

Aspects

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An Easy Likeness

People think it should require little effort to be like Christ. But why should it be any easier for us, than it was for Him?

Trying to walk in the steps of the Savior,
Trying to follow our Savior and King;
Shaping our lives by His blessed example,
Happy, how happy, the songs that we bring.

Eliza E. Hewitt

Life's Ledger

It's always a perilous enterprise to begin listing one's recent trials, holding them up for inspection as if they are somehow worthy of public consideration. There will always be those with weightier burdens on their backs, those for whom life has been a tougher grind, who will dismiss the burden of another for not meeting the standards of their own. Comparisons of woes are invariably unsightly, since human nature dictates that everyone else's problems are far less consequential than one's own.

If we can agree, however, that trials are indeed *not* woes — that the ledger column in which they have been listed is labeled not 'Debits,' but 'Credits' — then possibly our sympathetic disdain might turn, instead, to envy.



It's been a remarkable year. Roughly twelve months ago it began with persistent plumbing problems on the first floor, and a toilet that refused to flush. After repeated efforts that every time fell short of success, the problem was traced to the septic tank — in which the lines going in and going out were not just clogged, but atrophied. Sections of the line exposed to the light of day resembled nothing less than petrified logs.

This rather fragrant episode was followed quickly by leaks in the water line between the house and the well, resulting eventually in the replacement of the entire line — more than a quarter-mile of pipe.¹

After a relatively pain-free summer, October brought an early snow storm that toppled large branches, even entire trees across the property. Then, as we moved into winter, we officially entered our 'Transportation Phase.'

First the engine needed to be replaced in one car. After an extended period without that car, just as we received word that it was suitably healed, and ready to come home, Linda was involved in an accident in our second vehicle. Struck from behind twice, the relatively new Jeep was taken into the body shop on the same day I picked up the first car with its new engine.

During the almost eight weeks we were without the Jeep, minor problems continued with the remaining car, rendering it, at best, unreliable. Finally, its radiator blew. Just a few days after the Jeep was returned, we loaded up the car with gallon jugs of water, and set out for the repair shop: thirty miles away. With water and antifreeze spewing forth the entire way, every two or three miles I would stop to pour another gallon of water into the radiator, before continuing on. After two hours we made it, intact, with even a few gallons left over for good measure.

Meanwhile, running concurrent with the Transportation Phase, we were also passing through another 'Water Phase.' Early in the winter the water coming from the well suddenly turned brown, requiring us to drink bottled water. We treated the well water with bleach, and in the process discovered a family of mice living there. They had constructed a substantial nest of dried grass down on the shelf near the water line.

I nside

Staying in School

We never graduate from the school of Christ-likeness. Until we meet Him face-to-face, until the moment when we have no more use for this mortal form, we remain in school, learning how to become increasingly like Him.

The Pattern Set

Jesus Christ came to earth to serve and to suffer, and it's more than a little presumptuous on our part to think that now we should not suffer a little to be like Him.

A Servant Heart

There's simply no better way to come to grips with trials and testing than to accept the fact that Christ is the Master and we are His servants.

Learning Obedience

There is a tendency in our society to pull back from the truth in moments of crisis. Instead of confronting the moment from the perspective of heaven, we talk around the pain, and rationalize it from the perspective of man. The result of this dissembling is to effectively demote God from Lord to spectator.

Harvest of Righteousness

When we accept *everything* God sends our way — not simply the pleasant blessings that He showers into our life — then we are ready to be truly useful to Him.



Being tenderhearted toward all critters — even those fouling our drinking water — we didn't want to kill them, but rather *encourage* them to leave. (Besides, dead mice would just fall into the water. Not good.) The advice was to use mothballs, so we placed a fresh packet of mothballs into a bucket and carefully lowered it down, leaving it suspended over the nest.

Checking our progress a few days later, we discovered all but one mouse still pleasantly ensconced. So this time we took a more direct approach. We first exposed and widened the hole through which they had entered in the first place, then encouraged them to leave by splashing bleach directly onto their nest. One by one, and with a little coaxing and prodding, they all finally exited their cozy, albeit humid, domain.

