

GOD
THE BIBLE IN A
NUTSHELL
SIGNS

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SIGNS

DONALD
HENDERSON

REDEMPTION  PRESS

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PREFACE



Seven years ago I decided to continue writing a book I had begun several years earlier. I was at a point of career uncertainty and was house-sitting for a couple months after living in an old Chevy van for more than a year.

It seemed likely that finishing the book was what the Lord intended as a means of bringing me some kind of an income. I had even been enjoying a certain level of inspiration. One morning as I sat down at the computer to write, the Lord told me to stop and gather together all of my Christian books. At the time, only about a dozen of them were available to me. But, I did as I was told.

God then told me to take the books that had really blessed me and put them in a pile to the right. I was to take the books that had *not* blessed me or that I could not even manage to get started reading and place them to the left. I obeyed. There were about half-a-dozen books in each pile. The Lord then said, “The

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books on the right were written to bless people; those on the left were written to make money. Which do you want to write?”

Without waiting for an answer, because He knew what was in my heart, God told me to put the computer away. I did not know if He was just putting the book on hold for a while or whether I would never write again. Within a few weeks I was, once more, living in my van. At the Lord’s direction, relative to the story of the rich young ruler (below), I had spent my IRA money on an evangelism trip to the streets of Manhattan, New York, and on a donation to a missionary outreach in Russia.

Now I replayed the words of those scriptures in my mind:

¹⁶And behold, there came a man up to Him, saying, Teacher, what excellent and perfectly and essentially good deed must I do to possess eternal life?

¹⁷And He said to him, Why do you ask Me about the perfectly and essentially good? There is only One Who is good [perfectly and essentially]—God. If you would enter into the Life, you must continually keep the commandments.

¹⁸He said to Him, What sort of commandments? [Or, which ones?] And Jesus answered, You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness,

¹⁹Honor your father and your mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as [you do] yourself.

²⁰The young man said, I have observed all these from my youth; what still do I lack?

²¹Jesus answered him, If you would be perfect [that is, have that spiritual maturity which accompanies self-sacrificing

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character], go and sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; and come, be My disciple [side with My party and follow Me].

²²But when the young man heard this, he went away sad (grieved and in much distress), for he had great possessions.

²³And Jesus said to His disciples, Truly I say to you, it will be difficult for a rich man to get into the kingdom of heaven.

—Matthew 19:16–23 (AMP)

I spent the next seven years living in my van while on a mission and prayer walk on the streets and in the marketplaces of a suburb in Northwestern United States. I did not have the support of any church or missions board. I lived completely by faith, moving as the Lord directed.

The rules God gave were that I would ask no one for anything, or even drop hints as to my needs. I had only what was given voluntarily to me, as God provided. I was allowed to tell people what I was doing and how I was living, but only as led by the Holy Spirit.

I spent my days listening to God, interceding in a variety of ways, and encouraging believers, many of whom had no church or fellowship, and telling unbelievers about Jesus. The Lord also did some wonderful healing as He directed me to anoint the sick with oil in the name of Jesus.

It was during this time that God taught me much of what is written in this book. Just recently He put me in an apartment and is directing me to record and share the lessons I learned from Him during my years walking by His side through the highways and byways of life.

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One day during the summer between my freshman and sophomore years of high school I was watching television at home alone in my living room. I tuned in a crusade being conducted by Billy Graham and began watching. Being at a point of desperation, I knelt and prayed to receive Jesus Christ as my Savior. It is not easy to talk about this event in my life without feeling tremendous emotion, even though that day is now forty-two years in the past.

Just after my prayer, I soon began to enjoy a new intimacy with God, which included His comfort and answered prayer. However, I did fall under the sway, in some measure, to the now even more popular, blasphemous heresy that Jesus was “just” another teacher and a good man. I did continue to live a clean and moral life and to be faithful to my understanding of what God expected of me. In my senior year of high school I began to experience a hunger and longing for Him, just as if I had never known or experienced Him at all.

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This agonizing emptiness and longing for Christ continued as I entered my first year at one of the United States service academies. Here, we were all issued copies of the *New Testament*. My roommate and I decided to set aside a little time each evening when we would separately read a portion of it. The Scriptures were enough comfort and peace to let me know that I was headed in the right direction, but my intense longing for God continued.

