy. My hope lies only with you.

DO NOT FRET

Psalm 37:8-9 *"Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret, it leads only to evildoing. For evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord, they will inherit the land."*

Fretting is simply worrying that things won't work out, as you want them to. If you are fretting, you are spending valuable mental energy concentrating on the bad possibilities of life. You are letting your imagination paint an increasingly ugly picture of unknown events. Then you must imagine your response to such events. You find you are incapable of handling those events, and fear begins to encourage wrong choices or "evildoing".

The evildoing in fretting is a subtle thing. When you fret, you are cultivating the thought that God is not watching over you. You are indirectly attributing evildoing to God. In essence, fret says to God, "I don't believe that you are allowing this for any good reason." This attitude does not glorify God. It tears down our concept of His outstanding character qualities.

Faith has just been tossed out the window. Trust is severely weakened. Doubt about everything grows like a virus, seeking to kill your relationship with the only One whom has the answers to life's pain.

Praise and worship is the only medicine for such a virus as this. As we acknowledge God's supreme character qualities, we will be reminded that His love is too great to allow anything but the very best for us. His power is unlimited, and He will allow only what His love dictates.

Oh, the pain it must cause Him to allow us to suffer for a time, for the ultimate good for us and for others.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I am ashamed of my fretting. I didn't realize what I was doing to our relationship. I never realized how much you suffer for my ultimate good. Please help me to change my thought habits to praise and worship. In my relationship with You, I will find fulfillment.

PEACE CAN BE YOURS

Philippians 4:6-7 *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

This is a fantastically powerful Scripture! It contains the knockout punches for depression, anxiety, and fear. Let's look at it closely.

Notice that communication with God is foremost. The presupposition is that the lines of communication between you and Him are open. Sin interferes with our relationship and our line of communication; thus, we must confess our sins first. Once this is done, we can have confidence in bringing our needs to Him. Often this simple prerequisite solves our problems.

Notice the attitude in which we are to pray and supplicate — thanksgiving! This attitude says to our heavenly Father, "I trust you; you are going to give me what I need most, and that which you give is going to be good." It assumes He hears and cares. It believes He is actively working in my life. It expects only good from the One who loves me most. It accepts the fact that He has the power to affect the desired changes in my life. It creates the faith to commit my life into His awesome care.

It has always seemed strange to me that He wants us to pray when we know that He already knows what we want. I tend to believe that the process of prayer and supplication helps us to clarify in our own minds what we truly want and need. Then, most importantly, it deepens our love relationship with our most precious heavenly Father.

The caution I must add is that you must be careful not to demand your own way. After all, don't you truly want God's best for you, even if it is painful for the time being? Yes, I'm sure you do. In this remember, He feels all the pain you suffer, for His love would have it no other way.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I thank you for your peace. It is a tremendous help!

LET YOUR MIND DWELL ON THESE

Philippians 4:8 *"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things."*

Much of the help we need is already within our ability to reach. It is not easy, but it is there. It is the focus of our thinking and the meditation of our heart.

It is very difficult to ignore pain. It grabs your attention and thrusts your thinking into the dark, bleak realm of negative pondering. It is natural to wonder what is wrong and where the pain will lead. The problem comes when we allow our attention to dwell on ugly and potentially bad outcomes. This is like feeding a pet monster; soon it grows too large for us to control.

We should not try to ignore the ugly pain that comes into our lives. That may defeat the very purpose it is there to achieve. Sometimes God's blessings come in unusual packages.

What is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, and worthy of praise? Isn't it God who fits this description? We could easily say, "When pain stabs you, think about God." God is all these things and more, so much more!

When, amidst our pain and suffering, we turn our attention to applying what we know about God's character qualities to our situation, something marvelous begins to happen. We discover we are not alone or forgotten. God's love could no more desert us in our pain than we could desert our children in their suffering. His love and power are so enormous that nothing can defeat us, unless we let it. His wisdom and knowledge see and allow pain only for the ultimate purpose of creating the good.

