



# reflecting Jesus

BETA

“all things work together for good”  
—even when life is painful **24**

?

did you know...

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

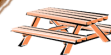


He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, 3 he restores my soul.



4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, a I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.



5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

6 Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (NIV)



psalm 23 is the journey of our lives...



## *the facts of his story*

1. What does Peter say about suffering in 1 Peter 4:12? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What are the four main causes for suffering that we will experience during our lives?
  - a) Revelation 12:12 \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) Romans 6:23 \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) Jeremiah 9:7 \_\_\_\_\_
  - d) John 15:2 \_\_\_\_\_
3. When you read Matthew 5:10-11, does suffering for being a Christian seem optional? What do you think about what Jesus says?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

"He who reads the hearts of men knows their characters better than they themselves know them. He sees that some have powers and susceptibilities which, rightly directed, might be used in the advancement of His work. In His providence He brings these persons into different positions and varied circumstances that they may discover in their character the defects which have been concealed from their own knowledge. He gives them opportunity to correct these defects and to fit themselves for His service. Often He permits the fires of affliction to assail them that they may be purified." (The Ministry of Healing, 471)



## *thinking it through*

1. Why do you think many people, even Christians, are surprised when God allows them to go through times of pain and suffering? Have you been aware of the four causes of suffering?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. When you think about your own life, when have you grown spiritually, the most—during the difficult or the easy times? Why do you think this is?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## habits for reflecting the will of Jesus ~ choosing to remain faithful under fire

### why difficult things happen

A goldsmith was purifying gold in the white-hot fire. "How do you know when the gold is pure?" someone asked him. He replied, "When I can see my face in it." (Amy Carmichael, *Learning Of God*, (London: SPCK, 1983), 50.)

Sometimes God does the same with us. God allows trials in our lives so that our sin can be burned away, enabling us to reflect his character more clearly. So it is important to know that experiencing difficulties does not mean that God has abandoned us. Rather, Peter writes,

These [trials] have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1 Peter 1:7)

Ellen White agrees,

Through conflict the spiritual life is strengthened. Trials well borne will develop steadfastness of character and precious spiritual graces. The perfect fruit of faith, meekness, and love often matures best amid storm clouds and darkness. (Christ's Object Lessons 61)

We suffer in this world because of the attacks of Satan (Revelation 12:12), and the consequences of our own sinful actions (Romans 6:23). We may also suffer when we ask God to remove our sin because the sin is so deeply entwined inside us (Jeremiah 9:7). But there is another type of pain that is the result of pruning.

### pruning

Jesus says that his Father, "cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." (John 15:2) We may not have sinned in a specific way that we can think of, but as sinners, we know that we are still weak in our faith and trust and all the other qualities that

God wants to strengthen inside us. In *Secrets of the Vine*, Bruce Wilkinson writes,

"Are you praying for God's superabundant blessings and pleading that He will make you more like His Son? If so, then you are asking for the shears." (Bruce Wilkinson, *Secrets of the Vine*, 60.)

Think about Paul's thorn. Paul writes, "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me." (2 Corinthians 12:7-9) Notice that Paul considers that he was "given" this painful "thorn". He considers it "a messenger of Satan" yet he sees that it is intended to carry a holy purpose, for God permits the thorn to keep him humble.

But what was this thorn? Ellen White says that it was his bad eyesight. She writes that "He was ever to carry about with him in the body the marks of Christ's glory, in his eyes, which

had been blinded by the heavenly light, and he desired also to bear with him constantly the assurance of Christ's sustaining grace." (Sketches from the Life of Paul, 34) So God permitted a physical problem to remain in Paul for a spiritual

benefit—that he could grow increasingly to be like him, and be useful in his service.

### never left alone

It is important to remember that we don't suffer alone. God has suffered since sin came into the world because his children hurt so much. And of course no-one on earth has suffered as much as Jesus. So this is why the book of Hebrews says,

We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive

"Someone put it this way, 'Whoever desires to walk with God, walks right into the crucible.' All who choose godliness live in a crucible. The tests will come."

