

SUFFERING AND BREAKTHROUGH

**Job 1-2; Luke 22:32; Romans 5:1-5; 1
Corinthians 13:13; 1 Peter 4:12-13;
5:9-10**

The Divine Purpose to Pain

By

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Intro— A Hard Look at a Hard Life.

There are a multitude of themes in Scripture: some major, some minor. It's one of the sad realities of modern theology {some of which is dissolving, thankfully, in our post-modern era}, that so many of the 'professionals' choose to major in the minors. There are two themes which if we're honest we can recognize as constants in the course of our lives— those of *loss* and *Life*, the place of suffering and of breakthrough. On one side of this fence are the concepts of crucifixion, suffering, darkness and loss. These have become for many the 'in' themes in Christianity today. On the other side of the fence is Life, Love, Liberty and Triumph. In a word, Resurrection ...and the profound power which flows from it. These, for the most part, have been relegated to an other-worldly status, it's a 'we'll have to wait til we get there to experience it' mindset. But is that honestly what Christ intended when He bought us with His blood? For His ransomed and redeemed, for the offspring of the Almighty, to flounder in failure... forever? I don't believe for a moment that's what God intended. Just as sin fulfills the purpose of pointing us to the Savior, the purpose of suffering is not the suffering itself, but what comes out of it. It's what we find on the other side by way of Freedom and Life, the *wholeness* and *healing* that is our birthright in Jesus. As our Father reaches down to restore one more broken part of the heart, one more shattered piece of the soul. This is the Journey we were made for; this is the Life we were meant to live.

We have two basic paradigms which we have operated out of when it comes to suffering in doctrinal circles. This is either divine discipline, cause I've screwed up royally, cause I've blown it big time. Or God is testing me. And He's going to keep on testing me, He's going to hammer the living *Hades* out of me until I pass this test. Discipline or testing, one or the other. The truth is, if we're willing to be brutally honest about it, the testing might as well as be discipline, because it all feels about the same as far as the receiving end is concerned. It feels about as caring and kind as a two-by-four to the back of the head. In a way, our response to suffering and heartache reveals a deep and fundamental distrust toward the heart of God. At the deepest level of our beliefs, at the deepest core of our convictions, we don't *really* trust that the Father's heart toward us is one of infinite goodness and unbearable grace. In our minds, a God who could allow this, or for Heaven's sakes *cause* it {and happily}, simply could not be as good and perfect and righteous as He say's He is in the Scriptures.

I would submit to you, and humbly I hope, that many of us have been misdiagnosing the hand of God in our lives and thus misinterpreting the work of God in our hearts for far too long. There is so much more to be revealed in suffering than the surface symptoms we have diagnosed as discipline or testing. Those are *two* valid options, but two out of a multitude. What God is primarily up to in the lives of His children, especially the masses of *uninitiated* men and women who live and breathe the 'spirit of this age,' is *initiation*. A Calling up and in to a much higher plane than the one we presently inhabit with its small stories and daily dramas. The Spirit is calling us up constantly into the pages of a much Larger Story, into the heat of a glorious Battle, into the path of an Epic Adventure. And for that He must have fellow-travelers who can walk with Him, who can fight beside Him, who can love as He loves and forgive as He forgives.

In other words, intimate allies of the Almighty. He wants men who are Warrior-Kings, valiant and courageous, and women who are Queens of Light, ladies of love and mercy. Thus, the Path He sets us on often looks like this: **instruction, initiation, and intimacy**. The instruction is easy; the initiation is hard; and the goal of both is always intimacy with Him. The intimacy, once established however, is beautiful beyond belief. It is here we find, ultimately, the purpose behind the pain we so frequently run from.

Essay— The Rest of the Story.

When we consider the primary place of suffering and breakthrough in the Christian Life there are some critical things we need to know, angles of understanding that need to be stored away within our hearts.

Breakdowns and Breakthroughs.

It often takes a *breakdown* in our souls to lead to a *breakthrough* in our lives. The deepest issues of our lives seem to surface more readily in our suffering than anywhere else. We find genuine clarity in our convictions, discover the courage that is ours in Christ, and come to realize— as our unbelief and idolatry is exposed— just how unimportant the things we have worshipped really are.

And if you have yet to come to that place, might I suggest that with boldness and trust in the passionate heart of God you approach the Throne of Grace and seek the unmitigated mercy God extends to us in suffering to strip away the veneer of invulnerability and knock you forever from the pedestal of perfection. That you ask Him to expose and to excise, by whatever means necessary, your arrogance, unbelief, and idolatry, so that you can live the Life for which you were intended.

