

Chapter One

Lord, I Am Made Whole By My Experiences

Wouldn't life be so much better if we could tell God how to do His job? Or maybe we could assist Him or give Him some advice on how to deal with our issues. Wouldn't we simply make sure we avoided much of the pain, sorrow, and disappointment life brought? The answer is a resounding yes! Avoiding hardship, pain, and heartache would be our primary solution in dealing with everything that life brings our way. If we could just sit back and live in complete harmony and joy, wouldn't that be wonderful? Who wouldn't want this kind of life?

Unfortunately, the world in which we live doesn't allow this type of ease. We call this kind of world imaginary, make-believe, or a fairy tale. Fairy tales are fables created for children with the illusion that the world is an ideal and wonderful place, a place, where there is no care or worry, and a place that is free or exempt from negative external influences. The truth of the matter is the world in which we live can be disappointing and cruel with plenty of let downs. Yet, depending on our attitude, the world can also be a place of limitless successes, great achievements, abundant blessings, and untold happiness. Each day that God blesses us to experience is a day in which some type of lesson is going to be taught. The question is: Are we willing to learn?

Many times we ask God, “Why? Why must we endure the things we do?” By nature, we do not embrace new experiences because most experiences require us to give something of ourselves. The truth is we don’t want to give anything without a guarantee of a return. We are not willing to surrender, submit, and give God what He asks for in the midst of our circumstances.

We must remember that when we accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we placed ourselves under His authority, His care, and His direction. Laying down our will and yielding to God’s will must come from a heart that has complete trust and confidence in His ability to sustain every situation, and resolve every conflict.

When we face a trying dilemma, our question should be, “What is God trying to say to us and teach us?” In life’s experiences, if we learn the lessons that God is attempting to teach and convey to us, we will gain valuable understanding, which makes us comprehend more clearly *what* is happening and *why*.

Oftentimes, we do not like how God picks those experiences for us. There are some experiences in life that I can’t go through because God knows my makeup, temperament, and personality; the same with you. Some experiences are more difficult to handle than others; yet God, in His infinite wisdom, knows exactly the kind of experiences each of us can bear.

No Easy Way Out

As children of God, we want an easy life without interruptions and difficulties; yet we live in a world where our homes, jobs, families, government, and churches are engulfed in turmoil. We often seek the easy road to circumvent the hurdles. Hurdles hinder our progress; unfortunately, we cannot simply go around them. Whatever you are trying to evade, whatever you are plagued with, remember this: You are not the only person who has petitioned the Lord for deliverance. In the Bible, we see what the apostle Paul wrote as he pleaded for God to set him free from his situation:

“And to keep me from being puffed up and too much elated by the exceeding greatness (preeminence) of these revelations, there was given me a thorn (a splinter) in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to rack and buffet, and harass me, to keep me from being excessively exalted. Three times I called upon the Lord and besought [Him] about this and begged that it might depart from me; but He said to me, My grace (My favor and loving-kindness and mercy) is enough for you [sufficient against any danger and enables you to bear the trouble manfully]; for My strength and power are made perfect (fulfilled and complete) and show themselves most effective in [your] weakness” (II Corinthians 12:7-9 AMP) .

In this passage of Scripture, we learn that Paul suffered with a nagging, tormenting ailment that he called a “thorn.” The dictionary defines a thorn as: “Something that causes pain, irritation, and discomfort.” It’s that annoying, frustrating, and bothersome irritant that always seems to raise its ugly head at the worst possible moment. This “thorn” is a constant, painful reminder that we still reside in the flesh; yet we attempt to live, behave, and conduct our lives by the Spirit. It’s that issue that relentlessly wars against our soul. Is the apostle Paul telling us that we will live with and carry some type of thorn or nuisance all the days of our lives? It certainly gives us reason to ponder.

According to the Scriptures, Paul’s thorn was given to him to keep him from becoming arrogant, conceited, and prideful because of all the awesome things God was doing in and through him. Paul could have easily developed an egotistical attitude since he was chosen to write most of the New Testament. As we know, God used Paul more than any other individual during his time. He heralds this testimony:

“Though for myself I have [at least grounds] to rely on the flesh. If any other man considers that he has or seems to have reason to rely on the flesh and his physical and outward advantages, I have still more! Circumcised when I was eight days old, of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew [and the son] of Hebrews;

as to the observance of the Law I was of [the party of] the Pharisees, As to my zeal, I was a persecutor of the church, and by the Law's standard of righteousness (supposed justice, uprightness, and right standing with God) I was proven to be blameless and no fault was found with me” (Philippians 2:4-6 AMP).

Paul petitioned the Lord three times to remove the agonizing thorn, but God refused to honor his request. Could it be that what Paul saw as a weakness was in reality the strength of God being made perfect through his infirmity? God's response to Paul's plea is the same response He conveys to us: His grace is sufficient. Almighty God demonstrates His strength and power in what men describe as weaknesses, flaws, or disadvantages. Our weaknesses and inabilities are canvases that God uses to show His might, power, and strength. You must understand that what God is doing in and through you has nothing to do with you, but it is more so for others. We are only empty vessels that He fills with His Spirit to accomplish supernatural acts, perform miracles, and change the world.

