

- TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS -

"Save me, O God, For the waters have threatened my life. I have sunk in deep mire, and there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and a flood overflows me. I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched; My eyes fail while I wait for my God." (Psalm 69:1-3)



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The Seven Churches (Revelation 2-3)

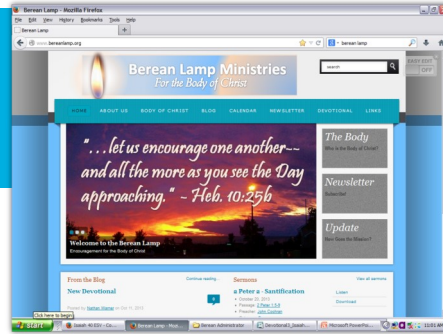


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The Berean Lamp Ministry seeks to:

1. Encourage and strengthen the Body of Christ by providing the means for each of its members to share their spiritual gifts with one another, rooted in the Word of God, thereby growing into deeper union with one another and with Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).
2. Minister to non-believers; be a witness for Christ and a testimony to His Body in the world.

We would appreciate your help in contributing to the content and in spreading the work of this ministry. Thank you, and God bless.

- Pastor Scott Moller

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I Am a Man Who Has Seen Affliction (A Scriptural Primer on Suffering)

By Nathan Warner

“He has driven me and made me walk in darkness and not in light. Surely against me He has turned His hand repeatedly all the day.”

(Lamentations 3:2-3 NASB)

“For the despairing man there should be kindness from his friend; So that he does not forsake the fear of the Almighty.” (Job 6:14)

God has given us two very detailed, first-hand accounts of suffering in His Word—Job and Lamentations. The words of Job and Jeremiah are some of the hardest to read in all of Scripture. Why did God see fit to include them in His Word?

God has given them to us for a reason—to better understand our own afflictions and the sufferings of others. God wants us to know that He understands, so that in our suffering, we might have hope through these harrowing testimonies and have compassion and kindness toward others suffering. God wants us to show, and be shown, patience, grace, love, and kindness in the trials and tribulations of life. Suffering and affliction are not pretty, but unlike the gods of false religion, our God does not ignore it nor explain it away. And He wants us to know through these testimonies that He will see us through.

HOW DO WE RESPOND TO SUFFERING?

As a whole, Believers in America seem to have a particularly poor understanding of Christian suffering. Some of their common responses to afflicted Christians are as follows: “Well, you must have sin in your life and this is discipline – pray that God will reveal your sin to you,” or “you need to have more faith – faith moves mountains – if you have enough faith God will do anything you ask,” or “you need to do X or Y – it worked for me, so it will work for you, too,” or “read this book and fol-

low the 5, 6, or 12 steps to healing and prosperity – it will change your life,” and, if that doesn’t work, “you obviously aren’t invested in the formula for success – try harder” or “okay, so that book didn’t help – read this other teacher’s book and follow his/her steps to happiness – you just have to find what works for you.” And so on and so forth.

“The afflicted testify to the reality of a fallen world, which is not intended for our happiness or fulfillment but to drive us to the only one who can fulfill us – Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the coming King, Who will restore our natures to righteousness and the nature of this world to perfection.”

Sound familiar? These are modern echoes of the advice Job’s so-called friends gave him when he underwent extreme affliction. None of these words are kindness to the despairing Believer. All of these things make “you” the focal point of what is happening in your life. They are all different ways to say, “you caused your affliction” or “you have the power to overcome your affliction.” This has more in common with the religion of karma than Christ. Karma is the idea that if you do good, good will come to you – and if you do bad, your life will be bad. It is the idea that you reap what you sow: good things come to good people and bad things come to bad people.

ARE WE JOB’S FRIENDS?

Many a Christian today would nod in agreement with that swell guy Eliphaz when he told Job, “*Behold, how happy is the man whom God reproves, so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty*” (Job 5:17). Here, Eliphaz is suggesting that Job was experiencing the Lord’s discipline for some sin he MUST HAVE committed, and he should be glad God cares enough about him to discipline him.

Next up, Zophar spends chapter 11 telling Job, “You deserve worse.” This is true spiritually—we all deserve worse for our sin—Zophar, Eliphaz, and Bildad also! So how is

this encouraging or kind to someone suffering? You could add here this common “encouragement” offered by people: “Well, at least you’re not worse off—just think how much worse your situation could be and then you’ll see it isn’t that bad.” There are always others who suffer more, but does that mean we should “put up or shut up”? Of course not.

Job’s friend Bildad jumped onboard the shaming of Job by suggesting that God rewards the good; therefore, Job couldn’t be in the right because God had stopped rewarding him: “Lo, God will not reject a man of integrity, nor will He support the evildoers” (Job 8:20). “If you would seek God and implore the compassion of the Almighty, if you are pure and upright, surely now He would rouse Himself for you and restore your righteous estate” (Job 8:5-6). Bildad was preaching the prosperity gospel—that if Job would just “get himself right with God,” life would be great again. It is true from an eternity perspective that God WILL judge the wicked and reward the just in the age to come, but we know that in the present world, God gives rain to the just and unjust, and prosperity and success are no measures of integrity. Job answers as much.

Eliphaz took his position further to suggest that Job’s affliction was judgment from God—because in his heart, Job must truly be a bad man. Eliphaz then proceeded to invent fanci-

ful reasons why Job was being judged: “Is it because of your reverence that He reproves you, that He enters into judgment against you? Is not your wickedness great, and your iniquities without end? For you have taken pledges of your brothers without cause, and stripped men naked. To the weary you have given no water to drink, and from the hungry you have withheld bread....Therefore snares surround you, and sudden dread terrifies you, or darkness, so that you cannot see, and an abundance of water covers you....Yield now and be at peace with Him; Thereby good will come to you” (Job 22:4-7, 10-11, 21).

