

THE PARABLE OF THE “KICKED PINECONE”!



By Ron Christian

Musings on the Significance of Life's Multiple Sufferings.

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1. AMIDST MULTIPLE HUMAN 'SUFFERINGS' CAN YOU REJOICE IN THE LIVING CHRIST?

One early morning, while I was resting, after I had run (jogged) my regular course of two miles, I looked down on the road, and there I viewed a perfectly-shaped 'pinecone'. This little pinecone appeared to be 'undisturbed' by any human being, or by any passing traffic. It was, to my 'sight', perfectly shaped, resting upright on its little 'base'. For some 'reason', instead of leaving the pinecone undisturbed, I decided to remove it from my 'jogging path', so I gave the pinecone a 'hard kick'! The beautifully-formed pinecone tumbled and twisted and turned (over and over – 'head over heels' as one might describe the 'pathetic' little pinecone)! What amazed me was this: when the pinecone 'came to rest' (after I roughly kicked it), the pinecone appeared to be in 'perfect shape' – resting on its 'proper base', looking as it did before I kicked it! No evidence of 'abuse' in its shape or form! I could hardly 'believe' what I saw – the little pinecone (in spite of my 'abuse' of it) appeared 'normal' (unruffled and radiant)!

I must 'admit' that, after I 'violently' kicked the little pinecone (needlessly and indifferently), I felt a little ashamed of myself! As I looked at the little pinecone, 'upright' in its 'stance' (a few feet from my shoe that had kicked it), it was (in my 'imagination') as if the 'defiant, little pinecone' said to me, "You have thoughtlessly 'kicked' me, needlessly 'abused me', treated me as 'worthless' – but I am determined that I will be 'resilient', 'strong', 'dignified', 'enduring', 'defiant', 'tough', and 'unruffled'! I will not allow any (cruel) human being to 'destroy' me or to 'ignore' me! I am a 'vital' part of the creation, and I will 'endure' the 'hits' and 'abuses' in this cruel world of indifference! I will maintain my own God-given 'dignity'. I may be 'small', and I may often be ignored (as an insignificant 'thing' in a vast world), but I will remain 'resilient', regardless of the mistreatment that I receive from the 'brutal forces of 'nature' (like the thoughtless 'kicking' of me from those 'large human beings' who approach me on their 'running courses'! Take notice how I 'landed' on my 'firm base' (upright and beautiful and uninjured), despite that 'rough kicking' by that uncaring 'jogger'!"

Even though the 'pinecone' was (obviously) an 'inanimate object', I have to admit that I felt a slight 'sense' of 'shame' that I failed to leave the 'little pinecone' undisturbed, as I was 'walking' (after my vigorous jogging)! I thought to myself, on that particularly beautiful early morning, "Why did I think it was necessary for me to 'kick' one of God's beautifully-formed 'pinecones'!"

After I needlessly 'kicked' that little 'pinecone', it seemed to me that the Creator of the pinecone (God Himself) 'spoke' to me, "Ron, this pinecone, which returned to its 'upright position' after you carelessly 'kicked' it, this pinecone is a 'parable' – a 'parable' that vividly teaches you to observe the amazing 'resilience' that many persons manifest when they (like the 'kicked pinecone') are 'insensitively persecuted' by 'God-haters', or when they are dealt hard 'blows' by life's countless trials and tests and losses and sorrows and hardships!"

After I observed the (surprisingly) 'upright' position of the 'kicked pinecone' I suddenly 'saw' the parallel between that 'resilient pinecone', and the 'amazing resilience' of the Apostle Paul, as well as the 'resilience' (endurance) of countless Christians throughout the history of the Church (during the last 20 centuries since the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth)! I thought of the Apostle

Paul – the one-time persecutor of Christianity who (following his remarkable conversion) suffered untold persecution for the sake of Christ! The one-time persecutor became (‘in the name of Jesus’) the persecuted one! Soon after his remarkable (dramatic) conversion, the Christ who appeared to Paul, told him that he was to become a ‘champion’ for the Gospel of salvation (repentance and faith)! Then Paul was told (warned) by God that he (as a follower of Christ) would ‘suffer greatly’ for the cause of Christ’s ‘Kingdom’!

Indeed, Paul (like the little ‘pinecone’) was often (during his long ministry as an apostle) ‘kicked’ by cruel persecutors! But, again like the ‘kicked pinecone’, Paul was “resilient” (steadfast, defiant, determined, unabashed, unashamed, courageous, undaunted, resolute) – in the ‘face of unbelievable persecution’ (all for the ‘sake of Christ’)!

The testimony (of resilience in the midst of trying circumstances) by the Apostle Paul is most amazing! Like the ‘kicked pinecone’, Paul received abuse, time and time again, and yet (by God’s grace, and because of his strong, unflinching loyalty to God) Paul endured the ‘kicking’ of cruel men, and the harshness of life’s circumstances – and Paul (like the ‘kicked pinecone’) ‘landed on his base’ (beautiful in his character and uncompromising in his ‘faith’)! Carefully read the following testimony of a man (the Apostle Paul) who never allowed adverse circumstances to ‘master’ him! In the midst of troublesome times, Paul was not a ‘mere stoical man’ (‘gritting his teeth’, and simply ‘bearing the pain’)! No, Paul was very ‘human’, and he knew that his victory over trials and tests and persecutions was due to the fact that God’s (unmerited) grace empowered and sustained him while he was enduring the ‘furnace of afflictions’! Following is the testimony of a courageous and humble ‘servant of God’ – a ‘servant’ who suffered greatly for the ‘cause’ of his Lord.

But this precious treasure – this light and power that now shines within us – is held in a perishable container, that is, in our weak bodies. Everyone can see that the glorious power within must be from God and is not our own.

We are pressed on every side by troubles, but not crushed and broken. We are perplexed because we don’t know why things happen as they do, but we don’t give up and quit. We are hunted down, but God never abandons us. We get knocked down, but we get up again and keep going. These bodies of ours are constantly facing death just as Jesus did; so it is clear to all that is only the living Christ within [who keeps us safe].

Yes, we live under constant danger to our lives because we serve the Lord, but this give us constant opportunities to show forth the power of Jesus Christ within our dying bodies. Because of our preaching we face death, but it has resulted in eternal life for you.

That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our inner strength in the Lord is growing every day. These troubles and sufferings of ours are, after all, quite small and won’t last very long. Yet this short time of distress will result in God’s richest blessing upon us forever and ever. So we do not look at what we can see right now, the trouble all around us, but we look forward to the joys of heaven which we have not yet seen. The troubles will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever. (2 Corinthians 4:7-12, 16-18; Living Bible)

Countless are the numbers of Christ-followers who, like the Apostle Paul, have suffered untold pain and loss and grief and tragedies and persecutions – and, ‘through all these horrible ordeals’, have remained ‘true to the Lord’ (resilient as they have been – like the pinecone – ‘kicked’ and

‘kicked’ and ‘kicked’!)! Noble are these many ‘souls’ who have ‘faced the worst’ and who have, nevertheless, ‘kept the faith’ and ‘returned’ to their ‘base’ (just like the ‘kicked pinecone’)! In spite of the fierce ‘storm winds’, these noble souls have maintained their steadfastness! Why? Because (like Jesus’ parable teaches in Matthew 7), these God-serving persons have ‘built their house/life on the solid rock’! That ‘Rock’ is Jesus! “My life is built on Jesus’ blood and on His own ‘borrowed righteousness’!

Yes, because the Master (Jesus Christ) suffered (maximally), His servants can expect to suffer also! But, as in the ‘case’ of Paul, God’s grace is sufficient to sustain the ‘suffering servants’ – at all times, under any circumstance! Through Christ, those who are ‘kicked’ by savage and brutal persecutors, those noble souls can endure anything! Like the ‘kicked pinecone’, the ‘kicked ones’ can ultimately (maybe even quickly) ‘return to their base’ (still beautiful and erect and ‘dignified’ and ‘confident’)!

Where sin abounds and where sinners persecute, God’s grace super-abounds! “Faith in the conquering Christ delivers victory to the persecuted Christ-follower!” God (temporarily) allows His children to ‘suffer’ for ‘righteousness sake’ – but God’s children are promised that they will eventually be “more than conquerors”! During the believer’s temptations, God has promised that He (the Lord of Mercy) will “make a way of escape”! Christians may (will) experience much ‘tumbling’ (caused by the cruel ‘kicking’ of unbelievers), but these persecuted Christians will eventually “find a resting place” (a solid, beautiful ‘base’ – like the ‘kicked pinecone’)!

Using the ‘word picture’ (analogy) of the ‘kicked pinecone’, we can state the ‘fact’ that the Apostle Paul (the one-time vicious persecutor of Christians) was ‘kicked’ and ‘kicked’ and ‘kicked’ by his God-hating enemies (enemies of the ‘Gospel of Grace’)! Whether it was outright Christ-rejecters, or whether it was Jewish ‘legalists’, or whether it was the one-time believers who became troublesome and disloyal ‘back-sliders’ (apostates), or whether it was the ‘wretched’ circumstances which became a familiar part of his perilous missionary journeys – Paul often became the ‘victim’ of cruel ‘kickings’! Like the tumbling (‘kicked’) little pinecone, the events and circumstances of Paul’s daily life (living) were uncertain and unpredictable and perilous! He endured great physical suffering for the cause of his Lord and Savior (even literal ‘beatings’ from angry mobs – mobs who hated every word that Paul spoke regarding the God of grace, whose love was demonstrated when Christ died and rose again)! Paul was ‘tracked down’ like one (a hunter) would ‘track down’ a ‘wild animal’! His ‘enemies’ (namely, the ‘enemies’ of the ‘Gospel of Christ’) were defiant, aggressive, merciless! Added to all of these ‘external enemies’, Paul experienced his own “thorn in the flesh” (apparently some sort of painful physical affliction)! Paul also daily felt the ‘burden’ due to his deep concern for the believers in the several new local churches that he had personal ‘founded’!

Paul well knew what the ‘burdens and cares and sorrows and pains’ of daily life were all about! But, through it all, Paul remained ‘true and faithful’ to his Lord! In spite of his great sufferings, Paul maintained his strong hope and confidence and even joy!

Yes, it is a well-known ‘fact’ (historical account) that the Apostle Paul was no ‘stranger’ to trouble – external forces of ‘evil’, internal forces of physical pain, ecclesiastical pressures from

his several (newly-founded) churches! Carefully read his own ‘personal account’ (summary) of his multiple ‘troubles’.

We patiently endure suffering and hardship and trouble of every kind. We have been beaten, put in jail, faced angry mobs, worked to exhaustion, stayed awake through sleepless nights of watching, and gone without food. We have proved ourselves to be what we claim by our wholesome lives and by our understanding of the Gospel and by our patience. We have been kind and truly loving and filled with the Holy Spirit. We have been truthful, with God’s power helping us in all we do. All of the godly man’s arsenal – weapons of defense, and weapons of attack – have been ours.

We stand true to the Lord whether others honor us or despise us, whether they criticize us or commend us. We are honest, but they call us liars.

The world ignores us, but we are known to God; we live close to death, but here we are, still very much alive. We have been injured but kept from death. Our hearts ache, but at the same time we have the joy of the Lord. We are poor, but we give rich spiritual gifts to others. We own nothing, and yet we enjoy everything.

Oh, my dear Corinthian friends! I have told you all my feelings; I love you with all my heart. Any coldness still between us is not because of any lack of love on my part, but because your love is too small and does not reach out to me and draw me in. I am talking to you now as if you truly were my very own children. Open your hearts to us! Return our love! (2 Corinthians 6:4-13; Living Bible)

Reading the above-stated ‘account’ of Paul’s multiple trials and troubles, one could quickly declare that he was the ‘victim’ of ‘cruel fate’, ‘unfair treatment’, ‘unjust dealings’, ‘arbitrary happenings’, ‘uncontrolled events’, ‘mob-rule’! But, in spite of every troublesome circumstance (cruel ‘kickings’), experienced by this unusual follower of Christ, it must be declared (as Paul himself exuberantly and boldly stated) that this Apostle was a not ‘victim’ of cruel fate; rather, this Apostle was a ‘victor’ through the living Christ! “More than a conqueror” over every obstacle and threat and pressure (including cruel persecutions)! Paul, in spite of harsh circumstances, was a ‘winner’ (who finally received the ‘crown of life’)!

Paul, who was at one time a ‘man of the Jewish Law’, was converted by the Living Christ, and henceforth, Paul was ‘lost in wonder, love, and praise’ as he proclaimed the ‘Gospel of Christ’s grace’! The following is the summary account of Paul’s testimony (of Christ’s soul-saving grace).

But all these things that I once thought very worthwhile – now I’ve thrown them all away so that I can put my trust and hope in Christ alone. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have put aside all else, counting it worth less than nothing, in order that I can have Christ, and become one with him, no longer counting on being good enough by obeying God’s laws, but by trusting Christ to save me; for God’s way of making us right with himself depends on faith – counting on Christ alone. Now I have given up everything else – I have found it to be the only way to really know Christ and to experience the mighty power that brought him back to life again, and to find out what it means to suffer and to die with him. So, whatever it takes, I will be one who lives in the fresh newness of life of those who are alive from the dead.

I don't mean to say I am perfect. I haven't learned all I should even yet, but I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ saved me for and wants me to be.

No, dear brothers, I am still not all I should be but I am bringing all my energies to bear on this one thing: forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God is calling us up to heaven because of what Christ Jesus did for us. (Philippians 3:7-14; Living Bible)

Using (again) the 'word picture' (analogy) of the 'kicked pinecone', we can state the fact that, just as the 'kicked pinecone' found its 'solid base' (after being 'tumbled' and 'kicked'), so the great Apostle Paul experienced the 'solid base' of Christ Jesus – in spite of the fact of his being 'kicked' and 'kicked' and 'kicked' – during his tumultuous life and Christian ministry! Paul was 'more than a conqueror' – even when he was 'kicked'!

2. EXPERIENCING THE GRACE OF GOD!

It is true that 'humans' are 'unique creatures', because humans are 'creatures' that are made in the 'image of God'. We are 'fallen creatures', affected by sin in every part of our lives. Our 'minds' are beclouded; thus we fail accurately to discern the 'reality' of our world! Our 'emotions' are affected; thus we tend to desire what we ought not, and we fail to desire what we ought to desire! Our 'will' is weakened; thus we are unable to choose the 'right' and refuse the 'wrong'!

Even though these persons (unbelievers) feel the devastating effects of sin in their lives, they are, nevertheless, the objects of God's love, and they are the recipients of God's grace.

Humans are the recipients of God's 'general revelation'. To the sincere unbeliever (i.e., to the one who is in a 'spiritual quest') God imparts a certain degree of His grace! God's grace (His enabling power) is sufficient for the sinner to 'think some objective thoughts', to 'feel some genuine compassion', and to make some unselfish decisions

This type of grace towards sinners (the grace that touches the mind, and the emotions, and the will of a sinner) – this grace has a special 'name'! It is called 'prevenient grace' – the 'preliminary grace' of God that seeks to prepare a sinner for the powerful 'saving grace' of God!

God initiates His call of love to the sinner, to prepare the mind, and the emotions, and the will of the sinner, so that the sinner will have the ability to respond to God's offer of salvation!

The kindness of God 'touches' the mind and the heart and the will of the sinner, and God seeks to persuade the sinner to make a major change in his life. God (Holy Spirit) offers the gift of 'repentance' and the gift of 'saving faith', and the Spirit (without 'forcing his will') urges the sinner to accept these all-important 'gifts' for the guarantee of salvation! When those 'gifts' are accepted and activated, the recipient (sinner) experiences new life in Christ!

The one who is 'born again' (through repentance and faith) is the one who enjoys new life in Christ! The 'old things' have passed away, and behold, all things have become 'new in Christ'!

The mind of the sinner is renewed, the emotions of the sinner are healed, and the will of the sinner is empowered (through personal 'surrender') to follow Christ's will!

How does this 'divine transformation' change the way a person faces life, and the way a person faces circumstances with its various trials and tragedies? In significant ways that come to a 'surrendered person' – both gradually and spontaneously!

3. EXPERIENCING 'TEARS OF REPENTANCE'!

When is it 'good' (proper and beneficial) to shed 'tears'? The Bible declares that the most important 'tears' that human beings can shed, are the 'tears of repentance'! The Bible says that 'godly sorrow works repentance'. The 'tears of repentance' express the kind of sorrow that leads to forgiveness and to personal salvation!

When God awakens a sinner to the reality of his sins, and to the seriousness of his lost condition, the 'proper' response to that disconcerting 'vision' of himself and of his sinful condition is a deep sorrow issuing forth in tears of repentance and of utterances of confessions!

For a sinner to see what 'sin' is (namely, rebellion against God's Holy Laws), and for a sinner to see what the deserved 'penalty' for sin is (eternal death), there will be an inner 'fear', and an inner 'humility of heart', and an inner 'contrition of spirit', and a 'release of tears'! Godly sorrow (the evidence of genuine repentance) results in God's forgiveness, in God's reconciliation with the sinner!

The Bible talks about another type of sorrow (a sorrow that probably is also accomplished with tears). The Bible calls this type of 'sorrow', a 'worldly sorrow'! The Bible says that this type of 'sorrow' leads, not to 'life', but to 'death'. Whatever may be the 'full explanation', I am sure of one thing: 'worldly sorrow' (unlike 'godly sorrow') does not lead one to 'repentance' (that is, it does not lead one to a turning away from a life of sinning)!

The man of the world (i.e., the rebellious person) may sometimes 'shed tears', but his 'tears' are 'tears of regret' or 'tears of remorse' or 'tears of anger', or possibly even 'sentimental tears' associated with 'religious observance'.

Persons (sinners) who accept the 'awakening ministry' of the Holy Spirit are those who, at first, are filled with 'regrets' and 'remorse'. Such persons (sinners) have 'regrets' that they (years before in their lives) chose the way of the 'flesh' rather than the way of the 'spirit'.

They 'regret' that they have wasted so many of their years in the 'pig pen' in the 'far country', when they could have (should have) been living their last many years in the 'Father's nurturing house'. That knowledge of what 'could have been', in contrast to what has been (wicked living), gives them a sense of 'regret' (deep sorrow)!

The 'regrets' lead to a feeling of deep 'remorse', deep sorrow because of 'lost opportunity'! Remorse that 'life has passed them by', and that their past years were wasted years, years that were lived for the devil, rather than years that were lived for the blessed Savior!

Repentance is an all-important ‘step’ that one must take, if he/she is to find a vital relationship with Almighty God! Repentance is changing one’s direction, from one of ‘embracing sin’ to one of ‘embracing the righteousness of Christ’!

Repentance is a ‘moral U-turn’, a change from the ‘way of one’s flesh’ (fleshly living), to the ‘way of the Spirit’ (Holy Living)! Tears of repentance, that lead one to the ‘foot of the Cross’, where confession (acknowledgment) of sins is made. “If we confess our sins, He (Christ) is able and willing to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness!” (1 John 1:9)

Repentance is the ‘turn of the will’ from self-centered living, to a life that is centered in God. ‘Tears’ that bring a person (sinner) to the ‘arms of God’s mercy’ are ‘tears’ that are God-honoring and have ‘eternal significance’! The Bible indicates that sinners are to ‘feel very bad’ about their sins, for sins are what ‘crucified the Son of God’ on a cruel cross.

4. IS ‘SIN’ REALLY THAT HORRIBLE?

Even though we (modern-day persons) were not actually present when Jesus was crucified, the sins that put Jesus on the Cross then, are the same sins that dwell in our own hearts. So, in that sense, your sins and my sins helped ‘crucify’ Jesus Christ! We, along with the ancient Jews and the Romans who crucified Jesus, are ‘guilty’ of killing the most pure and innocent person in the universe!

My ‘jealousy’ and my ‘bitterness’, along with the ‘jealousy’ and the ‘bitterness’ of the ancient ones, helped ‘crucify’ the Lord of Life, the King of Kings, the innocent rabbi from Galilee! When we look (honestly) at the Cross, we should ‘see’ the sheer ‘terror’ and the great horror of Sin. It was Sin that crucified Jesus Christ – your sin and my sin, and the sin of every human who has ever lived!

5. HOW CAN I ADEQUATELY DEAL WITH ALL OF MY SINS?

After ‘looking’ at the agony of the ‘Crucified One’, we should have a ‘greater hatred for sin’ – as we personally experience sin and as we see it visibly all around us! We should want to ‘forsake’ sin in our own lives, and we should seek to avoid sin, at ‘any cost’. When we sin, we should want quickly to confess to our Advocate (Jesus Christ, the Righteous one), and we should ask the Spirit to give us a daily awareness of temptation, and the strength to ‘turn our back’ on all sin!

When we ‘look’ honestly at the Cross of Jesus, these are the appropriate responses! Also, we should be ‘lost in wonder, love, and praise’ because we serve a God who loved us so deeply that He was willing to give Himself as a ‘substitute’ (sacrifice) for our sins. “Greater love can no man have, than a man (Jesus) should lay down His life for His friends (and for His enemies)!”

According to the Bible (the Book of James), when we look at that ‘Old Rugged Cross’ we should ‘weep and wail’ because of our sins! A deep ‘regret’ and ‘remorse’ and ‘repentance’ because of the way we have been living (i.e., a rebellious life of disobedience against God’s holy laws, and a life that has ‘Broken the Heart of God’)!

‘Sin’ is both a violation against the ‘Laws of God’ and a violation against the ‘Love of God’! When we break the Laws of God that is tragic enough, but, worst of all, sin breaks the Heart of God – the greatest tragedy of all. We human beings are sinners, but (tragically) sin destroys that love relationship with God – the very relationship which gives meaning to one’s life and which realizes the very purpose for which humans are created.

