**CONSIDERATION**

James Buchanan, 1840

"In the day of prosperity be happy, but in the day of adversity **CONSIDER**: God has made the one as well as the other." Ecclesiastes 7:14

There is a beautiful harmony between the *Word*and the *Providence*of God. When Providence *smiles*, the Word allows us to be joyful — when Providence *frowns*, the Word calls us to serious thoughtfulness. The scope and strain of God's revealed will, accord with the natural tendency and apparent design of His dispensations towards us. He neither requires us to rejoice in what is evil — nor to grieve for what is good. It is true, we are taught as Christians, to deny ourselves in the midst of outward prosperity — and to rejoice in the midst of tribulations. But it is only because self-denial in the one case, and joy in the other — are the proper fruits and manifestations of religious principle, and the means of promoting our highest ultimate good.

There is no such thing in the Bible as a disparagement of what is naturally good, or a recommendation of what is naturally evil — except in so far as these are, respectively, injurious or favorable to our true and lasting happiness. We are not required to take bitter for sweet — or sweet for bitter. But as *prosperity*, which is joyful in itself, may become ruinous to our spiritual interests — we are warned against its dangers. While we are taught that *adversity*, however bitter — is the wholesome medicine by which our spiritual health may be restored and preserved.

In a word, the Bible regards each of these states chiefly as it respects their *moral influence*on our hearts. And while it admits that the one is joyful, and the other painful in itself — it teaches us that each has its peculiar dangers, and proper uses — and that in both we are to have a supreme regard to those great religious principles which alone can render *prosperity*safe, and convert *sorrow*into joy.

We are not to conclude, then, from the antithetic expression of the preacher, either that we may not be joyful in the day of adversity — or considerate in the day of prosperity. On the contrary, we learn both from the lessons and examples of Scripture, that God's people have much reason to be wary and thoughtful while they walk in the sunshine of temporal *prosperity* — and that even in the darkest night of *adversity*, it is alike their privilege and duty to rejoice.

A long season of *uninterrupted prosperity*is accompanied with so many dangers; and productive, in many cases, of so much evil — that the disciple, who really regards the salvation of his soul as the one thing that is needful, will find that a holy seriousness of spirit, and a habit of thoughtful consideration, are essential to the right use and improvement of that condition, and to his preservation from the evils which are incidental to it. While, a season of *uninterrupted adversity*, if it is the blessed means either of commencing or of renewing his communion with God, of implanting, for the first time, in his soul, or of maturing and strengthening the graces of the Christian character — will be an occasion of joy, such as the world can neither give nor take away.

It is not prosperity and adversity, *considered simply in themselves* — but the presence or the absence of religion, in either case, that tells mainly on our present happiness, or on our eternal welfare. Without religion, *prosperity*becomes our ruin. While with religion, *sorrow*is turned into joy. But while this is the light in which these two states are for the most part presented to our view in the Word of God — we are nowhere taught to reverse the dictates of nature so as to regard prosperity in itself as evil; or adversity as in itself good. On the contrary, prosperity is declared to be a proper source of joy, and a strong motive for gratitude. While adversity is described as, for the present, not joyous but grievous. And accordingly, the duties which are peculiarly appropriate to each, and the exercises which they respectively require, are stated in express terms, and illustrated by beautiful examples. In *prosperity*, a cheerful gratitude, a bountiful charity, and self-denial, devoting all of God's gifts to his glory and the good of our fellow-men. In *adversity*, a resigned and submissive spirit, meek contentment, combined, not with an anxious care — but with a serious thoughtfulness, and a considerate regard of God's dealings towards us, such as may best qualify us for reaping the fruits of affliction, and enjoying religious comforts under its heaviest pressure.

In the day of **ADVERSITY**we are called to serious consideration on many accounts. Without this, we are in danger of allowing God's dispensations towards us to pass away unimproved, and of forfeiting the precious benefits which they are designed to confer. The whole advantage of *affliction*depends on a due Scriptural consideration of it. It does not operate as a charm, nor are its wholesome effects produced otherwise than through the medium of our own thoughtfulness. In all His dispensations God has a regard to our rational nature, and addresses himself to the thinking principle within us. And it is not until that principle has been awakened into lively exercise, and directed to Scriptural views of divine truth — that we can either expect to enjoy solid comfort under affliction — or to be sanctified by means of it. It is only to "those who are exercised thereby," that affliction becomes the means of producing "the peaceable fruits of righteousness." And as on these accounts we are called to serious consideration of the day of adversity, as it offers many important and impressive subjects to our thoughts, some of which we shall now enumerate, with the view of directing you in your private meditations.

**1. In the day of adversity, you should consider your adversity itself, not turning your mind away from it, because it is distressing to you**, nor allowing your thoughts to dwell on more pleasing topics, with the view of forgetting what has befallen you; but steadily and of deliberate purpose, looking at your afflictions in all their real magnitude and probable consequences.

This direction may at first sight appear to be unnecessary, as affliction, especially when it is severe, makes itself to be felt, and can hardly fail to command attention. To a certain extent this is true; yet we believe it will be found, that the mind is often unwilling to take a deliberate view of its afflictions; as a man on the eve of bankruptcy is too apt to shut his eyes to the fact of his danger — or as a man smitten with mortal disease is unwilling to be convinced that his recovery is hopeless — and the consequence of this is, that the mind is not suitably impressed by God's dispensations, nor qualified to derive from them the benefit which they might otherwise confer.

The reason why we ask you to *consider*your actual condition, and especially the nature and probable consequences of your affliction, is, that so long as you refuse to *consider*it, or take only a partial view of it — you do not read aright the *lesson*which God has placed before you — a lesson which you cannot understand if you turn your thoughts away from it. And thus it is that worldly men contrive to frustrate the beneficial design of affliction in their own case, and seek to obliterate from the hearts of their friends the impression which it is fitted to produce. They have recourse to business, to society, to change of scene, to frivolous amusements — with the avowed purpose of diverting their thoughts from afflictions which they cannot endure to think of with calm deliberation. And they are ever ready to prescribe to others the only remedy which they have tried for themselves.

But should this advice be offered to any one of Christ's disciples, we beg him to remember that he has a *remedy*provided for him, of which the worldly man knows nothing — a remedy, whose efficacy depends not on affliction being forgotten — but on its being duly considered; a remedy, which so far from requiring a diversion of thought as essential to our comfort — acts through the medium of thought, and makes affliction itself subservient to our good.

The Christian is not precluded, indeed, from availing himself of any benefit that might arise from change of air or scene, viewed simply as a means of relieving him, under God's blessing, from the physical weakness or disease under which he labors. This may even be his duty — a duty involved in the great law of self-preservation, and in attending to it, he may have a supreme view to the glory of God, his own spiritual improvement, and future usefulness in the world. But he is solemnly debarred from seeking relief to his soul by banishing the thought of affliction and death.

Oh! it is a dangerous error, it may be even a fatal error — to act on the supposition that we may lawfully seek relief by forgetting the calamities that have befallen us. These *calamities*are *warnings*addressed to us as rational beings, and, as such, they loudly claim our serious consideration. To have recourse to business, to society, to change of scene, or to frivolous amusement, in such circumstances, is to "despise the chastening of the Lord." It is to do violence to those feelings which affliction naturally produces, and which instinctively point to retirement and reflection as appropriate to our condition. And notwithstanding the favor with which this course is regarded by worldly men, it will be found to be opposed to the common sentiments of society, if it were pursued at those seasons when our sorrows are the most overwhelming.

