

PURSUIT OF PEACE

"Seek Peace and Pursue it" - Psalm 34:14

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

WHY?

My HUSBAND AND I stood beside a couple and their baby lying in a coffin. "What have I ever done to deserve this?" was the father's bitter question. We find that so many people, even unbelievers, seem to think that if they have lived what they think is a fairly decent life, they deserve something special from GOD. They think that GOD should reward for everything good they have done in their own eyes. They act as though they should be rewarded for handing out little favors to GOD much as we give candy to tots.

Even Christians have this same idea, probably because of the many wonderful promises in the Bible of GOD's care and love. They are tempted to think that what GOD does for them is on the basis of the good they are doing rather than on His pure, unmerited favor. What GOD does for any of us is done because of CHRIST's death and resurrection and has nothing at all to do with our works or manner of life.

"What have I done to deserve this?" Nothing to deserve anything from GOD but punishment and death. GOD taught Jeremiah the prophet this lesson when He sent him to the potter's house to watch the process of the making of pottery (Jeremiah 18). It is the potter's clay and he can do anything with it that he chooses. If he wants one lump of clay to be a beautiful vase, and another to be a container for garbage, that is his choice. If one pot is marred and he decides to throw it away or to remake it in some way, that is his right. The clay can never tell the potter what it will be.

GOD is our Creator and in His hand rests our very life from moment to moment. All GOD has received in return is sin and rebellion. He says that, "**The wages of sin is death**" (Romans 6:23). Death is all that we deserve! We don't deserve His salvation or His loving care. All that He gives us comes only as a result of His divine favor, apart from anything that we do. We are GOD's clay. He is the potter and can do with us as He wishes. The truth that GOD does so much for us even though we deserve nothing should bring praise and thanksgiving, never rebellion for something that is hard to bear.

Riding on the bus one day, the lady sitting next to me saw my Bible. When she found out that I was a minister's wife, she told me there was one question that nobody had been able to answer for her. Would I try? "If GOD is a GOD of love as the preachers say He is, why did He let war and suffering come into the world?"

To give myself a few minutes to think before answering, I asked her why she thought He did. Her ideas showed the normal reaction of many unbelievers. They seem to think of GOD as One who indulges everyone his wishes unless He gets mad with them and then He makes them suffer out of revenge.

Of all the wonderful attributes of GOD given in the Bible, one is clearly stated in what was probably the first verse you learned. "**God is love.**" That is as much of GOD as many people know. They forget that love doesn't make Him GOD. It is necessary that He also be holy, just, merciful, all-powerful, all-wise, present everywhere, etc. But judged on the one attribute alone - love - it is still necessary that He allow suffering in this world. In GOD's holiness, He can have no part with evil.

But we are sinners and He loved us so much that He planned a way whereby we might be made right before Him and thus be able to enjoy His fellowship, care, and love. He allowed sin to enter the world knowing that He would suffer the most because of it. "**God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself**" (II Corinthians 5:19). "**I and my Father are one,**" are CHRIST's words (John 10:30). GOD knew that when He gave His Son to die on the Cross, He must suffer not just a physical death, through which all must pass, but the added burden of carrying the sin of the world on Himself.

GOD could have left Adam and Eve in the garden without any choice of right and wrong. That way He would have had slaves who obeyed Him because they had to and not because they loved Him and wanted to obey. GOD gave us a free will so that we might make our own choice of loving or rejecting Him. His wonderful love cried out for our voluntary love in return. We were all put under the judgment of sin and condemnation so that GOD could then reach down and pick us out to be saved through the Lord JESUS CHRIST. Now we are no longer in slavery to GOD but we are sons and friends (Galatians 4:6, 7; John 15:15).

If there had been no suffering, we would be mere puppets dancing around on the end of strings pulled by another. People would be just as rebellious against GOD's strict control under that reign as they are today against the suffering that GOD allows because we have free wills.

As Christians we have the assurance that GOD's love is behind all our suffering. It may seem to come through others or through Satan's power, but in reality it comes from GOD in His will. GOD has promised to meet our every need (Philippians 4:19). In His love and wisdom, He knows what is best for us and sends it no matter what the cost may be.

