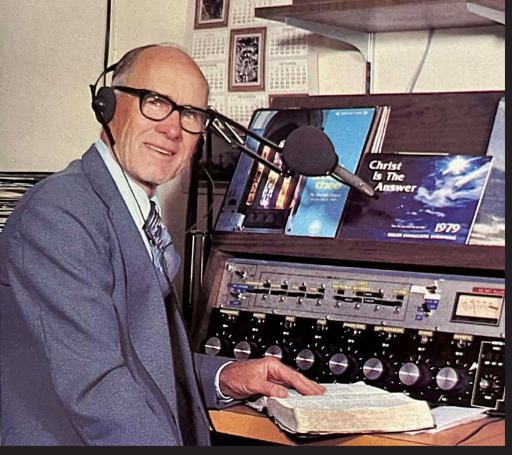

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The Savior and Sorrow

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My ministry to the sorrowing began thirty-five years ago, while I was still in Bible college. My mother called and asked me to come home and preach the funeral for our next-door neighbor's little daughter, who had accidentally been run over by a truck and killed. "I cannot do it, Momma," I responded. But she insisted that I come and try.

I stood there that day, a timid preacher boy, while my mother sat with the grieving mother. The Lord alone knew how much I needed His help as I literally broke apart on the inside. But at the close of the service, after sufficient grace was given, I heard our neighbor say, "If only I had the faith of Lester." Oh, if only she knew how feeble and frail my faith truly was! But a little faith brings ample grace. From that day until this day, through the many valleys of sorrow, I have found God's grace altogether sufficient.

...that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. **–II Corinthians 1:4**

Sorrow is a universal experience for the human race. And that is why we need a universal remedy. We must look to the Savior and the Scriptures for this remedy.

Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward. **–Job 5:7**

Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. **–Job 14:1**

Trouble is a divine invitation into the comforting arms of our Savior. The prophet Isaiah saw Jesus as a "Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). And in the great Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught His disciples, "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4).

For the Christian, sorrow is Heaven's lubrication system to help and not to hurt—to make better instead of bitter. All of our experiences of sorrow and trouble must be interpreted in the light of two great truths: God is too good to do wrong, and He is too wise to make a mistake.

God is too good to do wrong. His character can be trusted, and He always has a purpose for our sorrow. It isn't our sorrow that brings glory, but our faith that brings the Savior to the scene. It wasn't the death of Lazarus that brought glory to God, but rather the words of the Savior in the cemetery at Bethany that raised Lazarus from the dead. There is no glory for God in sickness, suffering, and death—apart from the demonstration of His grace to bear, to give victory, and to give deliverance. Tears are not a blessing unless they become telescopes through which we see the Savior (Psalm 27:13-14).

And call upon Me in the day of trouble:
I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.
–Psalm 50:15

God is too wise to make a mistake. I have found that it is not the necessary sorrow, but rather the unnecessary sorrow, that weighs so heavily. Indeed, it is imaginary trouble that does the most damage. David became weary and said in his heart, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul" (I Samuel 27:1). And yet, the truth of the matter was that David died in a ripe old age—full of years and with a completed ministry.

Bible faith will always bring you to the conclusion that our Father never makes a mistake. So many of the world's trifles are unnecessary sorrows for the Christian. Yet so much of our time is consumed by anxieties that will prove unnecessary in the end.

God is developing us for the journey ahead. Tears and testings have always been part of my heydays and high-days with God. Great waves of blessing and refreshment have often followed nights of sorrow and heartache. I remember, years ago, when the power of God greatly visited our church after a season of great suffering. Oh, the souls that staggered feebly through our doors to find rest in Jesus during those years. But if our church had never suffered, she probably would never have saved.

Sorrow has so often become Heaven's mechanic in the garage of life—tuning the motor for the journey ahead. I believe the wise man was right when he said, in Ecclesiastes 7:3, "Sorrow is better than laughter," though it may come as an unwelcome friend. Each valley of sorrow has a purpose—leading us deeper into the grace that God has planned for our good.

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom
and knowledge of God! How unsearchable
are His judgments, and His ways past
finding out! **–Romans 11:33**

I have found that the will of God never leads us beyond the promise of I Corinthians 10:13 and the comfort of Romans 8:28. I remember waking up one morning during an agonizing season of abandonment. I rose from my bed only to fall to the floor and cry, "Lord, this is the end of the road." To which He said, "It's only the bend in the road—there's a lot more road." We will never rest all of our hope on the permanent pillars of God's eternal truth until the temporary pilings have been swept away!

Our hard times can teach us. Disobedience has brought me many heartaches and bitter disappointments. But it has also brought the chastening hand of God into my life. Sometimes it is necessary for the Great Shepherd to break a leg in order to save the sheep—to teach us that obedience is better than sacrifice. Hard times don't break us, they make us—if our relationship is right and our fellowship is sweet.