Gradually the water cleared itself of color and the strong scent of chlorine. We even reached the point where we could once again drink the water without permanent risk to our health. Then, just recently, about the time we finally had both of our cars back home and in reasonably good health, the water once again turned a sickly brown.

Practicing Joy

Any one of these things, taken by itself, would have been entirely manageable; life for everyone is filled with such challenges. But the sheer, repetitive magnitude — the unrelenting parade of one small crisis after another — became more than a little oppressive for this household and (I'm not happy to report), we began to wonder if it would ever end.

Frankly, there were times when we felt sorry for ourselves. But then I was also reminded of our study, a few years back, of the epistle of James, in which the brother of Christ states with brave clarity

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:2-4

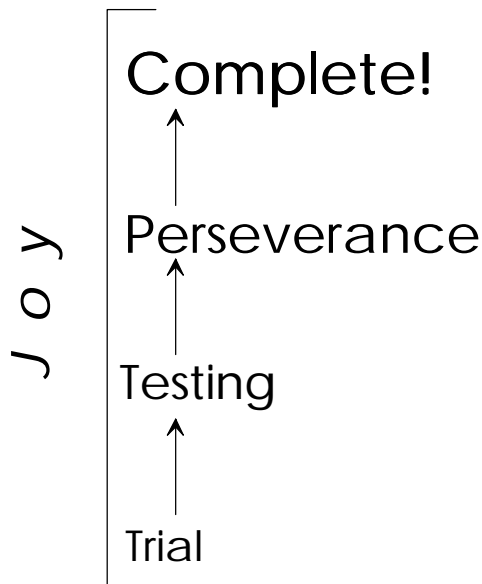
I recall vividly the incredulous expression on the face of the man sitting across from me during the study of this passage. He was having a terrible time understanding this Biblical concept — that we are to not only rejoice *because of our trials*, but to consider it joy *during* our trials.

Not only so, but we also rejoice **in** our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Romans 5:3-4 (emphasis added)

We're given this instruction in several different places in His word because God knows that finding joy in trials and sufferings cuts contrary to our nature. Our first instinct is to rebel against it. It's not in our base nature to actually *enjoy* trials, so quite often we will, instead, short-circuit the suggested process from the outset.

God knows that this response does not come naturally or even easily to us. It takes practice.



Staying in School

When faced with an extended period of waiting — such as renewing my driver's license, or accepting an afternoon doctor appointment — it's my habit to take along something to read. Since my taste in reading material does not lean toward *People* magazine, but to history, biography, or a thick computer manual, I sometimes draw stares.

More than once I've been approached with a remark such as, "What'ya, some kinda student or something?" as if only someone formally enrolled in school would bother reading anything weightier than *Better Homes and Gardens*, or *Field and Stream* — or the very latest in beach towel paperbacks. And I *really* draw quizzical stares when I combine the aforementioned reading material with note-taking; this sends them reeling. Some people seem to think it perfectly bizarre that a rotund, middle-aged gentleman with thinning pate would voluntarily be highlighting passages when reading something informative.

It's possible I was influenced years ago by the lead sax player in our band in Vietnam. Floating around the Gulf of Tonkin on the good ship *Chicago* back in 1970, one of the highlights of this grim existence for him was receiving his weekly issue of *Time* magazine. Naturally, by the time it found its way to the middle of a war it was not the current issue, but until it was read-through, cover to cover, it was his prized possession. At twenty-seven, he was the old man of the band, and, being eight years his junior, I was one of the youngest. At that impressionable age, I found it remarkable that instead of simply reading the magazine, he would use it as a learning tool by actually marking any words for which he didn't know the meaning. Later, he would look them up in the dictionary, and often work them into his conversation.



Because it will never come naturally to us, as attentive Christians we are to be constantly practicing and learning how to live like Christ. There is no other way we will learn how to find joy in trials. The process is not automatic; it does not progress unattended.

And the most critical point in the process is our *first* response, for from that the rest flows.

If we respond to testing in a negative, rejecting way, we stifle the process James outlines from the outset, and it cannot proceed. If, however, we respond to testing in a positive, more receptive way, the subsequent perseverance (or 'steadfastness') will come automatically. And having come this far, we cannot help but gain maturity — which, of course, prepares us for the next, inevitable round of trials.

