THE DAILY BREAD

The Mission of the Apostles



Suffering & the Apostolic Life

A FORMATION BOOK BY

Kendall Peterson

The Everyday Apostle

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Suffering and the Apostolic Life

Finding Meaning and Power in the Cross

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A Daily Bread Formation Book

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INTRODUCTION

The Thing No One Escapes

There is one experience that comes to every human being without exception, that no wealth can buy off, no cleverness can evade, and no strength can finally resist: suffering. Sooner or later it comes to every man, in the form of pain, loss, illness, disappointment, betrayal, failure, grief, and at last death itself, and much of the wisdom or folly of a life consists in how a man meets it. The modern world offers a man essentially one strategy toward suffering, which is to avoid it, to minimize it, to flee it by every available means, and when it cannot be avoided, to regard it as a pure evil, meaningless and to be escaped at any cost. This strategy fails, because suffering cannot finally be avoided, and the man who has only the strategy of avoidance is left helpless when it comes.

This book offers something the world cannot: a way of understanding and meeting suffering that finds in it not meaningless evil to be escaped but mystery, meaning, and even power, when it is joined to the suffering of Christ. The Christian faith does not promise a man escape from suffering, which it cannot honestly offer, but it transforms suffering from within, revealing it as something that can be redemptive, fruitful, and united to the greatest act of love in history, the cross. For the apostle especially, suffering is not an obstacle to the mission but often its very instrument, and a man who learns the Christian meaning of suffering gains not only the ability to bear his own but a power for his mission that no comfortable life could give.

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. — Colossians 1:24

We will begin by facing honestly the reality of suffering and the failure of the world's strategy toward it. We will see how the cross transformed suffering forever, making it capable of meaning and redemption. We will take up the mystery of redemptive suffering, the astonishing truth that a man's suffering can be joined to Christ's and made fruitful. We will consider how to actually bear suffering well when it comes, the practical spirituality of the cross. We will see suffering as a means of a man's own purification and growth. And we will discover that for the apostle, suffering is often the very power of the mission, the cross from which fruit comes, so that a man's suffering, rightly understood and offered, becomes one of the most fruitful things in his life.

CHAPTER ONE

The World Has No Answer

Why Avoidance Fails

The modern world approaches suffering with a single strategy, avoidance, and when avoidance fails, as it must, the world has nothing left to say. A man formed only by this world is therefore left defenseless before the suffering that inevitably comes, armed only with a strategy that cannot work against the one thing it most needs to address. Before a man can learn the Christian meaning of suffering, he must see clearly the failure of the world's approach, for only a man who has recognized that avoidance is no answer will seek the deeper answer that the faith provides.

In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world. — John 16:33

The Strategy of Avoidance

The modern world's entire approach to suffering can be summed up as avoidance, the attempt to escape, minimize, numb, or flee suffering by every available means, and this is the only strategy most men are given. The culture offers endless means of avoiding or numbing pain, from comfort and distraction to medication and entertainment, and it treats the avoidance of suffering as the obvious and only sensible goal, so that a man learns to regard any suffering as simply something to be escaped as quickly and completely as possible. There is nothing wrong with reasonable efforts to relieve suffering, which the faith also commends, but the world makes avoidance the whole of its wisdom, offering no understanding of suffering that cannot be avoided and no meaning in suffering at all. This leaves a man with a strategy that works only as long as suffering can be escaped, and that collapses entirely when it cannot, which is precisely when he most needs an answer. The strategy of avoidance, however sophisticated its means, is no answer to suffering itself but only a way of postponing the encounter with it, and the man who has only this strategy is unprepared for the suffering that will eventually find him.

When Avoidance Fails

The fatal flaw in the strategy of avoidance is that suffering cannot finally be avoided, that it comes to every man despite all his efforts to escape it, and that when it comes the man who has only known avoidance is left with nothing. Illness comes, loss comes, grief comes, failure and betrayal and at last death come, and no amount of comfort or distraction can finally keep them away; the suffering that the world taught a man to avoid arrives anyway, and finds him without any means of meeting it. In that moment the

strategy of avoidance not only fails but leaves a man worse off, for he faces suffering with no understanding of it, no meaning to give it, no way to bear it other than the avoidance that no longer works, and so he is overwhelmed, embittered, or broken by what he cannot escape. The failure of avoidance is not occasional but inevitable, built into the nature of suffering and of human life, and the man who has staked everything on avoiding suffering discovers, when it finally comes, that he has no resources for the one thing he most needed to prepare for. The world's strategy fails precisely when it matters most.

