



Joni, Suffering And Our Pilgrim Fathers

Be changed by five transforming thoughts in five days

Grab a cup of coffee and have your online Bible and a new word page open for notes. Can I suggest you take five days to read and study each of the five transforming thoughts. resource. Come with me now into another world of hope rather than the despair often of the world, own flesh and the Devil. -Editor

Surprisingly Joni's robust theology of hope in suffering is not new; in fact Christians throughout the history of the Church enjoyed the same beliefs as Joni. Many of the founding fathers of America, men like Jonathan Edwards and Cotton Matther shared Joni's theology of suffering. They sailed from England were they where nicknamed Puritans. These men and women had an inspiring faith in a big strong loving Father God who through His Son Jesus Christ came to model suffering for us and so inspire us as we suffer. So to understand Joni and why she continues to be such an inspiration to Christian women who suffer worldwide we need to open our minds to what the Puritans passionately believed. The story of the Bible; the gospel of transforming grace changed their hearts to passionately pursue and enjoy God as they suffered. Will you pray with me now that their thinking would become yours, so changing you to know and enjoy God anew as you suffer.

A Prayer

"My Father God, thank you that you made me for a purpose and in your great love that includes my present suffering. Teach me now by your Holy Spirit to apply what I read so I can learn to enjoy you more in my suffering and so make you happy. Thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ who died and suffered for my autonomy. Help me to turn daily from my autonomy so Christ is King of my present suffering, in fact all my life. Help me also to trust Him completely for your forgiveness from my rebellion. Thank you that in Christ Jesus you treat that and me as "not guilty" I'm now your loved child with the certain hope of heaven when I die. Holy Spirit helps me to see my suffering through new eyes and so become more like Jesus Christ. Amen"

What motivated our Pilgrim Fathers?

The Pilgrim Fathers of the 1600's had a bigger vision of God than millions of us evangelical Christians enjoy today. Why is this and how can we recapture a bigger vision of God so our hearts too are refilled and ablaze with God instead of self-pity as we whether the storms of life? And how could they often welcome great personal suffering and endure it in away we find so hard? These questions and others we will attempt to answer from the writings of Thomas Watson, an outstanding Puritan preacher and pastor and John Owen. May God by His Spirit change us powerfully from the inside out as we study what this extraordinary Christian says about basic gospel themes. May these steel girders of truth transform our thinking and be life changing as we seek to glorify God in our suffering.

Our Pilgrim Fathers made the study of God a life long obsession because they found in their mediations on God's character in scripture a realm and sphere of enjoyment that was breath taking and that left the pleasures and pain of this world far behind them. They didn't have the distractions of TV or retail therapy to fill their minds. They learned the secret of daily enjoying God for who He is and in turn this put the trials and suffering of life into perspective. The pursued the God of the Bible with a vengeance and He blessed them beyond measure. They learned the secret of communion with God the father, Christ their High Priest and received for this daily

discipline in fillings and often-strong baptisms of the Holy Spirit. No wonder their writings still quicken and convict us hundreds of years after they were penned.

J.I.Packer says, “ The Puritans taught me to see and feel the transitoriness of this life, to think of it, with all it’s richness, as essentially the gymnasium and dressing-room where we are prepared for heaven, to regard readiness to die as the first step in learning to live. Here is an historic Christian emphasis – patristic, medieval, reformational, Puritan, evangelical – with which the Protestantism that I know has largely lost touch.

“The Puritans experienced systematic persecution for their faith; what we today think of as the comforts of home were unknown to them; their medicine and surgery were rudimentary; they had no aspirins, tranquilizers, sleeping tablets or anti-depressants, just as they had no social security or insurance; in a world in which half the adult population died young and more than half the children died in infancy, disease, distress, discomfort, pain and death were constant companions. They would have been lost had they not kept their eyes on heaven and known themselves as pilgrims traveling home to the Celestial City” 1.

What drove the Puritans to having such a big vision of God’s character? The simple answer is they took God at His word. In other words the overarching message of the Bible; the saving gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit was their interpreter of life. This gospel they drunk deeply from, they allowed it to pepper their minds and intoxicate their hearts so they blazed with hearts bursting with faith and hope in this sovereign loving God. No wonder their preaching was powerful and life changing. To read their sermons is to be transported to another world, heavy with God’s power and mercy and grace and the awesome wonder of the gospel.

This couldn’t help but produce in them a deep hatred of personal sin and a love and passion for Jesus Christ and their fellow man. It was that and more but amazingly the Puritan movement was essentially a revival movement generated by the Holy Spirit. God the Spirit took the great truths of justification by faith rediscovered at the Protestant Reformation and applied them to the minds and consciences of the next generation of Christian so they too sort to glorify God in the midst of their daily trials under this God’s loving eye. Gone was the legalism of works espoused by the tyranny of Catholicism.