Both Paul and the prophet Jeremiah realized that in spite of the miracles God worked through them, the focus of the praise and glory belonged to God and Him alone. As it is written, *“Let him who boasts and proudly rejoices and glories, boast and proudly rejoice and glory in the Lord” (I Corinthians 1:31 AMP)* . The Scriptures also state,

“Thus says the Lord: Let not the wise and skillful person glory and boast in his wisdom and skill; let not the mighty and powerful person glory and boast in his strength and power; let not the person who is rich [in physical gratification and earthly wealth] glory and boast in his [temporal satisfactions and earthly] riches; But let him who glories glory in this: that he understands and knows Me [personally and practically, directly discerning and recognizing My character], that I am the Lord, Who practices loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, says the Lord” (Jeremiah 9:23-24 AMP) .

All the tributes these men of faith received belonged only to the One who had called them, appointed them, and ordained them to carry out their assignments. It doesn't matter how skillful, wise, or influential one may be. Accolades mean absolutely nothing compared to the knowledge of Christ.

We must continually deal with recurring events in spite of our praying, fasting, and Bible study. There are reasons, some beyond our comprehension, which God allows thorns to remain. The apostle Paul revealed the purpose of his thorn: It was to keep him humble. Some thorns come to bring awareness of how much we must rely on and trust God. Other thorns have been placed in us as corrective methods to discipline us and to keep us tethered to His will. David proclaimed, *“It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Your statutes” (Psalms 119:71 AMP) .* Psalms 119:67 (AMP) states, *“Before I was*

afflicted, I went astray, Your word do I keep [hearing, receiving, loving, and obeying it]”

If God does not allow afflictions or thorns to bother us at times, we might fail to seek Him. In order for us to remain humble and not become arrogant, God knows exactly what He needs to do to keep us from experiencing the repercussions of a haughty spirit. I'm sure David believed that the affliction was a great annoyance and brought much suffering. Later, he realized *why* God afflicted him. Eventually, David humbly admitted that he brought the affliction on himself by his own selfish behavior.

Here, David attempts to offer insight on the cause of his affliction. First, David admits that he went astray. His affliction was divinely designed to get him back on track and on course with God's will and purpose. God will permit painful experiences to get us to align with His will, especially when we clearly lack a sense of focus. This is the primary reason the enemy places distractions in our path. Distractions are designed to derail us, to sidetrack us, and to redirect our attention, ultimately causing us to miss our mark. Distractions can create the illusion of being important issues, but in reality they aren't. They're merely illusions.

A distraction can be anything from a previous issue resurfacing to perhaps an old boyfriend, girlfriend, or business acquaintance fighting to recapture your

focus. Have you ever experienced a former acquaintance calling you from out of nowhere? These kinds of distractions can trigger an emotional imbalance, causing you to entertain thoughts that are far from the truth. Distractions will take your focus from what God is doing, thereby causing confusion. The enemy knows that if he can divert your attention away from the Father, he can draw you away, causing you to meditate and ponder on things that only have the *appearance* of reality.

Have you ever been driving, minding your own business when all of a sudden an animal dashes out in front of your vehicle? Immediately, your first response is to avoid hitting the animal by sharply veering away from it, which steers you away from your original course. Unfortunately, we are sometimes unsuccessful in our attempts, and we hit the very thing we tried so desperately to avoid. We kill “something” that didn’t belong in our path. This is the same way God expects us to deal with our distractions. We must “kill” them quickly, without hesitation. Recognize the distractions for what they are and eliminate them immediately! As long as you continue pondering on the distractions by giving them your attention, they will remain.

David’s affliction drew his attention back to God’s statutes. He later spoke of his affliction as a good thing. What a transformation of his attitude! Most of us would not view our afflictions as good. Prior to David’s troubles, it appeared that learning about God’s statutes was not on his list of priorities. Afflictions, heartaches, and

difficulties have an amazing way of highlighting what things matter most in life.

When we begin to examine why God allows us to experience those things we consider difficult, we find that when we seek the presence of the Lord, He will begin to show us reasons why things happen the way they do.

God knows what is best for us, and He will use different methods to speak to us—methods we don't understand—to draw our attention from what we are doing and redirect it on Him. Because we can be so consumed with our own accomplishments and pursuing our own desires, we often shut God out. Was this David's mindset? Was he completely lost by planning the direction of his life and not inviting God into his decision-making? When we have gone this far, God must do something very drastic to get us to "come to our senses."

What is your thorn or affliction in life? What causes you the greatest irritation? Is it your ex who has nothing better to do than harass you? Is it someone at work who continues to nag and pester you? Is it your constant picking of the wrong mate time and time again? What experiences in your life keep recurring? The very same issues reappear, over and over, day after day, week after week, even year after year. In some cases, the same issues appear in generation after generation. These are uncomfortably familiar patterns and cycles.