Singled Out for Suffering?

You haven't been singled out for suffering. It's simply a fact of life in a fallen world. The Father knows that without suffering we would never search for solutions. He also knows that our hope is shored up by another fact: **One day all our suffering will cease— Revelation 7:16-17 and 21:4**. When you compare Revelation 7:16-17 with Revelation 21:4, you see a magnificent picture of Eternity, one where we as the children of the King **“will hunger no longer nor thirst anymore; nor will the Sun beat down on”** the Redeemed, **“nor any heat; for the Lamb ...will be their Shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the Water of Life. And God will wipe every tear from their eyes. ...And there will no longer be {any} death; there will no longer be {any} mourning or crying or pain.”** All those **“things have passed away.”**

The Enemy's Shock and Awe.

Suffering is a shock tactic used by Satan, a bit of warfare intended to shatter our souls. See Job 1-2 for the handbook on it, on this type of overwhelming attack from a cruel and cunning enemy. One of Satan's foremost tactics is the shock that comes from the intensity of an attack, the overwhelming awe of being blindsided when you least expect it, or unprepared because of spiritual neglect, or just weary from the wear of a far too busy life. The enemy loves to sit back and observe the aftermath of his tactics, his strategies and schemes for shocking the soul; he loves to watch the confusion, disenchantment, and disgust of reactionary believers to pain and adversity.

A Universal Reality.

Sometimes suffering is the end result of our own bad decisions. Notice I said sometimes, not *all* times. It's how we learn incredible lessons from the Universal Law—Hosea 8:7a. Galatians 6:7: **“Do not be deceived, God cannot be mocked. For whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.”**

Character, Courage, and Conviction.

Character and courage can only be purified on the anvil of adversity. In 1 Peter 4:12-13 Peter said, **“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you** [*Ksenizo* means- ‘be surprised and astonished at the novelty of something.’ Peter’s saying, ‘If you’re going to walk in the Way of the Master, you better set aside your surprise and get over your astonishment *fast!*’ *Purosis* was a word used for the fire over which metals were refined. Two things: {1} *Heroes of faith are forged in the fires of adversity*; and {2} *Character is concluded only in the crucible*. It is the ‘fiery ordeal’], **which comes upon you for your testing** [‘testing’ is where we find *proof*— proof that our faith in the Father’s heart toward us is more real than the testing trials around us. The reason we don’t ‘exult in our tribulations,’ as Paul exhorted us in Rom. 5:3, is that we don’t see them from an eternal perspective, we don’t see them through the eyes of our *Abba*. We can’t see the pure product that results from the *end* of the refining process because the *beginning* has so skewed and distorted our spiritual vision.], **as though some strange thing were happening to you** [if you pursue Christ with passion, as He has pursued you, I guarantee you it won’t be something ‘strange’]; **but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ** [as Paul said in Col. 1:24, ‘I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His Body, which is the Church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions’], **keep on rejoicing** [To ‘rejoice’ in the flames of suffering, apart from Christ and the strength His Spirit offers us, is utterly *impossible*. Just imagine suffering with celebration as an unbeliever or as one of God’s own wandering around in constant carnality. Do you ‘rejoice’ in anything when your soul is weighed down by the shame of your own sin? Do you find it easy to be grateful or loving when sin is having its way with you?], **so that** [this tells us why] **at the revelation of His glory** [Christ’s appearance and Return]

you may rejoice with exultation.” The last phrase Peter uses here speaks of a joy that is intensified beyond our wildest imagination. This is the joy of salvation David so often speaks of in the Psalms {5:11; 16:11; 20:5-6; 51:12-14}. There’s only one way to truly experience an everlasting celebration, and that’s with a ransomed soul and a resurrection body. One is ours already; the other will be at the Return of the King.

Shattering Our Security in the World.

Suffering shatters our sense of familiarity with the world around us. And that’s a *good* thing, by the way. It makes us long for our true Home while at the same time realizing ...this ain’t it!

Exposing the Lies We Live By.

Suffering exposes the lies we choose to live by. Like those deep-seated messages that came with the arrows aimed at your heart: “Nobody will ever love you, so you might as well forget that dream. Nobody will ever accept you just as you are. No one can handle the full weight of your life. You are a bad man. You are an evil woman, a lying, lustful, depraved and despicable sinner. Even when God looks down at you, He turns away in disgust. Your life is worthless to Him or anybody else, and if you fell off the face of the Earth, no one would even notice.” The air around these accusations is so thick you could almost choke on it. And so, when suffering exposes the insidious influence of the **“father of lies”** {Jn. 8:44}, we have a golden opportunity to redirect our lives back into the Light.

