

DEALING WITH PAIN AND HARDSHIP

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**Scriptural Ways to
Find God's Strength
in Challenging Times**

James L. Morrisson

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NOTE: Sometimes the author has added boldface type
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To Frances, my beautiful bride of 63 years.
And to our children, whose prayers
helped bring us into the Kingdom of God.

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Author's Preface

The purpose of *Dealing with Pain and Hardship* is very practical—to let Scripture stir people into action. The Bible says that Scripture is living and active. It can profoundly impact our lives if we allow it to. It has impacted my life greatly. I hope that *Dealing with Pain and Hardship* will encourage all of us to allow Scripture to affect the way we live our lives.

I have sought to keep my presentation simple and non-technical. My brother (an engineer) used to say that if he could not express his ideas in ordinary lay language, then he probably didn't understand them himself. I have tried to follow that example.

I have quoted and referred to a considerable amount of Scripture. I have several purposes in doing so.

- As a lawyer, I like to document what I say.
- I want to encourage my readers to read Scripture, and to read it in context.
- I want to encourage my readers to check Scripture for themselves to see whether these things are so. (See Acts 17:11.)

- I like to let Scripture speak for itself. The language of Scripture is far more powerful, and more capable of reaching people's hearts, than any words I could write.
- One of the things I enjoy about Scripture is the repeated discovery that different human authors, writing at very different times, have said essentially the same thing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. I delight in the way different parts of Scripture fit together.

I sometimes refer to personal events in my life. I do this, not out of any desire to call attention to myself, but in the hope that this may help bring Scriptural principles to life, and may demonstrate that God's principles work. Our God is a very practical God.

As a federal attorney, I attained some skill in interpreting a written text. Our understanding of Scripture must always be based on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Someone who does not have the Holy Spirit cannot understand spiritual things (1 Corinthians 2:14). But I believe my legal training can help me organize and present what the Holy Spirit has shown me is in the Scriptures. As a student and performer of classical music, I had a different kind of experience in interpreting a written text in accordance with the intent of its author.

During much of my life I was a humanist, believing in the power of man to improve himself by his own efforts. I eventually found that this was false.

In seeking for a more spiritual dimension to my life, I joined a New Age organization. After a number of years I left it, because I concluded that its teachings were inconsistent with Scripture, and I decided to believe Scripture. I later earned a Master's Degree in Biblical Studies.

When I left the New Age organization, I adopted, as a description of my situation, the words of Psalm 40:2 (NIV), "He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand." Ever since, I have taken my stand on the rock of Scripture. I find it a great comfort that, in a world in which so much seems like quicksand, there is a solid rock on which to stand.

Everything I have written is based on Scripture. Some may disagree with my interpretation of Scripture, or may feel that I have emphasized one aspect of it and given inadequate attention to other aspects. This is fine; I encourage my readers to check everything out for themselves. But I do claim that everything I say has Scriptural support, and for that reason deserves your serious consideration.

The basic message of this book is both simple and Scriptural. Please don't allow differences of opinion over some details to detract from that basic message.

May God bless us all as we seek to know and understand him better!

James L. Morrisson

Chapter 1

The Challenge

*“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong.”
(1 Corinthians 16:13 NIV)*

We live in challenging times. Ours is a fast-paced, stressful society where many people lack strong, long-term personal relationships. We are bombarded with so much secularism that Christian beliefs and values can become eroded. As a result, it is more difficult to deal with health problems, personal crises, and other hardships. Now, more than ever, Christians need to be solidly grounded in their faith so that they can stand firm in the face of difficulties.

What I am dealing with in this book is some changes that I believe need to occur in the minds and hearts of many Christians. These changes are necessary if we as individuals are to survive in this challenging world, and if we, and the church as a whole, are to play an effective part in stemming the tide of secularism in our nation.

I tend to emphasize the demands of Christianity because I feel that, in our affluent society, there is

great danger that our faith will be flabby and apathetic. But I must also say two other things, which I hope you will keep in mind.

First, Christianity is tremendously rewarding. To those who truly believe in Jesus Christ, it promises eternal life in heaven with God. It promises forgiveness of our sins, and freedom from many things that have held us down. It promises an abundant life on earth, in which we can overcome every adversity. It promises peace, joy and true fulfillment. These are not empty promises. I have seen them realized, in greater or lesser degree, in my own life and the lives of others around me. Whatever Christianity may cost, the rewards are much greater.

Second, God expects us to change, but he also accepts us and loves us as we are. His love is not conditioned on our changing. We don't have to earn his love and acceptance. They are just there for us. Wherever we are in our Christian life, God is there for us.

We can stand firm on the words of the Bible. The Bible is true and reliable, and it can and should be the guide for everything we do. In my book *Standing Firm in the Faith*, I give my reasons for believing this. You can read the entire book online at

www.StandingFirmInTheFaith.com

Belief in the truth and reliability of Scripture underlies everything else I say. If we accept Scripture

on its own terms, as an authoritative revelation from God, then we have a solid rock to stand on. If we do not accept it as authoritative, then it becomes merely one among many expressions of fallible human opinion. It is largely because many Christians, today, do not accept Scripture as authoritative that we find such wide divergences of opinion among those who call themselves Christians.

The Bible tells us very clearly certain things about God, about Jesus Christ, and about our relationship with God. These basics of our Christian faith are things we need to stand firm on and not compromise.

Then we need to be able to apply what we believe to what is happening in our lives. If we can't apply it to the life situations we face, it is probable that we either don't understand it, or don't really believe it, or both. It is in our actions that our faith becomes real.

Faith that does not result in action, that does not make a major difference in the way we view and respond to everything around us, is not real faith. The teachings of Scripture give us guidance, confidence and strength in dealing with many practical issues.

I want to say something about that word "believe." We Americans often use "believe" to mean intellectual assent. In Scripture it means much more than that. The Biblical words for "believe" and "faith" mean to put our entire trust in, and obey. They imply a total commitment. In the Biblical sense, belief is something we do, not just with our mind, but with all of us. Jesus told us,

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30)

I think it fair to say that the whole Bible also tells us to **believe** “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” The belief that Scripture talks about is a belief that shows itself in action. It shows itself in your whole life.

One other thing about belief should be kept in mind. It is important for us to be clear, and Scripturally sound, about **what** we believe. It is even more important to know **whom** we believe. Paul wrote,

“I know **whom** I have believed” (2 Timothy 1:12)

Our Christian faith is not primarily a belief in doctrines. It is a belief in a person. It is a relationship with a person.

It is because we know who God is that we can put our trust in him. It is because we know who God is that we can say, with the Psalmist,

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear” (Psalm 46:1-2)

No matter what happens, we will not fear.

We are not victims of the circumstances. They are temporary and God is eternal. God is greater than the circumstances, he is faithful to his promises, and he wants what is best for us. He has promised us that, in him, we can be overcomers (1 John 5:4-5).

“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4-5)

No matter what happens, we can depend on God.

Chapter 2

The Problem of Pain

“In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

One of the problems we all have to deal with is that of pain. Some even find that the existence of pain, to the degree that we see it in this world, causes them to doubt their faith in God. They say, “If God is both all-powerful and loving, how can he allow so much pain and suffering?”

Some conclude either that God is not all powerful (which means that he is not God), or that he is not loving (which is a denial of Scripture). Implicit in this kind of question is the assumption: “God, if I were in charge, I would not do it your way.” This is an assumption that we are not entitled to make.

Most people can handle a good deal of pain if they can see a reason for it. Athletes, mountain climbers and others who place great demands on their physical bodies willingly subject themselves to a great deal of pain. Soldiers accept suffering, hardship and death in the service of their country. Most women are able to

accept the pain of childbirth because they love their baby. Many people will work very hard if they see their work as bringing a reward. But when suffering seems meaningless, it is hard to accept.

Scripture gives us some clear guidelines for dealing with pain, suffering, and hardship. These Biblical principles have practical applications for our daily lives.

In considering pain, it helps to remember that God is faithful and he loves us. No matter what happens to us, He is willing and able to make it work out for our good.