Embracing Discomfort

It is admittedly a tough concept — one that flies in the face of every human precept from time immemorial. It is actually in our nature to *flee* uncomfortable things, not embrace them. We seek pleasurable experiences, not painful ones.

But to anyone paying attention, the truth is clear: When times are good, we coast; when times are tough, we are pushing forward. James says that the trials are there to test our faith — to hone and refine it. Without the trials we remain incomplete.

Webster's says that one who is *mature* is in "a state of full development." It's been quite a few years since I've been in a darkroom, but I

think I could still go through the steps in my sleep. I remember the acrid whiff of the developer, stop bath, and fix, and the gentle sting of the chemicals on the skin. I still remember how to pour the chemicals, in order, into the light-tight tank in which the film reels have been stacked, how to agitate in just the right way so as to minimize bubbles on the surface of the film. Inside that tank the film is put through a series of caustic, chemical baths which methodically strip away all the emulsified silver, removing everything but what is needed for the final image.

Gold 'develops' in a similar way, by being heated and reheated until all impurities have been purged. Fine steel is 'developed' from pig iron by burning out the excess carbon and other impurities at temperatures reaching 1700° Fahrenheit. None of these processes are terribly pleasant, but they're necessary for refinement — for mature development.

Not only must our relationship to God be right, but the outward expression of that relationship must also be right. Ultimately, God will allow nothing to escape; every detail of our lives is under His scrutiny. God will bring us back in countless ways to the same point over and over again. And He never tires of bringing us back to that one point until we learn the lesson, because His purpose is to produce the finished product. It may be a problem arising from our impulsive nature, but again and again, with the most persistent patience, God has brought us back to that one particular point. Or the problem may be our idle and wandering thinking, or our independent nature and self-interest. Through this process, God is trying to impress upon us the one thing that is not entirely right in our lives. Whatever it may be, God will point it out with persistence until we become entirely His. *Oswald Chambers*²

We never graduate from the school of Christ-likeness. Until we meet Him face-to-face, until the moment when we have no more use for this mortal form, we remain in school, learning how to become increasingly like Him.

And the process is not always pleasant; like film in its acid bath, that which is not needed must be cut away to improve that which remains. There's no getting around it: Trials will come, and it's not that trials aren't painful, but that the pain is good for us.

Through practice we learn that testing is not punishment, but improvement. By learning to not refuse delivery of the trial, we understand that it is not part of God's wrath, but His mercy.



In the hour of trial,
Jesus plead for me,
Lest, by base denial,
I depart from Thee;
When Thou seest me waver,
With a look recall;
Nor for fear or favor
Suffer me to fall.

Should Thy mercy send me
Sorrow, toil, and woe;
Or should pain attend me
On my path below;
Grant that I may never

Fail Thy hand to see;
Grant that I may ever
Cast my care on Thee.

When, in dust and ashes,
To the grave I sink,
While heaven's glory flashes
O'er the shelving brink,
On Thy truth relying
Through that mortal strife;
Lord, receive me, dying,
To eternal life.

James Montgomery

It's not that
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painful,
but that the
pain is good
for us.

The Pattern Set

There's really no good way to sugarcoat it. Part of being a follower of Christ is to join the process of becoming like Him, and that involves some discomfort. And why shouldn't it? Jesus experienced more discomfort Himself — and on our behalf — than we will ever experience for Him.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality

with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross!

Philipp. 2:5-8

The writer to the Hebrews points out that we are kin to Jesus — not in spite of suffering, but because of it.

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. *Hebrews 2:9-11*

Jesus Christ actually *came* to earth to serve and to suffer,³ and it's more than a little presumptuous on our part to think that now we should not have to suffer a little to be like Him.

Let's be clear: We're not talking about salvation. Jesus suffered through death precisely so that we would have the opportunity to avoid it. Our redemption and eternal salvation are gifts of His sacrifice, and need not be purchased a second time.

We're not talking about salvation, but *living*. We're talking about what Paul referred to as "working out" our salvation —

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed — not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence — continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, *Philipp. 2:12*

— the day-by-day process of rising steadily toward maturity in the things of God. If we are to “work out” our lives by the pattern set by Christ, then our days will include times of trial, sacrifice, and suffering, because these were all a part of *His* path toward ‘perfection.’