Godly sorrow first, and then grateful trust! ‘Turning from sin’, repentance, and then quickly turning towards the Savior (Faith). Repentance and Faith take place almost simultaneously. Not quite, for repentance is what quickly leads to faith.

When I am heart-sick, sorrowful regarding my sins, I turn from my sinful lifestyle. Almost immediately, after I make the ‘moral U-turn’ (repentance), I turn (in trust and in faith and in commitment) to the ‘Living Savior’! The purpose of repentance is not simply to ‘turn away’ from a godless lifestyle, but the ‘Act of Repentance’ is meant (naturally) to lead me quickly and decisively to the only One who can ‘save’ me.

Repentance without surrender to the Savior is, of course, incomplete. The two steps must work ‘hand in hand’ if a sinner is to experience the ‘forgiveness of sins’. Only Christ can forgive me of my sins, and it is only as I ‘turn to Him’ for that needed forgiveness that I will actually ‘step into a new life’ (a life of regeneration and reconciliation and justification)!

I must ‘weep and howl’ because of my wretched life, and I must allow my weeping to carry me to the ‘Foot of the Cross’ where I confess all my sins to the ‘Forgiving Savior’! When I do this, I am meeting the ‘conditions’ that bring me a wonderful ‘new life’. “If anyone be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creation; the old life has passed away, and behold, all things are become new!”

Simply stated, ‘repentance’ and ‘faith’ are the two all-important (non-negotiable) ‘steps’ that must be taken, if a person (sinner) is to ‘enter the Kingdom of God’ (to become ‘Born Again’, to become a ‘True Christian’)! “Could my tears forever flow, Thou must save and Thou alone”! Tears that do not lead one to Christ are needless tears! Tears are precious and valuable only if they lead a sinner to confess his sins to the Savior! The ‘tears’ of repentance (godly sorrow) are the most important ‘tears’ that can ever be shed!

6. HAVE YOUR CHEEKS BEEN ‘WET’ WITH THE TEARS OF GREAT SORROWS?

Following the ‘tears of repentance’ (the most important ‘tears’), a believer will shed many other types of tears, throughout his long life. Even the believer, who seldom reveals ‘tears’ on his ‘cheeks’, will, at time of loss and grief in his life, shed many ‘inward tears’. In the ‘rough and tumble’ of life, which inevitably renders many kinds of losses and sorrows to everyone, the ‘inner reservoir of tears’ will sometimes overflow!

If the tears do not ‘flow down our cheeks’, they surely will ‘flow down our heart’! No one (saint or sinner) can get through this life without knowing, to one degree or another, the ‘sharp ‘pangs’ of sorrow and loss! No one in this ‘fallen world’ is immune to ‘heart-shattering’ loss, of one kind or another, to one degree or another. That is just the way it is, if we live on this planet!

Jesus said that it “rains on the just and the unjust”! Jesus was, Himself, a “man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief”. There was no human being (and Jesus was fully human, as well as fully divine), I say, there was no one on this planet who suffered more than Jesus Christ. Therefore, He understands our sorrows, and He sees our ‘tears’! He is the ‘sympathizing Christ’!

7. DOES JESUS UNDERSTAND THE ‘HEARTBREAK OF MY LIFE’?

There is no sorrow that you ‘feel’, but what Jesus also ‘feels’ that pain with you! For every loss (tragedy) that you experience on earth (i.e., the tragedies that defy reason, the losses that have come to you as the result of another’s unjust treatment of you) – I say, there are no losses that you experience but what God will (in eternity) ‘compensate’ you.

God will never be ‘indebt’ to any of His children. Eventually, and wonderfully, Jesus will ‘make it up to you’. In eternity, God will ‘redress’ all of your ‘losses’ on earth.

Because God is a ‘perfectly just’ God, He will see to it that all unjust treatment (on earth) will be vindicated (in eternity). God loves you with an everlasting love, and that love will be demonstrated (applied) in ways that are most wonderful (complete) in eternity. Suffering that seems senseless here on earth, will (in God’s own timing) be explained in eternity.

It is God’s will that we ‘use’ all suffering while we live on this planet (even though some of the suffering seems senseless and unnecessary), and ‘by and by’ in eternity God will give a complete and understandable ‘reason’ for the suffering.

8. CHRIST’S PROMISED ‘VICTORY’ OVER ALL ‘EVIL AND SUFFERING’!

There is no one who ‘hates’ suffering more than Jesus Christ, and He will totally eliminate all suffering in eternity. But, because everyone (including Christians) presently lives on a planet that is terribly affected by the original ‘fall’ of mankind, everyone must (temporarily) ‘endure’ the suffering (of many kinds) that is the direct result of that ‘fall’. Christ came to ‘destroy’ sin, suffering, death and the devil.

The victory over those ‘enemies’ has been guaranteed by God, because of the ‘finished work’ of Christ on the Cross, but the ‘guaranteed’ victory (because of Christ’s “It is finished”) won’t be ‘sealed’ (totally manifested) until Christ returns to this ‘redeemed planet’.

In the meantime, the Holy Spirit has been given as a gift from God, in order that the ‘victory’ over sin (in this present world) can become a reality in the hearts and lives of all human beings (sinners). “Sin abounds (in this fallen world), but grace super-abounds” (in this fallen world, all because of the ‘finished work’ of Christ).

When Jesus said (on His cross), “It is finished”, He meant that the ‘wicked one’ (Satan) had been defeated. His evil work will continue for a while, but his destiny (in the Lake of Fire) is sure and certain.

When Jesus died that day, Jesus signed the ‘death warrant’ for Satan. He is a ‘defeated foe’, all because of Jesus’ sacrifice for sin. No person need, any longer, be his ‘slave of sin’! Jesus, by His death and resurrection, was able to declare Satan’s day of ‘execution’!

While Satan is still ‘on the loose’, doing great damage to the ‘sons of men’, it may seem that Satan is not defeated, but, nevertheless, the devil has totally lost, and Christ has totally won. It is simply a ‘matter of time’ until the total defeat of Satan will be manifest, and then the total victory of Christ will be revealed and consummated! Christ has ‘said’ it, and that ‘settles’ it! No debate! Christ meant what He said (from the Cross): “It is finished!” Not ‘will be finished’! “It is finished!” Christ can do no more than what He has already done – the ‘innocent’ one dying for the ‘guilty’ ones! Christ will make a complete elimination of sin, suffering, death, and the devil.

The victory has been ‘purchased’ decisively by the ‘Great Conqueror’ – the Lord Jesus Christ! All things, in heaven and on earth, have been placed under Christ’s feet! Satan is a ‘defeated foe’, and some wonderful day Satan will be a ‘destroyed foe’!

No more will Satan be able to ‘take out his bitterness’ against mankind! By ‘right’ of creation, and by ‘right’ of Christ’s redemption, humans belong alone to Christ! Christ is in the process of ‘claiming’ what rightfully belongs to Him.

The ‘plan of salvation’, when willingly accepted by humans, means forgiveness of sins, cleansing from ‘heart pollution’, reconciliation of all relationships, strength for living abundantly, renewal and healing of the body on earth, and final redemption of the body in eternity! Jesus’ sinless life, Jesus’ sacrificial death, Jesus’ victorious bodily resurrection, and Jesus’ glorious ascension – these facts regarding Jesus spell ‘total’ victory over sin, suffering, death, and the devil.

Sin can be forgiven; suffering can become redemptive here on earth with the promise of an eventual ‘new body’ in eternity; death becomes the open door into Christ’s nearer presence; and the devil will meet his final destiny in the ‘lake of fire’! All of the believer’s ‘enemies’ (sin, suffering, death, and the devil) will be destroyed, in God’s own way, and in God’s own time! “What a Friend we have in Jesus!”

9. SHOULD I EXPECT BOTH ‘SUNSHINE’ AND ‘RAIN’ IN MY LIFE?

As believers, we are taught to look for ‘choice fruit’ while we are ‘living in the valley of adversity’, that is, we as believers are to allow God to bring about some kind of ‘good’ (benefit) because of the adversity that we are enduring. James (in the New Testament) says that we are ‘to count it all joy when we experience trial of many kinds’, for these trials enable us, through the imparted wisdom of God, to grow in our Christian life – to become more mature in our ‘journey of life’.

No one should deliberately ‘invite’ trials to come into his life, but, on the other hand, we need to remember that, as much as we ‘hate’ the trials and the temptations and the tests that come into our life, it is during the difficult times that we can ‘learn the most’ and that we can ‘grow the greatest’. Again, remember, it is in the ‘valley’ (the rich soil of adversity) where the ‘lush fruit’

(of the Spirit) best grows. On the ‘mountain top’ (of ‘airy happiness’) there are a lot of ‘bare rocks’ and ‘little fruit’!

The top of the mountain is a place it is ‘fun’ to be, but, nevertheless, it is a place where little ‘fruit’ can be grown. God will allow us to enjoy many mountaintop ‘experiences’. It is acceptable to God if we ‘relish’ those ‘mountaintop’ experiences (when in our lives, all seems to be ‘perfect’ in terms of prosperous circumstances).

God expects us to be ‘thankful’ for the ‘happy times’, the ‘times’ when we seem to be free from life’s ‘aches’ and ‘pains’. But during those times, when we are enjoying the ‘warm sunshine’ of life’s prizes and pleasures, with no ‘storm clouds’ in view, we must remember that God is the One who is ‘sovereign’ of all ‘events’ of our lives. He is the One who, according to His ‘mysterious ways’, allows (and sometimes directly ‘sends’) both ‘sunshine’ and ‘rain’ into our lives. He knows the ‘proper’ (needed) ‘blend’ for each of us. He knows how much ‘sunshine’ we need, and He knows how much ‘rain’ we need in our lives – and both are maximizing our total growth (mentally and spiritually). Jesus, who made each of us, is the ‘Master of Life’. He knows each of us perfectly. God knows everything there is to know about each of us. God, who knows us best, loves us best!

The Bible says (regarding the temptations that each of us face), that He stands ‘guard’ over us when we must ‘suffer being tempted’. Why does Jesus (God in human form) understand? Because Jesus was tempted in all the ways that we are tempted, and yet (of course) Jesus never once sinned. Jesus knows, and He understands, and He cares for each of us!

10. IF THE MASTER WEEPS WON’T HIS SERVANTS ALSO WEEP?

Does God weep? If persons (including believers) are everywhere ‘weeping’, I know that God (who loves humanity with an eternal love) is also weeping alongside the weeping men and women and boys and girls and teenagers! There is not a sorrow that God does not share! Why is there so much weeping? Simply because humans live in a ‘tangled and twisted and broken world’. As a member of a ‘fallen race’ both sinners and saints will inevitably ‘weep’. That is an integral part of this world!

No human being can escape the trials and the tests and the temptations that compose the ‘stuff of this world’. The servant is not greater than his Master! Jesus wept! Jesus suffered persecution. Jesus wept because of the hardened hearts of unrepentant leaders (scribes and Pharisees). For many different reasons, Christians will weep, but, for certain, no Christian is excluded from experiencing (at times) a ‘Broken Heart’.

As noted previously, that which makes God weep the most is the unrepentant hearts of sinners! It was the unrepentant condition of the Jewish people that caused Jesus to weep – as He looked over the City of Jerusalem!

11. DO YOUR TEARS FLOW FOR THE SUFFERING OF OTHER PERSONS?

The ‘tears’ from personal experience, and the ‘tears’ of empathy for others – either way, ‘tears’ are evidence that the heart is deeply ‘hurt’! When one feels ‘pain’ for others (sympathy), that pain can be deeply felt, but, of course, one (as an outsider) cannot feel the ‘pain’ at the same level as the person who is personally ‘feeling the blow of cruel fate’! Only the one who is going through the ‘ordeal’ can fully understand the depth of the pain that he/she is enduring. One of my divorced daughters, who had confided numerous times with her caring mother regarding the ‘suffering’ that she had experienced during the last five years, said to her mother, “Mom, you have never been through divorce, and therefore, you don’t understand how it feels!”

Only the person who has personally gone through the ‘horror of divorce’ can be ‘empathetic’ (i.e., have in-depth feelings for a suffering one). The mother of my daughter definitely ‘feels’ deeply for her daughter, but she cannot express ‘empathy’, she can only express ‘sympathy’. Yet our Lord Jesus Christ was tempted (tested) in all the same points we are tempted. Therefore, Christ Jesus can give us true ‘empathy’!

12. LOWER ‘OCTANE’ SUFFERING OR ‘HIGH OCTANE’ SUFFERING?

Sometimes the use of ‘word pictures’ facilitate in making proper distinctions and differentiations when one observes the wide range of experiences in life that entail ‘suffering’. There are, obviously, different ‘kinds’ of suffering, and different ‘degrees’ of suffering, and different ‘consequences’ from suffering. The following are simple ‘word pictures’ that possibly will help make some distinctions, as we observe several ‘cases’ (incidents) of suffering – namely, ‘High Octane Suffering’, and ‘Lower Octane Suffering’.

The ‘High Octane’ stories of suffering are those situations in which there were ‘grave elements’ involved – and in these ‘situations of sorrow’ the consequences (outcomes) brought long-lasting or even permanent affects.

From ancient history, David’s adulterous affair (although forgiven) was a ‘high octane’ suffering, because the consequences from his ‘suffering’ were long-lasting, and even permanent (because of the rape of his daughter and because of the death of two of his sons)! (Remember: the nails can be pulled out of the board of one’s life – forgiveness can be granted – but the nail holes – consequences – remain!)

From contemporary times (1992) a man (one of my parishioners) was insanely jealous because of his departing wife, and (on the parking lot of my church) he shot and killed his wife (in my presence and in the presence of 10 other parishioners), then immediately this murderous husband was shot by an off-duty policeman (and this husband later that day passed away at the hospital)! This is ‘High Octane’ suffering! Permanent consequences!

Are you willing to ‘pay the price’ to live a life of love – real love? Lives that are ‘given away’ to lift up the fallen, to encourage the discouraged, to give hope to the hopeless, to give companionship to the lonely, to give direction to the confused, to pray for the sin-bound person, to give a loaf of bread to the hungry, to lead the lost ones to the ‘foot of the Cross of Christ’ to find forgiveness and new life?

As believers, we are called to ‘weep with those who weep’, to lift the fallen ones. What is important to notice, when considering the various ‘accounts’ of adversity, is not the time when an episode happened, or the specific ‘locale’ where the episode of suffering happened (while those two things are interesting). What is ‘essential’, when making observation of ‘cases’ of suffering, is to see the ‘Hand of God’ that rescues, that saves, that delivers, that heals, and that blesses those who have found themselves in the ‘vice’ of pain and grief.

It is legitimate for one to ask, when he/she is going through the ‘valley of suffering’, “Does Jesus care when I’ve said goodbye to the dearest on earth to me?” Does Jesus really care when loneliness haunts me, day and night? Can Jesus wipe away my stream of tears?

13. DOES JESUS CARE WHEN I SUFFER?

Does Jesus care when I can’t get to sleep at night, because of my ‘searing pain’? Does Jesus care when I am engrossed in self-pity, when I can’t stop crying after the funeral service for my wife? Because my ‘eyes’ are red with ‘tear stains’, I want to be alone. I don’t want to see anyone, even my closest friends. I am embarrassed for even my family to see me in the pitiful condition that I find myself in! Why can’t I quickly ‘get over’ my sadness and the heaviness in my ‘chest’? Will I ever be ‘normal’ again? Why is it so difficult for me to ‘receive’ my healing from God whom I have earnestly sought? Is it because I simply lack the necessary ‘faith’ and ‘trust’ in God?

Does Jesus care when my wife suddenly loses her ‘mental faculties’, and consequently, I must retire from my teaching position at my seminary where I have taught for the last 20 years! Does Jesus care that, because of her debilitating disease, I must take care of her in my home for the remainder of her life?

Does Jesus care when I am enduring the shame and the grief, because of my inability to find a job? Does Jesus understand the ‘pain’ that I endure when I must apply over and over for a job, with no success?

Does Jesus care when I feel that there are ‘daggers’ being thrust into my heart, because someone I have known for many years, has ‘turned against me’, a one-time friend who now is ‘falsely accusing’ me of ‘sexual abuse’! Horror of horrors, this ‘friend’, who has falsely accused me, has actually taken me to ‘court’! Does Jesus care?

Does Jesus care when I have tried ‘over and over’ to resist my ‘cravings for alcohol’ (my temptation not made any ‘easier’ when my friends often offer me ‘social drinks’)?

Does Jesus care when my anticipated retirement income has been suddenly, and substantially, reduced, and I have no idea what I am going to do during my ‘senior years’ to supplement my income?

Does Jesus care when my wife suddenly dies, and, as a result, I am left to raise ‘small children’, and when I am (admittedly) left alone and without the knowledge that her skills provided during our happy marriage (food, finances, friends, family, and fun)?

Does Jesus care when my one-time ‘good health’ suddenly turns to ‘poor health’, because of an unexpected and an incurable physical disease? Does Jesus care that, with this incurable disease, I am facing ‘astronomical medical bills’, let alone, the mounting ‘fears’; that I feel as I face the ‘unknown future’ that ultimately will bring me to my impending, and perhaps, ‘painful ‘death’?

14. DOES GOD REALLY ‘BOTTLE UP OUR TEARS’?

There is a ‘curious’ verse in the Bible, a verse that declares that God will “bottle up our tears”! What does this verse mean? Of course, I am not sure, but I love the ‘word picture’ that describes God’s compassionate treatment of His children! Does this verse mean that there is never a ‘tear’ that we shed but what God knows and cares about that ‘tear’? Does it mean that God preserves all our ‘tears’? The Bible says that God does not ‘despise’ a ‘broken and a contrite heart’.

I believe that tears that come from a heart of deep repentance and genuine humility, God ‘bottles up’, i.e., God keeps ‘account’ of those tears! “Could my tears forever flow’ thou must save and thou alone!”

The shedding of tears is the outward sign of inward repentance, and those tears are precious, for those tears are an indication that the repentant one (a sinner) desires for God to save him! Tears that are shed because I have carefully observed my ‘sinful condition’ (through the ministry of the Holy Spirit) are very precious in the sight of God!

My willingness to accept the ‘awakening ‘ministry’ of the Spirit, results in my mind becoming opened to truth, and in my heart becoming broken with sorrow for my sins. The shedding of my tears, because of ‘viewing’ the horror of my sinful lifestyle (and ‘viewing’ the breaking of the heart of God because of my sinful lifestyle) – these ‘tears of repentance’ are most precious in the sight of Almighty God!

15. ARE THE ‘TEARS OF REPENTANCE’ IMPORTANT TO GOD?

Perhaps there are many different ‘kinds of tears’ that God values so much that He desires to save those ‘tears’ (as it were, in a ‘bottle’)! But surely, the ‘tears of repentance’ are most important to God! Surely, God would want to keep the ‘tears of repentance’ in a special bottle, especially visible for all the angels to view! Remember what the Bible reveals about the angels: There is great rejoicing by the angels in heaven, when one sinner comes to repentance!

The ‘tears of repentance’, contained in special bottles, demonstrate to the heavenly host of angels that a ‘sinner has repented’ and that the ‘name of a new convert’ has been entered in the ‘Lamb’s Book of Life’!

God not only (apparently) has a large inventory of ‘bottles with tears contained in them’, but God also has a ‘giant book’ in which are recorded all the names of those who are ‘followers of the living God’!

If you have truly repented of your sins, than God surely must have your ‘tears of repentance’ contained in a ‘special bottle’ labeled with your name (in His massive inventory)! From the

account of Scripture, we know that, if you are a ‘true believer’, your name is (wonderfully) ‘recorded in the Lamb’s Book of Life’!

The Bible speaks both of a ‘bottle’ where tears are contained and of a Book in which is recorded the names of those who are ‘true believers’! Often, of course, the Bible seeks to communicate ‘eternal truths’ using ‘word pictures’ (metaphors) and parables. Jesus often taught eternal truths using parables.

16. HEALING FROM A ‘BROKEN AND CONTRITE SPIRIT’!

The ‘tears’ of repentance from sin, and the ‘tears of surrender to Christ – these intermingled ‘tears’ usher the sinner into the ‘family of God’! ‘Godly sorrow’ brings forth health and wholeness! “Worldly sorrow’ is simply the sorrow of ‘regret’ – perhaps ‘regret’ that the sinner has ‘sown his wild oats’, and that he must now reap his ‘wild oats’ – a life of barrenness and a life of great unhappiness!

The sinner had pleasures in sin for a short time, but those temporary pleasures turned to sadness and to despair and to ‘bitter remorse’! Such a life of regrets (a wasted life in sin) cause the ‘tears to flow’, but those kinds of ‘tears’ (worldly sorrow) eventually bring forth ‘death’!

It is not a ‘case’ in which God is unable to ‘save’ the sinner, or a ‘case’ in which God is unwilling to ‘save’ the sinner, even in his ‘old age’ (after he has lived a long life of rebellion against God and against God’s laws). No, God is willing to save a man, even a very wicked man on his ‘death bed’!

God is always willing to save anyone, at any time, even if it means (like it was in the ‘case’ of the dying thief on his cross, near to Jesus’ cross) at the ‘last hour’ of a man’s life! Of course, it is true that a ‘death bed’ repentant will ‘lose his life’, because, throughout his long life, he lived in sin, with no ‘spiritual fruit’ developed in his life!

It is not a question of God’s willingness to ‘save’ a person (for Jesus’ death on the cross purchased salvation for every person). It is a question of the willingness of an ‘old-timer in sin’ meeting the conditions for ‘salvation’, namely, repentance and faith (trust) in Christ! Whosoever will, may come to the ‘fountain of Christ’s cleansing blood’ and experience the ‘remission of sins’!

