

Why, O Lord...?!

Afflictions and Trials: A Christian Look at Life's Adversities

If I asked you which of the following three items—carrot, egg, or coffee bean—which one best describes you, how would you respond? You would probably wonder what I was talking about, right? Fair enough. But what if I added a second question: how you would handle the boiling waters of life? Read the following parable and ask yourself which one you are. Are you the carrot, egg, or coffee bean?

A young woman went to her mother and told her about her life and how things were so hard for her. She did not know how she was going to make it and wanted to give up. She was tired of fighting and struggling. It seemed as if when one problem was solved a new one arose. Her mother took her to the kitchen. She filled three pots with water and placed each on a high fire. Soon the pots came to a boil. In the first she placed carrots, in the second she placed eggs, and in the last she placed ground coffee beans. She let them sit and boil, without saying a word. In about twenty minutes she turned off the burners. She fished the carrots out and placed them in a bowl. She pulled the eggs out and placed them in a bowl. Then she ladled the coffee out and placed it in a bowl. Turning to her daughter, she asked, “Tell me, what do you see?” “Carrots, eggs, and coffee,” she replied. She brought her closer and asked her to feel the carrots. She did, and noted that they were soft. The mother then asked her to take an egg and break it. After pulling off the shell, the daughter discovered a hard-boiled egg. Finally, she asked her to sip the coffee. The daughter smiled as she tasted its rich aroma. The daughter then asked, “What does it mean, mother?” Her mother explained that all of these objects faced the same adversity, boiling water, but each reacted differently. The carrot went in strong, hard, and unrelenting. However, after being subjected to the boiling water, it softened and became weak. The egg had been fragile. Its thin outer shell had protected its liquid interior. But after sitting in through the boiling water, its inside became hardened. The ground coffee beans were unique, however. After they were in the boiling water they had changed the water. “Which are you?” she asked her daughter. “When adversity knocks on your door, how do you respond? Are you a carrot, an egg, or a coffee bean?” So, I ask each of you reading this, which one are you? If it's not the one you desire, by God's good grace he will help you change.

What is an affliction?

So, how are you doing today? How are you feeling? Do you have an illness or sickness that you just can't seem to get over? Maybe you recently lost a loved one and can't seem to understand why that person was taken from you. Maybe you have a loved one lying in the hospital and you feel so helpless

because all you can do is sit there and watch him sleep, and you hope and pray to God that he will recover. Maybe you go to school every day knowing that you're going to get picked on or made fun of again. The loss of a job, home or loved one. Financial hardships. Marital troubles. Constant stress at work and/or at home. These are all examples of afflictions people may go through at some point in their lives. Does your life seem to be a constant set of unpleasant and disappointing and even painful circumstances and outcomes? Are you beginning to wonder, "If God really does love me, then why does all this keep happening to me?" Maybe you're even starting to doubt whether you really are a child of God. After all, God is a God of love, isn't he? And the God of love wouldn't let this kind of stuff happen to his beloved children, right?