In the summer between my fourth class (freshman) and third class (sophomore) years, our class took a field trip to several different military installations across the country. I took every opportunity to visit churches as I continued my desperate search to know my Creator. I visited a variety of Protestant churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Latter Day Saints tabernacle in Salt Lake City. I came to the conclusion that God was not in any of the churches. I remembered the words of Jesus, which I had read in the *New Testament* and that my father had once quoted to me:

⁶ Jesus said to him, I am the Way and the Truth and the Life;
no one comes to the Father except by (through) Me.

—John 14:6 (AMP)

I also remembered hearing Billy Graham say that the only place where God could be found was in the Person of Jesus Christ. My soul yearned for an opportunity to attend a Billy Graham Crusade. I thought that if I could be physically present I would receive whatever was lacking in a television evangelism experience. What I did not understand was that I had received a New Life, Jesus Christ Himself, when I had prayed four years earlier. What God was really after was that I recall the truth about

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what I had received and always remember the truth of just Who He is. He is Emmanuel or “God with us” and nothing less.

²¹She will bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus [the Greek form of the Hebrew Joshua, which means Savior], for He will save His people from their sins [that is, prevent them from failing and missing the true end and scope of life, which is God].

²²All this took place that it might be fulfilled which the Lord had spoken through the prophet,

²³Behold, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel—which, when translated, means, God with us.

—Matthew 1:21–23 (AMP)

He is God Himself, come in the form of a man to reveal the character of the Father to us all!

⁵Let this same attitude and purpose and [humble] mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus: [Let Him be your example in humility:]

⁶Who, although being essentially one with God and in the form of God [possessing the fullness of the attributes which make God God], did not think this equality with God was a thing to be eagerly grasped or retained,

⁷But stripped Himself [of all privileges and rightful dignity], so as to assume the guise of a servant (slave), in that He became like men and was born a human being.

⁸And after He had appeared in human form, He abased and humbled Himself [still further] and carried His obedience to the extreme of death, even the death of the cross!

—Philippians 2:5–8 (AMP)

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I had received a New Life-form, now living in the depths of my being, and it was very important that I appreciate just Who I had received. This New Life-form was, as Jesus said of Himself and of His kingdom, “not of this world,” but utterly extraterrestrial in nature.

²³He said to them, You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world (of this earthly order); I am not of this world.

—John 8:23 (AMP)

¹⁶They are not of the world (worldly, belonging to the world), [just] as I am not of the world.

—John 17:16 (AMP)

³⁶Jesus answered, My kingdom (kingship, royal power) belongs not to this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My followers would have been fighting to keep Me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, My kingdom is not from here (this world); [it has no such origin or source].

³⁷Pilate said to Him, Then You are a King? Jesus answered, You say it! [You speak correctly!] For I am a King. [Certainly I am a King!] This is why I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the Truth. Everyone who is of the Truth [who is a friend of the Truth, who belongs to the Truth] hears and listens to My voice.

—John 18:36–37 (AMP)

He is nothing like anything this world has ever seen, and that is what He came to show us.

When I returned to the academy at the beginning of the academic school year I found a surprise on the squadron

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bulletin board. It was a sign-up list for a bus trip to a Billy Graham crusade in a nearby city. Of course, I put my name on the list and was among those going forward to receive Christ at the closing invitation.

I had peace on the bus trip home. As I walked between my scheduled academic classes, I had new joy in just looking at the sky or other parts of God's creation. I found myself once again spontaneously praying to my God. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association sent me my first Bible study lesson, with instructions to complete it and mail it back to them. As I did so, they sent me another and another until I had completed all four lessons of their *New Believer's Study* package.

Through those studies I received an understanding of the importance of knowing and not forgetting the true identity of Jesus. I received a much greater comprehension of the significance of His death and Resurrection, which had provided my salvation from a state of *separation* from God to a place of having a relationship with Him.