Every sinner – young or older – must come to God based on the ‘conditions’ of repentance (godly sorrow for sin), and faith (trust in Christ alone for the forgiveness of sins). ‘Tears of repentance’ lead a sinner to the ‘foot of the cross’ where the ‘broken-hearted’ (tear-filled) sinner hangs down his head, and where the guilt-filled sinner cries out, “God be merciful to me, a sinner!” He admits that he (a lost person, a hell-bound sinner) is “not worthy of the least of God’s favor”! He knows that, if God treated him with justice (righteousness), he would surely be condemned in time and in eternity.

17. THERE IS ‘WONDER-WORKING POWER’ IN THE ‘BLOOD OF JESUS’!

This broken-hearted sinner asks, not for ‘justice’ (i.e., to be treated as he deserves to be treated – condemnation), but he asks for ‘mercy’ (i.e., to be treated in a way that he does not deserve to be treated)!

What the sinner most needs, this mercy is most ready to give – forgiveness! Reconciliation with the Father, all because of the atoning and the justifying blood of the Son of God! “The blood, the blood, O Hallelujah, it cleanses me!” Yes, there is, indeed, wonder-working power in the precious blood of the Lamb of God!

If there is true repentance and if there is genuine faith in Christ, God is able, and He is ‘glad’ to take a very sinful man and to transform him into a very good man – a godly man, a man who will be impassioned to follow Jesus Christ the remainder of his days!

‘Tears’ are flowing – that is, ‘tears of joy and exaltation’ that the lost ones are now found, that the bound ones are now free, that the despairing ones are now the hopeful ones, that the selfish ones are now the self-giving ones, that the grasping ones are now the giving ones, that the filthy-minded ones are now the pure-minded ones, that the broken ones are now the healed ones!

The greatest evidence that Christianity is authentic, and that Christianity is a ‘powerful force’ in the world, is this: A wicked man can become a righteous man, a bad man can become a good man. “I once was lost, but now I am found; I once was blind, but now I see.”

The total transformation of a ‘wretched’ man into a kind and loving and thoughtful and generous and tender-hearted and longsuffering and patient and self-controlled man! There is no power anywhere that can turn a wicked man into a godly man, a selfish man into a caring man – except the power of Jesus Christ! “Christ receives sinful men, even me with all my sin!”

18. WHAT ABOUT THOSE PERSONS WHO ARE SUFFERING FOR NO REASON?

Some of the ‘best Christians’ in the world are suffering for no apparent reason! Some godly persons are experiencing suffering as the result of accidents or as the result of unjust persecution. There seems to be so much unmerited suffering in our tear-stained world!

As a pastor of one local church in Fort Collins, Colorado for over 25 years, I officiated funeral services for many persons – including a few infants, young persons (including suicides), and middle-aged adults, as well as numerous elderly folks. I have no problem in suggesting that it was God’s ‘perfect will’ to call home to Heaven many of the ‘saints’ of God who had lived long and productive lives.

I do have difficulty in believing that the deaths of infants and children and young adults are an expression of God’s ‘perfect will’. Yes, it is true that all things which happen, (including thousands of deaths which result because of earthquakes, tornados, hurricanes, wars, car accidents, etc.) are ‘allowed’ by the God of Heaven, and thus these tragedies are subject to God’s so-called ‘sovereign will’.

Some well-meaning Christians – Christians who believe they are honoring the ‘sovereignty’ of the living God – find themselves saying some very hurtful (and erroneous) things to broken-hearted parents of infants or young people who have tragically died by disease or accident. Things like, “Well, God wanted another ‘angel’ in heaven, so that is why God chose to take your baby”. How horrible and how heretical!

I held a double funeral service for a young couple whose car was hit head-on by a drunk driver, and this young father and mother left behind several children to grieve the tragic loss of the loving Christian parents. Was it God’s ‘perfect will’ for this couple (near Fort Collins) to be suddenly killed as an oncoming vehicle (driven by a drunk driver) hit them head-on at the top of a hill on that country road?

What about the several children who died from one cause or another – from cancer or from some other ‘defect’ – whose parents I, as pastor, tried hard to comfort in their bereavement? Would it have helped those sorrowing parents for me to have told them that they should not grieve too much, for the death of their children was a ‘manifestation’ of God’s mysterious, sovereign, and perfect will? Was it God’s ‘perfect will’ that my beloved, godly fifteen-year-old niece died in 1981 from a seizure as she was happily riding on a roller coaster in an amusement park in Denver?

19. IS THERE ANY HOPE FOR ME IF I WRONGLY CHOOSE TO SIN?

But what happens if (through my own carelessness) I fail to ‘keep myself within God’s keeping power’? What if I should ‘fall into sin’? Is there any hope for me, if I do not resist temptation, and if I, instead, yield to my ‘besetting sin’, or to some other sin? It is far better if I do not sin, but, if I do sin, God has (wonderfully) provided a ‘remedy’ for me!

Wrote the Apostle John (so long ago), *“My little children, I am telling you this so that you will stay away from sin. But if you sin, there is someone to plead for you before the Father. His name is Jesus Christ, the one who is all that is good and who pleases God completely. He is the one who took God’s wrath against our sins upon himself and brought us into fellowship with God; and he is the forgiveness for our sin, and not only ours but the entire world’s.”* (John 2:1-2; Living Bible)

Does Jesus care when I’ve tried and failed,
To resist some temptation strong;
When for my deep grief I find no relief,
Though my tears flow all the night long?

O yes, He cares, I know He cares,
His heart is touched with my grief;
When for my deep grief I find no relief,
Though my tears flow all the night long!

O yes, He cares, I know He cares,
His heart is touched with my grief,

When the days are weary, the long nights dreary,
I know my Savior cares!

Does Jesus care, really care, for you and for me, when we fail to ‘resist some temptation strong’? Did Jesus care for Simon Peter when he denied his loving Master, three different times? When Jesus’ eyes met Peter’s eyes at the time of that betrayal, don’t you think that Jesus (despite His own trouble) was ‘weeping and weeping’ in His heart – for Peter?

Jesus could have, so easily and so understandably, been preoccupied with His own suffering (treatment by the Jewish leaders), but, instead, Jesus was, at that very crisis, concerned for His friend who had just ‘fallen’ deeply into the ‘sin of denial’!

Does Jesus care when we fail and falter and fall during our life’s pilgrimage? Jesus, as He was facing the agony of His own crucifixion, was ‘thinking’ of Peter (and Peter’s wallowing in the shame and guilt because of Peter’s dastardly denial).

The time would come (after Jesus’ resurrection) when Jesus would gently (though firmly) restore Peter to his former place among the band of disciples! As Peter had denied his Lord three different times, so Peter’s lips would soon declare three times that he loved his Master.

Peter had deeply repented of his tragic moral failure (denial), and, therefore, the forgiving Lord was willing (gladly) to restore Peter to fellowship and to apostleship with his Master! Just think! Peter’s actions caused Jesus to ‘weep’ just a few hours before Jesus’ crucifixion. Peter’s deep repentance and renewed surrender to the Lordship of Jesus, now brought great ‘rejoicing’ to Jesus! Peter wept ‘bitterly’ (repentance), but Jesus forgave Peter, and Jesus took away his shame and guilt and fears! Peter’s tears were wiped away!

When the greatest king of Israel, King David, gazed on the beautiful, naked body of a lady while she was bathing, do you think God was indifferent to David’s lustful look? I think that, far from indifferent, God was fully present on that tragic day. I think that God saw, and He understood everything that David did on that day! I think that God ‘read’ the content of David’s heart – his heart of passionate sexual desire. God created sexual passion to be used appropriately, but God did not create sexual passion to be satisfied in an illicit manner, that is, with another woman who is not your wife (of your lifetime commitment). David, on that day, fell from the grandeur of his kingly nobility, to the depth of his lustful shame and guilt!

David’s sins were at least three in number – adultery, murder, deception! What were God’s reactions to these terrible sins? God wept, God was ‘shocked’, God was angry! When David took this beautiful woman unto himself (by ‘force’, for King David has great authority and power) and when David committed the act of ‘sex’ with her (probably several times within a short period of time) God, of course, saw everything. Nothing is ever hidden from the ‘all-seeing eye’ of Almighty God!

God could have ‘wiped out’ David at this time – because of David’s unfaithfulness to the divinely-established ‘covenant’ that God had with David. But, in mercy, instead of engaging in vindictive judgment against David, God ‘wept and wept’.

God yearned for David to repent of his serious violation against God's law, and David's serious violation of God's love for David! When David arranged for this woman's husband to die (in battle), God was 'shocked' that David could do such a cunning and wicked act.

When David became a 'murderer' (a 'cold-blooded' murderer) God's tears streamed down His 'cheeks' (symbolically speaking)! When David attempted further to 'hide' his adulterous affair (following his arranged murder of the woman's husband), God was distressed and horrified ('shocked') that David's sins could cause David to become so deceptive!

David, the shepherd boy, who courageously 'took on' that 9-foot-tall giant, and killed him, giving 'glory' and honor' to all of Israel; David, that courageous 'fugitive' who had to run 'for his life' away from jealous King Saul; David, that friend of friends to Jonathan, who mourned the death of Jonathan (son of Saul), and who showed kindness to Jonathan's crippled son, after Jonathan died in battle; David, the object of great admiration by the multitudes of Israelites; David, the most popular and beloved of all the Kings of Israel. That David is now wicked sinner!

David, known as the 'man after God's own heart'! How could this man 'fall from the pinnacle of glory' to the 'depth of shame and deception'? How could this remarkable man (greatest of all the kings) descend to the 'pit of wickedness' (adultery, murder, deception, shame)? "How art the mighty fallen!"

What made David a 'man after 'God's own heart'? David, who sinned greatly, also repented greatly (see Psalm 32 and 51). There is more written about David in the Old Testament than there is written about any other person. The Book of Psalms, (largely written by David) reveals that David, more than any other person who is recorded, poured out his heart in louder 'tones of repentance' than is known of anyone else.

Talk about 'tears' of repentance'! David shed 'buckets full' of tears – tears of overwhelming grief that he had 'broken his holy covenant' with his God, overwhelming grief that he had 'hurt' so many persons – the woman that he had 'forced' into an unholy relationship, the woman's husband that he had (through deception) killed in 'cold blood', his cherished nation that for months he had deceived through his careful 'cover-up'.

David's tears flowed day and night, because he had allowed his 'lust' to rule his life on that deadly passion-filled day. David's 'glance' at that naked woman, became his 'gaze', and his 'gaze' became his passion-driven action (adultery). That act on that day was like the first of many 'dominos' that fell during the next fateful days following David's adulterous act. The consequences from that one act (consequences that unfolded for many years) were many and they were tragic.

The death of a beloved soldier (a soldier who had been long loyal to David), the death of the newborn child (the result of David's adulterous 'union'), Israel's shame as a result of David's 'cover-up' (deception) for many months, the rape of David's daughter by one of David's sons, the murder of David's son by another one of David's sons, the Insurrection (plot against David) by one of David's sons, and the overwhelming grief that David experienced when that rebellious

son (who led an insurrection) was killed by one of David's generals. All tragic consequences of David's sins!

Sorrow upon sorrow, grief upon grief, tears and more tears! David experienced how 'harsh' the consequences of a lustful (adulterous) action can be! "Why, oh why did I allow my eyes to gaze upon that woman, on that sunny day so long ago? Why did I not respect the Laws of God? Why did I not 'take charge' (with God's help) of my 'wild passions'? Why didn't I go to battle with my soldiers on that day, instead of staying home with 'time on my hands'? Why didn't I keep my mind occupied with the reading of God's Word? Why was I such a 'fool' to allow myself to be 'dragged' into the 'snares of evil'? I have found out that, indeed, 'the way of the transgressor is hard'!"

David was no stranger to 'tears'! He felt at times that he was 'swimming in tears'! Wrote David, "I am worn out with pain, every night my pillow is wet with tears." (*Psalms 6:6; Living Bible*) It was not only an abundance of 'tears' that David shed, but it was also an abundance of entreaties that he presented to God.

David prayed to the God of mercy, "*Hear my prayer, O Lord, listen to my cry! Don't sit back, unmindful of my tears. For I am your guest. I am a traveler passing through the earth, as all my fathers were. Spare me, Lord! Let me recover and be filled with happiness again before my death.*" (*Psalms 39:12-13; Living Bible*) "*You have seen me tossing and turning through the night. You have collected all my tears and preserved them in your bottle!*" (*Psalms 56:8; Living Bible*) How do you feel when you realize that your God has preserved all your 'tears' in His bottle, and that He has a complete record of all your 'tears'?

20. CONFUSED IN THE MIND BUT TRUSTING WITH THE HEART!

Notes will-known Bible scholar William Barclay, (who, himself, lost his only child at 'sea'): "Quite clearly, Jesus did NOT think sickness and illness and untimely death the will of God. Quite clearly, Jesus thought them he reverse of the will of God. They were the very things that he had come to help and to overcome. In the life to come God is seeing to it that the life cut off too soon is getting its chance to blossom and flourish, and the life involved in tragedy is finding its 'Compensation'. The eternal world is redressing the balance of the world of time."

Remember: The One who suffered the most on this planet (Jesus Christ, "Thou are all compassion, pure unbounded love Thou Art"), Jesus sheds the sympathizing tear with you! Usually, there is some 'mystery' involved in all human suffering!

As a finite person, you will always be lacking in your understanding of "why" tragic things happen. After you suffer a great loss, you have the 'right' to try to understand the 'causes', but you must soon ask "How" instead of "Why?" How can I use this great loss to make me a better person (not a 'bitter' person)? How can this loss in my life be used (by God) to help me to become the person who is more tender, more loving, and more determined to reach out to other suffering 'pilgrims'!

Remember, even though your mind is confused, and your heart is broken, God understands, and He cares. He will apply the ‘balm of healing’ to your ‘open wounds’! When life is ‘turned upside down’, you still have your ‘Unmovable Rock’ to stand on. “On Christ the solid Rock I stand; all other ground is sinking sand. You dare not trust the sweetest ‘frame’, but wholly lean on Jesus’ name! When all around my soul give way, He then is all my hope and stay.”

When your mind ‘plays tricks on you’, and when you don’t know which way is ‘up’ and which way is ‘down’, there is one solid foundation upon which you may stand, namely, the foundation of Divine Love! Amidst all the changes and the chances of your life, God will hold you steady! If you are an ‘injured sheep’ that needs to be carried by the loving Shepherd, then that loving Shepherd (who knows His sheep intimately) will carry you until you are well enough to join the other sheep!

21 SURVEYING LIFE’S VARIOUS SUFFERINGS!

In our life’s journey, we all experience various types of suffering, and through God’s grace, these sufferings can turn out to be ‘stepping stones’, rather than ‘stumbling blocks’ in our life.

First, there is the suffering of ‘infirmities’. While it is true that both Christians and non-Christians experience this kind of suffering, the Christian is best prepared to face this kind of suffering successfully. There are believers – persons of great faith – whose tears have often flowed as they have earnestly prayed for healing, but to no avail! Paul prayed that the ‘thorn in the flesh’ might be removed, but the thorn was not removed. God said to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you!” If an obstacle (physical problem) is not removed, then God will ‘use’ the obstacle as a means of perfecting the character of the sufferer.

Many of the most mature persons (Christ-like persons) are the believers who have suffered the most! These Godly persons have often been ‘tried in the fire’ of adversity, and they have come through the ‘fire of adversity’ and are the ‘purified gold’ (beautiful and lovely in character – the kind of persons that are magnetic, attracting others to be altogether lovely in Christ)!

Second, there is the suffering of chastisement. The ‘athlete of God’ must undergo rigorous training, and he must experience some necessary ‘correction’ because of weaknesses in his life. The ‘divine coach’ has a right to expect submission from His trainees (believers). Training (i.e., laying aside unnecessary ‘weights’) may be rather painful at times, but there is great joy in one’s spiritual understanding, as the disciplined ‘athlete’ prepares to receive someday the ‘crown’ from God at the end of the race of life.

To change the analogy, the ‘soldier of God’ must be disciplined, and some of that discipline involves suffering. “*Take your part in suffering as a loyal soldier of Jesus Christ.*” (2 Timothy 2:3)

Here is another analogy: The branches of the vine must be pruned, if there is to be a fruitful harvest (John 15). The pruning process in the life of a believer is often ‘painful’, but there is joy because of anticipation of a fruitful harvest!

Another analogy: The potter must mold the clay if beautiful pottery is to be the finished product. Believers must be made moldable and soft in the hands of the Great Divine Potter, but there is often some 'pain' involved when the Divine Potter models us to become a 'beautiful vessel', worthy for the Potter's glory!

Third, there is the suffering of persecution. Jesus said that anyone who lives a godly life will suffer persecution. Jesus suffered great persecution, and His followers are bound to suffer persecution also – in one form or another. Many believers, throughout the ages, have suffered the ultimate for Christ – they have laid down their lives for the sake of Christ! One famous German Pastor, who confronted Hitler because of the persecution against the Church, was finally hanged (at the very end of the War). His name was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who (after all these passing years since 1946) is still remembered as one of the great Christians of the 20th Century!

He exercised a profound influence for Christ, but he gave his life because he boldly confronted a mass murderer (evil dictator). The suffering of persecution is intense, and it is hurtful. The surrender of one's life on the altar of obedience, in the face of murderous persecutors, is the height of bravery and loyalty to Christ! Jesus said that the reward for those who are persecuted for 'righteousness sake' will be 'great' – very 'great' in heaven!

Christians are not to 'court' persecution, but if (when) it comes, Christians are to 'suffer' boldly and faithfully. While Christians do not needlessly 'embrace' suffering, if it comes, Christians are to 'commit their case unto the Lord', for the Lord alone has the authority to 'render justice' unto the persecutor. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay" saith the Lord! (Romans 12)

Just punishment will be certainly and eventually given to lawbreakers – to those who defy the laws of God. God has appointed government officials, who will act as God's 'agents of justice' to bring lawbreakers to the 'bar of accountability'. Wrong will be punished, and the righteous will be rewarded. God's righteousness will be honored. God's integrity will be recognized. God's justice will be vindicated. God's holiness will be respected. God's peace shall be restored. God's love will be celebrated. If not on this planet, then hereafter, all persecutors will be punished. If not on this planet, then hereafter, all (persecuted) believers will be rewarded!

Christians do not 'court' the suffering of persecution, but, on the other hand, Christians are not to run from the 'suffering of persecution' simply because of the 'fear' of consequences! Through the enabling presence of the Spirit, Christians are to 'stand tall' and to witness for Christ, regardless of the possibility that they will be persecuted mercilessly, or shunned socially! Followers of Christ cannot expect that all persons (sinners) will be receptive to their message.

The Bible reminds us: "Woe unto you, if all men think well of you"! Christians can expect that they will be persecuted – in one form or another, at one time or another, from one person or another. To one degree or another – persecution will come to every follower of Christ! Jesus said, "If they persecuted me (The Master), they (the world of sinful men) will also persecute you (the servants)".

Fourth, there is the suffering of temptation. It is written that Jesus suffered 'being tempted'. Temptation is Satan's attempt to get us (believer's) to 'fall into sin'! Temptation is Satan's

attempt to ‘lure’ us into forbidden thought or into a hurtful action. Satan fell from ‘favor’ with the Master (pre-history), and now Satan seeks to get humans to follow his rebellious path! Satan is ‘taking out his bitterness against God’ by attempting to ‘capture humans’ as his victims.

As Satan desired to destroy Simon Peter, so Satan today desires to destroy us (believers) by tempting us to ‘fall into sin’. Temptation is Satan’s attempt to ‘lure us into a forbidden thought or into a hurtful action’. Satan fell from ‘favor’ with his Master (pre-history), and now Satan seeks to get humans to follow his rebellious path! Satan is ‘taking out his bitterness against God’ by attempting to ‘capture humans as his victims. **[I repeat this fact – for emphasis!]**

As Satan desired to destroy Simon Peter, so Satan today desires to destroy us – he desires to ‘sift us as wheat’! Satan can ‘misquote’ Holy Scriptures. In his attempt to deceive mankind, he tries to imitate the work of God, by pretending to be ‘an angel of light’. He comes as an ‘angel of light; he disguises himself with the goal of causing believers to ‘taste of the ingredients of the world’s pleasure’!

Temptation, looked at from God’s viewpoint, is not meant to be the ‘downward pull to evil’ but rather temptation is to be a ‘stepping stone’ to further spiritual growth! The believer, by saying ‘No’ to the temptation to lie, is given opportunity to demonstrate his integrity! This same ‘logic’ (of converting ‘temptation’ into a ‘test’ for character-building) can be applied to any specific type of temptation (cheating, lust, gossip, jealousy, gluttony, etc.)!

Someone said that ‘temptation’ is not the punishment of being a human, but rather, ‘temptation’ is the ‘glory’ of being a man! Temptation, meant by Satan as his opportunity to destroy a man, is, from God’s perspective, the opportunity for a man to become a stronger follower of Christ.

Said one rugged and discerning believer, “I used to say the devil is tempting me; now I say the Lord is testing me.” It is possible for the believer to experience joy amidst the suffering of temptations and trials. *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.” (James 1:2; NIV)*

It is true that the ultimate purpose of experiencing temptations is to look at the temptations as ‘tests’ by which the believer is given opportunity to prove his faithfulness to God, and opportunity for the believer to ‘grow’ every time he faces personal temptation!

When a believer struggles with the approach of temptation, is he simply ‘left to himself’ to face the vicious presence of the tempter (devil)? Thankfully, the answer to this question is a resounding ‘No’! Says Hebrews 2:18, “Because he (Jesus) himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” (NIV) You are not left alone when Satan suddenly approaches you, when he approaches you with a blatant temptation or with a subtle temptation!

