

# **“WHY ME?”**

By

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(slightly revised by Pastor Hyle Anderson)

## **12 Devotions on Christians' Tribulation**

### Foreword

“Why did this happen to me?” is a question that has always troubled people in times of misfortune. This booklet is written to help understand God’s ways and accept them, so that by faith we might be “more than conquerors.” Rom. 8:37

The devotions may be read singly, since each one is a unit, or they may be read together so gain a broad perspective on the problem of suffering, as the Word of God is applied to its various facets.

These pages are dedicated to Edward. C. H. Berg, at whose urging they are written.

To God alone the glory!

KKM

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### **WHY ME?**

1

This is a very difficult question since it is such a personal one. Our gracious Lord deals with each of us as an individual. Our spiritual needs are different, and the timing of our lives is not the same. So if you examine your own spiritual life carefully you can probably answer these questions better than I or anyone else.

I can tell you this, however. Each of us is a sinner, and the evil that befalls us is no worse than we deserve. Psalm 143 says, *“Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.”* In Psalm 88 we read, *“Thy wrath lies hard upon me.”* What you are suffering is a sampling from God of the everlasting wrath that the damned in hell must suffer. So one reason for your misery now is that you might know what He saved you from when He gave you His only-begotten Son to suffer the pains of hell on the cross for you.

Another reason is that this is a reminder of the inescapable truth that we must die. This life is not going to go on forever. Every pain, every failure, every frustration reminds us that we are in the power of God, and our times are not in our own hands. All the issues of life are with the Lord. Perhaps it does seem cruel that God should so darken our lives with the clouds of the valley of the shadow of death, but this is really a gracious visitation. He is not cutting us off in His wrath but grants us time and occasion to recall our hopeless natural conditions, and to lean upon His all-conquering grace by which we have eternal victory. In Job 33 we read, *“Lo, all these things God works oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living.”*

Prayer: Holy Lord God, “I have sinned and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not.” (Job 33) Forgive my sins and deliver me ... not for my sake, for I am unworthy, but for Jesus' sake, my Savior. Amen.

I am already a good Christian, so why is God doing this to me? Why does He not do it to someone else, especially someone who is not a Christian? It could well be that He sends you these afflictions because you can bear them. A heathen might only become hardened, and a weaker Christian might despair or forsake the faith. The Lord knows what you can bear and knows how to draw you to Himself. His Word says, *"God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tempted above what you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it."* 1 Cor. 10:13

Every Christian must learn to know that we have each been assigned a cross to bear in this life. Romans 8:29 says, *"Whom God did foreknow he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son."* That is, from eternity God had decreed that both Christ and we should be placed under the cross so that we might be saved, not by our achievement, but by His cross. It is certain above all things that God has not made a mistake in giving you your cross.

God is all-wise. He is like a great painter, who makes not a single stroke that has not been carefully planned. Remember, too, that Jesus Himself said, *"And whosoever does not bear his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple."* Luke 14:27 These may sound like harsh words, but they are not intended to make us despair; they should only make the flesh despair, as it should. They are intended to teach us that we should trust Christ with our whole heart, no matter what our senses tell us. Did you count the cost when you became a Christian? The cost always was that we must forsake the world and all its good, and the reward has always been eternal life, with its endless bliss and glory.

Prayer: Gracious God, my cross is heavy. Grant me strength to bear it, faith to rejoice in Christ, who is my salvation, and hope to see the end of my faith, life eternal. Amen.

Solomon writes, *"My son, do not despise not the chastening of the Lord: neither be weary of his correction."* These words imply that His correction is not just once in a while but may go on and on so we might feel weary of it, just as we get *"weary in well doing."* But we should not turn away from Him when He treats us roughly, because Solomon adds, *"For whom the Lord loves he corrects; even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights."* Proverbs 3:11-12 The cross I must bear is not really a sign of His wrath, after all, but of His grace. Imagine a very wealthy man with a single son, to whom he intends to leave all his money. Will he not correct him, spank him, scold him and sometimes make life miserable for him, because he wants him to be worthy of his inheritance? So our Lord has for us an eternal kingdom, bought for us at the cost of His own blood. Do you not suppose He wants to purge our hearts and minds of the distractions and desires of this vain world and to set our attention on our inheritance? Would he hesitate to cut off my hand or pluck out my eye if it will interfere with my salvation? or to lay me low to prevent me from polluting my soul with sins that will prove a snare and drown me in destruction and perdition? 1 Timothy 6:9 Don't you suppose He loves me at least that much? If He did not care anything about me, He would let me go my own way and perish everlastingly in hell.