Each Friday evening I received a visit from a cadet in the class ahead of mine for a time of fellowship. When my cadet came, I had never met him before, but he had been told of my recent decision to follow Jesus Christ. His visits had a great impact on my life, bringing encouragement. He always had his *New Testament* in his pocket. I recognized this to be a significant practice for a person who takes their walk with God seriously. Since that time I have made it a habit to always have a *New Testament* or an entire Bible with me wherever I go.

The importance of the new life cannot be overstated because it is the very essence of our salvation from an eternal exclusion from God's Kingdom, and that is certainly the greatest measure of Hell. Salvation is not merely an acknowledgment of who Jesus

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is. One must first recognize the wickedness and disobedience of his or her present state, then have a desire to make an about-face and live life God's way. It must be realized that eternal separation from God is what is deserved, but a merciful and gracious Father is offering us a pardon.

Let me explain it like this: Five prisoners are on death row for horrible crimes that they have separately committed. The Governor sends each a "get out of jail free" card that says, "We have a law in this land that two people cannot be punished for the same offense. Last night I allowed my only son to be executed in your place. Since he was an absolutely perfect man, his death is sufficient punishment for all of you. If you will just remorsefully admit your guilt, present this card to the guard, and state your desire to have a new life with intent to live as my perfect son did, you will walk free. Additionally, we will establish for you a new life and a new identity and give you all the assistance you need to walk in *newness of life*. We realize that there will be a learning process as we teach you to walk in newness of life, and that is understood."

One prisoner thanks the messenger for the pardon and walks free to a changed life and an eternal reward. The second prisoner replies, "I don't believe any of this stuff!" A third prisoner answers, "That's absurd! No governor would do that for a wicked man like me." The fourth prisoner says, "I'm a good person. I don't need a pardon when I've done nothing all that bad."

²³Since all have sinned and are falling short of the honor and glory which God bestows and receives.

—Romans 3:23 (AMP)

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The fifth casually answers, “I think I’ll wait until the last minute,” while ignoring that execution could come at any time, as an instantaneous and total surprise. Jesus stated that in the final analysis people will not suffer judgment because of the sins they committed, but only because they rejected His pardon!

¹⁸ He who believes in Him [who clings to, trusts in, relies on Him] is not judged [he who trusts in Him never comes up for judgment; for him there is no rejection, no condemnation—he incurs no damnation]; but he who does not believe (cleave to, rely on, trust in Him) is judged already [he has already been convicted and has already received his sentence] because he has not believed in and trusted in the name of the only begotten Son of God. [He is condemned for refusing to let his trust rest in Christ’s name.]

—John 3:18 (AMP)

Right before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead He explained this plainly to Martha:

²³Jesus said to her, Your brother shall rise again.

²⁴Martha replied, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

²⁵Jesus said to her, I am [Myself] the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in (adheres to, trusts in, and relies on) Me, although he may die, yet he shall live;

—John 11:23–25 (AMP)

Eternal life is not an extension on existence delivered to us when we die. Eternal life is a person named Jesus, received only by repenting of sin and asking for Him. When this is done,

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a human becomes a holy temple of God, as Christ takes up residence within.

¹¹And this is that testimony (that evidence): God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

¹²He who possesses the Son has that life; he who does not possess the Son of God does not have that life.

—1 John 5:11–12 (AMP)

Receiving His New Life is wonderful, and is the starting point of a lifelong adventure and a process of transformation. This starting point is a prerequisite to realizing the maximum application and potential of the lessons that follow.

CHAPTER 1

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?



Suffering is a reality that everyone must deal with at some point. It is one of the most common issues with God mentioned by unbelievers, especially those who oppose faith. Nearly every believer will be asked *why suffering exists* and will probably wonder himself why God, who is infinitely kind and loving, would create a universe, then allow it to fall into such a sorry state of pain and turmoil.

The Bible is not silent concerning God's purpose in creation, nor is it silent concerning the cause of suffering, nor its purpose in our lives. God's ultimate purpose in this and in all things is discussed in the book of Ephesians.

⁴But God—so rich is He in His mercy! Because of and in order to satisfy the great and wonderful and intense love with which He loved us,

⁵Even when we were dead (slain) by [our own] shortcomings and trespasses, He made us alive together in fellowship and in

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union with Christ; [He gave us the very life of Christ Himself, the same new life with which He quickened Him, for] it is by grace (His favor and mercy which you did not deserve) that you are saved (delivered from judgment and made partakers of Christ's Salvation).

