“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...
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.
Moving Out of the Darkness

1. Lament
2. “Why me?”
3. Profound crisis of identity
4. Petition
5. Metanarrative
6. Trust
7. Restoration
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).
Lament

• Brokenhearted, we pour out our souls and complaints to God.

• “Every emotion, though horizontally provoked, nevertheless reflects something about the vertical dimension: our relationship with God” (Dan Allender).

• Emotion points us to the reality that we are not at home.
“The presence of disruptive emotions that feel irrational or out of control is not necessarily a sign of disease, sin, or trauma. Instead, it may be the signal that the heart is struggling with God. Therefore, we must view the ups and downs of our emotional life not as a problem to be resolved, but as a cry to be heard.”
Lament

• Our propensity is to dull the intensity of our pain and groaning.
• Our emotions reveal the nature of our true relationship with God.
• Listening is the first step. Am I pursuing the one true God or false gods?
• God reveals Himself more often in the darkness than in the happy moments of life.
Psalm 13:1-6

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?
Psalm 13:1-6

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.
Psalm 13:1-6

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 requests to God: Look on me; answer me; give light to my eyes.
• 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 who are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).
Psalm 6:6-7

I am weary with my moaning;
Every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping.
My eye wastes away because of grief;
It grows weak because of all my foes.
“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.”
Metanarrative

Any narrative which is concerned with the idea of storytelling, *spec.* one which alludes to other narratives, or refers to itself and to its own artifice. Also: a piece of narrative, esp. a classic text or other archetypal story, which provides a schematic world view upon which an individual's experiences and perceptions may be ordered.
The Lord of the Rings
• Acknowledging an all-encompassing, grand story that makes sense of our individual stories.

• “All suffering is orchestrated for larger purposes” (Allender).

• “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28).
Aslan: “I was the lion who forced you to join with Aravis. I was the cat who comforted you among the houses of the dead. I was the lion who drove the jackals from you while you slept. I was the lion who gave the horses the new strength of fear for the last mile so that you should reach King Lune in time. And I was the lion you do not remember who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it
came to shore where a man sat, wakeful at midnight, to receive you.”

“Then it was you who wounded Aravis?”

“It was I.”

“But what for?”

“Child,” said the Voice, “I am telling you your story, not hers. I tell no one any story but his own.”
Why Me?

• This question causes us to come to terms with seeming randomness.

• “My days have passed, my plans are shattered, and so are the desires of my heart” (Job 17:11).

• “In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps” (Prov. 16:9).

• “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (Jer. 29:11).
Profound Crisis of Identity

• Overcoming the amputation of the self.
• Loss leads to a confusion of identity.
• “Catastrophic loss cannot be mitigated by replacements” (Jerry Sittser).
• The crisis of identity can lead to the formation of a new identity that integrates the loss into it. Loss creates a new set of circumstances in which we must live...We come to the end of ourselves.
Petition

• Crying out to God for his help, light, and peace.
• “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7).
• Corrie ten Boom: “No matter how deep our darkness, he is deeper still.”

• “The solution to our suffering is our suffering! All our suffering can become a part of his work, the greatest work ever done, the work of salvation, of helping to win for those we love eternal joy. How? This can be done on one condition: that we believe...Our part is to receive that work and let it work itself out in and through our lives, including our tears” (Peter Kreeft).
“Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.”

- Isaiah 50:10
“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”
Restoration

• “He restores my soul” (Ps. 23:3).

• “He (Jesus) did the most important thing and he gave the most important gift: himself. It is a lover’s gift. Out of our tears, our waiting, our darkness, our agonized aloneness, out of our weeping and wondering, out of our cry, ‘My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?’ he came, all the way, right into that cry” (Kreeft).
“He sits beside us in the lowest places of our lives, like water.”
The Strength of Jesus Christ

“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.
“In truth we may be confident that nothing bad will ever happen to us if we belong to Christ. This does not mean that nothing painful will ever happen. Our hearts may be broken a thousand times in this world, and our bodies wracked with pain. But these things are part of the Refiner’s Fire, the crucible of the kingdom of God.”