You may suffer deeply, but remember that GOD's heart is infinite and as such, He has a much greater capacity for suffering. He is suffering right along with you no matter what He is asking you to bear, more so because He loves you. GOD does not shun His own suffering when He knows it is for the good of one of His children. Have you sat beside little ones when they were burning with fever, and crying in pain, and suffered along with them? Haven't you been brokenhearted when your children had to be given badtasting medicine and shots in their arms? They don't understand; it would be much easier to be sick yourself than to see them suffer.

Think of that from GOD's viewpoint. He knows that many times we are distressed and upset and

can't understand, but He suffers right along with us. In His love, He can't remove that suffering for He has sent it for our good, but He stands beside us all the way and gives the strength to bear the burden.

Our teen-age daughter had to have minor surgery. I sat beside her bed as soon as she returned from the operating room. As she thrashed around on the bed, moaning, and I looked on, I am sure I was suffering more than she was. It was all I could do to hold back the tears when I left the room; I just couldn't stand it any longer. I wished that I could have had the operation myself. Our child was suffering and I suffered right along with her. In our love we knew that we couldn't spare her that operation because it was necessary. We signed the papers and made arrangements knowing that she and we would suffer, not because there was anything lacking in our love for her, but because we loved her so much and wanted her to be strong and well.

There is another question that is frequently asked ministers which is similar to the last one. "If GOD has all power, why doesn't He take suffering and sin from Christians?" Some of the same answers to the other question also apply to this one.

There must never be any doubt on the part of a Christian of GOD's power! "**All things are possible,**" are CHRIST's words (Matthew 19:26). "**All power is given unto me in heaven [where I am] and in earth [where you are]**" (Matthew 28:18).

"Yes;" we say emphatically, "GOD has the power to do any thing that He wishes" (Psalm 62:11). However, GOD has limited His power voluntarily in some ways. We are told in the Scriptures that there are three things that GOD cannot do.

- He can't lie (Hebrews 6:18).
- He can't be tempted with evil. He cannot sin (James 1:13).
- He is too pure to behold evil (Habakkuk 1:13).

Since GOD can't lie, He must carry out what He has said in His Word in spite of all His power.

GOD has laid down laws in nature. There is always day and night; the sun rises and sets in its regular time. There are four seasons of the year and they come in turn because it is GOD's law. What goes up must come down, for the law of gravity was set in force by GOD. In some cases He allows men to overcome some of His laws of nature such as giving them the knowledge to fly planes and run elevators.

He has made physical and psychological laws by which He governs the earth. When we ignore these laws we naturally have to bear the result. Many times, in His wonderful kindness, GOD spares us the complete suffering of disobedience but His laws still operate. "**Whatever a man soweth, that shall he also reap**" (Galatians 6:7).

We have seen it happen over and over again. That is GOD's Word and He must keep it because He cannot lie. When I plant flower seeds, I get flowers and not nuts. When I sow vegetables, fruit does not grow. If we insist on sowing the seeds that make for suffering and sickness, we must be prepared to take what comes without thinking that it is a lack of GOD's power when we are not spared.

We have matches. They are used for cooking, heating, and many other useful purposes, but they can also be used to burn down a house. We have cars that are so necessary and useful in these days. They can be used for business and pleasure when handled properly or for killing when driven by drunken or careless drivers.

Whenever you are tempted to doubt GOD's power and love, remember that the very suffering you are experiencing has come because of GOD's love and power. His love sends what you need; His power keeps a check so that nothing can touch you outside of His will.

In our first pastorate, we lived in a small town where there were many retired people and widows. Many of them were invalids. Perhaps the most asked question during those years of service was, "Why does GOD let me suffer?" They weren't interested in suffering in general. The emphasis was on the me. "Why me?"

Sometimes it was asked for comfort and in hopes of finding GOD's answer for them. But many times it was asked in bitterness as though they deserved better things from GOD. But it has been asked hundreds of times. That same question must be multiplied a million times around the world.

Perhaps one of the biggest reasons that we suffer is because we bring it on ourselves. Most of us seem to be gamblers at heart (though we might shudder at the idea of gambling with money) . We somehow think that we can get away with what we are doing even though it might be forbidden in the Bible. "Maybe GOD will overlook this in view of the good I am doing for Him" is our attitude.

