

# The Enemy of Joy

(selected Scriptures)

## Introduction

➤ Preaching a “thanksgiving message” on Thanksgiving can be a bit of a mixed bag. There can be a bit of “thanksgiving fatigue” (perhaps influence by a tryptophan overdose) as people have grown weary of being told to “Be thankful!” or “Count your blessings!” A thanksgiving message can also add to the misnomer that Christians are to be thankful once a year (pack it all into one weekend and call it good). For others, Thanksgiving is ironically painful as it reminds them of what they have lost or wish they had.

On the other hand, Thanksgiving is great and necessary reminder that we (especially as Christians) are supposed to be thankful – overflowing with gratitude to the Lord for all that He is, all that He has done, all that He is doing, and all that He will do. This is to be so much more than a once-a-year holiday. The Bible is replete with declarations of thanksgiving, and exhortations to be thankful. And with Thanksgiving on our minds, I felt compelled to preach the topic.

- Specifically, I want us to grapple with the biblical relationship between joy and thanksgiving. For truly you cannot have one without the other; both are commanded in Scripture, both are natural byproducts of being in Christ, both are spiritual realities for Christians, both impervious to life’s trials and sorrows, both are expressions of worship God (and both are often misunderstood and misapplied).
- For our time in the Word this morning, I want us to take a topical look at thanksgiving and joy. In doing so, I hope and pray that we will not only gain a biblical (better) understanding of these two great Christian virtues. In addition, I hope and pray that we will be warned against forsaking these commands and falling into idolatry (i.e., self-centeredness, vanity, narcissism).
- First, let me offer three important truths that we must understand if we are going to be truly thankful as God has created and commanded us to be.

### 1) The ultimate source of our joy must come from who God is and not what He does.

- We must not make the subtle, yet grave, mistake of worshipping and loving God solely because He blesses us. We must not become the object of worship – our wellbeing, our happiness, our performance, our goodness. We must not love the “gifts” of God more than we love God as the “Giver.”

For such a “faith” is really self-centered and self-serving, which seeks to reduce God to a divine Santa Claus or cosmic bellhop. In addition, when “what God does for me” becomes the focus of our worship, our love for God – our very perspective of God – can be fickle and fragile. That is, praying to God only when we need/want something (and ignoring Him when we feel things are going well); declaring God’s goodness only when we feel that He has given us good things (and doubting or being angry with God when we feel that He has done us wrong or harm); obeying Him only when we think it is beneficial or convenient (and disregarding or defying Him when we want to do our own thing or go our own way); reading our Bibles only when we need encouragement or wisdom (and letting it gather dust when we do not feel we need it); going to church only when we are hurting, lonely, or in need (and having no time for church when all is well).

- Any joy that begins with us – our needs, our wants, our feelings, our desires – is defective and destructive. True joy is neither temporal, psychological, nor circumstantial; it is eternal, spiritual, and unconditional. For true (biblical) joy is based on the perfect and unchanging nature of God. The deepest root of our joy should be in God – who He is in His divine nature and character (His sovereignty, His love, His holiness, etc.) – and not in what He gives, or does for, us. Specifically, true joy is anchored to the eternal reality of who we are in Christ (i.e., our new nature, our calling, our destiny).

For who He is:

**Ps 69:30-31** ~ “I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving. <sup>31</sup>This will please the LORD more than an ox or a bull with horns and hoofs.”

For who what He has:

**Ps 107:22** ~ “And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of his deeds in songs of joy!”

- If we worship God, first and foremost, for who He is we will naturally praise Him for all that He has (and will) do for us (e.g., Creator, Savior, Father, etc.). If, however, we begin with what He has done for us – and fail to worship Him for who He is as God – we can make the grave mistake of idolizing ‘self’, and our worship of (love for) God will ebb and flow as we perceive God “making much” of us.

## 2) **The ultimate expression of our joy comes from being thankful to God for God, and everything He gives and everything He takes away.**

- When our joy is anchored to, and derived from, God as God, we can rejoice in Him no matter our circumstances or feelings. When we find our joy in God our joy is resilient as He is unchanging. When our joy is anchored to who God is – in His nature and character – our joy is impervious to the storms of life. When our joy is more than a worldly, a narcissistic, or a circumstantial happiness, our joy is protected from the assaults of pain and sadness.