What you have to realize is that you’re on a New Road now. And so we must take our eyes off those old signs on the edge of the Way. What our Lord is telling us is that those old signs we grew up following— like the idea that God can be controlled by human behavior, or that He is power unrestrained by compassion or concern, and that everything He asks me to do or believe must make perfect sense or else I have no sacred honor or obligation to do it or believe it— are nothing but *lies* the enemy uses to prop up a dying system of falsehood and fabrication, the distorted images of the Father that Satan loves to paint. The reality behind this idea that God and His glorious Adventure must make perfect sense is that *every* aspect of Life in the Spirit of Christ is a profound paradox: you must give graciously to be filled with joy {Phi. 4:10-19}, you must lose your life for Christ’s sake in order to find it {Mk. 8:35}, the first must become a servant and make himself the last {Mk. 9:33-37; 10:42-45}, you love those who hate you and pray for those who persecute you {Lk. 6:27-28}. To any clear thinking, wide-eyed, rational human being, *none* of those things makes sense. Not one. Because they don’t line up with the Way of the World, with what is most familiar to us.

Unearthing the Wounds.

Our Savior often uses our suffering to unearth our wounds. Or reveal agreements we've made with the past because of the sentences that were spoken into our unguarded souls. What was administered in pain, those wounds to the soul and hurts to the heart, can often only be accessed *in pain*. The pain of the present puts us in touch with the pain of the past.

Is There Really an Enemy... and Do We Have to Do Anything About It?

If there is only you and God in this life, most suffering will never make sense. When we fail to acknowledge the existence of the evil one and his sinister schemes against us, that leaves only ourselves or the Almighty to blame. And blaming God is a course I would not advise for anyone. There are two lessons to take from this point: [a] **self-hatred** {the constant finger-pointing in our own direction; I'm not talking about a healthy analysis in light of the Word, I'm talking about self-hatred and an eager shouldering of the weight of shame, and they are two completely and totally different things} **corrodes our willingness to live and love in Christ**; and [b] **blaming God, while He can certainly handle the full force of your anger, is a recipe for disaster.**

There is a villain in this Story, and we have to learn to live like it— Revelation 12:9. Read this passage and you will see what his name is: **“the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world....”** Satan is the seducer of souls, the deceiver of men, and the enemy of God. What he hates more than anything else is you in communion with your Creator. He will stop at nothing to deceive you, destroy you, or disrupt your conversation with Christ. Remember it well.

What Abba Wills and What He Allows.

What *Abba* wills in our lives and allows in our lives are completely different concepts. E.g., we've seen the existence of evil, and now we know in this fallen world God has allowed a viciously brutal enemy to assault us in order to unveil for the entire Universe the glory of His Love, and the beauty of that Love's power to redeem and restore the most broken heart imaginable, a life shattered by suffering and sin. My point is: **The Conflict must be given a chance to run its course.**

War has been declared. The great, governing cherub had become the malignant enemy. Our God was neither surprised nor astonished, for, of course, He knew before it happened that it would happen, and He had His perfect plan ready to be put into effect. Although the Lord had the power to destroy Satan with a breath, He did not do so. It was as though an edict had been proclaimed in Heaven— ‘We shall give this rebellion a thorough trial. We shall permit it to run its *full course*. The universe shall see what a creature, though he be the highest creature ever to spring from God's Word, can do *apart* from Him. We shall watch this experiment, and permit the universe of creatures to watch it, during this brief interlude between eternity past and eternity future called Time. In it the spirit of independence shall be allowed to expand to the utmost.

And the wreck and ruin which shall result will demonstrate to the Universe, and *forever*, that there is no life, no joy, no peace apart from a complete dependence upon the Most High God, Possessor of Heaven and Earth.¹ {Italics Mine}

Somewhere in the Journey we've got to rid ourselves of the notion that suffering is automatically the sign of God's displeasure. "Man, I'm not sure what I did, but it must be divine discipline for something. I'll just start confessing everything I can think of, and maybe that'll cover all my bases." When the Battle heats up and is raging around you, when the night has closed in and surrounded you in darkness, the easiest thing in the world is to look inward through the eyes of self-contempt and say, "This is all my fault. It *has* to be. It's not God's, so it must be mine. I must have blown it big time." When the Battle rages around you, and one hammer stroke after another is falling on your heart, it doesn't necessarily mean you're blowing it or that God is holding out on you. It means, quite possibly and quite probably {though most of us live from such a shame-based center we would never consider it}, that you are *dangerous* to the enemy's designs. It means the demonic realm has turned up the heat because you are, as the CIA would say, a very 'real and present danger,' a threat to their initiatives of distraction, deception, and destruction.

