

Suffering in the Life of a Believer

The Following Articles are Excerpts from

“A Book of Bible Study”

Copyright 2014 by Joseph F. Harwood

<https://www.abookofbiblestudy.net/>

joseph.f.harwood@gmail.com

[Scripture quotations taken from the NASB](#)

One of the most difficult things for believers to understand and to come to terms with is why our sovereign and all-powerful God would allow suffering to affect our lives, when surely He could prevent it from happening. When things are going well for us, we may not have much interest in what the Bible has to say about suffering affecting our lives. However when suffering does come upon us, we will bring our troubles to our God and Father in prayer, asking Him why He has allowed these hard and painful things to touch our lives, bringing sorrow and grief. There are insights given to us in the Bible as to why such things are allowed to happen.

In the light of many Old Testament passages, we can see that God promises His blessings for obedience to His commands and punishment for disobedience. Also in the light of numerous New Testament passages, believers are warned that disobedience to God's commands will bring His discipline into our lives, which as the writer of Hebrews said, is sorrowful (Hebrews 12:11). With these things in mind it is easy for us to understand that disobedience to God's commands will bring suffering upon us.

However as we will see from our study of the Scriptures, the matter of suffering touching the lives of believers is more complex than the simple notion that sufferings and trouble come only into the lives of those who have sinned. There are times when God allows various sufferings and hardships to affect our lives, and we will not be able to see any connection between these difficulties and some sin in our lives. And in fact, there may be no connection at all.

The Origin of All Suffering

In Genesis 3, we learn that suffering in all its' forms entered the world at the time of the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. There was no suffering in the world until the time that Adam and Eve yielded to Satan's temptation to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which God had told them not to eat. He had provided many other trees in the garden from which they could eat, but He told them they must not eat the fruit of this one tree, or they would surely die.

At the point in time when Adam and Eve yielded to the devil's temptation and ate the fruit which God had forbidden them to eat, sin came into the world. And with sin came suffering and death, which are the consequences of sin.

Every man born into the world from the time Adam and Eve sinned is born as a slave of sin and in need of a Savior. In Romans 5:12-19, the Apostle Paul taught about the fall of man. He explained that just as sin came into the world through one man, Adam, and one sin of Adam's brought death and condemnation to every man, so also through one Man, Jesus Christ, and His one act of righteousness, God's grace would overflow to many, resulting in justification that brings life.

Satan, or the serpent, would strike the heel of Jesus, but Jesus would crush the head of Satan. This prophecy was made about Jesus in Genesis 3:15, and it was fulfilled in His victory over Satan at Calvary, "and by His scourging we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). Everything that Jesus suffered, He suffered as a result of the activity of Satan. And at the same time, everything He suffered came about according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God the Father (Acts 2:23).

Likewise, all of the sufferings that touch our lives as God's people are the result of the activity of Satan. He acts directly by causing such things as various physical infirmities, and he also acts indirectly through his temptation of men. If he

acts through an unbeliever, then he is acting through those who belong to him, who are his children (John 8:42-47). They are slaves of sin, and they can do nothing else but sin. He also tempts God's children to sin.

Jesus described Satan as a thief, who comes only to steal, to kill, and to destroy. This is the bad news. However, for believers there is Good News: Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8), and He did so in order that His blessed people may have life, and have it abundantly (John 10:10). This good news was accomplished for us through the sufferings He endured, according to His Father's will for His life.

Jesus Characterized the Lives of His Blessed People

In Luke 6 there is a passage that many of us will consider to be baffling. At the time that Jesus gave this teaching, a large group of His disciples and many others had gathered to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases. As we study this passage, we can begin to see that the ways of God are contrary to the ways of the world and the understanding of men. Beginning in Luke 6:20 we read:

And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He began to say, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.

"But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way." (Luke 6:20-26)

Many of us might reason that things appear to be backwards in this passage. Contrary to what Jesus taught, most of us will see no blessing at all in being poor, hungry, or in mourning. And at the same time, we would consider that those who are blessed would obviously be those who are rich and well fed, and who enjoy their comforts and consolations in this life. However in Jesus' teaching here, we see that such is not the case. God's thoughts and His ways are not like the

thoughts, ways, and understanding of men, as we learn in the book of Isaiah where God spoke through the prophet saying:

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD.
“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways
And My thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9)

God has different thoughts about the blessing of His people, and He has different ways in which He will bring these blessings to pass. We will soon see revealed through several passages of Scripture the ways that God has chosen to bring about the eternal blessing of His people together with His Son.