God is with you, to sustain you, to protect you, to give you courage and wisdom. If you trust Him, he will ‘carry you through’ temptation! *“No temptation is irresistible. You can trust God to keep the temptation from becoming so strong you can’t stand up against it, for he has promised this, and you can bear up against it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13; Living Bible)*

God understands the ‘pain’ (suffering) that you experience when you confront temptation! Temptation (by its nature) seeks to ‘exploit’ the weak areas of your life! Jesus has promised to ‘aid’ you during your times of temptation (*Hebrews 2:18*). The ‘pain’ that you feel when Satan is tempting you may be ‘sharp’ and it may be difficult. But the ‘pain’ that a believer feels when he actually ‘yields’ to temptation is likely to be the greatest pain!

The shame one feels because he took the ‘road of least resistance’ (yielding to sin), the pangs of guilt or loneliness he feels because he senses that his fellowship with God has been injured, the ‘sense’ of personal disappointment that he feels because he has taken the ‘low road of transgression’ instead of taking the ‘high road of righteousness’! Shame, fear, social isolation, guilt, condemnation, personal disappointment, disillusionment – a terrible litany of consequences, because of his yielding to temptation! Can any ‘suffering’ be as great as this type of suffering?

Does Jesus care when I’ve tried and failed,
To resist some temptation strong;
When for my deep grief I find no relief,
Though my tears flow all the night long?

O Yes, He cares, I know He cares,
His heart is touched with my grief,
When my days are weary, the long nights dreary,
I know my Savior cares.
By Frank E. Graff

The Bible explicitly states that the ‘norm’ for the Christian life is ‘sinless’ – that is, the living of life with no deliberate breaking of God’s clearly-revealed and known laws! Jesus came into this world to deliver His people ‘from’ their sins, not ‘in’ their sins. (Matthew chapter 1) The Christian life is not meant (by God) to be a ‘sinning religion’, that is a religion that practices sinning. In fact the Bible (1 John 3) indicates that anyone who ‘practices sinning’ is of the ‘devil’.

The call to live a ‘righteous’ life (a life free from ‘sinning’) is a call that is reiterated time and again in the New Testament! It was ‘sin’ that nailed the Son of God to a cruel cross, so Christians should never tolerate any sin in their lives! The Son of man came to this earth to destroy all sin, objectively, through the sacrifice of the Cross, and subjectively, through the application of the atoning blood of the Cross to each individual heart.

With all these statements of truth being declared, it must be admitted, however, that many Christians (probably most Christians) morally fail – do sin – at one time or another time, in their sincere attempt to live the Christian life!

Sadly, but truly, many Christians do break the known laws of God, at some time in their life. One need never sin, and no Christian should ever break God’s holy laws, but, realistically, Christians

sometimes do indeed sin in one way or another. Sadly, it is far too easy for a Christian to be ‘off his guard’, to ‘slip into an act of sin or into an attitude of sin.

There are countless sins into which believers can easily ‘fall’! The entertainment of a jealous thought, the opening of the mind briefly to a lustful thought, the allowance of feelings of resentment toward an ‘offender’, the ‘surprise’ envious or greedy thought, the enjoyment of proud feelings because of an honest compliment from a friend, the resistance of the Spirit who is definitely directing you to give some money to a poor person, the nurturing of bitterness towards your cruel enemy who enjoys ridiculing you because of your Christian ‘faith’!

There are, indeed, many sins into which believers can ‘fall’! The doubting of your trust in God as you face a troublesome future, the return of your ‘self-consciousness’ which hinders you in social settings, jealous feelings that crop up because you feel that God has gifted another believer more than God has gifted you, neglect in paying your bills which could lead to a form of stealing, feelings of anger towards a person who undercuts your work on a Christian project, a new craving for money because of the comfortable lifestyle you think money will make possible.

Our God is able, and He is willing to guard us against attacks of evil, and against the ‘evil one’ (devil). As we seek to follow our Master, our Master will protect us from the snares and traps of Satan! If we ‘watch and pray’, the Lord will respond by shielding us from the ‘forces of evil’!
“The Lord is faithful; he will make you strong and guard you from satanic attacks of every kind.” (1 Thessalonians 3:3; Living Bible.)

Weak though we might be, if our heart is sincere and our mind is open, we can be assured that our mighty Savior will give us strength to overcome all threatening ‘evil’ in our life. God’s power is limitless, and His power is far greater than the power of Satan! *“God is able to keep you from slipping and falling away, and to bring you, sinless, and perfect, into his glorious presence with mighty shouts of everlasting joy.” (Jude 25; Living Bible)*

God speaks to His followers; “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life”! A most glorious promise, but a demanding condition! Only those who are faithful, not temporarily, but constantly (till the threshold from earthly life to eternity) – these persons will be crowned with eternal life! If I fall away from following the Lord (backslide from the Christian faith and from personal relationship with the Lord), the promise of receiving a ‘crown’ will not be fulfilled in my life – after dying!

‘Faithfulness’ is at the ‘heart’ of all Christian virtues. Someone said that if you place ‘faithfulness’ on one side of the scale and if you place all the other Christian virtues on the other side of the scale, ‘faithfulness’ would outweigh all the other virtues.

Being ‘true’ (faithful) to our Lord (as a branch, abiding in the vine) is what determines if we are finally granted a place in the eternal kingdom! Only as the branch abides in the Vine can the branch enjoy continuing life and vitality. When the branch is severed, the branch dies (and it is cast into the fire). (Read John 15)

This sober portion of scripture should not be interpreted to mean that, if a Christian commits one sin (or even a few sins), he is automatically ‘severed’ from the ‘Vine’ (and, thus, in danger of being ‘thrown into the fire’). If I sin, I should be concerned, and I should ‘run to the arms of Jesus’ for forgiveness and for restoration. So thus I might once again enjoy a wonderful and a close relationship with my Savior. I should never minimize the seriousness of even ‘one sin’.

One sin can lead to another sin, and to another sin, and so on! An example of this is seen in the life of the Christian who decides to abandon the position of ‘total abstinence’, and he decides to start enjoying a ‘social drink’ (and enjoy a ‘social drink’ quite often). One ‘social drink’ becomes two ‘social drinks’, and (for many Christians) these occasional ‘drinks’ become a lot of ‘drinks’. This unsuspecting Christian ‘wakes up one day’ and he finds that he is ‘hooked’ on alcohol, and the next thing he knows, he is an alcoholic (attending AA)!

Here is another example. A little sinning (such as an occasional ‘glance’ at pornography on the Internet) becomes a lot of sinning, and this ‘Christian’ finds (sadly) that he is on a very ‘slippery slope’. His ‘lustful thoughts’ have opened the door to eventual ‘sexual bondage’ (a very hard bondage to ‘break’).

There are countless examples (from ‘real life’) that demonstrate the problems that develop, all because the heart and the hand and the mind of a believer allows the entry of the first sin into his life, followed soon with the second sin and on and on and on, until a habit has been formed, and spiritual wreckage has resulted.

Here is a third example. There are too many believers who yield to their ‘craving’ for a material object (car, boat, house, vacation, etc.), and instead of resisting that craving, they decide to borrow money (perhaps on a credit card). It is ‘enjoy now and pay later’ – the attitude that brings so many Christians to the ‘brink of bankruptcy’!

The Bible makes it clear (to every believer, 1 Timothy 6), that if we have food and clothing and shelter, with these we ought to be ‘content’! However, so many of us (believers) are not satisfied with the ‘necessities’ of life. Instead, we fall prey to the advertising world, and we think that we must have more and more and more ‘things’ (stuff we think that we can’t get along without), the ‘toys and trinkets’ of our world.

There is some kind of ‘hole’ in our life that we think ‘just one more thing’ will fill! Daily life is ‘boring’, so a new car will ‘make life more interesting’. Never mind the ‘cost’; I will put it on my credit card. I simply must give a new ‘sparkle’ to my life of drudgery! The temptation, in this materialistic society, is to purchase anything that ‘appeals to our imagination’.

Christians get themselves into ‘tons of trouble’ when they get their eyes off the ‘Lord of Sufficiency’ and begin to ‘glance’ and then to ‘gaze’ at the glitter and the trinkets and the entertainment of this world! The Bible encourages us (believers) to resist the temptation to purchase everything upon which we ‘lay our eyes’! Wise believers embrace what the Bible says: “Life does not consist in the abundance of the things that a man possesses”!

There is assurance for every yielded believer! God, in mercy and in love, has given to us humans certain ‘deterrents’ against sinning. First, the greatest deterrent against sinning is the Holy Spirit, who helps us to guard against temptation. Temptation, of course, is inevitable, but the Spirit gives us strength to resist the allurements of the evil one (devil). The Spirit helps us to discern the nature and the consequences of our temptations.

The Spirit actually ‘intercedes’ in our behalf, and the Spirit ‘translates’ our ‘inner groans’ of agony, and the Spirit presents our inarticulate cries to the Heavenly Father. Short of being coercive, the Spirit does everything in His power to guard us against ‘falling into sin’!

If we are rebellious in our attitudes, and if we are intent on committing a ‘wrong’ (sin), then the Spirit must allow us to go foolishly and carelessly into our ‘ditch of sin’! But, the Spirit who has access to our inner conscience, will appeal to our reason and He will seek to guide us away from a course of action that is fraught with disaster!

The Bible warns believers never to grieve or to quench or to resist the blessed Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the believer’s greatest Helper, so believers must learn to be sensitive to the Spirit, to listen to the ‘still, small voice’ of the Spirit. The voice of the ‘evil one’ is boisterous (loud and clamorous), and that (deceptive) voice demands immediate and thoughtless action!

On the other hand, the Spirit’s voice is soft and kind and without coercion, and the Spirit appeals to the better reason of the person with whom He is dealing. To listen to the Spirit’s voice is to find peace and joy and greater understanding of reality. To listen to the voice of the evil one (devil) is to be led into paths of wickedness and sorrow and bondage!

Second, another deterrent against sinning is the Holy Scriptures. When Jesus was tempted by the devil (Mathew 4), Jesus quoted scriptures to the devil. “It stands written” Jesus said to Satan. Satan had to retreat, because God’s Word is powerful and authoritative and final, and Satan’s falsehoods (lies and deceptions) cannot stand up against the eternal truths that are recorded in the Bible. “Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Thee, O God!” Ephesians 6 (listing of the spiritual armor) says that the ‘sword of the Spirit is the Word of God’. Of the six pieces of armor (for spiritual warfare), the ‘sword of the Spirit’ (Word of God) is the only ‘offensive piece of armor’!

Third, another deterrent against sinning is Prayer. “Pray without ceasing.” That is, have an inner attitude of trust in God, always. When temptation assaults you (at unexpected times during the day), simply ‘breathe a quick prayer’ to your ‘Divine Defender’. In the wilderness, when Jesus was tempted by the devil for 40 days, Jesus was in constant communion with His Heavenly Father. Though it is difficult to conceive, God is more interested in you enjoying spiritual victory (over sinning) than you are yourself.

The Spirit (as noted above) is always present with you, and He is (through your obedient cooperation and through your attitude of prayerful submission) committed to applying Jesus’ victory over Satan (won at the Cross) to your own personal life. The historic victory of Jesus is meant to be your own (constant) victory in your own personal life! Christ has already (finally)

won the victory over sin and over Satan, and you (as a believer) now have the 'right' and the 'privilege' of 'tapping into Jesus' historic victory'!

Because Christ won the victory for the entire human race, the victory over sin and Satan and death is assured for every yielded believer! You now (as a child of God, in fellowship with the victorious Christ), can daily appropriate Christ's victory over sin and the devil! Of course, you can have no victory independent of your 'conquering Christ', but when you are 'vitaly connected' (through obedience and surrender) to Christ, then Christ's strength becomes your strength, Christ's victory becomes your victory!

Living a life of 'constant victory over sinning' should be the 'norm' for believers. Christians need never to 'break God's known laws'. But unfortunately, Christians sometimes do not 'guard themselves' against a certain sin, particularly a certain 'besetting sin', and they find themselves realizing that they said something they should not have said. Rather than being contemplative, they have been impulsive (thoughtless), and they have offended someone by the words they spoke or by the actions they performed. Afterwards they feel 'bad' (guilty), for being so insensitive in words or careless actions.

Christians who fail to be equipped (daily) with all the 'armor of faith' can too easily stumble into an act or into an attitude of sin! What should a believer do if he finds himself with a conscience that is not 'clear', if he finds himself with a spirit that is 'troubled', if he finds himself with a heart that is 'guilty', if he realizes that his 'tongue' was too loose, if he realizes that he has offended a 'brother' or a 'sister'? He feels 'miserable' because of the thoughtless word he spoke and because of the selfish actions that he performed!

My sinning is unnecessary! My sinful actions are hurtful to someone, somewhere! What can I do? Thankfully, my loving Heavenly Father is not going to allow me to be 'suspended in guilt' and alienated from my fellow men. It is a 'bitter pill' to swallow (spiritually speaking), but the 'bitter pill' of 'humble restitution' is the answer to reconciliation with the brother (or sister) whom I have offended. Going to the one that I 'wronged' is not easy. But it is an act of humility.

Simply asking for their forgiveness is essential if the relationship is to be restored. After honestly confessing your specific 'wrong', you then say something like this, "Can you find it in your heart to forgive me?" It is likely that the offended person will, indeed, forgive you. If not, at least you are 'clear' in your own relationship with God (for you have obeyed the 'voice' of the Spirit). Your conscience is clear, and you hope the 'heart' of the offended person will also eventually become 'right'! You continue to pray for that offended one, and, if the 'occasion arises', you will be kind in his presence (but, you will not 'force' yourself upon that one-time friend whom you offended).

To ask the offended one to forgive you is vitaly important, but, the all-important 'step' for a believer to take, is to come to God to ask forgiveness. David said (during his 'heavy sins'), "Against thee, and thee only, have I sinned, O God!" All sin is primarily against God, and only secondarily against our fellow men. The Bible says, "If anyone should sin, we have an Advocate before the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous One!" Jesus is ready to 'plead our case' before the Father. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and He will forgive our sins, and He will

cleanse our hearts from all unrighteousness.” The ‘pain’ of guilt will be resolved, the broken relationship will be restored, the departed joy will return, the heartbreak will be healed, the humiliated shame will be gone!

Fifth, there is the suffering because of life’s losses and tragedies. Perhaps the hardest experience in the life of a Christian comes when he is called to experience a sorrow, a disappointment, or a loss, the explanation for which defies human reason. Each of us (believers) – if we have lived long enough – knows by personal experience what it is like to lose a loved one prematurely. When my brother’s daughter (my niece) – 15 years old – suddenly died, because of her having a very rare seizure while she was riding on a roller-coaster, her parents and her siblings, obviously, were devastated. The sorrow from the premature death was very great! Why did this young lady (a sincere Christian) have to die when she was so young? I suppose some ‘positive benefits’ came from this tragedy, but, nevertheless, this tragedy defies human reason. My niece was so talented and so dedicated to Christ, and she had great potential in countless ways!

When I was a pastor for a long time, I witnessed the death of several younger persons. For me to minister to surviving loved ones was not the easiest job I ever had! How difficult it was for me to stand beside a young couple, as they buried their ‘infant’ child (a crib death). And there were the surviving four children and teens, who had to attend the double-casket funeral for their parents, who were the victims of a head-on collision (killed by the collision of an oncoming car, driven by a drunken college student)!

I previously had led this couple to a saving knowledge of Christ, and this couple was making ‘great strides’ in their spiritual growth! Of course, they suddenly appeared in heaven when they were suddenly killed, but what about the four children who were left behind?

On a dreadful (tragic) day in August 1992, there was the ‘tragedy of tragedies’ when a jealous-ridden husband shot and killed his wife on the church parking lot! About ten of us witnessed the entire horrible scene! A police officer and the murderer exchanged ‘fire’, and both were seriously injured. The man who shot his wife died a few hours later in the hospital, and the police officer barely survived. He finally recovered several weeks later. Both parents dead, their three children were taken into the home of their grandparents. Those children received great training for many years, by their grandparents, and they are now adjusted adults (despite the unbelievable tragedy)!

There are some others who chose to leave this earthly life, by their own will! Each of these had an outstanding mind and they were lavishly endowed by their Creator. The hardest of all hard funerals for me to conduct were the funerals for those precious folks who decided that life was not worth living any longer. The inner tears and the heartbreak that I experienced when I learned that these persons took their own life! Of course, various death-dealing instruments were used, but all these instruments of destruction accomplished the same intended purpose!

Tragically, the purpose of these ‘instruments’ was to enable the despairing person to escape earthly life! Each of these persons had one thing in ‘common’ – each felt that they could no longer deal with all the burdens and the sorrows and the heartbreaks that were ‘heaped’ upon them! It is ‘chilling’ to one’s inner soul to think about those ‘death-delivering’ instruments –

ropes, gas, pills, guns, railroad tracks, all used to end the precious life that God gave each person!

All these precious lives left this earth prematurely! Only our merciful God understands the depth of their respective and unique ‘pains’! None of us has the ‘right’ to stand back and judge these persons who, obviously, came to a point of ‘no return’ in their respective lives.

Sadly, none of them saw a ‘way out’ of their ‘valley of despair’ and depression and unbearable pain. The Bible says, “Thou shalt not kill”, and that is a prohibition against killing one’s own body. No, suicide is not a legitimate option for any believer, but God knows the person and God understands the ‘factors’ that are involved in the life of the person that caused him to take this desperate action, this final exit. We are not the ‘judge’, only God is the altogether ‘Righteous Judge’! God will judge according to love and mercy! God alone has the full knowledge of all the facts surrounding every person!

22. TRUSTING WHEN WE CANNOT UNDERSTAND

It is true that there are many tragic events that happen in one’s life, that are beyond our ability to comprehend or to understand! Christ did not come to earth to give us an ‘easy’ life. There are many trials and there are many tests and there are many temptations that come to every believer – sometimes great and terrible suffering! But, during our struggles, we must remember that our God loves us, and that our God will “make a way through the wilderness of suffering!” Because of God’s grace, Christians can ultimately ‘come out on top’ – Christians can be like ‘gold tried in fire’!

The well-known Bible scholar William Barclay has an important insight. “There are times when a Christian has to learn the hardest lesson of all, the very lesson which Jesus Himself had to learn in Gethsemane; he has to learn how to accept what he cannot understand. There are times when things happen that he cannot understand, but he can still say, ‘God, Thou art love; I build my faith on that.’”

“The universe is not ‘a vale of tears’; rather, it is a ‘vale of character-making’ and character cannot be made except in the strain and stress and struggle.” (E. Stanley Jones)

23. PINPOINTING THE SOURCES OF SUFFERING!

To the careful ‘observer’ of life, as it is lived in the daily activities and in the ‘grind’ of life’s routine responsibilities, it is quite easy to recognize that people, far and wide, experience suffering from many different sources and for different ‘reasons’.

Of course, after ‘all is said and done’, there is a certain ‘mystery’ that surrounds suffering in general and suffering in some ‘individual cases’. Without attempting to amplify (detail) the ‘reasons’ for suffering, the following is a simple list of the ‘sources of suffering.’

1. Suffering comes as the consequences of one’s own wrong moral choices.

2. Suffering comes because of bearing the consequences of someone's wrong moral choice (divorce is a vivid example of this kind of suffering).
3. Suffering comes because of 'natural disasters' (like tornadoes, etc.).
4. Suffering comes because of the devastation of disease (such as cancer).
5. Suffering comes because of the attacks of Satan (like the incredible suffering of Job).
6. Suffering comes because of believers enduring hurtful persecution, inflicted by evil persons.
7. Suffering comes (to all believers) because of enduring the 'chastening rod' of discipline of the loving Heavenly Father (Hebrews 2).
8. Suffering comes because of experiencing ill health (physical and mental illness).
9. Suffering often comes because of the 'natural aging process (the natural deterioration of the physical body).
10. Suffering comes because of the loss of many things in one's life (loss of job, loss of loved ones through death, loss of income, loss of friends, loss through multiple trials and temptations).
11. Suffering comes (in a 'necessary' and God-honoring way) when a person experiences 'godly sorrow through the repentance of his/her sins.
12. Suffering comes when war ravishes a nation, resulting in the loss of life, and resulting in the pain and sorrow in the lives of loved ones.
13. Suffering comes when believers experience losses, the purpose for which defies human reason, suffering for which there does not seem to be any apparent reason.

24. BENEFITS OF SUFFERING!

1. Suffering can cause one to see God more clearly. Great spiritual vision of God is often the product of great sorrow. Someone said, "The vision of God can be seen more clearly through a tear."
2. Suffering can cause one to depend more on God's power instead of on human strength. God's strength is made perfect through human weakness. God's power is only available to the person who knows that he is weak and powerless and helpless and hopeless without the enabling presence of the Indwelling Spirit!
3. Suffering can perfect one's character and bring about greater spiritual growth and maturity. The Greek word that is translated "character" is the word that is "used of metal that has been

passed through the fire so that everything base has been purged out of it. It is used of coinage as we use the word 'sterling'. When affliction is met with fortitude, out of the battle a man emerges stronger, and purer, and better, and nearer to God." (Daily Study Bible, Romans by William Barclay, pg. 74).

Problems and suffering, successfully met, can perfect one's character. In the world of nature, pearls are the product of pain. A pearl "is a symbol of stress; it is a healed wound; it is the enduring token of a tiny creature's struggle to preserve its life. If there had been no wound there could have been no pearl." (Daily Readings, William Sangster, pg. 94)

Beautiful character may be the product of suffering! A trial successfully met produces stronger character and inspires greater hope for further progress towards the realization of final maturity in Christ.