Didn't Job and all his friends make this same mental mistake? His life was on trial before a watching, waiting Universe, not because he was a fool and blowing the blessings of God all for the sake of self, but because his heart and life were in love with His Lord, because he was a man who lived with honor and loved with conviction. As it says in the very first v., he was a "**man... who held God in reverence and turned far away from evil;**" or as one translation has, he "**was totally devoted to God and hated evil with a passion,**" 1:1 {*The Message*}. His life was put under the cosmic microscope because "**the Satan**" {found with the definite article in the Hebrew of Job chs. 1-2}, the Adversary and Opponent of God, the slanderer and accuser of His Children, longed to see another creature curse the face of his loving Creator.

In 1:11 and 2:5 the evil one overplays his hand and we get a glimpse at the hatred and malice that motivates his actions. He says to God, "**stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has,**" and when that didn't work, "**stretch out Your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse You to Your face!**" There it is, in all its God-forsaken glory. That same phrase is used in both sections of Scripture. "What do you think would happen if You just reached down and took away everything he has? Well, no, he didn't curse you *this time*! But he will. A man will give up every thing he has, including his commitment to You, to save his own skin. In the end, all Your creatures are as selfish as I. Just reach down now and strip the health from his flesh and the strength from his bones, and he'll curse you like a dog right to Your face." I want you to notice something that's vital to this passage: **Satan wanted God to do it.** He didn't ask permission for himself or his servants, he tried to coerce God into crushing His child, as our Lord Himself said, "**to ruin him without reason, to destroy him without cause,**" 2:3b. Thus, winning a major argument in his case that God really is unjust and unfair. What's the lesson for our lives?

It's that suffering often indicates God is setting us free from bondage so we can follow Him more fully and desire Him more deeply. His desire is that we follow Him from hearts that are free, unleashed and unbound. To reach that place of peace and perspective, He has to tear down the idols we've erected and the arrangements we've concocted. I think it's an important question to ask— in light of our tendency within Christianity to deify things like tradition, ritual, pomp and circumstance— whether we as believers in a Bible-teaching church have worshipped the teaching of the Word, or the Living Word Himself? Have we loved the insight and instruction for mere instruction's sake, while at the same time running from the intimacy and honesty {the stark, raving, ruthless honesty} of relationship with the Lord of Glory, Jesus Christ? If you consider yourself a man or woman of integrity, someone who strives for brutal honesty with themselves and with God, then I think you owe it to yourself to answer that question.

Most people spend enormous amounts of spiritual energy just trying to get God to make their lives work easier, just to rid them of some of their suffering and pain. And it's through these very things that He awakens us from our loathing of Life and loving of death. Walking with God in the Light of His love means that you *will* be going against the enemy's grain. And the world will resist you at every turn. So don't expect your circumstances to conform easily to this Journey. Our King wants to teach us how to walk with Him through these things so that you can know in the deep places of your heart a joy that transcends circumstance and a peace that transcends suffering.

A Fallen World of Fallen Wills.

Much suffering exists {very much, in fact} because we live out our lives in a fallen world, a world in the midst of a terrible struggle between God and Satan. It is a world that has been ravaged by sin and death— Romans 8:19-22. And it is a world at War with God. This is reality; and we must orient to it daily for survival. The only way to adjust to life on a Field of Battle is to learn how to fight and fight well, meaning faithfully and fiercely. This is our role in the Story, our part to play. **“The Battle is the Lord's”** {1 Sam. 17:47b}; but the fight is *ours*.

If you won't step in to the fray, if you won't step up to your place in the line, if you refuse to engage the hearts of those you love for the side of goodness and grace, who will? There is no other man or woman who can replace you in your life, in that arena to which you've been called. And if you leave your place in the Line of Battle, it will remain empty. Why? Because in order for someone else to fill it, they would have to leave their place in the Line. And on and on it goes. You can divide the human race up— and since we're talking about the warfare that rages around us, men and women alike— into three categories:

One, those who have no battle to fight, no mission to maintain. They're just here... killing time and soaking up space.

Two, those who are fighting the wrong battle.

I'll give you some examples from Scripture: Saul I, who made it his mission to kill off David, his successor; and Saul II, who made it his mission to kill off everybody who worshipped the Son of David, Jesus Christ. You want a modern example? How 'bout the woman who spends her time trying to 'straighten out' everyone around her? "Everyone I know is wrong. Everybody I know has a problem, but me." What are the chances of that being true? It's the **wrong** battle in the wrong place at the wrong time.