Let me first say that the very fact that you are wondering or worried about truly being a child of God is likely evidence that you are one of his children. The non-believer does not even worry about whether or not he is a child of God. I will get into this more a little bit later on. Next, let me say that you are certainly not alone. Many others have felt or are feeling the way you do right now. There were a number of people from the Bible who went through and suffered trials and afflictions, some like yours and some a bit more severe. For example, Paul went through numerous adversities and trials in his life. While leaving Damascus (just after his conversion), the Jews were waiting for him and watching the city gates, intending to kill him. He was stoned and left for dead in Lystra. He was imprisoned with Silas in Philippi (Acts 16). In Jerusalem, Paul was seized by the mob near the temple, but was rescued by Roman soldiers and then kept in prison for two years in Caesarea. He was also shipwrecked near the island of Melita (Acts 27, 28), and also spent two years in Rome under house arrest. David was hunted by and forced to flee from King Saul numerous times. David lived with the sin of adultery with Bathsheba and also the sin of the murder of her husband Uriah. We read how Jeremiah was cast into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, and had no water, but just sank in the filthy mire (Jer. 38). We also read of Job and the many trials he faced. In Job 1:13–19 we read how his servants were slain by the Sabeans, his sheep and servants were burned, his camels were stolen, and his servants slain by the Chaldeans, and also how a great wind brought down the house which all his children were in, and not one of them survived. According to chapter 2 Job was smitten with sore boils from the soles of his feet to his head. After all that and throughout much of the rest of the book of Job he was not even understood or supported by his wife and friends. Rather, they actually tried to get Job to curse God for all that had happened to him. In Genesis 37 we read what Joseph's brethren did to him. They conspired against him to slay him (v. 18), but instead stripped off his coat and cast him into a pit (vv. 23–24). They then took him out of the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver (v. 28). Later Joseph was brought down to Egypt and bought from the

Ishmaelites by Potiphar (39:1). While living in his master's house, Joseph was tempted by his master's wife to lie with her (vv. 7, 12), and then accused by her of being sent to mock her (vv. 14–18). Joseph was then cast into prison by his master (v. 20). Or consider Stephen, “a man full of faith and the Holy Ghost” (Acts 6:5), and how he was accused of blasphemy and then stoned to death (Acts 6, 7). These are but a few of the accounts we read of in Scripture of the afflictions that God's people endured.

All of the above mentioned events were afflictions and trials that God's people went through. I believe that it's safe to say that most of God's people whom we know have not experienced such afflictions, but it certainly cannot be said that there are not believers today who do not still experience such traumatizing afflictions. We just may not happen to run into those people every day. It is also certainly not accurate to say that our afflictions are not bad or even a “big deal”. I can personally tell you that some of the trials and difficulties in life can seem a bit overwhelming and almost as though you are drowning and it's utterly hopeless. It can be extremely frustrating when you get laid off from a job that you've been at for many years and then find only a few jobs here and there that just don't pan out, Then you find one that does look quite promising, but you are forced to quit because you just can't do it for health reasons, because it is taking such a toll on you physically, along with your being sick. All the while you can't seem to find out what's exactly wrong with your health, even after you've been to doctor after doctor. Meanwhile, you have bills to pay and are unsure where the money will come from to pay for those bills, and you are really too proud and stubborn to ask for assistance.

It helps us to hear of other Christians going through difficulties and “rough patches” and various afflictions in life, because we then see that we truly are not alone, and there are others who have suffered and are suffering like us. They are the “cloud of witnesses” whom God places in our life's pathway and who can and do help encourage us, whether through their present actions or words or their past personal experiences.

An affliction can be defined a number of ways. It can be physical or emotional or spiritual pain or discomfort that we constantly find ourselves struggling to get over. It can be any one of the previously mentioned trials that God's people went through. It can be a sudden shock that a loved one has been badly injured and will be hospitalized for a while, so that we are not sure if he or she will ever be the same. It can be daily living with the fear that someone is after you, whether it is real, as it was for David, or mentally, as part of an illness. Affliction can be having too little and not knowing how you are going to continue to get by, and where the money will come from for the bills that need to be paid, or it can be having too much, so that people look at you as though all you care about is money, or all they want you for is your money, and they are constantly borrowing money from you. An affliction can also be having too many demands, whether at work or at home, or even the feeling of not being

needed. It can also be the daily thought of knowing that other people just don't understand what you are going through (whether it be health issues or something else), and they even tell you that they don't believe you, and it is likely all in your head and so forth. These people can even be your own family and friends, which tends to make it that much more difficult to live with. Some afflictions can be and feel rather large and can almost turn your life upside down, or they may seem much less significant, so that we feel others would say it's nothing to make such a big deal about. Either way it is very unpleasant.

Who sends afflictions?

