

How to Understand Suffering

by Manford George Gutzke

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." With these words I want to bring to your mind a wonderful truth in which the Christian believer is able to rest and be quiet. This verse is found in the Psalm 30, verse 5. The whole verse reads: "For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favor is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." These words come from a soul that believes in God and gives expression to an underlying confidence that encourages and sustains the believer at all times.

When you read "his anger endureth but for a moment," this word anger is used to indicate the experience that a man has when it seems to him that the hand of God is heavy upon him. That would mean that the course of events for him are giving him trouble and distress. Now you see, a believing person takes all things as from God; everything that happens is under God's control. And so, if the day is a hard day, that came from God. If the experience is a suffering experience, that came from God. If the trial is a cruel trial, that came from God. A way of referring to these things is that God is in some way bringing to bear upon the individual that which is unhappy and distressing. Here he puts that together under the general word anger. When he speaks of the anger of the Lord, he is referring I think primarily to the experience he is having that makes him feel the anger of the Lord toward him. It does not mean necessarily that God is at this particular moment displeased with the man, but in general this is the suffering that is permitted to come from God.

Now this one says, "His anger endureth but for a moment; in his favor is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." For Christian people our God is a Father unto us. We verily believe our God is over all things. We sometimes hear it said publicly that He has made all things and that God holds the whole world in His hands, and that is true. We believe that. Someone else will sing that "This is my Father's world," and that's true. Someone else will say that God has made all things and is the ruler over all, and a Christian person knows this. The Christian person knows that Almighty God is sovereign over all things that happen. But that does not change the fact that when something is hard, it is hard. Or when something hurts, it hurts. Or when a man is under strain that he is under strain. Those experiences are real too. Yet the Christian remembers that his God who is the Father, his own Father, is in control of all things and that He doeth all things well. And because God is a Father, he recalls the Word of God that says "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." So the Christian person is prepared to think that the experiences that he has which are distressing which cause him to weep, which give him sorrow and hurt, come to him in the sense of chastening. At times, they may even come in the way of correction. And, they are coming from the hand of the loving, kind Father. Certainly, correction by chastening is not easy to endure, but it is to be expected when we know God.

In the book of Hebrews in the twelfth chapter you will find a number of these things set forth. Beginning at the sixth verse we read. "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If you endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons." To endure chastening means you accept it. You continue in it, trusting in God. The writer to the Hebrews goes on to reason that this is something we should expect. "Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." And then comes this verse, "Now no chastening for the present

seemeth to be joyous, but grievous." No chastening, no experience of suffering, grief and distress for the present seems to be joyous. "Nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

Now in this particular text that we have before us. Psalm 30:5, we have the report of one who actually had been in distress and who called upon God. If you were to look at Psalm 30 all together you would find that this writer is referring to just such an experience. He starts out by saying, "I will extoll thee, O Lord." That is, I will praise thee. "For thou hast lifted me up, and hast not made my foes to rejoice over me. O Lord my God I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me. O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave: thou has kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit. Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness. For his anger endureth but a moment." The suffering, the grief, the distress, the hurt that comes in the chastening is only for a little while. "In his favor is life: Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." He goes on to say how he had experienced this in various ways. Then in verse seven, "Lord, by thy favor thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: Thou didst hide thy face and I was troubled." Here he is referring to the fact that he passed through an experience that was hard. His experience was heavy to understand and to endure. "I cried to thee, O Lord; and unto the Lord I made supplication." Then he tells about his prayer in the ninth verse and in verse ten calls out, "Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me: Lord, be thou my helper." In the eleventh verse is his report, "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: Thou has put off my sack cloth and girded me with gladness; to the end that my glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever." That's the total story.