And three, those who know their place in the Battle. They understand the Mission for which they were made. Husbands and wives, do you have a mission for your marriage? If not, where is your marriage going, what are you doing, what are you about? Just here to take up each other's time? If you don't have it yet, find it!

The End Result.

Suffering has an end result, an eternal achievement in the Story God is telling. We know all about 1 Peter 5:8, about Satan on the prowl "**like a roaring lion.**" What we don't know nearly as well— cause we don't hear it taught nearly as often— is how we're told to stand and fight, to not just lay down our arms and wait to die. What enemy in the world wouldn't love an opponent like that? And yet, defense has become the position in which much of modern Christendom finds itself today. The time is now to take a stand against the Enemy, and not only hold this ground but take back what's been stolen by the "**father**" of liars and thieves! To give you an illustration from WWII, Gen. Patton's main principle of warfare was simple. He said, "I never pay for the same piece of real estate twice." His objective was to move forward at all times, to gain ground against the enemy, to stay on the offensive. Because he understood, better than any other commander in the Great War II besides MacArthur, that the offensive is what wins tactical battles. An army on the move {especially one seeing the results of their combat} is motivated and focused; a soldier on the defensive may delay defeat, but rarely will he win the day. **Bold offensive action is the key to waging effective warfare.**

So, what exactly is the 'spiritual offensive'? It may be the Gospel of Grace offered to the lost and alone, or the willingness to speak the healing words another needs to hear; it may be the Truth that speaks clarity into the midst of confusion, or the grace that binds up the wounds of the heart. But whatever, whenever, and however it comes, it is {above all else} the will to *act* and to act decisively. This is the thing which characterizes believers on the Offensive. It is not enough to know the Word in theory, to know what needs to be done and be unwilling to do it. As James says in 1:25 of his Epistle, "**the one who looks at the perfect law of freedom and remains committed to it— thus proving that he is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of what it requires— will be blessed in what he does**" {ISV}. This is a reflection on the Word in our souls and a focus on love in our lives. The Romans used to say, *Vincit Omnia Veritas*: Truth Conquers All!, and as bold a fact as that is they had another saying even more revealing, *Amor Est Vitae Essentia*: Love is the Essence of Life— John 13:34-35. The power of love protected by Truth is redemptive; the power of Truth surrounded by love is eternal. Love protected by Truth and Truth surrounded by Love. This is what it means to take

offensive action against the evil of the enemy, to defeat his lies and destroy his designs. As the apostle John wrote in 1 John 3:8, **“The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil”** {NAS}; He was **“seen”** and believed in on this **“Earth that He might put an end to the works of the evil one.”**

There are three things that will *never* fail to defeat the enemy: the heart of the Father, the love of the Son, and the **“sword of the Spirit,”** Ephesians 6:17. The heart of the Father is grace, grace now and grace forever. And G.R.A.C.E. is God’s Resources, God’s Riches, God’s Righteousness At Christ’s Expense. The heart of our *Abba* is grace; the love of His Son is everything, an all consuming compassion; and the sword of His Spirit is Truth. The apostle Peter in 1 Peter 5:9 says, to **“resist him** [which is battlefield terminology, a warfare word: ‘hold your ground, take your stand on the field of Battle and *fight!*’], **firm in the Faith** [the word for ‘firm,’ *stereos*, is used for a solid foundation, steadfast and strong], **knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your Brotherhood in the world,** these **“same experiences of suffering are being executed, accomplished, undergone by”** the Brotherhood, that Band of Brothers in love with the Lord Jesus. **“After you have suffered for a little while** [that’s all it is, just a ‘little while’] **the ‘God of all grace’** [what a magnificent name], **who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself** [1] **perfect,** [2] **confirm,** [3] **strengthen {and}** [4] **establish you.”** This is what suffering is designed to do: to perfect, to confirm, to strengthen and establish— to perfect our faith, to confirm our convictions, to strengthen our souls and establish our lives. The enemy has one aim and God has another.