I once read of a Christian who was willed a very prosperous brewery. He reasoned that he could keep it and the money would enable him to give more to the Lord's work and, of course, give him a much higher standard of living. He chose to ignore GOD's warning, "**Woe unto him that giveth his neighbor drink**" (Habakkuk 2:15). Woe and more woe was the result of his action.

Even the chastening hand of the Lord brought little change of attitude until GOD let him suffer terrible physical pain from a car driven by a man who had been drinking the liquor he had manufactured. That settled the matter and the brewery was destroyed.

Today that man is still marked physically. He gives little to the Lord's cause because of inability to work fully, but the Lord has all of him and that is what He wants most from all of us. He is not bitter; he praises the Lord that He checked him in his wrongdoing before more damage could be done and he prays for all those people who have suffered because of the liquor he sold. His heart is happy in GOD's forgiveness but it will always be a little sad for all the suffering he has caused others.

No man can give the reason why you suffer; that is between you and the Lord. The only way you can find the answer for yourself is in GOD's Word. GOD has given many reasons in the Bible for suffering.

If you sincerely want to find out why you suffer, study the Bible and pray for guidance.

Sooner or later He will probably see fit to show you why, though not always. If you find that the cause is something wrong in your life, be sure you are willing to take fast steps to correct it so GOD can remove trials He may have sent to make you see this fact. Oftentimes, we find that the people who talk the most about GOD's improper treatment of them already know that something sinful is in their lives. They either won't let themselves admit it or they love their way of life so much they have no intention of changing.

First, GOD allows suffering for our faith in CHRIST. "**Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution**" (II Timothy 3:12). "**For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake**" (Philippians 1:29).

While CHRIST was still on earth, He warned that the world hated Him and would hate Christians, too (John 15:18-21). John tells us in his first Epistle that "**the whole world lieth in wickedness**" (I John 5:19). Do you think that unbelievers are going to happily accept you, especially if your life is a reproach to them? If your life is lived pleasing to GOD, don't be surprised if you are persecuted and misunderstood by your unsaved friends and business associates.

While my husband was a student at seminary, he had a Jewish classmate from New York City. Harry was an outstanding Christian who had lost everything for his faith in CHRIST. The moment he told his family that he was saved and felt called into the ministry, he was put out of his home. Later his father put through legal proceedings to declare his son dead. His friends and relatives were forbidden to do anything for him and his parents never spoke to him again. In spite of losing everything that most of us would count as the most precious possessions in life, Harry was the happiest person we knew. The students were nice to him, and later the Lord opened the hearts of some Christians to help him through school and get established in evangelistic work among his own people.

It is imperative to be sure that you are suffering for CHRIST's sake and not because of some foolish and perhaps sinful things you are doing. From time to time we meet people who brag about their suffering because of their godly life when it is obvious to everyone else that they are being mistreated because they are unloving, rude and obnoxious.

We knew a church member who bragged about losing all her friends because she was living so true to the Lord. The few of us who were even kind to her were so because we felt sorry for her. She ruined every ladies' meeting, party and tea we had in our church by her rudeness and unkind ways of telling us what she knew was the Lord's will for us. She sought out the unsaved in our church and promptly told them just what she thought of them. Many of them were driven from the church by her brutal attacks. It was her idea of suffering for CHRIST's sake. It was our idea of how to drive people away from the Lord.

Dr. L. K. Anderson, who was a Secretary to Latin America on the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, told us an experience his missionaries had in a city of Latin America.

The city council had ruled that there would be no street meetings by the missionaries. This was

largely incited by a small group of those who hated the Gospel but it was partly for the protection of the missionaries and their equipment. The workers were free to carry on church services, teach Christianity in their schools, and hold any kind of meetings they wanted to in their homes.

The Presbyterian missionaries were asked to discontinue their street meetings. Another missionary group was also working in the same city. They decided to ignore the order and put on an even bigger display at the next street meeting. They overlooked the places in the Bible where we are told to be subject to governments and rulers. These are ordained of GOD although they may be wicked and unfair men. The missionary workers borrowed a new sound truck and several cars from the Presbyterians for the meeting. As a result a riot broke out. The sound truck and cars were destroyed and the missionaries were severely injured. Because of their disobedience, all missionary work was immediately closed in that city.