With our meditation on our wonderful heavenly Father, our hearts and minds are protected against the devastation that sin has wrought on this world and on our lives.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I will let my mind dwell on you, for you are my help in all of my need.

HE HOLDS YOUR HAND

Isaiah 41:13 *"For I am the Lord your God who upholds your right hand, who says to you, 'Do not fear, I will help you.'"*

This Scripture depicts a simple child-like response to pain — reaching out to the One you love and who loves you- your heavenly Father.

When we examine our situation with our physical eyes alone, fear can take a strong hold upon us. When we open our spiritual eyes also, we see the One Who holds our hand. Our perception of the true nature of the situation we face becomes clearer.

The problem that most of us face is that we tend to impose our own solution for the situation, but our solution is often at odds with what God wants right now for us. Allowing Him to take our hand and lead us like a little child through our pain is the key to overcoming fear.

Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:3) The meaning of this is greater than simply going to heaven. I believe it speaks of living here and now as though we were in heaven.

A child-like faith is the essential first step in cooperating with God as He molds our character for eternal purposes. He uses the pain we face to create the good — good that cannot be achieved any other way.

God does not torture us into submission! His love could not allow that. He gave us a free will to choose whom we would love so that our love would be genuine and valuable.

Most often our timing is not His timing. We must cultivate submission, humility, and patience. In His timing He has for us a new body without pain and tears. (Revelation 21:4)

From eternity we will look back on the situations of our lives and say to Him, "Truly you do **all** things well!"

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I reach out to you. Take my right hand and lead me in your paths of righteousness. Though I face the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil because you are with me, holding my hand. (See Psalm 23)

BE THANKFUL IN THIS

I Thessalonians 5:16-18 *"Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."*

You are not asked to be thankful **for** your pain. You are told to be thankful in everything. This is very difficult to initiate when pain is stabbing at you with its hot burning needles, but it is not impossible.

Not very often in Scripture are we told so directly that something is God's will. That fact alone should raise the level of the attention we give to this important activity.

It is no coincidence that we are told to rejoice always before we are asked to pray without ceasing. When we are rejoicing first, our focus and perspective change. Then our prayers can be accurate, concise, to the point, and, more likely, according to God's will.

Equally important is the follow-up of giving thanks. This attitude tends to remove frustration, fear, and worry. It focuses your faith in the One Who holds you tenderly and guards your heart against depression.

This process is more of a circle than an open-ended line of actions. It must be practiced, nurtured, and developed. To rejoice, you must be thankful, to pray properly. Round and round it goes.

There is more to rejoice about than you may think. The best starting place is with God's character qualities. Then move to what He has done. Then on to what He is going to do in the end-times and in heaven. I know I skipped over what He is doing now, but this is for a reason. The now may be so filled with pain that we have built up an untrue picture of our future, thus making it impossible to rejoice.

The more you apply God's character qualities to the events of your life, the more you will rejoice. Then your prayers will proceed from faith and according to His will. Then your heart can be truly thankful in everything. Then you will find it easier to rejoice always. Then you won't want to cease praying. Then you...

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I am beginning to see how developing my love relationship with you is the most important effort of my life. I love you.

HE WILL HAVE COMPASSION

Isaiah 55:6-7 *"Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the righteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."*

Now is the time when He may be found, not tomorrow. Every moment of every day that we are alive is a precious opportunity to seek the Lord.

We are not asked to do some impossible task to earn His favor. We are simply asked to stop doing wicked things and to take control of our thoughts.

It is a humbling experience to admit you were wrong and ask for forgiveness. When pain is involved, sometimes we have ulterior motives in our return to the Lord. Often there is the hope that He will take away the pain. Down deep inside we know we deserve punishment. Maybe we even believe that this pain is punishment for our evil doing.

We think we have everything figured out. We take action. We say how sorry we are. We beg and plead. But, if we do not turn to Him from the heart, our efforts are doomed to failure. Any circumstance that focuses our attention on our love relationship with our heavenly Father is good, but our attention must stay focused even after our pain eases.