Eliphaz is saying, “Job, clearly you’ve done something really awful to deserve what is happening to you. Just admit this is why you’re being punished and God will restore you.”

None of this was the right way to handle Job’s affliction, and we’ll see that God was not pleased with their “encouragement.”

WHEN SHOULD WE ADDRESS SIN?

Is there a right time to suggest someone’s affliction is judgment for sinful behavior—or that they are responsible for their situation? Yes. When the sin is open and clearly connected to the affliction. For example, if a Christian has an outburst of anger, physically assaults someone, and ends up in the hospital



with serious injuries, this “affliction” is a direct result of sin. Similarly, if someone is sexually promiscuous and gets a disease, this “affliction” is a direct result of their sinful behavior: *“Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name”* (1 Peter 4:15-16), *“for it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong”* (1 Peter 3:17). We are told not to bless people in their sin: *“Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin”* (1 Timothy 5:22).

Where there is no open sin, however, we probably shouldn’t be suggesting to the afflicted that their actions could be the cause of their situation. Unfortunately, we are often guilty of telling the afflicted, “Well, you probably should have done X or Y, and because you didn’t, you’re in this fix.” That is not kindness or compassion—it’s self-righteous judgment.

And this is Job’s struggle, for he is not suffering for being a murderer or thief or even for some small sin—he is suffering as a follower of God. He could not understand why, and he would not accept the lie that he had done something to cause it—even if that would have made peace with his friends.

THE PROBLEM WITH JOB’S FRIENDS

Many of us have said things like Job’s friends to afflicted Believers. But we do not want to be in this camp with Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. God was very angry with them for their self-righteous handling of Job’s utter helplessness and despair rather than offering him kindness and empathy. *“It came about after the Lord had spoken these words to Job, that the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, ‘My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has’”* (Job 42:7).

Why was God angry with Job’s friends? Because without knowledge of God’s purpose, they judged both Him and Job. Unbeknownst to them, God Himself had appointed for Job to endure affliction for eternal glory – the afflic-

tion WAS unjust but not by God’s hands – satan’s unjust hands were trying to destroy Job in a fallen, unjust world, which had been made that way by satan’s hand.

SUFFERING IS UNCOMFORTABLE

Suffering is dismaying! Job’s friends were dismayed at his suffering and affliction! This is normal. But the problem lies with what you attribute as the cause of someone’s suffering.

Like Job’s friends, we don’t like suffering, and we Americans even seem to have a special aversion to it. We often prefer to explain it away – sweeping it under our theological rugs so that it won’t disrupt our tidy understanding that everyone is entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And if someone hasn’t attained this, then it’s their own fault for not trying hard enough. There is an attitude that life is good and opportunity is yours for the taking if you just make the right decisions. This is all “you”-focused, not God-focused.

Suffering is uncomfortable for us, partly because it reveals the ugliness of the fallen nature around us that we try so hard to beautify, cover up, and ignore. And people experiencing affliction are like those pesky Prophets who wouldn’t let people live in their comfortable theological constructions but kept chipping away at them with inconvenient truth.

For the sake of discussion, let’s define “prophets” loosely here as people who have been touched by God (or their situation) to reveal truth to them in such a way that they cannot keep up the façade that everything is okay with the world.

Even if the afflicted don’t speak the truth that has touched them, their very affliction speaks to it. And that truth is invariably that everything in the world is not “okay.” This world is a mess – it has always been a mess (since the Fall), and it will continue going from mess to mess until Jesus returns. The afflicted testify to the reality of a fallen world, which is not intended for our happiness or fulfillment but to drive us to the only one who can fulfill us – Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the coming King, Who will restore our natures to righteousness and the nature of this world to perfection.

“For the anxious longing of the creation

waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.” (Romans 8:19-21)

Job experienced the futility of creation. He groaned and suffered in that pain and would not pretend that everything was okay. He wrestled with what was happening to him and he wrestled with God. He testified to man’s fallen estate and injustice. But notice that this made Job’s friends uncomfortable. Eliphaz went so far as to suggest in Job 15 that Job did not fear God because he was struggling with what God was allowing. Job’s friends wanted to shift the discussion to make it about him rather than the reality of the fallen life and the nature of God.

Yet through all his struggles with the nature of God, Job never lost sight of Him, declaring, *“As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the*

earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; Whom I myself shall behold, And whom my eyes will see and not another. My heart faints within me!” (Job 19:25-27) “But it is still my consolation, and I rejoice in unsparing pain, that I have not denied the words of the Holy One” (Job 6:10).

Perhaps Job’s friends were afraid to think that Job’s fate could befall any of them for no apparent reason. So, to make themselves feel better, they resolved that Job’s affliction had to be because he had done something to deserve it or that he just needed to do x, y, or z to raise himself up. Eventually, God made the real reason apparent to Job – it was, indeed, because of the Fall of nature, but beyond that, it was the first sinner, satan, who was responsible for Job’s affliction and the injustice he experienced—he was being persecuted by satan—tried and tested for an eternal glory. But it took an agonizing 42 chapters for God to explain this to Job.

JEREMIAH’S BURDEN

Job was touched by reality and he spoke about it, as did many of the Prophets. For Jeremiah, being a prophet meant God touching him in such a way that he could understand the depravity of all men in the face of God’s holiness. He was given the eyes to see that everything was not “okay.” In response to this



knowledge, he could not remain silent or wear a smile when he went out among the people. He had a burden of understanding that God gave him, and he had to share it, regardless of whether anyone wanted to hear it or not – he was commanded to!