When through fiery trial thy pathway lies,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply.
The flame shall not hurt thee;
I only design thy dross to consume
And thy gold to refine.
(Hymn – How Firm a Foundation)

Wrote James, *“Dear Brothers, is your life full of difficulties and temptations? Then be happy, for when the way is rough, your patience has a chance to grow. So, let it grow, and don’t try to squirm out of your problems. For when your patience is finally in full bloom, than you will be ready for anything, strong in character, full and complete.”* (James 1:2-4; Living Bible)

God can use all things in life – the ‘good’, the ‘bad’, and the ‘indifferent’ – and God can produce something ‘excellent’ out of them. He can take the ‘raw materials’ of life and do something good with them. Would you eat a cake if the heat of the oven was not first applied intensively to the cold liquid ingredients which were poured into the cake pan? Heat is important to produce a tasteful cake. Is it not important for ‘heat’ (suffering, discipline, and trials) to be applied to the life of a believer is he is to become a mature, ‘tasteful’, and ‘attractive’ Christian?

4. Suffering can enable a believer to develop a heart-felt ministry to other suffering persons. Many times, those who are most effective in ministry are those who minister in an area where they have themselves suffered most.

Notes William Sangster, “We see how rich a service the sufferers render to our poor tormented race. Sympathy is a shallow stream in the souls of those who have not suffered. There is something unheeding and harsh in a man who has known nothing of pain. And sympathy is far too precious in this needy world to begrudge the price at which it must be purchased. When Richard Baxter lost his wife, he declared, in his grief, ‘I will not be judged by any that have never felt the like.’ It was only another way of saying that he could not be comforted except by those who had suffered. Suffering, in a disciple, can often be wrested to service. It is Christ-like work to soothe and sympathize, and only those who have drunk the cup of sorrow are fully equipped to do it.” (Daily Readings, pg. 48)

5. Suffering can help develop a tender heart and a sympathetic nature. Wrote Paul, *“What a wonderful God we have – he is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the source of every mercy, and the one who so wonderfully comforts and strengthens us in our hardships and trials. And why does he do this? So that when these who are troubled, needing our sympathy and encouragement, we can pass on to them this same help and comfort God has given us. You can be sure that the more we undergo sufferings for Christ, the more He will shower us with his comfort and encouragement. We are in deep trouble for bringing you God’s comfort and salvation. But in our trouble God has comforted us – and this, too, to help you; to show you from our personal experience how God will tenderly comfort you when you undergo these same sufferings. He will give you the strength to endure.”* (2 Corinthians 1:3-7; Living Bible)

Think of the most beautiful and lovely and tender-hearted people you have known. Have they not usually been persons who have gone through difficult trials and tests and sorrow, and who have emerged victoriously? Have they not been the persons who, because of life's trials, have become understanding, gentle, stable, and caring?

Someone said that when certain sorrowing people needed a comforter, they would turn to a certain woman who was known for her gentle eyes. Those eyes came from a gentle heart, made tender through much sorrow.

6. Suffering can result in making you strongest where you have long been weakest. It is said that where a tape is spliced, it is stronger at the point of the splice than anywhere else. It is said that the place where the broken bone heals is much stronger than any other part of the bone.

Someone might say that an eagle with a broken wing which has been healed can never fly as high again. Or, the 'fallen Christian' who has been restored to fellowship with God through repentance can never be strong again (or 'effective') in Christian ministry.

Who can limit the power and the possibilities of grace which heals the broken and the wandering Christian who had succumbed to temptation, but who had learned his 'lessons' (in humility) will from his 'spiritual reversal'?

The story is told of a man who told the passenger in the back seat of his car to 'kick him forward' for 'greater comfort and better position in the car'. Will life's problems (and sufferings) 'kick' you forward during your journey of life?

7. Suffering can help turn your 'focus' away from the transitory and temporary concerns of earthly life, to more clearly 'focus' on the permanent and eternal verities of life. Susanna Wesley (mother of John Wesley), whose soul was many times covered with the 'sea billows of sorrow' (many of her 19 children died early in life), sought to make her sorrows 'serve' a redemptive and a beneficial purpose. She sought to turn her eyes toward God and toward heaven when she was immersed in earth's sorrows and griefs.

The mother of John Wesley wrote, "Since I must expect to meet with many difficulties, much opposition, many disappointments and daily trials of faith and patience in my passage through this world, may it be my highest wisdom to disengage my affections as much as I lawfully may from all transitory, temporal enjoyments, and to fix them on those more rational and spiritual pleasures which we are to enjoy when we enter upon our state of immortality."

25. MY GOD KNOWS THE WAY THROUGH THE WILDERNESS, SO I WILL FOLLOW!

God, during chaos and destruction, is the 'miracle-producing' God! What is 'impossible' with me is not impossible with God! "He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think!" What comfort this Biblical promise has given to me, during life's multiple trials and sorrows! I don't know what the future holds, but I do know who holds the future! "My Lord

knows the way through the wilderness, and all I have to do is follow!” (A chorus I sang numerous times when I was young.)

Our Savior has decisively won the ‘victory’ for mankind, at the Cross! Now, through the Holy Spirit, we can appropriate Christ’s victory for our own victory. “To God be the glory, great things He hath done!”

God is ready to forgive anyone of any sin when there is wholehearted repentance and genuine faith in Christ’s atoning grace!

“There is no sin stain that has gone so deep, but what the blood of Jesus goes deeper yet!”

John Newton (many years ago) was a ‘slave trader’ (a very wicked man), and God found this ‘lost soul’ and thoroughly converted him! Miracle of miracles! This man, once on the slave ships, became a love-filled preacher of the gospel! He wrote the song that is still sung by millions of folks: “Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I’m found, was blind, but now I see!”

26. A GREAT WOMAN SUFFERS GREATLY!

I was both sad and glad as I entered the hospital room of a ‘saintly’ woman by the name of Beulah Pilcher. I was glad to be in the presence of one of the godliest persons I had ever known. She was an older member of the church where I was pastor, whom I had long admired for her godly wisdom and her sweet temperament and her wise words and her special skills and her lifetime of service with her minister husband. She had been a widow for several years (her husband died before I was this woman’s pastor). Yes, as I entered that hospital room, I was glad when I thought of the many times that she and I had worshipped together, and when I thought of the joyous fellowship I had enjoyed being with her and with several other widows in the weekly ‘cottage prayer meeting’. When I went to her mobile home, I greatly enjoyed listening to her stories from the past, times when she and her dedicated husband (minister) saw God work miracles in the lives of persons that she reached out to. Yes, lots of reasons for my spirit of gladness, when I entered her hospital room.

But I also had reason for sadness! I had ambivalent feelings, before entering that hospital room! I had a certain ‘dread’ come over me. I knew that (again) when I entered that room, and when I stood beside her bed, that I would be looking into the face of a woman who would (despite the administered drugs) be in the agony of pain! She was slowly dying of that dreadful disease that everyone ‘runs’ from, namely, cancer!

How many are there right now who are slowly and painfully dying of cancer – the monster that is traversing the land to find someone to render a painful death! As I recall, it took several weeks (maybe months) before her agony (suffering) finally and mercifully ceased!

Death was such a ‘welcome friend’ for this saintly widow! Of course, during her bout with cancer, she had been ready to die for an extended period. She had walked with her Lord for a lifetime, and amidst her constant pain, she could hardly wait until she breather her last breath!

Why did she have to suffer for so long, and with such intense pain? Why did it take so long for her to die? If God was not the 'source' (cause) of this suffering, then was God trying to teach this faithful saint some important lessons? How was this terrible suffering, being endured by a beautiful human being, consistent with God's love? There must be some purpose in the 'long chapter of suffering'!

The 'mystery of human suffering' will probably never be 'solved', as we humans travel the many pathways on this terrestrial planet. We explore this 'mystery', but we will find only partial answers to our probing questions. Above everything else, it is important that we never conclude that God is the 'source' of human suffering! God is only the 'Author' of all things 'good', not all things 'bad'!

It is His perfect will, of course, that every human (sinner) experience the sorrow that always accompanies true repentance. 'Godly sorrow' (because of one's awakening to the reality of sin in his life) – that kind of grief and sorrow is meant to lead the sinner to the 'foot of the cross'! That sorrow, initiated by God, is a healthy sorrow. The sorrow that accompanies the chastening rod of correction – that, too, is initiated by God, and the result of that sorrow is healing and discipline and growth in the Lord! (Hebrews 12)

One highly respected writer, William Sangster, has some helpful insights regarding suffering. He notes, "People talk at times of sickness and disease as being 'the will of God', but it does not prevent them waiting on the doctor for a cure. It is only 'the will of God' in the sense that God created the world order in which sin and disease were possible. But man has misused his freedom. So, sin has come into the world, and sickness and disease with it. But God is not more opposed to sin than He is opposed to sickness. His will for men and women is perfect health of body and of soul. 'Why then', people ask, 'doesn't He banish sickness with one stroke of almighty power?' If this question troubles you, ask yourself another one. 'Why doesn't He banish sin the same way?'" The answer is, 'because our freedom is involved.' The moment God forced us to goodness, we should be robots and not men. At some level, our freedom is involved in sickness as well – not precisely the same way, not in a fashion easily recognizable, but in the fact that we sometimes break God's laws of health through folly or ignorance and the penalties follow (even where we are in no way to blame, as with little children and many adults too). God is fighting disease as He is fighting sin. All who really heal are his colleagues. Medical research students receive his aid – whether they are aware of it or not. He does not write the answers on the heavens for us, because He treats us as persons and works with us in fellowship. But He is against disease."

Because of the above comments on the phenomenon and mystery of human suffering, I was helped in my long-time and persistent struggle with the question as to why people in general suffer and why godly persons suffer. Of course, we finite, frail, 'creatures of clay' are not equipped to understand many of the divinely-concealed mysteries of life.

When we cannot understand with our minds, we must trust without our hearts. God does all things well and rightly, and we must put our trust in God's wisdom. He is all-wise (He knows

what is best). He is all-loving (He wants to do the best for each person). He is all-powerful (He can do what is best for each person).

Even though we will always, of course, come ‘very short’ of understanding the ‘mysterious ways’ of Almighty God, we must, nevertheless, be diligent in our search for truth. God gave us a good brain and, therefore, we should earnestly search for the truth about all of life, and specifically about the mysteries of human suffering. God, through various means and various methods, is seeking to eliminate human suffering.

Because God created human beings with a free will, human suffering is inevitable as a ‘happening’ in this type of world. God does not force His will upon humanity. Much of human suffering is the result of an individual’s own wrong moral choice. In many cases, persons suffer because of the wrong moral choice of other persons (near to them) – such as the suffering of unborn babies because of the wrong choice of the mother, and such as the suffering of troubled children because of the choice of their parents to divorce.

27 BEWILDERED MIND BUT A TRUSTING HEART!

Even though the mystery of human suffering remains, we can be assured that God loves humans. However, to the broken-hearted person who is seeking for answers, we must not give quick or easy or dogmatic or heretical answers to explain the premature (tragic) death of his loved ones!

Because we (believers) are called to comfort our sorrowing ‘brothers and sisters’ (in the faith), we will (carefully) want, at times, to offer some rational explanation for another’s misfortune. But, most of the time, sorrowing persons do not want rational explanations for their grief, but, rather, most sorrowing ones want a sympathetic heart and a listening ear!

There is probably no Christian (including an intellectually-oriented Christian) who can give an intellectually honest answer to many of the mysterious deaths that they encounter first hand, or that they read about. How do you give an answer to a person who is asking why their loved one died because of a tornado or of a hurricane or of a flood or of an earthquake? It is reported that more Christians died for their faith (persecution) during the 20th century, than in all the other centuries combined! Some skeptics ask, “Where was God when each of these loyal followers of Christ were being cruelly tortured and put to death so unjustly?”

Without being irreverent in attitude, the question can be asked, “Why were so many Christians being killed in car accidents, caused by drunk drives?” And another piercing question (not meant to be irreverent): “Why has God allowed the slaughter of many, many millions of unborn babies, through the cruel intervention of pain-giving, heartless doctors (who, despite their denials, played the role of monsters)?” And, focusing again on a ‘saintly woman’, “Why did Beulah Parker have to suffer so much, and for so long?”

28. GOD’S WAYS ARE HIGHER THAN OUR WAYS, AS HEAVEN IS ABOVE OUR EARTH!

There are many mysteries in life that will never be fully solved by us frail 'creatures of clay'. To understand all the mysteries of life (which God has not chosen to reveal) is about like an ant trying to understand the mysteries of Einstein's brain! God's ways are higher than our ways, as high as the heavens above the earth, and so are His thoughts compared to our thoughts!

The one 'mystery' that God has revealed – the most important mystery – is the fact that what Jesus (the Incarnate One) was here on earth – Perfect Love – God the Creator has always been! What kind of God is at the center of the Universe? Jesus revealed that He is a God of perfect Love! The most important fact of reality! Jesus revealed (once and for all) that God is for humans, not against humans.

Even though there are many injustices and inequities that are apparent in the 'happenings' of human life, and there are so many 'things' that occur on the earth (wars and crimes and so-called 'natural disasters', etc.) that defy human reasoning, we humans can be assured that God loves the human race, that God understands the hurts and sufferings which humans undergo, that God is the 'Great Compensator' who will redress every loss and who will repay every wrong.

Not one person will go 'unpaid' who has died prematurely (like aborted babies) or who has died unjustly (like martyred persons, or like war victims) or who has died accidentally (like those who died in tornados, and like those who died in car crashes).

29. GOD WILL 'BALANCE THE BOOKS' AT THE 'END OF HUMAN LIFE'!

God (in eternity) will 'make it up to those who suffered loss' here on earth. God, who is perfectly 'just' in all His dealings with humanity, will be a 'debtor to no man'! To those who have done evil (with no repentance) God will repay with just punishment. To those who have done great evil (hard-heartedly), God will apply 'many stripes'. To those who have done little evil (with little understanding of the nature of evil), God will apply fewer 'stripes'.

To whom much is given, much will be required. To whom little is given (pagan persons with no light of Christianity), little is required. God is the just judge, and His justice is always 'tempered with mercy'! The same is true of God's evaluation of the believer. The believer who has suffered the greatest for God (the believer who has shed his blood for Christ) will receive the greatest reward from Christ. Great will be the reward for those who have been greatly persecuted for Christ's sake (Matthew 8).

Why do some Christians, when they are going through the dying process, experience much more intense and extensive pain than do other Christians who die painlessly and quickly? Only God know the answer to that question!

One sure thing: Every Christian, as he is dying, and regardless of how much or how little pain he is enduring during the process of dying, experiences God's presence and God's enabling power. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." (Psalm 23)

It is my understanding that the last words that John Wesley said before he died were, “The best of all, God is with us!” As many martyrs for Christ were dying, throughout the last twenty centuries of Christian history, it is known that words of triumph were often on their lips – even while they were greatly suffering! If God gives His followers ‘living grace’ (i.e., power to live the Christian life), so God will also give Christians ‘dying grace’ (i.e., the strength to go through the dying process).

The ‘mystery of why some Christians suffer and why some other Christians apparently suffer much less – this mystery probably will never be ‘solved’ on this side of eternity. For instance, Hebrews 11 (the faith chapter) records the fact that many believers, because of their faith in God, escaped the ‘edge of the sword’ in persecution, while other believers, who possessed equally great faith in God, died by the ‘edge of the sword’ during bitter persecution!

Both are equally blessed by God, but some Christians at that time experienced great physical sufferings for Christ, while other Christians escaped great physical suffering! Why did God deliver some from suffering, while He allowed other Christians to suffer greatly – in life and during death? Does God have favorites?

God ‘favors’ all persons who have a ‘close walk’ with God, but, for some unknown (strange) reason, God allows some of His ‘choicest servants to ‘suffer greatly’! Does anyone understand the ‘mysterious ways’ of God’s love? Because someone suffers greatly, this fact does not mean that God loves him less!

Who can discern the mysterious ways of God? One’s mind is ‘baffled’ when he tries to figure out the strange ways of God. All we can say is that God loves everyone, and that God has a specific ‘purpose’ for the life of every soul – including the soul who suffers pain because of life’s circumstances! We can never fully understand the mysteries of life (the many injustices and inequities of life), and why ‘things happen’ the way they do.

We must affirm, anew, that, despite the confusion of our mind and despite the doubts of our spirit, God, indeed, is who He said He is – namely – a God of perfect and unconditional love. During our times when our suffering seems to defy reason, we must say, “God, Thou art love, and, even though I am deeply hurting because of the bruises and the beatings of life, I will put my trust in you. I know that you will use all the difficult experiences in my life, for my own good and for your own honor and praise”!

30. GOD IS THE ‘GREAT COMPENSATOR’ IN ETERNITY!

Why have some persons experienced a rather ‘easy’ or ‘comfortable’ exit from this earthly life, while other persons (like Beulah Parker) had a painful time during their dying process? Only God can answer that difficult question! God is the “great Compensator”, and in eternity all things will be made ‘right’. No more injustice and inequities – in eternity!

All who were unrewarded and unrecognized on earth will be rewarded and will be recognized in heaven, and God will exalt those who were humiliated or persecuted on earth. The followers of

Christ who, on earth, were bitterly persecuted, will be crowned with the ‘crown of life’ in heaven! No more sorrow and no more suffering!

The former (evil) things of earth will all be passed away, and behold, all things in heaven will be new! The remaining questions (regarding the mystery of human suffering) may or may not be answered by God, in heaven.

But, whether those ‘thorny questions’ are answered, the important thing is that the justice of God will be vindicated, and the righteousness of God will be honored, and the peace of God will prevail among all of heaven’s inhabitants. As previously mentioned, those who suffered most for Christ, while they lived on this earth, are the ones (such as martyrs) who will receive the ‘greatest rewards’! Jesus said, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for great will be their reward!”

It is conceivable (based on this scripture) that there will be ‘levels of rewards’ in heaven. Because the love of God is in the heart of every heavenly citizen, there will be, of course, no carnal (jealous) competition between the inhabitants of heaven!

31. WILL GOD DISTRIBUTE ‘REWARDS’ IN HEAVEN?

There is scriptural teaching regarding the ‘Judgment of Rewards’. From a study of this scriptural passage, it is certain that God will reward each person in eternity, according to the quality of his/her life that he or she has lived (that is, the quality of godlike living). Also, the quality and the quantity of ‘good works’, done with a loving heart, and for the glory of God – these ‘good works’ will also be evaluated, and appropriate rewards will be given to the ‘worthy recipients’.

The ‘Judgment of Evaluation’ is only for believers in heaven. The ‘Judgment of Damnation’ will be only for unbelievers who failed to make heaven their home. There will be differing ‘degrees of rewards’, given by God to persons in heaven! It appears from studying scripture that there will be a great deal of difference in the kind of rewards, and in the degree of rewards that God will give to the heavenly citizens.

For the sake of emphasis, it needs to be stated again that the greater that believers suffer for the sake of righteousness (that is, the greater they suffer for the person of Christ) here on earth, the greater their reward in heaven!

32. CAN JESUS ‘CALM THE STORM’ OF GREAT SORROW AND GRIEF AND HEARTACHE IN YOUR PERSONAL LIFE?

“I believe that pain and suffering are never the will of God for his children. I was never able, in the days when I was a pastor of people, to go into a house where someone was stricken with illness – perhaps a condition which would be like a living death – and say, “This is the will of God.” I could never go into a family where there had been a death by accident or where a young person had died too soon and say, “This is the will of God.” I cannot conceive that it is the will of God that anyone should be run over by a driver under the influence of drink, or that a young mother should die of leukemia, or that someone in the first flush of youth should face the increasing helplessness of arteriole-sclerosis. When these things happen, I am quite certain that there is no one sorrier than God.

“When things like that happen, we are not meant to accept them with folded hands. We are meant to do all that we can to see that we do not allow them to happen again. Jesus said, *“If it is by the finger of God I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you.”* (Luke 11:20) The coming of the kingdom involves the defeat of disease and pain.

“I knew a woman whose daughter was killed by an electrical household accident, electrocuted by an electric blanket. There was a fatal accident inquiry, and the verdict was that it was ‘an act of God’. The mother was shattered. Of course, it is only a legal formula to denote something of which the explanation is undiscoverable, but there are few more blasphemous phrases in the English language. At that time there was no one sorer than God that something which should never have happened had happened to one of his children!

“I had my own experience, a wounding attribution of events to the will of God. The BBC asked me to do a week’s ‘ten to eight’ in the morning talks on radio, and they asked me to take as a subject the modern approach to the miracles of Jesus. It was not a subject which I myself would have chosen, but I agreed to do it. The line I took was a line that I have always taken. (I have always felt that Jesus is to be regarded, not as a person who did things nineteen hundred years ago, but as a person who does things now!) I therefore said that the miracles were often not so much stories of what Jesus once did, but symbols of what he still can do!) I spoke of the stilling of the storm, and I said that if Jesus did still a storm on the Lake of Galilee in AD 28, it meant very little to me. But it is different if the lesson of the story is that in any storm of life there is in the presence of Jesus confidence and calm, that the storms Jesus stills are in the hearts of men, so that, no matter what tempest of trouble or pain or sorrow may blow upon life, with him there is calm.

