

Perseverance in the Midst of Perplexing Pain

No one has ever compared life to a cake walk.

Sometimes it can feel as if the path of life is circular, but when your number is called, you don't receive a delicious confectionery concoction.

Instead we find that trials and pain are not uncommon in this life. The sinful world we live in is rife with its clear indicators of that disobedience that occurred so long ago.

Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God said, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?"

And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit from the trees of the garden; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You will not eat of it, nor will you touch it, or else you will die.' "

Then the serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! For God knows that on the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasing to the eyes and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

The Lord God said, "The man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil. And now, he might reach out his hand,

and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”—therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken (Gen. 3:1-7, 22-23).

Paradise began to resemble more of a stagnant cesspool than an oasis. But when Jesus came as a man to die for every person's sins and liberate us from being slaves to sin, He created a growing fountain in the middle of that dry place we know as our current home. As His kingdom advances, more of His character, power and authority seep into the dry crevices of this world to transform and bring beauty from ashes.

However, our proximity and access to that fountain can sometimes seem distant and strained as life weighs on us like slabs of concrete pressed down on tired shoulders. But like patches of grass bursting through the sidewalk toward the sun, we too can continue to grow toward what is greater despite resistance and pressure.

In this life, yes, there is trouble, but God causes us to grow through trials and hardship, ensuring we will have His best regardless of how we feel we're doing in life.

Jesus offers to every believer a life more abundant and an opportunity to rest.

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me. For I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:28-29).

Footnotes

This doesn't mean that life suddenly is free of trials and those challenges that seem to sprout up from nowhere, but instead it means He will use them to grow us. Through each and every argument, misunderstanding and sacrifice, we have the

Lord's promise that He will use it, causing us to become all that He intended for us to be before we see Him face to face. What was prophesied about Jesus by Isaiah is what He still fulfills today.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19).

When challenges arise and trials threaten to derail us, there is a sure hope.

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed" (2 Cor. 4:8-9).

It can be hard to remember that in the midst of discomfort or pain—when the SUV swerves into that small space in your lane, or coworkers malign your reputation, or when you have to release all the dreams you held for your child and bury them alongside a small coffin. It is hard.

These life events haven't escaped our Father's attention. As One who weeps with us, our God comforts us and never relinquishes His power as king. He remains determined to cultivate beauty in the midst of hardship.

Because of what the Lord has done and His commitment to us, we can be ones who "rejoice in hope, [are] patient in suffering, persevere in prayer" (Rom. 12:12). In the day to day, as we read and meditate upon the Word, we can let it renew our thinking in order to have confidence for what the Lord is doing. It's imperative that we vigilantly guard our thoughts to believe what is true.

Right Perspective

1. How We See God

Our Heavenly Father is strong; He is all knowing and has all power and is always present. He refers to Himself as an ever-present help in times of trouble (see Ps. 46:1). Not only is He powerful, but He is gentle with us in our weakness. God's nature is demonstrated to us daily as He shows His faithfulness to sustain and free us to look more like the Son of the living God. Our loving Father has sacrificed everything to pay the debt man accrued, and, if He's given us His Son, He will freely give us all we need and continue to take care of us. He cares for His children and what happens in our lives matters to Him. The things that hurt us do not go unnoticed by Him. And just as He had a plan for the redemption of the human race, He has, and is now working out, His plan for redeeming all that comes against us.

As for God, His way has integrity; the word of the Lord is proven; He is a shield to all those who take refuge in Him (Ps. 18:30).

2. How We See Ourselves

Many times accusation accompanies the hard moments we face. There's accusation against the Lord and others, but often what bombards our thoughts are accusations the enemy hurls at us about ourselves. Thoughts of how we're failing, falling short and unable to shake the sins of our past are whispered to us to hinder the truth of how God actually sees us. We are more than conquerors through Christ, chosen by God and fully accepted by God to enjoy fellowship with the Trinity. God's opinion of us is often more kind than our opinion of ourselves, and it is always accurate. We are destined for victory. We cannot fail as we trust and follow God.

You are of God, little children, and have overcome them,

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

3. How We See Our Circumstances

In the middle of a battle, it's common to think the chaos will continue to rage. For days it's been the same, and the idea of reprieve continues to be just that—an idea. But something amazing happened when Jesus was crucified on the cross. He opened a completely different possibility to anyone who follows Him. Instead of challenging circumstances harming us, He made it possible for those same challenges to be key stepping stones into seeing His strength, glory, passion and tenderness in this life.

Though the enemy may try and steal the joy, kill the hope, and destroy the dreams of believers, God uses all attacks on us to grow and mature us into who we were meant to be—mighty men and women of God. Because of His sacrifice, the horrible things we experience in this life will forever be the worst we will ever have to endure. As followers of Christ, we are guaranteed an eternity of pure pleasure with the One who knows us completely and loves us fully. All that lies ahead of us is joy and the realization of what the Lord felt and thought every time we faced hard trials, challenges, supposed setbacks and turmoil.

Our light affliction, which lasts but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, ¹⁸ while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal {2 Cor. 4:17-18}.

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