If a husband were seen in the theater on the evening of that day which witnessed the death or burial of his beloved wife, or child; or if a man smitten with poverty were seen to join in the dance — would not the moral sense of the whole community be offended? And yet if the recipe is good for anything, it should stand us in stead in our greatest extremities. No!*Adversity is a serious thing!*It calls for solemn consideration. It never can be improved nor endured as it ought, unless we *think*of it, and *learn the lesson*which it affords.

View it in whatever light you please; consider it as a *trial* fitted to exercise your minds; or as a *discipline*designed to improve them; or as a *chastisement*for past transgression; or as a *preparation*for future duty — in every aspect in which it can be contemplated, it claims a thoughtful consideration. And, if this is refused, it will harden the heart, and all the more if it be superseded by the cares and pleasures of the world.

Were no better remedy provided for the afflicted, or were the mind to brood over its sorrows while the remedy is unknown or overlooked — then, indeed, it might be our wisest course to seek diversion in the world. But a remedy has been provided; and the Christian disciple can well afford to look on his affliction in all its magnitude, without incurring the least hazard of troubling the springs of his comfort. If he falls into melancholy or dejection, it is only because he omits someone thing from his consideration which the Bible presses on his attention.

**2. In the day of adversity, you should consider from *whose hand*it has been sent to you.** It comes direct from the hand of God.

*Intermediate agencies* may have been employed in inflicting it:
a cherished family member may have been the messenger of disease;
a treacherous friend may have been the cause of bankruptcy;
an avowed enemy may have been the author of reproach and shame;
Satan himself may have been allowed to smite you. But through whatever secondary agency it may have been conveyed, adversity comes from God's hand!

"I form the light — and create *darkness*; I make peace — and create *evil*. I the Lord, do all these things." Isaiah 45:7

"Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both *calamities* and good things come?" Lamentations 3:38

"Shall we receive good at the hand of God — and shall we not receive *evil*?" Job 2:10

"Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or *mute*? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" Exodus 4:11

"See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides Me. I put to *death* and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of My hand!" Deuteronomy 32:39

"The LORD brings *death* and makes alive; He brings down to the *grave* and raises up. The LORD sends *poverty* and wealth; He *humbles* and he exalts." 1 Samuel 2:6-7

"This is what the LORD says: As I have brought all this great *calamity* on this people . . ." Jeremiah 32:42

"When *disaster* comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?" Amos 3:6

"For He *wounds*, but He also binds up; He *injures*, but His hands also heal." Job 5:18

From these and many other passages it is plain that temporal affliction is ascribed to God in the Holy Scriptures, and no one who acknowledges God's Providence at all, can fail to believe that the numerous calamities of human life are permitted, appointed, and overruled by the Supreme Governor of the world.

This is a consideration of great practical importance, and should be seriously weighed in the day of adversity.

For *first*of all, it assures us that our afflictions are neither imposed by a fatal necessity, nor produced by the uncertain vicissitudes of chance — but come forth from the hand of one who is infinitely wise and just and good.

*Secondly*, it is fitted to minister at least a certain degree of comfort, inasmuch as it demonstrates that we have the security of all his attributes against the infliction of greater or more protracted suffering than is required by the necessities of our case, and the rules of perfect justice and wisdom and love.

*Thirdly*, it teaches us in many of our afflictions, and those which it is indeed most difficult to bear, to look beyond, and to rise above, the consideration of the mere *human agency*by which they have been inflicted. I refer to such as are brought on us through the malice of our fellow-men, in regard to which we are too apt to alone consider the *secondary agency*through which they fall upon us — instead of steadily contemplating God as addressing to us, through that agency, the warnings and lessons which we need to learn and improve. Thus it is that this class of afflictions — comprising calumny and defamation, extortion, oppression, and such like — are too little improved, and, indeed, seldom fail to produce an exasperation of spirit, diametrically opposed to that submissive temper which other afflictions, recognized as coming more directly from the hand of God, are fitted to produce.

Whereas, did we consider all afflictions, of whatever kind, as emanating from the unerring heart of loving Father — we would find, that even those which the hand or the tongue of man inflicts — are a wholesome discipline, and means of spiritual improvement.

And, finally, did we habitually bear in mind the consideration which I am now pressing on your attention, we should be the more disposed, and the better prepared for inquiring, with becoming earnestness, into the *reasons*which may exist for such dispensations, and the *grand ends*and uses for which they are designed. Let us remember, then, that every affliction, through whatever channel it may flow, comes to us ultimately from God's hand.

***~~3. In the day of adversity, you should consider the causes and occasions of suffering in general — and especially, inquire into the causes and occasions of your own affliction at the present time.~~***

As to the *general*cause of all suffering, it is sin, and nothing else than sin. But for this accursed thing, there would be . . .
no affliction in the world,
no painful disease,
no abject poverty,
no hostile violence,
no death,
no damnation.

Sin is the root of bitterness — and no wonder that its fruits are bitter. Rest assured, that God has not allowed so much suffering to prevail in the world from mere indifference to its welfare, or from any disposition to cruelty. No! "God is love" — and your happiness is dearer to him than any other object — his own glory excepted. All suffering is designed to mark his holy displeasure against sin, and to vindicate the honor of that law which God, as the righteous governor of the world, has prescribed for the regulation of our hearts and lives.

When viewed in this light, the sufferings which prevail to such a melancholy extent in the world, are fitted to deepen our conviction of *the odious nature of sin*. For when we reflect, on the one hand, on the infinite love of God, and his delight in the happiness of his creatures — and consider, on the other hand, how that, notwithstanding this love, God has permitted, nay, appointed so many evils to befall us — Oh! are we not sensible that sin, which is the cause of all suffering, must be, in his estimation, a most offensive and loathsome thing!

When a warm-hearted and kind father, who finds his chief delight in the bosom of his family, lifts the rod, and smites his beloved child for no reason? Does not the very warmth of his love, when viewed in connection with the severity of his chastisements, demonstrate that he abhors the *disobedience*which imposed on him the necessity of doing violence to his own feelings, by inflicting pain on the object of his fondest regards? Just so it is with God.

And his severe but beneficial and needful discipline, is a signal proof and manifestation of the hatred with which he regards transgression, seeing that for a time that displeasure seems to overcome all his delight in human happiness, and his reluctance to the infliction of pain.

But, in the day of adversity, the Christian disciple should not content himself with this *general*view of the cause of all affliction. He should inquire into the *special reasons*that may exist, in his past life, or in the present condition of his own soul — for God's dispensations towards him. He should consider "why the Lord is thus contending with him" — what root of bitterness there is still in his heart, or what cause of offence in his life, which can have called for the providential warnings and chastisements with which he has been visited. And, in short, whether any, and what cause can be assigned for his own personal and peculiar trials.