“On the last day of the week instead of a talk I was interviewed by David Winter. He asked me how I had come to this way of looking at things. I told him the truth. I told him that some years ago, our twenty-one-year-old daughter and the lad to whom she would someday have been married were both drowned in a yachting accident. I said that God did not stop that accident at sea, but he did still the storm in my own heart, so that somehow my wife and I came through that terrible time still on our own two feet! The letters after the broadcasts began to come in, and there came an anonymous letter from Northern Ireland:

“Dear Dr. Barclay: I know now why God killed your daughter; it was to save her from being corrupted by your heresies.’ That the accidental destruction of the beautiful and the good was the will of God! If I had had that writer’s address, I would have written back, not in anger; the inevitable blaze of anger was over in a flash, but in pity, and I would have to have said to him, as John Wesley said to someone; ‘Your God is my devil’. The day my daughter was lost at sea there was sorrow in the heart of God.

“When things like that happen, there are just three things to be said:

“First, to understand them is impossible. Second, Jesus does not offer us solutions to them. What he does offer us is his strength to somehow accept what we cannot understand. Third, the one saving reaction is simply to go on living, to go on working, and to find in the presence of Jesus Christ the strength and courage to meet with steady eyes, and to know the comfort that God too is afflicted in my affliction.”

(*William Barclay, A Spiritual Autobiography*; by William Barclay, pp. 44-46)

33. WHAT ABOUT THE ‘UNMERITED SUFFERING’ OF GODLY PERSONS?

Serious-minded persons (including serious-minded Christians) have often asked the aforementioned question (and other similar questions) regarding the ‘mystery of human suffering’. Some good, but incomplete, answers have been given to these questions, to satisfy men’s minds and to comfort men’s hearts, but honesty demands that we must admit that all inquirers probably have as many questions as they now have answers regarding ‘human suffering’.

Finite persons (regardless of their high level of intelligence) can hardly fathom the mind of the Infinite God. The Bible says that God’s ‘ways’ are higher than man’s ‘ways’, as high as the heavens are above the earth, and so are God’s thoughts compared to the thoughts of man!

It is right and it is proper for humans to inquire and to probe and to contemplate the ways of God, for God gave humans a mind that, in some ways reflects the mind of Almighty God. God has been pleased to reveal some of His thoughts and some of His ways to finite man. God primarily reveals truth about Himself through the written Word (the Bible), and secondarily through the ‘pages of Nature’. “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” – this statement amazingly states that God has been pleased to reveal to man some of the thoughts that are in the mind of the glorious Son of God! This seems ‘too good to be true’, but God has willed it to be true.

Because we humans (at our very best) are still members of a ‘fallen race’, imperfect in our body and mind, and spirit, and because we humans are subject (even at our best) to mistakes and to misjudgments, we humans (including Christians) must not be dogmatic or proud in our claims to understanding the ways and the will of Almighty God!

The fact that equally intelligent and equally godly persons (Christians) disagree about important matters (like the mystery of ‘human suffering’) demonstrates that (at best) Christians now (on earth) perceive ‘reality’ as if they were ‘looking through a colored glass’ (not through a ‘clear glass’). At best, we humans, who are very limited in our capacity to perceive ‘reality’ from God’s perspective, can understand only a small portion of the whole ‘horizon of truth’.

What we see of truth is most wonderful, but we can only see the bare outlines of reality. We can only see a small part of reality, as if we were peering through a ‘hazy colored window’!

We must continue to ask questions and to seek solutions to the ‘riddles of life’ (to the troublesome questions regarding the ‘dilemmas of human suffering’), but, amidst all our continuing ‘honest and diligent inquiries’, we must humbly admit that the ‘half has not yet been told’, that there is so much that we finite creatures will never know!

We must have a teachable, humble, prayerful attitude, for God cannot and will not reveal Himself and His exalted ‘ways’ to the proud and haughty and self-reliant and close-minded persons!

The conclusions we draw regarding the difficult and the complex issues of ‘human suffering’ must be ‘tentative’ conclusions, that is, ‘tentative’ conclusions unless the Bible speaks explicitly and clearly regarding some ‘aspect’ of the broader topic.

Whether these mysteries (regarding ‘human suffering’) will be revealed to us earthly creatures, we do not know. Probably some questions regarding the ‘mysteries of human suffering’ will never be fully revealed to humans, while we roam the beautiful fields of this amazing earth. Will our questions regarding the ‘unmerited suffering’ of godly people only be answered when ‘earth’s sufferers’ get to heaven?

Will God unlock the mysteries, and will God clearly reveal the meaning of His sovereign purposes (i.e., purposes for so much suffering on this planet)? Will God think it necessary (or desirable) to give an answer regarding the mysteries of human suffering, an answer from the perspective of His ‘eternal purposes’?

When we (by God’s grace) ‘end up on those heavenly shores’ (in our home of no ending), will our inquiring mind be satisfied, and will our crushed spirit be healed, as these resulted from earth’s experiences of great suffering?

Or, will our joys and our glory and our health be so perfected that we heavenly citizens (clothed with our heavenly body) have no recall or remembrance of the trials (sufferings) that we experienced on earth? Perhaps, in our heavenly ‘state’, we will have no interest whatever to ask questions regarding the mystery of human suffering (as we personally experienced it on earth).

Will the heavenly citizens (who were aborted babies on earth) have any need or have any desire to ask God for an explanation for their premature death at the hands of a selfish mother and a cooperating doctor? Will those millions of Jews who were slaughtered by the Nazi regime need to or want to ask why they were the unfortunate victims of evil tyrants during an evil regime on earth? No one knows the answers to these honest and penetrating questions.

God is the ‘Great Compensator’, and God will abundantly ‘compensate’ persons who died prematurely (like aborted babies) and who died unjustly (like the Jews in the concentration camps).

Remember, God is a debtor to no man. God will surely ‘pay’ those who deserve to be paid (even though their deserved ‘pay’ is a long time in coming)! God will ‘make it up’ to those who suffered at the hands of evil persons (like aborted babies and the Jews who suffered terribly and unjustly).

Make no mistake about it: God is a perfectly just God, and no wrong escapes God’s attention! Sooner or later (on this earth, or in eternity) God will ‘balance the books’ (the books of justice). All evil will be punished, and all righteousness will be rewarded. Though the wrongs seem often so strong, God is the Ruler yet. God will ‘redress all wrongs’. He will vindicate His justice!

Sinful men think they can control evil, with impunity (i.e., they think they can sin ‘in secret’ without any accountability or any punishment). So much of the suffering in our world is the result of the criminal actions of evil men. Often, persons are irresponsible in their behavior (such as a drunkard who disturbs an entire household, or like an irresponsible husband who divorces his wife and, thus, greatly hurts his children).

There often is a chain reaction affect, because of the sinful actions of an adulterous husband, and (tragically) that chain effect of suffering can go on for many years. To break God's moral laws, not only brings suffering to the lawbreaker, but the lawbreaker, in turn, negatively affects many others (obviously his wife and his children, but often his extended family members).

34. WHAT CAN THE HOLY SPIRIT DO ABOUT HUMAN SUFFERING?

We may not fully understand with our mind why 'certain things' (sufferings) happen, but when our mind is 'void' of understanding, our hearts, nevertheless, can 'feel' the sympathy and the love of our blessed Savior. The Bible calls the Holy Spirit (the Third Person of the Trinity) the 'Comforter'. This word in the original language means 'the one who is called alongside' of the needy person. That needy person might need a 'Comforter' (a companion) to go with him to a legal court, to aid him in making a proper defense. Another needy person might need the 'Comforter' to go with him through one of life's difficult experiences, like a hard trial, or like a heartbreaking sorrow! The 'Comforter' (Holy Spirit) is man's "Helper" (companion) the one who is called alongside of a needy person.

When our hearts are breaking, when our dreams have died, when our inner spirit is damaged because of our own moral failures, or because someone around us (like an abandoned father) has deeply hurt us, or because we are facing the trauma of a terminal illness, or because we have lost an important job, or because we as a teen are facing the ridicule or bullying from our school peers, or because, or because!

You name the particular 'crisis' that you are facing (the suffering of one kind or another). It is 'good news' to know that Jesus sent into our world (on the Day of Pentecost) the 'Comforter' (the blessed Holy Spirit). The Holy Spirit (Comforter) is ready to 'come along beside you' to encourage you and to guide you, during every difficult experience of your life! Every morning, before you leave your bed, call upon the blessed Spirit to come along beside you during your every 'moment' of your day! The Spirit's main 'function' on earth is to enable believers to 'exalt Christ in all they think and do'!

Just as Jesus is the 'sympathizing Friend' (the One who can perfectly 'identify' with suffering mankind), so the blessed Holy Spirit is the 'Comforter', the One who is hovering over our 'weeping world' – to heal us and to guide us and to protect us from all 'evil'!

The 'Comforter' is ready and He is able, and He is willing to 'come to our aid', to heal the brokenhearted, to lift the fallen, to speak words of reassurance to the discouraged, to apply the 'healing balm' to the wounds of hurting and suffering folks. In all these ministries of comfort, the Holy Spirit is intent on raising our sights to worship and to praise the Living Christ!

He is the perfect 'Comforter', but you must allow Him to 'comfort' you – to comfort you in a hundred different ways! O Hallelujah, the Comforter has come! Someone said that if you take just 'one step' towards the 'Comforter', the 'Comforter' will take a thousand steps toward you!

35. CAN I BE HEALED WITHOUT THE SURRENDER OF MY 'WILL' TO GOD?

The Comforter (Holy Spirit), because He has profound respect for the human ‘free will’, will not force Himself upon anyone. However, if you activate your ‘will’ in a movement (however small) towards the ‘Comforter’, then the ‘Comforter’ will respond positively towards you.

The Comforter is a Divine Person, and as such, He has a divine mind, a divine heart (feelings), and a divine will (purpose). The Bible exhorts us to respond to the ‘Comforter’ with profound respect and with sincere worship and genuine love. The ‘Comforter’ (as a Person), can be ‘quenched’, can be ‘grieved’, can be ‘resisted’. The ‘Comforter’ wants to be your ‘Helper’ (the One who is called alongside of us), but, without the willing consent of a human being, the ‘Comforter’ will not minister to a human being, that is, to a human being who is resistant or who is indifferent to the Spirit’s overtures of divine love.

The ‘Comforter’ will not ‘force’ His way into our lives. He very much wants to be our ‘Divine Friend’, but He wants to be invited into our lives – to be invited into our lives so that He may minister to us in various ways – to comfort us in our sorrows, to guide us in our decisions, to heal us in our hurts, to strengthen us in our weakness, to enlighten in our confusion, and so much more!

The Spirit (Comforter) is willing and He is desirous to administer healing to our multiple hurts and sufferings, but He awaits our willing response to His loving invitation to us.

I must not try to explain all the mysteries of human suffering (although intellectual inquiry is permitted by the God who created my brain)! Also, I certainly must not try to explain away my suffering (which a certain religion tends to do), but I must (most importantly) allow the Spirit to enable me to ‘use’ my suffering in some positive way.

Either the Spirit (as the ‘Comforter’) will heal my suffering (swiftly or gradually), or the Spirit will enable me to live with my continuing suffering and thus become a stronger believer because of living with the suffering! The New Testament places great emphasis on the importance of seeking God with the surrender of my will to conform to the will of the Almighty and the Loving God! God honors my will!

36. ASK GOD TO ‘USE’ YOUR SUFFERING FOR SOME BENEFICIAL PURPOSE

Someone said (so wisely) that, in light of the mysteries of human suffering, we should not try to ‘explain suffering’, nor should we try to deny suffering (i.e., we should not try to ‘explain away suffering’), but that we should seek to ‘use’ suffering in some way for our own benefit and for the benefit of others. In other words, we should not allow our suffering to be ‘wasted’!

We should learn some life lessons (because of going through our suffering) – lessons that will enable us to grow in our ‘faith’ (in our walk with Christ). No one likes suffering, and no one should ‘seek’ suffering, but when suffering comes to us (from several possible sources), we ought (with the help of the Spirit) to ‘get some good out of our suffering’!

Now (on earth) we see reality as if we are peering through a ‘tinted glass’ (not a ‘clear glass’), but then (in heaven) we shall see reality more clearly – and probably see reality ‘progressively’ as knowledge continues to be unfolded to us, throughout the ‘endless ages of eternity’! I do not know what is meant by the Biblical promise, but it is an amazing statement: “We (believers) shall know, even as we are known!”

As I have previously noted, in ‘light’ of the kind and immensity of ‘human suffering’ in the world, I have found great comfort in the concept of ‘compensation’. Because God is, indeed, a God who is all-loving and all-powerful, and all just, I believe that God is the ‘Great Compensator’!

If not always in this world, in eternity God will vindicate every person who has suffered unjustly in this world. God will not be a ‘debtor’ to any person who has been the object of unjust treatment, God, the ‘Great Compensator’, will make it up to those who die ‘before their time’, whether that death was because of ‘war’ or because of ‘disease’ or because of ‘accident’ or because of ‘natural disaster’ or because of abortion!

37. ARE ALL ‘HUMAN DEATHS’ THE RESULT OF THE DIVINE EXERCISE OF GOD’S SOVEREIGN (MYSTERIOUS) WILL AND PURPOSE?

As a pastor of one local church for nearly 27 years, I officiated at the funeral services of many people – including several infants, young persons, and middle-aged adults, as well as numerous elderly folks. I have no problem in suggesting that it was God’s ‘perfect will’ to call home to Heaven many of the saints of God who had lived long and productive lives. But I do have difficulty in believing that the deaths of infants and children and young adults are an expression of God’s ‘perfect will’. Yes, it is true that all things which happen (including thousands of deaths which result because of earthquakes, tornados, hurricanes, wars, car accidents, etc.) are ‘allowed’ by the God of Heaven, and thus these tragedies are subject to God’s Sovereign Will. It is at this point that we must make a distinction between God’s ‘perfect will’ and God’s ‘permissive will’. Notes Robert Shank, “All that occurs in the universe is within the permissive will of God. Neither men nor angels nor devils can go beyond the limits of God’s permissive will. But it is by no means true that all that occurs is in accord with the perfect will of God. One may argue that, since the world is filled with greed, lust violence, debauchery, hatred, and impenitence, God wishes it to be so and is well pleased. But the Scriptures declare otherwise. Although God allows these things to exist in the world, He has revealed His displeasure and wrath with respect to all such things and has commanded all men to repent. Thus, it is evident that there are two aspects of the will of God with respect to sin: His permissive will allows it, but His perfect will forbids it and will bring all sin into judgment.” (Life in the Son, pg. 348)

Some well-meaning Christians – Christians who believe they are honoring the ‘Sovereignty’ of their living God – find themselves saying some very hurtful (and erroneous) things to broken-hearted parents of infants or young people who have died. Things like, “Well, God wanted another ‘angel’ in heaven, so that is why God chose to take your baby.” How horrible and how heretical! I held a double funeral service for a young couple whose car was hit head-on by a drunk driver, and this young father and mother left behind several children to grieve the tragic loss of their loving Christian parents. Was it God’s ‘perfect will’ for this couple to die on that

sunny Saturday afternoon, as they were enjoying a relaxing ride in the country, and who suddenly were killed as an oncoming vehicle (driven by a drunk driver) hit them head-on at the top of a hill on that county road? And what about the several children who died from one cause or another – from cancer or some other ‘defect’ – whose parents I, as their pastor, tried hard to comfort in their bereavement. Would it have helped those sorrowing parents for me to have told them that they should not grieve too much, for the death of their children was a manifestation of God’s mysterious, sovereign, and ‘perfect will’? Was it God’s ‘perfect will’ (if not ‘pleasure’) to take the life of my beloved, godly fifteen-year-old niece – who died in 1981 from a seizure as she was happily riding on a roller Coaster in an Amusement Park? Was it God’s ‘perfect will’ for several of my dear friends (and parishioners) to die in their middle age from cancer – cancer that admittedly was caused by long-time smoking? Yes, these latter persons were believers when they died, and I know they are now in heaven, but was it “God’s fault” that these believers succumbed to their ‘physical weakness’ and failed to ‘give up’ their destructive habit of smoking cigarettes? I have officiated at funeral services for young adults who chose to take their own lives (suicide). But are those who believe strongly in the sovereignty of God going to declare that such (suicidal) deaths are ‘God’s will’?

Writes William Barclay, “I read of a minister who visited a mother who had lost a daughter in most tragic circumstances. When the accident was being investigated, a certain phrase was used by one of the chief investigators, a man with long experience in such matters. He said that the accident was so impossible of explanation that all he could say was that it was ‘an act of God’.” Barclay then notes, “It is difficult to imagine a more terrible and a more blasphemous phrase....It is NOT an act of God. When a child or a young couple dies too soon, when there is a fatal accident, maybe due to someone’s mistake or misjudgment, that is NOT an act of God, neither is it the will of God. It is, in fact, the precise opposite. It is against the will of God, and God is just as grieved about it as we are....It is exactly and precisely what God did NOT will. It is due to some human failure or to some human selfishness. God gave men free will because there could neither be goodness nor love without free will, and exactly for that reason the action of men can run right counter to the will of God. I do not think that anyone can calculate the vast amount of damage that has been done by suggesting that terrible and tragic events in life are the will of God. Quite clearly, Jesus did NOT think sickness and illness events in the life are the will of God. Quite clearly, he thought them the reverse of the will of God. They were the very things that he had come to help and to overcome. What can we say at a time like this? We can say that he has it in his power to make it up to those who are taken too soon away, and to those to whom sorrow, and suffering has tragically come. If God is justice, and if God is love, I am as certain as it is possible to be certain of anything, that there is a life to come. And in that life to come, God is seeing to it that the life cut off too soon is getting its chance to blossom and flourish, and the life involved in tragedy is finding its compensation. The eternal world is redressing the balance of the world of time. We can say that Christianity has never pretended to explain sorrow and suffering. It may often be that in any tragedy there is traceable an element of human fault, human sin; in any disaster the reason may well lie in human error. Yet even when all such cases are considered there remains much that is sheer inexplicable. Christianity offers no cheap and facile explanation. In face of such things, we have often to say, ‘I do not know why this happened’. But what Christianity does triumphantly offer is the power to face these things, to bear them, to come through them, and even to transform them so that the tragedy becomes a crown.” (*In the Hands of God*; pp. 126, 127)

Notes William Sangster, “People talk at times of sickness and disease as being the ‘will of God’, but, it does not prevent them from waiting on the doctor for a cure. It is only the ‘will of God’ in the sense that God created the world order in which sin and disease were possible. But man has misused his freedom. So, sin has come into the world, and sickness and disease with it. But God is not more opposed to sin than he is opposed to sickness. His will for men and women is perfect health of body and of soul. ‘Why then’, people ask, ‘doesn’t he banish sickness with one stroke of his almighty power?’ If this question troubles you, ask yourself another one. ‘Why doesn’t he banish sin in the same way?’ The answer is ‘Because our freedom is involved.’ The moment God forced us to goodness, we should be robots and not men. At some level, our freedom is involved in sickness as well – not in precisely the same way, not in a fashion easily recognizable, but in the fact that we sometimes break God’s laws of health through folly or ignorance and the penalties that follow (even when we are in no way to blame, as with little children and many adults, too). God is fighting disease as he is fighting sin. All who really heal are his colleagues. Medical research students receive his aid – whether they are aware of it or not. He does not write the answers on the heavens for us, because he treats us as persons and works with us in fellowship, but he is against disease.

“There are problems of pain and providence we cannot fully solve. But we have had enough evidence of God’s love to trust. We (Christians) have seen God in Jesus Christ. We are putting our hand in his and going forward unafraid. If this is irrational, then every child in the world is irrational too. All children are perplexed at times by their parents. ‘Why this?’ ‘Why that?’ They are old enough to ask the question, though not old enough to understand the answers. But they trust their father’s love. Is this not what we (Christians) are doing?” (*Questions People Ask About Religion*; pp. 89, 90, 94)

38. LEARNING TO LIVE WITH THE ‘MYSTERY OF UNEXPLAINED HUMAN SUFFERING’!

It is the ‘way of wisdom’, indeed, the ‘way of humility’ for a mere, finite, frail, ‘fallen’, human being – you and me as representatives of the ‘human race’ – to acknowledge that, at best, we will understand the ‘mind’ (the ‘movements’ and ‘methods’ and ‘intentions’ and ‘plans’) of Almighty God, very ‘inaccurately’. After all, we humans are the ‘fallen’ creatures, while God is the ‘unfallen’ (sinless) Eternal Creator! We are ‘finite’, while God is ‘infinite’! We are ‘material’ (subject to deterioration and ultimate death), whereas God is ‘immaterial’ (eternal and totally alive! Our knowledge (at best) is incomplete and partial, whereas God is perfect and complete and accurate in His knowledge! We ‘see reality’ (incompletely and inaccurately), as if we are looking through a ‘hazy glass’! We can only ‘see’ one ‘room’ of the house (life), but God sees the entire ‘house’ (human life) from both the ‘inside of the ‘house’, and from the outside of the ‘house’ (entirely and accurately and completely)! We see only a ‘small portion’ of human life (events and circumstances), at any one time, during our earthly ‘venture’ (journey), but God, who is ‘all-knowing’ (all-seeing) can see the entire life of every person, at all times (i.e., God can see all of the thoughts and intentions and decisions of each person, and God can ‘trace’ all the events and happenings in the life of each person)! God can see the ‘end from the beginning’, the “causes and the effects”, the “dynamic factors” which influence the decisions which each person

makes! Without violating the ‘free exercise’ of each person’s own ‘choosing’, God (the Sovereign One) guides the direction of His ‘beloved children’!