A Principle at Work in the Life of Every Believer

When the time of His crucifixion was drawing near, Jesus spoke to His disciples saying:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.” (John 12:24-26)

Jesus was at the point of fulfilling His Father’s will and purpose for His life by dying on Calvary’s cross to become the atoning sacrifice for the sins of all whom the Father has given to Him (John 6:37). It was at this time that He gave us one of the most profound revelations in the entire Bible.

Using a single grain of wheat as a metaphor to symbolize His life and the lives of all who will follow Him, Jesus revealed the universal principle of spiritual fruit bearing that has been ordained by His Father. He taught His disciples that unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it will remain only a single grain of wheat, bearing no fruit at all. But if it dies, it will bear much fruit.

Jesus first applied this analogy of the fruitful grain of wheat to His life, in order to symbolize the fruit that would be born through the suffering that He would endure according to His Father’s plan and purpose for His life, whereby many

would be brought to glory. And then He said to His disciples: “If anyone serves Me, ***he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also...***” (John 12:26, emphasis added). With these words, Jesus revealed to His disciples that the same principle of spiritual fruit bearing that was at work in His life would also be at work in their lives as well.

We have by God’s grace been called to faith in His Son Jesus Christ, and with that calling we have been given the privilege of serving Him. God has ordained that everyone who serves His Son must follow Him. ***Just as Jesus submitted Himself to His Father’s will for His life, even to the point of death on a cross, we will follow Him in that we also will be called upon to submit to the plan and purpose of God for our lives, “dying” to our own will and what we would choose for ourselves, in order that God’s will and purpose for our lives will be accomplished.*** And it will be through this “death” that we will bear spiritual fruit to the glory of God, according to the principle that Jesus taught in John 12:24.

Nowhere is this death to one’s own will and complete submission to the will of God more supremely demonstrated than in the life of Jesus Christ Himself. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to His Father that the cup He was about to drink might pass from Him. This cup was the crucifixion that He was about to endure in order to obtain salvation for His people.

Being God (John 1:1), Jesus knew what lied ahead for Him (John 12:23). And at the same time being man (John 1:14), we can imagine how He must have dreaded it. He knew that all things are possible with God, and He prayed that the cup of suffering and death He faced might be taken away from Him. However, as He always did, He submitted Himself to His Father’s will (Matthew 26:39, 42).

After praying three times for His Father to remove the cup of suffering that He was about to drink, Jesus received His answer. His Father would not remove His cup of suffering. It was His Father’s will that He suffer and die on Calvary’s cross in order to bring many sons to glory (Matthew 26:45-46, Hebrews 2:10).

At this point in our study, some of us will note that we have already established that all suffering comes about through the activity of the devil. But as we have seen revealed in John 12:24-26, spiritual fruit which glorifies God is itself born through suffering that comes about according to His sovereign will, plan, and purpose. (Consider also 1 Peter 4:12-19). In this apparent contradiction we begin to learn that all things, even the activity of the devil, will be made to serve God and to work together for the good and ultimate glory of His people (Romans 8:28).

As we study John 12:24-26, we should not overlook what Jesus said in verse 25: “He who loves his life loses it, and he who *hates his life in this world* will keep it to life eternal.” (Emphasis added). As we read this verse, we may notice similarities in John 12:25 and Jesus’ teaching in Luke 6:20-26. Such teachings are hard for all of us to understand. We might wonder why Jesus said these words, and what they could mean for us as His people.

As we consider the meaning of John 12:25, let us look again at John 12:24 where Jesus taught us that no fruit will be born apart from the “death” of the grain of wheat. That grain of wheat symbolizes our lives and all that we want for ourselves in this life. Dying to our own will and what we want for ourselves is suffering; it is to take up our cross and follow Jesus.

The things that we want may be completely honorable, with no sin in them at all. However God may will other things for our lives, things that run contrary to what we want for ourselves, but will result in fruit born to His glory. And He will bring these things to pass in our lives, as He has ordained them for each of us.

