

PROGRAM 37 PAGE 1

WHY MUST GOOD PEOPLE SUFFER?

Page 1 God Of The Four Seasons

"But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold." Job 23:10

"Why does the Bible speak so much about pain and suffering?" Only the very young ask that question. As we grow older, we learn the answer the hard way: pain, suffering, difficulties, heartbreak - they come our way just as surely as four seasons come to my favorite New England.

George Matheson was engaged to be married, when he was told he would soon be totally blind. His fiancée fell out of love in a hurry, leaving George so shattered that he tried to commit suicide. It was in that darkest of darkness when he cried out and God touched him with a light from heaven. Matheson experienced such overwhelming love from God, that he wrote the old hymn: "O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go."

Beyond his screams and broken dreams, Job knew deep down that God would not and could not abandon him. Such would be impossible to the loving heart of the Father who is preparing His children for eternity. But that's just it - to conform us to the image of His own precious Son, the Lord uses trials and suffering. Isn't that when we know we need Him the most? And while wood and hay are reduced by fire to worthless ashes, gold tried in a furnace only becomes purer and more valuable.

He knows the way you take, dear friend. Just trust Him even when you cannot trace Him. Though we cannot avoid the furnace of assorted afflictions, our Father controls the heat and will bring His children out as gold. He didn't fail Job - or George Matheson. He won't fail you!

My prayer: "I love You, my precious Lord. And I thank You that You know the way I take. Cause me to trust You in my trials with the confidence of one who desires to be purified as gold that I might be conformed to the image of Jesus."

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Page 2 When You Walk Through The Storm

"Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the Lord delivers him out of them all." Psalm 34:19

Two truths stand out in today's scripture that call for mature understanding: 1) righteous people suffer many afflictions and 2) God delivers him or her out of them all. We would like to see it teach the reverse: that evil persons suffer much and are not rescued by the Lord. While the latter is true in the long run, with those who reject the Savior lost forever, our loving Father uses all kinds of afflictions to test, teach and train His children to trust Him. These are no smooth paths devoid of pain for those who follow Jesus. He walked the way of the cross and so shall we if we are to be conformed to His likeness.

"But", you say, "at least I shall be delivered from them all." While that is true, the Lord does not have to tell us how He will deliver us or when. Perhaps deliverance will be immediate in a physical, mental or spiritual healing. Sometimes it will be nothing less than a miracle. Or the "deliverance" may be final - where no more afflictions can follow the death of His saint and his/her graduation to glory. Either way, whether in or out of the body, God always delivers the righteous.

You and I will suffer many afflictions, dear friend. Though the Lord may not send them, He will allow them, not to destroy our faith but to develop it. But the same Lord who allows temporary afflictions will also take delight in personally delivering us from every one of them.

My prayer: "I thank You for allowing afflictions to come to my life, Father, both to draw me back when I stray and to refine me when I walk in Your way. I trust You, Lord

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Page 3 He's God In The Bad Times

"And He said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will." Mark 14:36

"Make mine a cup of coffee, please," is heard often in America. Go to England and you'll hear, "I'll have a cup of tea." But nowhere that I've been in over one hundred countries have I ever heard or seen Christians welcome a cup of suffering. Yet that is one cup we cannot and will not avoid if we are to take on the likeness of our Savior.

Jesus knew the Father as no one else can. He was with Him from eternity and had left the penthouse of glory for the pigpen of a sin-cursed earth. Now, about to have the sin of all mankind laid on His pure and perfect being, He bares His soul to the Father using the endearing term "Daddy" (Abba) and knowing that nothing is too difficult for God. He sighs for relief from the coming cup of suffering, yet bows to the highest will of His Father in accepting the pain-filled way.

One of the most godly women Norma and I have ever known is enduring a broken heart over her teenage runaway daughter. A mighty man of God, known for his faith to pray for and receive miracles from God, endures the pain of cancer before going home to the Lord. Other Christians - all Christians, if we would be honest - endure great suffering whether in the physical, spiritual, emotional or material realm.