I want to deal with those of us who have been passing through some heavy, suffering experience. When a soul takes everything as from God and then has moments of sorrow, grief, or distress, sees things that hurt, then the Word of God speaks to remind us that we can be sure that this is not in vain. Job is the classic example where a man suffered on into blessing. A good many of us know something of his terrible experience when he was covered with boils apparently. James says about him in 5:11, "You have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." This was a wonderful thing to say afterwards, but I want you to remember that when Job was passing through agony, this was not said to him then. One of the things about suffering is that at the time when the hurt is right there, when it looks to you as though your whole world has been broken and when you are put under special strain, often just then you feel so much alone. This must have been Job's experience. You and I know about Job's circumstances because we can read the first chapters. We know that everything that happened to Job was because of spiritual warfare where God was dealing with Satan. Job never knew that in all his experience he was in a sense a champion for God. All that Job knew was that he was having terrible suffering, and he did not know why he was having it. In that whole story he never found out. But, he did find peace in trusting God.

I want to offer that to you now. At one time or another sorrow or grief may come. If you are a believing person, it is your privilege to accept everything that happens as from God. When I say everything I do not mean only such things that happen to you for which you have no explanation, the things that happen apparently just out of the blue. Not only that. Nor do I specially refer only to the things that happen to you because you are trying to do good. I will include in this even the things that happen to you because you are bad or you have done wrong, all those things. Every single thing that happens to you happens under the hand of Almighty God. Job lost his family, he lost his property and then he lost his health He was in misery, distress and despair; he was downhearted and discouraged. Then Elihu, one of his four friends came to speak to him. We read about him in chapter 33. He told Job

that sometimes suffering comes because of sin. We do wrong and we suffer, that is only proper. That is like saying that I walk carelessly thru the house and bump my toe on some furniture, and it hurts. Yes it does. If I had not been careless, it would not have happened. It may be that I will go out and drive my car and not watching where I am going, I am talking to somebody, looking somewhere else, and I run into a gate post. Well, that's too bad. It is going to cost money, and it's embarrassing, it delays me and everything else like that; but the whole truth of the matter is that if I had been watching where I was going I would not have hit the gate post. Sometimes the suffering we have comes because of something we ourselves have done or have not done.

Sometimes suffering comes to turn us away from sin. We actually have suffering come to us today because God knows that tomorrow we will be in a situation where we might fall into some temptation. The suffering we have today sobers us and draws us so close to God that tomorrow we have the help of God. In Psalm 119:67 we read, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word." That is a common experience of believing people. Also, sometimes the suffering that we, have is due to the sin of others. Somebody else does the wrong and as a consequence we get hurt. It is as though you were in the house, somebody else left the door open and you got cold. Now you didn't leave the door open; he did. But because he left the door open, you got cold. That is not so bad when its a matter of temperature, but it can follow through for other things as well. We may have suffering come to us from Almighty God who allows this to come for our own maturity. He wants us to grow in grace and in knowledge.

Regarding spiritual experience, I am reminded that living the Christian life and growing in the Lord, growing in Christian experience, is a good deal like an apple that is to be baked. Some apples are sweeter when they are baked than when they are raw. And then I am sure that any cook can tell you that it takes some apples longer to bake than it does others. Maybe that's the reason why some of us suffer so much more than other people. This is not the only answer, and I do not want it to be an easy answer. All I want to tell you is that no matter what happens to you, God knows about all these things; and He can make all these things work together. Sometimes the suffering that comes to us is such that we can see no reason at all, said Elihu; and that just about sums up the whole matter. But, never does this suffering come without God's knowledge. Never does it come apart from His Providence. He is always watching over us.

Now this verse, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning," points to the kind of suffering that comes to us because God's hand is upon us. This applies to every believer. He is not talking only about suffering that comes to you on a certain day in a certain way as having spiritual benefit, and all the rest is just your bad luck. It is not like that. "All things work together for good to them that love God." But this very same gracious statement refers to such people as believe in God. Somebody may think I am saying that for everybody in the world everything is going to turn out all right. That's not what I said. I wish I could say it. I can tell you one thing: If everybody will believe in God and will walk with God, I will guarantee them that everything will turn out all right. If you are believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, no matter how humble you are, no matter how much you may come short, but you really believe that Jesus Christ died for you and have made a confession of faith in Him and are trusting Him to save your soul, then I will tell you beyond any hesitation whatever that all things will work together for good to you because you love God. Suffering under God's hand is no sign then that you are out of His will. This does not mean that God has to correct you, although there may be correction in it.