Now they relished the liberty of the gospel and worshipped God in the beauty of holiness. They rejoiced that in Christ they where perfectly sanctified, forgiven of sins, right with God and sons and heirs of God the Father. Jesus Christ was their new advocate in Heaven. They enjoyed a spiritual unction, an anointing of the Spirit that transformed British society as they preached and wrote and lived for King Jesus. No wonder out of its womb came a John Bunyan and the Pilgrims Progress and a Jonathan Edwards and the great awaking of the 1700s in the U.K and America.

J.I.Packer also says; “California’s Redwoods make me think of England’s Puritans, another breed of giants who in our time have begun to be newly appreciated. As Redwoods attract the eye, because they overtop other trees, so the mature holiness and seasoned fortitude of the great Puritans shine before us as a kind of beacon light, overtopping the stature of the majority of Christians in most eras, and certainly in this age of crushing urban collectivism, when Western Christians sometimes feel and often look like ants in an anthill and puppets on a String.” 2

The Puritan preacher Thomas Watson says; “We glorify God, when we are God-admirers; admire His attributes, which are the glistening beams by which the divine nature shines forth; His promises which are the charter of free grace, and the spiritual cabinet where the pearl of great price is hid; the noble effects of His power and wisdom in making the world, which is called ‘the work of His fingers.’ Psalm 8:3. To glorify God is to have God –admiring thoughts; to esteem Him most excellent, and search for diamonds in this rock only.” 3

Five steel girders underpinned the heart both of Joni’s and Puritan thinking. For her now and them then these great truths gave them a rock solid foundation on which to base their faith and

give them hope in their suffering transformed their hearts to passionately pursue and enjoy God as they suffered. We need to rediscover the power of these truths for ourselves experimentally for in doing so they will strengthen your faith in God's sovereign purpose behind your suffering. Here are the five transforming thoughts to work through.

- Day 1. - God's Word gives you hope
- Day 2. - God's control of your life gives you suffering purpose
- Day 3. - Christ is your Prophet, Priest and King gives you comfort
- Day 4. - God can make sense of your suffering
- Day 5. - So think on heaven often

Day1. God's Word Gives You Hope

We live in a day when our minds are bombarded by images and information from the media that have no sanctifying influence on our walk as Christians. We desperately need to have our minds exposed, refilled and cleansed by the pure Word of God. Here the Puritans help us because they discovered in the Bible a continuous source of scared wisdom, hope and comfort for life that has a sanctifying and empowering effect on our hearts and minds.

"The Scripture appears to be the Word of God, by the matter contained in it. The mystery of Scripture is so abstruse and profound that no man or angel could have known it, had it not been divinely revealed. That eternity should be born; that he who thunders in the heavens should cry in the cradle; that he who rules the stars should suck the breasts; that the Prince of Life should die; that the Lord of glory should be put to shame; that sin should be punished to the full, yet pardoned to the full; who could ever have conceived of such a mystery, had not the Scripture revealed it to us? 4

"The mighty power and efficacy that the Word has had upon the souls and consciences of men. It has changed their hearts. Some by reading Scripture turned into other men; they have been made holy and gracious. By reading other books the heart may be warmed, but by reading this book it is transformed. 2 Corinthians 3:3. "Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistles of Christ, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God." The Word was copied out onto their hearts, and they were become Christ's epistle, so that others might read Christ in them. If you should set a seal upon marble, and it should make an impression on the marble, and leave a print behind, there would be a strange virtue in that seal; so when the seal of the Word leaves a heavenly print of grace upon the heart, there must needs be a power going along with that Word no less divine.

It has comforted their hearts. When Christians have sat by the rivers weeping, the Word has dropped as honey, and sweetly revived them. A Christian's chief comfort is drawn out of wells of salvation. Romans 15:4 "That we through comfort of the Scriptures might be given hope." When a pour soul has been ready to faint, it has had nothing to comfort it but a scripture promise. When our souls have been sick, the Word has revived it. 2 Corinthians 4:17 " Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

When it has been deserted, the Word has dropped as the golden oil of joy. Lamentations 3:31. "The Lord will not cast off for ever." He may change his providence, not his purpose; he may have the look of an enemy, but he has the heart of a father. Thus the Word has power in it to comfort the heart. Psalm 119:50. "This is my comfort in mine affliction; for thy word has quickened me."

As the spirits are conveyed through the promises of the Word. Now, the Scriptures having such an exhilarating, heart-comforting power in them, shows clearly that they are of God, and it is he that has put the milk of consolation into these breasts." 5

The Puritans were not arm chair students of the Word of God. They challenged each other to apply it for their spiritual good. Listen as they exhort us to be doers of God's Word and not merely hearers;

"If the Scriptures be of divine inspiration, they be exhorted to study the Scriptures. It is a copy of God's will. Be Scripture-men, Bible-Christians. "I adore the fullness of Scripture," says Tertullian. This blessed book will fill your head with knowledge; and your heart with grace.