There are four verbs here, each one of them a vibrant word-picture in and of itself. All four are future active indicatives: the future tense and indicative mood combine to form a ‘statement of reality.’ The best way I can explain this is to say: **this will come to pass.** The active voice tells us that the subject, the **“God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself... perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish.”**

Katartizo is used for ‘setting a broken bone;’ and in Mark 1:19 as a fisherman’s term for **“mending the nets.”** It means- *supply what is missing, to mend what is broken— and restore or repair, to put something in its proper condition.* It is a mighty work of restoring the soul and healing the heart, a mighty work only God can accomplish. And it is a mighty work which He *wants* to accomplish for all of His children. Scottish NT interpreter William Barclay once said, “Through suffering God will *restore* a man.” He will use it to “add the grace to life.”²

Sterizo means- *set fast* and to *fix firmly*, like Christ on His way to Jerusalem {Lk. 9:51}; it means- *make rock solid.* This should be the word translated **“establish.”** To *sterizo* is to ‘strengthen’ your soul with a firmness of faith and purpose, a relentless allegiance to your king. After informing Peter of Satan’s demand to **“sift him like wheat”** Jesus say’s to him in Luke 22:32, **“but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers [sterizo].”** I love how Weymouth translates the last half of this v.;

he says, “**and you, when at last you have come back to your true self, must strengthen your brethren** [*sterizo*: ‘set them fast and fix them firmly, make them as solid as granite in their faith’].”

There’s something I want you to see here; I think this is absolutely phenomenal. When Jesus say’s, “**I’ve prayed that your faith may not fail you,**” he’s not talking about Peter’s betrayal. He knew the betrayal was coming, and He knew it without a doubt. He goes on to tell him so two vv. later {v. 34}. The failure of Peter’s faith which Jesus speaks of is not his betrayal, it would’ve been his refusal to “**strengthen**” his “**brothers,**” his inability or unwillingness to trust God enough to get to his feet and get back in the Battle. “**When at last you have come back to your true self,**” get up on your feet once again, stand and deliver! If you know the story of Acts 2, that’s exactly what he did. He stood with boldness and audacity, with courage and clarity, and delivered a glorious Message of Grace to the salvation of three thousand souls. Can you imagine what the other 119 must have been thinking: “Where did this guy come from? Whoaahhh! Where was this Peter when the Sanhedrin railroaded our Savior?” His “**true self**” had now arrived, in living color!

Sthenoo means- *make strong, to fill with strength.* Get this down: A life without pain, sorrow, or suffering is a life with no capacity for grace. If you could find that life in this world {that’s ‘if, and you cannot’}, it would lack all color, glory, and grandeur. Never forget what Barclay said, that God uses suffering to add His grace to our lives.

Somewhere along the Way, you and I must get a sense of the strength Jesus supplies His Apprentices. The testimony of Philippians 4:13 and 19 is that “**I can do all things through the One who pours His power into me, who keeps on infusing His strength into me**” {RR Exp}, and “**my God will fully supply your every need according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus**” {ISV}. Weymouth translates v. 19 in his NT, “**But my God— so great is His wealth of glory in Christ Jesus— will fully supply every need of yours.**” You need a taste of the might and mercy He’ll release through your life, if you will let Him fill it. An ancient Christian mystic named Bernard of Clairveaux gave an analogy of Christians as either a canal or a reservoir. A *canal* gives out water in every direction: the water comes rushing in and as soon as it does it dissipates, it spreads itself out in every direction. But a *reservoir* is a different story. A reservoir gives forth water out of its overflow, out of its abundance, with no diminishment of quantity or quality. It fills and fills and fills and then spills over to the lives all around it. We are called to be reservoirs and not mere canals, to live in abundance and to give from the overflow. To do that we must first learn how to *receive* in faith from the Father’s heart all the compassion and concern which He has stored away just for us, all the courage and inner conviction which belongs to us as His sons— Galatians 3:26! It takes the humility to first admit that I am utterly empty and in absolute need. That’s the perfect perspective for grace to honor. God will go to work on a woman like that; God will meet that man where he is and take Him to where He wants him to be.