Character

That path toward completeness, for us, includes a transition through *perseverance* — endurance, a hardening of our shell, what in another time might have been called ‘strength of character.’

Have you ever noticed how much more interesting people are who have experienced some of life’s hard knocks? People who have never experienced trials, hardship, testing — people who have never really been inconvenienced — are very often immature, and spoiled. They have a shallow perspective on life, both in what it is and what it can be. They’re often boring (and boorish), self-centered, and have little patience with inconvenience of any sort.

James tells us that we experience trials so that we might acquire what the *King James Version* calls ‘patience.’

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

James 1:2-4 KJV

This patience is ‘an abiding under,’⁴

but it is really a much more active and forceful word. It speaks of tenacity and stick-to-itiveness. Barclay explains that it is not the patience that passively endures; instead, it is the quality that enables a man to stand on his feet facing the storm. It is in struggling against difficulty that spiritual stamina is developed. *Burdick*⁵

When a young tree is forced to stand against the wind, it becomes stronger. When a plant or animal suffers through drought, it either dies or becomes stronger and more inventive through its struggle to live.

Likewise, people who have passed through trials are stronger than the rest. Compare this generation to the one that passed through World War Two, or the Depression that preceded it, and you’ll understand the difference. People today love to talk about being ‘stressed out’ (as in “Oh, I’m so *stressed!*”), but what they really mean is that they’ve simply become entangled in their own ambition.

You want to talk about stress? How about a father in the 1930s not knowing where the next crust of bread for his family would come from. How about a mother in the 1940s, her husband thousands of miles away literally battling for his life, while she cares for her children, alone, after putting in a long shift at the munitions factory.

The people of these generations emerged strong, toughened by their personal struggles to survive. They emerged people of character who understood duty, and the need to see a hard task through to the end.

Jesus emerged from His earthly sojourn toughened with a more intimate knowledge of what it was like to dwell in human form. He came away with the understanding of what it was like for humans to suffer hate, persecution, pain, and death. And He returned to His heavenly home better equipped to rise in our defense before the Father.

Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 5:8-10

A Servant Heart

But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, “Why did you make me like this?” Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? *Romans 9:20-21*

It’s not easy to be a Christian. You cannot follow Jesus unless you are ready to deny yourself. *Billy Graham*⁶

Embracing Possibilities

Servanthood is not something to be endured, but something to be embraced. And there’s simply no better way to come to grips with trials and testing than to accept the fact that Christ is the Master and we are the servants. Some people spend their entire lives fighting against this truth and, as a result, miss out on all the joy that comes with it. His joy is a gift that comes *through* trials, not in spite of them.

We can fight against His Lordship tooth and nail, stiffening our backs and refusing to accept His power over our lives, but none of our fighting will make any difference in the truth — the truth that the Lord God has every right to mold and shape us to His pleasure.

So I went down to the potter’s house, and I saw him working at the wheel.

But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. Then the word of the LORD came to me: “O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?” declares the LORD. “Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.” *Jeremiah 18:3-6*

Christians who struggle with their role under Christ imagine that becoming His servant means that they will have to go without. They imagine certain rights and privileges will be removed when they submit to Him. But in fact, the opposite is true. When we release ourselves from those invisible bonds that hold us back from Christ, our world of possibilities actually widens. When we practice and live servanthood we gain freedoms never before imagined: freedom from worry, freedom from despair; freedom to rest in the arms of someone more wise, more experienced, more compassionate than anyone else we know.

When we refuse to submit to this good and healthy order, we are, instead, submitting ourselves to a life of frustration, anger, and recurring feelings of hopelessness. Trials will come; they’re inevitable. The only question is: Will we face them with or without the kind of relationship to Christ that will see us through?

Servanthood is an attitude, methodically practiced, that changes our natural inclination toward selfish, protective behavior into a yearning to see and experience every moment of life from God’s perspective. It doesn’t come naturally; it must be practiced and developed.

With a servant heart, trials become manageable, understandable. We are equipped to more quickly see their value for our lives. Without the attitude of servanthood, however, instead of flowing with the trials, we struggle against them. And in that lies only despair.