Charles Swindoll

mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16)

### using your habit

As make choices to remain loyal to God under pressure, our challenge is to remember that trials come for different reasons. So when you face difficult situations, pray for the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom, and think about the following questions:

- a) Is this situation difficult, not because of anything I have done, but because Satan is at work in the world? If so, choose to persevere, knowing "that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)
- b) Do I hurt because I am reaping the consequences of my sin. If yes, choose to repent immediately, trust that God that "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us

from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

- c) Could it be that God is working now to remove the sin from me? If yes, choose to hang on! For "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)
- d) Is this situation difficult because God is pruning me? If this is the case, choose to keep your ears open to the voice of the Holy Spirit. God may not explain everything to you today. Be patient and hold on to him, remembering his promise to you, "For I am the LORD, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you." (Isaiah 41:13)

However, God may not always think it best to explain the reasons at the time we want them—or even at all! When God is silent, it is his invitation for us to hold on and keep trusting his goodness.



## putting the pieces together

In the introduction, we saw how Psalm 23 describes our lives. Life not only includes the pleasant times, but also the unexpected, and sometimes painful. However, the good news is that Jesus, the Shepherd will stay with us until the very end.

In "the facts of his story" Peter says 1) not to be surprised when bad things happen to us. 2) This is because a) Satan is at work in the world causing pain everywhere he goes, b) we reap the consequences of our sin, c) God is working to remove the sin in us, and d) God "prunes" us, to increasingly reflect his character. Therefore, as Jesus says, 3) suffering for the Christian is not optional, but will certainly happen if they remain faithful to God.

In "habits for reflecting the will of Jesus" we looked at the idea of "pruning"—where God uses difficulties in our lives to mature us spiritually. We also saw that it is helpful to keep in mind the different reasons we may face trials, so we know how to respond.



### my time with God

This week, read through the stories of the following people and try and identify the reasons for their suffering, and what kept them faithful to God.

1. Abraham (Genesis 22)
2. Job (Job 1-2)
3. Jesus & us (Hebrews 12)
4. Paul (2 Corinthians 1:3-11)
5. Moses (Numbers 16)
6. Hosea (Hosea 1 & 3)



### pass it on!

Can you explain to someone the four reasons why we experience painful times in our lives?



### extra help

1. Hinds Feet on High Places, Hannah Hunnard.
2. The Meaning of Trials by Ellen White, Review and Herald April 10 & 17, 1894
3. Secrets of the Vine, by Bruce Wilkinson
4. The Refiners Fire, by Gavin Anthony

The Review & Herald  
April 10, 1894

The Meaning of Trials.  
By Mrs. E. G. White

"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years." {RH, April 10, 1894 par. 1}

A refining, purifying process is going on among the people of God, and the Lord of hosts has set his hand to this work. This process is most trying to the soul, but it is necessary in order that defilement may be removed. Trials are essential in order that we may be brought close to our heavenly Father, in submission to his will, that we may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. God's work of refining and purifying the soul must go on until his servants are so humbled, so dead to self, that when called into active service, they may have an eye single to the glory of God. Then they will not move rashly from impulse, and imperil the Lord's cause because they are slaves to temptation and passion, because they follow their carnal desires; but they will move from principle and in view of the glory of God. The Lord brings his children over the same ground again and again, increasing the pressure until perfect humility fills the mind, and the character is transformed; then they are victorious over self, and in harmony with Christ and the Spirit of heaven. {RH, April 10,

1894 par. 2}

The purification of God's people cannot be accomplished without suffering. God permits the fire of affliction to consume the dross, to separate the worthless from the valuable, in order that the pure metal may shine forth. He passes us from one fire to another, testing our true worth. True grace is willing to be tried. If we are loath to be searched by the Lord, our condition is one of peril. God is the refiner and purifier of souls. He places us in the heat of the furnace, that the dross may be forever separated from the true gold of Christian character. Jesus watches the test. He knows just what fire of temptation and trial is needed to purify the precious metal, in order that the radiance of divine love may be reflected. {RH, April 10, 1894 par. 3}

It is by close, testing trials that God brings his people near to himself; for in trial and temptation he discovers to them their weakness, and teaches them to lean upon him as their only help and safeguard. When this result is attained, his object is accomplished, and his tried servants are prepared to be used in every emergency, to fill important positions of trust, and to accomplish the grand purposes for which their powers were given them. God takes men upon trial, and he proves them upon the right hand and upon the left, until they are educated, trained, and disciplined for his use. {RH, April 10, 1894 par. 4}