It is important to see that even though it is God who sends afflictions, he is not the one who tempts us with them. God sends afflictions in our life but it is Satan who uses them to try and tempt us and cause us to fall into sin. We read in the James 1:13, "Let no man say that when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." God does allow Satan to tempt us through those afflictions, but he will, as 1 Cor. 10:13 states, "not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." We all know that Satan hates the church, so it should be no surprise to us that Satan uses afflictions to try and destroy the Church and "get at" God. When we go through afflictions of various natures, how often do we not (as mentioned earlier) question why God would allow this, how long it will last, why it is not someone else, and so on? When we do question the way we do, we are sinning against God; Satan knows that and he loves it when we do. Satan will then try to get us to use other means to get through our trial, whether it be drugs, alcohol, busyness, gambling, or any other god or person or activity that will help us to alleviate the affliction soon or immediately. It is not to say that we should not go to a psychiatrist or psychologist for help, but we should first see whether it is the right thing to do or not (and we can do that by going to God in prayer). Satan may even tell us—and may even use another person to do so—that if we truly are a good Christian, then we should not be suffering at all. He may even say, "Maybe God doesn't love you as much as he say he does." We may likely be at a very low and weak point in life when Satan comes to us like that, but we should be like the school crossing guard and throw up the STOP sign and dive into God's Word and come to him in fervent prayer.

Why are we afflicted?

Why are we afflicted? Why does God send those afflictions? A simple answer may be that we just don't know why God sends afflictions. However, I will try to elaborate on a few reasons why God does send them. One reason is that God uses trials and afflictions in our life to chasten us, as is mentioned in Deuteronomy. 8, where we read: "...that he might make thee know that man doth not live

by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live” (v. 3). Then in verse 5 we read, “Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his own son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee.” The chapter goes on to say how the people should keep God’s commandments, walk in his ways, and not forget all that he had done to deliver them out of the wilderness.

God also uses trials and adversities to refine and purify us. We know that from reading these words: “...and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them” (Zech. 13:9). We also read of purifying in Malachi 3:2–3 which speaks of the purifying of the sons of Levi. God also uses afflictions and trials to try our faith, as is mentioned in James 1:3, 12: “Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life.” In 1 Peter 1:7 we read, “That the trial of your faith...might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”

We should take notice of how God uses trials and afflictions to draw us closer to him. A great example of that is Job. As totally depraved sinners, we are inclined to act against God and turn our backs on him because we do not think we deserve such an affliction (or someone deserves it more). Remember all that Job went through? It is key for us to be reminded of how through all his suffering Job *remained faithful*, even through the criticism and harshness of those who seemed to care about him so much. “In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly” (Job 1:22). In Job 13:15–16 he mentions, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust him...He also shall be my salvation.”

Like us, Job never knew exactly why God was allowing all this to happen to him, but, as unsure as he was, Job never cursed God out of anger or frustration. In Chapters 38 and 39, God answered Job and told him that since he didn’t understand why all of this was happening to him, it just meant that he did not have the correct knowledge to understand. God emphasized how he is and always was in control of all things and that job should find comfort in that. That is evident from what we read in Job 42:10, where God “turned the captivity of Job...also God gave Job twice as much as he had before.” Just as God was in complete control in creation and all other events in history, so also is he in complete control through our afflictions and sufferings. Just as God is completely sovereign, so is he good and merciful. Afflictions can be good, for they can help teach us God’s statutes (Psalm 119:71), and that God is faithful even through afflictions (Psalm 119:75).

We may even be inclined to ask if afflictions are because of a specific sin. Remember the account of Jesus’ passing by the man who was blind from birth, and the people asked Jesus who sinned to make the man to be that way? Did Jesus say that the man sinned? No. His parents sinned? No.