Our God is full of compassion. He knows what we truly need. His compassion does not allow Him to do anything, which is not good. We must truly want His best for us, or we will be the losers. His compassion holds to strict standards.

God does not torture us into submission. We must come willingly. He uses the events of life to help us see the difference between Him and Satan. It is only natural to love the One who is kind and compassionate.

Yes, He does offer us pardon. Pardon, because we are guilty of sin.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I know I can never be good enough to deserve your pardon, but I will work to love you with all that I am.

HIS WAYS ARE HIGHER

Isaiah 55:8-9 *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.'"*

The more you get to know about God, the more appreciation you will have for Him. In the Bible there is treasure of eternal value beyond description. Within its pages one finds a composite picture of our heavenly Father. Each little piece fits together with others like pieces in a big jigsaw puzzle.

It is a shame that all too often the Bible stories are looked at as only events in history. That is just the first step.

The next step is to understand what the story tells us about God's ways. Through this knowledge one begins to understand the very nature of God. Once you have some knowledge of His character qualities, then you can begin to see the reasons why He does what He does.

Next, it is possible to get a glimpse of His thoughts. This is not impossible or forbidden. He wants us to be able to respond to life according to His will.

The real treasure in this is the love relationship that begins to develop. It is worth the cost of your life to obtain!

Simple knowledge of God is not enough. This knowledge must be internalized and acted upon. This develops one aspect of loving God—loving with your mind.

Through praise and worship your love relationship begins to be consummated. Through obedience, witnessing, and service to others your love relationship begins to grow and blossom. In time, fruit will be produced, and with it the promise of new life.

When your thoughts begin to be His thoughts, peace in the midst of life's storms is assured.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I am so grateful that you have given me help in my quest to know you. Your Holy Spirit is one of your most precious gifts.

NO MORE PAIN

Revelation 21:4-5 *"and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." And He who sits on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' And He said, 'Write, for these words are faithful and true.'"*

This one Scripture has been the source of untold, marvelous dreams. It has been an anchor of hope to my pain-wracked life. It has given me incentive to continue in the paths of righteousness.

I firmly believe that those of us who have suffered the most and have cried such awful tears will appreciate most that moment of complete and eternal healing.

It sometimes seems too good to be true, especially when relief seems to be an eternity away. I dream of my weakened, pain-filled body being part of the "all things new."

They say angels have wings. I believe I will need no wings, for if the joy of it all does not make me explode, I will soar the heights of heaven on the clouds of ecstasy.

Our love for Him is the key that unlocks the gates of eternity. Obedience to His commandments or the doing of great works in His name does not qualify us for heaven. They are more gauges of our love for Him than anything else. Do our actions proceed out of a heart filled with love or a head filled with fear? One leads to eternal life; the other to eternal death.

We will never fully understand God's ways. This is why faith is vital to our spiritual survival and development. Faith in who He is leaves no room for doubt about what He is doing, even when everything seems to be going wrong.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I get so excited when I think of our eternity together that sometimes I can hardly wait!

FOR YOUR GOOD

Deuteronomy 10:12-13 *"And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the Lord's commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?"*

Our sinful nature seems to prod at us like an evil elf sitting on our shoulder. "How can this pain be good?" he taunts. "A God of love wouldn't allow His child to suffer so! How can you love someone who treats you so badly? God doesn't really exist; you have just been fooling yourself. After all, He hasn't answered your prayers and taken away your pain. Why don't you just give up and enjoy what you can before you die in misery?"

These lies are clearly exposed in Scripture, especially in the book of Job.

All that God has set forth in this life is for our ultimate good! If any of God's Word is true, all of it must be true.

Israel as a nation is like us as individuals. They were blind to the big picture because of their rebellion. Obedience to God's commandments helps us to see the wisdom and benefits of living His way. This knowledge increases our love, which enables us to serve Him with all our heart and soul.