Trials will come upon us that are originated by the prince of evil. The enemy will contend for the life or the usefulness of the servants of God, and will seek to mar their peace as long as they remain in the world. But his power is limited. He may cause the furnace to be heated, but Jesus and holy angels watch the precious ore; and to the trusting Christian, grace will be found sufficient, and nothing but the worthless dross will be consumed. The fire kindled by the enemy can have no power to destroy the true gold. At times the powers of darkness gather about the

soul and shut Jesus from our sight, and we wait in sorrow and amazement until the cloud passes over. While under the trial, these seasons are terrible. Hope seems to fail, and despair seizes upon us. But in these dreadful hours we must learn to trust, to depend wholly upon the merits of a crucified and risen Saviour, and cast our souls in their helplessness and unworthiness upon him who is mighty to save unto the uttermost all who come unto God by him. We shall never perish while we do this, never. {RH, April 10, 1894 par. 5}

We need not be astonished at trial. Peter says, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." {RH, April 10, 1894 par. 6}

Jesus says: "I am the true vine, and my father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." There is a constant tendency among the trees of the Lord to be more profuse in foliage than in fruit. Just as the strength and nourishment of the grape-vine are taken up in abundant foliage, and the fruit is not brought to perfection unless the vine is pruned, so the strength of the Christian will fail of its true end, unless the heavenly husbandman prunes away the useless growth. In prosperity the followers of Jesus often turn their thoughts and energies toward gratifying themselves, to securing worldly treasure, to the enjoyment of ease and pleasure and luxury, and they bring forth little fruit to the glory of God; then the heavenly husbandman, in order to promote the fruitfulness of the branches, comes with the pruning-knife of disappointment, loss, or bereavement, and cuts away the hindering growth. {RH, April 10, 1894 par. 7}

One evening a gentleman who was much depressed

because of deep affliction, was walking in a garden, where he observed a pomegranate-tree nearly cut through the stem. Greatly wondering, he asked the gardener why the tree was in this condition, and he received an answer that explained to his satisfaction the wounds of his own bleeding heart. "Sir," said the gardener, "this tree used to shoot out so strong that it bore nothing but leaves. I was obliged to cut it in this manner; and when it was almost cut through, it began to bear fruit." {RH, April 10, 1894 par. 8}

Our sorrows do not spring out of the ground. In every affliction God has a purpose to work out for our good. Every blow that destroys an idol, every providence that weakens our hold upon earth and fastens our affections more firmly upon God, is a blessing. The pruning may be painful for a time, but afterward it "yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness." We should receive with gratitude whatever will quicken the conscience, elevate the thoughts, and ennoble the life. The fruitless branches are cut off and cast into the fire. Let us be thankful that through painful pruning, we may retain a connection with the living Vine; for if we suffer with Christ, we shall also reign with him. The very trial that taxes our faith the most severely and makes it seem as though God had forsaken us, is to lead us more clearly to him, that we may lay all our burdens at the feet of Christ, and experience the peace which he will give us in exchange. Let no Christian feel that he is forsaken when the hour of trial comes upon him. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without your heavenly Father's notice. God loves and cares for the feeblest of his creatures, and we cannot dishonor him more than by doubting his love to us. O let us cultivate that living faith that will trust him in the hour of darkness and trial! Living faith in the merits of a crucified Redeemer will carry men through the fiery furnace of affliction and trial, and the form of the Fourth will be with them in the furnace,

however fierce its heat; and they will come forth from its flame with not even the smell of the fire on their garments. {RH, April 10, 1894 par. 9}

Joseph was sold into Egypt. He was put into prison. The enemy strove to overwhelm him in darkness. The darkness was so great that it seemed every ray of hope was extinguished; but his faith took hold on God, and it was rewarded. God brought him out of the dungeon, and made him a light to the world. Our heavenly Father sees the hearts of men, and he knows their characters better than they do themselves. He sees that some have capabilities which are not directed in the right way, but that if they could be turned into the right channel, they would bring glory to his name by advancing the cause of truth in the world. He places these persons on trial, and in his wise providence brings them into different positions, into a variety of circumstances, where they are tested in order that they may reveal what is in their hearts and make manifest the weak points of their characters, which have been hidden from their own eyes. God gives them opportunities to correct these defects, to polish off the rough corners of their natures, and to fit themselves for his service. If they do this work, then when he calls them into active service, they are ready so that the angels of heaven co-operate with them in their labors, and the purpose is fulfilled for which God called them to his service. {RH, April 10, 1894 par. 10}

It is in mercy that the Lord reveals to men their hidden defects. He would have them critically examine the complicated emotions and motives of their own hearts, and detect that which is wrong, and modify their dispositions, and refine their manners. God would have his servants become acquainted with their own hearts. In order to bring to them a true knowledge of their condition, he permits the fire of affliction to assail them, so that they may be purified. The trials of life are

God's workmen to remove the impurities, infirmities, and roughness from our characters, and fit them for the society of pure, heavenly angels in glory. Then as we pass through trial, as the fire of affliction kindles upon us, shall we not keep our eyes fixed upon the things that are unseen, on the eternal inheritance, the immortal life, the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory? and while we do this, the fire will not consume us, but only remove the dross, and we shall come forth seven times purified, bearing the impress of the Divine.