There is a melody in Scripture. This is that blessed harp which drives away sadness of spirit. Hear the sounding of this harp a little. 1 Timothy 1:15. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;" He took not only our flesh upon Him but our sins. And Matthew 11:28 "Come to me, all you that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." How sweetly does this harp of Scripture sound, what heavenly music does it make in the ear of a distressed sinner, especially when the finger of God's Spirit touches this instrument!

Read the Bible with reverence. Think in every line you read that God is speaking to you. Read the word with affection. Get your hearts quickened with the Word; go to it to fetch fire. Luke 24:32 "Did not our hearts burn within us?" If we are deserted, here is spiced wine that cheers a heavy heart; if Satan pursues us, here is the sword of the Spirit to resist him; if we are diseased with sin's leprosy, here are the waters of the sanctuary, both to cleanse and cure.

Conform to Scripture. Let us lead Scripture lives. Oh that the Bible might be seen printed in our lives! Do what the Word commands. Let the Word be the sundial by which you set your life. What are we better for having the Scripture, if we do not direct all we do and say to it?

Day 2. - God's control of your life gives you suffering purpose

If the Puritans excelled in anything, it was surely their hunger to know the God of the Word. Literally 24/7 the spiritual Puritan had the character and doings of God on his mind. Why was this? Well as they daily studied and meditated on gospel themes in the Bible the Puritans discovered startling things about God's character lost in the Dark Ages but in God's providence rediscovered a century earlier through the reformation teaching and writings of a previous generation of giants in men like [Martin Luther](#) and [John Calvin](#).

In the 1600's in England the light still shined brightly with the glorious reformation truths of the gospel of God's sovereign grace. With its powerful emphases of our total depravity, God's unconditional election of us His people and Christ's death for us not the world coupled with God's irresistible grace in calling us to be saved from sin and hell plus our daily perseverance as Christians for heaven, it's not surprising in this rich gospel soil the Puritans hungered to know and worship this glorious and powerful God, the author and giver of their salvation. They lived humbled by God's grace alone seeing no goodness in them. Exercising daily faith in the person and work of Christ alone as found in the pages of scripture they grew strong in salvation and delighted in pursuing sanctification. Listen to Watson again on God;

"I think it hard for a person to be a natural atheist, he may wish there was no God, he may dispute against a Deity, but he cannot in his judgment believe there is no God, unless by accumulated sin his conscience be seared, and he has such a lethargy upon him, that he has sinned away his very sense and reason." 7

"We prove there is a Deity by our conscience. Conscience is God's deputy or vicegerent. Conscience is a witness of a Deity. If there were no Bible to tell us there is a God, yet conscience might. Conscience, as the apostle says. "Either accused" or excused" Romans 2:15. Conscience, being sinned against, spits fire in men's faces, fills them with shame and horror." 8.

“God is Spirit, so the rewards He gives are spiritual. As the chief blessings He gives in this life are spiritual blessings, Ephesians 1:3, not gold and silver; as He gives Christ; His love; He fills us with grace; so the main rewards He gives us after this life are spiritual, “a crown of glory that faded not away.” 1 Peter 5:4 Earthly crowns fade, but the believers crown being spiritual is immortal, a never fading crown. This may comfort a Christian in all his labours and sufferings; he lays out himself for God, and has little or no reward here; but remember, God, who is a Spirit, will give spiritual rewards, a sight of His face in heaven, white robes, a weight of glory. Be not then weary of God’s service; think of the spiritual reward, a crown of glory which faded not away.”⁹

Is God a God of infinite knowledge? Then there is comfort in respect of personal injuries. It is the saint’s lot to suffer. The head being crowned with thorns, the feet must not tread upon roses. If saints find a real purgatory, it is in this life; but this is their comfort, that God see what wrongs is done to them; the apple of His eye is touched, and is He not sensible of it? Cruel hands scourged Paul. 2 Corinthians 11:25. Believers are part of Christ’s mystical body; and for every drop of a saint’s blood spilt God puts a drop of wrath in His vial. 10

God is eternal; therefore He lives forever to reward the godly. Romans 2:17 “To them who seek for glory and honour, eternal life.” The people of God here are in a suffering condition. Acts 20:23 “Bonds and afflictions abide me.” The wicked are clad in purple, and fare deliciously, while the godly suffer. Goats climb upon high mountains, while Christ’s sheep are in the valley of slaughter. But here is the comfort, God is eternal, and He has appointed eternal recompenses for the saints. In heaven are fresh delights, sweetness without surfeit; and that which is the crown and zenith of heavens happiness, is, that it is ‘eternal.’ 1 John 3:15. ‘An eternal weight of glory.’ 2 Corinthians 4:17 The saints shall bathe themselves in the river of divine pleasure; and these rivers can never be dried up. Ps 16:11 ‘At thy right hand are pleasures evermore.’ There is peace without trouble, ease without pain, glory without end, ‘Ever with the Lord.’ 1 Thessalonians 4:17. Let this comfort the saints in all their troubles; their sufferings are but short, but their reward is eternal. Eternity makes heaven to be heaven; it is the diamond in the ring. Oh blessed day that shall have no night! The sunlight of glory shall rise upon the soul and never set! 11