⁶And He raised us up together with Him and made us sit down together [giving us joint seating with Him] in the heavenly sphere [by virtue of our being] in Christ Jesus (the Messiah, the Anointed One).

⇒ ⁷He did this that He might clearly demonstrate through the ages to come the immeasurable (limitless, surpassing) riches of His free grace (His unmerited favor) in [His] kindness and goodness of heart toward us in Christ Jesus.

—Ephesians 2:4–7 (AMP)

⁵[This mystery] was never disclosed to human beings in past generations as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles (consecrated messengers) and prophets by the [Holy] Spirit.

⁶[It is this:] that the Gentiles are now to be fellow heirs [with the Jews], members of the same body and joint partakers [sharing] in the same divine promise in Christ through [their acceptance of] the glad tidings (the Gospel).

—Ephesians 3:5–6 (AMP)

⁹Also to enlighten all men and make plain to them what is the plan [regarding the Gentiles and providing for the Salvation of all men] of the mystery kept hidden through the ages and concealed until now in [the mind of] God Who created all things by Christ Jesus.

⇒ ¹⁰[The purpose is] that through the church the complicated, many-sided wisdom of God in all its infinite variety and

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innumerable aspects might now be made known to the angelic rulers and authorities (principalities and powers) in the heavenly sphere.

¹¹This is in accordance with the terms of the eternal and timeless purpose which He has realized and carried into effect in [the person of] Christ Jesus our Lord,

¹²In Whom, because of our faith in Him, we dare to have the boldness (courage and confidence) of free access (an unre-served approach to God with freedom and without fear).

—Ephesians 3:9–12 (AMP)

His purpose in the creation, then, is to obtain for Himself a bride in a meaningful freewill love relationship and to make known His desire or need for this kind of relationship. He intends that all created beings will see attributes of Himself that could only be revealed through a medium that gives them meaning—that is, a fallen creation, a lost and dying world.

Sacrificial love, grace, and mercy were for the first time displayed as God exercised them in an environment created for the purpose of revealing His character to His own. Even this very act itself further displays His love—His intense desire to share Himself with not just His bride, but with all His creation through the revelation of His character. And doing all this cost Him dearly:

¹⁶For God so greatly loved and dearly prized the world that He [even] gave up His only begotten (unique) Son, so that whoever believes in (trusts in, clings to, relies on) Him shall not perish (come to destruction, be lost) but have eternal (everlasting) life.

—John 3:16 (AMP)

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Also, His wrath and judgment are revealed in a way previously unknown.

In this revelation of His character we, the church, have a center-stage role as His Bride; we are the recipients of His love exhibited. In this demonstration of love He will share His throne with us in a union of intimacy for all eternity (Ephesians 2:6, previously quoted). This was His plan long before the creation.

⁴Even as [in His love] He chose us [actually picked us out for Himself as His own] in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy (consecrated and set apart for Him) and blameless in His sight, even above reproach, before Him in love.

⁵For He foreordained us (destined us, planned in love for us) to be adopted (revealed) as His own children through Jesus Christ, in accordance with the purpose of His will [because it pleased Him and was His kind intent]—

⁶[So that we might be] to the praise and the commendation of His glorious grace (favor and mercy), which He so freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

¹¹In Him we also were made [God's] heritage (portion) and we obtained an inheritance; for we had been foreordained (chosen and appointed beforehand) in accordance with His purpose, Who works out everything in agreement with the counsel and design of His [own] will,

—Ephesians 1:4–6, 11 (AMP)

This was God's intent in sending His Son to redeem us. To illustrate it, let me share a short story. Once there was a cartoon that showed a woman in a wedding dress primping in front of a mirror. The caption read: "Just think! In less than an hour I

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will be Mrs. What's-his-name!" It is doubtful that anyone would envy her future husband.

What could this woman's motive in marriage be? Is she just looking for someone with a paycheck to cover all of her living expenses? Such a motive with no desire for a love relationship would be much like that of a prostitute. Or is she just in love with domestic life and maintaining her own household? God continually rebuked Israel for such motives, as did Jesus. We too must stay aware of the pitfalls of giving too high a priority on what we expect God to do for *us*, to the benefits of church life and even the joy of being used in ministry. Relationship with the Lord must always come first.