The Review & Herald  
April 17, 1894

The Meaning of Trials

By Mrs. E. G. White

This world is not the Christian's heaven. It is the place in which to fit up for heaven. It is the scene of our life-battles, our conflicts and sorrows. While here we must, if we would be successful, have a firm grasp of the better world, where, when the warfare is ended, will be found peace and everlasting joy. {RH, April 17, 1894 par. 1}

Through all our trials, which have never been fully revealed to others, we have had an unfailling Friend, who has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." While upon the earth, Jesus was ever touched with human woe, and although he is now ascended to his Father, and is adored by angels who swiftly speed to obey his commands, yet his heart, which loved, pitied, and sympathized with men, knows no change. It remains a heart of unchangeable tenderness still. "We have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are." Jesus is acquainted with all our trials, and he does not leave us to struggle alone with temptations, to battle

alone with sin, and to be finally crushed with burden and sorrow. Through his angels he whispers to you, "Fear not; for I am with thee." "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore." "I know your sorrows; I have endured them. I am acquainted with your struggles; I have experienced them. I know your temptations; I have encountered them. I have seen your tears; I also have wept. Your earthly hopes are crushed, but let the eye of faith be uplifted, and penetrate the veil, and there anchor your hopes. The everlasting assurance shall be yours that you have a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother." {RH, April 17, 1894 par. 2}

God has always tried his people in the furnace of affliction, in order to prove them firm and true, to purge from them all dross and unrighteousness. It was after Abraham and his son Isaac had borne the severest test that could be brought upon them, that God spoke through his angel to Abraham, and said: "Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me." {RH, April 17, 1894 par. 3}

The work of pruning and purifying the people of God for heaven is a great work, and it will not be accomplished without great suffering on the part of the servants of God, because it will cost them something to bring their wills into harmony with the will of Christ. We must go through the furnace till the fires have consumed the dross, and we are purified so that we reflect the divine image. Those who follow inclination, and judge from appearances, are not good judges of what God is doing. They are filled with discontent. They see failure where there is indeed triumph, a great loss where there is only gain; and like Jacob, they are ready to exclaim, when trial comes upon them, "All these things are against me!" when the fact is, that the very things of which they complained, were working for their good. {RH, April 17, 1894 par. 4}

"No cross, no crown," One cannot be strong in the Lord and never experience trial. To have strength, we must have exercise. To have strong faith we must be placed in circumstances where our faith will be called forth. Just before his martyrdom, the apostle Paul said to Timothy: "Be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel, according to the power of God." It is through much tribulation that we enter the kingdom of heaven. Our Saviour was tried in every possible way, and yet he triumphed continually in God. It is our privilege under all circumstances to be strong in the strength of God and to glory in the cross of Christ. {RH, April 17, 1894 par. 5}

Every follower of Christ will have a cross to bear; and when he takes it up resolutely, though in weakness and trembling, he will find that that which seemed so terrible to him is a source of strength and blessing and courage. It will be a staff to him to help him on in his weary pilgrimage through this earth. Then shall the professed follower of Christ drop his cross, and seek to please those who are deriding his Lord? Shall he, for fear he will not receive honor of men, reject and despise the cross of Christ? {RH, April 17, 1894 par. 6}

What if you do suffer, dear fellow-Christian? The Master of the house suffered before you. Jesus, our Redeemer, representative and head, endured the testing process. He suffered more than we can be called upon to suffer. He bore our infirmities, and was in all points tempted like as we are. He did not suffer thus on his own account, but because of our sins, that we, relying on the merits of our Overcomer, might be victorious in his name. Christ was the exalted and glorious commander of heaven, before whom the angelic hosts bowed in adoration, yet he condescended to give up his glory that he had with the Father, that he might save a fallen race; and shall we, in our turn, refuse to deny ourselves for his sake and the gospel's? Let the words of Paul

be the language of our hearts: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." {RH, April 17, 1894 par. 7}