Jeremiah was to *“roam to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and look now and take note. And seek in her open squares, if you can find a man, if there is one who does justice, who seeks truth, then I will pardon her”* (Jeremiah 5:1). He saw that *“out of the north the evil will break forth on all the inhabitants of the land. For, behold, I am calling all the families of the kingdoms of the north,” declares the Lord; ‘and they will come and they will set each one his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all its walls round about and against all the cities of Judah. I will pronounce My judgments on them concerning all their wickedness, whereby they have forsaken Me and have offered sacrifices to other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands’”* (Jeremiah 1:14b-16).

How did the Israelites respond to this? Did they listen to the warnings? No. It made them uncomfortable. They ignored it: *“You shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you; and you shall call to them, but they will not answer you”* (Jeremiah 7:27).

Ignoring someone is like abandoning them – it is getting away from them to distance yourself from the discomfort they cause. They ignored Jeremiah, but they couldn’t get away from him, and he wouldn’t go away. He just wouldn’t shut up so they finally began answering him but with attacks: *“Then they said, ‘Come and let us devise plans against Jeremiah. Surely the law is not going to be lost to the priest, nor counsel to the sage, nor the divine word to the prophet! Come on and let us strike at him with our tongue, and let us give no heed to any of his words’”* (Jeremiah 18:18).

So, they began to silence him with their words. They started out basically saying, “Why are you trying to ruin our fun, Jeremiah? You’re such a downer! Life is good and no judgment will befall us!”

But Jeremiah wouldn’t shut up and keep it to himself. So, finally, they tried to silence him: *“Pashhur had Jeremiah the prophet beaten and put him in the stocks that were at the upper Benjamin Gate, which was by the house*

of the Lord” (Jeremiah 20:2).

Jeremiah struggled with the fallen nature he saw all around him, but he also struggled with God’s response to that fallen nature – terrible judgement. The judgement was so terrible, it broke Jeremiah and he shared that brokenness in Lamentations.

Not unlike Jeremiah, Christians who go through affliction are touched by those circumstances to personally know “everything” is not okay. Like Job and Jeremiah, they intimately wrestle with the fallen nature and God’s nature. The reality of a fallen world has touched their lives. Sometimes it is with such force that they despair.

We need to be careful how we respond to our brothers and sisters who are suffering and experiencing affliction. We shouldn’t ignore them, abandon them, lecture them, preach at them, or strike out at them with our tongues.

Job was right that *“for the despairing man there should be kindness from his friend; So that he does not forsake the fear of the Almighty”* (Job 6:14). Kindness, empathy, and presence from friends and family are what helps the Believer despairing in his or her affliction – not words of correction, theological sermonizing, testimonies about other people suffering, testimonies about how others were restored, or self-help and “fix it” approaches. We need to show the nature of God: loving-kindness.

THE DESPAIRING BELIEVER

When a Believer is struggling with reality and God’s nature, it can be terrifying for the immature Believer because it is where the flesh meets the fire. It is painful, and those going through it often question God’s purpose, His character, and His point. This can be very frightening to witness. Job struggled this way: *“For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, their poison my spirit drinks; The terrors of God are arrayed against me”* (Job 6:4).

“Know then that God has wronged me and has closed His net around me. Behold, I cry, ‘Violence!’ but I get no answer; I shout for help, but there is no justice. He has walled up my way so that I cannot pass, and He has put darkness on my paths. He has stripped my honor from me and removed

the crown from my head. He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone; And He has uprooted my hope like a tree. He has also kindled His anger against me and considered me as His enemy. His troops come together, and build up their way against me and camp around my tent.” (Job 19:6-12)

“Therefore I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. Am I the sea, or the sea monster, that You set a guard over me? If I say, ‘My bed will comfort me, My couch will ease my complaint,’ then You frighten me with dreams and terrify me by visions; So that my soul would choose suffocation, death rather than my pains. I waste away; I will not live forever. Leave me alone, for my days are but a breath.” (Job 7:11-16)

Was God angry with Job for expressing these emotions? No. God wasn’t angry with Job but with Job’s friends—and they were out to defend God’s name to Job! You see, God understands our suffering. He knows that the despairing, like Job, *“speak in the anguish of my spirit...and complain in the bitterness of my soul”* (Job 7:11b). Even Job admitted that *“the words of one in despair belong to the wind”* (Job 6:26b).

Sometimes we need to be heard. We need others to understand our emotions. We may not even mean what we say, but the pain is real! Our words may be reprovably, but our emotions are not—they are the cry of our human frailty. And reproof, correction, or judgment are not empathetic but the badges of self-righteous people who cannot empathize.

God sympathizes with the afflicted and the despairing. He knows that suffering is an immense burden, one which cuts us down.

Like Job, Jeremiah also said some truly terrifying things through his ordeal:

“I am the man who has seen affliction because of the rod of His wrath. He has driven me and made me walk in darkness and not in light. Surely against me He has turned His hand repeatedly all the day. He has caused my flesh and my skin to waste away, He has broken my bones. He has besieged and encompassed me with bitterness and

hardship. In dark places He has made me dwell, like those who have long been dead. He has walled me in so that I cannot go out; He has made my chain heavy. Even when I cry out and call for help, He shuts out my prayer. He has blocked my ways with hewn stone; He has made my paths crooked. He is to me like a bear lying in wait, like a lion in secret places. He has turned aside my ways and torn me to pieces; He has made me desolate. He bent His bow and set me as a target for the arrow. He made the arrows of His quiver to enter into my inward parts. I have become a laughingstock to all my people, their mocking song all the day. He has filled me with bitterness, He has made me drunk with wormwood. He has broken my teeth with gravel; He has made me cower in the dust. My soul has been rejected from peace; I have forgotten happiness. So I say, ‘My strength has perished, and so has my hope from the Lord.’” (Lamentations 3:1-18)

Pretty intense, isn’t it? How would you react to your Christian Brother or Sister saying this? Would you correct them or chide them or explain that they must have done something wrong to deserve it or tell them that they should just do this or that to make it all better? Most of us would probably be tempted to say something along those lines. But that’s a job for Job’s friends, not us.