Many, many years ago the Lord rebuked me with the question, "Who is going to be your God? Am I going to be your God, or is *ministry* going to be your God?" In Revelation 2:4–5, Jesus gave stern warning concerning the dangers of replacing our original love for Him with something else. The Jews very much loved being religious. They even loved knowing and keeping the Law. In fact, they excelled at it! Yet Jesus accused them of honoring God with their lips while having hearts that were far from Him.

It is so easy to become overly preoccupied with ministry to others and, even worse, to be obsessed with attaining to someone else's misguided standard of success. The only standard for success is obedience to Christ in all things with a heart filled with love for the Master. What He does with our act of obedience to bring about a certain result is His business only. This requires that one keenly recognize His voice, which may seem an overwhelming and bothersome task for someone not interested in any such thing in the first place!

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However, Jesus did say, “My sheep know My voice,” (John 10:27). He also told us that in the judgment *many* (not a few) will come to Him proclaiming the success of their ministry and that His response will be, “Get out of here; I have never known you [author’s paraphrase of Matthew 7:23]!” No small wonder that there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth as those who confidently considered they had settled the question of their own eternal salvation long before this begin to be sentenced without appeal to an eternity without God. Imagine the anguish as they begin to scream through clenched teeth, “What do you mean? I served You all of those years.”

In 1 Corinthians 3:12–13 the destruction by fire of wood, hay, and stubble is discussed. It illustrates the key point here: Having false motives renders any good work we do as nothing but flammable wood, hay, and stubble.

Several years ago a man in southern California had a vision. He saw a woman in a wedding dress. The dress was soiled and wrinkled; the woman’s hair uncombed and matted. Her face was bruised. She had been greatly abused. Then the Lord told him, “This is my church—and those who did this to her are her leaders.”

Ephesians 4:11–14 says that the Lord has given leaders to the church in order to bring His people to maturity and to protect them from men who would mislead and harm them. Three times in John 15:13–15, Jesus refers to us as “friends.” He later tells Peter how He expects him to act out his friendship:

¹⁵When they had eaten, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these [others do—with reasoning, intentional, spiritual devotion, as one loves the Father]? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You

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[that I have deep, instinctive, personal affection for You, as for a close friend]. He said to him, Feed My lambs.

¹⁶Again He said to him the second time, Simon, son of John, do you love Me [with reasoning, intentional, spiritual devotion, as one loves the Father]? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You [that I have a deep, instinctive, personal affection for You, as for a close friend]. He said to him, Shepherd, (tend) My sheep.

¹⁷He said to him the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love Me [with a deep, instinctive, personal affection for Me, as for a close friend]? Peter was grieved (was saddened and hurt) that He should ask him the third time, Do you love Me? And he said to Him, Lord, You know everything; You know that I love You [that I have a deep, instinctive, personal affection for You, as for a close friend]. Jesus said to him, Feed My sheep.

—John 21:15–17 (AMP)

Imagine a man planning a wedding. He loves his fiancée so much that he has suffered unspeakably just so that he can spend time with her (John 3:16). Now imagine he even *died* for her and was somehow brought back to life. He can hardly wait for the wedding day, but he must first leave the area for a while in order to prepare a place for her to live (John 14:2–3). He calls his good friend and trusts him to help her to prepare herself for the wedding while he is gone (Ephesians 4:11–13, Ephesians 5:24–27).

When the bridegroom returns he finds her bruised and abused, as described in the vision—all of this done by his “good friend.” If you were the bridegroom, how would you feel about that friend? Your feelings might probably be a baffling

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combination of betrayed, bewildered, and outraged! Who would want to be in that friend's shoes, especially if the bridegroom were one with unlimited authority? Likewise, no one would want to reap the "reward" of any leader who has prostituted the Bride of Jesus Christ for his own gains of fame, wealth, or fleshly lust.