No one really knows the strength of their faith {or the depth of God’s grace}

until it's been tried in the furnace of affliction— Romans 5:1-5. Romans 5 begins with one word, “**Therefore** [which is always there for a reason: drawing on Paul’s dissertation in ch. 4 concerning Abraham as the ‘father of the faithful,’ he say’s], **having been justified by faith** [*dikaïos* was a legal term in ancient Greece, it means to ‘be vindicated, acquitted, declared righteous’ in the Father’s eyes], **we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ** [which is what Scripture calls ‘reconciliation’ {v. 11}, the offering of peace from holy God to fallen man, and fallen man’s acceptance of it], **through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith** [there’s that phrase for the second time in as many vv.: ‘by faith,’ and it opens the door to every single aspect of relationship with God] **into this grace in which we stand** [perfect tense— Paul settles the issue unequivocally: the glorious grace of our glorious God is the realm of freedom in which we stand forevermore. There’s a fantastic term he uses for our ‘introduction into grace:’ *prosagoge*. It’s used only 3 times in all of Scripture— here, in Ephesians 2:18 and 3:12— and it carries within it these two magnificent images: {a} in Classical Greek it was the customary word for ushering someone into the presence of royalty, and it was the customary word for a worshipper of God approaching the Almighty. What Paul’s saying is, ‘Jesus Christ the Son ushers us into the presence of the Father. He opens the door to the King of all Creation. And on the other side of that door is *grace*, not cold condemnation, not fiery vengeance, but the sheer undeserved, undiluted, unimaginable grace of God, the loving-kindness we can never lose.’ And {b} in later Greek *prosagoge* was used for the place where ships come in to dock, a ‘harbor and haven.’ Because of Jesus we have entry to the presence of Sovereignty, a Deity we need never fear, and entry to the haven of His glorious grace. It is Jesus, and no other, who ushers us into the presence of the Father, who sets us down in the Land of Undying Love, in Fields of Freedom shimmering with the golden hues of grace.]; **and we exult in hope of the glory of God** [Our ‘hope,’ unlike the uncertainty of the unbelieving world, is the confident expectation, the absolute assurance, of one ‘day sharing in God’s glory’ {Weymouth}. How do we acquire this hope? How else? By a faith active and alive! *Elpis* is the confidence which comes through our moment by moment trust in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You see, One is the Author of Truth, One is the Giver of Life, and One is the Bringer of Light, and we need all three of these *desperately*.] **And not only this,**” say’s the Apostle— remembering once again that our backs are against the walls of the world— **“but we also exult** [‘we glory’] **in our tribulations** [‘in our troubles, sufferings, and afflictions’], **knowing that tribulation** [which comes from a word used as a metaphor for ‘*pressure* and *oppression*,’ the completely natural outcome of living as a child of God in the Devil’s world] **brings about perseverance** [I like the term ‘endurance,’ *divine* endurance. The word is *hupomone* {a compound from *hupo* meaning- ‘under, beneath’ and *meno*- ‘abide, dwell’} literally- ‘an abiding under, a patient enduring.’ The root verb *hupomeno* means- ‘stand one’s ground, hold out and endure in the midst of trouble,’ and that’s what it takes to survive the Conflict of Christ with all manner of warfare being waged against your life. Here’s the point: ‘endurance’ is the characteristic of a man {or a woman, for that matter} who cannot be diverted from his relentless allegiance to Grace and his unconquerable love for his Lord by trials, sufferings, and sorrows unimaginable to those around him. Someone once said to a courageous Follower of Christ, ‘Boy, suffering sure colours life, doesn’t it? To which came the reply, ‘Yeah, it does.

And I intend to choose the colour!']; **and perseverance, proven character** [is 'character' that's been forged in the fire of tribulation and tempered on the anvil of adversity. *Dokime* is used of metal which has passed through the flame so that everything impure has been burned out of it... what the British would call *sterling*. When affliction is met with fortitude, pain with perseverance, suffering with the desire to endure and to find what God has waiting for us, out of the Battle a man or woman emerges stronger and purer and better, as opposed to bitter, nearer to the heart of her Father.]; **and proven character, hope** [There it is once again. 'Hope' is so crucial to our walk with Christ, because to lose hope is to lose heart, and vice versa. *The Journey cannot be made, the Battle cannot be fought, the Life cannot be lived, without the human heart!* Two Christians can meet the same situation {pain, sorrow, rejection, loss, abandonment or betrayal}: it can drive one of them to despair and spur the other to triumph; it all depends on *where* you go with it, that is, into whose hands you entrust your heart in it. Second thing: *Character which has endured the trial always emerges in hope.*]; **and hope does not disappoint** ['hope' is a source of strength, a place of power based on perspective, a rock-solid assurance in the heart of God because of our absolute faith in the wisdom of God; why does 'hope' never leave us empty and alone?:], **because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."**

Until it's been purified by the flames of sorrow and disappointment, of pain and disillusionment, you have no idea how precious it is... this place of intimacy you inhabit with Jesus, that Home where your heart resides. The progression of vv. 1-5 looks like this: [1] We have righteousness and peace with God through one thing— our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; [2] This single *act* of faith ushers us into the freedom of grace, our realm for all Eternity; [3] We rejoice over an inheritance of glory in Eternity, and the experience of it in Time {you were made to reveal the glory of the Living God to a world weighed down by the shadow of sin and death, a world wrapped in the darkness of the devil's system}; [4] The more we trust the Father's heart in every circumstance, the greater our endurance becomes; [5] The enduring of all that assails us in the Conflict brings about character which is *true* because it's been tried in the fires of affliction; [6] Character which is proven and real results in a deeper confidence in God and His grace, in turn leading to security of soul and stability of spirit; [7] This sense of inner strength enables us to love fully and freely, because our hearts are no longer entangled in the web of the world or the lies of its leader.

