

When I Am Afflicted/Immutable God Never Changing

Ps. 102

Temporarily Afflicted

We can rest contentedly in our sins and in our stupidities, and everyone who has watched gluttons shoveling down the most exquisite foods as if they did not know what they were eating, will admit that we can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain.

I heard Professor Bruce Waltke describe a Christian's response to pain this way: We once rescued a wren from the claws of our cat. Thought its wing was broken, the frightened bird struggled to escape my loving hands. Contrast this with my daughter's recent trip to the doctor. Her strep throat meant a shot was necessary. Frightened, she cried, "No, Daddy. No, Daddy, No, Daddy." But all the while she gripped me tightly around the neck. Pain ought to make us more like a sick child than a hurt bird.

Dan Foster.

Though thou with clouds of anger do disguise
Thy face; yet through that mask I know those eyes,
Which, though they turn away sometimes,
They never will despise.

John Donne, "A Hymn to Christ".

Everything difficult indicates something more than our theory of life yet embraces.

George MacDonald.

Dr. Paul W. Brand, the noted leprosy expert who was chief of the rehabilitation branch of the Leprosarium in Carville, Louisiana, had a frightening experience one night when he thought he had contracted leprosy. Dr. Brand arrived in London one night after an exhausting transatlantic ocean trip and long train ride from the English coast. He was getting ready for bed, had taken off his shoes, and as he pulled off a sock, discovered there was no feeling in his heel. To most anyone else this discovery would have meant very little, a momentary numbness. But Dr. Brand was world famous for his restorative surgery on lepers in India. He had convinced himself and his staff at the leprosarium that there was no danger of infection from leprosy after it reached a certain stage. The numbness in his heel terrified him.

In her biography of Dr. Brand, *Ten Fingers for God*, Dorothy Clarke Wilson says, "He rose mechanically, found a pin, sat down again, and pricked the small area below his ankle. He felt no pain. He thrust the pin deeper, until a speck of blood showed. Still he felt nothing...He supposed, like other workers with leprosy, he had always half expected it...In the beginning probably not a day had gone by without the automatic searching of his body for the telltale patch, the numbed area of skin." All that night the great orthopedic surgeon tried to imagine his new life as a leper, an outcast, his medical staff's confidence in their immunity shattered by his disaster. And the forced separation from his family. As night receded, he yielded to hope and in the morning, with clinical objectivity, "with steady fingers he bared the skin below his ankle, jabbed in the point--and yelled."

Blessed was the sensation of pain! He realized that during the long train ride, sitting immobile, he had numbed a nerve. From then on, whenever Dr. Brand cut his finger, turned an ankle, even when he suffered from "agonizing nausea as his whole body reacted in violent self-protection from mushroom poisoning, he was to respond with fervent gratitude, "Thank God for pain!"

Dorothy Clarke Wilson, Ten Fingers for God, pp. 142-145.

Pain is not good in itself. What is good in any painful experience is, for the sufferer, his submission to the will of God, and, for the spectators, the compassion aroused and the acts of mercy to which it leads.

C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain.

The story is told about the baptism of King Aengus by St. Patrick in the middle of the fifth century. Sometime during the rite, St. Patrick leaned on his sharp-pointed staff and inadvertently stabbed the king's foot. After the baptism was over, St. Patrick looked down at all the blood, realized what he had done, and begged the king's forgiveness. Why did you suffer this pain in silence, the Saint wanted to know. The king replied, "I thought it was part of the ritual."

Source Unknown.

IMMUTABILITY (Never Changing)

Repenting means revising one's judgment and changing one's plan of action. God never does this; he never needs to, for his plans are made on the basis of a complete knowledge and control which extends to all things past, present, and future, so that there can be no sudden emergencies or unlooked-for developments to take him by surprise. "The counsel of the Lord stands for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations" (Ps. 33:11). What he does in time, he planned from eternity. And all that he planned in eternity, he carries out in time. And all that he has in his Word committed himself to do, will infallibly be done. Thus we read of the "unchangeable character of his purpose" to bring believers into full enjoyment of their promised inheritance, and of the immutable oath by which he confirmed his counsel to Abraham, the archetypal believer, both for Abraham's own assurance and also for others (Heb. 6:17-19). So it is with all God's announced intentions. They do not change. No part of his eternal plan changes.

It is true that there is a group of texts (Gen. 6:6-8; 1 Sam. 15:11; 2 Sam. 24:16; Joel 2:13-14; Jon. 3:10) which speak of God as repenting. The reference in each case is to a reversal of God's previous treatment of particular men, consequent upon their reaction to that treatment. But there is no suggestion that this reaction was not foreseen, or that it took God by surprise, and was not provided for in his eternal plan. No change in his eternal purpose is implied when he begins to deal with a person in a new way.

James Packer, Your Father Loves You, Harold Shaw Publishers, 1986.

When Lloyd C. Douglas, author of The Robe and other novels, was a university student, he lived in a boarding house. Downstairs on the first floor was an elderly, retired music teacher, who was infirm and unable to leave the apartment. Douglas said that every morning they had a ritual they would go through together. He would come down the steps, open the old man's door, and ask, "Well, what's the good news?" The old man would pick up his tuning fork, tap it on the side of his wheelchair and say, "That's middle C! It was middle C yesterday; it will be middle C tomorrow; it will be middle C a thousand years from now. The tenor upstairs sings flat, the piano across the hall is out of tune, but, my friend, THAT is middle C!" The old man had discovered one thing upon which he could depend, one constant reality in his life, one "still point in a turning world." For Christians, the one "still point in a turning world," the one absolute of which there is no shadow of turning, is Jesus Christ.

Source Unknown.