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

“But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20)

God Strengthens and Empowers Us

Paul prayed that the Ephesians would have the eyes of their heart enlightened so that they might know God’s “...incomparably great power for us who believe” (Ephesians 1:19 NIV). (Also see Ephesians 3:20.)

God's incomparably great power is at work within us. We may not feel it, but Scripture says that it is there.

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.” (Ephesians 6:10)

God wants us to live every aspect of our life in his strength and his mighty power.

“...in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28)

We should do everything in his great power. Apart from him, we can do nothing (John 15:5). In all things we can draw on the mighty power of the God who lives in us and in whom we have our being. Paul wrote,

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13)

“I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Paul prayed that the Colossians would be “strengthened with all might according to [God's] glorious power” (Colossians 1:11). When David was greatly distressed, he “strengthened himself in the

LORD his God” (1 Samuel 30:6). (Also see 2 Samuel 22:33; Psalms 28:7, 46:1, 119:28.)

While on earth, Jesus Christ ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:14). He told his disciples, “you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8).

This includes the power to love people who seem unlovable, to forgive those who have wronged us deeply, and to get rid of all bitterness. God can make us willing and able to cast off everything that hinders (Hebrews 12:1) and to persevere in the face of great obstacles. He can enable us to live by the Spirit, to show the fruit of the Spirit, to minister in love to others, and much more. It is God’s power to become what we could never become on our own.

Grace came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17), and part of the definition of grace is God’s influence working in us. It is only by God’s power working in us that we can possibly hope to develop godly character qualities.

I find all this astonishing. Of ourselves we are weak and fallible. Of ourselves we can do nothing. But the Almighty God, who created and sustains the universe, has enabled us to be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

By the mighty power of God working in us, we can overcome the world’s temptations and pressures, and we can surmount every difficulty and problem we may face. Whatever our problems or difficulties may be, the

one who lives in us is greater. We need to learn to believe this, to feel it, and to act on it.

We Have Hope

With God there is always hope. He is “the God of hope” (Romans 15:13). (Also see 1 Timothy 1:1, 4:10.) “Happy is he... whose hope is in the LORD his God” (Psalm 146:5). (Also see Psalms 33:20, 37:9, 39:7, 62:5, 130:7, 147:11; Jeremiah 14:22.) Those who believe in God will always have hope (Psalm 71:14). Part of standing firm in the faith is to “...hold unswervingly to the hope we profess...” (Hebrews 10:23 NIV). We need to “...continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel” (Colossians 1:23 NIV).

“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul,
both sure and steadfast” (Hebrews 6:19)

God “...has given us new birth into a living hope...” (1 Peter 1:3 NIV). Peter is there talking about the hope of eternal life, but with God there is hope in this world also.

“Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not be weary; they will walk and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:31 NIV)

Abraham in hope believed God's promise that he and Sarah could have a son, and their hope was realized (Romans 4:18-22). The Psalmist wrote, "I hope in Your word" (Psalm 119:81). (Also see verse 147.) He wrote, "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him" (Psalm 42:5). (Also see Psalms 42:11, 43:5.) Whenever we find ourselves getting discouraged, the answer is to put our hope in God.

Those who are without God are without hope (Ephesians 2:12). "Brothers, we do not want you to... grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13 NIV). (Also see Hebrews 2:15; Job 27:8; Proverbs 24:20.)

Christian hope is not wishful thinking. It is confident expectation. As Christians we can be "...sure of what we hope for..." (Hebrews 11:1 NIV). "...those who hope in me will not be disappointed" (Isaiah 49:23 NIV). "Hope does not disappoint" (Romans 5:5). Our confidence is based on who God is. We know, without any doubt, that God is far greater than any problem or concern we may have, that he is a good and loving God, and that he is faithful to keep his promises. We know that "...in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who are called according to his purposes" (Romans 8:28 NIV).

One of the remarkable things about our position in Christ is that so often we find ourselves in a win-win situation. However it comes out, we will be winners.

Paul gives us one example. He wrote that God's power is made perfect in weakness, and therefore Paul delighted in his weaknesses, because when he is weak (in himself) then he is strong (in God's power) (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). So whether Paul feels strong or weak, it all works out for good.

I can give an example in my own life. I am fighting advanced cancer. If I should die soon, then I will go to be with the Lord. That is a very good place to be! And if I go, I am sure that God will continue to take care of my family. On the other hand, if, as I hope and desire, God heals me of this cancer, then I will have more time to serve him here on earth. So I cannot lose. Whatever happens, God works it out for good.

Because of our position in Christ, we can know that, no matter how difficult the outward circumstances may seem, we can, in God's strength, be overcomers. And so we can be "rejoicing in hope" (Romans 12:12).

We Can Overcome Any Adversity

God enables his people to overcome evil.

"His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness." (2 Peter 1:3)

Therefore, we can overcome trials and tribulations, and we can conquer the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil. Jesus said,

“In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”
(John 16:33)

But then Scripture says that **we** can overcome the world.

“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4-5)

When Scripture says that we can overcome the world, I believe this means that no matter what our problem or difficulty, the power of God is greater.

Paul was an overcomer. He had “...learned the secret of being content in any and every situation...” (Philippians 4:12 NIV). (See verses 11-13.) He was no longer at the mercy of his circumstances.

We are more than conquerors because nothing can separate us from the love of Christ (Romans 8:35-39). We can see this with Stephen. An angry mob stoned him to death, but Stephen saw the glory of God and he died praying for his enemies. They conquered him physically, but Stephen was more than a conqueror.

The mob couldn't destroy his relationship with Jesus Christ or his godly character. (See Acts 7:54-60.)

We have "...authority... to overcome all the power of the enemy..." (Luke 10:19 NIV). We can overcome every evil influence because,

"He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." (1 John 4:4)

Chapter 3

Pain and Hardship Are Part of Life

“Yet man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” (Job 5:7)

I start with what may seem an obvious proposition. In this imperfect world, pain and hardship are a part of life. No one is immune from them. No one can claim any right to be free of them. Some suffer more than others, and that may be thought to raise a question of fairness, which I shall address later. But no one is exempt.

When we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, our sins are forgiven, we enter into eternal life, and we can look forward to spending eternity in heaven with God. We have the Holy Spirit living within us, we become adopted sons of God, and we are enabled to start a remarkable process of transformation in our lives. These are tremendous gifts, which we do not deserve, and for which we should be very thankful. We receive them by the grace of God, and part of the definition of grace is “unmerited favor.” But I do not

see anything in Scripture that says that we are exempt from pain and suffering.

Scripture says that we can expect difficulties, testing and suffering. One difference is that we are much better able to deal with them because of the power of God working in us, because of the hope that God always gives us, and because of the support and love of our fellow-believers.

God has many blessings for us. He is “able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or think, according to his power that is at work within us” (Ephesians 3:20 NIV). But blessings are gifts. No one is entitled to them. When we get them we give thanks, but if we do not get all that we hoped for, we have no right to complain.

God does not owe us anything (Romans 11:35; Job 41:11). God has generously given us the tremendous blessing of forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation. Compared to that, everything else becomes relatively unimportant. (See 2 Corinthians 4:17.)

We Live in an Imperfect World

When God created the earth, put plants and animals on it, and created man, he looked at everything he had made and saw that it was very good (Genesis 1:31). There was no sin and no death. Eventually, there will be a world in which there is no sin, no death, no pain

and no suffering. But for the present, pain and suffering are a part of our life. How did this come about?

The Fall in Eden

At the Creation, God put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. He gave them everything they needed. They had food, shelter, and dominion over the earth. They walked with God every afternoon. He put only one restriction on them. He told them not to eat the fruit of one tree. He did not want them to know (experience) evil.

They disobeyed and were driven out of Eden. Adam and Eve, who knew God intimately, chose to believe the serpent (satan) rather than God. They chose to do things their way rather than God's way.

The result was that sin and death came into the world for the first time.

