



CHANGING FROM THE CENTER

Where Does It Hurt?

³⁹ Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." ⁴¹ He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, ⁴² "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

⁴³ An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. ⁴⁴ And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. ⁴⁵ When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow.

Jesus suffered physically.

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Jesus suffered in his mind, emotions, and soul.

Jesus was “fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.” (Hebrews 2:17)

Jesus suffered physically.

Jesus suffered in his mind, emotions, and soul.

Jesus suffered relational disappointment and isolation.

When we hurt or suffer, our lives will often slow down. Sometimes to a crawl, or a halt.



Is a person valuable when they aren't accomplishing anything?

"The short answer is yes, of course! Imagine a tiny infant who sleeps most of the time and can barely hold her head up because her neck muscles are still strengthening. To a new parent, there is hardly a more beautiful sight. But what is she accomplishing? On any scale of productivity, nothing. But on the scale of being human, she is overwhelmingly valuable. She is valuable because she exists."
(from *What Does Your Soul Love?*)

Is God there if you can't feel him?

"Another fruit of that time [of pain] was that I was left with a new sense of the 'eternalness' of God... The sense of God's with-ness was deeper than a feeling, deeper than cognition. God is not bound by my timeline or even by my senses. He is boundless, eternal, everywhere present, and 'every time' present."

(from *What Does Your Soul Love?*)

² Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Trials can be tests.



“Trials, hardships, challenges all have a way of testing what we believe about ourselves, about God, and about reality. Pain has a way of dispelling fantasies and illusions. Perseverance is a priceless, precious quality. Don't we want to be able to stay with something important even when it's difficult? Don't we want to have power not to give up when things are hard?”

(from What Does Your Soul Love?)

Pain interrupts denial and avoidance.

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Pain commands your full attention.

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Pain exposes lack of control.

"I thank God for pain, and I cannot think of a greater gift I could give to my leprosy patients. Most people view pain as an enemy... Yet, without it, heart attacks, strokes, ruptured appendixes, and stomach ulcers would all occur without any warning. Who would ever visit a doctor apart from pain's warnings?"

(Dr. Paul Brand - *The Gift of Pain*)

Trials —> Testing —> Perseverance

“Gen Z is the loneliest, least resilient demographic alive today.” (Stuart Lustig)

This trend can be linked to factors like increased screen time, social isolation, overprotection, instant gratification, and ongoing awareness of large-scale societal stressors.

Trials —> Testing —> Perseverance...

“Mature and complete, not lacking anything...”

"We've prayed many times asking God to grow our trust in him, or for him to make us whole in ways that we haven't been so far, or to provide us something we're lacking. But we seem to always be surprised when we're brought to such places along a painful path of hardship. Perseverance leads to good and lasting work in us. If we let it, we'll discover that much of what we've longed for in our lives will be realized." (from *What Does Your Soul Love?*)

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Justified through faith...
Peace with God through Jesus...
Standing in grace...
Boasting in the hope of the glory of God.

Only when we are first able to “boast in the hope of the glory of God” can we then “glory in our sufferings.”

"Paul surely doesn't enjoy suffering, but the suffering he faces as he follows Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit is *purposeful*. The suffering Paul is talking about *produces something*. No woman relishes the great pain of labor. But there is grace and purpose in that pain as it brings with it the promise of a baby boy or girl."

(from *What Does Your Soul Love?*)

