



*Flo Harvey*

I'm Flo Harvey—mother of eight, part-time florist, homeschool teacher, adoptive parent of two young children with special needs, Sunday school and young moms group study leader, and elder at Northridge Friends Church in Wichita, Kansas. In our busy home, as I prayed for leading with this writing, a familiar theme kept resonating in my heart. Then, within the last month or so, my husband suffered a couple of heart attacks. He had an emergency heart procedure, and a stent was placed in his body. I didn't need to put out a fleece to assure me of God's leading: Trust God in difficulty in a way that honors and glorifies him, and be willing to faithfully suffer well.

None of us likes suffering, yet every one of us is called by Christ to “take up their cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). In the week to come, we will examine what this means. May we encourage each other to an unbending glorious faith, in spite of our earthly circumstances.

Second Corinthians 12:9-10 says: “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 6:25-34 NASB*

As a mother of eight and wife of a semi-employed, recent heart attack survivor, I am a champion worrier. If left unchecked, I can fret and agonize over every minute detail of life. Questions—*When? How? What if? Why?*—can plague my already overwhelmed mind.

But worrying denies God's power in our situation and, let's face it, produces absolutely no positive results. It stealthily destroys our physical health, our relationships, and our peace of mind. Most of all, worrying erodes our faith and trust in God's continual presence and his work in our lives.

Our worrying is offensive to God. It takes our eyes off the Almighty and compels us to dwell on our perception of the situation at hand. Worry shows that we are thinking, "This is too much; even God can't handle it." It indicates that we are questioning our belief in God's power or lacking trust that he can bring us through. Peter walked on water while his attention was focused on Jesus. Then, when he saw the wind and water, doubt crept in and caused him to be fearful, and he began to sink.

Gaze intently upon the Lord by keeping his Word continually before you. "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33 NASB). Don't be anxious; know that the storms of life are calmed by his voice. Listen for him and leave worry behind.

*SONG: It Is Well With My Soul*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, we are prone to worry. Help us to focus on you and not on the storms. We trust you to keep watch over us. Amen.*

—Flo Harvey

*BIBLE READING: Romans 4:18-21*

The Harveys have experienced many trials and setbacks over the past few years. We know that when trials and sufferings come our way, it is easy for our faith and belief in God to waiver. We struggle to see and know the purpose of our suffering and can even question if God has forsaken us. Flawed human reasoning can convince us that God no longer loves us, that he doesn't have our best interests at heart.

Without experiencing suffering, very few people could have developed their unwavering faith or a deep level of spirituality or holiness. Admittedly, as we learn to embrace it, trouble tends to deepen our character, increase our faith, and give us blessings we might never have obtained if we weren't willing to accept and endure difficulties. The heart of suffering molds us and makes us more like Christ.

Clinging to our knowledge of who God is and how he has been faithful in our past helps us to endure in difficulty. Choosing to be continually rooted in his Word both comforts us and gives us hope for a future free from suffering. And, often in my case, I am reminded once again that my God is sufficient and in control—not me! Knowing this renews my faith and strengthens my belief in him in a way that no amount of blessing ever could.

*SONG: I Know Whom I Have Believed*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father God, you know our hearts and you know exactly what is needed in each life to help us to know you more. As trials and suffering come our way, let them do your work in us. Amen.*

—Flo Harvey

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 4:1 (KJV)*

Parenting our seven-year-old, Kimberly, has been challenging. The agencies, which at first tried to help her family stay together, tell us that she suffered neglect and physical/emotional abuse by her biological parents. She doesn't remember enough to talk about it, so it's hard to know what to address or how to help her. Having been with us for three years, and now adopted, Kimberly's wounds are still slowly healing. She tends to respond to our direction or training by lashing out in rebellion and disobedience, creating an hour-by-hour struggle for those around at the time. And that just stinks.

As Kimberly has experienced a different "normal" in the Harvey house, she is slowly beginning to trust us. And as we see her follow more of our guidance, we can trust her to make better decisions. With that growing trust, Kimberly is becoming more inclined to submit to our authority and direction. She is ever so slowly opening her heart to love and to be loved.

We have some of those same tendencies, choosing to rebel and disobey God's direction and training when facing trials and suffering. We don't like it, and we don't mind saying so. But, like Kimberly, as our trust in a loving Father grows, submission comes a little easier. We will have more opportunities to submit and walk with him through difficulties; and as we do so, trust, dependency, and love will enlarge us. It all goes hand in hand. Distress has refined us and we are more than we were.

*SONG: 'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Dear Jesus, never leave us as we are. Work in us to enlarge us and make us fit for your kingdom. Amen.*

—Flo Harvey

*BIBLE READING: Romans 5:3*

My husband's last full-time job went away more than five years ago. I never dreamed that we would continue to be in a place of part-time/contract work for this long. Throughout we have continued to believe that a permanent full-time job was just around the corner. In this time, Mike has been a substitute teacher, dealt with government agencies for Stanley and Kimberly, worked with the adoption process, and performed other small jobs.