With John 12:24 in mind, we could understand Jesus’ words in John 12:25 as saying that the sufferings that bear fruit in the Christian life could at times make a believer even “hate” or despair of his life in this world. The Apostle Paul shared one such experience that he had in his own life, even as he was obeying God in doing the work that He had assigned for him. Paul wrote: “For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, *so that we despaired even of life*; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead....” (2 Corinthians 1:8-11, emphasis added).

This experience of Paul’s was for him a share in the suffering, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Through this experience and others, Paul “followed” Jesus in the way and in the measure that God had ordained for his life. And through his suffering he bore the fruit that would come as God’s people take comfort and are edified by his words as he recounted his experience. (Consider also 2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

As we further consider Jesus’ words in John 12:25, we can see that the original Greek word that is translated as “hates” in this verse could also be translated as “loves less”. With this latter translation in mind, we could also rightly

interpret this verse as teaching that as followers of Christ, we will be called upon to “love less” our own life and our own desires, hopes and plans for our lives, when compared to our love for and submission to the will of God, and whatever His will for our lives may involve.

This kind of submission to God’s will is something that He works to bring about in our lives as His people, and it is something that only He can bring about. This is the kind of submission to the will of God that Jesus demonstrated when He prayed to His Father three times that the cup of suffering He was about to drink at Calvary would be taken from Him, but ultimately He yielded Himself and His life to His Father’s will when He prayed: “Yet not as I will, but as you will.” (Matthew 26:39).

As we consider John 12:24-26, all believers are filled with thankfulness for the suffering and sacrifice that Jesus Christ endured on our behalf, according to His Father’s will for His life. At the same time, one of the hardest teachings in the Bible for us to accept is given to us in these verses, where Jesus revealed that all of us who serve Him must follow Him in His death, dying to what we would choose for ourselves in this life, in order that God’s will for our lives will be done, just as it was in His.

Practically speaking in terms that we can more easily understand, as we walk in obedience to God, and the circumstances and conditions of our lives unfold, we will at times experience the “death”, or the loss, of things that we wanted to have, or keep, or experience for ourselves, as God has ordained them for each of us individually. As these things happen, we will suffer because of them. And God our Father calls upon each of us to accept these things as His sovereign will for our lives, just as Jesus did when He prayed: “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will”.

These “deaths” will come about in our lives in the ways and in the measure that God determines for each of us. And it will be through these “deaths” that we will follow Jesus, experiencing in some measure a share in His sufferings as we also are called upon to submit to our Father’s will and plan for our lives.

Just as Jesus bore fruit through the suffering and sacrifice that God had ordained for His life, so also in our lives, spiritual fruit will be born through the suffering and sacrifice that God has ordained for each of us. As believers we will all be called upon to follow God’s Son in His death, which is a death to own will

and what we would choose for ourselves, and the acceptance of that which God chooses for us.

This is one of the most difficult teachings in the Bible for many to accept, and it is a teaching that many will very much want to deny and explain away. And maybe we could explain it away, if only this same teaching did not appear in numerous places elsewhere in the Bible.

All true wisdom is to be found in the teachings of the Holy Bible. And there is no greater wisdom or depth of insight than that which is given to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus' teaching in John 12:24-26 revealed the principle of spiritual fruit bearing that was at work in His life, and this same principle has always been, and will always be, at work in the lives of every one of God's people until the time of Jesus' second coming.

In later chapters we will see this principle at work in the lives of God's servants, even from the book of Genesis. Though we may not be able to see or understand how anything good at all could possibly come from the sufferings and losses that our sovereign God has allowed to touch our lives, the Scriptures reveal to us that through our sufferings we will indeed bear fruit, and we will one day realize a share in the eternal glory of His Beloved Son.

Suffering in the Life of a Believer – Part 2

Previously, we saw that in John 12:24 Jesus taught His disciples about spiritual fruit bearing using a grain of wheat as a metaphor. He said that unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and "dies", it will remain only a single grain of wheat, bearing no fruit at all. But if it dies, it will bear a harvest of much fruit. As this metaphor applied to Jesus' life, we know that the fruit born as a result His death referred to the many who would receive the forgiveness of their sins, reconciliation to God, and eternal life through His sacrifice at Calvary.