As a matter of fact we have evidence in Scripture that there were people who suffered just because

they did God's will. They were doing only what God wanted them to do, and then they had trouble. You may be having sorrow that you cannot understand. You have not particularly disobeyed God in the last few months so as to bring this particular thing upon you, and you have tried in every possible way to honor Him. Well I'd like to say to you immediately that the suffering you have would not be punishment at all. It would be something that would come in the ordinary experience to the glory of God. For in it you could show what a faithful person you are. For example in Hebrews 11:35, "Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; . . . others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment." (We know that some people got out of prison by faith, but some people got into prison because of faith.) "They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; of whom the world was not worthy: they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report thru faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." That should give you the impression that people walking in the way of God can actually have much grievous experience.

Notice: "These all, having obtained a good report thru faith. . . ." If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and you have been doing everything that you know how, trusting Him, and now trouble should come to you, this is no sign that He is displeased. It is no sign that you have done wrong. It can be that He is now going to lead you into a situation where you can honor Him by being faithful and obedient to Him, even though you are suffering. Our confidence that everything will work out well, that all things will work together for good to them that love God, is not in the natural processes. We are not confident that everything will turn out well for everybody. We do not think it will. Nor are we believing in the inborn goodness of things or events or people. We do not think the world is that good. We think in this world there can be real sorrow and real grief to no end and to no purpose. We believe that there are forces in the world that would destroy you for no good reason whatever. Further, our confidence that all things will work together for good is not in our own virtue or strength. We do not think we are that good or strong. But we do have this Confidence in the overruling power and wisdom of God. The reason why joy cometh in the morning is because God can bring His Will to pass. He is able to work all things according to His Will.

The sorrow, distress and grief that we have can be summed up under that word *weeping*. It is true that weeping may endure for a night, meaning that our sorrow belongs to this world. There's no doubt about it. And, of course, it comes up very easily in this world whenever God is ignored. We know that. At the same time such sorrow and distress may come to all people or to anyone. It may be all the heavier because of our bewildered dismay in our ignorance of why. I would say that such sorrow and grief would actually lead a believer closer to God, But, there's one thing we need to keep in mind about trouble: it does not bring everybody closer to God. Actually, I think that in people who are not yielded to God, people who are not trusting in God but are trusting in their own strength, you are far more likely to see bitterness than sweetness when trouble comes. You are far more likely to see rebellion than submission. The heat of the fire does not turn out pure gold but actually reduces things to cinders and ashes. There is no gold there; there is no faith. When there is faith, this grief and suffering can actually bring a believer closer to God.

One thing you can be sure of is that all this suffering and grief will be under the control of the Sovereign God. And we can be sure too that this grief will work out for that which the will of God would bring to pass in our lives. You can expect God to be working out His Will; and if special sorrow and grief is coming to you now, you can be confident that God is working things out according to His Will. A

good prayer when you are in the midst of your trouble is to ask Almighty God not to let you suffer in vain, but to make that suffering bring out and work out what He has in mind to do. Mind you, this sorrow and grief may be long. It says weeping may endure for a night, and it may endure all night long.

The great joy in this whole matter is that joy cometh in the morning. Everything you suffered to produce results will actually come to pass. In the morning there will be the joy of deliverance. From all the suffering and the misery you have had you can actually come out free and clear because of what God will do for you. Joy may be to you the joy of forgiveness. You may have had distress because you were being chastened, but you will remember that God is kind and merciful in Christ Jesus and that He will forgive you for Christ's sake. It may be the joy of reconciliation. You may have been far from God and this sorrow and grief came and turned you around. Weeping may endure for a night, but the joy of reconciliation of looking up into the face of God as your Father will surely come in the morning. It may be the joy that will come to you with friends. You may have to go a long distance where you feel you are going alone. Then you will find that God will raise up friends who will comfort you. It may be the joy of achievement. It may be as you do and suffer these things in trust, that God will work them out to His glory and praise. This will remind you of that passage in Hebrews, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Take courage. Put your trust in God, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."