We know that waiting is tough, especially when it accompanies some type of suffering. We want the trial to be over, the hurting to stop, and we often can't see the "trees" of blessing through the "forest" of despair. Perseverance is a close relative of patience. You don't want to pray to acquire either one for fear of what might be required to obtain them.

Many of the Bible greats have been required not only to suffer, but to wait and persevere in that suffering. Just read many of the psalms. David suffered greatly. He was anointed king as a boy, yet then was pursued for years by King Saul before he was enthroned. Joseph, too, suffered at the hands of his brothers and was imprisoned before he rose to a place of authority.

The waiting was difficult, but both David and Joseph continued to trust and praise God. They persevered by keeping their eyes on him, not giving in to despair, using this time of waiting to grow in relationship with him. May we follow their lead.

*SONG: They That Wait Upon the Lord*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, help us to wait well. May we use the time effectively to grow in faith, trust, and perseverance, glorifying you in all we do. Amen.*

—Flo Harvey

*BIBLE READING: Philippians 4:7 NASB*

A little before Easter, Mike suffered a heart attack. A week or two later, as another episode began, a stent was put into one of his arteries. While he was in the emergency room, I was a bit overwhelmed, to say the least—this seemed to be the straw that might break this camel’s back. The recent adoptions resulted in financial lack and stresses, presenting challenges for our family. Now we were facing a medical crisis with no insurance and a longer period of unemployment, along with costly medications and an uncertain future. Admittedly, peace and joy eluded me at first.

Having learned from my prior experiences with God, “But do not lean on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5b), I went immediately to his Word and found a multitude of Scriptures on which to rely. Many of them encouraged us that it was possible to have peace and joy—yes, joy—in the midst of trials and suffering. We also witnessed others in our congregation who were suddenly and unexpectedly walking long journeys of extreme physical suffering during this time. They challenged us with their own attitudes of peace and joy in the midst of trials.

It certainly isn’t easy to have joy and peace in times of suffering, but it is a choice. Choosing to acknowledge God’s sovereignty in spite of your emotions and circumstances is the key, to set your mind on God and trust that his ways with you are just and true. Such assurance is pure uncontained joy and abundant peace.

*SONG: The Joy of the Lord Is My Strength*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, remind us each and every day of your love for us. May we be transformed through our difficulties and claim your joy and peace as our own. Amen.*

—Flo Harvey

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 43:5*

Many times over the last few years, I have had to fight the desire to curl into the fetal position in my “safe room” and ride out the storms of life. Living in Kansas, this type of self-preservation comes naturally. Survival often depends on that “duck and cover” mentality in Tornado Alley.

During these times of hunkering down under the weight of trials and suffering, a hymn or a worship song will penetrate my heart. As I lift my voice to sing, words comfort and encourage me. The very act of singing to my Redeemer takes away my inward focus and helps me to see God’s power and love, no matter how my situation might look at the time. Praise reminds me of the bigger picture and elevates me above my circumstances. Perhaps this is because, according to the psalmist, God inhabits our praise.

Worship pleases God because it acknowledges his rightful place in our hearts. That is why God made us—to praise him. It is especially sweet to God when in the midst of suffering, we choose to seek his face. Real praise is truly evidence of a strong faith in him, a faith that rarely bends when battered by the winds of suffering. Worship flows from our praise as we recognize that nothing touches us which hasn’t been pre-approved by the Father himself. We couldn’t be in a safer place than that.

*SONG: Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Jesus, we praise you for who you are. We thank you for the trials of life that remind us how very much you love us. Thank you for keeping us safe in your arms. Amen.*

—Flo Harvey

*BIBLE READING: 1 Chronicles 29:11 NASB*

Difficult trials and suffering can put us into a very isolating place. Depending on the situation and the duration, we can become extremely lonely, convinced that we will never be victorious in our battle. We can even begin to doubt that our handling of our circumstance is honoring or glorifying to God at all. What did Jesus say about the blind man's sufferings? It was so that God would be glorified (John 9).

We need to remember two important things:

First, Scripture indicates that we have a victorious position in Romans 8:31: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Then in Romans 8:37: "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Victory in Jesus has already occurred and is assured. The victory may not look like we envisioned it, but his promises are true, whether fulfilled here on earth or later in heaven. We can take that to the bank.

Second, as we share in the sufferings of Christ, we have a choice. Either we can hold fast to and grow in our relationship with him, or we can give up our faith and walk away. Remember, though, as we have heard before: If you don't feel as close to God as you have been, God is not the one who has moved. By choosing to believe in God's promises and cling to him, we truly do honor and glorify God. We elevate him in our lives and witness to others of his faithfulness. I wouldn't choose any other way.

*SONG: Victory in Jesus*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father God, help us to cling to you, no matter what life throws at us. May we give honor and glory to you always, in every circumstance. Amen.*

—Flo Harvey