THE NEED FOR JUSTICE

Justice is very important to those enduring affliction and suffering, regardless if it is justice from God for the persecutions of men or justice from God for the persecutions of satan. We hold onto truth and justice in the face of the injustice of our situation.

“But I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to argue with God...Though He slay me, I will hope in Him. Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him...Behold now, I have prepared my case; I know that I will be vindicated.” (Job 13:3, 15, 18)

“My enemies without cause hunted me down like a bird; They have silenced me in the pit and have placed a stone on me. Wa-

ters flowed over my head; I said, 'I am cut off!' I called on Your name, O Lord, out of the lowest pit. You have heard my voice, 'Do not hide Your ear from my prayer for relief, from my cry for help.' You drew near when I called on You; You said, 'Do not fear!' O Lord, You have pleaded my soul's cause; You have redeemed my life. O Lord, You have seen my oppression; Judge my case." (Lamentations 3:52-59)

WHEN GOD IS NOT COMFORTING

Believers undergoing affliction often go through times when the things of God are no comfort to them. They have difficulty praying, singing hymns, and being in God's Word. Why is that?

In the midst of his terrible experience, Job understood that regardless of his prayers for mercy and help, God *"will complete what He appoints for me, and many such things are in His mind. Therefore I am terrified at His presence; when I consider, I am in dread of Him. God has made my heart faint; the Almighty has terrified me"* (Job 23:14-16 ESV), for *"when I hoped for good, evil came, and when I waited for light, darkness came. My inward parts are in turmoil and never still; days of affliction come to meet me"* (Job 30:26-27).

It truly is one of the hardest struggles in life to pray for good and receive harm, as if in answer to your prayers. It knocks the wind right out of you and is one of the most evil persecutions satan can devise for the Believer.

We need to take care to not add harm to Believers by judging them in this.

ABANDONED BY GOD?

In addition to this, there is often a fear among those suffering that what is happening to them is a sign that they have been abandoned by God—even if they know in their minds that this can't be the case, physically and emotionally, it is not so clear: *"Even when I cry out and call for help, He shuts out my prayer. He has blocked my ways with hewn stone; He has made my paths crooked"* (Lamentations 3:8-9 NASB). *"If I called and He answered me, I could not believe that He was listening to my voice. For He bruises me with a tempest and multiplies my wounds with-*

out cause. He will not allow me to get my breath, But saturates me with bitterness" (Job 9:16-18).

The Scriptures that promise God will never abandon us can be small comfort in the moment of affliction and silence when we feel abandoned. In this way, some people undergoing affliction have difficulty engaging with Believers who speak of the goodness of God and how faithful He has been to them. It is as if salt is being rubbed into their raw wounds.