There is no middle ground in our relationship with God. Fence-walkers are doomed to fall to their destruction. The most miserable people in the world are half-hearted Christians. Their lukewarm-ness is sickening to God.

We torture ourselves needlessly when we are afraid to commit totally to the will of God. Instead of believing the best, we fear the worst. The lies of that evil elf drag us down into the depths of despair.

God must be allowed to be sovereign in all of your life, or He is not your God at all.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I know you love me. I no longer gauge your love by the comfort of my life. Whatever I experience is your good for me.

HOW TO RESPOND

Job 1:20-22 *"Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.' Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God."*

God Himself declared Job to be blameless and upright. His sufferings were not a punishment for sin. Though he may have learned some things, the story indicates that this was not the purpose for his pain.

Much can be learned about God's hedge of protection for the righteous and His behind-the-scenes dealings with Satan by reading the book of Job. A casual glance at the story could make one draw the conclusion that we are just pawns in a giant chess match between God and Satan. But pawns are not the winners of the game, as Job came to be.

Job suffered, in many ways, for people of many generations. My mental anguish has been lessened because of the story of his sufferings. He set forth an example of the proper response to unimaginable suffering. He humbled himself by falling to the ground and worshiping God. He established the value or worth of his relationship with God in spite of circumstances. Then he declared to God that value. He did not blame God. He did not give up and go into sin. He honored and glorified his Lord.

Job was not only in physical pain, but in mental pain also. His wife was a hindrance and unsupportive. His friendly "comforters" tormented him. He was reduced to sitting on an ash heap scraping his sores with broken pottery and listening to the lectures of his friends.

If Job could respond properly, so can you and **me**.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I am sorry for blaming you for my pain. Please forgive me. I want only your best for my life. I know that in the end, like Job, I too will see the fullness of your blessings to me.

HOLD FAST YOUR INTEGRITY

Job 2:9-10 *"Then his wife said to him, 'Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!' But he said to her, 'You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?' In all this, Job did not sin with his lips. "*

Many wild thoughts come into our heads when our life is ripped apart with pain. We struggle physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. The world tries to deny the spiritual part, thus leaving out the key to solving our problems. It is from the spiritual part of our existence that the power to overcome emanates.

Only a fool would say that there is nothing more to us than primeval slime that got lucky. God has made us in His own image. In this life He continues the process of developing and maturing us for our eternal existence.

If we are going to believe in Him at all, we must accept Him totally as He is described in the Bible. We must accept the fact that He is worth trusting with our life and death.

We cannot just accept the pleasures of life from Him and reject the unpleasant. God has His reasons for what He allows into our lives. Our responsibility is to respond properly.

It is vital to our spiritual health that we do not attribute any evil to God. It is possible to attribute evil to God in subtle ways. We might say that God has brought evil to tempt us. We might even say that He is wrong to allow this pain. Anything other than responding as Job did could easily lead to sinning with our lips by attributing evil to God.

We must establish the standard of our integrity and hold on to it no matter what the circumstances. The stakes are great. We have the wealth of the universe to gain and eternity to enjoy it, filled with the love of our heavenly Father, which is the most valuable commodity of all.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, forgive me for thinking less of you than the truth. Please help me guard my heart and lips that I might not sin against you.

HEAVENLY HELP

Romans 8:26-27 *"And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."*

The same Spirit that promised never to leave us or forsake us also translates our hearts' desires and relays them to God. This line of communication could not be better. He is in tune with the will of God and intercedes according to that will.

Often the thing that we truly want and need is vastly different from what we pray for. We see events from a very limited viewpoint. Our first desire is often a selfish one.

All too often we pray with the wrong attitude. We tell God what is wrong and how to fix it. We talk to Him as though He does not know what is happening. Then we presume to tell Him what is best for all concerned. Then, as if that is not enough, we tell Him when to do what we ask—right now!