✓ Illust: “I Set My Hope (Hymn for a Deconstructing Friend)”:

Verse 1

When this life of trials tests my faith / I set my hope on Jesus  
When the questions come and doubts remain / I set my hope on Jesus  
For the deepest wounds that time won't heal / There's a joy that runs still deeper  
There's a truth that's more than all I feel / I set my hope on Jesus

Chorus:

I set my hope on Jesus / My rock, my only trust  
Who set His heart upon me first / I set my hope on Jesus

Words and Music by Matt Boswell, Matt Papa, and Keith Getty ©2023 Getty Music

- Ultimately, this means that our faith is unwavering and unconditional. When we know that God is good, we know that what “He gives” and what “He takes away” is ultimately for our good. When we know that God is love, we know that what “He gives” and what “He takes away” is ultimately an expression of His love for us. When we know that God is holy, we know that what “He gives” and what “He takes away” is ultimately for our holiness. When we know that God is omniscient (all-knowing), omnipotent (all-powerful), and omnipresent (all/always present), we know that what “He gives” and what “He takes away” will ultimately result in His glory and our being glorified in Him.
- The piercing question that the book of Job confronts us with is this: “Would you worship God for nothing in return?”

**Job 1:20-21** ~ “Then [after hearing the news that he'd lost his livelihood, his possessions/wealth, and all of his 10 children] Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. <sup>21</sup>And he said, ‘Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’”

- As devastating as this news was to Job (see Job 3), it did not change or ruin his understanding of who God is. He refused to look at God through the lens of his worldly circumstances. Rather, he was determined to look at his worldly circumstances through the lens of God's Word (which reveals God's nature, character, and will).

- We need to develop a biblical theology of suffering – preferably before we find ourselves in the valley of suffering (the best time to learn to fight is before the battle, not after you are thrust into battle). In the wake of such false teachings as the “prosperity gospel”, “positive thinking”, and “Christian karma”, many professing Christians are terribly ill-prepared for trials and suffering. When difficulty or pain come their way, they immediately doubt or disbelieve in God (e.g., “deconstruct” their “faith” and their “doctrine”).
- The language we use can reveal a misunderstanding of the (harmonious) relationship between joy and suffering. For example, we can ask: “What is the opposite of light?” Darkness. “What is the opposite of happiness?” Sadness. “What is the opposite of blessing?” Many people would answer “suffering”, but suffering can actually be a blessing (in disguise). The opposite of blessed is cursed. The opposite of joy is not sorrow, because joy can coexist with sorrow. The opposite of joy is despair.

**James 1:2-4** ~ “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, <sup>3</sup>for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. <sup>4</sup>And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

**James 1:12** ~ “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.”

**1 Peter 1:6-7** ~ “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup>so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

**Eph 5:20** ~ “giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”

**1 Thess 5:18** ~ “give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

**Phil 4:4** ~ “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.”

**Col 2:6-7** ~ “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, <sup>7</sup>rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”

### 3) The ultimate enemy of our joy is ingratitude.

- Nothing eclipses or robs our joy quite like ingratitude. Ingratitude (toward God) is not only a sin – a disobeying of God’s command to be thankful in and for everything – it is also a spiritual cancer. Ingratitude weakens one’s faith in God; it attacks one’s love for God; it damages one’s Christian perspective; it kills one’s Christian joy; and, left untreated, it spreads throughout one’s Christian life.

Make no mistake, ingratitude is not a fruit of the Spirit nor a virtue of Christianity. In fact, quite the opposite. In Scripture, those who are ungrateful to God are unbelievers (who have rejected God and who engage in idolatry).

**Rom 1:18-23** ~ “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. . . they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup>For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

**2 Tim 3:1-5** ~ “But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. <sup>2</sup>For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy . . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, <sup>5</sup>having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.”

**Gal 5:22-23** ~ “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

➤ Gratitude is like gravy on Thanksgiving. When gratitude is absent or bad (tainted, corrupted), it ruins everything (imagine pouring bad gravy all over your Thanksgiving meal). However, when gratitude is present and good it makes everything better (great gravy can make a mediocre meal much better). And like gravy, true gratitude seeps into every part of our lives. Gratitude is the song of those who have been saved. Gratitude is the expression of one’s true joy in the Lord.

***“Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous, and give thanks to His holy name!” (Psalm 97:12).***

➤ So, how do we always rejoice in the Lord and always give Him thanks? By way of practical application, let me suggest five truths we must remember in our fight to be ever-abounding in gratefulness to the Lord and ever-joyful in the Lord.