Rather, Jesus said, “Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him” (John 9:1–3). So just because you go through a difficult trial in life does not mean that it is a result of a specific sin. We likely won't ever know why, but that is okay. We just need to put our trust in God and have faith in him that he will help us through it and use it for our good and for the good of others who love him (Romans 8:28).

The apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:10 says that he is what he is by the grace of God, and that “his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain.” What do you think the Psalms would be like David had not suffered the afflictions he did? A few of the Psalms that David wrote were likely written while he was fleeing from King Saul. I don't know if we can know for sure if that's when he wrote some of them (some believe it was the 6th, 7th, and 11th Psalms), but it certainly makes sense. David is fleeing for his life, and while he is hiding he sits down and fervently asks God to help and save him from his enemies. Then you have the multiple Psalms David wrote while pouring out his heart to God for help and guidance and comfort through all he was experiencing in his life. Did David come to God as he did, “hoping” that God would help him? Did he come to God even though he thought he could get through things on his own? No and No! David knew that he could not do it on his own; he also knew that God could, and that he would if it was his will. Listen to these words David wrote in Psalm 34:4: “I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.” Or the well-known 23rd Psalm; “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want...thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (vv. 1, 4). David knew where to find comfort and where to place his trust, and so should we.

Is there really comfort?

David found comfort and knew where to put his trust, as we read in the Psalms (11:1; 16:1; 17:6; 18:2–3; 25:1–2; 40:1; 62:1–2, and many more). Paul found comfort and understood that it was for much better reasons that he suffered (Phil. 1:12; 3:7–14; Acts 16:25–34). Job also found comfort and confidence in God (Job 1:20–22; 42:1–6). The Bible is full of passages that help us find the comfort we need in difficult times. “In all their afflictions he was afflicted” (Isaiah 63:9), and “...he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities...with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

God will give us strength and renew it (Isaiah 40:29–31; 41:10), shall wipe away all our tears (Isaiah 25:8; Rev. 21:4), has mercy upon his afflicted (Isaiah 49:13), and saves his own out of their distresses (Psalm 9:9–10; 46:1–3). As Jesus said to Martha in John 11:25, he is the resurrection and the life. He is the rock of our salvation and nothing can separate us from God's love which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:28–39). Also, there is nothing that is impossible with God (Matt. 19:26); we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us, and “God shall supply all your need according to

his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:13, 19). We can also find comfort in knowing that affliction is not really as bad as we think (2 Cor. 4:7–10), and that it works for us something far better than what we can possibly imagine (2 Cor. 4:17).

It is also important to point out here that all who live a “godly life” *will* suffer persecution (whether it be a spiritual or emotional affliction and/or physical torture). Peter makes crystal clear that growing Christians are going to experience a number of trials, tribulations, afflictions, and difficulties (1 Peter 4:12). We sing in Psalter 91 (Psalm 34), “Afflictions on the good must fall, But God will bring them safe thro' all; From harmful stroke he will defend, And sure and full deliv'rance send” (stanza 3). Also, afflictions are for our good, as we sing: “Affliction has been for my profit, That I to thy statutes might hold” (Psalter 329:4, Psalm 119).

There is much comfort and beauty in the Psalms and we have the great blessing to sing them each Lord's Day. In the Psalter we sing of how our gracious and sovereign heavenly Father knows our afflictions and woes (#80:6). He hears, delivers and saves us (# 88:2; 175:1; 248:4; 293:2-3; 300:13). He is our rock, refuge and source of strength (# 16:4; 34:1,9; 71:1; 161:1,5,8; 191:1; 203:1,4). He is faithful to His own (#312:6; 400:2-5). He guides our way with his word (#334:1). He is in control and will not let us fall (#345). We are called to rest in and have patience in him (#96:1), to call upon him, and cast our burdens upon him (#149:5). We sing of his love and care for us in Psalter #202, his goodness in #201, his enduring mercy in Psalms 376–378 (taken from Psalm 136). His protective power is sung of in #127, and in #126 we sing of “God a Very Present Help” (both numbers taken from Psalm 46). “Thro' pain and trouble Thou hast led, And humbled all our pride...O let the Lord, our gracious God, Forever blessed be, Who has not turned my prayer from him, Nor yet his grace from me...Who safely holds our soul in life, And steadfast makes our ways” (Psalter 174:2, 4).