Many ‘things’ (events and happenings) that transpire in one’s life defy ‘reason’ (i.e., many events are beyond the mind of ‘Man’ to understand, rationally). The question is often asked (in humility, not defiantly), by sinners, and by God-fearing persons, (i.e., by God-lovers), “Why do ‘bad things’ happen to good persons?” Of course, this question is not only asked by modern-day persons (including Christian persons)! Not only do ‘hurting’ believers (today) ask this question! It was the ancient man, Job, whose sufferings (losses and griefs) were beyond imagination, who also asked the same question! God, whose ways are ‘higher than our ways, and whose thoughts are greater than our thoughts, as the heavens are higher and greater than we can comprehend” (note Isaiah 55:8), it is this God who asks us humans. *“Can you solve the mysteries of God” Can you discover everything there is to know about the Almighty? Such knowledge is higher than the heavens – but who are you? It is deeper than the underworld – what can you know in comparison to him? It is broader than the earth and wider than the sea.”* (Job 11:7-9; Living Bible).

Out of His great ‘heart of love’, God (the Creator) has chosen to reveal ‘some reality’ – in fact, the most important ‘reality’ – to ‘fallen’ human beings! “In the fullness of time” – at just the ‘right time’ in human history – God revealed the greatest ‘reality’ of all, revealed the ‘reality’ of His own ‘eternal nature’! What was that ‘eternal reality’, revealed to a ‘lost race’ of creatures? Namely, that “God so loved His lost world that He was willing to redeem that world of sinners, by taking the penalty of man’s sins upon Himself (by sending His own Son to die a cruel death on an old rugged cross)!”

The ‘mystery’, hidden for generations, was revealed on a dark Friday, the Friday when Jesus suffered and died – all for the purpose of demonstrating God’s eternal love (a redeeming love)! Because Jesus died for sinners, all sinners can now enjoy forgiveness from sin, and enjoy a new life! A ‘divinely-wrought’ transformed life! (2 Corinthians 5:17)

But , as glorious as this Redemption is, God’s redeemed sons and daughters are not saved from the ‘troubles’ and ‘trials’ and ‘tests’ and ‘temptations’ that are a ‘part and parcel’ of human living on a ‘fallen planet’!

There are many ‘God-allowed’ benefits that are derived from ‘human suffering’ – the ‘chief benefit’ (possibly) being the ‘production of God-like character’! When facing suffering (suffering that believing ones have no way to ‘explain’), children of God are assured that the ‘Comforter” (Holy Spirit) will give needed ‘grace’ (strength) to ‘cope (with all kinds of troubles and losses and griefs)!

What should the suffering one say (to himself) when he/she is experiencing ‘irrational’ (unexplainable, mysterious, undefined) sufferings? He/she should pray (to himself and to His loving Lord) something like this:

“O God, Thou Loving Lord, I am troubled deeply, and I fail to understand why I, who have sought obediently to follow You, am suffering such loss in my life, at this particular time! I know You are a God of Infinite Love – a God who wants nothing but the best for me. I know

You are a God of Wisdom – a God who knows me perfectly and who knows what is best for me. Also, I know You are a God of Infinite Power – a God who is able to accomplish what is going to make my life truly ‘fruitful’ and ‘successful’! Thou God of perfect love, wisdom, and power, I humble myself in your presence, just now! I am deeply ‘hurting’ emotionally! I am greatly confused in my thoughts, mentally! I feel so weak in my will, hardly able to ‘act’ and ‘react’ to my external world (affairs and responsibilities)! You, loving Father, have told me that You would not allow your children to shed ‘needless tears’! I cannot understand the ‘mystery’ of my personal suffering, but You said that your ‘grace’ is all-sufficient for all my tragedies and troubles in this human life! I do not understand the ‘mystery’ of all my present suffering, but I believe You truly love me (as demonstrated on Mount Calvary)! Therefore, amidst my suffering, I will ‘rest my case’, ‘surrender my questions’, ‘commit my will’ to follow You! I will build my future life upon the ‘solid foundation’ of your Eternal Unconditional Love! I will seek (intellectually) to understand (as best I can) why I am suffering and (much more importantly) I will ask You, my God, for your wisdom that I may be able ‘creatively’ to USE my suffering for beneficial (God-honoring) purposes! Humbly, I will continue to affirm the reality of my createdness, in contrast to the mystery and majesty of God’s Creatorhood (Deity). Yes, God, I acknowledge the very obvious ‘facts’ of ‘reality’. I am finite, You are infinite! I am ‘time-bound’ and You are ‘eternal’! I am ‘limited in knowledge’ and You are ‘all-knowing’! I am ‘vulnerable’ as a lost soul, and You are the ‘Rock of ages’! I am a ‘dying creature’ and You are the ‘eternal Creator’! I am a ‘mere mortal’ and You are ‘immortal’! I am ‘the spiritually-thirsty one, and You are the ‘fountain of life! I am the ‘hungry one’, and You are the ‘Bread of Life’! I am the ‘sick one’, and You are the ‘Great Physician’! I am the ‘anguished one’, and You are the ‘Giver of Peace’! I am the ‘grief-stricken one’, and You are the ‘Bosom of Comfort’! I am the ‘fear-tossed one’, and You are the ‘Reassuring Divine Presence’! I am the ‘despair-filled one’, and You are the ‘Hope-giving Lord’! I am the ‘subject’ and You are the ‘Lord of Life’! I am the ‘guilty and morally undone person’, and You are you are the ‘One who is rich in mercy and ready to forgive’! I sometimes feel lonely and insignificant, but You (Loving Lord) breathe value into every person (including me).

“Yes, as stated in detail above, I am totally dependent upon You, in times of joy and in times of sorrow! In Thee, O my God, I live and move and I have my very ‘being’ – I am totally dependent upon You (my Creator and my Savior)!

“Yes, I affirm your unconditional, steadfast, comforting love! I also acknowledge (humbly) that You (O, God) have ‘thoughts’ that are completely different from my thoughts. Your ways are far beyond anything I could imagine. *‘For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are your ways higher than my ways and your thoughts higher than my thoughts.’* (Isaiah 55:9)

[End of personal, humble prayer to one’s Loving, Sovereign God.]

The ‘mystery of human suffering’ is just that – a mystery, an event that the human mind cannot fully understand! God’s ‘ways’ and ‘will’ (both His ‘perfect will’ and His ‘permissive will’) – these are not easily ‘discovered’ or accurately ‘discerned’! Sometimes, because God is sovereign and mere man is very limited in knowledge, the ‘best of minds’ are dumbfounded and baffled! We humans ‘see’ reality as if we were looking through a ‘hazy glass’!

One of the most perceptive (mature) minds was the ‘mind’ (contemplations) of a 19th Century man whose name was John Henry Newman (who died August 11, 1890, at age 89). As brilliant, and as insightful as this philosopher/theologian was, he readily (humbly) acknowledged the ‘limits of human understanding’ as it relates to the mysterious ways (actions) of Almighty God! Tragedies, in other words, happen that no human being (including Christians) can fully understand. In humility, the most brilliant minds throughout the ages, have had to learn to ‘live with unsolved mysteries’ – to accept that God’s all-wise ways are higher than any human way of thinking (as ‘high as the heavens are above the earth’)!

John Henry Newman readily acknowledged that there is no ‘clean-cut’ system of theology (‘study of God’) that solves all the perplexities and mysteries of life, that solves all the ‘dilemmas’ of unexplained sufferings (or, for that matter, any other mysterious happening)! Notes Newman, “No revelation can be complete and systematic, from the weakness of the human intellect; so far as it is not such, it is mysterious. . . .There are forthwith difficulties and perplexities. A revelation is religious doctrine viewed on its illuminated side; a mystery is the selfsame doctrine viewed on the side unilluminated. Thus religious truth is neither light nor darkness, but both together; it is like the dim view of a country seen in the twilight, which forms half extricated from the darkness, with broken lines and isolated masses. Revelation, in this way of considering it, is not a revealed system, but consists of a number of detached and incomplete truths belonging to a vast system unrevealed, of doctrines and injunctions mysteriously connected together; that is, connected by unknown media, and bearing upon unknown portions of the system.” (Newman, *A Man for Our Time*; edited by David Brown; pp 9-10)

39. TRAGEDY AT THE CROSSING! By Damon Heinrich

I was serving as a volunteer with the Police Reserve of the city where I lived. Because I was a Pastor, I also served as the Chaplain for the Police Department. For reasons of separation of Church and State, the department could not employ a Chaplain, but found it useful to use a volunteer.

Late one cold winter night I received a phone call telling me the Reserves were called out. There had been a train/car collision at a crossing on the east side of the city. Reserves were needed to help with traffic and crowd control. I could not understand why so many people would flock to see such a gruesome sight! I can never forget it, but I wish I could!

A young man on leave from his first combat tour in Viet Nam was back in the area visiting family and friends. He had been to the local plant where he worked the late shift before being drafted, to visit some of the men there with whom he was friends. A short way from the plant as he left to go home, he had to cross a railroad. The engineer of the train told us the car stopped at the track, and then proceeded to cross directly in front of the train. The car did not seem to be in a hurry, so it is not likely that the driver was trying to beat the train to the crossing. Apparently he looked, *but did not see* the train coming. The train was pulling nearly two hundred cars of freight and going about fifty miles an hour. There was no time for the engineer to do anything. It took nearly two miles to bring the train to a stop.

The body of the young man was mangled far beyond the possibility of identification. I was assigned, along with one of the regular officers, to go to the location of the collision to see if we could find something to give us the identification of the driver who was killed. At the crossing debris of all kinds was scattered for considerable distance along the track. After much searching, we were able to find the registration for the car. We never did find a wallet or a driver's license.

From the auto registration, we determined the probable identification and address of the young man. As Chaplain, my duties included death notifications and attempted suicide interventions. So I and the officer with me were dispatched to the family address. They lived at some distance outside the city, in a semi-rural location. As we approached we could see a fairly large house with all lights on, as well as lights outside.

The family had heard of the wreck on the news, and because of the time and the location, had already concluded that the person killed was their son. They had called neighbors in to wait with them. My task was comparatively easy, because they were already expecting the news.

They knew something about what to expect. And their hearts were prepared to face their loss. The parents were believers in Christ, and it was to Him they looked in this hour. As we talked with the couple in the early morning hours, they told of another experience which only added to their tragedy. They had three sons. A few years earlier the two eldest sons had gone fishing on the reservoir. As teen agers are prone to do, they did not pay sufficient attention and were thus caught by surprise by a sudden summer thunderstorm. The wind and waves from that storm swamped their small fishing craft. Both boys were drowned.

This experience brings to mind several questions, none of which has an easy answer, or perhaps no answer at all. First, what is there in human nature that draws us to the scene of the horrible? Why is there something within us that is attracted to the gruesome? Second, why would God protect a soldier through the combat of Viet Nam, only to allow him to be killed at home by a train? Third, why would God allow Christian parents to have not one, not two, but all three of their sons die in preventable accidents? Finally (and most importantly) what is there about people who are committed Christians that enables them to receive such tragic news with a spirit of calmness and peace?

CAN YOU TRUST (REST) WITH YOUR 'HEART' WHEN YOU CANNOT UNDERSTAND
WITH YOUR 'HEAD' (MIND)?

(A personal testimony by Damon Heinrich)

"O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me." (Psalms 131:1 ESV)

Many good Christian folks I know are greatly troubled with questions. "Why do bad things happen to good people?" "Why do I suffer – trouble, illness, problems at work, financial stress, whatever?" "How come God allowed this (whatever "this" may be) for surely He could have prevented it?"


However, I count it one of the great blessings of my life that the Lord has allowed me to be content without knowing these answers. In fact He has permitted me to be at ease to the extent that I seldom even think to ask such questions!

May each of you, my good friends and brothers, find the deep settled peace of Christ to be your companion this day and always.

38. PRAYERS AND AFFIRMATIONS TO HELP YOU 'COPE' WITH LIFE'S HARD
(MULTIPLE) SUFFERINGS AND HEARTBREAKS!


PRAYER FOR THE DAY: "O, God, I confess that I don't understand the mysteries of human suffering – why good men suffer, and evil men prosper! But I choose to believe – 'despite' life's mysteries, realizing that You hold the key to all understanding. I will know 'by and by'."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Because God's way are perfect, I can find rest for my heart even when my mind is restless with 'unanswered questions'.




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: "O, God, I know there are no easy or 'pat answers' to the mysteries of life, and especially to the mystery of human suffering. Christianity does not try to answer all my 'Whys', but it does answer the 'Hows' of life – 'How to use life's tragedies to produce lasting good in my life!'"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I cannot always solve life's mysteries, but I can use life's mysteries (including human suffering) to make me better instead of bitter, to drive me to God instead of driving me from God!




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: "How great thou art, O God. Your greatness cannot be known! Your limits are higher than the heavens and deeper than the seas. My finite mind can never comprehend your infinite wisdom. And, yet, I thank You that You are not only big enough to rule the Universe, but that You are also small enough to live in my heart!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My mind is not equipped to understand the mysterious ways of God, but my heart is made to experience the intimate fellowship of God!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: "Do You care, God, when my days are weary, and my nights are dreary, when my heart nearly breaks with sorrow? O, yes, I know You care, for I see Jesus moving among suffering humanity, applying His touch of healing. Let Jesus touch me! Amen!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Because Jesus was acquainted with grief I will not detach myself from grieving persons.



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “God, I so often become shaky when circumstances around me become shaky. My little world within me becomes cloudy when the big world around me is filled with despairing clouds! Help me to rejoice in hope even when circumstances seem hopeless!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: There are no hopeless situations, only people who have grown hopeless about them!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “The pain of separation from loved ones is more than I can bear! Will I see and know them again? Yes! Because of the resurrection I shall be with thee, O Christ, and with them! Glory!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The resurrection is my upward call from God to a new life and to a new body!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “O Christ, because You live, I too shall live forever. Sometimes my earthly body makes me groan and sigh, reminding me that this present body is but a temporary dwelling place for my eternal spirit which shall someday take its flight to You. Earth’s pains shall give way to Heaven’s pleasures, and death shall be swallowed up by everlasting life! Glory!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Death for me shall be a joyful departure, not a tragic disaster, for I have a grip on the timeless life of God!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “God, what power can make the fearful into the fearless, the doubter into the believer, the impotent into the powerful, the whiner into the winner, the spineless into the courageous? The world has been shaped and shocked since Jesus came! Why? Because of the resurrection power? I believe so!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Nothing less than resurrection power can change a Saul into a Paul, a bad man into a good man!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “God, I am now realizing that the Christian Way is the way to live! It is hard to ‘kick against the pricks’. It is hard ‘to spit into the wind’. Surrendering to You, I surrender to Life!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: If I am ‘out of sorts’ with God, then I am ‘out of sorts’ with myself!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “God, can a stranger become a friend? Can a ‘nobody’ become a ‘somebody’? Can the lost be found? Can the disillusioned find meaning and purpose? Can a sinner become a saint? If the answer is ‘Yes’, then I am ready for the transformation!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Christ has broken down the dividing walls of hostility. I am coming Home – Home to God!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Just as I am and waiting not to rid myself of one dark blot, to thee whose blood can cleanse each spot, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Instead of being so overwhelmed by my nagging habits and sinful practices, I will get my eyes fixed upon Christ, who can transform and empower me to live a new way of life!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “O God (if there is a God), I have travelled many roads in life, most of which appeared to be broad, beautiful, and full of pleasure. But the longer I have travelled these roads, the narrower they have become, and the less enjoyable they are. I have discovered by experience that these roads are dead-end roads! If there is an open-ended road which leads to increasing happiness and meaning, lead me to that road!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Amidst all the dead-end roads of life, there surely must be one road which, while it may appear narrow at first, increasingly becomes broad, expansive, and more beautiful, and full of purpose and destiny.



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “O God, deliver me from the futility of materialism! Help me to know, from observation of others rather than from bitter personal experience, that accumulated wealth, instead of giving happiness, oftentimes is the chief thief of happiness!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: “Material things are regarded as the chief good in life only by those who do not have them.”




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “O God, I have often eaten at earth’s tables, only to be left starving. Let me feast at your table. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God is my native home. I am only a pilgrim passing through, anxious for my heavenly home.




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “O God, in Thee I live and move and have my Being. Help me to know who I am, why I am here, and where I am going. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The God who created me, knows me, and knows why I am here. In finding God, I will discover my purpose for existence.



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “God, help me to be a wise investor, laying up treasures in Heaven, not on earth; living for eternity, not for mere time. Then my life shall be worth living!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: There is a way that seems right unto man – Materialism. But the end there is futility and utter frustration!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “The fragrant scent of the flower is so strong that I will not be satisfied until I find the flower! Please guide me to the Flower! Amen!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: However hard the search is, the ‘flower’ is worth pursuing!




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “O God, don’t let me be disillusioned into thinking that earth’s treasures can satisfy me. Let me see Reality. Let me see You! Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I am made by God and for God. Therefore, I will give myself to God.




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “God, You created sex to be enjoyed within the sacred confines of marriage, not to be abused outside of marriage. May I respect your laws and delight myself in your gift – given to me to be used at the right time and in the right way. Amen”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Sex is a mighty dynamo – either to create endlessly, or to destroy totally. I will allow the Creator of my urges to control and to cleanse my urges!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “O God, I must confess in all honesty that it is not only a statement of faith but a clear observation of life that the lives of the righteous are filled with joy that lasts, in contrast to the fleeting pleasures of sin which I have too often bitterly experienced! Help me to find real and lasting joy!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: There is pleasure in sin only for a short time, but there is lasting and real pleasure in living for Christ.



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “God, I see that the modern-day ‘success syndrome’ leads to bitter disillusionment. Help me to seek, not my happiness, but your honor, not my power, but your praise! Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will seek, not the applause of men, but the approval of God.



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “God, help me to find myself, not by asserting myself, but by surrendering myself to You and to others.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Any old ‘dead fish’ can float downstream, but it takes a ‘live fish’ to swim upstream. I will swim against the popular current of worldly power pursuits and be a real servant of God.



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “God, help me to serve You because you deserved to be served, not because of some reward which I will receive for serving You. And yet, let me know that my deep need for recognition, power, permanence, and identity will abundantly be met by You, both in time and in eternity.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God is in debt to no man. It has not entered the mind of man what rewards God has prepared for those who humbly and faithfully serve Him.



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “God, never allow my mind to be educated beyond the understanding of my heart. In finding human knowledge, let me also receive divine wisdom, in order that all knowledge may be used for right ends. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My quest for knowledge will be matched with my thirst for wisdom?



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Is there no hope for modern man? None – except in Christ! Outside of Christ, there is unyielding despair! In Christ, there is unending hope! God of the Universe, forgive me for worshipping matter rather than the Creator of matter.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will honor the methods of Science, and enjoy the benefits of Science, but I will never turn Science into a god!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “God, give me a sensitive spirit which is intolerant to falsehood and error, and a diligent mind which is pursuant of truth and knowledge. Help me to throw away the chaff of worldly philosophy and cherish the wheat of divinely-inspired wisdom.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will seek to be teachable without being gullible, and broadminded without being shallow-minded.



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “God, help me to find faith amidst my doubts, to find your truth amidst the world’s falsehoods, to accept your mercy despite my sins, to believe in your justice despite the moral inequities in the world.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The awesome fact of final moral accountability will motivate me to live morally, responsibly, and righteously.



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Christ, You are the only open-ended road! To go with You is to go on a glorious journey and to anticipate a wonderful destiny! What a thrilling companion You are!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The greatest of all joys is the ‘Joy of Becoming’ – becoming more and more like Christ!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, let me never forget that love is meant to ‘go down’ into the valley of human needs to heal the sick, to visit the lonely, to comfort the sorrowing, to recover the wandering ones. Expand my capacity to love with your kind of love!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Love never fails – regardless of the degree of visible or immediate results from loving – for ‘God is love’!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, cleanse me at the deepest depths of my human nature, enable me genuinely to rejoice with those who rejoice, and empathetically to weep with those who weep. Never allow my heart to become calloused, and guard my heart against the perverse inward pleasure that some take when others around them falter and fail. Make me a ‘man after your own heart’! In Jesus’ powerful name. Amen!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The Holy Spirit will enable me to disdain only what God disdains, and to delight in only what God delights in!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “God, don’t let me go through life begrudging others of their happiness and success and, at the same time, losing my own joy and contentment. Deliver me from my mad pursuit for success and recognition, based on a competition with others. Help me to be neither the object nor the subject of jealousy, but to live at peace with all men. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Outdoing one another in showing love and demonstrating generosity is the only kind of competition that is acceptable and worthy.



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “O Father, I am restless until I rest in Thee, and yet I cannot rest in You without coming to your Son, whose blood alone can affect a reconciliation between You

and me. The blood of your Son can cleanse me at the deepest level of my sins, and speak peace to my troubled soul. Hallelujah!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: “I see the new creation rise! I hear the speaking blood. It speaks! Polluted nature dies – sinks ‘neath the crimson flood.” (The Cleansing Wave)



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Greater love hath no one than this – that the sinless One would lay down His life for the sinful ones. O Christ, your sacrificial life and substitutionary death provide, not only inspiration for change, but power for moral transformation of my life. Your blood speaks peace to my sinful heart, and draws me to make peace with my fellowmen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The love of the invisible Christ will motivate me to express love to His visible creation!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, I confess that I desire to be known as a fruitful, successful worker in your spiritual vineyard! Cleanse me from my inordinate desires to be ‘successful’, and help me instead to be faithful to your divine call to love people, regardless of the visible results of such loving. In Jesus’ name. Amen!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Love never fails, so when I truly love people ‘in the Spirit’, I am always successful, regardless of the tangible results of such loving!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, I see now that patience is a divine enablement, not a human attainment, and yet I realize that I must cooperate with You in cultivating spiritual graces in my life. Help me to surrender to the Holy Spirit, allowing Him to control my life. Then I, even I, will be able to work with people without despair, to experience love without resentment, and to suffer without complaint.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The fruit of patience is the fruit of holy love, produced by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, I will not try harder to be patient, but I will trust more in the Holy Spirit who will produce patience within me.