“...through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin” (Romans 5:12)

“...by man came death.” (1Corinthians 15:21)

Pain is mentioned for the first time. God told Eve, “in pain you shall bring forth children” (Genesis 3:16). He told Adam that he would “toil” and would have to struggle against “thorns and thistles” (Genesis 3:17-

18). Pain and suffering came into the world as a result of the wrong decision Adam and Eve made.

Since the Fall in Eden, the earth has been under a curse.

“For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.”
(Romans 8:22)

Why did God allow this to happen? Because he wanted men and women to have free will, to have genuine freedom of choice. He wanted them to serve him and love him by their own free choice, and not because they were incapable of doing anything else.

Having free will means that you can choose wrongly. The price for giving man free will was that man, in the persons of Adam and Eve, made a terrible mistake, which had profound consequences.

Some might question God’s decision to give man free will. But God is God, and we cannot change him, nor should we want to.

“O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’”
(Romans 9:20)

God said to Job, “Would you indeed annul My judgment? Would you condemn Me that you may be

justified?” (Job 40:8). We have to accept God as he is, and give thanks that he is such a wonderful God.

If we want to blame someone for our suffering, we should not blame God. If anyone is to blame, it is Adam and Eve.

There Will Be a World without Pain and Suffering

At some time in the future, there will be a world without pain and suffering for those who are righteous and follow God.

“And God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”
(Revelation 21:4)

“The voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying.” (Isaiah 65:19)

There will be “everlasting joy” and “they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isaiah 35:10). (Also see Isaiah 51:11.) “They shall not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain” (Isaiah 11:9; 65:25). “There shall be no more curse” (Revelation 22:3).

Our bodies now are perishable, dishonorable and weak; but we shall eventually have bodies that are imperishable, glorious, and powerful (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). Even animals will no longer eat each other (Isaiah 11:6-9, 65:25).

The present world is not the way God finally wants it. But for the present, we have to deal with the world as it now is.

Chapter 4

God Can Bring Good out of Pain

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17)

In the present imperfect world, pain and hardship serve a useful, and even necessary, function. Let me illustrate this in several ways:

The Physical Body

For our physical bodies, pain serves as a necessary warning system. We put our hand on a hot burner and instantly snatch it away. We cut or scratch ourselves and react instantly to get away from whatever is causing the injury and to deal with the injured tissue. We feel an internal pain which gets us to the doctor, who tells us that our appendix is inflamed, we have kidney stones, or whatever else is wrong, and we get it attended to.

Pain is like the warning lights on a car, which alert us to things that need attention. Our pain system is carefully designed and adapted to our bodies' needs. For instance, the pain sensors are much more strongly concentrated in some areas than in others; some areas are very sensitive to pressure but less so to pricks or scratches; etc. The system is carefully and specifically designed. Interestingly, the same nerves that transmit pain, also transmit pleasurable sensations.

There are some who are unable to feel pain, such as lepers, advanced diabetics, and some others. They can injure themselves and not know it. Their life is full of hazards and very difficult. They would give much to be able to feel pain.

Study with these people, including unsuccessful attempts to create a workable man-made warning system, has made it clear that any warning system must give a strong enough signal so that we cannot ignore it. Physical pain cannot be turned off, and it is so insistent that we cannot ignore it. It's a good thing that the signal is strong and unpleasant.

Does pain also serve a function in our spiritual life? I think it does.

Responsibility for our Choices

There are many "natural laws." Ignoring them often results in pain.

If we try to walk off a rooftop, we will fall and hurt ourselves. Foolish, dare-devil actions can produce painful consequences. If we touch a hot thing, we will get burned. If we smoke heavily, we have a greater likelihood of getting cancer or respiratory illness. Drinking heavily, overeating, and using “recreational” drugs can all have painful consequences. If we were to be relieved from all pain and suffering, we would never have to face the consequences of our actions.

The same is true with spiritual laws. There is a spiritual principle called sowing and reaping.

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that will he also reap.”
(Galatians 6:7)

If we sow anger, hatred, hostility, bitterness, unforgiveness, ingratitude, selfishness and the like, we shall receive the same from others. If we choose to cause harm to others, we can expect to receive harm. By the same principle, if we are giving, loving, considerate, thoughtful, and unselfish towards others, we shall receive many blessings.

“Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.” (Luke 6:38)

This principle does not work perfectly. Nothing does in this imperfect world. But it still is true, in my experience and that of many others, that those who choose to be giving and loving usually receive love and generosity, while those who choose to give anger and hatred receive anger and hatred.

If there were no painful consequences to our negative actions, would we ever learn to give them up? Would we perceive them as harmful and spiritually dangerous if we did not have a pain mechanism to warn us? If there were no unpleasant consequences from violating them, could these even be said to be laws?

The principle applies more broadly. God has given us certain commandments and laws. For them to be meaningful, there need to be consequences from following them or violating them.

In many places, Scripture sets forth blessings and curses. God says, behave in this way and you will be blessed; behave in that way and you will be cursed.

In Deuteronomy, chapter 28, for example, God set forth a series of blessings and curses. If his people obey his law and commands, then they will be blessed with prosperity, military success, and honor and recognition. If they disobey, God will send on them plagues, wasting diseases, military defeats, oppression, madness, blindness, confusion of mind, and much more. Then in Deuteronomy 30:19 God says,

“I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live.” (Deuteronomy 30:19)

God uses the possibility of intense suffering as a way of bringing his people into obedience.

In the New Testament, Paul contrasts two ways of life: living by the flesh and living by the Holy Spirit. Living by the flesh results in sexual impurity, idolatry, hatred, discord, jealousy, dissensions, drunkenness, and the like.

“...those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Galatians 5:21)

“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.” (Ephesians 5:6)

In contrast, those who live by the Spirit receive the “fruit of the Spirit,” which is “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). The first group is miserable and suffers; the other group is blessed. Paul expresses the difference as that between life and death (Romans 8:5-17).

God has declared that those who believe in Jesus Christ will have eternal life, while those who do not

believe in him are condemned already (John 3:16, 18). He has established a judgment in which the righteous go to “eternal life” and the unrighteous to “everlasting punishment” (Matthew 25:46). The righteous “will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father,” while the wicked will be thrown into a “furnace of fire” (Matthew 13:42-43, 50). (Also see John 5:29.)

In all of these, we see the use of pain and suffering as a means of enforcing the laws God has established, and as a consequence of violating those laws.

God Uses Pain and Hardship to Train and Strengthen Us

God’s priorities are not our priorities. We tend to want physical health, freedom from physical and emotional pain, and enough material possessions to live comfortably. We may feel deprived and unjustly treated if we do not have these. God wants us to have “good” things. (Psalm 84:11) However, his primary concern is not with our physical circumstances. I believe his primary concerns are:

- Our eternal salvation
- Our growth into Christian maturity with godly character

- Our usefulness (“fruitfulness”) in the kingdom of God

The early Christians endured a great deal of suffering. They were a persecuted church. What was their reaction to hardship and suffering? The record of Scripture is absolutely amazing! They did not complain about it, or say that it was more than they could bear. They welcomed it as something that taught them and strengthened them! Look at what they said about it:

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (James 1:2-4 NIV)

“...we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” (Romans 5:3-5 NIV)

“...now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than

gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may prove to be genuine...” (1 Peter 1:6-7 NIV)

“...God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.” (Hebrews 12:10-12 NIV)

The unanimous voice of the New Testament writers is that pain and suffering teach us and strengthen us and help us to become mature. These were writers who had, themselves, experienced considerable suffering.

There is a principle in athletic training that says, “No pain, no gain.” I suggest that the same principle applies to our growth into spiritual maturity. Quite often it seems that we grow only in the presence of discomfort or pain that makes us feel the need for change, and forces us to cry out to God.

I want to make one thing clear. These New Testament writers did not seek out pain. They did not deliberately inflict it on themselves. But when it came, they welcomed it as an opportunity to grow and to learn.