If God’s decree were eternal and unchangeable, then God does not elect upon faith foreseen, as some maintain. ‘The children being not yet born, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, it was said, Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated.’ Romans 9:11,13. We are not elected for holiness, but to holiness Ephesians 1:4 If we are not justified for our faith, much less are we elected for our faith; but we are not justified for it. We are said to be justified through faith as an instrument in Ephesians 2:8, but not for faith as a cause, and, if not for faith, then much less elected. God’s decree of election is eternal and unchangeable, and therefore depends not upon faith foreseen. ‘As many as were ordained to eternal life, believed.’ Acts 13:48. They were not elected because they believed but they believed because they were elected. 12

God is all-powerful but saint is your lot one of weakness of grace and fear of falling away? I pray, but I cannot send out strong cries. I believe, but the hand of my faith shakes and trembles. Cannot God strengthen weak grace? “My strength is made perfect in weakness; most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” 2 Corinthians 12:9. 13

God is holiness. “Glorious in holiness.” Exodus 15:11 Holiness is the most sparkling jewel of His crown; it is the name by which God is known. Ps 111:9 “Holy and reverend is His name.” His power makes Him mighty, his holiness makes Him glorious. God’s holiness consists in holiness in His perfect love of righteousness, and abhorrence of evil. “Of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity.” Habakkuk 1:13.

God’s providence or His control over all events gave great comfort to the Puritans in their suffering. There was no place for the doctrine of chance as though events were random and had no order to them. Their belief that God was behind and in their suffering for good was a comforting teaching that grew out of their big views of God’s character. Listen to Watson;

There is no such thing as blind fate, but there is a providence that guides and governs the world. "The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." Proverbs 16:33

God orders every thing that happens, by the counsel of his will, for His own glory being the ultimate end of all His actions, and this is the center where all the lines of providence meet. The providence of God reaches all places, persons, and events, "I am God at hand, and not God afar off?" Jeremiah 23:23

"God's people are sometimes low. It seems to be out of order that they who are best should be in the lowest condition; but there is much wisdom in this providence. Perhaps the hearts of the godly are lifted up with riches, or success; now God comes with a humbling providence to afflict them and fleece them. Better is the loss that makes us humble than the success that makes us proud. If the godly were not sometimes afflicted, and suffer an eclipse in their outward comforts, how could their graces be seen, especially their faith and patience? If there was always sunshine we would see no stars; so if we should have always prosperity, it would be hard to see the acting of our faith. So we see God's providences are wise and regular, though to us they seem very strange and crooked."

Day 3. - Christ is your Prophet, Priest and King gives you comfort

There can be no doubt in Joni's early growth and development as a Christian the Lord Jesus Christ and his suffering for sinners played a crucial and life changing role. Again we see Joni is not alone in this, countless suffering saints have been comforted by the clear teaching of Scripture on the person and work of Christ for us.

Likewise the Puritans employed the grand themes of Christ's work for us to comfort, encourage and quicken them in their daily suffering. Three notable descriptions of Christ's work that found their genesis in Calvin's teaching found in his Christian manual; "The Institutes of the Christian Religion. They are the basic themes of;

See Christ as your Prophet

"The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet." Deut 18:15 This is spoken of Christ. There are several names given to Christ as Prophet; He is called 'The Counselor' in Isaiah 9:6. A lamp 2 Samuel 22:19, The Morning Star." Revelation 22:16 Christ is the one who," Opened their understanding," Luke 24:45 He not only "opened the scriptures but their understanding."

How does Christ teach us? He teaches us outwardly by His word, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet." Psalm 119:105 Inwardly by the Holy Spirit John 16:13.

What are the lessons Christ teaches us? To see our own hearts. The heart is a great deep, which is not easily fathomed, but when Christ teaches He removes the veil of ignorance and lights our hearts so he sees his vain thoughts. Next He teaches us the vanity of the creature

How does Christ's teaching differ from other teaching? Christ teaches the heart; "Whose heart the Lord opened." Acts 16:14. He gives us a taste for His word; If so be you have tasted that the Lord is gracious." 1 Peter 2:3. When Christ teaches us he makes us willing to learn. They say, "Come let us go up to the mountains of the Lord, and He will teach us of His ways and we will walk in them." Isaiah 2:3. When Christ teaches us he illuminates and quickens us, "I am the light of the world; he that follows Me shall have the light of life." John 8:12. When Christ comes with His light, there is the heart of spiritual life along with it.