Servanthood represents a conscious choice to submit to God’s will.

Servanthood represents a conscious choice to submit to God's will, and in that, it has a close relationship with *lordship*. Acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord — confessing that He, and He alone, is the one in charge of our life — is the key to peace in the midst of trials. And, in contrast, the key to a life of utter despair and hopelessness, anger over circumstances that come our way, and a life clouded with bitterness is the rejection of Christ's deserved position as Lord.

I Never Called Him Lord

The Time: Eternity

The Place: Hell

The tortured remains of Judas Iscariot cry out from their eternity. The devil's pawn. His best man. Once paid handsomely for his deceit, he now pays with his soul in torment. Hear the voice of one who made the wrong choice. Heed his wisdom.

Judas Iscariot bursts in. As he comes through the door he is screaming at someone — or something — behind him.

JUDAS

(to something on the other side of the door)

Get away from me! Leave me alone! For once, just leave me alone!

In a paranoiac panic, he stumbles to center stage, furtively glancing behind him, his back to the audience. He senses their presence and slowly, cringingly, turns.

(stammering) Why are you looking at . . . stop staring at me! Were you there?! (pause; giggling insanely) What's the matter? Do you feel uncomfortable in my presence? (with contempt) I'm nothing more than those things you keep hidden . . . nothing less than those things you choose to reveal.

(more calmly) I could just as easily have gone the other way, you know. If I am, indeed, the worst it only means I had the potential to be the best. (the voices in his head begin building again, building, building . . .; in anguish; screaming in reply) I know! I know I crucified Him! (back to the tormentor behind the door) I might as well have driven the nails into Him myself. (with disgust) Worse. I hadn't the courage to see it that far. I took the easy way out — before He even reached the cross. (to the audience) Go ahead. I deserve your contempt. But be careful; if you condemn me you run the risk of condemning yourself. And remember: In your times of deepest shame, you have not approached the remorse I felt that morning.

(quieter; exhausted) There's no explanation you'll understand. I know the explanation and I don't understand.

(fearfully) Where I live now (furtively glancing back at the door) there is no understanding. There's no reasoning.

(pause) But I tell you this: The options I had then are still available to you. You, too, can go either way.

(intimately) At first I blamed it all on Satan — and it's true, he came into me and pressed me into his service. But who opened the door to my heart? Who made the choice?

(pause) Don't make me into some hideous monster. Don't make me darker than I really am — some image of evil incarnate. I was only a man — flesh and blood like you. I held no secret power of evil. I just let evil have its power over me.

I was only a man. Jesus called me along with the others. I was one of the twelve. But I thought myself smarter than the rest. More *(with clipped diction)* in-tel-lec-tual. I felt I was above all this *(with arrogance)* silly adoration of someone who was, after all, only a man . . .

(with great sadness after a long pause) I never called Him 'Lord.' My highest praise for Him was 'Rabbi.' (pause) I never gave Him control over my life, my being. I always held some back. (building to a high pitch) And by holding some back I gave entrance to Satan himself! My pride would not allow me to give it all to Jesus — to let Him be my Lord. So Satan became my Lord — he took over the emptiness in my heart. (building again) He filled me with his evil . . . and took away my heart. (running out; crying) Don't let him have yours! Don't let it happen to you!

Screaming, Judas runs off the stage toward the door through which he entered. He jerks it open, hesitates, then returns to his personal hell.



Jesus is Savior and Lord of my life,
My hope, my glory, my all;
Wonderful Master in joy and in strife,
On Him you too may call.

Blessed Redeemer, all glorious King,
Worthy of rev'rence I pay;
Tribute and praises I joyfully bring
To Him, the Life, the Way.

Jesus is Lord of all, Jesus is Lord of all,
Lord of my thoughts and my service each day,
Jesus is Lord of all.

LeRoy McClard

Learning Obedience

Lordship is at the root of our willingness and ability to become like Him. Jesus understood His responsibility under the Father: obedience.

"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." *Luke 22:42*

From Jesus we learn obedience toward the Father, and the truth of His word. There is a tendency in our society, however, to pull back from the truth in moments of crisis. Instead of confronting the moment from the perspective of heaven, we try to talk around the pain, and rationalize it from the perspective of man.