There have been, and still are, some people who deliberately inflict pain on themselves as a way of

showing devotion to God or attempting to achieve holiness. I find no support for such a view in Scripture. This kind of self-inflicted pain is not what I am talking about.

God Uses Hardship and Pain to Get us to Depend on Him

God can also use hardship, pain and suffering to get us to depend on him rather than ourselves. Paul refers to the great pressure he was under in the province of Asia, which was so great that he despaired of life, and then says,

“...But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead”
(2 Corinthians 1:9 NIV)

Paul asked God to take away his “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7-8). God replied,

“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Paul added,

“That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in

persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:10 NIV)

Paul’s weakness made him strong in the sense that it caused him to rely to a greater degree on God’s incomparably great strength. God used this “thorn in the flesh” (which evidently bothered Paul quite a bit, whatever it was), to cause Paul to depend on God at a deeper level.

This is an important principle. We see it illustrated in a number of ways. For example, Jesus said that it is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 19:23-24). One reason is that a rich person tends to rely on his own riches rather than on God. More generally, those who are comfortably off, and successful by this world’s standards, often feel that they do not need God.

Those who are in very difficult situations, and do not see how they can get through them, may be much readier to turn to God for help. When things are going well, we can easily believe that we are self-sufficient. In the face of hardship and suffering, the myth of self-sufficiency loses credibility.

We see this in another way. In the relatively affluent West, the Christian church has tended to be weak. Not only are its numbers declining, but many individuals and churches seem to be lacking in strong commitment to God.

In other parts of the world, such as Africa, where many people face hardships, the Christian church is growing and strong. It is striking that in China, where the independent Christian church faces severe persecution, the church has been growing rapidly. The rate of growth has been far greater under Communist persecution than it ever was before.

I have seen this operate in my own life. The experience of having to deal with advanced cancer has not been easy. But I can see that it has done several things for me.

It has increased my faith. I have been put in a position where I had only God to depend on, and I have become willing to depend on God. I have identified and gotten rid of a number of things that had been weakening my faith. I have been praying more consistently and more effectively. I have gained a greater appreciation and thankfulness for the many blessings God has given me.

I believe that this difficult experience has helped me to get my knowledge and understanding of God beyond the intellectual, head level, to a level that reaches the heart. My wife and I were commenting the other day that, on the whole, this has been a good experience.

Chapter 5

Loving God for Who He Is

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” (Matthew 22:37)

God wants us to love him for who he is, and not just for what he does for us. This is the issue in the Book of Job.

Job was a wealthy man, with a large family; “the greatest of all the people of the east” (Job 1:3). Satan said to God, “Does Job fear God for nothing?... Stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face” (Job 1:9,11). But Job remained faithful to God.

Then satan said, “Stretch out Your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face” (Job 2:5). But no matter what happened to him, “Job did not sin with his lips.” (Job 2:10)

Job’s wife told him to “curse God and die” (Job 2:9). But Job replied,

“You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?” (Job 2:10)

Job complained to God, he demanded explanations, he showed anger at God, but he never turned away from God. At the end, when God gave him no explanations, he was content with the fact that “now my eye sees you” (Job 42:5).

He remained faithful to God for who God was, even though God had allowed satan to take away his family and wealth, and to inflict on him a painful disease. He served God for who he was and not for what he had bestowed on Job.

David wrote,

“Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.” (Psalm 37:4-5)

Often, before God is ready to give us the desires of our heart, he may test us to see whether we have truly committed our ways to him and are willing to trust him. It is when things are going “badly” that we have to trust in God because we have nowhere else to turn. Just as he did with Job, God may test us with troubles so that he, and we, can know whether we are really committed to him and trust in him.

When the three young Hebrews refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's statue, he threatened to throw them into a very hot furnace. They replied,

“Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image you have set up.” (Daniel 3:17-18)

They believed that God would save them from suffering. But even if he did not, they would serve him. Their serving God did not depend on what he did or did not do for them, but on who he is.

If God always blessed us with good things, and rescued us from suffering, then we would be tempted to love and serve him just for what he does for us. Our faith in him would be based on greed and self-advantage.

God does not want that kind of faith. He wants us to believe in him, and to love and serve him, for who he is, and not just for what he does for us.

There are many reasons for loving God for who he is. These include his character and his greatness.

God's Character

The important thing to remember about God's character is that it has many aspects.

God is loving, compassionate, merciful, forgiving, and kind. He is amazingly patient with us. He also disciplines those he loves. He is holy, righteous, and just. He cannot tolerate evil. He is a God of judgment.

God has all wisdom and all knowledge. He is faithful; he keeps his promises. He reaches out to us and desires our companionship. He wants us to know him personally. But he is also a great and powerful God. He is awesome in the original and true meaning of that word.

I could go on and list many more aspects of God's character. It would take a whole book to begin to deal with them adequately. But the point I want to emphasize is that we need to deal with every aspect of God's character.

One of the great sources of error in our thinking about God is that we sometimes put so much emphasis on certain aspects of his character that we neglect the others and arrive at a distorted picture. We need to know and follow the whole teaching of Scripture about God, and not just parts of it. Let me illustrate this by just one example.

Paul wrote, "Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God" (Romans 11:22). (The NIV says "...kindness and sternness...")

God is a loving God. “God is love” (1 John 4:16). “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

God is merciful and patient with us. “The LORD longs to be gracious to you...” (Isaiah 30:18 NIV). He lavishes his grace—his unmerited favor—on those who love him.

But he is also a just God and a holy God. He will not forever tolerate evil and sin. He is a God of judgment. “...we will all stand before God’s judgment seat” (Romans 14:10 NIV). (Also see John 5:28-29.)

Scripture tells us to love God, and also to fear God. How can we do both? How can we both love God and fear him? A simple example may help. A young child loves his daddy. But he also fears him, especially when his daddy finds it necessary to discipline him physically.

We need always to be aware of these two aspects of God.

In the past, there have been those who put such emphasis on God’s severity that we tended to lose sight of his love and mercy. Today there are some who put such emphasis on God’s love and mercy that we tend to lose sight of his wrath and judgment. Either view is incomplete. Either view, without the other, is a distortion of God’s character.

The Greatness of God

God has all wisdom and all knowledge. He is faithful; he keeps his promises. He reaches out to us and desires our companionship. He wants us to know him personally. But he is also a great and powerful God. He is awesome in the original and true meaning of that word.

God is “the great God, mighty and awesome” (Deuteronomy 10:17). (Also see Deuteronomy 7:21; 2 Samuel 7:22; Nehemiah 1:5, 9:32; Daniel 9:4; Titus 2:13.)

“O LORD my God, You are very great: You are clothed with honor and majesty” (Psalm 104:1)

“For the LORD is the great God, And the great King above all gods. In His hand are the deep places of the earth; The heights of the hills are His also. The sea is His, for He made it; And His hands formed the dry land. Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture, And the sheep of His hand.” (Psalm 95:3-7)

“Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;
his greatness no one can fathom” (Psalm 145:3
NIV)

To get some sense of God’s greatness, I suggest reading Isaiah, chapter 40, and Revelation, chapters 4 and 5. Even they do not give the whole picture.

God created the earth, the sun, the moon, our solar system, and millions upon millions of stars, most of which are larger than our sun. He created a physical universe that extends, so our scientists tell us, for a huge number of light years—distances that most of us cannot begin to grasp. And he is greater than his creation!

We cannot begin to conceive the full measure of God’s greatness, his splendor, his majesty, his power. He has given us, in his Scriptures, some remarkable visions of him; but they are incomplete and partial. God lives “in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see” (1 Timothy 6:16).

Part of God’s greatness is that he is all-powerful. God is the Almighty. That is his nature. That is what it is to be God. God’s power is incomparably great (Ephesians 1:19). He can do all things.

“For with God nothing will be impossible.”
(Luke 1:37)

“Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, according

to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.”
(Genesis 18:14)

“I know that You can do everything, And that
no purpose of Yours can be withheld from
You.” (Job 42:2)

“But Jesus looked at them and said to them,
‘With men this is impossible, but with God all
things are possible.’” (Matthew 19:26)

God’s purpose and plans will prevail. Nothing can
thwart or defeat them.