How are we to make Christ our teacher? Not by making excuses that we are ignorant and dull. Knowledge is in Christ for us as milk in the breast for the child. Oh then go to Christ for teaching.

Christ delights in teaching the ignorant to get Himself more glory. "The eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.

Wait on the means of grace Christ has appointed. Christ speaks to us from heaven by His pastors, as the king speaks by his ambassador. Hebrews 12:25. The word preached is Christ's voice in the mouth of the pastor; so don't refuse to hear Christ speaking in the ministry of God's word; preaching.

Walk according to the knowledge you have. Use what little knowledge you have well and Christ will teach you more. "If any man will do His will, he will know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." John 7:17 It is an honour to have Christ for your teacher and not others, this is a matter of admiration and congratulation.

See Christ as your Priest

Why do you need Christ as your Priest? Because you are a sinner and need someone to offer up himself as a sacrifice to satisfy God's justice and bring you back into relationship with God by making constant intercession for you. Christ does two things for you as our priest. He provides satisfaction and intercession.

His satisfaction has two parts; He actively obeyed; "He fulfilled all righteousness." Matthew 3:15. Christ did every thing that the law required; His holy life was a perfect commentary on the law of God and He obeyed the law for us.

His passive obedience; our guilt being transferred and put to His account He suffered the penalty we deserve; he put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. The paschal lamb slain was a type of Christ who was offered up as a sacrifice for us. Sin could not be done away without blood. "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." Hebrews 9:22. Christ was not only a lamb without spot but also a lamb slain.

Is Christ our priest, who was sacrificed for us? Then see the endeared affection of Christ for us sinners. "The cross," says Augustine "was a pulpit in which Christ preached His love to the world." That Christ should die was more than if all the angels had been turned to dust; especially that Christ should die a criminal having the weight of all men's sins laid upon Him and that He should die for His enemies. Romans 10:10 The balm-tree weeps out its precious balm to heal those that cut and mangle it; so Christ shed His blood to heal those who crucified Him. He died freely. It is called the offering of the body of Jesus. Hebrews 10:10 Though His sufferings were so great that they made Him sigh and weep and bleed; yet they could not make Him repent. "He shall see the travail of His soul and be satisfied." Isaiah 53:11. Oh infinite amazing love of Christ! A love that passes knowledge! That neither man nor angels can parallel. Ephesians 3:19. How we should be affected with this love!

Let us apply this blood of Christ; though the medicine is made of the blood of Christ, it will not heal unless applied by faith. Faith makes Christ's sacrifice ours, "Christ Jesus my Lord." Philippians 3:8

Christ intercedes for us. "Who also makes intercession for us." Romans 8:34

He is faithful." It behooves Him to be like His brethren, that He might be a faithful high priest." Hebrews 3:5. He does not forget any cause He has to plead nor does he use any deceit in pleading. An ordinary attorney may leave out some word for his client but Christ is true to the cause He pleads. We may leave matters with Him, we may trust our lives and souls into His hands."

See Christ as your King

How does Christ execute the office of a King?

In subduing us to Himself, ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all His and His enemies. (Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 26.) [Hyperlink](#)

Jesus is a king of mighty renown; He has a kingly title. "High and Lofty." Isaiah 57:15

He has His ensigns of royalty; a crown is a symbol of royal power. He has his crown; Revelation 6:2. His sword, "Gird your sword upon your thigh." Psalm 45:3 . His scepter, "A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom." Hebrews 1:8. He has his coat of armour and inserts the lion in it. "The lion of the tribe of Judah." Revelation 5:5.

The text says He is "King of Kings." He is above all other kings and called, "The Prince of the kings of the earth." Revelation 1:5. He has to be for "By Him kings reign." Proverbs 8:15. Christ infinitely outshines all other princes; He has the highest throne, the largest dominions, and the longest possession. "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." Hebrews 1:8. He has many heirs, but no successors. Well may He be called "King of Kings" for He has unlimited power. The power of other kings is limited but Christ's power is unlimited. "Whatsoever He pleased, that He did, in earth and heaven and in the sea." Psalm 135:6.

In what sense is Christ your king, sufferer?

He is your personal king;

Because His kingdom is spiritual He rules in your heart Christian. King Jesus sets up his throne in your heart where no other king does. He rules your will and emotions; His power binds your conscience and subdues your lusts. "He will subdue our sins." Micah 7:19

He rules you by His laws, He makes the laws and by them He rules us. As the law of faith; "Believe on the Lord Jesus" And the law of holiness "Be holy in all your speech." 1 Peter 1:15 . Do you want Christ as your advocate to plead your case before God the Father will you have Him as your king to rule over you?