I am aware that, while all suffering proceeds from one general cause, namely, our inherent and actual sinfulness in the sight of God — yet it does by no means follow, that the special afflictions with which any one of God's people may be visited, can in all cases be ascribed to any particular dereliction of duty, and decay of personal religion; or that we are warranted to regard those who are visited with the severest and most protracted sufferings, as being, on that account, marked out as the greatest sinners. Absolutely not! Affliction is not dealt out in this state of probation on the principles of strict retribution; nor in the case of God's people, although, in some sense, it is still the consequence, is it to be regarded as the penal desert of sin.

God has other ends in view than merely to recall to their remembrance the sins of their past lives. He often sends trials upon them with the view of *preparing them for future duty* — of *fitting them for more extensive usefulness* — and of promoting, in general, their more rapid progress in the path of sanctification, and their fitness for a speedy translation to glory. Still, even when affliction is viewed in this light, as a preparatory discipline of the soul, it implies and presupposes certain defects in our character, which ought to be supplied — certain remaining corruptions which should be subdued. And, in most cases, the Christian disciple will be at no loss to discover, in his own state and character, many sufficient reasons for God's dispensations towards him.

Now it is of great importance that he should consider these in the day of adversity — that he should ascertain what are the defects of his character, and what are the special reasons of his present affliction, in order that, knowing the plague of his own heart, he may apply himself vigorously, and in right earnest, to the work of his high calling. Let him, in such circumstances, consider whether he may not have been gradually, and almost insensibly, falling from his first love — whether he has not become less spiritual in the ordinary frame of his thoughts and affections — whether he has not become, more than he once was, a stranger at the throne of grace, or more of a formalist in the exercise of prayer — whether he has not been neglecting some duty, or addicted to some self-indulgence, or in one respect or other exhibiting the marks of a decaying piety, or walking as a backslider from the Lord.

And if, on making such an inquiry, he see cause to conclude that it is not now "with him as it was in months past, when the candle of the Lord shone upon him" — Oh! let him acknowledge the seasonableness of God's interposition — his faithfulness in fulfilling his promise of needful discipline — and his own sinfulness in provoking the Lord to anger, even though he is one of his own adopted and forgiven children.

Most assuredly he will feel, unless, indeed, he is one that "turns the grace of God into licentiousness," that *the sins of God's people are in some respects more heinous than those of unregenerate men*, who have never enjoyed the same privileges, nor made the same professions, nor offered up the same prayers. And feeling how much his sins are aggravated by the consideration of God's love, and his own ingratitude — he will regard God's chastisements as a reason for the deepest humiliation of heart, for unreserved confession of sin, and for earnest prayer — not so much that his *affliction*may be removed, as that the *cause*of it may be taken away.

**4. In the day of adversity, you should consider the *design*and *end*of affliction, or the *uses*which it is intended to serve.** As it proceeds neither from blind necessity, nor from casual accident — but from the hand of your Omniscient Governor and Judge — so nothing can be more certain than that it is designed for the accomplishment of some great and useful purpose. Now the design of affliction is expressly revealed in the Word of God. He has condescended to explain the reasons of his dealings with you — and it is alike your duty and your privilege to consider and to concur in his declared design.

The general end of affliction, as it is explained in God's Word, is the moral and spiritual improvement of believers — in other words, their progressive sanctification, and their preparation for glory. Oh! how important must the right use of affliction be, if it is intended to terminate in such a result. It stands connected with our everlasting welfare — with all that we can enjoy on earth, and all that we hope for in Heaven.

But more particularly, the day of adversity is intended for our **INSTRUCTION**. The *Lord's rod*has a voice which speaks to us lessons of heavenly wisdom; and, therefore, we are required "to hear the rod, and Him who has appointed it." (Micah 6:9.) "The rod and reproof give wisdom." (Proverbs 29:15.) It presents to our minds many of the same great truths which are declared in Scripture — but which we may have overlooked, or failed rightly to understand — until they were pressed on our attention, and made the matter of our personal experience, in the day of trouble.

Thus, it teaches most impressively, that great Scriptural truth of **the vanity of the world, and its insufficiency as the portion of rational and immortal beings**. This is a truth which might almost be regarded as self-evident; yet it is one which is very slowly and reluctantly admitted by the young disciple, and which can only be effectually impressed on his mind, and unfolded in all its extent, by the experience of disappointment and sorrow.

In the case of unrenewed men, the world is the only portion which is valued — the object of their supreme affections — the source of their highest enjoyments. When the day of adversity arrives, even they are made to feel that the world is a poor and empty thing — "a broken cistern which can hold no water." But so long as they know nothing of a better portion, they are glad to cling to it, notwithstanding all their experience of its worthlessness. If, however, at such a season, they have their attention directed to the better portion that is provided for them in the Gospel, their experience of *the uncertain and unsatisfying nature of all earthly good*is fitted to awaken their desires after that higher happiness, and those *enduring riches*, which belong to the people of God.

And thus many an individual has been brought, by the *discipline of sickness*, and many a family, by *bankruptcy*or *bereavements* — to relinquish the world, and to seek God as their chief good. No new truth has been revealed to them; for they had often read in the Scripture, and heard from the pulpit, of the vanity of the world — but that which was then addressed to their understandings, is now impressed with power on their hearts. Their own experience has confirmed and strengthened the testimony of God.

On the same subject — the day of adversity administers a wholesome lesson, even to God's own people, who, in some prosperous season, are too apt to attempt a compromise between God and the world, and to seek only a part, and that, perhaps, a small one, of their happiness in Him. They are ready, in such circumstances, to "settle on their lees;" and because "their mountain stands strong," or because "they have had no changes" — they have become more familiar with the world, less conversant with God, and more wedded to temporal enjoyments, than befits the candidates for heavenly glory.

But the day of adversity comes, and dispels at once the fond illusions by which they had been deceived. It reveals the world to their view in its true light, and they awaken as from a dream to the inbred and thorough conviction that all is meaningless and vanity! Poverty, disease, and death are employed, to teach them a lesson which they were slow to understand or believe when they read it in the Bible, or heard it declared from the pulpit, while as yet they had no experience of its truth. And as soon as they are thus thoroughly impressed with this practical conviction, they are prepared to rise above all worldly influences, and to seek with greater earnestness than ever, the enjoyment of God's favor, which is life, and his loving-kindness, which is better than life.

In like manner, **the day of adversity teaches us the great lesson of our entire and constant dependence on God**. But a little while before, we were rejoicing in the midst of prosperity — our health was sound, our business prosperous, our families entire. But the sudden stroke has come which has smitten . . .
our bodies with disease,
our business with bankruptcy,
or our families with death.

*And that stroke has come from the Lord's hand!*

Oh! in such circumstances, we are impressively taught . . .
that we are absolutely in God's power;
that all that we have is at His sovereign disposal;
that we depend on Him, day by day, continually for . . .
  our personal preservation,
  our worldly prosperity,
  our domestic comfort,
  for all, in short, that we desire or love on earth.

It befits us never for one moment to forget our obligations to him "in whom "we now feel more sensibly than we ever felt before, that "we live, and move, and have our being!"

And finally, our experience of present suffering exhibits to us in a most impressive and convincing light, **some of the grand leading principles of God's moral government**. It demonstrates his holy determination that sin shall not pass by unpunished; and makes it as certain as any other fact in human history, that as a sinner, man is exposed to the righteous judgments of God.