The Need for Meaning

What a man most needs in the face of suffering is not escape, which is often impossible, but meaning, some way of understanding his suffering that allows him to bear it, and this is exactly what the world cannot provide. The deepest human need in suffering is not the removal of the pain, which cannot always be granted, but the sense that the suffering is not meaningless, that it can be borne because it means something, that there is some purpose or dignity in it; a suffering that is meaningless is almost unbearable, while a suffering that has meaning can be endured. The world, having no meaning to offer, can give a man only the counsel to avoid suffering or, when he cannot, to regard it as meaningless evil, which is no help at all to the man actually suffering. The faith, by contrast, offers meaning, a way of understanding suffering that allows it to be borne and even to become fruitful, and this is precisely what the suffering man most needs. The failure of the world's approach, then, is finally a failure to provide meaning, and the recognition of this failure is what sends a man to seek the meaning that only the faith can give. The need for meaning in suffering is the need the faith uniquely answers.

CHAPTER TWO

The Cross Changed Everything

How Suffering Was Transformed

At the center of the Christian faith stands a cross, an instrument of suffering and death, and this is no accident, for the cross is the place where suffering itself was forever transformed. Before the cross, suffering was simply evil to be endured; after it, suffering became capable of meaning, redemption, and even glory, because God himself entered into it and transformed it from within. The whole Christian understanding of suffering flows from the cross, and a man cannot grasp the meaning of his own suffering without first understanding what happened when God suffered on a cross. The cross changed everything about suffering, and this transformation is the foundation of all that follows.

But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities… and with his wounds we are healed. — Isaiah 53:5

God Entered Into Suffering

The astonishing claim at the heart of Christianity is that God himself entered into human suffering, that in Christ the eternal God took on human flesh and suffered, so that suffering is no longer something God merely permits from a distance but something he has personally undergone. This changes the entire meaning of suffering, for the Christian God is not a remote deity untouched by human pain but one who has entered into it fully, who knows suffering from the inside, who has wept and bled and died. When a man suffers, he is not suffering before an indifferent God but before one who has suffered himself, who understands his pain from within, who is present with him in his suffering as one who has been there. This presence of a God who has entered suffering transforms the experience of suffering, for the sufferer is no longer alone with a meaningless evil but accompanied by a God who has shared his pain and who meets him in it. That God entered into suffering is the first and most fundamental way the cross transformed suffering, making it no longer a realm from which God is absent but one in which he is intimately present, having been there himself.

Suffering Made Redemptive

The cross did more than show that God shares our suffering; it made suffering redemptive, turning the greatest suffering in history into the means of the world's salvation, and so revealing that suffering can be fruitful and life-giving rather than merely destructive. The crucifixion was the worst evil ever committed, the killing of the innocent Son of God, and yet from it came the redemption of the world, the greatest good ever accomplished, so that God brought the supreme good out of the supreme evil and made suffering itself the means of salvation. This reveals that suffering, which seems only destructive, can become redemptive, can be transformed into something fruitful and life-giving, when it is taken up into God's purposes. The cross shows that suffering is not necessarily a dead end but can be a seed of life, not necessarily meaningless but capable of the deepest meaning, not necessarily only loss but able to become the means of gain. This transformation of suffering into something redemptive is the heart of what the cross accomplished, and it opens the possibility that a man's own suffering, joined to Christ's, might likewise become redemptive and fruitful rather than merely destructive.