The result of this dissembling is to effectively demote God from Lord to spectator.

In the painful wake of the recent school yard shootings in Jonesboro, Arkansas, in which a teacher and four students were gunned down by two boys from the same middle school, a Baptist youth minister was being questioned by a TV reporter. In the interview, the young minister was asked what he tells those in his charge when offering comfort. How does he explain this horrible event to them? He answered the reporter, "I tell them that it's not God's fault. God didn't pull the trigger."

To be fair, it must be terribly difficult to look into the tear-drenched face of a youngster who has just lost a friend to violence, and tell him the truth. There is surely a strong temptation to explain pain with words more comfortable to the ears.

Technically, part of the youth minister's answer was correct: God did not pull the trigger; it was not His hand on the gun that day. But either "Jesus is Lord of all," or He is not. We can't pick and choose; we can't have Him in charge when life is comfortable, then relieve Him of all responsibility when life gets hard.

"The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up. The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor. For the foundations of the earth are the LORD'S; upon them he has set the world." *1 Samuel 2:6-8*

Job knew. Even sitting in his ash heap, miserable with the loss of virtually everything dear to him, Job had heaven's perspective.

"His wisdom is profound, his power is vast. Who has resisted him and come out unscathed?

He moves mountains without their knowing it
and overturns them in his anger.

He shakes the earth from its place
and makes its pillars tremble.

He speaks to the sun and it does not shine;
he seals off the light of the stars.

He alone stretches out the heavens
and treads on the waves of the sea.

He is the Maker of the Bear and Orion,
the Pleiades and the constellations of the south.

He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed,
miracles that cannot be counted.

When he passes me, I cannot see him;
when he goes by, I cannot perceive him.
If he snatches away, who can stop him?
Who can say to him, 'What are you doing?'" *Job 9:4-12*

The rules don't change just because we're unable to explain God's logic. His justice and wisdom are not malleable, but steady and true. God does not adapt to our level of understanding, but steadily encourages us to rise to His.

Are events taking place around you that don't make sense? Are you having a hard time explaining that God's hand is in them? Fine. Then everything is as it should be, for nowhere does it say that the clay is to understand every decision made by the potter.

I don't want to worship or serve a god who plays by *my* rules; that kind of god is little more than a plaster saint. I prefer to serve a God who is Master and Lord of the universe. Nothing is beyond His grasp. He is never surprised by events taking place in a school yard. And if I don't understand His logic? Fine. That's how it should be. Any god who can be fully explained is no god at all.

Understanding

Consider Mary, the mother of Jesus, standing before the cross, watching the life drain away from her son. Imagine the awful pain of that sword piercing her soul.⁷ Of all people, she had the right to cry out at the injustice. She had the right to claim that, surely, *this* could not be a part of God's plan — this horrible ending for His Son.

But it was, and to this day we shake our heads, wondering at His wisdom. Couldn't God have found an easier way? Why did He require the blood sacrifice? And why did He require the death of His own Son?

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

1 Peter 2:21-25

It makes no sense to mere mortals, that Christ should be put through such horrible torture. But there it is. And it really makes no difference whether Mary understood or not; it makes no difference whether the soldiers, or Pilate, or His disciples, or the common people of the street understood God's reasoning. It's very simple:

By his wounds you have been healed.



The man who measures things by the circumstances of the hour is filled with fear; the man who sees Jehovah enthroned and governing has no panic. *G. Campbell Morgan*

Harvest of Righteousness

Through regeneration, the Son of God is formed in us,⁸ and in our physical life He has the same setting that He had on earth. Satan does not tempt us just to make us do wrong things — he tempts us to make us lose what God has put into us through regeneration, namely, the possibility of being of value to God. He does not come to us on the premise of tempting us to sin, but on the premise of shifting our point of view . . .

The temptations of Jesus continued throughout His earthly life, and they will continue throughout the life of the Son of God in us. Are we going on with Jesus in the life we are living right now?