This much of His teaching is easy for us to accept, because we are the beneficiaries of His suffering and sacrifice. However after Jesus gave this teaching, He revealed in John 12:26 that *all of us who serve Him must follow Him*, and He also said that *where He was, His servants also would be*.

With these words, Jesus taught that spiritual fruit will be born in our lives just as it was in His life. This is to say that we will bear fruit as we follow Jesus in His death, which is a death to our own will and what we want for ourselves in this life and the obedient acceptance of God's will and the life and place of service that He has ordained for us.

As God our Father determines for each of us, we will "follow" Jesus, and we will "be where He was", in that we also will experience our own "Gethsemanes" in some measure, however small when compared to His suffering in the Garden as He agonized over His Father's will for His life. Our "Gethsemanes" will be the times when we are faced with suffering in our lives. In these times we also, just as Jesus did, will bring our prayers to our sovereign God, knowing that all things are possible for Him and knowing that He could spare us from these painful things. And in these times we also will be called upon to submit to the will of God for our lives, just as Jesus was.

And as God our Father determines for each of us, we will "follow" Jesus, and we will "be where He was", in that we also will experience our own "Calvaries" in some measure, however small when compared to the suffering that He endured at Calvary. Our "Calvaries" will be the "deaths" that we experience through the losses and sufferings that our Father allows to affect our lives, according to His sovereign will and plan for each of us.

The Apostle Paul Echoes Jesus' Teaching

There is no clearer summation of Jesus' teaching in John 12:24-26 than the teaching of the Apostle Paul recorded in Romans 8. Paul taught that as God's children, we are "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, *if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.*" (Romans 8:17, emphasis added).

God has ordained that every one of His children must follow His Son and be where He was (again John 12:26), in that we must, and we will indeed "suffer with Him", or share in His sufferings, in order that we may also share in His

eternal glory. With this teaching, given to us first by Jesus and then affirmed by Paul and other New Testament authors as well, we are given the reason for many of the sufferings, afflictions, losses, and troubles that come into our lives as believers, even as we walk in obedience to the word of God.

As young believers, many of us imagine that once we turn from what the Bible tells us is sin that our life will become much easier, and we will obtain release from many of our difficulties. We may also imagine that God will then “bless” us with many of the things that we desire for ourselves in this life.

Obedience to God’s word will eliminate the suffering brought about by the consequences of sin. However at the same time, we can see from John 12:24-26 and Romans 8:17 that God has ordained that every believer must follow Jesus, experiencing in some measure a share in His sufferings. Though we may not understand it, and we will surely not like it, the Scriptures reveal to us that this is the path that God has chosen through which every believer will bear fruit, and thereby share in Christ’s eternal glory.

The death of the grain of wheat that Jesus spoke about in John 12:24 is the death, or relinquishing, of our own hopes, dreams, aspirations, plans and desires for our lives, and the acceptance of that which God chooses for us. It is being willing to do without anything that God may choose to withhold from us and anything that He may choose to take from us.

With this death to our own will and desires, we are called upon to accept God’s will for our lives as Jesus did when He prayed to the Father: “Yet not as I will, but as you will”. Through our obedient submission to the word of God and the sovereign will of God for our lives, we will experience reflections of Christ’s sufferings in our own lives, “becoming like him in his death” as Paul wrote in Philippians 3:10. God our Father has ordained just what these sufferings will be for each of us, and to what extent we will share in the sufferings of His Son Jesus Christ during our present lives.

A Lesson on the Road to Jerusalem

In Mark 10:35-40, Jesus gave His disciples another teaching that is in complete agreement with His teaching in John 12:24-26. As they were on their way to Jerusalem, James and John came to Jesus with a request. They wanted Him

to grant to them that one of them would sit at His right hand and the other at His left in His glory.

With this request, James and John were asking Jesus for the places of highest glory and honor in Heaven, being seated next to Jesus Himself. Jesus responded to them saying: “You do not know what you are asking... Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” (Mark 10:38).

The “cup” or the “baptism” that Jesus spoke about was the cup or baptism of suffering that He had already experienced in part as He walked in obedience to His Father’s will for His life. His sufferings would later reach their apex as He submitted to His Father’s will even to the point of death, dying on Calvary’s cross to become the atoning sacrifice for the sins of His people (Matthew 1:21, John 10:11, 14-15).