The Presbyterians lost five thousand dollars worth of equipment that was never replaced. The other missionaries went around in this country telling how they had suffered for CHRIST's sake. What they failed to tell was that they never replaced the equipment that was destroyed and that they were the cause of the closing of all missionary work in that city. Who do you think caused the trouble? They had brought this trouble on themselves by disobeying GOD's Word and breaking the laws of that city.

If you realize that you might be suffering because you brought it on yourself, don't despair. You have probably missed much blessing, but you now should come back to GOD and He will receive you and restore you in His fellowship again. Confess what you know has been wrong and GOD will restore you. It might not be the best in life for you because you have spoiled it, but GOD still has a plan and a will for you. This time stay in the "straight and narrow" way with Him where you can't get out of His will.

Second, GOD allows us to suffer that we might be able to help and comfort others called upon to go through trials. " . . . **the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God**" (II Corinthians 1:3, 4).

GOD chooses some to go through certain trials so they may experience GOD's comfort and later have a ministry to others who suffer in the same way. I will never forget the first time that GOD brought this verse to my attention. It was one of the worst periods of physical suffering I have had. I was confined to my home most of the time and to bed a large part of the time. It was frightening to see what rebellion broke out in my heart about GOD's will. Why should I suffer just so I could comfort others? If they had to suffer, why couldn't they get their comfort from the Word as I was doing?

Even though these verses upset me, I still felt a pull to go over them every day. Then GOD gave me a great blessing in seeing a little phrase in the last of the third verse. I had found a new name for GOD, "**the God of all comfort.**"

Since then I have always known where to turn for my own comfort. Now I see as never before His comforting hand working for me because I am expecting it. It might come as the smile of a

stranger on the street, a kindness of a store clerk, the song of a bird on the windowsill, the choice of a hymn sung in church or a Scripture verse that has suddenly taken on new meaning. I would probably let all these things pass by unnoticed if it were not for my need of comfort. In one of Dr. Norman B. Harrison's books, he compares our suffering and GOD's comfort to that of a clock. The short hand that moves so slowly around is compared to GOD's hand of chastening and suffering. The minute hand that moves so rapidly is compared to GOD's comforting hand that overshadows the slow-moving hand of suffering.

The best human comfort that we can have is someone who has suffered in a similar way. GOD let me be helped by another minister's wife who had suffered in the same way as I. Her understanding and comfort was all that kept me going for several years. She had suffered so that later she might be a help to me. Now I can look back through the years and see that GOD has used me to comfort others because of the trials that He has sent. I know that my ministry as a pastor's wife has been greatly changed because I have experienced some of the same trials through which our people are going. My heart and prayers and sincere interest go out to them because I understand what it means to suffer. My suffering through the years has taught me what I have written in this book. It is my prayer that all this will be a comfort to many hundreds that I will probably never see but who will get this message.

Third, GOD allows suffering to bring glory to Himself. In one sense everything brings glory to GOD, but in a special way the saints who take suffering cheerfully as from His hand glorify Him most.

CHRIST used the death of Lazarus, one whom He loved dearly, to bring glory to GOD (John 11:1-45). Mary and Martha had sent word to CHRIST that Lazarus was very sick, but He delayed His coming to their home until after Lazarus had been dead four days and buried. He allowed Lazarus to pass through death and his sisters to suffer the sorrow that accompanies the death of a loved one. When CHRIST spoke of it to His disciples He told them, "**This sickness [death] is not unto death [final physical], but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby**" (v. 4). Later when CHRIST came to their home, He merely spoke and Lazarus was raised from the dead. He was restored again to his family and the miracle brought many others to believe in CHRIST as the Son of GOD.

I used to think that the only way one could glorify GOD through some hard trial was to tell everyone about it first and then they could see me live for GOD's glory. Being a very truthful person, I often told people exactly how I felt. Later GOD showed me that I would bring Him more glory by keeping my feelings to myself. He was the only One who needed to see how I reacted to suffering to bring glory to Him. If He wanted others to notice, He would bring it to their attention.

Fourth, GOD allows suffering to make us a testimony to others. "**Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living GOD; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart**" (II Corinthians 3:2, 3).

