

IS GOD ENOUGH? **When Life Gives you Lemons!**

2012

Alongside the wonderful and blissful moments in my life co-habit the trials and afflictions that I cannot escape. They show up unexpectedly from time to time and like parasites, they literally suck the life out of me. But I have to accept them as they are unavoidable, and it would be wishful thinking on my part to believe otherwise. But do they bring anything good and positive besides the usual pain and suffering?...

I headed out the door for my regular walk this morning with these thoughts in mind. Gloomy ones perhaps, but if they are viewed with the right perspective, they can be a game changer in my life. To find the correct or best answers to my dilemmas can oftentimes prove to be a real breakthrough for me. So, I always keep searching until I find them. And oftentimes, it happens in some unexpected ways.

As I turned onto Hebron Street, I spotted the familiar red scarf from afar with its owner standing on the curbside and looking up at a tree in front of him. *What's he up to this morning?* I wondered, as I walked in his direction.

"What's up there?" I asked him as I came and stood by his side with no forewarning. I realized I had startled him but as soon as he saw me, his face brightened up.

"Oh...hi, dear lady! Nice to see you again!. I'm looking at these huge cocoons full of caterpillars. As you can see, they've made their home on a good part of this tree. It's quite an amazing sight actually!.."

While he was still talking, I looked up and gasped. "Wow! I've never seen so many of them! These branches should be cut off and burned before they damage the tree even more!" I commented.

He frowned. "That's a solution. But in doing so, we would miss the beautiful butterflies or moths that will eventually come out of these cocoons, wouldn't we? Don't you like butterflies?" he asked.

"Of course, I do. But I also enjoy looking at a beautiful healthy tree with leaves on it." I replied, as I led him to a shady spot on the other side of the road.

"I can't disagree with you on this one," he said. "But I'm always amazed to see how nature reproduces itself... In this instance, one of the most truly amazing occurrences is complete metamorphosis, which literally means changing from one creature into a completely different one... It all begins with the egg, then the larva. The larva then transforms into a pupa or chrysalis. The pupa of many moths is protected inside a cocoon of silk like this one. This stage can last from a few weeks, a month or even longer... Some species have a pupal stage that lasts for two years! Can you believe this?.. Finally when the caterpillar has done all of its forming and transformation, if we are lucky, we'll get to see an adult butterfly emerge. Quite amazing, isn't it?.. And you may find solace, dear lady, in knowing that even though these caterpillars can defoliate a tree, it doesn't kill it. The tree will grow a second batch of leaves if it's not compromised by other diseases. So, we're still able to enjoy them both!" he reassured me.

"Now, are you going to tell me that you're an expert in butterflies?" I teased.

He chuckled. "An expert? Not at all... I don't really study or collect them but I enjoy reading about them. I find these creatures very beautiful and captivating. And I have to say that we're a bit like them in some way!" he added with excitement.

"How so?" I asked, puzzled.

"Well, simply put, we all start our lives from an egg that has been fertilized. Then, we live in some sort of a 'cocoon' where we go through a period of gestation during which time we grow and develop. And when time finally comes, we emerge as beautiful human beings, all created by God!" he answered beaming, seemingly pleased with his analogy.

It was not the first time this old man surprised me with his figure of speech and as we started walking further down the road, I finally asked him about it. "Sorry to interrupt here, but I notice that every time you speak, you always bring some kind of comparison between man and nature. You particularly enjoy doing this, don't you?"

"Yes, I must admit I do. It's a little habit of mine that I acquired watching my father. He always used this manner of speech when he wanted to get his point across, and it seemed to work. I hope you don't mind me doing so?" he asked.

"Oh, not at all... It was simply an observation. You're the first person I know that does this, and my reason for noticing it... Listen, can I ask you a question?"

"Sure!"

"Do you think that anything positive can come out of the trials and afflictions we experience in life?.. I know my question has nothing to do with caterpillars, butterflies and metamorphosis, but this morning this is all I could think about. As far as I'm concerned, I see more pain and suffering than good..."

"I can tell, dear lady, that you're in a mood for some introspection this morning! As you probably noticed by now, this is something I enjoy doing too. So, I'll be happy to give you my opinion." he replied.

"Great!" I said, eager to listen to what he had to say.

"First, let me just say that you're not that far out with your question. The hardships we go through in life can also be part of our 'metamorphosis' if we learn something positive from them. Let me explain..."