God knows all we go through, hears all our cries, and never turns his back on us. He will always be there for us, even if it may not seem like it at the moment. He will deliver us from our affliction when he sees fit, for he knows best. It may not just be for our own good, but also for the good of someone else that he allows us to go through an affliction or hardship, even though we fervently ask him to take it away. Take the apostle Paul as an example of that. Paul suffered through many trials and hardships in his life and even asked God many times that they be removed from him, but the Lord answered Paul, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). God was telling Paul that he needed a certain thorn in his flesh, and God was also saying that he shows his power through our weakness, as was pointed out to us in a sermon we had a short while ago. Rev. Eriks also pointed out in that sermon that God prunes us through the thorns in our flesh; whether that be sickness, loss of a loved one, a wayward child, financial hardships, marital troubles, or whatever

else it may be. Whether we want to admit it or not, thorns are a blessing because through them God's grace comes to us. That was exactly what the Lord told Paul and what he tells us also today. God may also use thorns to cause us to “bleed for Christ” to turn from our non-God-centered ways, and to focus on him, who is the supplier of all our grace and needs. How did Paul respond to the Lord? “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Cor. 12:9–10). We ourselves are weak in our sins, but we are made strong in Christ through his glory, for through afflictions and troubles we see how much we need him and how good he truly is. Just as the hart thirsts for water, so may we thirst and hunger for God and his word (Psalm 42).

Help and hindrance

Even if we personally are not going through an affliction or trial in life, I'm sure that we all know someone who is. So is there something we can do to help those who are going through an affliction or hardship in life? Yes, there certainly is, but before we get into that, let us first see what we should *not* do.

There definitely are things that we should not say to someone who is going through a great trial in life. Even mentioning such things as that one must have a problem with their prayer life, that one should search his heart because God is likely pointing to a great sin in his life, that he just needs to let Jesus lead him and then he won't have troubles anymore, or if he only had enough faith then all would change—all these are more hindering than comforting. Statements like these that seem to be full of comfort can actually do more harm than good, for they can come out as more of a comparison or criticism, as Edith Schaeffer points out in her book, *Affliction: A Compassionate Look at the Reality of Pain and Suffering*. I do not agree with everything she says in the book, but she does make some very good points. She mentions that “Why don't you pray?” is a question that can be an insult to someone who is already spending sleepless hours in prayer. She also says that “If only you had enough faith, everything would change!” is a judgment that only God can make. Another judgmental statement she warns against is, “There must be something wrong with your life.” She adds, “This is another cruel sentence on the part of a human being who is no position to make such bold statements.” Saying, “If you only had the Holy Spirit...” is also a judgmental statement that is like saying that someone has not been born again.

We must be ever so careful when it comes to judging another person, and that is especially true regarding the trials and afflictions of life; for we are quick to judge someone when he is going through a trial in life, also regarding the reason for the affliction. Some people even say that we are not to judge

at all. After all, Matt. 7:1 says, “Judge not, that ye be not judged”. However, when these people use this passage, as well as John 8:11, John 13:34, and similar passages, they fail to interpret these passages correctly. As Rev. Doug Kuiper points out in his pamphlet, “*Judging: The Christian's Duty*”, God does in fact command us to judge. We must, however, not judge hypocritically. That is to say, we must first look at ourselves and must first consider the beam that is in our own eye before we worry about the sliver that is in our brother's eye, as we read in Matt. 7:1–5. This is the context we must use (and many fail to use), and not forget when it tells us not to judge. We must use Scripture to base our judgment of others' teachings and practices, as well as their lives and actions. “Because we do not know the hearts of others,” Rev. Kuiper adds, “we must not judge secret motives (1 Cor. 4:5). God will judge these.” As we read in Prov. 17:3, “...but the LORD trieth the hearts.” Because with regards to afflictions it can almost become a habit for us to judge someone as to why they are going through such a trial in life, we must stop ourselves and see first if we are doing so in righteousness, as is mentioned in Lev. 19:15. It is not easy to judge righteously, but we must continue to strive to judge that way, as it is the way God calls us to judge. For a better and more thorough understanding of proper judging, I strongly encourage you to read Rev. Kuiper's pamphlet on this subject.