Suffering —> Perseverance —> Character —> Hope

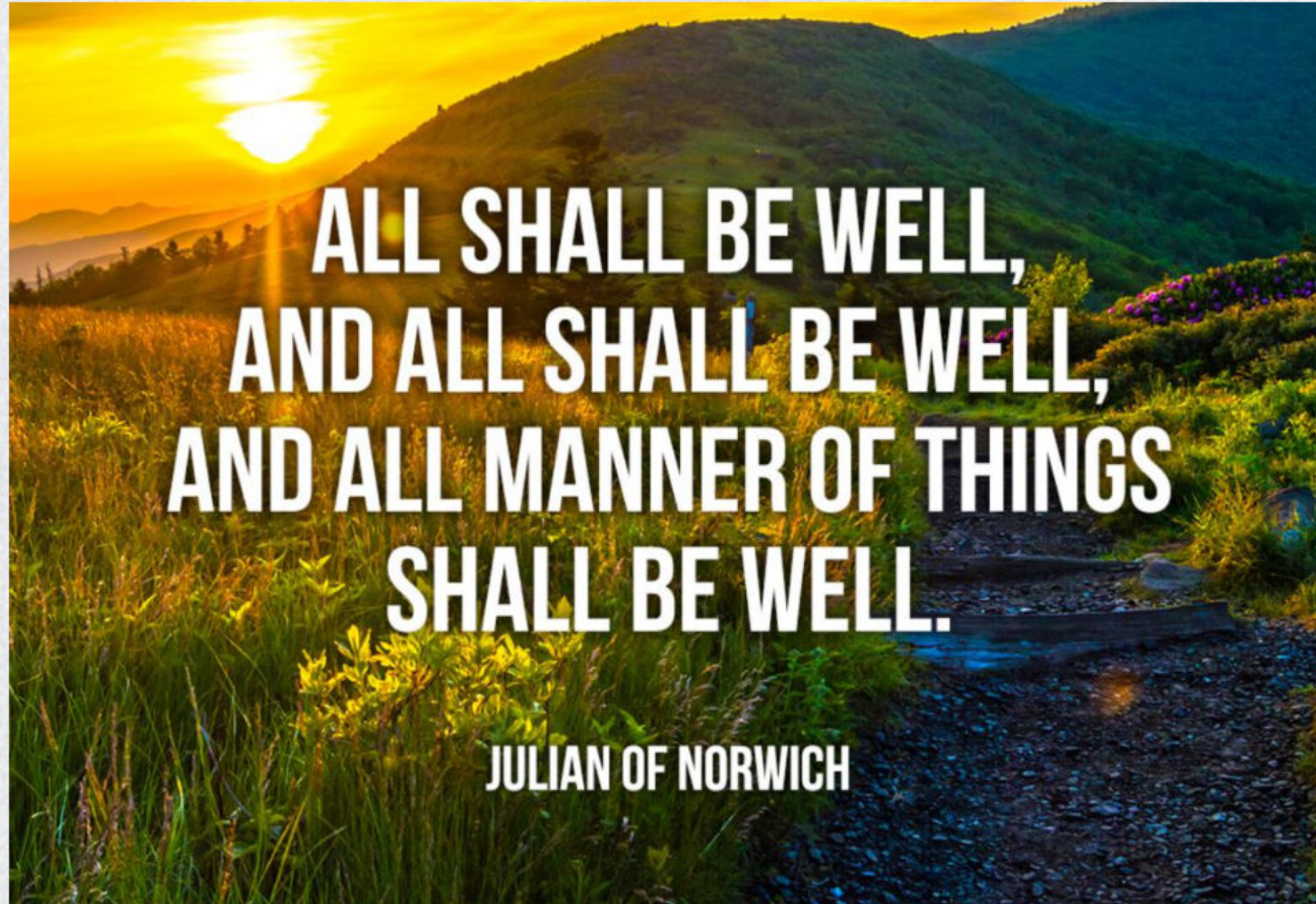
"I do not believe that sheer suffering teaches. If suffering alone taught, all the world would be wise, since everyone suffers. To suffering must be added mourning, understanding, patience, love, openness, and the willingness to remain vulnerable."

(Anne Morrow Lindbergh)

There's a difference between
sitting with the reality of
suffering and "*wallowing*" in it.



CHANGING FROM THE CENTER



Closing Reflections

CHANGING FROM THE CENTER

Are you going through some kind of struggle or suffering right now? Physical? Mental? Emotional? Relational? Spiritual?

Closing Reflections

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Are you ready, and willing, to be tested or taught by your hurt or struggle?

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Invite the Spirit to strengthen you for the “work” of perseverance, for the struggle you are in currently, or the one that is coming next.

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Ask God to deepen your connection to hope—the hope of God’s glory, and the hope that is gained as we grow in the character of Christ through adversity.

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