These are some of the lessons which adversity, when viewed as a means of moral instruction, is fitted to inculcate and to impress with great practical power on our hearts. And when these lessons are duly considered, and, above all, when they are submissively embraced and acted on — the disciple will learn from his own experience the value of affliction, and admire the wisdom with which God suits his lessons to the most urgent necessities of his soul.

The day of adversity is intended not only for our INSTRUCTION — but also for our **REPROOF**.

**It is designed as a chastisement, to rebuke and humble us.**The grand design of God both in his Word and Providence is to produce a genuine humility of heart. Many of his most solemn messages to us in the Bible are intended for this purpose — but the evil is, that pride is too apt to resist the application of these passages to ourselves. Nay, the more proud any man is, and the greater his need of being humbled — so much the more averse is he from this faithful application of God's revealed truth to his *own*soul.

But in the day of adversity, the Lord takes the *rod*in his hand, and by singling out an individual or a family for his fatherly chastisement, he makes a *personal application*, as it were, of the truth to that individual or family, so as to make them feel that they are under his reproof and correction. Then many sins that had been made light of at the time of their occurrence, and which had perhaps escaped altogether from their remembrance, are forcibly recalled and pressed upon their consciences. The *threatened judgments*which, when heard by the ear merely, had failed to awaken their apprehensions — are now realized and felt to be certain as well as solemn, when they are actually suffering under the rod.

God's holiness and justice are now known to be *active* attributes of his nature, as well as *essential*attributes of his nature. And his moral government is felt to be at work in reference to themselves. Thus *pride*is slain, *repentance*awakened, and *humility*produced. God has applied the truth by the agency of the rod! And while they smart under his chastisement, they feel that it reproves them for sin, and that they dare not utter one word of complaint, or offer one plea in their self-justification. Thus God "has humbled them, and proved them, and shown them what was in their hearts."

**The day of adversity is designed for our probation and trial.**It brings with it peculiar trials, which are fitted to *test*as well as to *exercise*the graces of God's people. Thus Abraham was tried, when he was commanded, apparently in direct opposition to God's covenant promise — to offer up his son Isaac. This was, in every point of view, a sore trial; it brought with it peculiar temptations to unbelief and disobedience, such as had never assailed the patriarch before. But he was strong in faith, giving glory to God — -and his faith and obedience were rendered only the better and more illustrious by means of his trial.

So is it with the people of God, who are the children of faithful Abraham. God visits them with adversity, not merely with the view of *instructing*or *chastising*them — but **for the purpose of *trying and exercising their Christian graces*.**By means of such trial and exercise, these graces are strengthened and matured. For just as the bodily frame is more fully developed, and grows in vigor by means of active exertion — so the principles of spiritual life in the soul are improved and perfected by means of discipline — that discipline calling these principles into exercise, and thereby increasing their strength and vigor.

Thus, when a man who has long been weak in faith is visited with adversity — he is laid under a necessity, as it were, of having recourse to God in his straits. He feels that he has no other being on whom he can depend for support or help; and as one consideration after another presents itself to his mind, as to the all-sufficiency and faithfulness and love of his Lord — his faith acquires increasing confidence, and when he is weak he feels that he is strong.

So with the man who, while he lived in the sunshine of earthly prosperity, may have been easily annoyed by trifling inconveniences, and reluctant to submit to them. But when he is visited by a signal and sore affliction, he is compelled, as it were, to recognize God's hand in it, and thus*a holy resignation to the Divine will,*and *a submissive temper*, are exhibited by him in his severest trials, such as he was unable to preserve in former times. These *graces of the Christian character*being called into lively exercise, and thus strengthened and matured.

And oh! if this be the benevolent design, and this the happy effect of affliction, how much reason has he to rejoice that, while his outward man perishes, his inward man is renewed day by day! And who that knows the unspeakable value of those heavenly graces which are thus invigorated and strengthened by affliction — will murmur at the *discipline*by which God seeks to call them into exercise, and to carry them onward to perfection.

**The day of adversity is designed as a means of *preparation for the future*which lies before us.** This is an interesting aspect of our present trials. We are too prone to take a *retrospective view*of their causes and occasions — while we think little of their *prospective*design and results. But we ought not only to look back on the *causes*which may have rendered our afflictions necessary — we should also look forward to the events for which they are designed to prepare us.

I believe that affliction is often sent, not so much as a *chastisement for past sins* — but as*a means of preparation for future duty.*And for this end, it is most suitable and efficacious. It is a means of fitting us for future trials.

All the afflictions of life are not sent upon us at once, otherwise we should be in danger of being overwhelmed by them; but one is sent at a time, and this makes way for another, and prepares us for enduring it. The Lord, in his providence, follows the same rule as in his instructions: "He gives line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; according as the disciples are able to bear it." One affliction, duly improved, prepares us for enduring another, and deriving good from all.

There is *great diversity, indeed, in God's methods of dealing with his different disciples*.

Sometimes, by a sudden stroke, he visits a prosperous disciple with the heaviest calamity at first. And it is not astonishing if, thus unprepared by previous discipline, it should be felt to be almost overwhelming. But then, if such an affliction is at all improved as it should, it must serve, by its very magnitude, to suppress all repining, and to produce a meek and resigned spirit, under the smaller afflictions which may follow it.

In other cases, the smaller trials are sent first, and one follows after another, until the disciple is prepared for enduring the heaviest of all. The mind that is in any measure duly exercised by the former — becomes, as it were, familiar with the principles which administer support and comfort, and is ready to have instant recourse to them, when the latter arrives.

Oh! how mercifully does God deal with his people, in thus *adapting the method of his discipline to their respective circumstances —*sending on one, who might otherwise fail to be awakened to his highest interests, a stroke like a sudden thunderbolt — and on another, whom such a heavy stroke might overwhelm, such preparatory minor trials as initiate him gently in the *school of affliction*.

Some may wonder that we speak of so many successive trials, and of the wisdom of God in making one affliction prepare the way for another — but it is even so in the experience of God's people. Affliction is not one act of chastisement — but a course of beneficial discipline, a series of preparatory trials leading on to the glorious consummation — for it is "through much tribulation that we must enter into the kingdom of God."

**Adversity is a means of fitting us for future temptations**. God, whose knowledge extends to all future events, sees that a disciple is before long to be placed in circumstances which will throw strong temptation in his way. And He also, whose knowledge extends to the secrets of the heart, knows that, in the frame of mind which present prosperity has induced, that disciple would be ill qualified to resist these temptations — perhaps prone to yield to them. He must be called off from the world, and brought to his knees, and strengthened inwardly with strength in his soul. But so long as *prosperity*continues, this moral change, so essential to his future safety, is not to be expected.

Therefore, in the exercise of his unfailing love and faithfulness, the Lord takes him into his own hand, and visits him with affliction. The disciple is grieved, no doubt — but he is also humbled, and instructed and strengthened by this discipline — a new and more spiritual frame of feeling is produced — the truths of religion acquire a firmer footing in his mind, and a fuller ascendency over his heart. And these truths, thus applied to his soul, furnish him with new and stronger motives — so that, when the hour of temptation comes, he is prepared, through God's grace, to meet it, and his very sorrows are his preservative from sin!