“The counsel of the LORD stands forever, The
plans of His heart to all generations.” (Psalm
33:11)

“The LORD of hosts has sworn, saying,
‘Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to
pass, And as I have purposed, so it shall stand’”
(Isaiah 14:24)

“I know that You can do everything, And that
no purpose of Yours can be withheld from
You.” (Job 42:2)

The Fear of the Lord

Because God is so great, we should fear him.

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10)

“The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.” (Psalm 19:9)

“Fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing.” (Psalm 34:9 NIV)

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7)

What does it mean, to fear God? I think it means that we recognize God’s tremendous power, and his potential for wrath against things that are ungodly. God is not mocked. We need constantly to keep watch over how we live.

It means that we do not presume on God. “Keep back your servant from presumptuous sins... and I shall be innocent of great transgressions” (Psalm 19:13).

What are presumptuous sins? We presume on God when we take him for granted, or seek to manipulate him. We presume on God when we put him to the test.

(See Matthew 4:7.) Jesus would have presumed on God if he had thrown himself from the Temple when God did not tell him to do so. (See Matthew 4:6-7.)

We presume on God whenever we think we can obligate him to give us something or to do something on our behalf. God does not owe anything to anybody. He is not obligated to anybody. (See Romans 11:35.)

God is not a heavenly vending machine in which you put in a prayer and get whatever you have asked for. God is sovereign. And note that the Psalmist refers to presumptuous sins as “great transgression.”

It means that we recognize that we cannot hide anything from God. God knows us completely (Psalm 139:1-6). He knows our every thought and action. And we cannot escape from him (Psalm 139:7-12). Even those who deny the existence of God will ultimately have to deal with him.

It means that we are serious about our faith. God wants a total commitment of our lives to him.

It means that we take his Scriptures seriously. We don't just ignore them, or give them lip service, or construe them in a way that waters down their clear meaning. It means that we act on them and live by them.

Some do not like to consider God's greatness because it makes them feel small. That is where God wants us. Scripture tells us to humble ourselves before God (1 Peter 5:6; James 4:10). This is part of the fear of God, that we recognize how much greater he is than we are.

Confidence in God

God's greatness also means that, by his incomparably great power working within us, we can conquer whatever problems and difficulties we may have to face. God is bigger. He is bigger than anything we have to deal with.

Nothing is impossible for him. In him we can overcome trials and difficulties. It is wonderful to be able to trust in such a great God.

Freedom From Fear

To put it another way, if we fear God, we do not need to fear anything else. If we do not fear God, then we will fear everything else.

Chapter 6

The Issue of Fairness

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:9)

When we encounter suffering we often ask, “Why me? What have I done to deserve this?” Our sense is that it is unfair for us to have to suffer.

However, when “good” things happen, we seldom ask, “Why me? What have I done to deserve this?” Perhaps we should. But let’s look at this issue of “fairness” in a little more depth.

Scripture speaks much about God’s grace, the unmerited favor he bestows on us. Would we want to receive only what we deserve and never receive God’s grace, his unmerited favor? Would we want to deny ourselves the “exceeding riches of His [God’s] grace” (Ephesians 2:7) by insisting that we receive only what we deserve? Scripture says,

“See to it that no one misses the grace of God...” (Hebrews 12:15 NIV)

Would we want to miss the grace of God by insisting on a principle that we receive only what we deserve?

If we received only what we deserved, none of us could be saved! We are saved by grace, by God's unmerited favor (Ephesians 2:8). Whatever may happen to us in this life is minor compared to the suffering of spending eternity in hell separated from God.

If we complain about suffering here on earth, are we not a little bit in the position of someone who receives an unmerited gift of \$1,000 and complains because it is in \$20 bills rather than \$100 bills? So long as we have the unmerited gift of eternal salvation, should we complain to God because our life on this earth is relatively more or less difficult? This idea of asking God only to let us have what we deserve cuts two ways, and I suggest we should not want to have him establish such a principle.

“God... does not treat us as our sins deserve, or repay us according to our iniquities” (Psalm 103:10 NIV). So let us not complain that sometimes we may have to undergo suffering that we think we do not deserve.

People also say, “Why is this happening to me and not to this other person?” Would we want to have God make things “fair” by making the other person suffer as much as we suffer?

Jesus predicted to Peter how Peter would die. When Peter saw John he asked, “Lord, what about him?” And Jesus answered,

“If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.” (John 21:22)

It is none of our concern how God treats somebody else. We need to focus on **our** relationship with him.

Jesus told a parable about workers in a vineyard. Some came to work in the beginning of the day, and agreed to receive one denarius as a wage. Others started work at the third, the sixth, the ninth and the eleventh hour. The owner of the vineyard paid each of them the same wage. Those who had worked the longest complained that this was not fair, and the master (God) replied,

“...I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?”
(Matthew 20:13-15 NIV)

Scripture tells us not to compare ourselves with others (Galatians 6:4). One reason this principle is applicable here is that we cannot know fully what the other person may be going through.

Often others, who seem outwardly to be doing well, may be struggling with difficulties we know nothing of. Or they may have come through periods of severe pain in the past.

How are we to measure pain? How do we compare the pain of arthritis or cancer with the pain of a marriage that is breaking up, or a rebellious child? It is better to stay with Jesus' "What is that to you?" (John 21:22).

Examples of Dealing with Pain and Hardship

Scripture gives a number of examples of those who dealt with suffering. Above all, there is Jesus, "who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Hebrews 12:2).

Whenever we feel overwhelmed by the pain we have to endure, we can consider the agony that Jesus voluntarily suffered for us. Whenever we complain about what we consider the unfairness of our suffering, we can consider the injustice that Jesus suffered.

There is also Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his brothers, unjustly accused by his master's wife and thrown into jail, and forgotten by those who promised to help him. So far as Scripture records, he never complained. Eventually he became one of the rulers of Egypt and was able to save his family from starvation. He told his brothers,

"You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20)

There is David, who for years was running for his life, just a step away from death. His Psalms are full of words of pain and agony, physical and spiritual. (See, for example, Psalms 6:1-3, 13:1-3, 38:68, 55:4-5, 69:1-3.) Yet David always sensed that God was with him. David said,

“Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me” (Psalm 138:7)

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me, Your rod and Your staff they comfort me.” (Psalm 23:4)

One of the noteworthy things about the psalms is that, while they often start in despair, they usually end in affirmation, as David turns his eyes from his own suffering to the greatness of God.

“Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, for the help of His countenance” (Psalm 42:5, 11)

But I want to talk about Paul. When Paul accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior, God said, “I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake” (Acts 9:16). Paul later said,

“We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22)

And suffer he did. Read this recital and think what each phrase of it must have meant:

“In labors more abundant, in stripes [whippings] above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.” (2 Corinthians 11:23-28)

Even this list may not be complete, for elsewhere he speaks of fighting wild beasts (1 Corinthians 15:32), and of encountering such hardships in the province of Asia (part of modern Turkey) that he despaired of his life (2 Corinthians 1:8).

What would five whippings, three beatings with rods, and a stoning do to a man's back? I expect that Paul was in almost constant pain. This may be why he said, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection" (1 Corinthians 9:27 KJV). (The Greek word translated "keep under" can mean to "subdue.") Yet Paul, writing from a Roman jail, could say,

"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4)

He wrote,

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

He could say,

"I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content" (Philippians 4:11)

How did Paul achieve this? I think we can see some keys.

- Paul took his eyes off of the circumstances and focussed them on eternal things (2 Corinthians 4:18). This is also what David did. He took his eyes off his problems and put them on God. We generally cannot control our circumstances. If

we see ourselves as “victims” of circumstances we cannot control, then we feel helpless and abused. If we focus on God, on his almighty power, and the security of our relationship with him, then we can see ourselves as overcomers.