### **1. We must remember that God is ULTIMATELY sovereign over all things.**

➤ God’s sovereignty is His ultimate, unrivaled, power and authority over all things – nothing, absolutely nothing, stands outside of the scope of God’s knowledge and control. There is not one molecule in the universe – not one dust particle, grain of sand or microscopic virus – that is beyond God’s sovereign power and authority.

This means, among other things, that there is no difficulty or trial, no suffering or loss, that we encounter that God cannot ultimately use for our good and His glory. We need to know that God’s will is perfect, and His execution of the will is also perfect. God makes no mistakes, He is never late or absent-minded, He is never too weak, He is never ignorant.

**Eph 1:11** ~ “In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will”

**Ps 115:3** ~ “Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.”

**Ps 135:6** ~ “Whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.”

**Job 42:2** ~ “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.”

**Mark 10:27** ~ “[Jesus said] ... For all things are possible with God.”

**Luke 1:37** ~ [Gabriel said to Mary]: “For nothing will be impossible with God.”

➤ God does not call us to be morbidly preoccupied with suffering. Nor does He want us to respond to suffering superficially or hypocritically. We are not commanded to be ever-chipper, or always smiling. God does not forbid us from crying or weeping (see Rom.12:9, 15; 1Thess.4:13).

✓ Illust: “But let us be very careful here. It doesn't say you should dance around the coffin. It doesn't say you can't cry if you have cancer. It doesn't say there is no place for anger against injustice. But it does say, ‘Always be thankful for everything’” (John Piper, sermon: “Urgency and Gratitude”; Eph.5:15-20; Nov.23, 1986).

➤ For the Christian, gratitude does not end in the suffering or trial – or even in the blessing or prosperity – but in the God who is in all and over all (Eph.1:11; 4:6; Rom.11:36)! We are to be grateful for everything because we know that God is sovereign over everything.

**Rom 8:28-30** ~ “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup>For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup>And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”

## 2. We must remember that Christians are ALWAYS infinitely “better” than they deserve.

➤ This is often much easier to say than it is to believe (we must not use this truth on others in an unloving or unkind way). Sometimes, like the Psalmist in Psalm 42 (“*Why are you cast down, O my soul*”, vs.5, 11), we need to preach this truth to ourselves – even audibly (“Why are you cast down, O my soul, you are infinitely better than you deserve)! Again, this truth applies only to Christians – those who have truly been saved and sanctified in the Lord.

For the Christian, this world is as bad as life will ever be. For Christians, this life is as close to hell as they will ever be (for unrepentant non-Christians, this life is as close to heaven as they will ever be).

➤ As Christians, we must always remember, never forget, that God has graciously and generously blessed with salvation (freedom from the penalty of sin), and sanctification (freedom from the power of sin), and the promise of glorification (freedom from the presence of sin). If we are not careful, such amazing truths can become dull and fade into the deep recesses of our minds. If we are not careful, we can overlook the fact that God has saved us from eternal damnation – forgiven us of every single sinful thing we have ever done, thought, and said – and brashly and arrogantly cry out to God, “What have you done for me lately?”

✓ Illust: “Preach the Gospel to yourself every day” (Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, p.36).

**Rom 3:10-12, 23** ~ “as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup>no one understands; no one seeks for God. <sup>12</sup>All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. ... <sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”

**Eph 2:1-5, 8-10** ~ “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup>in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – <sup>3</sup>among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. <sup>4</sup>But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved ... <sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup>not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

**Rom 8:18, 37-39** ~ “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ... <sup>37</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

**2 Cor 4:16-18** ~ “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup>For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup>as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

**1 Peter 1:3-7** ~ “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup>to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup>who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup>In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup>so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

➤ If we are not faithfully in the Word, it can be relatively easy for us to believe the lie that “we deserve better” – that we are basically good and therefore deserve good things. This is a lie right from the lips

of Satan (who has always, since the beginning, tempted or deceived humans into thinking that God is stingy, oppressive, and unkind; see Gen.3:1). The truth is, God is incredibly loving, gracious, merciful, and kind, and we are innately sinful and rebellious. God cannot rightly be charged with any wrongdoing, and we cannot rightly claim to be innocent or righteous.

**Heb 12:28-29** ~ “Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, <sup>29</sup>for our God is a consuming fire.”