In addition to our judging righteously of others, we are to esteem one another, as we read in Philippians 2:3: “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory (pride); but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.” And we are to do it with a positive attitude, as we see in verse 14: “Do all things without murmurings and disputings.” We are also called in 1 Peter 4:9 to “use hospitality one to another without grudging.”

We are called to help and care for each other as the Lord cares for us. We are called to comfort one another, for we read in God's word; “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God” (Is. 40:1). True, it is not easy to comfort someone. However, this does not mean that we should think we just should not do it because it's not easy to do. It is difficult for us to experience comfort if *we* have not gone through an affliction or sorrow or trial in which comfort was needed. Second, “we have to recognize our need for comfort before we will let ourselves be comforted”, says Schaeffer. Also, we are not sure how to comfort someone else if we have never experienced comfort ourselves. You could use the example of driving a car: if you have never driven one or learned how to drive a car yourself, how are you to teach someone else (aside from guessing or asking someone else)? If you feel that you might be a bit inadequate in the whole area of comforting, then you should seek the dear heavenly Father to help you and to provide you with the courage and knowledge you need to comfort that wounded soul. If it is his will, he will supply your tongue with the words needed to speak to someone in need.

People who have suffered or are suffering with a specific pain, can better comfort someone

else who is suffering with that same pain (i.e. cancer, loss of a loved one, loved one lying in the hospital, personal health problems, marital issues, etc.). Even then we will not necessarily have the same understanding as the person we are trying to comfort, simply because we are not identical. So we can only do our best to comfort, and by God's grace we will be able to.

As mentioned earlier, we are to use hospitality to each other willingly. What is hospitality? It is picking up the phone and talking to someone for a few minutes to see how he is doing, even if we don't have a lot of time to talk (a quick chat can mean a world of comfort). It is helping out the person next to you, whether it is the one in next hospital bed who needs some assistance because the nurse doesn't seem to hear their bell, or your next door neighbor who needs help with something and you are the only one nearby. There are numerous other examples of how hospitality can be shown. In other ways of showing hospitality we are called to “Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law” (Gal. 6:2); also, “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves...For even Christ pleased not himself” (Rom. 15:1–3); and “lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees” (Heb. 12:12). In Hebrews 13:3 we are called to “remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.”

So it can be a phone call, card, letter, poem, visit, meal, or another kind personal act. These are all things we can do for someone who needs to be comforted. The best kind of comfort is found in God and in his word, for we are to seek him and his strength (Psalm 105:4) and to “seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” (Matt. 6:33). Even just being there for someone can be a great way to comfort them. I can recall when I was a hospice volunteer I would go and visit with those who were alone and had no one else around. Even with the training that we had for being a hospice volunteer, I was never certain of what I would do when I was with my patient. I just needed to ask them what *they* wanted to do, and all I ever did was just sit there and listen to them tell me all about their beloved spouse who passed away and their children (if they had any). Basically, just being there and listening to them and showing them that I cared was quite sufficient for them, and they were always very appreciative of the visits. This is not to “toot my own horn,” but rather to show that small things *do* matter. I admit that it wasn't always easy for me to do, but it did help make me a bit stronger and helped me see how little effort there actually can be in comforting someone, and the ways that God can use to comfort those in need. When I think of how much comfort they got from my visits, how much more comfort don't we get when we come to God, the great comforter, in prayer! “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17), and as the LORD told Jeremiah, we are to call upon his name and pray unto him, and he will hearken unto us (Jer. 29:12).