Suffering entered the human race (1 Corinthians 15:21–22) and the created universe of space and time (Romans 8:18–23) when Adam disobeyed God (Genesis 3:15–18). These same scriptures, as well as many others, promise that one day the time of suffering will end for those willing to follow Jesus on the narrow path that leads to Everlasting Life (Matthew 7:13). However, until then each believer is appointed his or her portion of suffering as allowed or determined by the Lord.

²¹When they had preached the good news (Gospel) to that town and made disciples of many of the people, they went back to Lystra and Iconium and Antioch,

²²Establishing *and* strengthening the souls *and* the hearts of the disciples, urging *and* warning *and* encouraging them to stand firm in the faith, and [telling them] that it is through many hardships *and* tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

—Acts 14:21–22 (AMP)

The message of the gospel of Jesus Christ is not a theology of suffering. It is a message of hope, healing, and deliverance! This is what Jesus came to bring us, but it is certainly not a balanced biblical faith that claims all of those precious promises while ignoring a vast number of "promises" that many would consider not-quite-so precious. If we refuse to acknowledge their

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existence and fail to comprehend their purpose, we will always be confused and suffer stunted spiritual growth. Instead, let us seek true understanding of God's wondrous promises.

I knew an athletic coach who had a standard comment for athletes when giving them a particularly tough opponent to practice with: "You never get any stronger lifting straws," he would say. Similarly, you do not often see a massively muscular weightlifter working out with an empty barbell—unless he is recovering from an injury. If you want to build muscle you must put some weight on the bar. You must make it *hard* to lift, or else you will get no training benefit out of it. In the military, whenever anyone had an undesirable circumstance forced upon him the standard sarcastic quip was: "It builds character."

This fallen creation not only serves to manifest attributes of God heretofore not seen, but it is also a necessary ingredient in the process of building the character of Christ in us. *Opposition* is a necessary ingredient for building the muscle of strong Christian character. The process would be impossible, of course, without the operation of the Holy Spirit through the Blood of Jesus, but adversity is an ingredient that He uses to train us.

The Scriptures make it very clear that we are not redeemed from all suffering, but rather we are called to it! We should never make an effort to produce suffering; we are to resist the devil always. When we know that we are yielded to the Lord and the suffering seems unavoidable, we must bear it patiently. If we find the mind of God in our suffering, we can even experience a certain joy of yielding to Him in the middle of it all.

²⁰[After all] what kind of glory [is there in it] if, when you do wrong and are punished for it, you take it patiently? But if you bear patiently with suffering [which results] when you

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do right and that is undeserved, it is acceptable and pleasing to God.

²¹For even to this were you called [it is inseparable from your vocation]. For Christ also suffered for you, leaving you [His personal] example, so that you should follow in His footsteps.

—1 Peter 2:20–21 (AMP)

We are not to shrink back from difficulties (Hebrews 10:38). To do so is certainly not pleasing to God, and in fact *can* invoke His wrath. When we courageously endure we prove outwardly the sanctification that He is working in us within.

¹So, since Christ suffered in the flesh for us, for you, arm yourselves with the same thought and purpose [patiently to suffer rather than fail to please God]. For whoever has suffered in the flesh [having the mind of Christ] is done with [intentional] sin [has stopped pleasing himself and the world, and pleases God],

²So that he can no longer spend the rest of his natural life living by [his] human appetites and desires, but [he lives] for what God wills.

—1 Peter 4:1–2 (AMP)

²And we sent Timothy, our brother and God's servant in [spreading] the good news (the Gospel) of Christ, to strengthen and establish and to exhort and comfort and encourage you in your faith,

³That no one [of you] should be disturbed and beguiled and led astray by these afflictions and difficulties [to which I have referred]. For you yourselves know that this is [unavoidable in our position, and must be recognized as] our appointed lot.

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

⁴For even when we were with you, [you know] we warned you plainly beforehand that we were to be pressed with difficulties and made to suffer affliction, just as to your own knowledge it has [since] happened.

—1 Thessalonians 3:2–4 (AMP)

God does not produce suffering. Rather, there is a *ravenous creature* roaming the earth who does so continuously. In fact, that is his most treasured vocation! But, the Lord does precisely monitor his access to us, and even causes the otherwise horrible events he causes to work in our favor in the end (Romans 8:28).