Christ requires all. His sacrifice was too great, too dear, to make it possible that we should give less than all, and be accepted. Our holy faith cries out, Separation. We should not be conformed to the world, or to dead, heartless professors. The Scripture says, "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." The way to heaven is a self-denying way. But when you think the way is too strait, and there is too much self-denial in the narrow path; when you say, How hard to give up all, ask yourselves the question, What did Christ give up for me? This question puts anything that we might call self-denial in the shade. Behold him in the garden of Gethsemane. Look upon the great drops of blood that are forcing themselves from his pores while he is bearing the inexpressible agony of soul. Look upon him in the judgment hall while he is derided, mocked, and insulted by the infuriated mob. Behold him clothed in that old purple robe, and hear the coarse jest and cruel mocking. See them place the crown of thorns on that noble brow, and smite him with a reed, causing the thorns to penetrate his holy temples, so that the blood-drops trickle down his face and fall upon the ground. Hear the murderous throng eagerly crying for the blood of the Son of God. He is delivered into their hands, and pale, and weak, and fainting, he is led away to the hill of crucifixion. They stretch his form upon the cross, and drive the nails through his tender hands and feet. Behold him hanging upon the cross through dreadful hours of agony until angels veil their faces from the scene, and the sun hides his light, refusing to shine upon the dreadful sight. Think of these things, and then ask, Is the way too strait? {RH, April 17, 1894 par. 8}

O that every one might realize that Jesus has something in

store for him vastly better than that which he would choose for himself! Would that all might come to understand the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the blessedness of righteousness! Would that all might see how powerless is all effort to contend with Omnipotence! Man is doing the greatest injury to his own soul when he thinks and acts contrary to the mind and will of God. He is sowing to his flesh, and of the flesh he will reap corruption. No real joy can be found in the path forbidden by God, who knows what is best, and who plans for the good of his creatures. In order to be happy ourselves, we must live to make others happy. We must yield our possessions, our talents, and our affections, in grateful devotion to Christ, and in this way we may find happiness here and immortality hereafter. {RH, April 17, 1894 par. 9}

The most trying experiences in the Christian life may be the most blessed. The special providences of the dark hours may encourage the soul in the future attacks of Satan, and equip the soul to stand most fiery trials. The trial of your faith is more precious than gold. But in order to endure the test, you must have that faith, that abiding confidence in God, that will not be disturbed by the arguments and temptations of the deceiver. Take the Lord at his word. Study the promises, and appropriate them as you have need. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Happy is the man, who, when tempted, finds his soul rich in the knowledge of the Scriptures, who finds shelter beneath the promises of God. "Thy word," said the psalmist, "have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." We need that calm, steady faith, that undaunted moral courage, that none but Christ can give, in order that we may be braced for trial and strengthened for duty. {RH, April 17, 1894 par. 10}

While on earth there will be no escape from conflicts and temptations; but in every storm we have a sure refuge. Jesus has told us, "In the world ye

shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." The forces of Satan are marshaled against us, and we have to meet a diligent foe; but if we take heed to the admonition of Christ, we shall be safe. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." There are foes to be resisted and overcome, but Jesus is by our side, ready to strengthen us for every attack. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Faith sees Jesus standing as our Mediator at the right hand of God. Faith beholds the mansions that Jesus has gone to prepare for those who love him. Faith sees the robe and the crown all prepared for the overcomer. Faith hears the song of the redeemed, and brings eternal glories near. We must come close to Jesus in loving obedience if we would see the King in his beauty. There is peace in believing, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Believe! Believe! My soul cries, Believe! Rest in God. He is able to keep that which you have committed to him, and will bring you off more than conqueror through him that has loved you. {RH, April 17, 1894 par. 11}

But remember that every one who shall be found with the wedding garment on will have come out of great tribulation. The mighty surges of temptation will beat upon all. But the long night of watching, of toil, of hardship, is nearly past. Christ is soon to come. Get ready! The angels of God are seeking to attract you from yourself and from earthly things. Let them not labor in vain. Faith, living faith, is what you need; the faith that works by love and purifies the soul. Remember Calvary and the awful, the infinite sacrifice there made for man. Jesus now invites you to come to him, just as you are, and make him your strength and your everlasting Friend.