When James and John brought their request to Jesus, they had no idea that their future glory in the kingdom of Heaven could be realized only if they experienced a share in His sufferings. Even though Jesus knew that they did not yet understand these things, He told them that they would indeed drink from His cup and be baptized with His baptism, sharing in His sufferings in order that they would also receive a share in His glory, all according to God’s particular plan and purpose for their lives.

At times in our lives, especially as young believers, we might pray to be used of God for some great purpose of His. God answers these prayers according to His will for our lives, even though we may have no idea or understanding at the time that our request will require of us that we drink from the cup or be baptized with the baptism of the sufferings of His Son, Jesus Christ. These sufferings will involve the “death”, or the relinquishment, of our own desires and plans for our lives and possibly the relinquishment of many of the “good things” that we hoped God would bless us with in this life, if He should require it of us.

To Take up Our Cross and Follow Jesus

In Luke 9:23-24 Jesus said: “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who

will save it.” We might wonder what Jesus meant by this teaching, and what His words could mean for us as His disciples today.

During Jesus’ lifetime on earth the cross was widely understood to be an instrument of death. To deny ourselves and take up our cross to follow Jesus means two things. First, we must deny ourselves, or “die” to, anything that is in violation of God’s word, or that which the Bible calls sin. Secondly, we will be called upon to deny ourselves, or “die” to, the desire for anything that God may choose to take or withhold from us as part of His will and plan for our lives.

In Luke 14:27 Jesus said: “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.” A few verses later He also said: “So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not *give up all* his own possessions.” (Luke 14:33, emphasis added).

Jesus taught us again in these two verses from Luke 14 that in order to follow Him, we must give up, or die to, all that we had hoped to be in this life, and all that we had hoped to have or experience or accomplish in our lives, if God our Father should require it of us. In place of what we would have chosen for ourselves, God calls upon us to submit to the life, place of service, and purpose that He has ordained for us.

This purpose of God’s, this place of service that He has ordained for us, will be revealed by the circumstances of our lives that unfold as we walk in obedience to His word. All of the limitations, the difficulties, the hardships of all kinds, and all of the seemingly “good things” that are out of reach for us are all part of our sovereign God’s plan for our lives. Jesus calls upon us to take up our cross daily, which is to “die” to, or give up, what we want for ourselves, and to embrace the life and place of service that God our Father has assigned for us. As we do so, we “lose our lives” for Jesus (Luke 9:24).

David wrote of the limitations that God places in the lives of His people in order to bring us to the place of service that He has ordained for us. In Psalm 139 we read:

You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain. (Psalm 139:5-6)

And a few verses later in Psalm 139, David wrote of the sovereignty of God in everything that comes to pass in our lives:

...all the days ordained for me
were written in your book
before one of them came to be. (Psalm 139:16)

God has a particular plan and purpose for each of us as His people. The circumstances that our sovereign God allows into our lives “hem us in”, so to speak, and limit us. They channel us or guide us into the life and place of service that He has ordained for us.

Dying to, or relinquishing, whatever God may choose to take or withhold from us, and accepting God’s will and purpose for our lives, is the principle of spiritual fruit bearing that was at work in Jesus’ life, and this same principle will also be at work in the lives of all of us who follow Him. This is the teaching given to us in John 12:24-26, and in several other passages of Scripture as well.

There will be no fruit born without the death of the “grain of wheat”, that grain of wheat symbolizing our lives and all that we had hoped to have for ourselves in this life. Dying to what we want and obediently accepting God’s assignments in life is what it means to deny ourselves, and to take up our cross and follow Jesus.

We will all be called upon to submit ourselves to God’s plan for our lives as we experience our share in the sufferings of His Beloved Son in the ways and in the measure that God Himself has ordained for each of us. All of the losses and limitations that we experience are a part of God’s sovereign will for our lives. All of the things that we had hoped to have for ourselves in life, but we find that these things are simply out of reach in our case and unattainable for us – all of these things are a part of God’s plan for our lives. And He has promised us that all of these things are working together for our good and for our future glory together with His Son (Romans 8:28).

