



On a walk early one Sunday morning, I find myself behind my brother's house in Flat Rock, Alabama. I have my camera and I am enjoying my walk through the woods on a quest to find something of beauty to photograph. Along the way I find plenty of my usual subjects while I am in this portion of God's country; spiders, snakes, bugs, butterflies, flowers and creeks. Each picture was nice enough but they all seemed to lack something that would set them apart from all the other photos I have taken in this area.

It did not take me long to find something that caught my attention and literally reached out and grabbed me. You can imagine my surprise when this object drew more than my attention; after the encounter, a drop of blood was left hanging from the tip of my finger. After I recovered from this brief interview, I decided to at least get something for my pain; so I took this picture of the strange thorny stick. Later that morning I took the photo of the cockle burs and decided that there was a pattern emerging from my mornings travels.

How many times as we walk through life, on our search for something of beauty, something that will bring us pleasure and happiness that the only thing we find is pain and a bloody finger? The sad fact is that none of us can totally avoid pain; no matter how rich we are, no matter how careful we try to be; there will come a day for each of us when tears fill our eyes. We cannot gather roses without being pricked by the thorns. God does not promise to keep us immune from trouble; rather He says, "I will be with you in trouble."

If we cannot avoid trouble, what should be our attitude when pain and trouble come our way? Our reaction to pain will either make us better or bitter, and the choice is totally up to us.

Pain is inevitable for all of us, but misery is optional. Determine in your heart to gain from your pain. Use the difficult situations and people in your life to spur you on to live life on a higher plane. If life gives you lemons, make lemonade; if your tree falls, make fire wood.

Sorrow and pain can be our servant, helping us to feel more compassion for others who hurt. Troubles are often the tool God uses to redirect and change our lives. Discontentment and disappointments are the source of a lot of trouble, but also of progress. Why do we consider painful what is good for us? An athlete dreads the conditioning and difficult training, but knows in his heart it is the only way to become better and win the prize. Let us face whatever comes our way today with faith and a certainty that it has first passed through the hands of a loving Heavenly Father.

Something to think about:

- Some people are always grumbling because roses have thorns; I am thankful that thorns have roses.
- The tests of life are to make, not break us. Trouble may demolish a man's business but build up his character. The blow at the outer man may be the greatest blessing to the inner man. If God, then, puts or permits anything hard in our lives, be sure that the real peril, the real trouble, is that we shall lose if we flinch or rebel.
- Attitudes are capable of making the same experience either pleasant or painful.
- "The dark night of the soul" is not something bad or destructive. On the contrary it is an experience to be welcomed as a sick person might welcome a surgery that promises health and well-being. The purpose of the darkness is not to punish or afflict us. It is to set us free.
- Trouble is only opportunity in work clothes.
- God is able to bring good to us, even out of evil and pain.

Thankful for the thorn

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