From Curse to Grace

In transforming suffering, the cross turned what had been a curse into a potential grace, so that suffering, while still painful and still an evil in itself, became capable of being an occasion of grace and a path to glory rather than simply a disaster. Suffering remains suffering, genuinely painful and not to be pretended away, but after the cross it is no longer only a curse to be escaped; it has become something that can be transformed into grace, united to Christ, made redemptive, turned toward glory. The resurrection that followed the cross reveals the final shape of this transformation, for the wounds of the risen Christ remain but are now glorious, showing that suffering endured in Christ leads not to final destruction but to resurrection and glory. This is the Christian hope in the face of suffering: not that suffering is avoided or denied, but that it is transformed, that what was a curse can become a grace, that the cross leads to resurrection, and that suffering joined to Christ's is not the end but the path to glory. The cross changed everything, turning suffering from a meaningless curse into a mystery capable of grace, redemption, and glory, and this transformation is the foundation of the Christian ability to find meaning and even power in suffering.

CHAPTER THREE

The Mystery of Redemptive Suffering

Joining Your Pain to His

We come now to one of the most astonishing and consoling teachings of the faith, that a man's own suffering can be joined to the suffering of Christ and made redemptive, so that his pain, offered in union with the cross, becomes fruitful for himself and for others. This is the mystery of redemptive suffering, and it transforms a man's experience of his own pain from meaningless endurance into meaningful offering. Saint Paul speaks of filling up in his flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, a startling phrase that points to this mystery, and understanding it gives a man a way to make even his suffering fruitful.

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.
— Galatians 2:20

Your Suffering United to Christ's

The heart of the mystery is that a man can unite his own suffering to the suffering of Christ, offering his pain in union with the cross, so that his suffering is taken up into Christ's redemptive suffering and shares in its fruitfulness. This does not mean that Christ's redemptive work was incomplete, for it was perfect and sufficient, but that Christ, in his love, allows his members to participate in his redemptive suffering, to join

their sufferings to his and so to share in the work of redemption. When a man offers his suffering in union with Christ, saying in effect, Lord, I join this pain to your cross, use it as you used yours, his suffering is no longer merely his own private pain but is caught up into the redemptive suffering of Christ and made to share in its power. This is a staggering dignity, that a man's suffering, which seemed only loss, can be united to the cross and made redemptive, can participate in the very work by which the world is saved. The mystery of redemptive suffering, then, is that a man need not waste his suffering but can offer it, uniting it to Christ's, and so transform his pain from meaningless endurance into a share in the redemptive work of the cross.

Suffering for Others

One of the most consoling dimensions of redemptive suffering is that a man's suffering, offered in union with Christ, can be fruitful for others, can be offered for their good, so that a man's pain becomes a gift he gives for the sake of those he loves and even those he will never meet. Saint Paul speaks of his sufferings as being for the sake of the Church, as somehow benefiting others, and the tradition has long held that a man can offer his sufferings for specific intentions, for the conversion of a loved one, for the needs of the Church, for souls in need of grace, trusting that his suffering, joined to Christ's, becomes spiritually fruitful for them. This transforms suffering from a purely private burden into a means of love and service, for the man who suffers can offer his pain for others, making even his helpless suffering into an active gift, a contribution to the good of those he loves. The bedridden, the chronically ill, the suffering who can do little else can yet do this greatest thing, offering their suffering for others and so participating powerfully in the mission even from a sickbed. That suffering can be offered for others, and made fruitful for them, is among the most consoling truths of the faith, giving the sufferer a way to turn his pain into love.

Making Pain Meaningful

The ultimate gift of the mystery of redemptive suffering is that it makes suffering meaningful, giving a man a way to understand and offer his pain that transforms it from meaningless endurance into purposeful offering, which is precisely what the sufferer most needs. A suffering that can be offered, united to Christ, made redemptive and fruitful for oneself and others, is a suffering that has meaning, and meaning is what makes suffering bearable. The man who understands redemptive suffering need no longer experience his pain as meaningless evil to be merely endured, but can offer it, give it purpose, make it a participation in the cross and a gift for others, and this transforms his whole experience of suffering. The pain itself may not diminish, but its meaning changes utterly, from pointless affliction to purposeful offering, and this meaning gives

the sufferer a way to bear what would otherwise be unbearable. This is the practical power of the mystery of redemptive suffering: not that it removes the pain, which it does not, but that it gives the pain meaning, transforming the sufferer's experience from helpless endurance to active offering, and so providing the meaning in suffering that the world cannot give and the human heart most deeply needs.