He rules you by his love. He is full of mercy as your king. He sheds abroad His love into your heart and rules you with His promises and precepts. This makes you become His volunteer so you're willing to pay your allegiance to Him. "Thy people shall be a willing people." Psalm 110:3

Therefore is no disparagement to serve Christ. He is your king and it's no dishonor to be employed in the king's service.

If Christ is your King, understand that all matters must one day be brought before Him. Christ has the power of life and death in His hand, "The Father has committed all judgment to the Son." John 5:22

If Christ is your King submit to Him. Many would have Christ as their Saviour but not their prince. If you will not have Christ to rule over you Never shall His blood save you.

Day 4. – God can make sense of your suffering - Hebrews 12:5-18

Joni has been able to make sense of her great suffering principally from the Word of God. Because the Pilgrim Fathers based their lives on the Word of God this helped them make sense of their suffering. The Puritan writer [John Owen](#) has written very helpfully from Hebrews 12:5-18 on how to make sense of our sufferings; discern if it is God's loving discipline. At first this may seem strange, even cruel of God our father to discipline us, but we need to rule it in or out for our own peace of mind and growth as Christians.

Lets look at what Owen says. His words here are modernized to help you get the impact of what he believes the writer to the Hebrews is here teaching us about the relationship between God's discipline and our present suffering.

"And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons:" Hebrews 12:5a

"What we don't keep at the front of our minds we forget. So it was with the Hebrews to some extent. Whether the words encouragement mean the words of Scripture or that they where encouraged makes little difference. To neglect the provision God has made in the Scriptures for our encouragement and comfort during difficulties amounts to a sinful forgetfulness and is very dangerous for our souls. The Scriptures are said to; "addresses you as sons." Why is this? Here are some reasons;

1. The Scripture is not a dumb or a silent letter as some blaspheme; they have a voice, and the voice of God Himself and if we don't hear the voice of God it is because of unbelief.
2. The word that was spoke ages ago to Solomon is spoken to these Hebrews because the Holy Spirit is always present in the word of God and speaks equally to the Church in all ages. He speaks to us as though it is the first time He spoke it. This should arrest us to give our complete attention to the Scriptures because it is the way God speaks to us.
3. The word "addresses" signifies that the Bible argues, pleads with us and even has a conference with us! It presses God's mind and will upon us.
4. How condescending and loving has God speaks to us as "sons. " What a father He is. This alone should move our minds to comply with His exhortation namely God's infinite condescension and love towards us as sons in all our trials and afflictions. God sees us going through suffering ready to through the towel in and so he says these comforting words; "sons."

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you." Hebrews 12:5b

We see in our sufferings, troubles and persecutions for the gospel, noting but men's anger and we think there is nothing in this. But they are God's loving discipline of us for our education and instruction in His family. We are cautioned not to despise this discipline; yes there may be few who do this but to take them seriously and fall into line with God's will in them is to despise them. So we are exhorted to "not lose heart when he rebukes you." This losing heart is in our minds and involves often complaining of our lose to others, neglecting daily prayer and reading and study of the Scriptures and misjudging God's deal with us in the severity of our trials, their length or his purpose in them.

"Because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Hebrews 12:6

"Because the Lord disciplines those he loves." We see the following;

1. God loves us before He disciplines us.
2. His discipline is an effect of love, it springs from His love therefore there is nothing judicial in our being disciplined. Remaining in a state of know and willful sin requires God's discipline because its purpose is to take away and subdue our sinning and in its place increase grace and holiness to us and in us.

3. God's love and our discipline can't be separated, there may be degrees, but you want escape it.
4. Because God's discipline is not judicial it proves we have been adopted into His family.
5. Because discipline is often the way God deals with us His children we must fall into line with His sovereign wisdom and "not lose heart."
6. None of us have reason to complain at God's discipline of us because this is the way God deals with all His children.

"And he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Hebrews 12:6

There is something here that is very interesting; the word "punishes" means discipline which is above the ordinary and is always used to express a high degree of suffering. The word "accepts" means special approval. So "everyone" is not to be understood universally for everyone is not punished but it is reserved for every son God especially accepts. This makes these words special; the writer is not repeating what he has just said. This is a great comfort to you child of God for when we are disciplined we need to acknowledge it's from God. Yes we may suffer were others of God's children are not but we mustn't become totally discouraged as Job and David were. But as we ponder His discipline; that God gives the severest trials to those He accepts and delights in, our response should be to lift our heads and rejoice in our tribulations.

"Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?" Hebrews 12:7

This patient enduring of God's discipline in your life is a great price in His sight. It's also useful to your soul because God proposes Himself to you as your father and not as a judge, not as a stranger as His child. This way of dealing with us speaks of God's relationship with us as our Father and us His children. There for He should discipline us when need and we should take it from Him. The Apostle illustrates this by teaching us that every wise, careful and tender father will when needed discipline His son or child.

