

On Purpose  
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**I form the light, and create darkness. O you foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified . . . Are you so foolish? . . . Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?**

**Publicly portrayed as crucified** implies Christ as suffering. Indeed Isaiah 53:1-12 specifically prophesies that the Messiah will suffer and die. It ends with:

**Because He poured out [r]Himself to death,  
And was numbered with the transgressors;  
Yet He Himself bore the sin of many,  
And interceded for the transgressors.**

Now this One is the One over whom God exulted: **This is my beloved Son in Whom I am well-pleased.** (Matt. 3: 17) So it is important that Jesus' sufferings, His afflictions, did not come in the absence of love! And, in the case of Job, I would venture to say, that Job was loved. **Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?** We should note the parallels between Jesus and Job in terms of moral character: **blameless and upright . . . innocent and without sin. Yet they were both severely afflicted**—as I would say, *on purpose*. Suffering is not outside the providence of God: **I form the light, and create darkness.** As Job confesses (42:2): **No purpose of Yours can be thwarted.**

To have suffered in vain, as Paul inquires of the Galatians, is to suggest that the apostle suspects that they have forgotten, or elected to ignore that God governs everything on purpose. Nothing is accidental. Job, like Jesus, really suffered—**many are the afflictions of the righteous but God delivers them out of them all.** Psalm 34:19 I want to suggest three things about affliction that warrant our attention: 1. Afflictions come that we might be drawn to God. When everything is peachy, and going well, it is our decided tendency to ignore God and to live thankless and oblivious lives. 2. That in addition to reminding us of God, afflictions are sent to refine, purify, guide and direct us. When we suffer, we realign ourselves. Affliction induces awe, adoration, prayer and worship. Although it may appear difficult to affirm, we are sorely tested in this life; but not beyond endurance for either God withdraws the suffering, or we are rescued entirely out of the realm in which suffering occurs. 3. Suffering can quicken in us compassion for others, issuing in sacrificial, or heroic love. The preciousness of living is underscored by the costliness of our love. Suffering provides opportunity, it gives a value-added dimension to this life. So relational, rectifying and redemptive features are attached to human suffering—yes, even to suffering brought about from evil intentions. I am unaware of anyone who misses out on the hateful, destructive malevolence of Satan as God permitted him to test either Job, or Jesus. Come to think of it, it is a little surprising that we struggle to see the application of suffering in our own journey through the wilderness of this world!

Let's turn to the relational side of affliction (1.). God's plan is for our troubles to remind us of His love for us and of the relationship He longs to have with each of us. Now Job's wife, at least at the outset of the chronicle of his afflictions lacks perspective, faith and patience: **Do you still hold on to your integrity? Curse God and die.** Her dismay and frustration are palpable. And it is quite remarkable that Job, unlike Adam, chooses to reprove her outburst. I choose to

treat her words as “a cry of dismay” and not her settled opinion due to the apparent restoration of her marriage relationship to Job in the conclusion of the book. There is a huge mountain to surmount in the restoration of seven sons and three daughters (**who were very beautiful women.** (40:15) **And their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers (!)**—an act of generous emancipation that should qualify the harsh indictment of Job’s generation as oppressive to women. And the mountain is this: her first brace of children were precious and irreplaceable. It is such a sorrow that they died and that God’s protection of their father did not extend to them. However, before we even arrive at these gracious end notes, we have this:

**10 The Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends, and the Lord increased all that Job had twofold. 11 Then all his brothers and all his sisters and all who had known him before came to him, and they ate bread with him in his house; and they consoled him and comforted him for all the adversities that the Lord had brought on him. And each one gave him one [a]piece of money, and each a ring of gold.**

The text doesn’t object to the materialistic flavor of Job’s “spiritual restoration,” so I won’t either. Instead, I draw your attention to how primarily relational it is that God restored Job’s fortunes **when he prayed for his friends.** And, after the two-fold increase, there is communion, breaking of bread and fellowship as the family re-unites in the aftermath of affliction. God comforts as well as afflicts on purpose.