### 3. We must remember that God will never FAIL, forget, or forsake His children.

➤ Christ’s apostles had a lot of devastating moments in their three years with Jesus. The greatest one was no doubt when they watched Jesus be arrested in the garden, and taken away to be tried, tortured, and crucified. One potentially “devastating” moment that we often overlook is when Jesus ascended into heaven (Lk.24:51; Acts 1:9). This was a mixed bag. We can only imagine the emotional roller coaster the disciples were on – Jesus’ crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. While He remained with them for forty-days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3), His disciples (more than the Eleven) “*worshiped Him*” (Matt.28:17), believed/trusted in Him (Jn.20:28-29), learned from Him and asked Him questions (Acts 1:3, 6), but “*some doubted*” (Matt.28:17). Even after Jesus ascended before their very eyes, they stood there – perhaps amazed and bewildered – staring at the clouds (Acts 1:10).

There is no doubt in my mind that this is one reason why Jesus had told them (after His resurrection and before His ascension):

**Matt 28:20** ~ “... And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

**Luke 24:51-53** ~ “While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. <sup>52</sup>And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, <sup>53</sup>and were continually in the temple blessing God.”

**Acts 1:10-11** ~ “And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, <sup>11</sup>and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’”

➤ It must have been awful, and awesome, to see Jesus leave again (at His ascension). It was undoubtedly more awful to see Him “leave” at His crucifixion and burial. Yet, as we look back on these painful and sorrowful events, we see them as good. We even call the day of Christ’s crucifixion “Good Friday” (which, on that day, the apostle’s would have never said “this is good”)! This wonderfully illustrates the fact that our human perspective is flawed and near-sighted. For without Christ’s crucifixion we could not be saved, and without Christ’s ascension we would not have received the indwelling power and presence of the Holy Spirit and Christ would not Return.

**John 16:7** ~ “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage [*sympherō*; beneficial or better] that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.” (see Jn.14:3, 12, 16-17, 26, 28)

➤ This was not just a promise to the apostles, but to all of God’s children throughout all time. After Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection and ascension, God lives in all true believers through the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:39; Gal.2:20). As believers, it is good to know that we are never truly alone. God is always with us.

➤ Again, this speaks to the character and nature of God. God will never forsake His promises – indeed, He cannot. For God cannot lie or break a promise (Heb.6:17-18; Tit.1:2), and since He knows everything that can be known (1Jn.3:20) He never assumes or guesses; and He is never surprised.

This again is where biblical doctrine proves so helpful (and why Christians who remain ignorant of biblical doctrine are disadvantaged). Scripture teaches us that God is omniscient (all-knowing),

omnipotent (all-powerful), and omnipresent (all/always present). These truths should be of endless comfort to us as God's children (those who have received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior). God will not fail; indeed, He cannot fail. God will not forget; indeed, He cannot forget. God will not forsake His promises or His children; indeed, He cannot.

**Heb 13:5-6** ~ "... [God] has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' <sup>6</sup>So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'" [see Deut.31:6; Josh.1:5; Ps.27:1; 56:4, 11; 118:6]

➤ While there may be times in our lives when it seems as though God has failed, forgotten, or forsaken us, we can be assured that He has not – and He never will!

✓ **Illust:** Many years ago, when I was in college in Eugene, I stepped on a piece of glass with my barefoot and needed to go to the emergency room to get stitches. While I was waiting, I heard a little girl screaming in pain. Her cries grabbed the attention of everyone in the ER. She was in obvious pain, and no doubt very fearful. She kept screaming, "Ow! Daddy it hurts!" over and over. When the nurse came in to prep my foot, I asked if he could tell me what was wrong with this little girl. He said that she had stuck a jagged rock in her ear, and in her desperation to get it out she pushed it in really far. The doctor was trying to extract the rock, while her daddy was trying to comfort her and hold her still. Clearly, the little girl could not fathom what was going on and why her daddy was allowing her to be in such pain.

Over the years, I have come to think of this as an appropriate illustration with regard to human suffering and the sovereignty of God. For like this little girl, we often do not understand why God would allow us to endure such painful trials and sufferings. In fact, many people assume that if God were truly loving and good He would never permit any suffering or pain. But like the father of that little girl, sometimes God allows us to experience suffering and pain for our good. God is our Heavenly Father, and He asks us to trust Him as God – the one and only God who is sovereignly omniscient, loving and good. We can be absolutely sure that since He knows everything, He knows what is best.