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Spirit of the Living God, I ask You to daily cultivate in me your noble fruit of kindness. Help me to be concerned with the feelings of others, and reach out a helping hand to meet the practical needs of others. Deliver me from mere sentimentality, and enable me to be concrete in expressions of love. In the compassionate name of Jesus, I make these requests. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Christianity that does not work itself out in deeds, is like a bell that is never rung and life a song that is never sung.




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, never allow me to mistake harshness for justice, or sentimentality for kindness. Help me to be kind to sinners without compromising truth, and instructive to the complacent without sacrificing kindness.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will seek to be kind without being morally soft, and disciplined without being morally rigid.




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, help me to cultivate every fruit of the Spirit in a balanced way. The goodness of kindness tempers justice with mercy and does not allow the goodness of righteousness, which seeks to destroy sinful practices, to destroy sinful men in the process! Cultivate both the fruit of tender kindness and the fruit of tough righteousness in my life. In Jesus’ name. Amen!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The balance of moral goodness with tender kindness will enable me to champion holy causes with a holy spirit.




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Heavenly Father, fill me with so much love for You that I will become unselfconscious in my concerns for others, and uncalculating in my work for You. Let my labors be the labors of love, not the labor of duty.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: “Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all!”




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, never allow your warm love in my heart to be chilled by the rigor and coldness of my moral codes. While upholding strict moral practices, keep me tender and responsive to people who are morally broken by sin.”



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “O God, don’t allow me to prostitute my divinely-given call on the altar of worldly success. Close my ears to the world’s call to power, prestige, wealth, and fame, and open my ears to the voice of the Spirit, who is calling me to follow in the footsteps of the Master, whose glory followed His suffering.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will repudiate the world’s standards of success and accept God’s standards for success – faithfulness and obedience!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, search my motives today. Have I followed You to see how much I can receive from You, or to see how much I can give to You? Do I follow You as closely when You call me to suffer, as when You promote me to success in the eyes of my fellowmen? In sunshine and darkness alike, I want to follow You! I commit myself to be a stormy weather follower of You!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Steadfastness and loyalty always have their rewards, if not immediately in life, always and ultimately in eternity!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, make me a Spirit-controlled person, one who is gentle, keeping his anger under control. I confess that my natural reaction to mistreatment is retaliation. I surrender myself and my passions and instincts to your control, asking You to cleanse me from carnal anger and to rechannel all my anger to constructive purposes. In Jesus’ name. Amen!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My God-created emotion of anger must be cleansed and controlled by the Spirit for redemptive ends today!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, forgive me for thinking that meekness is weakness, that gentleness is cowardice. Help me ever to remember that might is not right, but that the gentle spirit of Christlikeness is always right! I confess my hypocritical role-playing. I have often appeared peaceful on the outside, while suppressing my rage and anger on the inside! Purify my inward spirit that my outward behavior may manifest a genuine gentleness. In Jesus’ name. Amen!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The strength of gentleness is stronger than the might of violence!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, control my spirit in the expression of anger. Give me moral discernment to know those evil actions of sinful men against others which should incite my anger to defend the defenseless, and those vindictive actions of sinful men against me which should incite my compassion to return good for evil. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The Holy Spirit will make me calm in His calmness in the face of unjust evil against me, and angry in His anger in the face of unjust evil against others.




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, give me courage to face newly revealed truth, humility to receive it into my thinking, and strength to apply it in my daily relationships. Give me an open mind, a teachable spirit, and a determined will to do your will. Help me to walk in the light as You are in the light! Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will allow the Holy Spirit to take away the scales of prejudice from my spiritual eyes in order that I may clearly see reality!




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, I surrender my acquisitive urge to You. Help me to learn the secret of enjoying without coveting material things. Help me to develop the ‘Art of Being’ – using things for God’s glory and for man’s good, without exploiting the resources of your world.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Wastefulness of extravagance will have no place in my Christian practice of stewardship.




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Prejudice against a different culture, or different religion, or different personality and background – I confess that I have sometimes failed to be a ‘clear channel’ for your divine love! I have sometimes loved others, ‘conditionally’ rather than ‘unconditionally’. Teach me how to love the loveless and those who obviously are ‘ugly’ in their appearance, ‘ugly’ in their behavior and language, ‘ugly’ in their selfish attitudes. Those who are ‘unkind’ in their treatment of people in general, and ‘unkind’ (cruel) in their specific treatment of me! Those who slander me ‘behind my back’, who plot to ‘bring me down’, who find it acceptable to lie about my character! Lord, I find it rather difficult to ‘turn the cheek’ and to ‘return good for evil’ to these very unkind persons. But, I know, Jesus, that You forgave your persecutors (who nailed You to a cruel cross), and even today You send the sunshine and rain upon the wicked person, as well as upon the godly person! You are ‘good’ to everyone, regardless of the kind of response that people give to You. By your grace, I will forgive my persecutors, and I will pray for them, and (when possible) I will do kind deeds for them. For Jesus’ sake alone!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Dear Love One and Friend: “Whatever a man sows, that he will someday reap.” You are not seeking a reward, but God will nevertheless, someday heap ‘kindnesses’ on you, if you make it a practice to be kind to everyone around you! Always take the ‘high road’ of kindness, even with unkind persons.




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, just as your kindness led me to repentance, use my Spirit-inspired kindness to lead the careless to You. Make my kindness robust and enduring, expressed with no appetite for praise and gratitude from men, but with a desire to reveal the kind heart of God to all.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Dear Loved One and friend: Seek always to treat all persons in the same way that God treats you – kindly and mercifully!




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, help me to cultivate every fruit of the Spirit in a balanced way. The goodness of kindness tempers justice with mercy and does not allow the goodness of righteousness, which seeks to destroy sinful practices, to destroy sinful men in the process. Father, help me to cultivate both the fruit of tender kindness and the fruit of tough righteousness in my life. In Jesus’ name. Amen!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Dear loved One and Friend: Recognize where your strong sense of ‘moral oughtness’ originates. It originates, of course, in the ‘Divine Mind’ (God)! Therefore, what is morally right for you, is also morally right for everyone else. Of course, there are ‘grays’ in this world (areas of personal preference), and in these areas, that are not covered by the ‘Moral Law’, you must allow others the expressions of their own legitimate freedom!




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “If a human father, fallible as he is, is desirous to give good gifts to his trusting children, how much more is the Heavenly Father, perfect as He is, eager to give the greatest of all gifts to His believing children – the gift of the blessed Holy Spirit in all His fullness! Father, I invite the Holy Spirit into every part of my heart. I open my life to experience a ‘heaven of love’.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I do not get more of the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit gets more of me – when, as a believer, I surrender everything to Christ!




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Heavenly Father, I confess that sometimes I have contended for the right issues but with the wrong spirit. Let me speak the truth in love! Make me an encourager, treating others with the tenderness of a nurse caring for her patient, and with the understanding of a mother caring for her faltering children.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Affirmation not vindication, will be the goal of my life, in all the relationships of my life!




PRAYER FOR THE DAY; ‘Father, I cannot have a happy or a healthy life without your implanted holiness in my heart. Wash me and I shall be clean, clear from the deepest stains of inbred sin and selfishness! Fill me and I shall be full – full of your love and joy and peace and poise! I believe but my faith often waivers. Heal me of my double-mindedness. Make me a single-minded man and a Spirit-possessed man. In Jesus’ name. Amen!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: He who rules all, will have my all, in order that I may enjoy His all!




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Love is supreme, and without love, God’s love in me, everything else is ultimately worthless. Father, I see that this love is a gift, given to the humble, surrendered, responsive heart. Just now, I open my life to You. Fill me with your love. I receive it, as a small child trustingly receives a good gift from a generous father. I gladly surrender the total control of my life to the Holy Spirit. Thank You!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I feel this warm love everywhere within me, because God has given me the Holy Spirit to fill my heart with His love. (Romans 5:5; Living Bible)




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “O God, when I get my gaze on the Christ of the Cross, I am humbled, for I then realize that I am merely on the receiving end of the Father’s love. To be alive to Christ is to be dead to sin and to be dead to self-centeredness. Let me die in order that I might truly live.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Christ is the all-sufficient answer to the life of the individual Christian and to the life of the Church.




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, I see that I have only one true freedom in life – the freedom to choose the Master of my life. How I exercise that freedom determines my destiny – for time and eternity! If I refuse to surrender to You, I choose to surrender to pessimism, to hopelessness, to negativity, to futility, to self-destruction!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I choose to make a once and for all ‘blanket’ surrender to Christ, and then to learn daily to surrender every new detail of my life to the ‘Lordship of Christ’!




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, deliver me from painful introversion and hurtful introspection. Enable me to be humble in my evaluation of myself, compassionate in my service to others, and bold in my witness for Christ. Through your Spirit-imparted love, help me to be spiritually integrated, physically healthy, and mentally balanced. In Jesus’ name. Amen!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Dear Loved One and Friend: Remember that Love enables you to have humility without humiliation, and to have self-esteem without pride.



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “O God, my request shall be mercy, not justice. My motivation for labor shall be love, not fear. My accomplishments shall be God-given, not humanly achieved. My boasting shall be in God’s perfect glory, not in man’s passing glory. My rewards shall be humbly received, not pridefully demanded. I shall take the humble way of faith, not the proud way of mere human achievements. Pride leads to destruction, but humility leads to life, here and hereafter! The way of faith is the way of the open mind, the reverent spirit, the tender heart, the balanced emotions, the surrendered will, and the healthy body, whereas the way of human ‘works’ is the way of sinful pride and ultimate destruction!”


AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Dear Loved One and Friend: Remember that the way of strict justice is the way of harsh judgment; the way of mercy is the way of lavish love. God resists the proud (who only want justice), but God blesses the humble (who only pursue God’s mercy)!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Love is supreme, and without love, God’s love in me, everything else is ultimately worthless! Father, I see that this love is a gift given to the humble surrendered, responsive heart. Just now I open my life to You. Fill me with your divine-type love. I receive it, as a small child trustingly receives a good gift from a generous father. I gladly surrender the total control of my life to the Holy Spirit. Thank You!”


AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Dear Loved One and Friend: I believe you are aware that it is impossible to love the loveless, to befriend the lonely, to accept the downtrodden, to reach out to the forsaken, to forgive the gross offender, to rescue the perishing, to comfort the sorrowing,

unless you are living a self-forgetful life of true love! But you cannot earn, purchase, or achieve this love 'on your own'! Supernatural love is given as a gift by a supernatural God, the God whose very nature is LOVE!




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: "Dearest Heavenly Father, help me to know how to 'blend' two important virtues in my life, the virtues of mercy and justice. I tend to become 'unbalanced' in the exercise of these virtues, when I relate to many different persons (usually non-believers). How easy it is for me to be morally good and yet to lack loveliness, attractiveness, and graciousness in the expression of moral righteousness. It is possible for me to be practically and morally good, and yet not to be aesthetically good. To be aesthetically good is to be attractive, winsome, and lovely in my actions of good. On one hand, the goodness of justice and righteousness seeks to destroy personal and institutional evils. On the other hand, the goodness of kindness and mercy attracts the sinner away from his sin to the loveliness of Christ! O Christ, enable me increasingly to experience the 'balanced blend' of holy virtues in my life, both mercy and justice! Then I shall reflect the beautiful character of Christ!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Dear Love One and Friend: Never allow God's warm love in your heart to become chilled by the rigor and coldness of your 'moral code'. While you rightly uphold strict moral principles of justice and righteousness, always keep yourself tender and responsive to people who are morally broken by their sins. Make it your earnest desire to shed a sympathizing tear for sinners (who are greatly burdened down in their lives), without holding any sympathy in your heart for their sins!




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: "O God, I want to be a 'realist'! I cannot escape the hard facts of life! But to face all of life realistically, I now see that I must look at the spiritual as well as the material. I must look at the invisible support of the divine as well as the visible supports of the human. I must consider the limitless possibilities of divine power as well as the human limitations of human weakness. Now I see! The man of faith is the true realist! He sees reality through God's eyes."

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Through my faith my human problems will become divine projects, and God has never yet failed in His projects!




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: "O God, my good works are not good enough to save me. But the good work of Christ on the cross is altogether sufficient to save me to the uttermost! Reconciliation is the divine, objective accomplishment, ready to become a human experience through faith in the resurrected Christ!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God does not wait to be reconciled to me. He waits for me to be reconciled to Him! I don't earn His favor; I simply accept His favor!




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Master of life, enable me to live masterfully! Help me to use all of life’s experiences as the raw materials from which I make a Christlike life! Help me to see that my happiness does not depend upon my happenings, but upon my reaction to my happenings!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: It is not what happens to me that matters. It is what I do with what happens to me that makes the difference.




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Help me to know your love in all dimensions of my life – to realize that the pains of love, as well as the pleasures of love, are for my benefit. May the blows of life not destroy my life, but instead sharpen my character. In Jesus’ name. Amen!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I cannot always explain my sufferings, nor dare I explain away my sufferings. With God’s help, I will learn to use my sufferings!




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “God, I am beginning to learn that it takes both sunshine and rain to produce ‘fruit’, the fruit of a Christlike life. Help me to know that the best fruit is produced in the ‘valley’!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God’s grace will enable me to both enjoy my ‘mountain top’ experiences, and to learn from my ‘valley’ experiences.




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Give me the courage to accept what I cannot change. Give me the power to change what must be changed. Give me the humility to accept my positive blessings without pride, and to learn from my negative experiences without bitterness. In Jesus’ name. Amen!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: When ‘life’ hands me a ‘lemon’, I will learn to turn it into ‘lemonade’!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, during my ‘fiery trials’ let me hear You whisper your comforting words to me (as expressed by the hymn writer): ‘When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie, my grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply’.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God will ‘bottle up my tears’ (Psalm 56:8) and use them to cleanse my soul!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, help me to be open-minded to receive your truth, tender-hearted to experience your love, and strong-willed to obey your commands. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Easy guidance comes to those who are easily controlled by the Holy Spirit. I will keep the reins of my life in the hands of the Holy Spirit today!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, empower me through the sanctifying work of thy Holy Spirit, that I might witness fearlessly, live peacefully, work tirelessly, give generously, fellowship warmly, and live expectantly. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will use my head (intellect), my heart (affection), and my hands (will) to serve the Lord wholeheartedly in my world today!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “O God, help me to be wise with your wisdom, and to be righteous through your righteous Son. When I become captured by Christ’s love, then my entire attitude toward life changes! When I become broken on the altar of surrender, then I am willing to help bear the burden of my fellowmen, thus lightening the load of the world’s suffering. Help me to live a Christ-centered life, rather than a self-centered life. Then I shall see aright and live aright!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY “To become infatuated with the love of God, is to be compelled to surrender everything to Christ.



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “O God, allow my remorse over sins’ consequences to turn to repentance over sins’ commission. Help me make a U-turn, to turn from my old life to your new life! Through Jesus’ power. Amen!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will no longer embrace sin, but I will embrace my Savior! The Father is waiting for the ‘prodigal’ to return home!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Just as I am and waiting not to rid my soul of one dark blot, to Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot, O Lamb of God, I come!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will not waste God’s gift of faith to me. I will exercise it responsibly, and thus be saved decisively! Because the object of my faith is Christ, the value of my faith is incalculable!




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “God of peace, impart peace to my troubled mind. God of holiness, impart cleansing to my polluted soul. God of love, shed abroad your love in my loveless heart! God of the new, make me a new creation! Thank You. A thousand times, thank You!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My passion for God is created by God and is satisfied by God!




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “O God, your holiness is my happiness, your presence is my power, and your glory is my goal. When your smile of approval rests upon me, I laugh with a holy joy!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God wills that I be truly happy, therefore, I will “rejoice evermore with joy unspeakable.”




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “O God, open my eyes that I may see the unspeakably wonderful blessings which You wish to share with me! I am rich in Christ.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The bitter experience of repentance leads me to the blessed experience of enjoying heavenly blessings!




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “May I dare to believe that I am a redeemed and forgiven soul, a soul whose sins are buried in the Sea of God’s forgetfulness, never to be remembered against me again! In Christ, my dreams become realities! Glory!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Loosed from the chains of sin, I shall forever be chained to the heart of God.




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “God, send your hopeful Holy Spirit to inspire hope in my despairing soul. Send your powerful Holy Spirit to impart power to my weakened spirit. Send your inspiring Holy Spirit to cleanse my cloudy vision from earth’s trivia, in order that I may see heaven’s treasures alone!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: When God demands, He always provides! I will receive today!




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “O God, Thou art the source of all love. The world of needy people is the object of your great love. Make me the channel of your love. Let your love flow from You to them through me! Thank You!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God will give me as much as I am willing to give away, and no more! I must learn to give away my faith!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “O God, to refuse your love is to accept your wrath! To accept your mercy is to receive your forgiveness! Now and forever, I choose to accept your mercy. I am saved from present condemnation and from future wrath! Glory!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: There are both lines of love and lines of wrath in God’s Holy Face. I choose only the lines of love!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “O God, I see now that when I serve You I get some heaven here and a lot of heaven hereafter. The heaven I make for myself on earth will be multiplied infinitely in eternity! When I serve myself, I get some hell here and a lot of hell hereafter. I choose to be a double winner, not a double loser!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Every little action of this day either helps make or unmake my character for eternity! I will live carefully!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “O God, forgive me for secretly thinking that my own ‘righteousness’ in some way makes me acceptable to You. I exchange the filthy rags of my own righteousness for the pure garments of God’s holiness and righteousness!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The worst enemy of Christ-centered Christianity is self-centered religion!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “I am naked and open before the One who created me and knows me! O God, You see me as I really am, not what others think I am! I confess that often I profess more than I possess! Fill me within, and I shall be authentic without! Amen!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God will help me to close the gap between my profession and my possession! My life and my lips will combine in one harmonious praise to God!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “O God, I see that the ultimate cause of human suffering is rejection of Christ and Christ’s powerful provision for man’s sin problem! Why should I continue to suffer in sin when You have provided a solution to sin? The blood, the blood of Christ, is my healing and my health!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My double need has a double solution in Christ’s forgiveness and Christ’s cleansing. (1 John 1:9)



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “By this shall all men know that I am a true follower of Thee, O God, and by this shall I personally have evidence that I am truly a Spirit-filled person, because I love Christ supremely, because I love others sincerely, because I love myself subordinately. Flood my life with your holy love!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Baptism with water is an outward sign of an inward work of God’s justifying grace in my life. Baptism by love is an inward sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, making me more effective in performing outward works of compassion and mercy.



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, free me from judging my fellow Christians who differ from me in background, temperament, experience, and spiritual gifting. Help me never to impose my standards and convictions upon others, but instead to cultivate a spirit of love, acceptance, and understanding, recognizing always that there are a variety of gifts and a variety of manifestations of those gifts”



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, I see now that the final test to determine authentic Christians is the love test. Help me, in the spirit of charity, to allow my fellow brothers to respond to the Holy Spirit in their own unique ways. I know, O God, that you will vindicate your truth by the fruit that is borne in the lives of your people.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: By this shall all men know I am a Spirit-controlled believer – “Because of the Fruit of Christlike love which is evident in my life!”



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, teach me what true obedience really means. I delight to do thy will, O My God! It is not grievous to my soul; thy laws are nourishment to my spirit, enlightenment in my mind, and strength to my will!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Jesus did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill the law, through the enabling Holy Spirit who motivates me to act and to react in love!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, help me to guard against sin. Help me to ‘watch and pray’ constantly. You know, O God, where I am especially weak and vulnerable. You know also the subtleties of the devil. Give me the good sense to honestly and quickly confess when I sin, and to surrender my life anew to the ‘cleansing stream’ of the blood of Jesus.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: He who made me clean within, at the time of my sanctification, will keep me daily cleansed from the pollution and defilement of sin, until the day of my final glorification!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, I desire to maintain a loving relationship with You through prayer. Involving myself in regular prayer and study of your Word, I believe I will receive guidance in times of decision, reproof in times of mistakes, comfort in times of sorrow, strength in time of weakness, and courage in times of fear! Thank You so much!”


AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will meditate upon the Laws of God (the Bible), and I will muse on the Love of God (prayer) all the days of my life!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Help me, Lord, to listen carefully, understand clearly, and obey quickly. When I am in doubt regarding your will, enable me to wait patiently for further


instructions. Help me to follow closely in your footsteps. Then I shall always be a blessing to You and a benefit to others!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will train my ‘spiritual ears’ to listen for the ‘small still voice’ of the Holy Spirit and learn to obey gladly and quickly!




PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Father, enable me to live a balanced Christian life. Help me to ‘reach within’ myself to meditate upon your Word. Help me to ‘reach outside’ myself to serve others and to witness. Help me to ‘reach upward’ to worship and to praise You.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will dwell in the ‘House of the Lord’ all the days of my life, in order that I might behold the beauty of the Lord!



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “I am seeing that I am made by Love and for loving. If I don’t love, I perish, perhaps only gradually, but surely and ultimately! Enable me to love with your kind of love, the love that loves the loveless, that cares for the careless, that lifts the fallen, that soothes the sorrowing, and that heals the hurting. In Jesus’ loving name. Amen!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My motions today will be the motions of love, because I am motivated by nothing less than the love of God.



PRAYER FOR THE DAY: “Jesus, Thou art the Way, the divine resource to enable me to love You with all my soul (volitional response). Thou art the Truth, the divine resource to enable me to love You with all my mind (intellectual response). Thou art the Life, the divine resource to enable me to love You with all my heart (affectional response). What Thou hast commanded from me, total love, Thou hast totally provided, divine resources! Praise You! Amen!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God is the reservoir of divine love. I am the channel of divine love. The world is the recipient of divine love.