This attitude is vastly different from the example we are given by Jesus. When He was faced with the suffering of the cross, He prayed sharing His feelings, but then concluded by saying, "... not my will, but Thine be done." (Luke 22:42B)

We must say the same and truly mean it. Our praise and worship should reflect this attitude. We must tell Him that we trust Him. We need to tell Him that we believe He is doing a good job of preparing us for eternity. We must acknowledge His love for us—love that will allow pain only for good purposes. We need to tell Him that we want His perfect timing and His perfect solution.

Sometimes in the depths of pain we feel so alone and rejected that we feel as if we cannot take it anymore, at these times the only relief is the knowledge that God's Holy Spirit is searching our hearts and speaking to God with words that we could not even say.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I do want to change my attitudes when I pray. Thank You for being patient with me.

WE OVERWHELMINGLY CONQUER

Romans 8:35-39 *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, 'For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. "*

Wow! That is a powerful Scripture. It acknowledges the possibility or probability of tribulation in almost all its forms. It states that there is a larger purpose for our suffering.

Notice the little word, "in." "But **in** all these things we overwhelmingly conquer. ..." There are no victories without battles.

It is in the pain of life that we discover the true depth of our commitment to God. We find out how strong our faith is. We see how deep our love for our heavenly Father goes. Our old nature comes rushing to the surface in all its ugliness.

This is the true battlefield where medals are won and victory is achieved. All too often we cry to God, "Satan is attacking me. Defeat him!" The problem is that we do not realize that God has sent us into the battlefield for us to do the job of defeating Satan.

The battle that counts is the battle within. We must conquer our old nature, sending to hell the actions and attitudes that are contrary to God's.

We have all the power we need at our disposal to overwhelmingly conquer because He loves us.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I am afraid of the battle. I feel so weak. Help me to see this battle as you see it. I trust you.

THE CROWN OF LIFE

James 1:12 *"Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."*

To me the crown of life symbolizes more than just eternal life. The crown suggests that we will receive authority to perform special duties. I believe that in the trials of this life we qualify for those duties. I do not think that we are competing against one another. I believe that our heavenly Father has something in mind for each of us. To the degree that we walk in the Spirit, put on the armor of God, appropriate the beatitudes, and develop the character qualities of our Lord and God, the more authority we will receive here and in eternity.

Sometimes we lash out at pain, wildly fighting an unknown foe. Frustration settles in because our efforts seem to accomplish nothing. We need to focus on our love for our heavenly Father. If our love for Him has grown through our trial, then we qualify as one who has been approved. Approval means that we have gained a passing score in our trial.

God is not forcing us to love Him or to suffer. God is revealing Himself to us so that we can choose to love Him or not. The emotional and spiritual level of this revelation involves a complex set of events, each one tailor-made to fit each of our special lives.

As we struggle to be victors in our trials, we gain skills that can be gained only in this life. This whole concept brings new excitement to living.

With our goal and energies clearly focused, the promised abundant life is certainly within our grasp.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I want to know you more and love you more completely. This life is so very special. I want to make the most of it.

HE WILL EXALT YOU

James 4:7-10 *"Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you."*

Do you sometimes have the attitude that you are too good to suffer? Humility is vital to your relationship with God. Humility is essential if you want to achieve peace in pain. Humility allows you to accept the pain of life without anger. It does not allow you to blame God. Nor does it allow you to question His judgment.

The humble person bows before God and says, "Be it unto me according to your will." This means that his own desires are secondary.

The humble person does not feel that he deserves any special treatment. He feels honored to be considered worthy of suffering for the glory of God and the salvation of others.

The humble person regrets the smallest misdeed. This becomes his power to resist the temptation of sin. Yes, indeed, he is not a weak, spineless dupe as the world would portray him. He possesses the power to overcome double mindedness.

The humble person sees the value of the hard, narrow path that leads to salvation. He tries, and when he falls, he gets up and tries again because he knows that God will help him as he draws near to God.

The humble person knows that he must take the first step toward God. He does not expect God to rise to serve him.