We have the Bible and the HOLY SPIRIT to give us understanding. Unbelievers usually feel that GOD's Word is just another book and rather dull and uninteresting at that. For many people who

do not read the Word and seldom attend church, other Christians are the only revelation that they have of GOD. When people look at your life, what do they see? Is your testimony before them a shining, radiant picture of the joy and peace that comes from knowing GOD? Or, is your life just like theirs so that they will see no reason for wanting to know CHRIST as Saviour?

A lady in my prayer group has been in the hospital six times in one year. Recently, she said that a neighbor who had been in a terrible automobile accident confessed that she had been watching her to see if her GOD was able to sustain her through all the operations. Now the neighbor has an open heart to hear about the Lord because of the woman's testimony through physical suffering. This friend had to suffer in order to show the unbeliever that GOD is sufficient for every need.

Many times our hearts are sad as we look around us and see the Christ-rejecting people going merrily on their way. How we long to shout the good news of the Gospel everywhere we go, but how few times we have the opportunity to speak a word that brings saving conviction to those people. GOD knows all about our desires. He has given us all one way of being a testimony to Him all the time. That is by our lives!

We know people who have come to know CHRIST as Saviour by watching the lives of faithful Christians. If someone had spoken to these people about Christ, they would have been offended and flatly refused to listen. Just remember this, it is usually harder to live a consistent Christian life that will attract others to CHRIST than it is to give the Gospel by word of mouth. GOD may not give you opportunity to meet many people to whom you can talk about CHRIST but He does give you the privilege of a daily walk that is so pleasing to Him it is bound to attract others.

Suffering Christians can also be a real testimony and help to other Christians. The people in our church who have been through all kinds of suffering have been as much of a help to us as we have to them. It has increased our faith and thanksgiving to hear their words of how GOD has given them the strength to bear the trials He has sent. They have proved over and over the greatness of the Lord. They have seen His hand working for them and have learned to trust Him more. Other Christians seeing their reactions have been encouraged and strengthened in their struggles.

Fifth, GOD allows suffering on earth that we might have added glory in Heaven.

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

"If we suffer, we shall also reign with him" (II Timothy 2:12).

"But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (I Peter 4:13).

"For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (II Corinthians 4:16, 17).

"That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold . . . might be found

unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (I Peter 1:7).

These verses give abundant evidence that there is a relationship between our earthly suffering and our future glory in Heaven. We cannot explain just what this glory will be but we believe that it is true because we are told so much about it in GOD's Word.

Sixth, GOD allows suffering to fit us for service for Him. There are some things that GOD has planned for us to do that can only be accomplished through suffering.

The story of Joseph's life is a good example of this (Genesis 37-50). He is one of the few men about which there is no recorded sin. His entire life, in spite of much mistreatment and unfairness, was lived to GOD's glory. Joseph lost his mother early in life. Because of his father's great love for him, he was hated and rejected by his brothers. Their final cruelty led them to sell Joseph into slavery to the Egyptians. They believed because of that they would never see him again. Even in slavery GOD blessed Joseph and let him become the head servant in the home of Potiphar.

There, in spite of the seducing of Potiphar's wife, Joseph refused to sin. This angered the wife so much that she lied about Joseph by declaring that he had wronged her. For punishment, he was cast into prison. Even there his GOD was watching over him and gave him special favor with the jailer. During his stay, two of the king's servants had dreams that Joseph was able to interpret. The baker was to be killed in three days and the cupbearer was to be returned to the king's service. This came true. Naturally, he was so delighted that he made great promises of trying to get Joseph out of prison, but he didn't keep his promises and Joseph languished another two years.

However, GOD hadn't forgotten. Pharaoh had two dreams that none of the wise men could interpret, which reminded the cupbearer of Joseph. He was brought before the king and again GOD let him know the meaning of the dreams. The king made him second ruler in the land. It might seem that Joseph's suffering and testings ended right there, but I believe that Joseph was more tested in his prosperity than in the times of suffering for the things that he never did. Sometimes men in high authority suffer more temptations than those of which we common people would dream.

All of the suffering that had gone before was mere preparation for the final temptation of power. Think how Joseph must have felt when his brothers, who hated him and sold him into slavery, came to beg food to save their lives!

