



Christian Living!

by Mark Brunner

“Waiting For God!” (James 5: 7-11)

Why do Christians have to suffer? Whether suffering is physical, emotional or both, it hurts. One thing we can be assured of, Christians will suffer and that suffering will temper us. God promises us that if we're patient in that suffering, He will bless us and we will grow in wisdom and strength because of it.

Christians will and do suffer every day. It's part of God's plan. Like the farmer who waits patiently for the right weather conditions to plant, cultivate and harvest his crops, we Christians must too be patient and wait on the Lord for Him to fulfill His promise to us. Ultimately, when the time is right, God will harvest His people and bring them into His harvest home for eternal safekeeping. However, we should also be aware that before this happens, it is likely that we will suffer many things on this earth. The farmer knows that it takes the wind to dry out his fields in the spring to allow cultivation. He also knows that it takes rain throughout the growing season to produce good crops. And, without the warmth of the sun, crops will not properly mature and produce the abundant harvest he has planned for. The farmer also knows that wind can destroy a field of ripening grain. Rain can wash out young sprouting plants and the sun can sap the soil of its precious moisture. The same elements that preserve and protect can also ruin and destroy. We must also be aware that in like manner God sends blessings and persecutions into our lives. Our jobs,

our church and even family relationships can often become a two edged sword. On the one hand blessing us and on the other disturbing and hurting us. If we wait patiently on the Lord, seeking His guidance and putting all of our trust in His love for us, even these “persecutions” are bearable because the ultimate result, a final harvest of eternal life, is awaiting every Christian who “waits on the Lord.”

Nonetheless, waiting does not imply inactivity. If a farmer sat idly by waiting for the harvest time, he would be sadly disappointed. No, a farmer knows that he needs to keep up with cultivation and fertilization to make his harvest grow and prosper. The abundance of his harvest may rest on his ability to control choking weeds and replenish precious minerals to the soil. Christians also need to recognize that they should not stand gazing into the sky awaiting Christ’s second coming. Like the farmer, we need to be anticipating that final harvest. We are God’s workers and He expects us to make that final harvest an abundant one. We need to be busy sowing the seed of God’s Word, cultivating it with our love, and fertilizing it with our devotion to serve others. Only then can the harvest be rich and bountiful. Both the farmer and the Christian must live by faith, looking toward the future reward for their labors. Wait on the Lord; the wait is worth it.

“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt 6:34)

“In The Arms of God!” (James 4: 1-6)

“Submit!” Not a word that many Americans value highly. We’re independent and submission to a foreign authority is out of the question and even submission to our own government is sometimes dubious. But, like everything, there is a time and a place for submission. The Bible asks this question, “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? . . . Submit yourselves, then to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.”

“Come near to God?” Does that mean that we are to boldly present ourselves to God and demand what is coming to us? Rather, the Bible is telling us to come

near to the Father in submission. Approach God through His Son Jesus Christ. Stand in His presence in submission with a joyful heart. Submission to God leads to blessings--of this there is no doubt. When we come before our Father with thanksgiving and praise, He will hear our prayers and He will heal our lives. When we kneel at the altar and receive Holy Communion, we are practicing Christian submission. The Lord blesses us with His forgiveness. When we sit at the feet of our parents and listen to their words, we are practicing Christian submission. The Lord uses them to pour out His blessings upon us. When a wife submits out of love to her husband and a husband to his wife, God's blessings descend upon them and their children. Parents remember that you are vessels of God's love and it is through you that he blesses your children and so you receive mutual blessings through one another. As we are not slaves to our God, but are declared free on account of Jesus, so we are not slaves to one another when we submit to one another. Rather, we are conquerors in this service and we take command of our lives. Children, submit to your parents and experience an outpouring of grace that can be gained nowhere else in this life. Realize that your parents are the closest thing to the Father you will experience on this earth. God channels His grace through them and longs for you to partake in it. It is yours for the taking. Simply submit and enter into a state of loving grace in the arms of your parent.

Remember, when we submit to one another out of love, not only will God bless us and bestow on us His richest grace, we will also put the devil to flight. Scriptures tell us, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Are you experience tumult in your life today? Could you use a break? Try "coming near to God" through worship, prayer and, yes, submission one to another. God longs to come near to us if only we would practice submission to Him through our worship and through our mutual submission. Come near to God this way, and he will come near to you.

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“Neither Riches Nor Fame!” (James 2: 1-7)

We live in a “choosing” culture. We have so many choices every day. We can choose the breakfast cereal we wish to eat in the morning, the news channel we would like to watch, the clothes to wear for the day, yes, even the automobile we ride in the morning. Choice is certainly a blessing; especially in the culture that we live in today where there are so many things to choose from. However, choice can sometimes get us into trouble. Choosing things indiscriminately like the wrong, unhealthy cereal to eat, improper viewing on our TV sets, immodest clothing or, yes, even the wrong vehicle to buy for our family driving needs, can cause us to sin and fall short of the mark God has set for us. Like with all the material things in life, God also gives us the freedom to choose our friends. Essentially, there is no sin in making this choice since there are people out there that God would wish us to avoid. However, choosing or favoring one person over another simply because we don’t like something about them isn’t what God had in mind.