Oh! little do we know from what temptations we have been preserved or delivered by means of such *beneficial discipline*. How little do we know what we might have been, had we had fewer trials!

The Christian disciple, who has been subject to protracted bodily indisposition, may be apt to wonder why he should be for so long a time kept in a condition which apparently hinders or impairs his active usefulness. But perhaps that very disciple had the*seeds of vanity, worldliness, or intemperance*in his heart, which the *constant sunshine of prosperity*would have caused to spring up and ripen — or he was likely to be placed in circumstances which would have tempted him to open sin. How thankful, then, should he be for *God's restraining grace*, even though that grace has operated through the discipline of sorrow — especially if he finds that, during his sickness, his spiritual health has been preserved and increased, while he sees many a prosperous professor, who has fallen before the power of that temptation from which he has been so graciously preserved!

**Adversity is a means of *preparation for extensive usefulness*.**That affliction, when it comes upon us either in the shape of bodily illness, or extreme poverty, or blighting calumny, unfits us for the active service of God — is the complaint which is usually made by those who are visited with it in the prime of life. While many an aged disciple, who is completely disabled by his infirmities, is apt to wonder why he is still preserved in life when his usefulness is apparently gone. But he, who considers that *the greatest usefulness consists in glorifying God* — will see at a single glance that there is no ground for such thoughts in either case.

In regard even to present usefulness, and without reference to the future service for which affliction may be preparing them, *they may glorify God as much by patient suffering as by active service*, and may thus be in the highest degree useful to those who are around them.

The mere consideration of their sufferings may impress many a beneficial lesson on the minds of others, especially of the young; while the active and consistent exercise of their Christian graces, in such circumstances, may afford an example of religion in its *sustaining*power — such as is admirably fitted to commend it to the acceptance of their friends. Thus, even the aged sufferer, disabled as he is from active duty, may be a powerful witness for Christ. And although he has no prospect of being restored to his former sphere of exertion — he is occupying with good and beneficial effect the post which the Lord has assigned to him.

If it is true, as unquestionably it is, that even an old blind beggar is not without his moral use in the world — then how much more certain is it, that the aged and apparently disabled *believer*is, even in his greatest infirmities, a blessing to his family and friends. For how can he be more useful to them, or how could he better glorify God — than by exhibiting, as he does in the hour of his greatest need, the worth and value of that divine religion which comforts him in all his tribulations, and smooths his path to the grave; nay, which enables him to rise above the love of life and the fear of death, and to rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory, and to bear his testimony to the love and faithfulness of his Lord throughout the whole course of his protracted trials! Such a man is not useless. Oh no! Though his limbs are inactive, his memory faded, all his faculties impaired — yet . . .
his moral feelings are strong within him,
his faith is firm,
his hope is heavenly,
his heart is full of peace and joy.

And many others feel that the aged sufferer makes a deeper and more beneficial impression on it, than all the learning and eloquence of the schools.

As an aged believer was accustomed to say, when reduced to extreme poverty, and wholly disabled by a paralytic stroke, "I often seem to myself and others to be a useless burden on the world — but I know and believe that God must have something yet to do by me or in me, otherwise I would not be here." But while the believer, during the time of his affliction, is really occupying a post of usefulness, that season is, in many cases, designed to prepare him for more extensive and successful exertion in God's service hereafter.

While the *aged*believer looks forward to Heaven as his only remaining sphere of service, the *younger*brethren may anticipate a restoration to health, and a course of usefulness on earth. And their present afflictions are designed and fitted to *prepare*them for exerting a higher and more beneficial influence over their fellow-men. This they do by their influence in promoting our personal sanctification; by deepening our impressions of the vanity of the world, and the value of the soul, and the magnitude of eternity; by enlarging our experience of the power of religion, and teaching us its unspeakable importance.

In proportion as affliction serves to promote our personal growth in grace — in the same proportion it prepares us for future usefulness. Our capacity of glorifying God in all the ways of private or public duty depends on the condition of our own souls. If our souls have been improved by the discipline of adversity — our testimony to God and his truth, and our love and care for our fellow-men, will be proportionately more constant and more effectual than before. Thus the apostle refers to his own experience during his manifold afflictions, as having been a means of fitting him more fully for one important part of the Christian ministry. "Blessed be God," says he, "even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulations — that we may be able to comfort them that are in any trouble, by the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." (2 Corinthians 1:4.) Everyone can feel the force of these words.

The word of comfort comes with unspeakably greater power from the lips of a suffering Savior, or a sorely tried disciple, than from the lips of one who has never known adversity. And this holds good, not only of the minister of religion — but of every private Christian, and that, in respect to all the departments of Christian usefulness. He is better prepared by means of his experience, as for comforting the afflicted, so also for exhibiting in his own life and conduct the sanctifying and supporting power of religion, for commending it to the consideration of his family and friends; and for making many exertions, and submitting to many sacrifices, to which others, living in uninterrupted prosperity, might be less inclined to submit. In a word, the deeper the impressions are which he has received on his own soul — the better is he prepared both in point of knowledge and zeal, and sympathy, to care for the welfare of others, and to promote it.

**The day of adversity is a suitable preparation for the hour of death.**That solemn hour must soon arrive. Much inward preparation of heart is needful if we would meet death with calmness, composure, and fortitude. In the day of prosperity, that preparation may be made, if we can succeed in maintaining the ascendency of divine truth in our minds: for it is the truth of God inwrought, as it were, into the frame and temper of our spirits — and not any external influence merely — which fits the believer for his *last struggle*.

But during prosperity the mind is too prone to yield to worldly influences, and is often reluctant to allow God's truth that full ascendency which its importance demands, and which is in fact essential to the believer's comfort in the prospect of death. It is by its beneficial influence in breaking the power of worldly enchantments, in disengaging the mind from delusive expectations, and in directing it more earnestly and simply to the truths of God's Word — that adversity serves to prepare it for meeting death with fortitude. The sorrows of life may thus, without exciting one feeling of discontent, or calling forth a single murmur — predispose the soul to leave without reluctance, a scene of so much trial — and to anticipate without alarm that solemn event which will terminate all our earthly cares, and introduce us into a nobler and happier state of being.

Prosperity is less suitable than adversity as a means of preparation for death, not because the latter possesses any "magical charm" by which the fear or the pain of death is allayed — but because affliction is in God's hand a powerful instrument in awakening our attention to the truths of religion, and impressing them on our hearts. It is not adversity in itself simply — but adversity duly considered and improved, that has this effect.

Many a sorely tried and afflicted man is as reluctant to die as the most prosperous worldling. But the reason is that, in his case, adversity has failed in leading him to open his mind to the full influence of Gospel truth; and his experience, while it shows that affliction, like other means of grace, may be frustrated of its beneficial tendency — affords no ground for concluding that it has no such tendency.

The genuine disciple is all the better prepared for his last hour by the many seasons of affliction through which he has passed — because, at every such season . . .
his mind has been powerfully impressed,
his contrition deepened,
his faith strengthened,
his communion with God restored,
his love for the Savior increased,
his experience of the Spirit's supporting grace enlarged,
and his hope of Heaven revived.