⁸Be well balanced (temperate, sober of mind), be vigilant and cautious at all times; for that enemy of yours, the devil, roams around like a lion roaring [in fierce hunger], seeking someone to seize upon and devour.

⁹Withstand him; be firm in faith [against his onset—rooted, established, strong, immovable, and determined], knowing that the same (identical) sufferings are appointed to your brotherhood (the whole body of Christians) throughout the world.

¹⁰And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace [Who imparts all blessing and favor], Who has called you to His [own] eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will Himself complete and make you what you ought to be, establish and ground you securely, and strengthen, and settle you.

—1 Peter 5:8–10 (AMP)

More than once Scripture refers to us as *soldiers*, *athletes*, and *farmers*. Descriptions are also given of *boxing*, *wrestling*, *running*, and competing for a prize or a crown.

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³Take [with me] your share of the hardships and suffering [which you are called to endure] as a good (first-class) soldier of Christ Jesus.

⁴No soldier when in service gets entangled in the enterprises of [civilian] life; his aim is to satisfy and please the one who enlisted him.

⁵And if anyone enters competitive games, he is not crowned unless he competes lawfully (fairly, according to the rules laid down).

⁶[It is] the hardworking farmer [who labors to produce] who must be the first partaker of the fruits.

⁷Think over these things I am saying [understand them and grasp their application], for the Lord will grant you full insight and understanding in everything.

⁸Constantly keep in mind Jesus Christ (the Messiah) [as] risen from the dead, [as the prophesied King] descended from David, according to the good news (the Gospel) that I preach.

⁹For that [Gospel] I am suffering affliction and even wearing chains like a criminal. But the Word of God is not chained or imprisoned!

¹⁰Therefore I [am ready to] persevere and stand my ground with patience and endure everything for the sake of the elect [God's chosen], so that they too may obtain [the] Salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with [the reward of] eternal glory.

¹¹The saying is sure and worthy of confidence: If we have died with Him, we shall also live with Him.

¹²If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny and disown and reject Him, He will also deny and disown and reject us.

—2 Timothy 2:3–12 (AMP)

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

When God calls on us to endure suffering, we must take care that we submit to it as to the discipline of a loving father (Hebrews 12:3–13). If an athletic coach sees potential in his first team and makes them practice harder and longer than the second team, it would be foolish to attribute it all to indifference or a grudge punishment. The book of Proverbs has a strong theme that a wise person appreciates honest and competent correction.

¹WHOEVER LOVES instruction and correction loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is like a brute beast, stupid and indiscriminating.

—Proverbs 12:1 (AMP)

²⁰A man who is held in honor and understands not is like the beasts that perish.

—Psalm 49:20 (AMP)

We must also be careful to appreciate the fact that we are a part of this fallen creation for one lifetime only. We cannot build the muscle of Christian character once we have left this life and are in a place that has no weights to lift—no opposition or enemy of any kind. The character we leave this planet with is the full measure of character we will have for all eternity. It is one aspect of our crown and reward, and it will define our identities forever. It is the *measuring stick* of our “overcoming” in this life and is the gauge that defines our inheritance in accordance with the rich promises to the church so heavily emphasized in Revelation 2–3.

This does not mean that any part of an inheritance is obtained by our works, for Jesus said that the work God asks of

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us is to believe on the Messenger He sends (John 6:29). All of our inheritance is free! All that is required is that we yield to the process ordained by God to prepare us for all that He wants to give. This is why He sent the Holy Spirit to us! It is He who first convicts us of our need for Jesus and then leads us on to realize the fulfillment of our precious, blood-bought promises.

¹²Now we have not received the spirit [that belongs to] the world, but the [Holy] Spirit Who is from God, [given to us] that we might realize and comprehend and appreciate the gifts [of divine favor and blessing so freely and lavishly] bestowed on us by God.

—1 Corinthians 2:12 (AMP)

It behooves us to get to know our Comforter well and to cooperate with Him fully as He works to fulfill His mission here—to lead us into all that Jesus intends for us to have. The entire purpose of our lives is to cooperate fully with God as He molds us (and others) into what He wants us to be. We should do this out of a desire to please Him by becoming all that He intends us to be.