The humble person can be given great power without fear of misusing it. He has a clear assessment of his own abilities and is, indeed, exalted when entrusted with God's power.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I am deeply honored that you have accepted me as your child. My love for you is not based on the quality of my life. No matter what you allow in my life, I will praise you and love you with all my being.

PROVEN CHARACTER

Romans 5:3-5 *"And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."*

The Holy Spirit, our Helper, brings us the love of our heavenly Father. This alone is a treasure of indescribable proportions, but there is more.

The combination of exalting in tribulation and persevering causes hope to live within us as a candle in the darkness of despair. We do not always feel this hope because we neglect our love relationship with our heavenly Father, the source of all hope.

Without active praise and worship it is impossible to exult in the despair of our tribulation. Praise and worship gives us new sight for our spiritually blinded eyes. It also allows our wonderful Holy Spirit Helper to do His work in our lives.

From our new vantage point we also see our life from God's perspective. We begin to see some of the "whys" we always want to know. We then can and should focus our energies on cooperating with the true purpose of tribulation, which is proven character.

This proven character, simply put, is character that is consistent with the nature of our heavenly Father. If we persevere, or keep trying to put on the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus, we will display the fact that we are true sons of God.

Part of His character is hope, and His hope does not disappoint.

We are neither alone nor forgotten in our troubles. We are challenged, molded, and tempered. Tribulation is a crucial crucible for our transformation into eternal spiritual beings.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I almost want to say, "Bring on the tribulation." I want to be like you no matter what it takes. Thank You for Your Holy Spirit's help.

A TRADITION OF TRIBULATION

I Thessalonians 1:6-7A *"You all became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers. . . ."*

The joy of the Holy Spirit is an indicator of our inward attitude. If joy is absent, we know that our attitude needs to be changed.

Often we expect God to do the work of transforming us all by Himself. Too often we have the attitude that all we need to do is be willing to let God affect the change in us. But we are primarily responsible to do the work of transforming our minds and our actions. (See Romans 12:1-2.) This whole process of transformation is not easy, but it is well worth our total effort.

There is a tempering or strengthening process that takes place in tribulation. In the process of tribulation your very soul can be molded and eternally fashioned into the desirable image of our Lord Jesus.

As we imitate other true believers and our Lord, we establish patterns or habits that help us to keep from displeasing our heavenly Father. These actions then become an example to other believers.

Yes, tribulation is necessary and, if we could only see the end result, very desirable. By faith we must accept the fact that our Father is changing us into something eternally beautiful and useful. With our cooperation, we are being prepared for an eternal job. It will be the fulfillment of all our longing and desires. Wouldn't it be a shame to fall short of our potential because of our own stupid reluctance to trust God and our unwillingness to put forth the effort to participate in His creative efforts in our lives?

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, it is so hard to imagine the good that will come out of my pain. You have never created anything less than perfect and beautiful. I will cooperate with your efforts to create in me something eternally beautiful.

PREPARED FOR THE WORST

Revelation 7:14B *"These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."*

At the end of this world order, as we now know it, is a period of great tribulation. According to the description in Revelation, it will be an awful time.

Many Christians believe that as believers they will be spared this tribulation. I hope they are correct. The troubling thing is that this attitude promotes a lack of preparation. What if they are wrong? Are they spiritually prepared for such suffering?

I believe there is great tribulation waiting for all believers, whether it comes at the end of the age or not. During our lives, we all face personal tribulation in some form. Preparation for whatever tribulation we will face is extremely valuable, even if we somehow escape "the great tribulation."

This Scripture is talking about those who have come out of "the great tribulation." They endured it. They died under the weight of it. Often tribulation ends in a sad note of loss for this life, but eternity is another story!

The result of the tribulation they face is spiritual purification. They may have lost their physical lives, but they have gained eternal spiritual life in paradise with their loving heavenly Father.

They will not allow their troubles to destroy them. They will use their tribulation to cleanse themselves spiritually. In the tradition of our elder Brother and Lord, Jesus, their lives are not wasted, but spent wisely. They invest even their life's blood to gain eternal profit.