His reaction was quite different to the normal, natural one. He told his brothers that they had meant it for evil but GOD had meant all of his unpleasant experiences for good. GOD had put Joseph through the furnace of many afflictions that he might be the one who was to save GOD's chosen people, the Jews. This was GOD's method of getting a ruler on the throne in the one country where there was food so that the Jewish race might be preserved. Now, Joseph saw why GOD had sent so much suffering in his life.

Many times we will never know until years later why GOD's heavy hand is on us now. Just be patient and one day you will know what GOD has been preparing you for. GOD may be putting

you through testings that you cannot understand. He may be preparing you for some special service that can only be done after you have learned through some hardships. GOD has given me a special ministry to sick people because He has let me experience what it is to suffer physically. I could never understand and sympathize as I do now if it had not been for the discomforts that He has sent me through these past twenty years. It is hard at times not to beg GOD to remove the suffering but remember that if He does, He might also have to remove much of the blessing and usefulness for which He was preparing you.

A year after we were married, while visiting our parents in the East, I was forced to have an operation. A complication resulted which kept me flat on my back for three months. My husband had to return to school and I had to stay in the East. It was during that time that my grandmother came to see me and I was used to lead her to the Lord. That was the last time that I saw her alive.

The leg complication has returned several times since. It has left a slight lameness and is often painful; there is no hope that I will ever be free from it. Whenever the pain is bad and I am tempted to revolt, I remember one question that the Lord seemed to have asked me years ago: "Will you exchange a perfect leg for the salvation of your grandmother's soul?" GOD had to lay me aside in order to keep me in the East until I had a chance to witness to my grandmother. In this case GOD let me see why He asked me to suffer (so I can trust Him in every case, even those that I cannot see any purpose for).

Seventh, GOD allows suffering to keep us from getting too earthbound. This morning, the sun is shining brightly and there is the crisp feeling of fall in the air. My next door neighbor just called to me, "This is such a gorgeous day that it makes one glad to be alive." I got to thinking about that.

If everything in our lives corresponded to the perfect day we are having, we would want this life to go on forever.

As long as everything in our lives would work out as we want it to and our bodies would stay strong, we would rather stay right here on earth. Over and over we are told in the Word to look for the coming of the Lord JESUS CHRIST, but as long as things are going well for us here, we would rather He would wait a little longer. We are prone to set our eyes on the things of this world so firmly that to be strictly honest, we prefer this to being with the Lord. It reminds me of the girl who was soon to be married.

"Yes, I want CHRIST to come again but I am praying that He will wait until after my wedding. I want to have all the joyful experiences of life first."

Sometimes it takes an aging body or the loss of a loved one or financial stress to turn our eyes toward CHRIST. When an individual's life is in a mess or the national affairs are shaky, we often hear people say, "I wish the Lord would come to straighten out this mess."

The inference is that only when we are in trouble do we really want the Lord to intervene in our affairs.

Eighth, GOD allows suffering to make us kind, understanding and sympathetic. "**Charity**

suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (I Corinthians 13:4-7).

These are not character traits that come from an easy life. They aren't born in us. These are lessons that we learn from the things we suffer. Paul says that we are to be "**kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you**" (Ephesians 4:32).

Those who have not known bad health, misfortune, sorrow, or some kind of suffering are usually hardened to the suffering of others. They are thoughtless in their criticism of others who do things that they can't understand.

Our first family doctor, after we were married, told us that he could pick out the people, who came to him for the first time, who had not suffered much. He could tell by their actions, the way they treated his nurse, their attitude toward him, as well as the way they talked about their problem. Their self-sufficient, smug, know-it-all attitude betrayed them. He says that suffering softens and mellows people in such a way that they show it in the way they treat and understand others.

People who bring the most comfort and peace to us are those who understand what we are suffering because they have been through the same thing or something similar. The three friends who came to see Job when he was so sick were "**miserable comforters**" because they had never been through what Job was experiencing.

