

Job's Testimony:

"Though he slay me I will hope in him" (*Job 13:15*)

Dear Father God, the One in whom I trust, your gracious presence is my heart's desire. I love to hear your voice and to know your arms of grace around me. Gracious Father, I come to you today with fearful joy, knowing that there is no other to whom I can turn who will sustain and strengthen me in my weakness and need. I am so glad you both know me and yet love me. In these few moments I would turn my face heavenward and long to see you, like Stephen did, to see heaven open and the Son of Man at your right hand.

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Accept my thanks and praise in Jesus' Name. Amen

Hymn: by *B Fielding, B&J Johnson, E Cash, J Ingram*

1. I love You, Lord, for Your mercy never fails me

All my days, I've been held in Your hands

From the moment that I wake up, until I lay my head

Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God

*All my life You have been faithful, and all my life You have been so, so good*

*With every breath that I am able I will sing of the goodness of God*

2. I love Your voice, You have led me through the fire

In darkest night You are close like no other

I've known You as a Father, I've known You as a Friend

I have lived in the goodness of God.

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Scripture Readings:

- Isaiah 53:10-12
- Acts 21:10-14

Hymn: by *John Newton*

1. How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear!

It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds, and drives away his fear.

2. It makes the wounded spirit whole and calms the troubled breast;

'Tis manna to the hungry soul, and to the weary, rest.

3. Dear Name! the Rock on which I build, my Shield and Hiding Place,

My never-failing treasury filled with boundless stores of grace!

4. Jesus! my Shepherd, Husband, Friend, my Prophet, Priest, and King;

My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End, accept the praise I bring.

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### Christians Suffer

It doesn't take great wisdom to understand that suffering is part and parcel of this life. We read it and see it constantly. There is not a person living who has not experienced suffering in one form or another. Some hearing or reading these words are suffering right now.

Some suffer in silence. We sometimes hear in reference to another "I never knew". Of others it may be said "she never complains". At the other end of the spectrum there are those who make sure people know of all their trials. From my limited analysis and assessment it seems to me that the more severe and enduring the suffering, the less one hears about it. Amongst those who suffer, the ones who are most affected are more likely the ones to least complain.

No one wants to suffer. And those who do suffer want to be relieved of their suffering; when relief does come there is joy and thanksgiving. So when a Christian sees suffering it is natural and right to ask the Father to provide provision and relief from the oppressing circumstances.

There is a suffering that is self imposed, resulting from bad decisions. There is suffering inflicted by others, with or without an apparent reason. There is suffering from accidents, natural disasters and from trauma. There is suffering that results from being a Christian because, like Jesus, Christians tell the world that what the world is doing is evil (John 7:7). But could there be occasions when the Lord himself imposes suffering directly, or maybe indirectly through a third party?

I think so. The first and obvious case is Jesus himself. Scripture makes it quite clear both prophetically and in fulfillment. Isaiah prophesied "It was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer". Jesus prayed to the Father to take the cup of wrath and suffering away from him, but then submitted to the Father's will, which was to drink it (John 12:27, Matthew 26:39).

The second is Paul who was told up front that he was to suffer for the sake of the gospel (Acts 9:16), and the consensus was that this was the Lord's will (Acts 21:11-13).

The third is Peter who acknowledged the possibility of suffering being the Lord's will: "Let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good" (1 Peter 4:19).

Suffering has been, and I would say is being, used to effect the building up of good character. Even in non-Christians.

I have heard a couple of instances when listening to "Conversations" with Richard Fidler on ABC radio where the men interviewed had suffered, either a serious accident resulting in paraplegia, or serious long-term illness (tuberculosis). In both instances there was an expression of gratitude associated with the overall experiences. Neither of these men were Christians.

A second example is Fanny Crosby, composer of "Blessed assurance", "To God be the glory" and "All the way my Saviour leads me", blinded at the age of six weeks as a result of medical malpractice. Towards the end of her long life she said "The good Lord in his infinite mercy, by this means consecrated me to the work I am still permitted

to do. I remember his mercy and loving-kindness; I have been blessed above the common lot of mortals. Happiness has touched the deep places of my soul”.

I know a pastor who, in the early years of his pastoral work, suffered deeply from terrible bouts of depression and anxiety, but today gives testimony that this experience was a necessary adjustment to enable a far greater and long-term effectiveness of his ministry.

Suffering is sometimes taken on voluntarily, as part of serving in the body of Christ, the church. There are many Christian leaders and “ordinary” church members who are burdened not with their own problems but by their concern for the well-being of others, whether family or acquaintances, often for those in the same local church. These are burdens resulting from a care and love for people that many would, and many do, simply walk away from. It’s too hard. I don’t like it. I want to feel good. But instead they volunteer to carry these burdens, as Paul did, which he included as part of the various sufferings he had experienced: “there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches” (2 Corinthians 11:28). Maybe you are such a person. The people you pray for with great earnestness, even tears, are unaware of the impact their living is having on you. It’s all part of your service to your Saviour. Persevere, and keep asking for grace to help and if necessary, for a renewed love for those you are concerned for.

Christians are not exempt from suffering for a range of reasons, some of it necessary. But keep in mind that God himself suffered in Christ, and suffers still, and of course many around you are also suffering – you are not on your own. Whatever the cause, like others who have travelled before, remember that God is both willing and able to help you through it. He will use your suffering either through it or consequent to it, to demonstrate his character through you to others who are watching, or to develop his character in you for later work.

### Prayer for Suffering Christians: (Barnabas Prayer for 12/11/2023)

Lord God and Heavenly Father, we give thanks we are not consumed, because Your compassions never fail.

Nevertheless, we pray that You will help us to examine ourselves when we suffer, humbling ourselves and confessing our sin and our rebellion before You. We ask this grace also for our persecuted brothers and sisters, that they will remain humble before You even as they endure the hatred of this world.

Thank You in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ that if we confess our sins, then You are faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

(Lamentations 3:22; 1 John 1:9)

### Hymn: (MHB 579) *by Sylvanus Phelps*

1. Saviour, Thy dying love Thou gavest me,  
Nor should I aught withhold, dear Lord, from Thee:  
In love my soul would bow, my heart fulfill its vow,  
Some offering bring Thee now, something for Thee.

2. At the blest mercy seat, pleading for me,  
My feeble faith looks up, Jesus, to Thee:  
Help me the cross to bear, Thy wondrous love declare,  
Some song to raise, or prayer, something for Thee.
3. Give me a faithful heart, likeness to Thee,  
That each departing day henceforth may see  
Some work of love begun, some deed of kindness done,  
Some wanderer sought and won, something for Thee.
4. All that I am and have, Thy gifts so free,  
In joy, in grief, thro' life, dear Lord, for Thee!  
And when Thy face I see, my ransomed soul shall be,  
Through all eternity, something for Thee.

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### Benediction

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your heart and establish you in every good work and word.

Amen

This service was prepared by Warren Mack for HopeNet SA