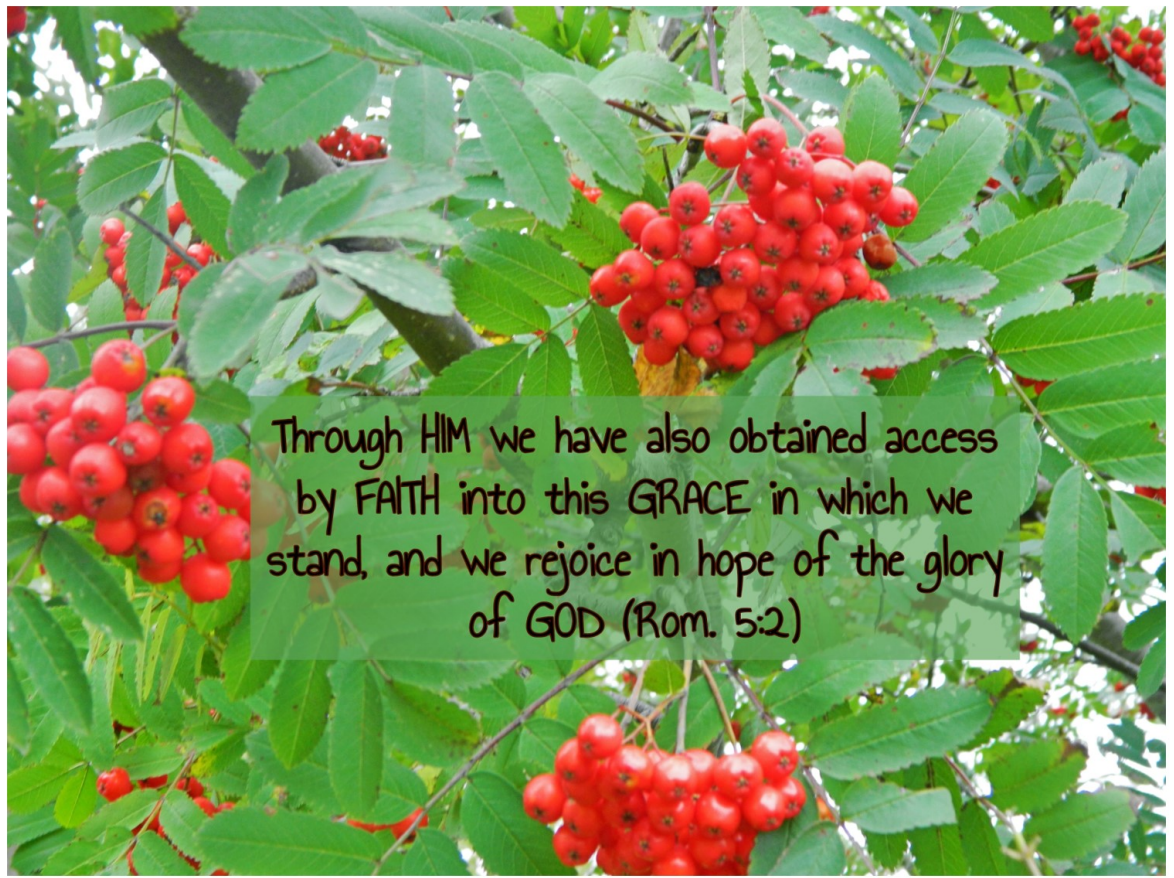
ABANDONED BY FAMILY AND FRIENDS

A more tangible abandonment comes from our "friends" and family. There is often a falling away of people from those going through a trial or affliction. Even non-Believers testify to the fact that their "friends" vanish when they go through hardship. Job experienced this, as he declares, *"My relatives have failed, and my intimate friends have forgotten me"* (Job 19:14). It is truly terrifying when all the people you thought cared about you, melt away from you because your affliction makes them uncomfortable. Of course, it is even worse if they won't leave you alone and continually blame you for your situation, like Job's three friends.

COUNTERPOINT: PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY IN SUFFERING

Some will ask, "Are you suggesting we just wallow in our suffering, feeling sorry for ourselves?" Self-pity is our natural reaction to affliction, and it is understandable, especially when our suffering is acute or "out of proportion" to expectation. But we should be honest in our assessment of our situation and not blow things out of proportion. And we should seek God when we are able.

Even in Job's anger and anguish, he earnestly desired to argue his case with God. And when the time was right, God told him: *"Now gird up your loins like a man, And I will ask you, and you instruct Me!"* (Job 38:3) Affliction can bring things to a head. You may start out angry at life or yourself, but ultimately, you may be forced to face the fact that you are angry with God. This is where our anger ultimately must go, for everything ends in God.



Through HIM we have also obtained access
by FAITH into this GRACE in which we
stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory
of GOD (Rom. 5:2)

By Ginny Larsen



*"Keep ME as the APPLE of the eye;
Hide me UNDER the shadow of thy WINGS."* (Psalm 17:8)

By Betty Harstad

Wrestling with God is certainly better than shutting Him out in anger and self-righteous self-pity. Like Jacob, whose name “Israel” literally means, “he who struggles with God,” we wrestle with God all our lives but most fervently in our afflictions.

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31-32). Like Peter, our temptation in affliction is to turn away and close ourselves off from what we perceive has hurt us. Even though Peter was responsible for his own affliction in this case (false expectations that Jesus was his political ruler and denying Jesus three times), Jesus still understood that it would take time for him to wrestle it all out with God, and He was not judging Peter for this.

Like Peter, when we are able to turn again, we ought to “gird ourselves” to return to the responsibilities that we can pick up—to strengthen our Brothers. If we are able, we shouldn’t surrender our duties simply because it is “easier” than facing them.

WITHIN SIGHT OF ETERNITY

One of the great blessings of Job and Jeremiah’s testimonies is in their conclusions. Both Job and Jeremiah are brought to the same understanding through their terrible ordeals.

We see Jeremiah concludes chapter 3 of Lamentations by declaring God is Holy and it is eternity, not this life, that is our only hope:

“Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and bitterness. Surely my soul remembers and is bowed down within me. This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. The Lord’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. ‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘Therefore I have hope in Him.’ The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him. It is good that he waits silently for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man that he should bear the yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone and be silent since He has laid it on him. Let him put his mouth in the

dust, perhaps there is hope. Let him give his cheek to the smiter, let him be filled with reproach. For the Lord will not reject forever, for if He causes grief, then He will have compassion according to His abundant lovingkindness. For He does not afflict willingly or grieve the sons of men.”
(Lamentations 3:19-33)

“Though He slay me, I will hope in Him. Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him. This also will be my salvation, For a godless man may not come before His presence” (Job 13:15-16). It was in the actual presence of God that Job finally understood why everything has happened. In the face of Eternity itself, everything becomes clear:

*“I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. ‘Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You, and You instruct me.’ I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; **But now my eye sees You**; Therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes.”* (Job 42:2-6)

In the presence of God and with sight of eternity, Job finally understands what the hell he has been through is all about, and he is so overwhelmed that he retracts and repents of all his anguish. Some of us in lesser straights can understand this without physically seeing God. King David came to this understanding: *“I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; Be strong and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the Lord”* (Psalm 27:13-14).

Job was in such despair that he could not understand this without seeing God. Affliction and suffering rob us of our flesh – even the physical pleasures God created for us to enjoy and look forward to in life. It is very painful to have your “life” destroyed. Especially when it is the “life” everyone else around you is able to live unmolested by affliction. We may feel robbed, cheated, and picked on. “Why me, God?” we wonder.

But we see through these experiences that

often the end result is a narrowing of our focus on eternity instead of this life because this life becomes a hell. But that doesn't make it any less painful, nor does it make us any less deserv-ing of kindness, empathy, and compassion.

GOD KNOWS

Jesus suffered more than any man on earth—more even than Job:

“He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; Yet we our-selves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.” (Isaiah 53:3-4)

Do we acknowledge this to say we should just “put up or shut up” because our situation can never measure up to His? No. We affirm this because it is our promise that we have an intercessor—God Himself—Who understands what we are going through, having gone through it all for us. *“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need”* (Hebrews 4:15-16).

Like Job or Jeremiah, it was Jesus Who said, *“My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me”* (Matthew 26:38b). And though He knew why He was on earth, He still cried out in the frailty of His flesh, *“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”* (Matthew 27:46b) God knows. He knows what affliction, suffering, grief, and despair is like.

We don't always know why we suffer, but we can be confident that God understands intimately what we go through, and we will be restored and glorified in eternity for every trial and affliction we endure here.