They didn't understand and were giving him platitudes from theory and not experience. They merely added to his discomfort by accusing him of some hidden sin in his life. Those who have called on me during the times that I have been sick have fallen into two classes. I say it with all kindness: those who knew nothing of the things that I was suffering were no help at all. They were uncomfortable in my presence because they were having trouble finding something to say to help me. Some believed that I could "just snap out of it" if I really desired. The others were those who knew what suffering is. Some of them said very little or nothing, but brought just the help I needed. The union of heart with heart of those who truly understand is the best comfort.

Suffering has taught me to be kind and considerate of others that I meet in everyday life. I am quiet when others are resting because rest is so important to me. I never "snap back" at the store clerk when she has been cross because her nerves may be as raw as mine. I never drive my car without praying not only for safety but that I will drive so carefully that I won't even frighten pedestrians or drivers. They may already be so nervous that my thoughtlessness might be the "last straw" for them. You who have known premature heartbeats, palpitations, and that terrible throbbing in your throat know just what I mean. To the calm ones, please just take my word for it and try to be considerate. There are hundreds of people that we see from day to day who may appear very composed but are going to pieces inside. Someone said that, "Christians may belong to the Lord, but they drive like they were Devil-possessed."

Ninth, GOD allows suffering so that He can bring us to the place where He can give us added

material blessings. GOD wants all good and pleasing gifts for His children, just as we want the best of everything for our children. But there are many times that He can't trust us with more wealth or success because we first have to learn how to keep these things from taking first place in our lives. Job went through some terrible experiences but when he learned the lessons that GOD had for him, his wealth was doubled. His wife and home were restored to him and he was given the same number of children again. GOD may have many wonderful gifts for us but we can't have them now. There often has to be a period of trial before blessing.

A near relative of mine, an outstanding government official, went through a hard experience that turned to great material blessing. He and his wife were both Christians but they were out of fellowship with the Lord and seldom attended church. They had completely ignored the Bible and prayer. GOD sent marital problems and in spite of an excellent salary, they never had enough money for their needs. After they were restored into fellowship, every problem cleared up in their marriage, and GOD added blessing to blessing both spiritually and materially. He is using both of them to win souls for CHRIST and to raise two Christian children. Every time he gave to the Lord, the Lord sent more in return. We had letter after letter from them telling how, in various ways that may have seemed just luck to others, the Lord had given them more than they could give Him in a financial way.

This is not always GOD's way of dealing with His children, so don't think that something is wrong if He is not treating you this way. But these loved ones have learned that all of their money belongs to the Lord. They can be trusted now to use it for His glory. The man buys Christian books by the dozen and as he travels from one government agency to another, he gives them to men in high places. Later he discusses the contents with these men, thus making it necessary for them to read the books. It gives him a chance to present the Gospel.

In this way he has been able to lead many government officials as well as businessmen to the Lord.

Tenth, GOD sends suffering as chastisement or child-training. I have purposefully left this very important reason until last because it is such a vast subject that it will take a chapter at least to discuss.

Remember that GOD owes you nothing. You have never been able to do anything that makes you deserve any favors from GOD. Our just desert is only death for the sin and rebellion in our hearts. In His love and unmerited favor, GOD sent CHRIST to save us from the penalty of sin. Our very lives and breath are in His hands to do with as He chooses.

Christians are His in a second sense because we have been redeemed by the precious blood of the Lord JESUS CHRIST. We are no longer our own and we have no rights of our own. GOD is the only One who has the right to decide just what should happen to us.

GOD has the love and power to remove all sin and suffering, but He has limited Himself to the laws that He has written to govern nature, man and even outer space. At times GOD overrides these laws if it is His will but the laws are still in force. He allows man a free choice of whether he will obey Him or refuse.

Adam and Eve refused and each of us has done the same thing down through the ages. Suffering

came as the result of our own choice. But in giving us a free will, GOD knew that He and His Son would suffer more than we. He suffered most when CHRIST died on the Cross for our sins. There is no suffering that anyone of us can know that can be compared to that, regardless of the trials He calls on you or me to bear.

The answer to why we suffer can only come from GOD and that will come through His Word. If we truly want to find the solution, He will be faithful in showing us as we seek His will.

Never think that all tribulations that come to you or to others is the result of past or present sin. There are ten reasons given for suffering in this chapter and only one, the last, has anything to do with sin in our lives. That one will be discussed now in detail.

~ end of chapter 11 ~