Thus enlightened, quickened, and comforted by the truths of God seasonably and powerfully applied to his heart by means of affliction — he is prepared to surrender himself into God's hands, and to trust in His unfailing love and faithfulness, at that last, that solemn hour, when leaving its earthly tenement, his soul must enter into the spiritual and eternal world!

**The day of adversity is a means of preparation for eternal glory.**"For our light and momentary afflictions are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." 2 Corinthians 4:17-18

So says the apostle in words which demonstrate the connection which exists between the believer's sufferings on earth — and his ultimate happiness in Heaven. That such a connection between these two things exists, a connection similar, in some respects, to that which existed between the *humiliation*and *exaltation*of the Savior himself; and that our present afflictions are working out for us a result so glorious — may well serve at once to reconcile us to them, and to impress us with a sense of the wisdom and love of God in imposing them.

But let us not imagine that afflictions have this efficacy in themselves, as if (ex opere operato) they automatically either secured or merited for us a future compensation or reward. Far from it! God does not visit us with afflictions beyond our desert — so as to make himself our debtor. Neither does any amount of affliction insure us of future glory, except in so far as it is made the means, in God's hand, of bringing the truth home to our hearts, and inducing us cordially to embrace and diligently to improve it.

And hence the apostle not only states the fact that affliction works out for God's people an exceeding weight of glory — but he points out the way in which it does so: "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." It is by its influence in weaning our thoughts and affections from the world, and directing them to spiritual and eternal things — that adversity tends to prepare us for glory.

We may suffer much and long — but not until the mind looks upward to God and forward to eternity — not until it cordially receives and embraces the truth of the Gospel, is it thereby better prepared for glory — any more than are the fallen spirits who are kept in chains of darkness unto the day of judgment. But as soon as it brings us to the knowledge and reception of the truth, it prepares us by the truth for glory. It then elevates our minds, and prepares and refines them, "so as to make them fit for the inheritance of the saints in light."

This it does . . .
partly by convincing us of the vanity of the world — so as to feel that God alone can be our satisfying and everlasting portion;
partly, by convincing us of the wretchedness of our condition as sinners — so as to feel that peace with God is essential to our happiness;
partly, by convincing us of the remaining corruptions that cleave to us — so as to feel that we must be made perfectly holy before we can expect exemption from trial;
and still more, by enabling us to experience the love of God, the pleasure of comfortable communion with Him, and the unspeakable blessedness of resting on Christ — so as to enjoy some foretaste of that higher and more perfect happiness which shall be enjoyed when we enter into his immediate presence.

Accordingly, we read in the Scriptures that even the redeemed in Heaven look back on their earthly trials with grateful ascription of praise to God for his wisdom and love in making them subservient to their present glory; and a venerable Christian emphatically observes, "I believe there are very few in Heaven — but owe their conversion or their continuance in that state, to some affliction or other."

Such is a brief account of **God's benevolent design in the afflictive dispensations of his providence**. Their general end is the progressive sanctification and ultimate perfection of our natures. And with this view, they are intended for our instruction, for our reproof, for our trial, and for our preparation for death and glory. That such is their declared purpose and use, may well serve to impress us with a sense of God's goodness, even when he chastens us. While their admirable fitness, as a means to so great an end, is illustrative of the Divine wisdom which presides over the management of our affairs. And the serious consideration of the grand design which they are so well fitted to accomplish, is not only useful in reconciling us to the patient endurance of our present discipline — but is also necessary to the right improvement of our present discipline — since, if we are either ignorant or forgetful of God's design in them, it is not to be expected that we shall either bear them with patience, or steadily pursue those grand moral results to which they tend.

**5. In the day of adversity, you should consider your remaining comforts, your numerous and undeserved mercies, and your ample and efficient means of relief.**Under the pressure of some sore trial, the mind is too apt to fall into a morbid state, and to brood over its peculiar misery — while it is forgetful alike of the mercies which might alleviate its bitterness, and of the means by which all that is really evil in it might be removed. In some cases there is a reckless desperation — in other cases there is a desponding melancholy, which prevents the enjoyment of any blessing after one favorite object has been withdrawn; and which indisposes, and in part disqualifies, the sufferer from having recourse to those means of relief and consolation which are yet within his reach. This is an ungrateful and rebellious, as well as wretched state of mind.

And hence the apostle rebukes it when he speaks of the two contrasted negatives, "Despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked of him." If we would avoid the latter of these extremes, and rise above our sorrow, or at least be able calmly to endure it — we must turn our thoughts to the consideration of our remaining mercies, and have recourse to the practical use of those means of relief which God has graciously given. Notwithstanding the severe stroke by which we have been deprived of health, or fortune, or friends — we are still surrounded with innumerable mercies, which are far, far beyond our deserts. Have we not still some earthly comforts — some small supply for our needs, however apparently casual — some sight and taste of the sweet beauties of nature, which are free to all — some few surviving friends who cling the more closely to us in proportion as their number is diminished, and who are still ready to weep with us when we weep, and to rejoice in our joy?

Yet suppose our condition to be the most desolate and forlorn, have we not still the almighty providence of God to trust in, and his precious promises to refresh and gladden us? Have we not still in Heaven a Great High Priest, a fellow-sufferer enthroned amidst the glories of the upper sanctuary, who has a fellow-feeling with us in our trials, and the power of supporting or relieving us in them all? Have we not still, as his disciples, the same grounds of everlasting hope, the same assurance of pardon and peace, the same interest in his great salvation? Have we not still the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, whose very office connects him with the afflicted, and makes them the object of his peculiar care? Have we not the sweet fellowship of our fellow-disciples, who can speak a word of comfort to us from their own experience, and bear us on their hearts at the throne of grace? And have we not access for ourselves to the mercy-seat, where, in the confidence of believing prayer, we may utter the fullness of our hearts in the presence of the God of all comfort?

Oh! let not these precious, these unspeakably sweet and glorious privileges forgotten or despised — merely because some affliction has befallen us! We have still far more left to us, than has yet been taken from us. We have everything we *really need*to bless us in time, and prepare us for eternity.

But let us not merely *think*of these things, let us seek to *enjoy*them. It may be, that affliction has been sent chiefly to restore us to the fuller enjoyment of that happiness which such privileges may confer — to teach us their unspeakable value, and by means of them, to raise us to a higher plane of spiritual life than any we had formerly experienced.

Let us not only consider our remaining temporal mercies — but with a grateful heart partake of them, rejoicing in the light and heat, the air, the verdant earth and starry sky, exclaiming, "My Father made them all!" Let us not only consider God's providence — but with lowly reverence adore and trust in it! Let us feed upon his promises by faith, looking forward with heavenly hope to their glorious consummation. Let us have recourse to Christ as a sympathizing friend, receiving his salvation freely, as it is freely offered, rejoicing in his unchangeable love, glorifying his transcendent work of salvation, and exulting in his exaltation. Let us yield to the Spirit's grace, seeking his guidance, submitting to his power, and rejoicing in his consolations. Let us cleave to our Bible, which contains our glorious charter and security for time and eternity — nourishing our souls with divine truth, refreshing them with divine promises, invigorating and strengthening them with the faith and patience of the saints. Let us more frankly enter into Christian fellowship with our fellow-disciples, learning from their experience, and deriving from their communion new light, and love and joy. And with them, or by ourselves, let us repair often and freely to that throne of grace, before which all the sorrows of believers in all ages have been divulged, not doubting, that to us, as to them — relief and support will be sent in every hour of need. And finally, let us not confine our consideration to the circumstances of our *present*condition — but while we gratefully enjoy our remaining mercies, and dutifully improve our present privileges, let us also consider, and seek in the exercise of holy meditation to realize our *future prospects and hopes*. These might well support us, *even though all earthly supports were removed.*

We know that all our afflictions are soon to terminate, and, if we are Christ's disciples — the end of affliction will be the beginning of perfect joy. Heaven is before us. Thence let us draw, as it were by anticipation, some *foretastes*of its blessedness — motives to encourage, and strength to animate us in our earthly pilgrimage, and an undying energy of perseverance in our spiritual welfare. For why should any Christian faint by the way — if that *way*is leading him to Heaven?