"If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons." Hebrews 12:8

Discipline is so we learn and know how to live, but not all Christians experience this. The discipline they receive does them no good. But all sons are disciplined; if they are not then they aren't sons but bastards. Such don't have a right to receive an inheritance. We can't enjoy this inheritance without God's discipline so don't faint under God's heavy hand or live unwisely when it comes.

"Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness." Hebrews 12:9-10

It's the job of parents to discipline their children when necessary and of children to submit to their parents. This is so they will be convinced of the need to submit to God in all their afflictions and suffering. The apostle shows the difference between God's discipline and parent's discipline. He by whom we are disciplined is the "Father of spirits," and that "for our profit;" what God designs by the discipline shall certainly happen. Our profit is "that we may share in His holiness;" that is the holiness he requires of us and is pleased we do.

This holiness is putting to death our lusts and desires, the gradual changing of who we are, the setting apart of our souls to God and the need to keep going and increase of the things God has

designed in our discipline. Next to have a part in Christ's putting His righteousness to our account; this is the greatest privilege, honor, glory and benefit we can have a part of so we have no reason to grow wary of His discipline of us. What is required of us is, "we submit to the Father of our spirits" this is what Peter calls 'humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God.'

This is submitting ourselves to His right to do as He will with us; acknowledging His righteousness and wisdom in His dealing with us; a sense of His care and love with an understanding of the purpose of His discipline of us; diligently applying ourselves to His mind and will; keeping our souls by faith and patience from being weary and downcast; and resigning ourselves fully to His will and eternal life in the world to come, these are the things intended. The rebellious child who will not submit itself to God's discipline will die without mercy but if you are in subjection to God's discipline you shall live.

"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." Hebrews 12:11

"Pleasant for the time;" that is will we are being disciplined and suffering under it; while the wound it gives our minds is fresh before it is healed by faith and submission to God. This discipline doesn't seem to be "pleasant at the time, but painful." In other words whatever good discipline is at the time it doesn't seem that way. It isn't something nice but a bitter pill to swallow. As Peter says; "being afflicted with sorrow through many temptations." But discipline, "yields fruit." (**Find verse**) It is not a dead useless thing. When God prunes His vine, it is that it may bring forth more fruit; that is the fruit that shows itself in right living. Our suffering is not the cause of right living but it activates new desires to please God and so our lives become fruitful.

Some of the fruits in our lives are increased patience, submitting to God's will, being no longer worldly, putting to death sin (**Romans 6**) [Hyperlink to bible verses and Heavenly mindedness](#) (Link to simplified book by John Owen). This fruit is called; "peaceable," because it is both evidence and a promise of peace with God! And because it brings peace both into our minds and with others. "Follow after peace with all men."

The effect of being disciplined by God may not be evident straight away, "but afterwards," that is, after we have been "exercised by it." To be disciplined by our Father is to have all our spiritual strength, faith and patience tried to the max.

Hebrews 12:12-13 Put in quote – niv

Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees." Change to NIV
This is a description of a person who has lost heart or is like a runner in a race who is so exhausted they have given up all hope of winning.
Feeling despondent and tired of the daily grind will make a person feel this way.

Day 5. – So think on heaven often

How are you to respond now you have seen your suffering through God's eyes? Listen to what Jonathan Edwards one of the leading Pastors during the time of the founding of America says. This comes at the end of a sermon called CHRISTIAN PILGRIM OR "THE TRUE CHRISTIAN'S LIFE A JOURNEY TOWARDS HEAVEN " And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. (Hebrews 11:13, 14)

I encourage you to spend your present life as a journey towards heaven. Labor to obtain such a disposition of mind that you may choose heaven for your inheritance and home; and may earnestly long for it, and be willing to change this world, and all its enjoyments, for heaven. Labor to have your heart taken up so much about heaven, and heavenly enjoyments, as that you may

rejoice when God calls you to leave your best earthly friends and comforts for heaven, there to enjoy God and Christ. Be persuaded to travel in the way that leads to heaven—in holiness, self-denial, mortification, and obedience to all the commands of God, following Christ's example, in a way of a heavenly life, or imitation of the saints and angels in heaven. Let it be your daily work, from morning until night, and hold out in it to the end, let nothing stop or discourage you or turn you aside from this road. And let all other concerns be subordinated to this. Consider the reasons that have been mentioned why you should thus spend your life; that this world is not your abiding place, that the future world is to be your everlasting abode; and that the enjoyments and concerns of this world are given entirely in subordination to the next world. And consider further for motive—

1. How worthy is heaven, that your life should be wholly spent as a journey towards it? To what better purpose can you spend your life, whether you respect your duty or your interest? What better end can you propose to your Journey, than to obtain heaven? You are placed in this world, with a choice given you that you may travel which way you please; and one way leads to heaven. Now, can you direct your course better than this way? All men have some aim or other in living. Some mainly seek worldly things; they spend their days in such pursuits. But is not heaven, where is fullness of joy forever much more worthy to be sought by you? How can you better employ your strength, use your means, and spend your days, than in traveling the road that leads to the everlasting enjoyment of God; to his glorious presence; to the new Jerusalem to the heavenly mount Zion; where all your desires will be filled, and no danger of ever losing your happiness? No man is at home in this present world, whether he chooses heaven or not; here he is but a transient person. Where can you choose your home better than in heaven?