"You cry out to God, can I get a reprieve, a little relief somehow, some way?" Could it be that this thorn, this nagging, annoying, persistent thorn is what

God is using to draw you into His presence and closer to His heart? Maybe this thorn is really what you need to strengthen your faith; maybe, just maybe, this is what it will take to bring out the best or the Christ-likeness in you.

You may or may not like the situation you are currently in. God understands exactly how you feel and He knows you want out. However, He will *not* abort His ultimate purpose and deliver you prematurely.

God's ways of dealing with us individually are unique. The final results are yet unseen as He guides us on these journeys. He's promised that the outcomes will definitely be greater than the beginnings if we continue to allow Him to carry us to our appointed place. Ecclesiastes 7:8 (KJV) reads, "*Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof.*"

There are avenues and detours we might take (or make!) as we try to maneuver ourselves out of circumstances; however, trying to find ways out of difficult situations only stifles our growth. We want to get from A to Z without the bumpy roads, flat tires, setbacks, and accidents. But in order for God to get us where we need to be, getting to Z may require pain, hurt, and disappointments. At times, our journey can bring us joy and happiness.

You ask again, "Lord, does it have to be this way?" Again, the answer is yes. God is telling you to learn from every experience, embrace every challenge, conquer every test, and move every mountain by faith. Here is how you must face

every challenge: Know that you are already victorious. According to the book of John, victory is won through our faith: *“For whatever is born of God is victorious over the world; and this is the victory that conquers the world, even our faith”* (I John 5:4 AMP) .

Can you recall the worst times in your life? Can you reflect on how God handled your situations? Would you agree that you would have handled it in an easier and faster way? The answers are probably yes. For reasons beyond our own comprehension, God chooses to deal with us and our problems through long-suffering. Here is how Moses describes God:

“The Lord is long suffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation” (Numbers 14:18 KJV) .

The dictionary defines long-suffering as “patiently enduring pain or difficulties;” it is the ability to suffer long. Moses is describing the nature and character of God, who is long-suffering and patient. God is tolerant and accommodating with us even though; He knows how long it will take us to choose and live in right-standing with Him. He will sit and wait until we get tired of the way we have chosen to live. God will not over ride our will; rather, He will allow

us do what we desire, even though He knows it might kill or destroy us! Selah!

Pause, think on that....

Let's look at some characteristics of God's children: lethargic, indecisive, faithless, timid, rude, procrastinating, judgmental, critical, and the list goes on. Despite God knowing how long it will take us to change, He endures our rebellion and disobedience because of His great love for us.

For many of us, God waited patiently while we were intent on destroying ourselves with drugs, alcohol, or other destructive lifestyles. Some of us have been incarcerated because we've violated the laws of the land. We've lived our lives totally contrary to the will and order of God. We have deliberately polluted our bodies by engaging in homosexuality, adultery, fornication and other forms of sexual perversion. We have completely abandoned ourselves to the filthy, lustful desires of our carnal, fleshly nature. Yet our gentle, loving Father God watches, patiently waiting for us to come to ourselves and run into the safety of His outstretched arms. David said this: "*The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and good*" (Proverbs 15:3 KJV).

When we were out partying and enjoying our sin, God was patiently beholding every lewd, disgusting act, listening to every curse word, and watching every foul thing we did. Yet, He waited until we had enough of what this world had to offer, and adopted us into His wonderful family, granting us rights and

privileges as sons and daughters of God. If God is willing to put up with us, surely we must be willing to accept the way He chooses to purify us and bring wholeness to our lives.

You might think you are the only one in a state of anticipation, but you are not alone. God the Father is waiting on you to come to Him; waiting on you to realize your need of His guidance; waiting on you to come back home; waiting on you to come to the end of yourself. Friend, are you there? He is waiting for you to acknowledge that it's not your good deeds that are acceptable; it's your heart He requires. Are you still on the throne of your own heart? Is it still all about you? Have you gotten all of your degrees and made all of the money and still find yourself feeling empty? Have you considered God?

Prayer

Father, I come to You in the name of Your only Son Jesus Christ. I understand now the lessons You were trying to teach me. I admit I did not trust You in my situations and circumstances. I accept Your will for my life. I submit my will to Your plan and purpose. When I didn't see You carrying me, You were. I choose to walk in holiness and purity. I want to be made whole through the experiences You have allowed me to go through. Although things might get

painful and I might not understand what You are doing, I choose to trust, rely and hope in You. I can't do anything apart from You.

I thank You that through my experiences, I am a better person. Lord, please help me overcome areas in my life that continue to be a problem for me.

Today's confession: I confess today that I choose to walk and live in Your plan for my life. Purify my heart, cleanse my mind, and make me complete in You. I am completely made whole by my experiences.

Chapter 1 Spiritual Lesson

What experience or experience in life taught you the most lessons?

What have you asked God to remove from your life that has been a thorn?

What recurring events are you dealing with?

Are you dealing with any distractions that are keeping you from moving forward?

Have you allowed God to work in you through your experiences? Explain.