Still, He does not enjoy chastening us. He says, Lamentations 3:32-33, *"But though he causes grief, yet he will have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men."* The original text literally says, He does not afflict from the heart. His heart is not in it; He does it only because we need it. If He would afflict us from the heart we would be wretched indeed. His heart is in it when He calls, *"Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."* Matthew 11:28

Prayer: O merciful God, I thank You for Your loving attention. You care for me, indeed. I beg You, lighten my burden that I do not despair; nor let me love this perishing world. Teach me to know Your love, which You have revealed in giving Your Son to redeem me. Amen.

4

The Bible says we walk "*by faith, not by sight.*" By such words the Holy Ghost urges us to believe in the grace of God, even though we cannot see it, even when it is hidden by this great dark cloud of trouble. True, He promises blessings to His faithful, but He says it will be done this way: "*Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.*" Psalm 34. Now these words are pre-eminently about Jesus, the only righteous Man who ever lived on earth. Many were His afflictions, especially on the cross, and the Lord delivered Him out of them all by the Resurrection. So we can expect that our afflictions will not be few, for Jesus said, "*The servant is not greater than his Lord.*" John 15:20. Our troubles will come to an end. St. Paul writes, "*It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him.*" 2 Timothy 2:11-12. This is the promise He has made to us, and we are to believe it just because He has said it. He knows, and He is able to do above all that we can ask or even think.

Paul said, "*I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.*" Galatians 6:17. He had suffered desperately, but he was proud of his wounds because they made him like unto Christ in suffering. Recall that Jesus asked, "*Are you able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of?*" Matthew 20:22. Every Christian must suffer in one way or another, in one degree or another, because "*we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*" Acts 14:22. Would it make sense for us to have only pleasure and good things when He hung on the cross in pain to redeem us? As long as sin dwells in us, as long as the flesh lusts against the Spirit and faith is not perfect, we need this reminder of wrath so we may better know grace.

Prayer: Lord, I cannot see Your goodness or grace now in this dark hour. I trust in Your promise, and know You will not fail to keep it, as You did not fail to send Jesus according to Your promise. Amen.

5

The question, Why did this happen to me? can be answered in part by recalling the example of the children of Israel in the wilderness. Remember that the Lord tested them there for 40 years, and in that time they often complained and murmured about their lot. They finally inherited the holy land, but then the Lord reminded them, "*Understand that the Lord your God does not give you this good land to possess it for your righteousness; for you are a stiff-necked people. You have been rebellious against the Lord.*" Deuteronomy 9:6-7 He tells us the same thing as we look forward to the holy land of heaven, and must we not confess that it is true? Must we not confess with Jeremiah, "*We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covers us; for we have sinned against the Lord, our God, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God?*" Jeremiah 3:25. It is of His grace that we are not consumed but expect to inherit eternal life.

And now He tests our faith, asking, Do we love Him, or do we just love the blessings He gives us? Remember how terribly Job was tested, afflicted by the devil. And when all was gone he said, "*The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord..... Shall we accept good at the hand of the Lord, and not accept adversity?*" Job 2. It is such a faith that the Lord wants us to have and therefore He tries our faith, so that we turn away from all else and believe that it is really true that "*all things work together for good to them that love God.*" Romans 8:28 St. Peter says we rejoice in our coming salvation, "*though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more*

*precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the appearing of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory." 1 Peter 1:6-8*

Prayer: Lord, I know You are testing my faith. Grant that I may be faithful, even as Jesus was faithful and did not shrink from the cross to deliver me from sin and every evil. Amen.

6

Perhaps the devil thought, "Ah, here is one who doesn't pray enough. He is not in touch with God. He is weak in faith, so I will strike. It should be easy to bring him down." Strangely enough, the Lord lets him strike, just so that we will turn to Him whom we may have neglected and "find grace to help in time of need." He is eager to answer our prayer, even if He has not heard us pray in many a year. But He wants to hear that prayer. The sound of it is sweet to Him, just as the voice of a long-lost child is sweet to his mother. Sometimes He does not answer our prayer at once, because if He did we might stop praying, and He wants to listen a while longer. So He urges us, "Pray without ceasing." The answer is all prepared and is on its way, due to arrive at the best possible moment, but meanwhile we must keep on praying. If we despair of Him and give up on praying, how can we expect Him to answer? Shall we be like the man who said, "I tried prayer once, but it didn't work"? Or shall we rather be like the widow who so pestered the judge that he finally gave in and gave her the relief she asked?

*"Shall not God bring justice for His elect, who cry night and day unto Him, and will He delay long over them?" Luke 18:7. "The Lord is good unto them that wait for him." Lamentations 3:25*

What kind of faith would it be that we have in God if it lasted only until trouble came? Doesn't God mean us well? Did not Christ redeem us from all sin, from death, and from hell? *"Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of patience, that after you have done the will of God, you might receive what was promised."* Hebrews 10:35-36. *"Behold, how happy is the man whom God corrects; therefore do not despise the discipline of the Almighty; for He inflicts pain and gives relief; He wounds, and His hands also heal."* Job 5:17-18.