This materialistic angle is also revealed in Jesus’ words Mark 10:29-31:

**29 Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, 30 [a]but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in [b]the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. 31 But many *who are* first will be last, and the last, first.”**

Moving on to rectifying (2.). Afflictions aim to refine, purify and guide us *by means of discipline and guidance.* Is Job a better person for all he went through? Leaving aside the fact that Job vindicates God’s confidence in him, Job is definitely refined by the fires through which he passed. His faith is purified; he vindicates his faith in God (Job 13:15-18):

**15 “Though He slay me,  
I will hope (trust) in Him.  
Nevertheless I will argue my ways [a]before Him.  
16 “This also will be my salvation,  
For a godless man may not come before His presence.  
17 “Listen carefully to my speech,  
And let my declaration *fill* your ears.  
18 “Behold now, I have prepared my case;  
I know that I will be vindicated.**

Job 40:3-4:

**Then Job answered the Lord and said:  
“Behold, I am of little account (I am nothing), what shall I answer you?  
I pray my hand on my mouth.  
I have spoken once, and I will not answer;**

twice, but I will proceed no more.

42 Then Job answered the Lord and said,  
know that You can do all things,  
And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.

2 “I

3‘ Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’  
Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand,  
Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.”

4‘ Hear, now, and I will speak;  
I will ask You, and You instruct me.’

5 “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear;  
But now my eye sees You;

6 Therefore I retract,  
And I repent in dust and ashes.”

Job’s faith is realigned; he has been rectified. The cry of his heart has been answered, too.

That brings us to the redemptive features (3.)—they are foreshadowed in what has already been shared on rectification. Job did not suffer **so many things in vain**. In Luke 24:25, we read Jesus’ words: **O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken . . . was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?**

**Luke 44:44 Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” 45 Then He opened their [a]minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the [b]Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance [c]for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed [d]in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things.**

Suffer, die and on the third day to rise again. Why? To attain our salvation: **repentance for forgiveness of sins . . . proclaimed in His name.** (v. 47) Now this is the second time, post-resurrection, that Jesus has **opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.** (vv. 27, 32 and 45). That is what our prayer should be—that God would open our minds to what the Scripture says.

I think it would be grand if people would think about God, earnestly consider God apart from crises and catastrophes. But God knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows we won’t get religious until we get in trouble. We probably won’t repent until get caught. We would forget God if He didn’t bring times of darkness and shade our sunlight. So He sends us reminders—that He is there, that He has made us, and that we have need of Him. War and famine, fires and tornadoes, floods and pandemics . . . they all come and yet we embrace that evil frequently comes to make room for greater good. War quickens compassion for the wounded and the injured—refugees receive food, clothing, water, shelter, all of life’s necessities. Courage, kindness, sacrifice and mercy are all quickened. Therefore, ***what we are going through is secondary*** to what God is doing through our circumstances. Our task is to discern the providential nature of troubles and then to embrace the opportunities they afford us to serve Him. Troubles can disrupt your rebellion and bring you to your knees . . . before it’s too late.

Troubles may be like the irritating grain of sand that inaugurates the formation of a pearl. There's something precious coming out of trouble. The rod of the Lord serves as an improver and sometimes to mend a limb, it must first be broken. Similarly, poison has to be cut out but the momentary affliction of the incision saves one's life. There must be sufficient heat in the crucible to burn off dross and drive out impurities. If conformity to the image of Christ is the goal, then we can see how suffering is native to the process for it is written, even of Him, **that he was perfected by the things that He suffered** (Hebrews 5:8-9) *out of love and compassion for us*:

**8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. 9 And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, being designated by God a high priest, after the order of Melchizedek.**

In 1 Cor. 3:21-22, it is written: **For all things are yours whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas** (all fellow workers for God in Christ) **or the world or life or death, or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are Christ's and Christ is God's.** For I tell you the truth, the welfare state is not merely what we've been led to believe (everything paid for by the state and everyone living off a government check). No, all of creation is our welfare state; it exists, all of it exists for our (weal), our benefit, or our well-being *if we truly are the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Everything exists as it does for the sake of blessing God's chosen ones—we enter into real life now, despite the fact that this life is but a foretaste of the life to come when we receive a far, far better inheritance than this world presently affords! The new heaven and the new earth is our welfare!

And that is God's purpose in all and through all . . .

**Amen.**