"It would be idealistic to believe that we could eliminate all the trials and afflictions in our lives... If we'd live in a perfect and sinless world, it would be a different story. But as we both know, it's not the case... All evil in the universe emanates from the sins of fallen creatures. God's role with regard to evil is never as its author... He simply permits evil agents to work, then overrules evil for his own wise and holy ends... Ultimately He is able to make all things work together for a greater good... I understand that it's difficult to fathom this while we're going through these hardships. But when the storm is over and our emotions have settled, we usually admit that we have learned a lesson or two from them."

"Well, I certainly hope so..." I was quick to comment.

"I must say though that certain trials are tougher to handle than others", he kept on. "And the temptation to condemn God for bringing them upon us is sometimes hard to resist. However, as I said earlier, he's never the author of it. Either we are for having made the wrong choices, for having been disobedient to his will or circumstances out of our control came into play..."

"Recently, I read the story of Job." I quickly interjected. "I tell you what..., he's one righteous man that went through some unbelievable trials and afflictions in his life!.."

"Yes, he certainly did... As you know, God had blessed Job tremendously and Satan believed that if God would take away all his blessings, Job would curse Him. Satan was so sure about this that God finally allowed him to test Job but under one condition: that he would not take away his life... The results were devastating for Job... He lost everything... His wealth, his health and all his children whose lives were taken away... At one point, three of his friends came to sympathize with him and comfort him, but they gave him plenty of bad advice in rounds of discussion. They mistakenly blame his sufferings on his personal sins... His wife even told him to curse God and die... Job at one point began to question God himself and this is when he answers him out of the storm...¹ He didn't mince words, that's for sure!.. God indisputably proved his sovereignty to Job. Job then admitted that he had no right to question Him in the first place, and humbled himself in front of the almighty God... This story has an incredible ending. After Job prayed for his friends and because of his faithfulness and endurance through such suffering, God blessed the latter part of his life more than the first... This is what I call the sovereignty and the faithfulness of God in action!" he exclaimed.

"I must admit that story puts things into perspective..." I said.

"It sure does," he replied. "Like Job, we can find ourselves fighting the most terrible battle of our lives which can bring hopelessness and discouragement... In moments like these, our faith in God needs to be stronger than ever knowing that he's by our side every step of the way. That he's in control of everything. That he knows what's best for us. God is faithful and his grace is sufficient to overcome. He will strengthen us. We need to dig even deeper into his Word, pray and have faithful, compassionate friends alongside of us interceding and praying for us... Ultimately, God has a way of taking Satan's best efforts and somehow uses them for his glory."

I was speechless for a moment trying to absorb everything he had just said. But at one point I couldn't help myself but ask: "Were you a preacher in your youth? 'Cause you certainly sounded like one just now!"

He smiled. "As a matter of fact, I was... But it was a very, very long time ago..." he replied without adding another word.

I felt he did not want to pursue the subject any further, so we kept walking in silence for a while admiring God's nature unfolding around us. *What a strange but extraordinary man..* I thought.

I left him. And on my way back home I thought how easy it is to completely trust God when everything in my life goes well. But when the going gets tough, when my prayers seem to hit a brick wall, when the suffering goes on and on and I am at my wit's end, can I still say that God is enough?.. A scripture comes to mind that should always give me hope when I find myself in the middle of a spiritual battle and that is... *'In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose'*.²

I further concluded that God's sovereignty cannot be challenged. *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."*³

At the end of the day, I have to keep reminding myself that I'm just a traveler passing by on this earth and while I'm here, the battle between good and evil will keep going on. God has not promised a clear blue sky without clouds, sun without rain, joy without sorrow, peace without pain. But God has promised strength for the day, rest for the weary heart, light on the way, grace for each trial, help from above, unfailing sympathy and undying love. YES, God is enough...for he will always make a way for me to keep *'fighting the good fight of the faith...'*⁴

I am reminded of a song by Don Moen which gives me great peace of heart and mind every time I hear it.

"God Will Make a Way"

*God will make a way
Where there seems to be no way
He works in ways we cannot see
He will make a way for me*

*He will be my guide
Hold me closely to His side
With love and strength for each new day
He will make a way, He will make a way*

*By a roadway in the wilderness, He'll lead me
And rivers in the desert will I see
Heaven and Earth will fade but His Word will still remain
And He will do something new today*

*God will make a way
Where there seems to be no way
He works in ways we cannot see
He will make a way for me...*

*He will be my guide
Hold me closely to His side
With love and strength for each new day
He will make a way, He will make a way*

He will...

¹ Job chapters 38-41

² Romans 8:28

³ Isaiah 55:8-9

⁴ 1 Timothy 6:12

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