CHAPTER FOUR

Bearing the Cross Well

The Practical Spirituality of Suffering

Understanding the meaning of suffering is one thing; actually bearing it well when it comes is another, and a man needs not only the theology of the cross but the practical spirituality of carrying it. When real suffering comes, the beautiful truths about redemptive suffering must become a lived practice, a way of actually meeting and bearing the pain, and this practical spirituality of suffering is what allows the understanding to become help. A man does well to learn, before suffering comes, how to bear it well, so that he is not left scrambling for help in the midst of pain.

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. — Luke 9:23

Accept Rather Than Rage

The first movement in bearing suffering well is acceptance, not the passive resignation of despair but the active acceptance of faith, which receives the suffering from God's hands rather than raging against it in bitterness. There is a great difference between the bitter resentment that rages against suffering, demanding to know why and refusing to accept it, and the faith-filled acceptance that, while not pretending the suffering is good in itself, receives it as permitted by God for purposes a man may not understand, and submits to it in trust. The raging only adds the suffering of bitterness to the original pain and closes a man off from the grace available in his suffering, while the acceptance, hard as it is, opens him to that grace and allows the suffering to become fruitful. This acceptance is not easy and is not achieved all at once, often requiring a struggle like Christ's own in Gethsemane, where he first asked that the cup pass but then accepted the Father's will; but the movement from raging to acceptance, from bitter resistance to trustful reception, is the first step in bearing suffering well. A man bears his cross well not by raging against it but by accepting it in faith, receiving it from God's hands and submitting in trust even when he does not understand.

Unite and Offer

The second movement, flowing from acceptance, is to unite one's suffering to Christ and offer it, actively joining one's pain to the cross and offering it for oneself and others, which turns passive endurance into active offering. Having accepted the suffering, a man can take the further step of consciously uniting it to Christ's suffering and offering it, saying, Lord, I join this to your cross, offer it for my sins, for the souls I love, for the needs of the Church, and so making his suffering a deliberate offering rather than mere endurance. This act of uniting and offering, repeated through the suffering, transforms a man's experience of it, giving him something to do with his pain, a way to make it meaningful and fruitful, an active participation rather than passive helplessness. The practice of offering one's suffering, of consciously uniting each pain to the cross and giving it purpose, is at the heart of the practical spirituality of suffering, and it is available to any sufferer, however weak or helpless, requiring only the interior act of offering. To unite and offer, then, is the second movement in bearing the cross well, turning accepted suffering into redemptive offering and giving the sufferer an active and meaningful role in his own pain.

Draw on Grace

The third essential in bearing suffering well is to draw on the grace that God provides for the bearing of it, for a man is not asked to bear his suffering by his own strength alone but is given grace sufficient for it, if he will draw on it. God does not abandon a man in his suffering but provides the grace to bear it, the strength, consolation, and endurance that the sufferer needs, and much of bearing suffering well is simply drawing on this grace through prayer, the sacraments, and trust. Saint Paul, pleading for relief from his own suffering, was told that God's grace was sufficient for him and that God's power was made perfect in his weakness, and this is the promise to every sufferer: not that the suffering will be removed, but that grace sufficient to bear it will be given. A man bears his cross well not by gritting his teeth and relying on his own strength, which will fail, but by drawing continually on the grace God provides, turning to God in his suffering for the strength to bear it, and finding that grace is indeed sufficient. To draw on grace, then, is the third movement in bearing suffering well, and it means that a man need not bear his cross alone or by his own power, but can lean on the grace of God, which is made perfect precisely in his weakness and is always sufficient for the suffering he is given.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Refiner's Fire

How Suffering Purifies and Grows a Man

Beyond its redemptive power for others, suffering has a particular work to do in the one who suffers, for it is one of the chief means by which God purifies and matures a man, burning away his faults and deepening his character as fire refines gold. This is not the only meaning of suffering, nor does it make suffering good in itself, but it is a real dimension of how God uses suffering, and a man who understands it can cooperate with the purifying work that his suffering accomplishes in him. The refiner's fire of suffering, painful as it is, does a work in a man that comfort never could, and a man does well to understand and embrace it.