Now is not the time to give up. Now is the time when victory is at hand. Reach out and take it!

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, this may not be the greatest tribulation, but it feels pretty bad to me. I am glad to know that it holds great eternal benefit for me. I will not give up!

LIVING BY FAITH

Hebrews 10:32-39 *"But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly, by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners, and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. But my righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul."*

There is a conflict of suffering that we must accept joyfully and with confidence. As we endure, we will receive the promised rewards from the very hand of our Lord and God.

To live by faith is to totally accept and believe that God is in control and is creating beauty out of our present ugliness. It is not a hope perforated with holes of doubt, like Swiss cheese. True faith holds no room for doubt.

Faith like this is a product of true love. One does not generate such faith through the force of will. This faith is an expression of total belief in who God is and a total personal dedication of our lives to His wonderful purposes.

This is the process of the preserving of our souls.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I have been struggling in the wrong area. I see that by loving you I will achieve all I desire. In loving you I find the true treasure of life.

SUFFERING FOR JESUS

Acts 9:16 (Jesus said) *"for I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake."*

Suffering has been an unpopular topic. So many preach that a believer's life should be pain free. It is sad to see how much believers suffer when this ill-conceived notion proves false.

To suffer for His name's sake can mean that we will suffer persecution for believing in Jesus. It can also mean that we will suffer in our personal process of conforming to all that His name stands for.

God's name stands for all the defining character qualities that make up who He is. For us to be transformed into His image, we must take on His name. In other words, we must appropriate the same character qualities that are indicated in our heavenly Father's character. This can be, and most often is, a painful process.

When we do not expect pain, we are not prepared for it. Our initial reaction shows us much about our beliefs and ourselves. It can be an ugly experience.

A wise person will use painful circumstances to adopt the spiritual qualities that match those of our Father. Just acting the part, though, is not enough. Our heart's attitude must be that of love; otherwise, our response will be for the purpose of getting rid of the pain and rather than gaining an eternal relationship.

Fortunately, God does a lot of the work of transforming us. Though our lot may be rough and painful now, the rewards will make our suffering well worth the trouble.

In the spiritual realm, the greater our pain is, the greater the potential for our gain. With this attitude we can welcome suffering as a true friend, instead of as an enemy. Our pain will make us, not break us.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, you have designed this life in an incredible way. Truly, you have fashioned a marvelous thing. How good you are to have given me such wonderful opportunities. I love you!

HEIRS OF SUFFERING

Romans 8:16-17 *"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him."*

In our heavenly Father's plan, the suffering of Jesus had a wondrous purpose. His suffering was not caused by God, but allowed. God used it to bring about the salvation of all generations of believers. God chose the best plan possible.

Only our Creator knows why suffering is necessary. It is inconceivable to think that any loving father could willingly allow his beloved child to suffer unnecessarily, when it is within his power to stop it. Our wonderful Creator understands the complexities of our lives and knows what is needed to bring about eternal good.

Our attitude must be the same as Jesus'. He was willing to experience all that was needful with complete confidence in His heavenly Father. Jesus is our example of the possibilities and the potential outcome of suffering with the correct response.

We will be glorified with Him! It is hard to imagine what that will entail. We are given a small taste of the glories in Jesus' teachings and in the end of the book of Revelation.

To me the most wonderful thought is that of the transformation of this shell of flesh with the accompanying completion of our spiritual development—to finally see as He sees, to be free from the prodding of the sins of the flesh, to be endowed with power and authority.

Along with this is the consummation of our dreams and hopes since our salvation, the occasion that is described as the marriage of our Lord and us. Every blessing in the universe would be hollow without this fulfillment of our love relationship with our God.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I want to use every opportunity to get ready for this wonderful event. I want you to do what is necessary in my life to bring about the best. I trust you, my awesome Creator!

FOR A GREAT PURPOSE

II Corinthians 1:3-4 *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."*

Our life is not strictly for our benefit. As children of God we have a mission. We are to look to the needs of others, not just our own.