There are also many great books and pamphlets and other fine literature that can help during

times of difficulty. Many of the books that I have read and would recommend are ones that I have already mentioned in previous articles, so I will not mention them again here. We all have different things that help us get through difficult trials in life, and for many it's a good quality book in which God will use a specific sentence or phrase to make us stop and reflect during that troubling time.

Things to remember

We have seen that affliction can come in various shapes and sizes and that not everyone's affliction is the same. It can last a short amount of time or a long period of time. It can be brought upon us because God is chastening us, he is trying our faith, or he has another useful purpose in mind. The fact is that we never know—nor need to know—why we are going through such an affliction, but that it is for our good (Rom. 8:28). We do know that not everyone will understand what we are going through with our affliction, but God does, and he will deliver us in *His* time.

We are to come to him with all our needs and pour out our hearts to him in prayer. We are to “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.” Also, “in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:4, 6). We are to have patience and wait on his will, and as we see in Romans 15, other people's trials should increase our patience with them, rather than make us have hard hearts toward them.

We have seen that Satan will try to deceive us and tell us that we do not need God because we can do it on our own by other means, but God tells us to rely on him and come to him in time of need. We can come to God, for “The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver is tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times” (Psalm. 12:6). If God says that he will be there for us, then he will be there for us. It is also important that we not get angry at God for our afflictions, for then we are sinning against God; this greatly displeases him, and it also greatly pleases Satan.

God also calls us to be there for each other and help each other in times of need. We are not to judge others (wrongly) or compare ourselves or our afflictions with someone else. We need to ask God for open eyes to see our own hearts and sins before we start to look at someone else's. Whatever we do or do not do to someone else, we do or do not do it to God (Matt. 25:40, 45).

It is also important to remember that you are not alone in your trial or affliction. Christ Jesus knows all we go through, and there is nothing that is impossible for him; he will see you through it. Also, it is important not to give up, for it takes time to get through such a difficult hardship. May we be as Abraham (Gen. 17:4 regarding the promise of being the father of many nations), as we read what Paul mentions of him in Romans 4:20–21: “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was also able to perform.” This reminds me of the beautiful words of a poem by Helen Steiner Rice,

based on Matt. 11:28.

*Whatever your problems, whatever your cross,
Whatever your burden, whatever your loss,
You've got to believe me, you are not alone,
For all of the troubles and trials you have known
Are faced at this minute by others like you.
Who also cry out, "Oh God, What Shall I do?"
Just find comfort in knowing, this is God's way of saying,
"Come to Me" and never cease praying,
For whatever your problem or whatever you sorrow
God holds the key to a brighter tomorrow!*

We should also know that it is okay to weep, and that as Christians we should not think for a minute that it is not okay to weep. We read of countless instances in the Bible of God's people weeping and crying out to God to help and save them. In today's thinking crying is considered a form of weakness, for someone may cry when he gets hurt or when he does not get what he wants. But the crying or pouring out of the soul of which the Bible speaks are other words for praying. We read how Jesus "cried out with a loud voice...My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). The psalmist used such wording multiple times throughout the Psalms. "LORD, I cry unto thee" (141:1); "I cried unto the LORD with my voice...I poured out my complaint before him" (142:1-2); "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD" (130:1). When we cry and pour out our hearts to God as the psalmist did, we are praying to God a fervent prayer. Cry out to God, and he will hear you.

May you find the comfort and rest you need as you continue to go through whatever trial or affliction God has placed before you. May you come to him for all your needs and cast all your burdens upon him. He is our Good Shepherd who is everywhere present. Through him we are more than conquerers. "Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (I Thess. 4:18).