We ought to hear more teaching on this greatest of fires God allows to consume any confidence we have in self and to cause us to place our only hope in Him. Look up all the verses on "suffering" and see how God uses such to let us feel a touch of the broken heart of Jesus in order to appreciate the glory that is coming.

My prayer: "You suffered a broken heart in proving Your love for me. Now, my Lord Jesus, give me the grace to prove my love for You not merely when blessings come my way, but when sufferings fill my day."

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Page 4 When You Feel Like Screaming "Why?"

"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you." I Peter 4:12

Simon Peter and the first Christians were already being threatened, beaten and imprisoned for faith in Messiah Jesus. Stephen and James had been martyred, and many others would follow. They had learned that persecution is the companion of bold faith and godly living. Far greater suffering lay just ahead in the Roman Coliseum and other places of devilish entertainment when Christians - young and old - would become fools to be laughed at and food for lions.

If you had been an observer, you would probably have said, "How could a God of love let children who love Him die so cruelly and painfully?!" After all, we still say that today when the most godly among us sometimes must endure intense suffering and ways of dying that are beyond explanation. Others suffer such heartbreak over another - husband, wife, children, etc. that their hearts do just that - break! And for others - including you and me - suffering will come in a thousand different ways where we will either accuse God with "Why?!" or else trust Him with "Why not?" For did not the Father suffer in sending His Son? Did not the Savior suffer in shedding His blood? Does not the Spirit suffer in our shutting off His voice and grieving Him so often?

Don't be "bewildered at the fiery ordeal which is taking place to test your quality, as though something strange - unusual and alien to you and your position - were befalling you." (v 12 Amplified) Instead, we are to rejoice in God's allowing us to have a share of Christ's sufferings - a brief moment in comparison to His glory that is about to be revealed to you and me - and which will last forever!

My prayer: "My Father, I know that times of suffering are to cause me to first search my heart before You. But once I know that there is nothing between my soul and my Savior, grant me great grace to suffer whatever comes with a supernatural rejoicing that can only come from You."

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Page 5 Life's Greatest Privilege

"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." Philippians 1:29

While today's materialistic churches may avoid the subject of "suffering," the early church embraced it as a privilege if it was for the cause of Christ. The word in today's scripture, "For unto you it is given" simply means "For you have been granted the privilege" (Amplified) not only to believe in Jesus but also to suffer in His behalf. Christians in lands of persecution know what this means. When Richard Wurmbrand was tortured for Christ during fourteen years of imprisonment under the Communists, God flooded him with such love for His tormentors that his witness was like a song in the dark. Those who beat him were stunned. They had never encountered such power - the one being whipped had a greater effect on the torturers than they had on him. Wurmbrand saw his many scars as virtual beauty marks to be offered to His beloved Bridegroom, Jesus. Like Paul, he could say, "I bear on my body the brand marks of the Lord Jesus, the wounds, scars and other outward evidence of persecutions - these testify of His ownership of me!" (Galatians 6:17 Amplified)

Christians in America and the democratic West seldom suffer persecution. But it's coming - when you and I may one day be hated for insisting that Jesus is the only way in a "new-age" world that embraces Satan's one-world religion where anything goes. We can prepare for suffering tomorrow by being faithful to carry our crosses today. Be faithful in your witness for Christ - never frightened or intimidated. Live a pure and holy life crediting it all to Jesus - though peers may try to make fun of you. Discipline your life by daily study of God's Word and prayer - learning to deny self when it whines, "Please don't make me suffer!" By not being afraid of a little suffering today, you will be better prepared to accept a lot of suffering tomorrow when it may cost much more to remain faithful to the Lord.

My prayer: "I gladly take up my cross to follow You, Lord Jesus. Help me to pay the price daily to deny myself and be faithful to You.