- He looked to see what he could learn from difficult experiences. “...we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Romans 5:3 NIV).
- He understood that he did not have to deal with difficulties, danger and suffering in his own strength. He could call upon God’s great power (Ephesians 1:19, 6:10). “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). He even rejoiced in his own weakness, because in it God’s power was made greater (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

I want also to mention one fairly contemporary example, from among a great many. The terrible suffering of the Nazi Holocaust has been hard for many to accept and understand. Yet there are those who overcame it. One such was Corrie ten Boom. During the Nazi occupation of Holland, her family hid a number of Jews in their home and enabled many of

them to get out of Holland, knowing the great risks of doing so.

They were betrayed, and imprisoned by the Nazis. Corrie's father died in prison. Corrie and her sister Betsy were sent to one of the Nazi death camps, Ravensbruck. Betsy died there.

Corrie, by what may have been a clerical error, was released just before she was scheduled to be gassed. She spent the rest of her life ministering to others, telling them of God's greatness, his love, his tender mercy, his goodness. She was even able to forgive one of the Nazi guards who had mistreated her and her sister, and to bring to Christ the man who had betrayed her family. She lived a life of joy and gave great joy to many.

Despite the terrible things she endured, Corrie was an overcomer. She kept her eyes on the greatness of God, rather than the terrible circumstances in which she had found herself.

Chapter 7

Renewing Our Minds

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...” (Romans 12:2 NIV)

In order to deal with pain and hardship, we must think Scripturally instead of thinking the way that the world does. The theme of transformation runs throughout the New Testament. God does not want us to stay where we are. He wants us to change—radically. Change is often difficult and can be painful. But it is what God wants and expects of us.

A Radical Transformation

God expects that, when we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we will be radically changed, transformed. The Greek word is *metamorphoo*. This transformation is to be a metamorphosis, of a magnitude at least comparable to that by which a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. God expects us to become totally different.

Scripture uses many different images to express the change that should occur:

- We become “a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). We really become a new species. Scripture speaks of the first Adam who was earthly and fell into sin, and the second Adam (Jesus Christ) who was sinless and holy (1 Corinthians 15:44-49). (Also see Romans 5:12-19.) It says that we will bear the likeness of the second Adam.
- “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV).
- We are “renewed in the spirit of [our] mind” (Ephesians 4:23).
- We “put off... the old man” and “put on the new man” (Ephesians 4:22, 24). (Also see Colossians 3:9-10.)
- We live by the Spirit and not by the flesh (Galatians 5:16; Romans 8:13).

- We become “instruments of righteousness” rather than “instruments of unrighteousness” (Romans 6:13).
- We have “been buried with him through baptism into death” in order that we may “walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).
- “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).
- We have “been set free from sin” and have “become slaves of God” (Romans 6:22). We are no longer slaves “of sin, leading to death,” but have become slaves “of obedience, leading to righteousness” (Romans 6:16).
- We are rescued (“translated” KJV) from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of God’s Son (Colossians 1:13). Our citizenship and our allegiance have been changed.
- We have become adopted children of God (John 1:12-13; Romans 8:15-16).
- We are born again (John 3:3, 5); born from above, of the spirit and not the flesh.

Each of these images, in a different way, emphasizes the magnitude of the change that is expected. Each is dramatic and astonishing in itself. Their cumulative effect is even more powerful. We are talking about a tremendous transformation. It should be visible to others, but its internal effect should be far greater than what others can perceive.

If a person is not significantly changed by their salvation, then we are entitled to wonder whether their salvation was genuine.

We are supposed to be salt and light to the world, and to let our light shine before men (Matthew 5:13-16). We need to so live that the difference between Christians and non-Christians is inescapable. We need to stand, boldly and clearly, for what we believe.

The Fruit of Transformation

What is the result of this metamorphosis? Scripture states it in a number of different ways, which overlap and can be seen as different ways of expressing the same basic concept. Scripture often does this, because our minds are inadequate to comprehend—and our language inadequate to express—the full scope of God's revelation to us.

Developing Godly Character

The whole concept can be summed up by saying that our character is to become more and more like God's character.

We are to "...put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:24 NIV), the "...new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Colossians 3:10 NIV).

"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV)

God intends us "...to be conformed to the likeness of his Son..." (Romans 8:29 NIV). We are supposed to think more and more like Jesus Christ does. (1 Corinthians 2:16). (Also see Philippians 2:5.)

Let us look at some other ways of expressing the same concept.

Living for Spiritual Things

Two of the great statements about this transformation are:

- “...we... are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory...” (2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV)
- “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

A look at what is said between those two statements tells us a good deal about the nature of this transformation.

In 2 Corinthians, chapters 4 and 5, Paul repeatedly contrasts the material world in which our bodies now live, and the spiritual world. He tells us that the spiritual world is the real one, on which we should focus. He says, “...we regard no one from a worldly point of view...” (2 Corinthians 5:16 NIV). Paul also said,

“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (2 Corinthians 4:4 NIV)

And in 1 Corinthians 2:14, he points out that the man without the Spirit cannot understand spiritual things.

“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them,

because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Corinthians 2:14)

“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:18 NIV)

“For we walk by faith, not by sight.” (2 Corinthians 5:7)

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” (Hebrews 11:1 NIV)

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.” (Colossians 3:1-2 NIV)

God is spirit and he lives primarily in the realm of the spirit. He lived in that realm before there was any physical universe, and he will live in it even though heaven and earth pass away. (See Isaiah 51:6.)

We need to learn to see things from God’s perspective. This results in a wholly different order of priorities.

First, the natural person, the untransformed person, lives primarily for material things. His priorities are

those of the material world. In contrast, the transformed person lives primarily in a spiritual world. He lives primarily by faith in God and in God's word, rather than by his physical senses. He regards the unseen things of faith as more real and more lasting than the material things which surround him. The transformed person is living primarily in a different world, a world in which spiritual rather than material things have primary importance.

Second, where the natural person lives only for this life, the transformed person is already living in eternity. Paul speaks of this in many ways. For Paul, tribulations and difficulties of this world become minor when compared to the glory to come. He says,

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”
(2 Corinthians 4:16-17 NIV) (Also see 1 Peter 4:12-13; Hebrews 12:2.)

Paul says, “So we are always confident” (2 Corinthians 5:6), because we know that when we leave this earthly body we will be with the Lord, which is better. (Also see Philippians 1:21.)

Jesus told those who believed in him that in this world they will have tribulation (John 16:33). Paul said that “We must through many tribulations enter the

kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22), and that “...everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...” (2 Timothy 3:12 NIV).

However, we should rejoice in our troubles, because we learn and grow from them (James 1:2-4; Romans 5:3-5), and because the glory that is to come is far greater than our troubles are. As believers, “...we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28 NIV).

Third, “...those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again” (2 Corinthians 5:15 NIV). Hence, “...we make it our goal to please him...” (2 Corinthians 5:9 NIV). We should not be like those who “loved praise from men more than praise from God” (John 12:43). (Also see Isaiah 51:12-13.) Jesus has told us,

“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you” (John 15:18-19 NIV)

These are all major shifts in our attitudes and priorities. Truly they require a renewing of the mind.

Living by the Spirit

When we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, God sends us the Holy Spirit to live with us and be in us (John 14:16).

It is because we have the Holy Spirit living in us, and his power working in us, that we are able to be transformed. But the process is not instantaneous. The Holy Spirit inhabits our spirit, but our soul and body need to be brought under the Spirit's control.

Yielding to God

Part of what living by the Spirit means is that we are wholly yielded to God. We are no longer slaves to sin, but slaves to obedience and righteousness (Romans 6:16). We submit ourselves to God (James 4:7).

Becoming Transformed

This transformation is a process. It does not happen all at once. We “...are **being transformed** into his likeness with **ever-increasing** glory...” (2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV)

We spend a lifetime learning how to live by the Spirit, to live a new life. We must keep making every effort to be holy (Hebrews 12:14). We must submit, and keep on submitting, to God. Over and over and over we must take our thoughts captive to obey Christ

(2 Corinthians 10:5). Near the end of his life, Paul did not consider that he had arrived (Philippians 3:12).

