The Pilgrim’s Progress

Chapter 5: The Cross and the Hill Difficulty, Part 6
In our last lecture, we saw that Formalist and Hypocrisy chose to take the roads leading to Danger and Destruction at the base of the mountain rather than ascend the Hill Difficulty.
“I looked, then, that they all went on until they came to the foot of the hill Difficulty, at the bottom of which was a spring...The narrow way went straight up the hill. Christian went to the spring and drank from it to refresh himself. Then he began to climb the hill, saying:
Bunyan’s Hill Difficulty

This hill, though high, I covet to ascend,
The difficulty will not me offend;
For I perceive the way to life lies here;
Come, pluck up, Heart; let’s neither faint nor fear:
Better, though difficult, th’ right way to go,
Than wrong, though easy, where the end is woe.
Bunyan’s Hill Difficulty

“I looked and saw Christian going up the hill. I perceived that he slowed down from running to walking, and from walking to crawling on his hands and knees, because the hill was steep. About halfway up the hill was a pleasant arbor made by the Lord of the Hill for the refreshment of weary travelers. When he got there, he sat down to rest. He pulled his roll out of his coat and read it; it gave him great comfort. He also
reflected again on the coat that was given to him when he stood by the cross. At last he fell asleep. This detained him there until it was almost night. And while he was sleeping, his roll fell out of his hand. Then someone came and awakened him, saying, ‘Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!’ With that, Christian suddenly got up and sped on his way. He went on until he came to the top of the hill.”
Difficult\text{\textsc{y}}, \textit{n.}: The quality, fact, or condition of being difficult; the character of an action that requires labor or effort; hardness to be accomplished; the opposite of \textit{ease} or \textit{facility} (OED).
"The hill Difficulty represents those circumstances which require particular self-denial and exertion, that commonly prove the believer’s sincerity, after he has first obtained ‘a good hope through grace.’ The opposition of the world, the renunciation of temporal interests, or the painful task of overcoming inveterate evil habits or constitutional propensities, these and such like trials prove a severe test” (Mason).
“Only this week I received a letter from a Christian telling me how much more difficult life has seemed since Christ took hold of her.”
“Sometimes it is with the greatest labor and trial, that in our Christian course we make any progress whatever. We have to clamber from duty to duty, from prayer to prayer, from chapter to chapter in God’s word. It is like an invalid climbing the pyramids, and with all the assistance we can get, it is slow work. Everything within and without seems to be against us. We wait upon the Lord, but the heart is still heavy,
the air seems heavy, and we do not mount up on wings as eagles; and though we walk we are weary, and we faint if we run. Many a Christian is climbing the Hill Difficulty when you cannot see his troubles.”

- G.B. Cheever
Trials

• The Greek word found in the New Testament for trials and temptations means “test” or “trial” as well as “temptation” or “enticement.”

• In James 1:2, the brother of the Lord writes: “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials; knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.”
Trials

• In Peter’s first epistle, he reminds his persecuted readers: “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials” (1:6).

• Both of these passages leave us no doubt but that sufferings for the sake of faith are implied by the use of this word. Trials and suffering serve to prove the steadfastness of faith.
“All people suffer loss. Being alive means suffering loss. Sometimes the loss is natural, predictable, and even reversible. It occurs at regular intervals, like the seasons. We experience the loss, but after days or months of discomfort we recover and resume life as usual, the life that we wanted and expected. The winter’s loss leads to the spring of recovery. Such losses characterize what it means to live as normal human beings. Living means changing
and changing requires that we lose one thing before we gain something else...But there is a different kind of loss that inevitable occurs in all of our lives, though less frequently and certainly less predictably. This kind of loss has more devastating results, and it is irreversible. Such loss includes terminal illness, disability, divorce, rape, emotional abuse, physical and sexual abuse, chronic unemployment, crushing
disappointment, mental illness, and ultimately death. If normal, natural, reversible loss is like a broken limb, then catastrophic loss is like an amputation. The results are permanent, the impact incalculable, the consequences cumulative. Each new day forces one to face some new and devastating dimension of the loss. It creates a whole new context for one’s life.”
Three Observations

• The difficulties of believers often seem to increase as they proceed.

• It takes more effort and exertion to press forward as the trials continue or increase.

• Losing one’s first love and becoming less watchful are two temptations associated with moving from a life of ease to one of hardships and difficulties.
What Difficulties May Bring

• Existential darkness. Sudden and tragic loss leads to terrible darkness.
• Loss of perspective and objectivity.
• Fatigue and exhaustion.
• Unspeakable emotional pain and agony.
• Reliving the difficulty over and over again.
• Unrelenting grief.
What Difficulties May Bring

- Acute depression.
- Frustration and bewilderment.
- Feeling fragile.
- Loss of concentration.
- Robotic functioning.
- Deep sorrow.
- Self-pity.
What Difficulties May Bring

• Denial.
• Apathy.
• Sleepless nights.
• Emptiness.
• Intense anger.
• Longing for the past; hoping for the future.
• Confusion of identity.
• Guilt and Shame
Bunyan’s Perspective

• I accept the biblical truth, that the way to life goes up the hill Difficulty.

• I will not be offended by the Difficulty.

• Even though it is Difficult, the way is right, rather than wrong, and will not end in woe.
1. **Lament**: brokenhearted, we pour out our souls and complaints to God.

2. **“Why me?”**: coming to terms with seeming randomness.

3. **Profound crisis of identity**: overcoming the amputation of the self.

4. **Petition**: crying out to God for his help, light, and peace.
5. **Meta-narrative:** acknowledging an all-encompassing, grand story makes sense of our individual stories.

6. **Trust:** acknowledging that our Lord is good and faithful and is working all things together for our good.

7. **Restoration:** knowing God and experiencing the restoration of my soul.
“The highest dream we could ever dream, the wish that if granted would make us happier than any other blessing, is to know God, to actually experience Him. The problem is that we don’t believe this idea is true. We assent to it in our heads. But we don’t feel it in our hearts.”
Psalm 13

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?
Look on me and answer, O Lord my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; my enemy will say, “I have overcome him,” and my foes will rejoice when I fall.
But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.
I will sing to the Lord,
for he has been good to me.
Four Questions

• Has God forgotten me permanently?
• Is God hiding his face from me?
• Why do I wrestle with my thoughts and have sorrow in my heart every day?
• Why does my enemy keep on triumphing over me?
• David’s statements: Look on me; Answer me; Give light to my eyes.
Lament

• Lament is a passionate or demonstrative expression of grief.

• Two questions dominate the songs of lament in the Old Testament:
  
  (1) Why? Why has this happened to me? Why here? Why now?
  
  (2) How long?

• “Emotions are the language of the soul” (Allender & Longman).
• David trusts on God’s *unfailing love*.
• The Lord’s salvation makes David’s heart *rejoice*.
• The Lord’s goodness makes him *sing*. He now sees that in all things God works for the good of those who love him what are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).
“A Christian finds satisfaction in every circumstance by getting strength from another, by going out of himself to Jesus Christ, by his faith acting upon Christ, and bringing the strength of Jesus Christ into his own soul, he is thereby enabled to bear whatever God lays on him, by the strength that he finds from Jesus Christ.”

- Jeremiah Burroughs
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.
His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.
Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.
“Depend on it, Pilgrim, some great blessing is at hand when thou hast some great difficulty to grapple with and to overcome.”

- William Mason