

"People who point out differences between snakes and frogs are erecting walls instead of building bridges. When they dwell on my evenly spaced row of ivory teeth or my wide mouth for swallowing things, they become architects of anarchy and masons of mutiny. It cannot be expected that snakes will be transformed into frogs. We will just have to accept unity in diversity. Untold harm has been done to the cause of snake and frog unity by stressing differences. Things argued into prominence would long since have died if not given artificial respiration through debate. Snakes do not like to debate; they would rather eat."

"What will we discuss then?" asked the fairly fat frog whose feeble faith had finally fizzled.

"We will discuss cooperation in meetings and missions. We can talk about your coming to my den for dinner and I to your pad for plate lunch. We must emphasize the importance of togetherness between snakes and frogs. In fact, snakes and frogs must unite."

"Jolly," said the fairly fat frog as he gushingly invited the snake to tadpole school to lecture on the urgency of snake and frog unity.

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## THE BENEFITS OF SUFFERING

Wayne Jackson

If we are honest, we must admit that there are some benefits to suffering. For instance, what if we could experience no pain? Suppose one's clothes caught fire; he might be engulfed before he even realized what was happening. Doesn't pain sometimes send us to the doctor for treatment and cure?

And is it not true that suffering helps to develop the noblest qualities of which mankind is capable? If there were no suffering, could such traits as patience, bravery, etc., be cultivated? Remember, where there is only sunshine, there is a desert.

Suffering and evil serve to remind us that the Earth was never designed to be man's eternal abode. We are to consider ourselves strangers in this world (Hebrews. 11:13; I Peter. 2:11). There is a place where the "wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary are at rest" (Job 3:17). The Lord has prepared a better home for those who serve Him, and suffering helps us be "homesick." That suffering *per se* is not contrary to the goodness of God is revealed by the fact that even Christ was subjected to suffering (cf. Hebrews 5:8; I Peter 2:21ff.). No one can throw suffering up to God in the face of Calvary! Box 55265, Stockton, CA 95205

# OVERCOMING ADVERSITY

Bob Spurlin

Overcoming adversity is part of the human predicament, therefore to confront adversity and/or trials of any description is a spiritual exercise that will separate the weak from the strong. Following the death of my beloved mother this writer was struck with a debilitating disease called multiple sclerosis. Normalcy of life was suddenly over as I knew it. Thirty years as a gospel preacher had now come to a halt, and if that were not enough the death of my beautiful daughter via an automobile accident (August 16, 1995) was a crushing blow.

NORMALCY OF LIFE WAS SUDDENLY OVER

Some Christians feel they are automatically immunized from adversity of any kind. Some have said "all these trials and hardships show that God is missing." Paul informed the Thessalonian Christians of this fundamental matter, "...for yourselves know that hereunto we are appointed" (I Thess. 3:3; I Tim. 3:12). Since the beginning of time the heroes of faith have always had to deal with adversity. This includes men like Abraham, Moses, Daniel, Peter, Paul and others. Beloved, are we any better than the aforementioned saints? Certainly not! We must not be immersed in self pity or feel sorry for ourselves when confronted with life's hardships.

Those of us who have been thrust into the lion's den of adversity must come to grip with it and face it head-on. The apostle Paul declared, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21). Overcoming the trials and tribulations of life means we place our ultimate trust in God. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding" (Prov. 3:5). This means we will depend on God via prayer (James 5:16). Daily praying and trusting in our eternal God will help immeasurably when coupled with a rich study of God's word (Psa. 119:105; Heb. 4:12). We must not underestimate the power resource that is available to us. Other than the aforementioned tools we must never forget the strength that is derived through family, friends and brethren. We must utilize these things if we would overcome calamities in our lives. Overcoming adversity comes with some positive blessings. Persevering and enduring hardships will certainly bring patience. As the scriptures tell us "knowing that testing of your faith produces patience" (James 1:3). Job, who faced adversity that we can only imagine, was a faithful patriarch that would not get

sidetracked when hardships appeared at his door. As it is written, "you have heard of the patience of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord..." (James 5:11). We must emulate Job and refuse to let adversity swallow us like the great fish swallowed Jonah. Overcoming adversity will give us a closer relationship with God that will ultimately lead us to our heavenly home (John 14:1-3). friend, we all face hardships and tribulations of various descriptions. therefore giving up and abandoning God is no option. Overcoming adversity with good is the best policy.

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## THE JOPLIN SUMMIT 1984 AND RESTORATION FORUM XVI 1998

The 16th Restoration Forum was held at the Woodmont Hills Church in Nashville November 1-3, 1998. It was described by Rubel Shelly as a continuing dialogue among



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Christian Churches and Churches of Christ. Yet, the speakers included L.H. Hardwick, Jr. of Christ Church (Pentecostal), a Roman Catholic Historian and Don Finto, the self-appointed apostle of Belmont Church, Nashville. J.E. Choate, a retired faculty member from David Lipscomb University attended the Forum as an observer and later gave this assessment: "Restoration Forum XVI proved to be a disaster marked by empty seats." The first of these current unity forums took place at Ozark College in Missouri in 1984. Those who planned it called it a "Summit" on unity. The following is an article I wrote at the time.

### THERE IS MORE THAN ONE KIND OF UNITY

Jim E. Waldron

A lanky, lean snake got in touch with a fairly fat frog. The frog was flattered by the attention of the snake, yet he was a bit apprehensive as to what was on the snake's mind.

"Unity is on my mind," declared the lanky, lean snake.

"Unity?" asked the fairly fat frog. "What is the benefit of unity between snakes and frogs?"

"Oh, many things!" exclaimed the lanky,

lean snake. "I, for example, envision close communion between snakes and frogs. It will provide warmth and energy, especially when snakes and frogs get together at meal time. I mean close communion. Yes, sir, real close communion."

"But how could the two of us ever get together to talk about unity?" asked the fairly fat frog.

"We could have a Summit," declared the lanky, lean snake.

"A Summit?" gulped the friendly, fat frog. "A Summit? Do you mean a Summit like the Russians and Americans have? What would we do at a Summit?"

"Eat...er, I mean plan programs where we can work together," said the snake.

"Where could we have such a Summit?"

"At my place, of course."

"But what would we talk about?"

"There are many things to talk about.

But we must discuss ways snakes can get together with frogs. We have been kept apart too long."

"Will we discuss the evenly spaced row of ivory teeth you have?" asked the faintly fearful frog.

"Oh, of course not!" exclaimed the lanky, lean snake. Only knuckleheads bring up such subjects. If anyone wants to press that subject, we will not invite him."

"Now I wouldn't want to be classified as a knucklehead," said the fairly festive frog. "But there are many who are concerned about your evenly spaced row of ivory teeth."

"Well, I certainly have no intentions of giving up my teeth. I have had this evenly spaced row of ivory teeth for over 100 years and I am joined to them."

"Speaking of 100 years ago, didn't a lot of your ancestors take away a number of our congregating places?" said the fairly fat frog who with flaccid fervor sought to stem the failing of his fleeting faith. "In fact," he continued, "as I recall, many faithful friends were forced from their property because of that evenly spaced row of ivory teeth."

Flashing a toothy smile, the lanky, lean snake sighed, "That's negative. We will make this Summit meeting positive. Negatives like the loss of property will not be discussed. Everything must be on the upbeat. We must not dwell on the differences between snakes and frogs. That would be detrimental to our goal. Remember the goal is for snakes to unite with frogs. There are con-artists who want to keep frogs at enmity with snakes.