One aspect of this transformation is showing the “fruit of the spirit.” A farmer cannot cause fruit to grow. However, he can create conditions that are favorable to its growth.

In somewhat the same way, we cannot cause God’s character to grow within us. Only God can do that. But we can create favorable conditions for its growth—by faith, prayer, Bible study, and guarding our thoughts.

Believe

We need to believe that God can, and will, transform us into his image—that this astonishing metamorphosis can, and will, occur. We need to consider him faithful who has made the promise (Hebrews 11:11).

Choose

We must make an act of the will. We must choose to be transformed, choose to put off the old self and put on the new self, choose to live by the Spirit, choose to submit to God, choose to be weapons of righteousness, and so on.

Stay in God's Word

The agent that renews our mind is the word of God. It is not enough just to read Scripture. We need to believe it, take it seriously, and follow it. We need to let it dwell in us, work in us, become engrafted in us, and become a part of us.

Scripture speaks often about the importance of meditating on the word of God (Joshua 1:8; Psalms 1:2, 119:78). The Hebrew word for “meditate” suggests a cow chewing its cud, working the material over and over to extract all the good from it.

Guard Our Thoughts

If we would be transformed by the renewing of our mind—be made new in the attitude of our mind—we need to guard carefully what goes into our mind. We need to think on those things that are true, noble, right, pure, etc. (Philippians 4:8). Even more important, we need to guard against our own wrong thoughts—the thoughts that come from the flesh and not the spirit.

We need to take our thoughts captive to obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). We need to do this, not just daily, but moment by moment. Whenever we find ourselves thinking unscriptural thoughts, we need to repudiate them, renounce them, and replace them with thoughts that are Scripturally true.

Pray

We need to pray for wisdom and for any other quality that we lack.

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5)

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7)

The form of the verbs means “keep on asking,” “keep on seeking,” “keep on knocking.” When we keep asking God to change us into his likeness, we unite our will with his and cooperate with his work in our lives.

Persevere

Jesus told his disciples to persist in prayer (Luke 18:1-7, 11:5-10). We are to “...run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Hebrews 12:1 NIV). (Also see Hebrews 6:11.) Scripture is full of words telling us to apply ourselves diligently to the task before us. We need to keep pursuing, making every effort, pressing on, continuing, standing, etc.

Chapter 8

How Can We Deal with Pain and Hardship?

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

There are no easy answers, no formulas. Everyone has to work it out for themselves. Dealing with suffering can be extremely difficult, but with God’s help, it is possible.

We need to be wary of the pat answers that are sometimes given. They usually do not work. Job’s “comforters” gave him pat answers, and God said of them, “You have not spoken of me what is right” (Job 42:8).

One pat answer is that suffering is always the result of sin, so the way to deal with it is to discover and get rid of the sin. It is well to examine ourselves and see if there is sin that needs to be dealt with. But suffering is not always caused by sin.

Jesus was sinless; yet he suffered terribly. Paul suffered much. Can we say that this was because of sin he had not dealt with?

Christians have been persecuted and martyred from the First Century until today. Would anyone suggest that this is because of sin?

Another pat answer is that, if our prayer to be relieved of suffering is not answered, it must be because of lack of faith. We do need to pray, believing (James 1:6). There have been times in my present illness when I realized that I lacked faith, and was able to do something about it. But lack of faith is not the only reason why men endure suffering.

The prophets who suffered in terrible ways were commended for their faith (Hebrews 11:32-40). When God refused to heal Paul's "thorn in the flesh," he said nothing about a lack of faith. Rather, he said,

"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

God did not answer Jesus' prayer that he not have to endure the Crucifixion (Matthew 26:36-42). Would anyone suggest that it was because of a lack of faith?

Let me suggest a few Scriptural principles that may be helpful.

Have the Right Attitude

Underlying everything else is the attitude with which we deal with pain, suffering and difficulties when they come, as they will to most of us. I can identify three general kinds of attitudes.

First, when suffering, difficulties, or hardships come, we say, “Why me?” We dwell on the seeming injustice and unfairness of it. This easily leads to self-pity, to feeling sorry for ourselves, which is one of the devil’s most effective schemes for making a Christian ineffective. From there it can go on to blaming God for allowing the suffering, and to anger and bitterness at God. Ultimately, this can in some cases lead to a total turning away from God, a total rejection of God.

This approach can be very damaging, very destructive. It does nothing to relieve the suffering or make it easier to bear.

Many of us go through the early stages of this approach for a while when suffering or difficulties come. But if we stay there, and do not move on, the result can be very destructive to us.

Second, we can decide to take a constructive attitude. We can say, “God, this suffering, this difficulty, is here. I don’t like it but I need to accept it. What are you trying to teach me by it? How can I use it to grow? How can I bring good out of it?”

With this approach, we can turn the suffering, the difficulty, to our good. We can use it to increase in

maturity and strength. We get our mind off our suffering and onto God and what he is doing in our lives. If we can see some good purpose in the suffering, it becomes easier to handle.

There is a third approach which builds on the second and is even better. Paul asked that he might “know Him [Jesus] and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings” (Philippians 3:10).

What does this mean? I am not sure. I am not there and have not experienced what Paul is talking about. But I suggest that Paul is saying that, when suffering comes, we can see it as a means of drawing closer to Jesus.

As we suffer, we can begin to understand better what Jesus voluntarily suffered for us, and appreciate more fully what he did for us. As we are unjustly treated, we can begin to understand more fully the rejection, injustice and false accusations that Jesus continually suffered. We can become more like Jesus, which is the goal of our transformation.

A related concept is found in 2 Corinthians 1:4-5, where Paul says that God “comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.”

Those who have lost a spouse can understand what others are going through who have lost a spouse; they

can speak to them in a way that others cannot. Those who have been physically or sexually abused can understand what others are going through who have suffered abuse. Those who have endured physical pain can understand what others are going through who have to deal with physical pain. And so on.

Our own suffering enables us to minister more effectively to others who are suffering. Thus our suffering helps to bring us together more closely as the body of Christ and it helps us "...encourage one another and build each other up..." (1 Thessalonians 5:11 NIV).

Once we have taken care of our attitude, there are some other specific things we can do.

Accept Hardship

Pain and hardship occur. They are part of this world. No one is immune or exempt from them. There is no guarantee that they will not occur. When they come in our life, we need to be able to accept them. As Peter wrote,

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you” (1 Peter 4:12 NIV)

This is not easy, but it is essential.

Scripture tells us to go further, and to consider it pure joy when trials come. I confess that I am not yet at this point! But if we can see pain and suffering as experiences from which we can learn and grow, then perhaps we can begin to see them as things that God is using for our good, and be able to rejoice in them.

Decide to Overcome

Scripture says that, in God's power, we can be overcomers. We need to come to a decision to believe those Scriptures. We need to make a conscious decision that, with God's help, we can and will overcome the pain and suffering. We need to decide that we will not allow it to undermine our faith in God, our joy, our peace, or our ability to function.

Do What You Can

Paul wrote, "Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the evil day comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and **after you have done everything**, to stand" (Ephesians 6:13 NIV). He was talking about facing the devil, but I think the principle applies to every kind of adversity. God wants us to do everything we can.

In the case of pain and suffering, this means to get all the help you can. Medical science knows quite a lot about pain management. What they have to offer does

not always work, does not always work fully, and sometimes has side effects we prefer to avoid, but we might as well use it when we can.

Having a prayer partner, or a close friend in whom you can confide, can be very helpful. Prayer is always helpful. So is reading, studying, and reflecting on Scripture.

My point is, avail yourself of anything that will be genuinely helpful in relieving your pain. There is no virtue in unnecessary suffering.

There are, however, some techniques of pain relief that Christians should avoid. Two examples are hypnosis (which involves allowing someone else to manipulate your mind while you are not aware of what he is doing) and New Age forms of meditation (which originate in pagan religions). Anything that derives from, or involves, a pagan religion should be avoided by Christians. There is little sense in relieving physical pain at the cost of spiritual harm to yourself!

