

10. God permits suffering in our lives and then uses it by comforting us in it, so that we in turn can comfort other human beings who are suffering.

Margaret Clarkson grew up in an unhappy home; and for many years has experienced excruciating headaches coupled with compulsive vomiting, a congenital back problem, and crippling arthritis. In her book Destined for Glory, she writes:

I found my answers in the Word of God, but not before I was well into my forties, and not without much pain. Slowly but surely the Holy Spirit began to make real to me the teaching of the Scriptures concerning the sovereignty of God and its meaning for my life. Gradually I came to understand something of God's over-arching purpose for His children and His ways of bringing it about. Slowly I began to learn to look beyond my immediate situation to God's ultimate purpose for my life, and doing so I gradually found peace. As my knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures increased, so did my assurance and my spiritual growth.

My general health remains unchanged to this day. Despite their best efforts, my doctors have never been able to do much for me beyond offering palliative measures for my illnesses and giving me much-appreciated moral support. Though I have besought God earnestly for healing, He has not seen fit to touch my body with a miracle. His working in me has been more intimate, more eternal—He has touched my spirit and is working His miracle of healing there.

I have learned that through understanding of the Scriptures there is comfort and hope in human sorrow. . . .

When this manuscript was little more than half written, I had a visit from my young friend Julie, eldest daughter of the family of whom I write in my opening chapter. Five years earlier she had lost her widowed mother after a painful struggle with cancer which had lasted nine years. As she read my manuscript she began to question me closely, and we spent three days discussing in depth the biblical teachings about suffering and evil. Many unresolved conflicts concerning her mother's death came to the surface, and we talked them out. She was able to find rest on a number of points that had been troubling her and commit herself in a new way to God's sovereignty.

Two weeks later I received her thank-you note, and with it, devastating news. During a routine physical examination required by her school board, she had found that she, too, was a victim of cancer.

During the months of surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation treatments that followed, she told me how grateful she was that God has prepared her for her trouble by giving her a more thorough biblical understanding of the whole problem of human pain than she had had at the time of her mother's illness and death.

"After going through what I did watching Mom's suffering, and having so many questions still in my mind about it," she wrote me,