It is our sinful nature to be selective when it comes to people. We like winners and people who are strong, bold and purposeful. Since we ourselves want to be identified with these characteristics, we are more comfortable associating with those who display these qualities. We tend to gravitate toward status, wealth and fame as the measurement of the man. These are the yardsticks by which the world measures “success.” However, these are not the yardsticks by which God measures souls. God treats all people equally--without discriminating. He gives to each as is His will. We will, therefore, always have the “have’s” and the “have-not’s” with us. It is God’s will.

Well, then, why is it really so bad to judge people by their wealth or status? Couldn’t that indicate that they have a great amount of wisdom or character? These are certainly qualities that reflect well on them and us. Yes, that is true; but it is equally possible that wealth and status could be the byproducts of chance or, perhaps, dishonesty. Only God can judge character and we should not put ourselves in that position by judging others with assumptive standards when we could be as equally wrong as right. It is also wrong to assume that a person is rich or famous because God has shown favoritism and we should, therefore, align ourselves with “God’s elect.” Riches and earthly blessings are

not a sign of God's blessings and approval. God promises neither riches or fame to anyone. He promises only Heaven for those who are faithful to Him. Fact is, the only thing that God really promises is that we WILL suffer for our faith and that we should be ready to die for it. Both rich and poor share in this promises equally.

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“In The Winner’s Circle!” (James 1: 12-18)

“I’m number 1.” Have you ever said that? It’s great to be in the winner circle; as it is an exciting place to be. We love to win and to be recognized for it. As Christians we also have an opportunity to experience the thrill of winning. Our goal is a crown of life. The Apostle James writes, “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.” The trials of this life represent a glorious goal for every Christian because when all of this is ended, we will stand in the winner’s circle, surrounded by the angels, standing in the presence of Jesus Christ. He will place a crown upon our heads and embrace us as brother and friend. This will be our ultimate “high” and nothing we can experience in this life can even come close to comparing.

But, why do we have to face so much temptation on this earth to secure that crown? We need to remember that temptations do not come from God. Rather, temptations come from within. Our own sinful nature works against us day and night to deny us that crown of life. The devil knows this and he places numerous prompts in our path; he seeks to bring out the evil in us to detour us from that straight and narrow course. Our own sinful nature and the devils plotting are what can do us in. Although God could prevent the devil from tempting us and He certainly could keep us from falling to the temptations of the world and our flesh, He, in His ultimate wisdom, has decided to allow these things so that they might serve to temper us and strengthen us. God is like a refiner who purified his gold by heating it and allowing it flow out of the crucible into the craftsman’s mold. Much work goes into the final precious

object. God has fitted each of us with just the right amount of molding and purification to fit His ultimate, molded plan for each of us. The refining will not end until we enter into eternal life with Him. Then, we will be complete and removed from the Craftsman's mold to be admired in Heaven for eternity.

We must never blame others and make excuses for our own failings. God doesn't tempt anyone for God cannot "know" or "be" evil. We can never shift the blame for sin from ourselves. Christians must accept responsibility for what they do wrong, confess their guilt, and ask for forgiveness. Only then can we share in the "first-fruits" of our salvation, the perfect and immaculate life of our savior Jesus Christ. Through our birth into eternal life and entrance into the winner's circle, we become the "first fruits" of Jesus Christ—the ultimate and pleasing sacrifice before the Father. We will, someday, stand in the winner's circle with the Savior who got us there, Jesus Christ. May we bask in the joy of that day eternally!

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“Let God Worry!” (James 1: 9 - 11)

The Bible tells us that the poor are not proud that they are not rich and therefore more highly regarded by God. And, the rich ought not to be proud that they have been so blessed materially keeping in mind that God does not regard riches in this world as important. Who has the easier task? Quite frankly, God blesses the poor in this instance with the easier task. Since the world condemns poverty and rewards wealth, the poor, at least, don't have to contend with the world in controlling their pride. They can seek God's wisdom less encumbered with the temptations to gain more wealth. The wealthy, on the other hand, must contend with the world's poor wisdom in this matter and with God's call to abandon the cares of this world for the glory of the next.

If the Lord has blessed you with little materially, thank Him for making the pathway to eternal life less cluttered by riches and material gain. The poor should be glad that riches mean nothing to God, otherwise these people would be considered unworthy. The rich, on the other hand, should also be glad that

money is meaningless to God because money is easily lost and riches fade. Rich and poor should be devoted to developing their spiritual lives above all things and God will take care of the rest. God is interested in what is lasting and not fleeting. Our faith is eternal and that is what God is continually at work on. He uses riches as a part of His design for you and me. In His wisdom He blesses some with great riches and others with little. Thanks be to God!

This is a difficult teaching. Most of us have been blessed to live in a nation that is materially very rich. We have the highest standard of living anywhere. The temptation to pursue riches is very strong in our land. “Invest wisely!” “Make your money grow!” “Think about your retirement now!” Whether its interest rates, cost-of-living adjustments, or capital drives, Americans are drowning in a sea of financial focus. Even the church is affected by this preoccupation. Is a remodeling project more important than outreach to the community? Are creature comforts a higher priority than reaping souls for Christ? Yes, even the church needs to sharpen its focus. The temptation is strong to think of “me” before we think of “them.” When you awaken tomorrow, check the content of your vault! No, not your safety deposit box or your savings account. Rather check the vault of faith known as the HEART! Is the vault of your heart filled with the riches that belong there? Is God’s Word deposited there every day? Are you adding to that account continually or is it depleted? Take stock in God’s Word today and let God worry about the stock market. So Shall it Be!

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