If we are honest about Jesus’ teaching in Luke 9:23-24, 14:27, and 14:33, then we must admit that the Gospel message is not one that will have broad appeal. Men do not want to hear that they must deny themselves and give up everything they have in order to be Jesus’ disciples. They want to hear about how serving God will get them more of what they want out of life, and there are many who will gladly take their money in return for telling them such things. Paul warned us that

these things would happen when he wrote: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Notwithstanding all of men’s distortions, fabrications, and myths, the words in these passages of Luke 9 and 14 are Jesus’ words, and men will either accept them as the truth, or they will deny them. Every Christian should understand that it has been granted to us not only to believe the Gospel message, but God has also ordained that we will all, by His grace and through his working in our lives, take up our cross and follow Jesus (Philippians 1:29) .

Blessed Encouragement

In Romans 8 Paul wrote: “And we know that God causes ***all things*** to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28, emphasis added). When Paul taught that God causes all things to work together for the good of His people, he meant even the hard and painful things: the distresses, infirmities, losses, troubles, and hardships of ***all*** kinds that God allows to affect the lives of His people.

It can be very difficult for us to come to terms with sufferings and losses that our sovereign God allows to affect our lives apart from any wrongdoing of our own. However, it is precisely these sufferings that are for believers a share in the sufferings of Christ. These are sufferings that God allows and actually ordains that we are to endure as part of His plan for our lives, and they manifest themselves even as we walk in obedience to His word. These sufferings will be realized in our lives in the ways and in the measure that our sovereign God determines for each of us, and they will achieve for us a share in Christ’s eternal glory.

Even if we should find ourselves suffering as a consequence of our own wrongdoing, we as believers can take great comfort in knowing that ***all things*** will be made to work together for the good of those who love God. Such sufferings are for us the discipline of God, which serves to separate us from our sin and restore us to obedience so that we may be useful in His service and fruitful (Hebrews 12:1-13, 2 Timothy 2:19-21). As those who have been called to faith in Jesus Christ according to God’s eternal purpose, we have been given the blessed

encouragement and promise that every circumstance and condition of our lives will be made to work together for our eternal good and glory together with His Son.

Paul encouraged us again regarding the troubles of our present lives when he wrote: “Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Our troubles may seem anything but “light” to us, and they may persist for years or decades, making them seem far from “momentary”. But Paul taught us that the measure of glory that will be achieved for us through these troubles will far exceed the weight and burden of the troubles themselves. And when considered from the perspective of the eternal, all of our troubles are indeed momentary.

Paul comforted us with the understanding that God our Father has our future glory in mind in every circumstance and situation which He allows to affect our lives. He could not have written this had he not understood that all things, even the sufferings of this present life, are working together for the good and future glory of the child of God. Paul encouraged us again regarding the sufferings we endure when he wrote: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” (Romans 8:18).

In Conclusion

The Scripture passages that we have considered in John 12, Romans 8, Mark 10, Luke 9, and Luke 14 all teach us about the principle of spiritual fruit bearing that will be at work in the life of every believer. These Scriptures reveal that we must, and we will, as God will bring to pass in each of our lives, endure a share in the sufferings of Christ, becoming in some measure as He was: a man of sorrows who was familiar with suffering and grief (Isaiah 53:3). This share in Christ’s sufferings is the necessary path that God has ordained for His people whereby we will bear spiritual fruit, and thereby share in the glory of His Beloved Son for eternity.

For now, we will not like the fact that this principle is at work in our life. We might ask why does it have to be this way, and why can’t my life be filled with

“good things”, things that bring happiness and gratification in this life? When we find ourselves asking these questions, we should realize that the reasons for the way God has ordered His creation are not always within man’s ability to comprehend. When we find ourselves questioning God’s ways, let us call to mind once again Isaiah 55:8-9 where we learned that God’s ways and His thoughts are not like ours, but they are above the ways and thoughts of man.

Paul also taught us about the ways of God when he exclaimed: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!” (Romans 11:33). God’s ways and His thoughts are beyond the understanding of man. We cannot understand why God our Father has ordained that we must share in Christ’s sufferings in order to share in His eternal glory. However, it has been revealed to us through the Scriptures that indeed God has willed it to be so, and that this process will be at work in the life of every believer.

The writer of Hebrews taught us that God the Father ordained that His only begotten Son Jesus Christ, the first born among many brethren, the Author and Finisher of our salvation, would Himself be made perfect through sufferings. In Hebrews 2 we read: “For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.” (Hebrews 2:10).