Prayer: O Lord God, I am too much ruled by my flesh. Let Satan have no power over me. Enable me to recognize his workings and resist him with Thy Word. Help me pray with assurance that Thou wilt answer me for Jesus' sake. Amen.

7

Someone once asked bitterly, "Do you expect me to believe that God beats me up to show me how much he loves me?" Such a question displays an ignorance of both God and man. The crosses we must bear do indeed confirm God's love to us. The Bible says, *"Those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you endure; for God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?"* Hebrews 12:6-7. A father who cares about his son wants him to be a good son, not to run wild and destroy himself, therefore he spans him. If he does not care about him he uses no discipline; he is not interested in his welfare. So discipline and the cross are truly marks of God's sincere interest in us. He cares about you more than anyone else can, and because He does you can be sure that you are His child, as long as you are not living in unrepented sin. Since you are His child eternal life is yours, where discipline will no longer be needed. For if we

are children, then we are *"heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together."* Romans 8:17.

A physician often prescribes bitter medicine or a rigorous diet, not to make your life hard but to save it. A shepherd puts his crook around the sheep's neck and jerks him away from the cliff, but only to save him. The gardener prunes the vine so it will bear fruit, not because he hates the vine but because it is precious to him. So the Lord afflicts us so that we do not look for glory on this side of the grave, but for grace. Isn't it worth losing everything in life to have the forgiveness of sins? Forgiveness is that pearl of great price which, *"when a merchant found one, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it."* Matthew 13:46

Prayer: Heavenly Father, grant me wisdom to understand that You do indeed love me with an everlasting love, even as Jesus was slain for me from the foundation of the world. Purify my faith and help me in my troubles. Amen.

8

The apostle Peter outlined three reasons for our trials. In 1 Peter 1:6-7 he said, *"You greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials."* (v. 6). They are just "for a season," a little while. They will not go on forever, but will come to an end at that time God has circled on his calendar. If it would never end, then our hearts would surely fail and we would despair, as do the lost souls in hell. But there is no reason for us to despair, because there are limits to our crosses.

Peter also said, "if necessary". God only sends such heaviness because it is needed for our salvation. Perhaps I don't think I need such things, but God know I do. His knowledge and wisdom are infinite, and if I think I am wiser than He or rebel against His wisdom, I put my own soul in jeopardy - my soul which is worth more than all the world.

Yet another reason for my cross is this: *"That the proof of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though tested with fire, might be found to result in praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."* (v. 7). Faith must be tested. If gold must be tested for genuineness, then faith, which is much more precious by virtue of the merit, o Christ that we have through faith, should certainly be tested also. If the gold is not genuine, it will not last but rust away; if the faith is not genuine, it will not stand the test of time. It is tribulation that shows what kind of faith we have, for in such a time it comes out whether I believe I am good enough to deserve good things from God, or whether I rely entirely on God's mercy in Christ Jesus. Simply to ask the question, "Why me?" is the same as saying, "How dare God do such a thing to me; I am not a common sinner. God owes me better than this." And if that is what I think, then I make myself god and try to make God merely my servant. God forgive me if I have done such a thing!

Prayer: Lord God, let me not be proud or rebellious or resentful as I suffer heavy trials. I know I am a sinner. You are my only righteousness, Lord Jesus. Amen

9

I am not lost and abandoned even though everything has gone wrong for me. Isaiah writes, 43:1-2, *"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you."* What ever happens to me in this world, God does not leave me, so long as I trust in Him. Whenever I call upon Him He is there. Perhaps I cannot see Him or feel His aid, but He is there lightening my load so I can bear it, helping me through as a soldier supports his wounded

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buddy. It is a powerful comfort to know He is there, just as a sick man rests more easily when his wife is with him.

Far more than any wife, the Lord knows and understands my anguish, my pain, my shame. *"We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who was tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."* Hebrews 4:15 He *"can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided since, He Himself is also beset with weakness."* Hebrews 5:2. When He came into this world He took on my flesh and blood, so as to offer them in death in payment for my iniquities, and He felt every pain of body and soul just as I do. He was *"a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."* Isaiah 53:3 When He must send me trouble He is not unfeeling or unsympathetic. He understands what He is giving me to endure. He does it with all the love and care and tenderness in His soul, even when He must speak harshly to me and frighten and hurt me, for with all these things He is only preparing me to receive a glorious retribution. *"The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."* Romans 8:18

Prayer: Dear Lord, You know that I am but dust. Have mercy upon me. Abide with me and deliver me from every evil of body and soul, even as You have saved me from my sins through Jesus Christ, my Savior. Amen.