These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith… may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. — 1 Peter 1:7

Fire That Purifies

Suffering functions in the spiritual life as a refiner's fire, burning away a man's faults, attachments, and illusions, and purifying his character in a way that ease and comfort never can. Comfort tends to leave a man's faults undisturbed, even to feed them, while suffering strips away the inessential, breaks attachments, humbles pride, and burns away much that needs burning, revealing and purifying the genuine core of a man as fire separates gold from dross. Many a man has been purified by suffering of faults that no amount of comfortable effort could touch, brought by his pain to a humility, a depth, and a reliance on God that his ease had never produced. This purifying work of suffering is painful, as all refining is, but it is genuinely a grace, accomplishing in a man a purification he needs and could not otherwise attain, and a man who understands it can embrace his suffering as a refiner's fire, cooperating with its purifying work rather than merely resenting the pain. Suffering purifies, and the man who grasps this can receive even his pain as a severe mercy, a fire that burns away what needs to go and refines him into something purer than comfort could ever make him.

Growth Through What We Suffer

Suffering is also one of the primary means of a man's growth in virtue and depth, for the virtues are developed and the character is deepened through what a man suffers in a way that nothing else accomplishes. Scripture teaches plainly that suffering produces endurance, and endurance character, and character hope, tracing a chain of growth that runs precisely through suffering, and experience confirms that the deepest and most mature people are almost always those who have suffered and grown through it. Patience is learned through what must be endured, compassion through what one has suffered oneself, humility through being broken, trust through being brought to the end of one's

own resources, and a whole depth of character that the unsuffering never attain. This does not make suffering good in itself or something to be sought, but it reveals that suffering, rightly met, is a powerful means of growth, developing in a man virtues and depths that comfort could never produce. The man who understands this can embrace his suffering as an occasion of growth, cooperating with the maturing work it accomplishes, and can look back on his sufferings, however painful, as among the chief means by which he became whatever depth of man he has become. We grow through what we suffer, and suffering well is one of the surest paths to the maturity and depth that mark a fully formed man.

The Compassion of the Wounded

One of the particular fruits of suffering is compassion, for a man who has suffered is enabled to understand and comfort others in their suffering as the man who has never suffered cannot, so that his own wounds become a source of healing for others. There is a depth of compassion, a capacity to truly understand and accompany the suffering, that is given only to those who have suffered themselves, who know pain from the inside and can therefore meet the suffering with genuine understanding rather than hollow words. The man who has been through suffering becomes, if he receives it rightly, a wounded healer, one whose own wounds have given him the compassion and understanding to heal others, and this is among the most valuable fruits of suffering. A man's suffering thus equips him for a ministry of compassion that his comfort never could, making him able to comfort others with the comfort he himself received, to accompany the suffering with real understanding, to be present to pain because he knows it. The compassion of the wounded is a great gift both to the one who has it and to those he serves, and it is one of the ways suffering, rightly met, bears fruit, turning a man's own pain into a capacity to heal the pain of others. The wounds a man has suffered become, in this way, the very source of his power to console.

CHAPTER SIX

Suffering in the Mission

The Cross as Apostolic Power

For the apostle, suffering has a particular and crucial place, for it is often not an obstacle to the mission but its very instrument and power, the cross from which apostolic fruit comes. The whole history of the Church testifies that the mission advances through the suffering of those who carry it, that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church,

and that apostolic fruitfulness is bought at the price of apostolic suffering. A man who would be an apostle must therefore understand that suffering is not a sign that his mission has failed but often the very means by which it bears fruit, and that the cross is the hidden power of all genuine apostolate.