#### 4. We must remember that **TRIALS** and sufferings are a part of God's redemptive plan.

➤ The Christian can be assured that every ounce of pain, every tear that is shed – every suffering, every sorrow, every affliction, every trial, every persecution, every martyrdom – God will use for our ultimate good and His ultimate glory! And for that we can, and must be, grateful.

God uses our trials and sufferings as spiritual surgeries. On the surface, surgery does not make any sense – you have something wrong with you (e.g., a broken bone or a tumor) and the doctor advises surgery, which initially makes you worse (as he cuts you open). Yet, we all know that sometimes things have to get worse before they can get better. God will use trials and sufferings to make us more godly.

**Rom 5:3-5** ~ "Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup>and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup>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."

**James 1:2-4** ~ "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, <sup>3</sup>for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. <sup>4</sup>And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

**1 Peter 1:3-9** ~ "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup>to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup>who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup>In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup>so

that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. <sup>8</sup>Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, <sup>9</sup>obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

- Here are a dozen reasons to be thankful to God, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, for the sufferings and trials He allows (or causes) us to endure:
1. Suffering can wean us off earthly comforts, securities, pleasures and idols. Anything that causes us to realize this world is not our home is ultimately a good thing (Rom.12:1-2; Col.3:1-2).
  2. Suffering can compel us to be (more) thankful for God’s blessings and provisions. It is easy to take God, and His manifold blessings, for granted; deprivation can remedy that (Eph.1:3; Phil.4:11-13; Jms.1:17).
  3. Suffering can help us to see the insidious nature of sin and evil. Living in a “moralized” world can sometimes mask the true depravity of the unsaved human heart and mind (Tit.3:3-6).
  4. Suffering can lead us to spend more time in prayer. Whatever drives us to our knees in prayer, in humble recognition of and submission to God, is ultimately a good thing (Rom.12:12; 1Pet.4:7).
  5. Suffering can give us more of an urgency and opportunity to evangelize the lost. All too often, Christians are satisfied with, and complacent toward, those who are going to hell (1Pet.3:15).
  6. Suffering can draw us ever-closer to Christ. In the words of the great hymn: “If ever I loved Thee, Lord Jesus, ’tis now” (2Thess.3:5; 1Pet.1:8-9).
  7. Suffering can create in us a great appetite for Scripture and doctrinal truths. In a world searching for answers, and wallowing in lies, God’s Word remains the inerrant and immutable standard of truth (Col.3:16; Heb.4:12; 2Tim.3:16-17).
  8. Suffering can remind us of the fragility and brevity of human life. Death is to be a sobering wake-up call to all who are alive (Lk.13:1-4; Heb.9:27).
  9. Suffering can awaken us to the uncertainty of “tomorrow.” Nothing quite like ruined plans, and dashed expectations, to remind us that we do not know what the future holds (Jms.1:13-17).
  10. Suffering can compel us to be more compassionate toward and willing to serve the needs and sorrows of others (2Cor.1:3-6; Rom.12:15).
  11. Suffering can humble us. Sufferings and trials can uniquely keep us from becoming conceited, or humble us if we are thinking of ourselves too highly (1Cor.12:7-10; Phil.2:3-8).
  12. Suffering can stir us to yearn for the Coming of Christ. “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev.22:20; Phil.3:20-21; 2Pet.3:11-12).
- My prayer is that you will prayerfully consider these benefits, and that the Lord will use anything and everything to increase our gratefulness to and godliness in Him. Trials are promised to us in Scripture, and every trial from God is a blessing – which He desires to utilize to increase our faith in Him and make us more faithful to Him. Such trials are meant to strengthen us, purify us, humble us, and mature us.
- The Bible assures us that every painful experience we endure – every suffering, persecution, or affliction – is used by God in order to make us what He wants us to be. Every stroke of pain we endure is a brushstroke that God uses to paint, on the canvas of His divine purpose, our portrait as we are created (and being created) to be in His likeness. The blood that is shed in and for Christ He paints in the dark red color of persecution and martyrdom. The bruises that are endured through affliction and suffering, in and for the sake of Christ’s name and honor, He paints in deep blue. The painful trials and tribulation that He uses to refine and purify our lives He paints in the fiery colors of yellow and orange.
- When He is done, the portrait that God has painted on our lives will look just like the holy and faithful life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!