10

Solomon wrote, *"Faithful are the wounds of a friend."* Proverbs 27:6 There is no more faithful Friend than Jesus, and when He wounds us there is no more friendly act. It is necessary for us to be wounded, each in his own time and place, so that we may not perish, just as it is necessary to receive an injection to protect us from a terrible disease.

St. Paul was wounded many times. He said, *"I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."* Galatians 6:17. The Lord has called us all to suffer with Christ, so we should also be saved through faith in Him. Suffering is necessary because the Old Adam must be crucified with all its affections and lusts. By nature we are unwilling and unspiritual. So the Lord holds up before our eyes the magnitude of our sin, showing us how much we need the Savior. Imagine how bad we would be if the Lord would let us loose and never show us His wrath. We would fill the earth with our wickedness. So He teaches us to fear His wrath and find our solace in the redeeming blood of Christ. He invites us to set our sights above this false, evil world, strengthening us to resist temptation and to serve Him in obedient faith.

Too easily do we fall in love with this perishing world; therefore He drives us, sometimes with painful whips, to the secret place of His Word to bring our thoughts and desires to Him. *"Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart fails, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."* Psalm 73:25-26. God's Word means much more to us in times of trial than in good times. Then it is stamped into the heart and there is no mere idle speculation, nor just the sound of a word, but the very power and consolation of the Holy Ghost.

Prayer: Gracious Savior, help me to bear my burdens willingly, for You draw me ever closer to Thee. Let not sin reign in my mortal body, but let Thy grace abound in my heart. Amen.

11

David wrote, *"It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes."* Psalm 119:71 It is good for me, because by affliction I gain spiritual experience: experience in Christian living, experience in actually living by the Word of God in which I trust. St. Paul says we not only rejoice in the glory of God, *"but we glory in tribulation also; knowing that tribulation works patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope does not disappoint."* Romans 5:3-5 Note well that patience and experience lead to hope, which is simply faith aimed

toward the future. If I have no experience, then the words, "*This is my body; this is my blood,*" are little more than words. But when life and death hang in the balance, those words are the most precious on earth and bring a solid joy to my weak heart. There is hope in those words, for they tell me I shall live forever with my Savior. Baptism, too, is not just an empty ritual but is a Sacrament full of promise for all the eons to come; for I have been baptized into Christ, whom nothing can take from me.

The experience of this tribulation also teaches me patience in my Christian living. It teaches me not to be quick to anger, nor to be jealous of the mere things that others have, nor to give way to sudden impulses, but to understand, to control myself, to be calm, and to have sympathy for others who are suffering. It teaches me first to pray and to say, "*Thy will be done.*" Jesus said that we are branches of the Vine. It is painful for us to be pruned, but it leads to the wholesome fruit of faith, which is good works. I want to be a fruitful vine. As many days as the Lord still gives me I want to use in serving Him and in doing His will. God help me!

Prayer: Keep me, O God, that I do not lose patience. Grant me the joy and peace that issue from Thy forgiving grace. Crucify my flesh that with my spirit I may glorify my Redeemer. Amen.

## 12

Although the Lord allows troubles to befall me, they originate with the devil, who is the most insanely vicious of the creatures. Satan wants to terrorize me so I will give up hope in God, just as Job's wife urged him to "*curse God and die.*" Then he would have me, and there would be no hope for me, just as there is none for him. Satan tries to scare me into believing either that there is no God who can help me, or else that God hates me and doesn't want to help me. Satan wants me to think that "*He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all,*" (Rom. 8:32) will not freely give us all things.

Satan hates to see patience in a child of God, for he knows as well as we that "*it is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth; it is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.*" Lamentations 3:26ff. So Satan keeps trying to deceive the elect, to confuse us, to frighten us, to draw us away from the Vine whose branches we are, so that our faith will wither and die. We can strike back at him by praying, "*Thy will be done,*" Matthew 6:10, saying, I will bear this evil, because I know that God's will for me is good and gracious. I will wait for God's good time, because "*this light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*" 2 Corinthians 4:17 What has Satan to offer if I despair? Nothing, but a far worse misery which shall never end.

Are we not pilgrims, traveling on the road to our heavenly home? Perhaps the devil thought he found an easy target in us because we are so weak, that he could easily lead us astray. Every obstacle should stimulate us all the more to press for home. "*We have here no continuing city, but we seek one to come.*" Hebrews 13:14.

Prayer: O my Rock and my Fortress, Satan would sift me like wheat. I run to Thee. Hold before my eyes Thy cross and my salvation, so that my faith does not fail, and I receive the end of my faith. Amen.