

Chapter 1

Does God Care?

DAY by day we read of the tragedies in war-torn Europe and Asia - of famine, pestilence, suffering, and death. We hear over the radio of the calamities and disasters by land, sea, and air, and we become so accustomed to them that somehow they are soon forgotten. But someday, like lightning out of a clear sky, the hand of fate strikes one of our dearest friends or a member of our family. Then, somehow, all the suffering and sorrow in the world become real to us.

Some years ago I picked up a newspaper and read an incident that impressed me deeply. A young man was standing at the end of a bridge crossing the river which flows between two cities. He was waiting for the interurban car to take him to his home, nearly an hour's distance away. It was a warm summer day, and many boys were swimming in the millpond far below the bridge. As the young man watched them, he noticed one of the smaller boys backing farther and farther from the shore. Suddenly the little fellow threw up his hands and disappeared under the water. The young man's first impulse was to run across the bridge and down the bank to rescue the boy. But, as he looked up, his car approached, and he decided that with so many good swimmers in the millpond, surely the little boy would be taken care of. So he boarded the car.

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Arriving home, he went into the dining room, and there found his mother lying unconscious on the floor. He hastened to bathe her face and rub her hands. As she regained consciousness, she cried, "Oh, John, your brother Willie is drowned in the millpond!" Then from his lips came the agonizing cry, "If I had only known it was my brother!"

While I was attending a meeting recently a woman came to me and eagerly sought information about conditions in the countries of southern Europe, where I was working when the war began. After answering a number of her questions, which seemed to indicate an unusual knowledge of those countries, she asked, "Did you meet A— B— over there?"

"Yes, indeed," I replied, "we had some wonderful experiences together."

Then she quietly said, "He is my brother."

Many of us have relatives and friends who are as dear to us as our own lives laboring among the millions of Asia and the Far East, or in war-ravaged Europe. We listen to the reports of the sufferings wrought by the war, and its accompanying perils of famine, pestilence, and disease. We read letters from those dear ones, telling how they have fled from falling bombs, how they hid in thickets by the roadside or in the fields. We are told of others who, though desperately ill, must be carried night after night to the bombproof cellars. This tragedy all seems very real when it involves our own loved ones.

So the questions arise again and again, "Why does a loving, merciful God, whom we believe to be almighty, permit such conditions? Why does evil grow worse day by day?"

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We do not ask these questions concerning all the suffering in the world, for there is much that does not seem difficult to explain. There is human suffering which is the result of man's refusal to obey the natural laws. A man stops at the roadhouse and takes several drinks of liquor, and then climbs into his car and speeds down the road. But he is driving too fast to make the next turn, and he goes over the bank and is picked up with body torn and bones broken. He spends long weeks in the hospital suffering for his folly. Others transgress the laws of health, and thus bring loathsome disease upon themselves. While still others, like the prodigal son, squander their money in riotous living, and come to poverty and want. Jesus taught that the father loved the prodigal son, but he could not interpose his authority to compel his son to do right.

But what appears a real problem to many is the fact that disaster, pain, and suffering overtake the good, the innocent, and the noble as well as those who live selfish, wicked lives. Millions of human beings are suffering today. Some of my dearest and most cherished friends who are endeavoring to follow Jesus Christ in every act of their life are suffering physical torture and mental anguish that seem almost unendurable. Physicians have exhausted their resources in seeking to alleviate the pain. Friends have done everything possible to lift the heavy burden of sorrow, yet weeks and months and years pass with little surcease from suffering.

I visited a woman whose Christian character is an example to the world. When a baby two months old she was terribly injured in a cyclone, and for sixty-eight years she has never taken a step. She has been confined continually to her

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bed or wheel chair, and she is seldom free from pain. Yet her smiling face, her enthusiastic words of courage and trust in God, reveal an inner source of peace and rest. We need not look long in any community to find these sufferers. My heart aches and tears come to my eyes as I think of them; yet with all my sympathy and longing there seems to be little I can do to give them relief.

I know of but one place to go to find the solution of this awful mystery of suffering, and that is to the word of God. So I take up the Scriptures eagerly and prayerfully, longing to know what the great Master of the universe has revealed concerning human suffering.

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Thy Will and Mine

Dear Lord, my will from Thine doth run
Too oft a different way; I cannot say, "Thy will be done,"
In every darkened day.
My heart grows chill to see Thy will
Turn all life's gold to gray.
My will is set to gather flowers;
Thine blights them in my hand.
Mine reaches for life's sunny hours;
Thine leads through shadow land.
And all my days go on in ways
I cannot understand.
Yet more and more this truth doth dawn
Through failure and through loss:
The heart that beats transverse to
Thine Doth hereby make its cross.
Thine upright will cuts straight and still
Through pride, and dream, and dross.
But if in parallel to Thine
My will doth meekly run,
All things in heaven and earth are mine;
My will is crossed by none:
Thou art in me, and I in Thee,
Thy will and mine are one.
- Author unknown.