## 5. We must remember that God is ALWAYS good and absolutely trustworthy.

➤ All too often, we are quick to presume that we know as much about life as God does (or that God only knows as much about life as we do). We rashly conclude that our thoughts and feelings are absolute – whatever we deem to be “bad” is always bad, and whatever we deem to be “good” is always good. And, yet, there are many times when we can look back on our lives and see “a blessing in disguise” – something, at the time, we thought was bad but actually turned out to be for good.

This is why we cannot be guided by our own “wisdom” or our often-misguided feelings. Rather, we must be guided by the character of God as He has revealed in and through His Word. We must know what God’s Word says, but we must also believe what God’s Word says.

**Ps 23:4** ~ “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

**Ps 84:10-12** ~ “For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. <sup>11</sup>For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. <sup>12</sup>O Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you!”

**Ps 95:2-3** ~ “Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! <sup>3</sup>For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.”

**Ps 100:4-5** ~ “Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! <sup>5</sup>For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.”

**James 1:17** ~ “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”

➤ The question each one of us must answer is: “Do I believe that God is always good, and do I absolutely trust Him?” Do you believe that God is good even in hard times, in the worst of times? Or do you believe that God is only good when your life is good (according to you), and you are getting what you want? The Bible does not say, “Trust in yourself with all your heart, and lean on your own understanding.”

**Prov 3:5-6** ~ “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. <sup>6</sup>In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

➤ A true barometer of our spiritual veracity and maturity is how we trust God when we are in the midst of trials and sufferings – not when things seem to be at their best, but when things seem to be at their worst (e.g., in “*the valley of the shadow of death*”).

✓ **Illust:** “Trust the heart of God, even when you cannot see the hand of God.”

✓ **Illust:** Corrie ten Boom, whose family hid Jews from the Nazis during WWII (which resulted in the entire family being killed, except for Corrie), once said, “When the train goes through a tunnel and the world gets dark, do you jump out? Of course not, you sit still and trust the engineer to get you through.”

➤ Again, this is much easier said than done. It is relatively easy to encourage someone else to have faith when they are going through a difficult trial, but it is an altogether different matter when you are the person experiencing a difficult trial. That is because it is much more difficult to see your way through a storm while you are directly in the midst of it. And, like the quintessential arm-chair-quarterback, observing another person enduring a trying experience can leave us with a bit of an overly simplistic perspective. In fact, simply telling someone to “trust Jesus” in the midst of their pain and suffering can sound like some trite Christian cliché.

**John 16:7** ~ “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”

➤ However, this is exactly what we are to say and exactly what we are to do: trust Jesus! In all reality, while it is certainly not terribly easy it's not terribly complicated either. The Bible embraces this straightforward tone as it over-and-over again instructs and exhorts all believers to trust Jesus. Essentially, faith is a simple matter of trust. Ironically, our trust tends to weaken or wane as the difficult circumstances surrounding us grow or intensify. But just as it is absurd to think that anyone would jump out of a moving train as it is going through a tunnel, so it is even more absurd that anyone would abandon their faith in God at a point when their world grows dark with trials and sufferings. Regrettably, we all-too-often do. Not rational, but unfortunately realistic.

## Conclusion

➤ True joy expresses itself in gratitude to God and for God. True joy confidently and triumphantly declares "Whatever my God ordains is right"!

✓ Illust: Originally written in 1675 by Samuel Rodigast (German poet and teacher; 1649-1708), the hymn "Whatever My God Ordains Is Right"

Whate'er my God ordains is right / His holy will abideth;  
I will be still whate'er He does / And follow where He guideth.  
He is my God, though dark my road / He holds me that I shall not fall;  
And so to Him I leave it all / And so to Him I leave it all.

Whate'er my God ordains is right / He never will deceive me;  
He leads me by the proper path / I know He will not leave me.  
I take, content, what He has sent / His hand can turn my griefs away;  
And patiently I wait His day / And patiently I wait His day.

Whate'er my God ordains is right / Though now this cup in drinking  
May bitter seem to my faint heart / I take it all, unshrinking.  
My God is true, each morn anew / Sweet comfort yet shall fill my heart;  
And pain and sorrow shall depart / And pain and sorrow shall depart.

Whate'er my God ordains is right / Here shall my stand be taken;  
Though sorrow, need, or death be mine / Yet I am not forsaken.  
My Father's care is round me there / He holds me that I shall not fall;  
And so to Him I leave it all / And so to Him I leave it all.

Words: Samuel Rodigast (1675), tr. Catherine Winkworth (1829-1878) Music: Matt Merker & Keith Getty © 2018 Getty Music Publishing