CONCLUSION

These testimonies are in God's Word to help us sympathize with the afflicted, to better

understand what they are going through, even if they cannot speak about it. They are also in His Word so that the afflicted themselves can know that God is aware of their plight and has not truly abandoned them. And finally, He has given us these testimonies to point to the per-manency of Eternity in an uncertain world.

When confronted by friends and family suf-fering affliction, God wants us to be present, to be kind, to be willing to bear another person's burdens. We should not be preachy, cajoling, or accusing. We should also do what we can to keep all eyes on Eternity.

“As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful” (Job 5:10-11), *“for I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us”* (Romans 8:18), *“for just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ”* (2 Corinthians 1:5).

“More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suf-fered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His res-urrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:8-11).

Even so, Amen.

RAINY DAYS

By Ginny Larsen

*Thank You Lord for rainy days,
When clouds darken the sun.
Thank You for days that I must see,
That You are the One.
You are the One I must cling to.
You are my hope that is sure.
In You my heart so overwhelmed
Finds hope and love secure.
No clouds can ever block the Son
Who is mine forever.*

God's Wonderful Purpose

By Ginny Larsen

So often I've asked God, "What is Your purpose?" Especially when we go through trials, we wonder what His purpose is. Our perspective usually will determine how we view "God's purpose" through our trials. If we are coming from a carnal perspective, we are thinking of how God is going to work our experiences together for *our* happiness and ease in this life, giving us all our dreams eventually and making us successful. No wonder so many worldly-minded Believers are disillusioned with Christianity when things begin to fall apart, when trials come, and when hardship seems to take over their lives and they don't find their dreams come true. Do we really want His purpose or do we want to convince Him to agree with ours?

One thing we can be sure – God loves us,

and He is for us (Romans 8). And we don't always know or understand the lessons He is teaching us, how He is developing His own character in us, or how He will bring us through a particular trial. When we try to determine His purpose for a particular trial, we often find we cannot, or if we think we have, we find we were wrong. Just as a parent disciplines a child and trains that child toward the maturity and character he will need in life, God disciplines us. That child most likely will not understand until he is much older why his father disciplined him, and he may even doubt his father's love or intentions.

Many times, I find God has chosen a particular discipline for me that He has not chosen for others. Why is it they are able to go about enjoying certain things in life that I cannot? Why have I had this particular thing to deal with all my life, yet others never have to? Yet, when I look back, I see how God has used it to teach me self-discipline, contentment, trust in

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Psalms 16:11)



By Ginny Larsen

Him, and reliance on His power. I see there is a purpose that is beyond just my comfort or happiness. He has done something inside of me that only He could do. He has produced a character inside me that would not have come if I had always had everything the way I wanted it to be. He has turned my heart from pleasing myself to wanting to please Him in all. I've had to look to His Word to find His mind and heart, and I've had to submit myself to His will in the matter and realize that I don't belong to me, I belong to Him – bought with His blood. I've had to replace my delight in some *thing* to delighting in Him and His will, trusting His love and purpose in all. *“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be **saved by His life**”* (Romans 5:10).

It is His life that now lives in me, saving me from the corruptions of the flesh and of this world. His very life is in me and is continually making known to me His own mind and heart through the obstacles I face here. I am always tempted to take the way of the flesh rather than the way of the Spirit when my happiness, my comfort, or my desires are threatened. But His life is always at work in me to produce that life in me, conforming me to it, as He is fitting us for Heaven. He is fitting us for His very own presence, to dwell there with Him forever. We have already, through faith in Him, been “put into Christ” when we trusted His salvation alone for ourselves. He is working that salvation out now day by day in our lives to conform us to the new creation He has made us in Christ.

Do we ever think our Abba for a moment neglects our highest good – He Who loved us so much that He sent His only begotten Son to be a sacrifice for us? Do we ever think He has somehow forgotten us now and has left us to figure our way out of the seemingly impossible trial we face? Do we for a moment think that it is not important to Him? Do we trust His love no matter what seems to be happening to us?

I remember at one point in my life when I came to one of the darkest moments of my life—I felt I was at a sort of cross-roads. Will I believe in God or not? Will I trust His love or not? Is God good or is He not? I chose to believe, solely because of what His Word said,

that He is God, that He is faithful, that He is good, and no matter what things looked like, I would praise Him through it. That was a long trial that had years go by before things got better or before I saw God's answers to prayer and fulfillment of promises I felt He had given me. But I grew more than ever during that time, in my trust in God and in His Word, and He often manifested His love and goodness to me, though circumstances were very bleak. I learned more than at any other time in my life that He was faithful and that though I was weaker than ever, He was strong enough to hold onto me when I could not even hold onto Him. I learned that it was Him all along that had always held onto me and kept me, and I learned to rest in His care and in the outcome of all.

This was not a one-time lesson that I learned and then suddenly everything went my way and now I have this wonderful fulfilled life of all my dreams. I've had to relearn it, or should I say, reapply it again and again in more trials and situations in my life. In fact, I've learned that as long as I'm in this body of flesh in this world I will continually have to apply that faith in new ways as I walk through this journey facing the world, the flesh, and the devil. I can never let down my guard, become weary in well doing, or give up and faint. I've wanted to many times! I've wanted to say, “Lord, haven't I had enough grief? Enough sorrow? Enough hardship? Isn't there ever a time to just enjoy life and be done with the trials?” It's not that the Lord hasn't given me many blessings and enjoyments in life. In fact, because of the trials and what God has worked in my heart through them, I am able to enjoy those little things in life all the more and give Him glory for them, delighting in Him all the more—and in the blessings He has given. Simple pleasures mean more to me now than ever. He has given me much joy and even taught me to rejoice in my trials, not waiting for them to be gone. He has taught me more about enjoying life than I was able to do before the trials. In fact, sometimes when I see a godly trait in my heart, I am amazed and wonder, “Wow... that is not me... that's You, Lord! How did You do that in my heart?”

“Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not

only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us" (Romans 5:2-5). "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, Who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him" (James 1:2-5).

It's when we endure the trial, walking by faith, simply trusting His hand through it all – those nail-scarred hands – that we find it produces endurance, character, hope, steadfastness and even joy in our lives. All of us have seen undisciplined children who are not at all happy. They cry and throw tantrums when they don't get their way, and the more they are given in to, the more unhappy they become – and the more tantrums they throw. Yet a disciplined child has learned to be secure in their parent's love and care, and they are content. It

is the same with God's children. Those who accept His discipline and do not throw tantrums like those trying to get their own way but trust His way (even if they don't understand it), find a contentment in life and security in His love and care—and even in His discipline. Each time they are tempted to balk under His hand of discipline, they are reminded it is from His love, and they must instead exercise faith in Him and walk the path He has chosen for them.

"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him Who called us to His own glory and excellence, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire" (2 Peter 1:3-4).

It is through trusting His great and precious promises and applying them to our lives that we escape the corruption that is in the world. Many Christians do not escape that corruption because they live the Christian life their way instead of God's way. They make their own decisions based on what they want in life in-



By Ginny Larsen

stead of seeking God's will for their lives. When they mess up their lives and find the corruption of the world has taken over their lives or families, then they cry out to God and wonder why it has happened. He is always teaching us to trust Him and to walk according to His Spirit. This is His purpose. He's conforming us to the image of His Son, for His own glory and our ultimate glorification in Him (Romans 8:28-31). When we do walk in faith, trusting His promises, His divine nature is formed in us more and more.

"For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:5-8).

The more we learn to know Him, the more we tend to walk like Him. He alone knows the path He has chosen for each one of us. We need to trust Him all along that path – applying His Word, appropriating by faith His promises for us, and walking in faith, believing He has provided for us *"every spiritual blessing in Heavenly places"* (Ephesians 1:3) and *"all that we need that pertains to life and godliness"* (2 Peter 1:3). When we're faced with what feels like the impossible, we can know that if God brought us to it, He also has a plan through it as we trust in Him. When our hearts sink for fear of what may be coming in an evil world that is more and more hostile toward Believers, we can look to Him and know He has already seen what's ahead and is there waiting for us. He already has made the way for us. We can only get through it in a way that will bring Him glory and benefit our own lives if we trust Him through it, knowing He does have a wonderful purpose.

One thing that has happened in my own life that is only a result of God's discipline, through my trials, is a true love for God's will in my life. I used to "accept" God's will because I knew in my head it was right and best. But I didn't "love" God's will. I've learned now to love His will because I've seen and understood His will is not only best but is the only will that is good and that is life. I've

learned to delight in His will because I delight in Him – in all He is. I don't always like the pain it brings me, but I trust that He will get me through the pain, and life will be at the other end. I don't want God to be anything other than what He is. I don't want to make Him into my image. I don't want to bring Him down to my level or to force Him to bend to my will (as though I could). I want to know Him truly, to know His will, to have His will alone be carried out in my life. I want His purpose to be fulfilled in me. I'm so thankful for His purposes and that He is faithful each day to all His children, never giving up working out those purposes in our lives. He is longsuffering, patient, and kind to us. He is for us, so who in the world can be against us?



By Patty Bustwell

Lessons from the Rain

By Jane Titrud

This summer I took a roadtrip through northern Montana. It really is “Big Sky Country” out there. With fewer trees than most areas in the Midwest, one generally has an unobstructed view in all directions. Oftentimes, there are both rain showers and sunshine in the same vista, and the sky is always changing. This can make for an interesting drive despite the general bareness and monotony of the landscape.

I made it a goal this trip to try snapping a few pictures of some typical Montana skies, so I could use them in the present newsletter. I knew the theme was going to be “trials and tribulations,” and this got me thinking of an adage having to do with rain.

Probably, most people have heard the saying, “Into each life some rain must fall.” To me, this spoke of trials and tribulations. They just seem inevitable. I was not sure where the quote came from but thought perhaps it was from the Bible. After some searching, however, I found that this was not the case. The author was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and it is found in the last stanza of “The Rainy Day” poem, which reads:

Be still, sad heart and cease repining;
Behind the clouds is the sun still shining;
Thy fate is the common fate of all,
Into each life some rain must fall,
Some days must be dark and dreary.

Yet, researching the quote left me with a different impression of it than what I had originally. For instance, Longfellow’s poem sounds very dreary, which is usually not the way the Bible depicts rain. It also seems fatalistic, which is not at all the way the Bible depicts trials and tribulations.

I noticed right away that rain is generally not used in the sense of doom, gloom, and sadness in the Bible, nor is it usually a bad thing. Instead, it is normally depicted as a reward or blessing—something that brings vitality, growth, and refreshing. Note the following verses: “If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments so as to carry them out, then I shall give you rains in their season, so that the land will yield its produce and the

trees of the field will bear their fruit” (Leviticus 26:3-4, NASB).

“And it shall come about, if you listen obediently to my commandments which I am commanding you today to love the LORD your God and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul, that He will give the rain for your land in its season, the early and late rain, that you may gather in your grain and your new wine and your oil” (Deuteronomy 11:13-14), “and I will make them and the places around My hill a blessing. And I will cause showers to come down in their season; they will be showers of blessing” (Ezekiel 34:26).

“But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:44-45).

By contrast, the lack of rain is typically associated with judgment: “But it shall come about, if you will not obey the Lord your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today... The LORD will make the rain of your land powder and dust; from heaven it shall come down on you until you are destroyed” (Deuteronomy 28:15, 24).

Too much rain may also be associated with judgment, as in the days of Noah when God sent so much rain upon the earth that it led to a worldwide flood: “For after seven more days, I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights; and I will blot out from the face of the land every living thing that I have made” (Genesis 7:4).