It is good for me that I have been afflicted;
that I might learn Thy statutes. **–Psalm 119:71**

Times of sorrow reveal our priorities. When the telephone call came that my earthly father had gone to be with the Lord, I made the decision to fulfill my weekend preaching engagements before returning home for the funeral on Monday afternoon. I made this decision in the face of much misunderstanding because my dad no longer needed me. And I believe he would have had me to stay and preach to the living. You will be misunderstood more for doing right than for doing wrong because the world understands wrong better than it does right. How quick we are to forget Christ's call to "let the dead bury their dead" (Luke 9:60).

The funeral arrangements of a believer are his final witness in this world. I believe the funeral time ought to be a time of strengthening for Christians and an invitation to the lost to be saved. If I were to come to physical death, I would want a warm, evangelistic sermon preached, with the simplest of funeral arrangements possible. When Jesus died, He sent a Comforter to make real His presence and His Word (John 14). This should be the final testimony of every Christian.

Only faith in Jesus can sustain us in sorrow. When sorrow comes, let me suggest that you read the Bible and pray and then sing and praise and stay around

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God's people. My memory goes back to my mother who was excellent in comforting others in times of sorrow. And yet, she was acquainted with grief in that her only two daughters had gone to be with the Lord.

I used to wonder when I was a boy leaving for school on a cold Monday morning, how my mother could manicure her fingernails at the old-fashioned rub board at the west porch—with the fire burning around the old wash pot and the weather so cold that sometimes the clothes would freeze on the line. And yet, she was singing, "Sweet hour of prayer that calls me from a world of care," and "What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear, what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer." After thirty-five years of serving our Savior amidst sorrow, I've found out what she was singing about.

Jesus truly is our example of a faith that never falters. Jesus experienced every kind of sorrow that you and I will ever face. He knew family sorrow and misunderstanding. He was acquainted with social sorrow and religious sorrow—suffering outside the gate and nailed to the cross with hammers of religion.

We are journeying toward a sorrowless city and a sorrowless future. Sorrow does not take away from—but instead adds to—the Christian's joy. Our Savior is perfectly able to see our affliction and to hear our cry. He knows, and He cares. God is too good to do wrong, and He is too wise to make a mistake.

Scripture for the Sorrowing

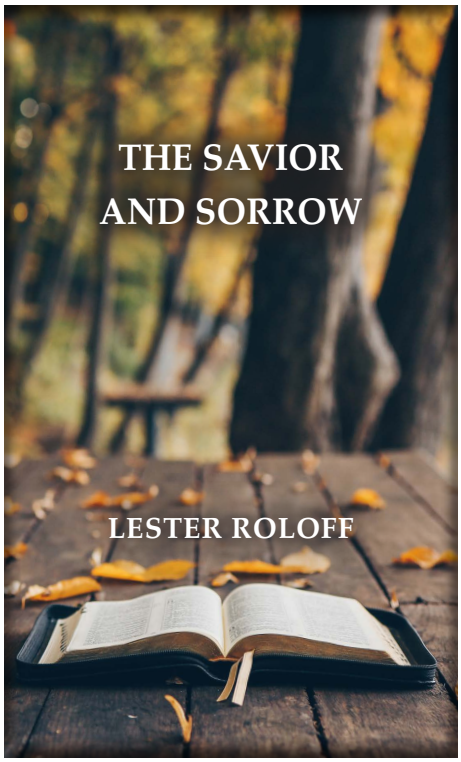
Surely He hath borne our griefs,
and carried our sorrows... **–Isaiah 53:4**

And He said unto me, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
–II Corinthians 12:9

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.
–I Thessalonians 4:13

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. **–Hebrews 4:15-16**

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.
–Revelation 21:4



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"I remember when I first started listening to Brother Roloff on the radio and heard the opening song: 'One sat alone beside the highway begging.' So was I, like a beggar, seeking the words of the Savior." (***Youtube*** **comment**)

"Thank you for sending the *Family Altar Newsletter.* I love to read the letters on the back page. It's a blessing." **–E.B.**

"Thank you so much for sending me the quarterly *Family Altar Newsletter*. It means a lot to me, and the sermon 'God's Little Biscuit' was right on." **–E.L.**

"This message ('The Mule Walked On') is just as relevant today as it was back then. We are reaping our fruits of unrighteousness all over the world. Come quickly, Lord Jesus." **–(*Youtube* comment)**

"I truly appreciate the wisdom of Brother Lester Roloff. The Church surely needs to be reminded of how important it is to respect and obey the Word of God. Every jot and tittle. We take the Word of God for granted when it is the very essence of our lives. Christ is the answer to our broken world." (***Facebook*** **comment**)

"I sure do love this sermon ('Confessing and Forsaking Sin.') Too many people get up from the altar and pick their burdens up instead of leaving them where they laid them down. Thank God for this wonderful sermon!" **–T.B.**

"I'm very thankful that these messages are still available to listen to. Praise the Lord that Brother Roloff is still preaching!" (***Youtube*** **comment**)