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. — John 12:24

The Grain That Must Die

Christ taught that the grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die to bear fruit, and this is the law of all apostolic fruitfulness, that fruit comes through a kind of dying, through the suffering and self-expenditure of the one who bears it. The apostle does not bear fruit by comfortable effort but by pouring himself out, by the suffering and sacrifice that are the seed of all genuine spiritual fruit, so that his sufferings are not obstacles to his mission but the very means of its fruitfulness. This is a hard but liberating truth, for it means that an apostle's sufferings, far from signaling the failure of his mission, are often precisely what makes it fruitful, the dying of the grain from which the harvest comes. The man who expects the mission to advance through ease and success, and is discouraged by suffering and apparent failure, has misunderstood the law of apostolic fruitfulness; the man who understands that fruit comes through the dying of the grain can embrace his sufferings as the seed of his harvest, pouring himself out in the confidence that his very sufferings are bearing the fruit he seeks. The grain must die to bear fruit, and the apostle's suffering is the dying from which his fruitfulness comes.

The Seed of the Church

The whole history of the Church confirms that it has grown and borne fruit precisely through the suffering of those who carried the mission, so that, as the ancient saying has it, the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. The faith has spread not chiefly through the comfortable success of its apostles but through their suffering, their persecution, their sacrifices and martyrdoms, which have again and again proved to be the very seed from which the Church grew, the suffering of the few bearing fruit in the faith of the many. This pattern holds not only in the dramatic suffering of martyrdom but in the ordinary sufferings of every apostle, the sacrifices, difficulties, and pains that the mission costs, all of which become, like the martyrs' blood, seeds of fruit. The apostle can therefore understand his own sufferings in the mission, whatever their form, as participating in this fruitful pattern, as seeds that will bear a harvest he may not see, and can offer them in the confidence that his suffering, like the martyrs', is not wasted but fruitful. The suffering of the apostle is the seed of the Church, and the man who suffers

for the mission, whether greatly or in small ordinary ways, is sowing seeds of fruit that God will bring to harvest in his own time.

Fruitfulness Through the Cross

The deepest truth for the apostle is that his fruitfulness comes finally through the cross, through his union with and participation in the suffering of Christ, so that the measure of his apostolic fruit is often the measure of his willingness to suffer for the mission. The apostle is fruitful not in proportion to his talents or his efforts alone but in proportion to his participation in the cross, his willingness to suffer, sacrifice, and pour himself out for the sake of those he serves, for it is through the cross that spiritual fruit is given. This means that an apostle's willingness to embrace suffering for the mission is not incidental to his fruitfulness but central to it, that the cross he is willing to carry is the very source of the fruit he bears, and that a mission conducted in comfortable self-preservation, avoiding all suffering, will bear little fruit however busy it is. The apostle who understands this embraces the cross as the power of his mission, willingly suffering for those he serves, pouring himself out in the confidence that his union with Christ's cross is what makes his labor fruitful. Fruitfulness comes through the cross, and the apostle who would bear much fruit must be willing to carry much cross, finding in his suffering for the mission not the failure of his apostolate but its hidden and essential power.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Hope That Does Not Disappoint

Suffering in the Light of Eternity

We come finally to the horizon against which all Christian suffering is to be understood, the hope of eternal life and the glory to come, in whose light the sufferings of this present time take on their true and final meaning. For the Christian, suffering is never the last word, for it is set against the background of an eternal glory that will more than compensate for it, a resurrection beyond every cross, and this hope transforms the meaning of all a man suffers. Without the horizon of eternity, suffering remains finally dark; in its light, even the heaviest suffering is seen as a light and momentary affliction preparing an eternal weight of glory.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. — Romans 8:18

Suffering Is Not the Last Word

The foundational Christian hope in the face of suffering is that suffering is not the last word, that beyond every cross lies resurrection, beyond every suffering an eternal glory, so that the sufferings of this life are not the end of the story but a passage toward a glory that will swallow them up. The resurrection of Christ is the pledge of this hope, for the one who suffered the cross rose to glory, and he promises the same to those who suffer in him, that their sufferings too will give way to resurrection and glory. This means that no Christian suffering is finally hopeless, that however dark the suffering, it is not the end but a passage, that beyond it lies a glory that will more than compensate for it. The Christian suffers, then, not as one without hope, despairing in a darkness with no end, but as one who knows that his suffering is not the last word, that resurrection follows the cross, that the darkness will give way to light. This hope does not remove the suffering, but it changes its meaning entirely, setting it against an eternal horizon in which it is not final, so that the Christian can suffer in hope, knowing that his present suffering is a passage toward a glory in which it will be swallowed up.