2. This is the way to have death comfortable to you. To spend your life so as to be on a journeying towards heaven is the way to be free from bondage, and to have the prospect and forethought of death comfortable. Does the traveler think of his journey's end with fear and terror? Is it terrible to him to think that he has almost got to his journey's end? Were the children of Israel sorry, after forty years travel in the wilderness, when they had almost got to Canaan? This is the way to be able to part with the world without grief. Does it grieve the traveler when he has got home, to leave his staff and load of provisions that he had to sustain him by the way?

3. No more of your life will be pleasant to think of when you come to die, than has been spent after this manner. If you have spent none of your life this way, your whole life will be terrible to you to think of, unless you die under some great delusion. You will see then, that all of your life that has been spent otherwise, is lost. You will then see the vanity of all other aims that you may have proposed to yourself. The thought of what you here possessed and enjoyed, will not be pleasant to you, unless you can think also that you have subordinated them to this purpose.

4. Consider that if you are willing to spend your life as a journey towards heaven, you may have heaven. Heaven, however high and glorious, is attainable for such a poor worthless creature as you. You may attain that glorious place which is the habitation of angels—yes, the dwelling-place of the Son of God; and where is the glorious presence of the great Jehovah. And you may have it freely, without money and without price—if you are but willing to travel the road less traveled that leads to it, and bend your course that way as long as you live, you may and shall have heaven for your eternal resting place.

5. Let it be considered, that if your life isn't a journey towards heaven, they will be a journey to hell. All mankind, after they have been here a short while, go to either of the two great places of all that go out of this world—the one is heaven, where a small number, in comparison, travel; and the other is hell where the bulk of mankind gather. And one or the other of these must be the outcome of our journey in this world.

Finally;

1. Labor to get a sense of the vanity of this world on account of the little satisfaction that is to be enjoyed here; its short continuance, and unserviceableness when we most stand in need of help—on a deathbed. All men, that live any considerable time in the world, might see enough to convince them of its vanity, if they would but consider. Be persuaded therefore to exercise consideration, when you see and hear, from time to time, of the death of others. Labor to turn your thoughts this way. See the vanity of the world in such a glass.

2. Labor to be much acquainted with heaven. If you are not acquainted with it, you will not be likely to spend your life as a journey there. You will not be sensible of its worth, nor will you long for it. Unless you are much conversant in your mind with a better good, it will be exceeding difficult to you to have your hearts loose from these things, and to use them only in subordination to something else, and be ready to part with them for the sake of that better good. Labor therefore to obtain a realizing sense of a heavenly world—to get a firm belief of its reality, and to be very much conversant with it in your thoughts.

3. Seek heaven only by Jesus Christ. Christ tells us that he is the way, and the truth, and the life. He tells us that he is the door of the sheep. "I am the door, by me if any man enter in he shall be saved; and go in and out and find pasture." If we therefore would improve our lives as a journey towards heaven, we must seek it by him, and not by our own righteousness; as expecting to obtain it only for his sake, looking to him, having our dependence on him, who has procured it for us by his merit. And expect strength to walk in holiness, the way that leads to heaven, only from him.

4. Help fellow Christians on this heavenly journey. There are many ways you another to heaven, i.e. talk together about spiritual things. Wherefore go on this journey as it were a company, talking together, and helping one another. Fellowship is very desirable in a journey, but go united and you want fall away. So don't to hinder one another; but use all means you can to help each other up the hill? This would insure more successful traveling, and a more joyful meeting at your Father's house in glory.

Paul Thompson is co-founder of the *Christian Library*. Paul is an active member of ***Elermore Vale Baptist Church***

1. "Among God's Giants" by J.I.Packer Pg 14
2. "A Body of Divinity" by Thomas Watson pg 7"
3. Among God's Giants" by J.I.Packer Pg 11
4. "A Body of Divinity" by Thomas Watson Published by Banner of Truth Trust
5. Christian Pilgrim by Jonathan Edwards – In Vol 1 The Works of Jonathan Edwards Published by Banner of Truth Trust

Suggested Reading

Among God's Giants by J.I.Packer - Published by Kingsway Publications
The Genius of the Puritanism by Peter Lewis - Published by Carey Publications
John Owen on the Christian Life by Sinclair Ferguson – Published by Banner of Truth Trust
The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes – Published by the Banner of Truth Trust
The Pilgrims Progress by John Bunyan – Published by the Banner of Truth Trust.
The Death of Death by John Owen