We have the idea that we ought to shield ourselves from some of the things God brings around us. May it never be! It is God who engineers our circumstances, and whatever they may be we must see that we face them while continually abiding with Him in His temptations. They are *His* temptations, not temptations to us, but temptations to the life of the Son of God in us. Jesus Christ's honor is at stake in our bodily lives. Are we remaining faithful to the Son of God in everything that attacks His life in us? *Chambers*



Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Hebrews 12:10-11

In his epistle, James describes himself (as does the apostle Paul in several of his letters) using the word translated “bondservant”⁹ in the NASB. This word for servanthood means

to completely and absolutely assign all personal rights over to the authority and will of another person; to be in a “permanent relation of servitude to another, his (the slave’s) will altogether swallowed up in the will of another” (Trench); the permanent surrender of personal rights in an attitude of total submission.¹⁰

This mind-set of total submission to Christ is what gives James the ability to find joy in the midst of trials. And that’s what is required for us. So long as we think more of ourselves than the Lord, we will reject any unpleasantness we consider undeserved. But when we accept *everything* God sends our way — not simply the more pleasant blessings that He showers into our life — then we are ready to be truly useful to Him.

God’s 2x4

When moving through the painful results of God’s decision for our lives, the first and most important thing we are to ask is, “What am I to learn from this?” God doesn’t waste His decisions, nor does He put us through trials at a whim. It is *always* for our good.

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 4:12-13; 5:10-11

Sometimes, however, it becomes necessary for God to get our attention. It’s easy for us to slide back into our old ways of self-determination and self-sufficiency. It’s easy for us to go on about our lives playing deaf to the Father’s whispered counsel.

So from time to time it becomes necessary for Him to slap us up side the head with His trusty 2x4. Over time, the wise learn to pay better attention to His quiet advice, to avoid the more painful ministrations of His stout paddle.

Shared Growth

John Donne, 17th Century poet and clergyman, wrote

No man is an Island, entire of it self; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main.

This is no more true than in the family of God. We are all interconnected and dependent on each other. As we pass through the learning process of trials, as we gain new wisdom and maturity from the testing, we bring strength to the body of Christ. Others will draw from our developed character, learning, by vicarious means, from our experiences at God’s hand — as we learn, at the same time, from theirs.

So there is an added urgency to our paying attention to the lessons the Lord would have us learn: Our increasing maturity will have a direct, positive effect not only on ourselves and those immediately around us, but on the Kingdom as a whole.

Painful times are a constant. No one, no matter how hard they try, will succeed in avoiding them all. And the truth is that the Christian may experience more than those happily ignorant of God. So it’s not unfair to ask: Where’s the percentage? Why should one bother?

But now, this is what the LORD says — he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you; when you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”

Isaiah 43:1-3a



Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
Thou art the Potter; I am the clay.
Mold me and make me after Thy will,
While I am waiting, yielded and still.

Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
Search me and try me, Master today!
Whiter than snow, Lord, wash me just now,
As in Thy presence humbly I bow.

Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
Wounded and weary, help me, I pray!
Power — all power — surely is Thine!
Touch me and heal me, Saviour divine!

Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
Hold o’er my being absolute sway!
Fill with Thy Spirit
Till all shall see
Christ only, always, living in me!

Adelaide A. Pollard

Notes:

1. This single-sentence description is expanded, and is the subject of the entire June 1997 issue of *Aspects*, entitled "The Well."
2. Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Discovery House, 1992), updated edition.
3. Mark 10:45; Luke 24:26
4. *hupomone*, hoop-om-on-ay', Greek Stg 5281; from Greek 5278 (hupomeno); cheerful (or hopeful) endurance, constancy :- enduring, patience, patient continuance (waiting).
5. Donald W. Burdick, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1984), p.168.
6. *Time* magazine, November 15, 1993, p75.
7. Luke 2:34-35.
8. Galatians 4:19.
9. *doulos*, doo'-los, Greek Stg 1401; from Greek 1210 (deo); a slave (literal or figurative, involuntary or voluntary; frequently therefore in a qualified sense of subjection or subserviency) :- bond (-man), servant.
10. *The Discovery Bible*, Gary Hill with Gleason Archer (Moody Press, 1987).

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Phone: **515-462-1971** or **515-462-4027**.

Postal address: **2444 195th Trail, Winterset, IA 50273-8172**.

Internet address: **dlampel@aol.com**

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