Getting our eyes off of ourselves is especially important when we are experiencing prolonged pain. Our outward focus opens the doors of possibilities. New and more positive light is shed on our condition; hopelessness is changed to hope.

You begin to see the sufferings and realize that things could be worse, much worse. Your spirit of depression begins to fade away. You realize that you are not alone. You see others making it through the struggle. You see that good can come from and through pain. You begin to see your heavenly Father's creative hand at work. As you begin to receive comfort, you then must seek to comfort those who need your help.

I can almost hear the objections rolling through your mind because I have had them all. You can make all the excuses you want, but until you change your attitude and focus, you are not in the position to receive the comfort God has for you.

Simple words of encouragement are powerful things to others who are hurting and to you. Others say, "If you can make it, so can I." These words also break the negative reinforcement of evil and unproductive thoughts and start the positive healing thoughts going. Old thought patterns that lack faith, hope, and love are replaced with a tremendous healing effect.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, open my eyes to the needs of others that I maybe, in turn, comforted. It is not easy sharing in your work here in this life, but it is well worth the effort. You are so wonderful!

ABUNDANT COMFORT

II Corinthians 1:5 *"For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ."*

As children of God we inherit a mini-version of the work of Christ. Along with our mission, we receive the sufferings He experienced, often in abundance.

There is a tremendous two-fold purpose to all of our sufferings.

One purpose is to be changed, molded, and transformed into the beautiful image of Christ Jesus, Himself. We are the ugly caterpillar being changed into a beautiful butterfly. The old destructive nature is being peeled away like the shedding of an old, dead skin. This can be a very painful process. Each of us is unique and requires special circumstances to get the job done. Only our Master Creator knows what it will take to accomplish the job. Our job in eternity is waiting for us, and we must be trained and ready for it. With our cooperation, we will be ready.

Another purpose is to participate in the work of Christ here and now, seeking to save and comfort the lost and dying. Our pain and suffering should bring forth new life in us and in others. The world has a warped understanding of the purposes and meaning of life. Non-believers have a twisted view of God. We must portray His true nature through our lives so that they can see what He is truly like. Then they may come to know and love Him as their heavenly Father. This is an awesome responsibility that we have as children of God.

We are not expected to be perfect or changed into His image overnight. We are expected to keep trying and not fight against God as He allows the pressure of pain in a loving effort to make us all that we can be for eternity.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, it is a big responsibility to accept the mission of Christ, but I do accept it.

SUFFERING FOR OTHERS

II Corinthians 1:6A *"But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation."*

To be of any benefit to others, we must first discover the benefit of affliction for ourselves.

When pain assaults us, our first response must be full of faith and trust in the One who knows the thoughts and intents of the heart. We must talk honestly, but with respect, to our loving heavenly Father about our situation.

To receive comfort ourselves in our affliction, praise and worship must be practiced. This must be more than a rote recital of some memorized litany. Your heart must join with your head to produce the harmony of a love song.

As you remind yourself about the character qualities of your Father, you must then either accept or reject their application to your present situation. Once you have decided, you must confess to God what you believe to be true. In this process you destroy wrong and unproductive thoughts, and strengthen the correct ones.

Our most powerful comfort comes in the midst of our afflictions. God does, sometimes, remove our pain, but most often this is not the case. He knows, as should we, that we gain more in our love relationship with Him when we apply faith to it.

Faith says to God, "I trust you. I accept this situation as a blessing in disguise."

We are then free to allow God to apply His solutions to our pain. Frustration comes under control, and worry fades away. Then there is room for peace.

Our focus is turned outward toward others. The world is literally dying for a "religion" that works in the reality of everyday life. As you display the power of true religion in your life, others will seek to know your secret. They will receive salvation and comfort themselves.

Our loving heavenly Father will not allow our relationship with Him to be a "fair-weather friendship." At stake are eternity and all its blessings. The standard is loving God with your entire being.

Praise, Worship, and Prayer

Father, I see real purpose in my life. I trust you with my pain.