

God Knows

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This message is for anyone who is suffering pain, affliction or tribulation. It is for the unemployed and those facing financial trials. It is for people who live each day with an anxious foreboding about their future. I want to say to each of you right now: **GOD KNOWS ABOUT IT ALL.**

The Psalmist testifies, "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off" (Psalm 139:1-2). He is telling us, "My God sees whenever I sit down and rise up. He hears and considers every thought I think. He knows everything about me." *When we are in tribulation, God knows what we are going through.*

Whenever I am in pain and need a word of encouragement, I want to talk to somebody *who knows*. I don't want someone who'll merely quote scriptures to me. I need to talk to someone who has also been in the fire — someone who has felt depths of suffering, who has been there himself.

Usually only those who have suffered deep pain themselves have genuine compassion for others who are hurting. I saw this over the years as my wife and I vacationed in Florida. At restaurants we overheard elderly people talking about their doctors and the operations they'd undergone. Someone who had the same pain would chime in with sympathy. In the very tone and timbre of their voice, I could feel the agony of the long nights they'd endured. A deep connection was established, a bond of understanding and compassion.

Many Christians today are so despondent over their pain they no longer believe God cares about their situation. They wonder, "Does God hear my prayers? Why does he allow this trial to go on?" Other Christians slowly grow more bitter in the midst of their trial. They think, "I've been faithful to love and obey God all these years. I've done right according to his Word.

Now I've lost my job and we're on the brink of losing our home. Medical bills are piling up, and our finances are spiraling out of control. We're facing permanent ruin. Why would God allow all this to happen? Why won't he hear my cry when I need him most?"

God knows about our suffering — and he cares.

Our heavenly Father also has known suffering — through Jesus, his only begotten Son. The author of Hebrews tells us Christ himself is touched by the feelings of our infirmities. The fact is our afflictions will either draw us closer to Christ or plunge us deeper into despair. Afflictions can make us wholly dependent on God's Word or they can drive us into a spiral of unbelief. If we continue to harbor bitterness, it can harden our heart until we end up in a pit of hopelessness.

I personally know the "soul battle" that suffering brings. My wife, Gwen, battled twenty-eight surgeries over a lifetime marked by physical suffering. Night after night, I sat on the edge of our bed burdened down with grief, crying, "Lord, I love you, I trust you. But we are hurting so badly. Why does this pain continue? Will it never end?"

At such times I heard him lovingly whisper to me, "David, I know. And I care. I am with you." Oh, the healing power of those words: "I know" — and the great mercy of our precious, loving Savior!

In our most trying times, we are faced with a choice. We either must trust God with our life and future, or we must charge him with willful negligence. This has always been the choice for God's people. In the Old Testament, the children of Israel made the wrong choice. The Lord had chosen them to be a "teaching people," examples of faith and trust in God before the world. And God had given Israel great promises to live on. The plan was simple: Israel, the "light of nations," was to *learn to live on every word that proceeds from God's mouth* (see *Deuteronomy 8:2-3*).

Great difficulties lay ahead of Israel, but God promised he would never leave nor forsake them. He pledged to lead them through it all by his own hand. He only asked that they trust him, living by every word he spoke to them.

Israel's difficulty was never about not having enough provisions. They never lacked food, water or shelter. Not one of them starved in forty years. Even in their unbelief, God provided for all of their physical needs through every trial and difficulty. Our Lord does not cut off his children from what they need because their faith falters.

The Israelites' trials were necessary to produce an enduring testimony to the world.

What was the testimony God intended for Israel? It was that *his people can survive and be at rest in any crisis*. The Israelites were headed to Canaan, the Promised Land, a place filled with a never-ending supply of milk and honey. Yet the "place of rest" that God intended for Israel was more than just a physical location. It was a place where his people would live completely by faith, trusting in every word that proceeded from his mouth.

This is still God's plan for his people — to have a place of rest. They find it by living wholly according to every word he speaks. The author of Hebrews tells us such a place of rest remains unclaimed by God's people. In short, the Lord is still testing a people who would "enter into his rest by faith."

Israel never did become the Lord's testimony in this sense. Instead, the people murmured and complained, questioning God's faithfulness in every crisis. And they died in misery. They led lives full of fear, completely self-centered, obsessed with their own needs. Yet all along the Lord had faithfully led them, clothed them and sheltered them. Inside, they were just spiritually dead.

The Lord knows what is in the heart of each of his servants. And he knows every reason given by those who once served him joyfully but now have turned away in bitterness. He sees clearly that inner place in us, even when we don't.

Jesus spoke about this when a group of covetous Pharisees came to hear him teach. As they harassed and ridiculed him, Christ responded, "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15).

Christ's words here have never been more relevant. In the world's eyes today, you do not want to be found out as being one of those "Jesus people." Many Christians who were once passionate about Jesus have now adopted a religion of respectability, emphasizing good works and charity. Utmost in their minds is to keep the approval of the crowd. So they justify their rejection of having any zeal for Christ. Jesus says this attitude is abomination in God's eyes.

I simply have no answer for those who ask why the holiest believers suffer so deeply and so often. I can't begin to answer why God's beloved ones endure such hard times. But I do know something about those who have turned away from the Lord in bitterness.

To all backslidden people, I must ask this: Is your heart softer since leaving the Lord? Or is it harder? Are you warmer or colder to the people in your life? Jesus told us to judge a tree by its fruit.

As a faithful shepherd, I have to speak to you a warning: The devil is happy to continually fill your mind with endless questions. He wants to smother any flicker of faith remaining in you with a growing mountain of doubts. You can be sure such thoughts will continue to pile up. Hear me when I say, you picked the wrong time to turn away from Jesus.

The truth is God knows. He knows your sitting down and your rising up. He knows all about your pain, all about your situation, all about your future. As David writes, "There is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before [surrounded me], and laid thine hand upon me" (Psalm 139:4-5).

David is saying, in essence, "Because I trust him, he has me covered on all sides. In the midst of tribulation, I am able to say, 'God knows. He cares. He is with me!'"

In Psalm 139, God reminds his people where he is in our tribulation and what he promises to do for us.

Perhaps you sense the Holy Spirit tenderly wooing your heart in the midst of your pain. Yet you continue to ask, "But what about my outward situation, my circumstance? Where is God in my case? When is this trial ever going to end?"

I don't know why the Lord allows the righteous to suffer. I don't know why he allows children to suffer. I don't know why he has allowed the suffering of my own children, my wife, my family. I simply can't tell you what I don't know. But I can tell you what God promises you in his Word.

Consider the beginning of Psalm 139. He pledges to all who call on his name: "I know you! You are never out of my mind" (verse 1). "I monitor your every move. I know every thought you think" (verse 2). "I have you covered at all times" (verse 3). "My very hand is upon you" (verse 5). "There is no place in heaven or earth you can escape my Spirit" (verse 7). "You may think my Spirit is not with you, but he is always there" (verse 8). "When darkness tries to hide me from your eyes, I will break through that darkness" (verse 12). "I loved you and covered you even in your mother's womb" (verse 13). "I saw the substance of your being before you were born" (verse 15). "And I've had precious thoughts toward you from then until now" (verse 17).

Beloved, you cannot begin to number the good thoughts God has toward you, even now. Be encouraged: He is with you in your situation, no matter how intense it may get. You have a faithful, knowing companion in your pain. Yes, *God knows!*

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