**6. In the day of adversity, you should consider Christ Jesus the Lord, as the forerunner and the pattern of his believing people.** Thus writes the apostle: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. *Consider him*who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." Hebrews 12:2-3

*Christ should be much in our thoughts in the time of suffering*.Let us consider the **number**and **intensity**of Christ's sufferings, and how far they exceed whatever we can be called to endure. Consider . . .
the lowliness of his birth,
the labor of his youth,
the poverty of his whole life,
the persecutions to which he was exposed,
the calumnies which were invented against his character,
the hatred of his avowed enemies,
the treachery of some of his professed friends,
the public insults and mockery with which he was treated,
the pains which he endured of hunger and thirst,
the still deeper pains of crucifixion, and
the deepest pains of all — his "soul-sufferings" which made him exclaim, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death!" "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!"

It is related of an eminent man that, while racked by severe suffering, he was accustomed to turn his thoughts to the scene of his Savior's agony, and that he thence derived at once a lesson of meek endurance and a motive to gratitude — he felt that his sufferings were as nothing, when compared with those of his Divine Master. This seems to be the idea that is suggested by the apostle when he reminds the disciples — that they had not yet, like their crucified Lord, "Resisted unto blood, striving against sin."

Let us consider the **DESIGN**and **EFFECT**of Christ's sufferings**.** They were different in these respects from our own. In his case they were strictly penal — intended as a satisfaction to divine justice for all the sins of his people; as a fulfillment of the curse of the law; and as such, their amount must have been inconceivably greater than *our light afflictions*, while their effect was and is to deprive all our afflictions of their bitterness, and death itself of its sting.

Our afflictions are *chastisements*, and as such, may be properly regarded as manifestations of God's fatherly displeasure — but they are not *penal*inflictions, such as can satisfy divine justice. No, all that was strictly penal in suffering, all that was required for the vindication of God's law and the fulfillment of the curse — Christ has already endured for us. This consideration is fitted at once to impress us with the conviction that our sufferings have been *alleviated*by the Savior's agony, and to cheer us with the hope that by the effect of his sufferings and death — we shall soon be delivered from their pressure and raised to perfect joy.

Let us consider the **divine sympathy**which Christ's personal sufferings secure for each of his suffering people**.**A suffering Savior, can sympathize with an afflicted people. "For 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. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

And let us consider the **patience**with which he endured his sufferings — his meek resignation to the divine will — his calmness in the midst of human enmity — his fortitude in the hour of death. "He suffered, leaving us an example that we should walk in his steps." "When they hurled their insults at him — he did not retaliate; when he suffered — he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."

The apostle's expression, "fixing our eyes on Jesus," is a comprehensive description of what should be in all circumstances — the habit of the believer's soul. But never is "fixing our eyes on Jesus" more *needful*or more *refreshing*than when he is placed in circumstances of affliction. Then, if ever, he should be looking unto Jesus — never losing sight of his once crucified, but now exalted Master, nor turning his eye away from his glorious person — until, by the view of his patience and success in the hour of trial, his heart is at once *subdued into tenderness and elevated by joyful hope*.

One view of Christ, will avail more for our relief in such circumstances than all other considerations combined. A suffering Christ is at once the *Savior*, the *friend*, and the *pattern*of the suffering Christian. And, when He is thus contemplated by the *eye of faith*, virtue will come out of him for the support and comfort of his redeemed people.

In vain is our attention directed to all other subjects — if Christ is *overlooked*or *misunderstood*. We may and should consider . . .
the adversities which befall us,
the hand from which they proceed,
the causes which have occasioned,
the guilt which has incurred them,
the declared design and end of affliction, and
the serious and beneficial lessons which it is fitted to teach.
But all this will not avail for our comfort and support — unless we know and consider "Christ and him crucified." This is . . .
the grand subject of contemplation,
the only genuine spring of comfort,
the only safe ground of confidence and hope.

If afflictions do not lead us to consider Christ in his sufferings, and to know the end and object for which his sufferings were endured, and their intimate connection with our own welfare in time, and happiness in eternity — our afflictions, however numerous, or heavy, or protracted, have been sent in vain! For all the lessons which they teach, respecting the vanity of the world, and the demerit of sin, and the justice of God — are useful chiefly in a way of subserviency to our progress in the knowledge of Christ! It is by their influence in leading us to Christ, and fixing our regards on Him as our only help and hope — that they conduce at once to our personal comfort and our progressive sanctification.

Let the sufferer reflect on his trials, and his sins; let him ponder the proofs of God's judicial administration until he is impressed with a solemn sense of his justice; let him consider the vanity of the world, the certainty of death, and his own weakness to avert any one of the calamities to which he is exposed — all these considerations are beneficial ONLY in so far as they have a tendency to convince him of his need of Christ. But he must look to Christ himself, and especially to Christ in his agony, and on the cross — and that, too, with an intelligent and scriptural apprehension of the nature and extent of his sufferings, as an atonement for sin — before he can experience either the sanctifying influence of affliction, or the sweetness of Gospel consolation under it.

He who, either through ignorance or error, thinks little of Christ, or misunderstands the mysteries of his humiliation and death — is yet in a condition which prevents him from being either duly *humbled*, or duly *supported*in the day of trial.

Oh! why will the weak and stricken spirit turn its thoughts to other objects — while Christ, the Son of God, is plainly exhibited to his view, as a fellow-sufferer on earth. Surely such a Sufferer claims his regard, and exhibits to him an *example*such as may cheer, and animate, and direct him, in his most trying hour. Surely it is "the cross of Christ" alone, "by which the world can be crucified unto us, and we unto the world!" And we may well "count all things but loss, for the excellence of the knowledge of Jesus Christ our Lord."

**7. In the day of adversity, you should consider the recorded examples of the saints and martyrs who have gone before you, and who, in similar trials, have been enabled to endure, as seeing God, who is invisible.** "Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy!" James 5:10-11

A very large part of the historical Scriptures is occupied with the sufferings of God's people, and their experience and conduct under them.*Our first parents*, who suffered in their persons, and were driven forth from the beautiful garden, to a world that was laid under the curse; and who suffered severely in their domestic relations, especially when their first-born imbrued his hands in his brother's blood — *Abel* himself a sufferer and a martyr. *Noah*, the witness of that terrible deluge, which swept away all but his own immediate relatives. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses and David; Isaiah and Jeremiah; the martyred Baptist, and Stephen, the first Christian confessor; Paul, and all the apostles and primitive disciples — all these are exhibited as *sufferers*, whose experience verified the statement, that it is through great tribulation that we must enter the kingdom.