But it is the storm and not just ordinary rain that tends to be the most destructive and worrisome. That is because storms contain elements of violence and destructive power.

Sometimes storms are associated with judgment in the Bible, as in the following cases: “Is it not the wheat harvest today? I will call to the LORD, that He may send thunder and rain. Then you will know and see that your wickedness is great which you have done in the sight of the LORD by asking for yourselves a king” (1 Samuel 12:17), “and with pestilence and with blood I shall enter into judgment with him; and I shall rain on him, and on his troops, and on the many people who are with him, a torrential rain, with hailstones, fire, and

brimstone” (Ezekiel 38:22).

Yet, Jesus slept in the stern of a boat during a strong storm that seemingly threatened the lives of its passengers. After being aroused from His sleep, He told the wind and waves to be still, and they obeyed (Mark 4:35–41). The purpose of this incident seems to have been to demonstrate that Jesus spoke with the power and authority of God—not judgment.

Paul was also caught up in a storm when his captors tried to escort him to Rome during a dangerous time of year for storms (Acts 27). Once again, the purpose seems to have been to demonstrate the power and protection of God and not judgment.

The trouble with storms, as opposed to ordinary rain, however, is that they seem threatening whether they are associated with judgment or not. The same goes for trials and tribulations, which may be likened to the storms of life. Just as the darkness of a storm and pouring rain oftentimes keep us from seeing beyond or through it, various elements of trials and tribulations keep us from seeing beyond

the immediate circumstances. When events seem overwhelming and swirling out of control, this mimics the wind, hail, lightening, and thunder that surround a person caught out in the middle of a rainstorm unprotected.

In the Montana plains, storms may frequently be seen coming and going. One can usually tell the beginning from the end. That is what makes watching them so fascinating to me. Yet, it is oftentimes difficult to see the end of a trial while in the midst of it.

Trials and tribulations are real and not to be minimized. Yet, the Bible does not necessarily depict them as bad things either. They can test our faith, but they can also verify it. And, if we learn from them, they can lead to spiritual growth as well as great reward in heaven.

No one must seek out trials and tribulations. As Christians, they will surely find us. It is important to remember, however, that a Believer is never left to face such things alone. *“God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble”* (Psalm 46:1).



Hair Cares

(A Joyce and Rejoice Episode)

By Jane Titrud

Joyce: What are you complaining about?

Rejoice: Oh, this hair. I can't do a thing with it. It's such a trial to have to deal with this all the time! You have the same problem as I do. You know what I mean. The humidity goes up, and it is either frizz or flop.

Joyce: Do you want me to send up a hair prayer?

Rejoice: Well, I could use a miracle about now. How come it doesn't bother you as much as it does me?

Joyce: It bothers me. It is just that I consider it a minor frustration of life rather than a trial. What if you didn't have any hair at all?

Rejoice: Oh, I have threatened to shave it off several times.

Joyce: I know, but I never thought you were serious. Remember what happened to our friend Jenny when she lost her hair after having chemotherapy? Now, that was more of a trial! She wasn't happy about the prospect of losing her hair. She was scared but had to learn to give her fears and sorrow to God and trust Him to keep her safe throughout her ordeal with cancer. That was not easy for her at the time, but she didn't have a choice.

Rejoice: I am so glad I haven't had to deal with anything like that. I just want better hair.

Joyce: I know. But real trials can be beneficial in the long run. They can make you see what you're truly made of.

Rejoice: You mean besides frizzy hair?

Joyce: Exactly. Trials test our faith. Severe or long-lasting difficulties sometimes cause people to think that either God doesn't hear them when they pray or else He isn't even there! A tremendous loss—say, the loss of someone close to them, the loss of a life-long dream, or a large amount of money may do that. Or perhaps a person is forced to endure the betrayal of a spouse or a long-standing illness with little hope of recovery. Under these kinds of circumstances, it's tempting to be-

come angry and ask, "Why me?" But Jesus said He would never leave us or forsake us.

Rejoice: True. We have to learn to trust the good hand of God. It doesn't hurt to encourage one another either. Things like that could happen to any of us. It's scary.

Joyce: We don't have to be afraid, but we do need each other.

Rejoice: Yah. In fact, I could use a hand right now. Could you please help me finish with my hair? That mess in the back is a bit scary too. Please, please, please? You're such a good sister!

Joyce: All right, come here. Maybe I can help you avert a real trial. You must be aware that God gave us our hair. But I'll send up a prayer for I know that He cares. He numbers our hairs!

Rejoice: Oh, brother! I mean sister. How about a simple buzz cut?



**November/December Newsletter Theme—
INTEGRITY AND JUSTICE
Submission Deadline: November 25
Publish Date: December 4**

Integrity and Justice...

- What is Integrity?
- What is Justice?
- Why is God so concerned about justice?

Verses on Integrity and Justice (NASB)

1 Kings 9:4 — “As for you, if you will walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you and will keep My statutes and My ordinances.”

Psalms 15:1-2 — “O Lord, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart.”

Proverbs 10:9 — “He who walks in integrity walks securely, But he who perverts his ways will be found out.”

Proverbs 11:3 — “The integrity of the upright will guide them, But the crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them.”

Proverbs 20:7 — “A righteous man who walks in his integrity— How blessed are his sons after him.”

Proverbs 21:15 — “The exercise of justice is joy for the righteous, But is terror to the workers of iniquity.”

Deuteronomy 16:18-20 — “You shall appoint for yourself judges and officers in all your towns which the Lord your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous. Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, that you may live and possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you.”

1 Kings 3:28 — “When all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had handed down, they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice.”

Job 29:14 — “I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; My justice was like a robe and a turban.”

Psalms 82:3 — “Vindicate the weak and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and destitute.”