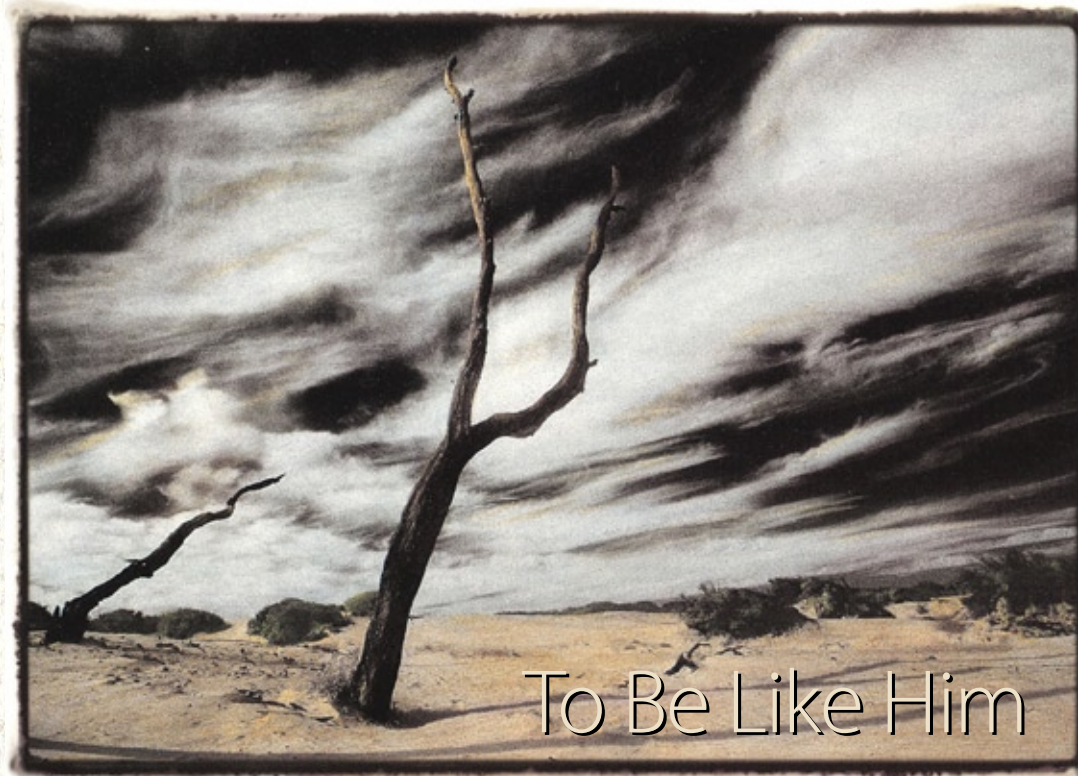


*Trying to walk in the steps of the Savior,
Trying to follow our Savior and King;
Shaping our lives by His blessed example,
Happy, how happy, the songs that we bring.*

Eliza E. Hewitt



Character

THERE REALLY IS NO GOOD WAY to sugarcoat it. Part of being a follower of Christ is to join the process of becoming like Him, and that process involves some discomfort. And why shouldn't it? Jesus experienced more discomfort Himself—and on our behalf—than we will ever experience for Him.

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Philippians 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 do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,

Hebrews 2:9-11

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

We are 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 are not talking about salvation, but *living*. We are talking about what Paul referred to as “working out” our salvation—

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling;

Philippians 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.”

Patience

For us, that path toward completeness 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 lived a while, and have experienced some of life’s hard knocks? People who have never experienced trials, hardship, or testing—people who have never really been inconvenienced—very often remain 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 old 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,” 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.

Donald W. Burdick

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 those who haven't. For example, compare this generation to the one that passed through World War II, or that suffered through 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 usually 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—trudg-

ing the streets until the soles of his one pair of shoes are worn through, performing menial, back-breaking labor for pennies, because it is the only job he can find.

How about a young mother in the 1940s—her husband is thousands of miles away, engaged in a war either in Europe, Africa, or the Orient, literally battling for his life every day, while she cares for her children, alone, after putting in a long and hard shift at the munitions factory. Her daily load is made all the heavier knowing that any day a dreaded telegram may arrive from the War Department.

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 the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 5:8-10

Self is the opaque veil that hides the face of God from us. It can be removed only in spiritual experience, never by mere instruction. We may as well try to instruct leprosy out of our system. There must be a work of God in destruction before we are free. We must invite the cross to do its deadly work within us. We must bring our self-sins to the cross for judgment. We must prepare ourselves for an ordeal of suffering in some measure like that through which our Savior passed when He suffered under Pontius Pilate.

Let us remember that when we talk of the rending of the veil we are speaking in a figure, and the thought of it is poetical, almost pleasant, but in actuality there is nothing pleasant about it. In human experience that veil is made of living spiritual tissue; it is composed of the sentient, quivering stuff of which our whole beings consist, and to touch it is to touch us where we feel pain. To tear it away is to injure us, to hurt us and make us bleed. To say otherwise is to make the cross no cross and death no death at all. It is never fun to die. To rip through the dear and tender stuff of which life is made can never be anything but deeply painful. Yet that is what the cross did to Jesus and it is what the cross would do to every man to set him free.

A.W. Tozer