It is a proof of God's supreme wisdom, that the history of suffering is thus interwoven, as it were, with the whole texture of his Word — since thus it is adapted to whatever has been, and ever will be, the experience of his people in all ages of the Church. Did the Bible speak little of affliction — did it exhibit the believers of olden times as prosperous men, enjoying a happy life on earth, with few or insignificant trials — we might have envied their happy lot, without imitating their virtues, or aiming at their comforts. But when it presents them to our view as men compassed with the same infirmities, exposed to the same trials, enduring the like afflictions with ourselves — we feel that they are our brethren in sorrow — and that like as they were comforted and enabled to endure — so may we also be supported by the same grace, and endued with the same patience from on high.

This it is which imparts a charm to the simple narrative of their experience, such as renders these passages among the most precious portions of the Word of God — insomuch, that it may with truth be said, that *the afflictions of David*, which occasioned the composition of the Psalms, have been a signal benefit to the universal Church of God — every member of which, in all ages and lands, can enter with all the interest of a fellow-feeling into . . .
those mournful complaints,
those pathetic expressions of a stricken heart,
those deep and profound acknowledgments of man's sin and God's eternal justice,
those earnest breathings,
those longing aspirations towards Heaven
— with which these Psalms abound.

And more generally, the consideration of the sufferings of God's people in all ages, is of the highest use in discharging the mind of that fond misconception which is so apt to be entertained in the hour of sorrow, even that our sufferings are of a *different*kind, or more *intense*in their degree, than those of other men, "I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of his wrath!" From which we are too apt to infer that God would not thus deal with us, if we belonged to the number of his people, or unless he had an unappeasable anger against us. Whereas, when we consider the Scripture narrative, we find that *affliction has been the badge of God's people in all ages*, and is to be regarded, not as a mark of reprobation, so much as a pledge of friendship. There we are taught that "fiery as our trial may be, no strange thing has happened unto us" — that "the same afflictions were and have been accomplished in our brethren in all ages of the world" — and that we are only the partakers of those trials, which, as being appropriate to our high and heavenly calling, are described as "the afflictions of the Gospel" — nay, as "Christ's sufferings."

The consideration of *the sufferings of God's people*is fitted farther to assure us, that the Gospel is adequate to sustain us under the severest trials, and in the prospect of death itself. For . . .
they passed "through a great fight of afflictions," and yet received no damage;
they were burned in the furnace, and were thereby not destroyed — but refined;
they submitted to violent death, and the Gospel was adequate to their support and triumph in that fearful hour.

Why then should *we*despond — *we*, to whom . . .
the same promises are addressed,
the same supports offered,
and the same hopes insured!

*Will not Christ be with us in the furnace*, even as he was with the Hebrew children who came forth from the furnace unhurt?

And finally, *their example in suffering affliction with patience*, is at once instructive and animating. When we consider Christ Jesus the Lord, we are too apt to think that *his divine strength*enabled him to endure in such a way as cannot be realized by his weak followers. But here are men, men with hearts as sensitive, with flesh as weak as our own — who have meekly suffered every form of natural evil, and who have been made more than conquerors over all! Let us consider them in the hour of our trial, and in the exercise of the same unshaken faith in God. Let us seek, like them, to "let patience have its perfect work, that we may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing."

**8. In the day of adversity, you should consider the actual effect which your trials have yet produced on your own souls.**We have seen what God's design in them is — let us inquire whether that design has been fulfilled in our own souls. Does our experience correspond with his declared purpose.

Are we more sanctified?
Are we more weaned from the world?
Are we more humbled under a sense of our unworthiness?
Are we more deeply impressed by Divine truth?
Are we induced to pray more frequently and more fervently?
Are we more thoroughly devoted in heart and life to God's service
 — by means of, and in consequence of, our afflictions?

If we cannot answer these questions in the affirmative, have we no reason to fear that we are fighting against God; that we are slighting his warnings, despising his rod, and frustrating his gracious intentions towards us? Oh! it is very needful thus to inquire as to the *actual effect of affliction on ourselves* — for it operates very differently, according as it is well or ill improved.

In the former case, affliction produces . . .
contrition of heart,
deadness to the world,
meek submission to God,
an earnest desire after communion with him,
a holy frame and heavenly temper, such as befits our condition as pilgrims and strangers on the earth!

Affliction prepares us . . .
for usefulness in life,
for peace in death, and
for glory in Heaven!

But in the other case, when it is despised, or misimproved, affliction leaves the soul as lifeless as it found it:
instead of contrition, it awakens discontent;
instead of Christian humility, it leaves us in unbelieving despondency;
instead of weaning us from the world, it rivets more firmly around us the remaining ties by which we cleave to it, and issues in dull insensibility, or reckless unconcern.

It has been beautifully said, that*"the same fire which melts the gold — hardens the clay."*Just so, the same afflictions which softened the heart of David — hardened the heart of Pharaoh into more obdurate impenitency. And is it not worth our while to consider *which of these processes*is now going on in our own experience — whether we are becoming better or worse by the discipline of God's providence; whether we are ripening for Heaven — or sinking towards Hell.

Oh! that is a solemn statement which declares, "that he who being often reproved, and hardens his neck — shall speedily be cut off, and that without remedy!"

If, on the other hand, we have good ground for believing that our minds have yielded to the beneficial influences of affliction, and have thereby become more dead to the world and more alive to God; if we feel a growing humility of heart, and experience a sweeter communion with Heaven; if our faith has been strengthened, and our hope confirmed in the hour of trial — then may we not only rest assured that it has been *good*for us that we were afflicted; but on a comparison of the spiritual benefit which we have acquired with the temporal prosperity which we have lost — we shall be able and willing to give our joyful and grateful testimony at once to the wisdom and goodness of God in *all*his dispensations towards us.

Having suggested various topics as suitable subjects for your consideration in the day of adversity — permit me again to remind you that all the benefits of affliction depend on your attention being awakened and directed to God's truth. It is by *consideration alone*that it can do you good. *An inconsiderate sufferer — will be an unsanctified sufferer.*He may suffer much and suffer long — but all to no purpose, unless he is brought to *think*, and to think seriously.

That affliction is fitted to induce *thoughtfulness*, is the reason why it is employed as a means in the discipline of God's providence. But its tendency may be frustrated, and then all its benefits must be forfeited and lost.

And finally, let me impress it on your hearts, that you should thus improve the first moments of affliction before yet it be too late. For while the season of adversity furnishes a fit opportunity, and addresses to you an impressive call to consider your case — it ought never to be forgotten, that when affliction reaches its extreme point, it does, in many cases, unfit the soul for all profitable thought. You may be subjected to a disease which will totally overpower your faculties, and give you over as a passive and unresisting prey to the power of death. Think not, then, of postponing consideration until a *future*hour; but laying to heart the trials which you have already experienced, seek so to improve them now, while reason is yet clear and strong — as that, whatever may befall you hereafter, you may have good ground to rejoice in the assurance that your soul is safe for eternity!