Pray

One of the things we can always do, and one of the first things we should do, is to pray.

“Is any among you suffering? Let him pray.”
(James 5:13)

Prayer brings us in touch with the almighty power of God. God does not always take us out of difficult circumstances. But he is with us in them. He is “a very present help **in** trouble” (Psalm 46:1).

“Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me. Your rod and your staff they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4)

Prayer also takes our mind off of our circumstances and puts it on God.

Focus on God and Not Your Circumstances

Paul, who went through a remarkable amount of suffering, wrote that in all circumstances we should give thanks (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Our thanks do not depend on the circumstances. Our thanks depend on who God is, on the salvation he has so freely given us, and on the relationship we have with him. As Paul wrote,

“Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things

which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)

To Paul, five whippings, three beatings with rods, stoning, and many other hardships were a “light affliction,” which was just for a moment! This seems amazing. But when we compare all that Paul suffered during some 60 years on earth to the joy of spending eternity in heaven with God, it becomes quite minor.

Because our thanksgiving does not depend on the circumstances, we are not at the mercy of the circumstances. I think this is what Paul was talking about when he said that he had learned how to be content in every situation (Philippians 4:12). You don’t look at the situation—you look at God. It is by this, also, that we can achieve “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding” (Philippians 4:7).

Our faith and hope also need to rise above our circumstances. Abraham “in hope believed” (Romans 4:18). All the circumstances gave Abraham reason to believe that he and Sarah could not have a child. But against that expectation based on the circumstances, Abraham set his hope, his confident expectation, based on God’s promise to him. He went past all the natural circumstances to believe God’s promise.

Whatever the circumstances, we need to believe that God is bigger than the circumstances, he will enable us to bear them, and he will bring us through them. Whatever the circumstances, we need to believe

that God will strengthen us with all power according to his glorious might, so that we may have great endurance and patience (Colossians 1:11).

In painful situations, many have found that it helps to focus on God. Jesus endured the Cross “for the joy that was set before him” (Hebrews 12:2). He looked at God’s power and his promise rather than looking at his own physical agony.

Stephen, while being stoned, had a vision of heaven with Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55-56). After Paul and Silas were beaten with rods and put in stocks in the inner prison, they prayed and sang hymns to God, and God moved mightily (Acts 16:25).

The Christian martyrs in the Roman arena sang hymns as they faced the wild beasts who were about to eat them. Since then, many other martyrs have faced their martyrdom with praise to God.

Let God Bring Good Out of the Situation

There is a further reason to focus on God rather than the circumstances. God works for good in all things, even in the most unlikely situations (Romans 8:28). Use praise, prayer, Scripture reading, reflecting on Scripture—whatever works for you—to draw closer to God and see things more from his perspective. Turn your situation over to him in prayer. Ask him to deal

with you and to show you anything he wants to show you about it.

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:8)

Be honest with God. He can handle anger, frustration, and even discouragement and despair. Job complained and got angry at God. And God spoke to him at length, revealed himself to him, and said that Job had “spoken of Me what is right” (Job 42:8).

David often complained and poured out his heart to God. And God called him “a man after my heart.” God does not mind hearing the distress and even anger of one who is genuinely seeking after him.

Remain Faithful to God

Job asked the question that many of us ask when suffering comes. He said,

“Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?” (Job 2:10)

Do we love God for what he gives us, or for who he is? Can we love him and serve him even in suffering? Even if he seems to have deserted us? Even if he seems not to answer our prayers?

In his great end-time prophecy, Jesus told the disciples that they would be persecuted and put to death. He said that many people would turn away from the faith, and the love of many would grow cold. (See Matthew 24:3-14.) Jesus ended by saying,

“But he who endures to the end shall be saved.”
(Matthew 24:13)

In each of the letters to the churches in the Book of Revelation, there is a promise of blessings to the one who overcomes. God has promised that we can be more than conquerors (Romans 8:37). “Whatever is born of God overcomes the world” (1 John 5:4)

God has made it possible to overcome pain and suffering, no matter how severe and prolonged.

May God bless us all as we seek to live according to His Word!

Trust

(By Frances Morrisson)

Suddenly the Everyday
is wrenched away.

Lord, please guard and grow
the fullness of my love and trust in You.

When all I know
is set afloat today,
pilot my boat and nudge me to
the harbor of the Narrow Way.

There let me find a clearer, newer view
where all that's upside down
resolves; makes sense;
steady in the light of love and Trust in You.

Blessed in the Crucible

(By Frances Morrisson)

O be blessed, by our Creator:

The One who stretched out the heavens by the breath of His
mouth;

and declared out of nothingness LIGHT! And all forms of LIFE!

the One who woos us beyond the Curse and our resistance;

the One who gives each life a glorious purpose.

O Lord:

You gave us hearts, and breath, minds and limbs

to welcome, and be nourished, by Your Love and Word;

to seek Your Wisdom, strength and Ways;

to carry Faith in Hope, to Your gates of Justice:

washed in Your Love, strengthened by Your Mercy.

O Lord:

How can we utter our praise high enough,

deep enough, with fullest joy in harmony?

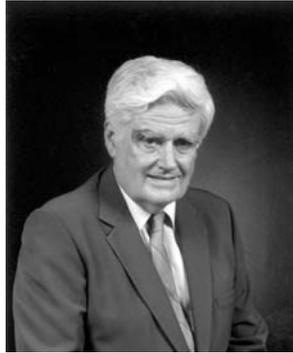
How can we murmur our love beautifully enough?

How can we bask peacefully enough in Your Presence?

How can we spread Your message clearly enough?

But these we try, blessed in the crucible of living Life.

About the Author



James Lord Morrisson was born in 1917. After graduating *magna cum-laude* from Harvard University, he attended Columbia University Law School, where he was editor-in-chief of the *Columbia Law Review*, and graduated with honors.

He then was law clerk to Chief Justice Stone of the U.S. Supreme Court. Justice Stone recommended him for the Operations Analysis Section of the Office of Strategic Services; and he served in the OSS in High Wycombe, England during World War II under the Eighth Air Force. While overseas he got to know some of the local people and played string quartets with them on a borrowed cello.

After the war, he served in the U.S. Office of the Solicitor General. He argued a number of cases in the U.S. Supreme Court and dealt with issues of major constitutional significance. As a federal attorney, he

served in several other capacities, including working directly with U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy.

After he retired from the U.S. Government, he taught a college course in government.

From his university years and on, he also pursued interests in music. As a baritone, he sang in operas, oratorios and song recitals in five languages; he also directed a choir and taught singing. As a cellist, he played string quartets informally with three other attorneys for many years and also played in a community symphony orchestra for several years.

In his sixties, he became a Christian and earned an M.A. in Biblical Studies. Scripture then became the focus of his studies.

He lived in Richmond, Virginia with his wife Frances, and died in April 2005 at age 88, shortly before their 64th anniversary. They have three children (Maria, Robert and Douglas); two grandsons (Matthew and Michael); and four great grandchildren.

About This Book

James Morrisson wrote *Standing Firm in the Faith: Finding God's Strength for Today's Challenging Times*. You can order it through book stores. You can also read the entire book at:

www.StandingFirmInTheFaith.com

Many Christians today are facing pain or hardship or difficult circumstances. As a result, our family decided to publish a shorter book, containing text from *Standing Firm in the Faith*. Its purpose is to help Christians deal with difficult circumstances in practical ways, using principles from Scripture.

James Morrisson died in 2005. Therefore, his family undertook this project on his behalf, knowing his desire to strengthen and encourage his brothers and sisters in Christ.

We excerpted relevant text from *Standing Firm in the Faith* and did some editing. So this is a family effort, in honor of James. We hope that it will be a blessing for Christians who are dealing with difficult circumstances.

The poems in *Dealing with Pain and Hardship* were written by James' wife Frances. You can read more of her poems in her book *Christian Reflections*

for Whosoever. You can order it through book stores.
You can also read the entire book at:

www.ChristianReflectionsForWhosoever.com