What did Paul tell the Corinthians at the close of his discourse on the redeeming power of Love? **"And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love,"** 1 Corinthians 13:13 {EMTV}. *Faith leads us to hope, and hope leads us to love.* Faith brings about an absolute assurance in our relationship with Jesus Christ, and from that assurance we learn how to love others without expectations. To love them without imposing upon them our desperate need for validation and all the unrealistic expectations that come with it. Here's how this sounds in Peterson's modern paraphrase *The Message*: **"for right now, until that completeness** [of Eternity comes], **we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation:**

trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.”

OK, hunters, campers, smokers, pyromaniacs, have you ever tried to light a match in the wind, even just a slight breeze? What happens? Keeps going out, again and again. Now, have you ever seen what happens when the wind hits a dying campfire? All of the sudden it's ablaze with intensity. So it is with the faith that resides within your soul. Suffering is the wind that brings it back to life, restores it to its full glory.

The last of the four verbs in 1 Peter 5:10 is *themelioo*, and it means literally- *lay the foundation, render firm and unwavering*. I.e., to stabilize the life, the life which has been adrift on a sea of deception, carried away by winds of distraction. Suffering can do that, in case you didn't know: it can make you secure in Christ! When the wind is whipping and the waves are rolling in, when darkness comes down like a landslide on our lives and suddenly we're standing face to face with unimaginable suffering, it's that place which drives us to the foundations of faith. It's there that we find out if we're running on empty. Then and only then do we discover the things which cannot be shaken: the very core of our convictions. And the way those convictions revolve around a relationship of deep communion and of open-hearted honesty with the Father of Jesus Christ.

If suffering is accepted, if it is ultimately embraced, in the heartfelt trust that the Father's hand will never *cause* His child a needless tear, never *allow* pointless pain in the lives of His children, then out of suffering comes a glorious breakthrough that an easy life and a lazy faith could never bring. Do you see the point there? Even when suffering is intended for our good, as in suffering for blessing' sake {1 Pet. 2:19-20}, we are to let it shape us, let it do the work that God intended— *then move on beyond it*, break on through to the healing and wholeness on the other side. The suffering itself is never the point.

Finale— Needing Someone to Blame.

When it comes to moments of pain and suffering— especially when those moments are extended over time— everybody wants a culprit for the crisis, everybody wants to know, “*Whose fault is this?*” Well, it might be an attack of the enemy or an event orchestrated by the Almighty. The truth is that doesn't really matter. That's the least important question to ask. What does matter in sorrow and suffering is my willingness to trust God with my heart throughout it, to know He can use even the worst situations of warfare or our own wrongdoing to expose the idolatries of our lives and to heal the brokenness of our hearts in ever deepening ways. Then to find out what He has for me in the midst of it, that's the second thing. **To walk with God through it, and to find out what He has for me in it.** If there is a divine purpose to pain, that's it: to draw ever-closer to the heart of our Father. ...Instruction, initiation, intimacy.

You need to know that God may move in ways which will never make sense to us in

Time. Why? To bring about an honesty and openness with Himself and with others that we would've thought impossible in the past, to bring us to the place where we're vulnerable to His everlasting love. To pray along these two lines, with our hearts wide open before Him, is how we discover the depths of the riches of His glorious grace. In the arms of Jesus Christ there is grace unbounded, mercy unmatched, compassion uncontainable, and love beyond belief. But apart from the capacity suffering brings to the soul and the passion that it stirs within, we would never know these things as eternal realities.

As we close this down, let me pose a question; I think it's vital to our Life in the Spirit of Grace. What if you knew that *Abba* was in this {whatever 'this' is, whatever you're facing in this present moment of pain}, *with* you and not *against* you? That He was leading you to the Life you've longed for from before you even knew what to call it. Wouldn't it keep you from feeling so overwhelmed, and so angry that life hasn't turned out the way you wanted? Wouldn't it make it so much easier to bear and to trust His heart toward you as His child? Absolutely. You know it would. So, let me say it. **He is here.** Right here in the midst of your pain, your sorrow, and your suffering, right here with you— now and forevermore.

¹ : Donald Grey Barnhouse, *The Invisible War*, p. 51

² : William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, p. 173 {Italics mine}