The Eternal Weight of Glory

Saint Paul, who suffered much, came to regard his sufferings as light and momentary in comparison with the eternal glory they were preparing, and this comparison, startling from a man who suffered as he did, reveals how the hope of eternity transforms the meaning of suffering. Paul does not deny the reality of his sufferings, which were severe, but he weighs them against the eternal glory to come and finds them light and momentary by comparison, a brief affliction preparing an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. This is not a minimizing of suffering but a right weighing of it, a setting of the temporary sufferings of this life against the eternal glory of the next, in which even the heaviest earthly suffering is seen as light compared with the infinite and eternal glory it helps to prepare. The Christian who learns to make this comparison, to weigh his sufferings against the eternal glory to come, finds his sufferings, while still real, put in a perspective that makes them bearable, seen as momentary afflictions preparing an eternal weight of glory. This eternal perspective is one of the greatest helps in suffering, for it allows a man to bear his present pain in view of the eternal glory it is preparing, which far outweighs it.

Hope as the Power to Endure

Finally, the hope of eternal glory is itself the power to endure suffering, the resource that enables a man to bear what would otherwise be unbearable, for a suffering seen in the light of an eternal hope can be endured as the same suffering seen without hope cannot. Hope is not merely a consolation but a strength, giving a man the power to persevere through suffering because he knows it is not endless and not final, that it is leading

somewhere, that beyond it lies a glory that makes it worth bearing. The martyrs endured their sufferings through this hope, the sick and the grieving bear theirs through it, and every Christian who suffers well draws on the hope of eternal life as the power that enables his endurance. This hope does not disappoint, as Scripture promises, for it is grounded not in wishful thinking but in the resurrection of Christ and the promise of God, and it gives the sufferer a sure ground on which to stand and a sure end toward which to press. The man who suffers in this hope suffers with a power that the hopeless lack, able to endure because he knows that his suffering is not the end, that beyond it lies the glory in whose light his present affliction is light and momentary, and that the hope which sustains him will not finally disappoint. Hope is the power to endure, and the Christian suffers in a hope that does not disappoint.

CONCLUSION

The Cross We Do Not Carry Alone

Suffering comes to every man, and the whole question is how he will meet it. This book has offered the Christian answer, which is not the escape the world vainly seeks but the transformation the cross makes possible. We have seen that the world's strategy of avoidance fails because suffering cannot be avoided and the world offers no meaning in it; that the cross changed everything, as God entered suffering and made it redemptive; that a man's own suffering can be joined to Christ's and made fruitful for himself and others; that suffering can be borne well through acceptance, offering, and grace; that it purifies and matures a man as a refiner's fire; that for the apostle it is often the very power of the mission; and that it is set finally against the horizon of an eternal glory that will swallow it up.

None of this makes suffering good in itself, or removes its pain, or pretends that the cross is anything but a cross. The Christian does not deny the reality or the agony of suffering; he transforms its meaning, finding in it not meaningless evil to be escaped but a mystery capable of redemption, purification, fruitfulness, and glory, when it is joined to the suffering of Christ. This is what the world cannot offer and what the suffering human heart most deeply needs: not escape, which is impossible, but meaning, which makes even the heaviest suffering bearable and even fruitful.

So when suffering comes, as it will, meet it as a Christian. Do not waste it in bitterness or rage, and do not expect the escape the world vainly promises. Accept it from God's hands; unite it to the cross of Christ and offer it for yourself and those you love; draw on the grace that is always sufficient; let it purify and deepen you; offer it for the mission,

knowing that the grain must die to bear fruit; and endure it in the hope of the eternal glory that will more than compensate for it. Do this, and your suffering, which the world can only flee, will become in your hands a participation in the cross of Christ, redemptive, fruitful, and shot through with meaning, and you will discover that the cross you carry you do not carry alone, for the God who transformed suffering by his own cross carries it with you, and will bring you through it to the glory beyond.

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