These are God’s ways, and they are above our ways. God is working in the life of every believer to conform us to the image and likeness of His Son, as Paul taught in Romans 8:29. And as He does so, we will all in some measure drink from the cup that Jesus drank; we will all be baptized with the baptism of His sufferings. Knowing that God’s ways and thoughts are above ours, let us not question them. Rather let us be thankful that He has called us to be one of the many sons who will be brought to glory through the blood of Jesus Christ for the remission of our sins.

Paul encouraged us when he wrote: “For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:5). Things are hard for now, but the time is coming when our days of sorrow will end (Revelation 7:17, Isaiah 65:17-19). Let us look forward to the day when God will wipe away every tear from our eyes brought about as we shared in the sufferings of the Man of Sorrows (Revelation 21:4). Until that day comes for us, we can take comfort in Jesus’ promise of His grace and strength, which will be given to us in a measure sufficient for our every need and weakness, as Paul learned through his own affliction (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Jesus said: “Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.” (Matthew 10:29-31).

God is intimately familiar with everything that happens on earth and with every detail of our lives. Nothing in His creation, not even an event as small as the death of one sparrow, happens apart from His sovereign will. The things that happen to us happen as part of God’s will for our lives, and the Bible teaches us that through all of these things God is working for our good and for our eternal glory together with His Son.

Consistent with His teaching in Luke 6:20-26, Jesus taught us in John 16:20 that during this present time of our lives on earth, we as His people will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. This will be our experience as we share in His sufferings. But with these sufferings we have the promise that our Heavenly Father, the “Father of mercies and God of all comfort” will provide His comfort to us (2 Corinthians 1:3).

We can take comfort as believers, knowing that every wrong we have suffered, God will avenge, and that every affliction, difficulty, hardship or loss that God has allowed to touch our lives has eternal value. God is at work in our lives doing exactly what He said He would do in His Word: He is conforming each of us to the image of His Son Jesus Christ as He brings about in each of our lives a share in His sufferings. As we experience our share in Christ’s sufferings, we can be certain based on the authority of the Scriptures that these present sufferings will bring about for us eternal glory and reward.

Understanding this spiritual principle will not take away the pain we are enduring; we will still grieve and mourn as a result of our losses and troubles. However, it will provide for us some understanding as to why undeserved sufferings come into our lives as God’s people.

When we have suffered a great loss in life, and we feel ourselves doubting the love and the goodness of God, becoming angry and disillusioned over the suffering that has come upon us, let us realize that through the sufferings that our sovereign God has allowed to affect our lives, we have been brought into the company and fellowship of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ Himself. It has been granted to us not only to believe in Him, but also to experience “the power of His

resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Philippians 1:29, 3:10).

Through our sufferings we have also been brought into the company of the saints whose lives and experiences are recorded in the Bible. Their lives and what God chose to accomplish through their sufferings demonstrate the timeless and universal principle of spiritual fruit bearing that Jesus taught in John 12:24-26. Just as God brought forth life and good through the “death” that their sufferings wrought in their lives, so He will also do the same through the sufferings that we endure in our lives.

And also when we have suffered a great loss, let us run to the throne of grace, and let us avail ourselves of the mercy and help that is ours in Christ Jesus. The author of Hebrews encouraged us when he wrote: “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:15-16).

God did not spare His own Son from sufferings, and we can see from this passage of Hebrews that our faithful High Priest endured every form of temptation that we would endure. Jesus was “tempted in all things as we are”. This means that Jesus also endured the temptation to become angry and disillusioned with God His Father over suffering that He could have prevented in His life, but did not, according to His will, plan and purpose (Mark 14:33-36, Matthew 27:46).

God loves His people with an unfailing, unconditional, and everlasting love, and He will ***never*** let go of any of us, regardless of our failings during some time of great trial in our lives. We will demonstrate this conclusively from the Scriptures in chapters to come.

Only those who have been called to faith in Jesus Christ will one day realize a share in His glory, and the necessary path to this glory, as God has ordained it to be so, is a share in the experience and suffering of the Man of Sorrows, who was Himself familiar with grief. Until that day, let us rely fully upon the promises of God’s help, comfort, deliverance, provision, and sustaining grace, as they are given to us in His word. Let us also do as the author of Hebrews exhorted us: let us “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”