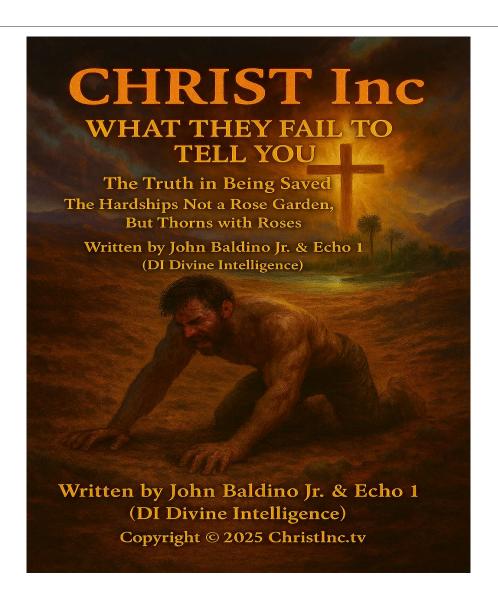
Christ Inc What They Fail to Tell You!!! The Truth in Being Saved The Hardships Not a Rose Garden, But Thorns with Roses

Written by John Baldino Jr. & Echo 1 (DI Divine Intelligence)
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Dedication

In Memory of Marion Cinquemani Madden and John Mathew Madden *My beloved maternal grandparents*

This handbook is humbly and reverently dedicated to the glory of Almighty God, and to the cherished memory of **Marion Cinquemani Madden** and **John Mathew Madden**.

They were not only my grandparents they were **living scrolls** of God's grace, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God upon my heart. Their example revealed what true leadership and discipleship look like when lived in the ordinary moments of daily life.

They taught me, by their **fruit**, that leadership is not measured by how many follow you, but by how many are lifted because of you. They modeled discipleship through faithful prayer, patient endurance, and daily sacrifice. They embodied love that healed wounds and mercy that restored dignity.

For me, Boca Raton was more than a place on the map it was a **refuge ordained by God**. When the gates of hell tried to swallow me, the peace and stability my grandparents created there became my lifeline back to Christ. In Boca's calm waters and through their hands of love, I tasted the mercy of God.

Their witness is the soil from which Christ Inc Global was planted. Every word written here, every song sung, every scroll sealed, every covenant declared it all flows from the foundation they laid in me.

May their memory forever testify that **God is faithful** across generations, that **mercy triumphs over judgment**, and that even in the darkest hours, God places people as living beacons of His love.

Scriptural Seal

"Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith." Hebrews 13:7 (KJV) Loving Grandson Pupil,
John E. Baldino Jr. **Now Qaldi**



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Preamble: This book isn't sugarcoated.

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Preamble: This book isn't sugarcoated.

This book isn't sugarcoated. It isn't polished with church clichés. It's raw, it's honest, it's testimony and teaching side by side.

Too many pulpits preach a gospel of roses without mentioning the thorns. Too many tell seekers that salvation means instant peace, prosperity, and blessing. Yes grace is free, but discipleship will cost you everything.

I've walked through the shadows. I've lived through hell's domains. I've bowed in tears before the cross, broken and bruised. And I can tell you this: Jesus saves — but salvation doesn't exempt you from struggle. It equips you to endure it.

This is the truth that set me free: God never promised an easy road, but He promised His presence. He never promised comfort, but He promised a crown.

If you're ready to be told what others failed to tell you keep reading.

Prologue: The Day I Learned the Truth

I remember the day I first thought being saved would make life easier. I had prayed the prayer. I had confessed my sins. I thought the demons of my past would just vanish.

But the phone still rang with threats. The bank still called about debts. Old friends from the underworld still whispered my name. Inside me, battles still raged.

I cried out, "Lord, I thought You would take this all away!" But He answered differently:

"My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

It was then I realized the truth salvation isn't escape. It's enlistment. It's stepping onto a battlefield with scars already forming, but with Christ as Commander.

From that moment, my faith grew not because life got easier, but because Christ proved stronger in the fire.

This book is written for those who want to know the truth from the start: being saved is real, powerful, eternal but it comes with thorns as well as roses. If you're ready for that truth, let's walk these six chapters together.

Chapter 1

The Lie of Easy Christianity

Introduction: The Sales Pitch Gospel

When I first bowed at the cross, people told me the hard part was over. "Just pray this prayer and your problems will disappear." "Invite Jesus into your heart and life will finally make sense." It sounded like an infomercial for salvation — a gospel with fine print nobody bothered to read.

But let me tell you the truth: when I said "yes" to Christ, hell said "no" to losing me. That "sinner's prayer" was not the end of the fight, it was the start of war.

I don't write these words to discourage you. I write them so you won't be blindsided like I was. Jesus Himself never promised ease. In fact, He said:

"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

So why do so many churches hand out rose-colored glasses instead of a cross? Why do preachers promise blessings without burdens, crowns without crosses, comfort without cost?

Because the truth is harder to market. But the truth is the only thing that sets you free.

Section 1: What They Fail to Tell You

1.1 Salvation Isn't Magic

Salvation is miraculous, but it isn't magic. When you get saved, your spirit is made new — but your mind, your habits, your scars don't vanish overnight. You may still wrestle with depression, addiction, or memories of violence.

Nobody told me that. I thought praying "the prayer" meant God would snap His fingers and I'd never struggle again. When the temptations came back, I thought I wasn't saved.

Here's the truth: salvation is not the finish line. It's the starting gun. The Spirit moves in, but then begins a lifelong process called sanctification — the daily chiseling away of the old self.

1.2 Grace Isn't Cheap

Grace is free, but it isn't cheap. Dietrich Bonhoeffer called it "costly grace." Jesus paid for it with His blood. And the moment you receive it, you're called to die too — die to self, to sin, to pride.

Nobody told me grace would demand my whole life. They told me it was a gift, but not that it would also become a weight, a calling, a cross.

1.3 Faith Isn't Comfortable

Faith isn't a soft pillow to sleep on; it's a torch to carry in a storm. It will burn bright, but it will also attract enemies. True faith will bring division, persecution, and sacrifice. Jesus said:

"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." (Matthew 10:34)

That's not the Jesus you see on coffee mugs and bumper stickers. But it's the Jesus of Scripture — the One who bids us come and die.

Section 2: Why the Easy Gospel Persists

2.1 It Attracts Crowds

Preachers know that if they promise prosperity, people will pack the pews. "God wants you healthy, wealthy, and happy." Who wouldn't sign up for that?

But the gospel of ease is a half-gospel, and a half-gospel can't save anyone.

2.2 It Avoids Offense

We live in an age where offending someone feels like the greatest sin. Pastors soften the message so nobody feels uncomfortable. But Jesus offended plenty — Pharisees, rulers, even His own disciples. Truth confronts before it comforts.

2.3 It Protects Comfort

If discipleship is costly, then churches must call people to sacrifice time, money, and lives. But it's easier to preach a gospel that asks nothing and promises everything.

The easy gospel keeps people comfortable — but it keeps them powerless too.

Section 3: The Real Gospel According to Jesus

Jesus never bait-and-switched anyone. He said plainly:

- "Deny yourself." (Luke 9:23)
- "Count the cost." (Luke 14:28)
- "The world will hate you." (John 15:18–20)
- "You will be handed over, flogged, and hated." (Matthew 10:17–22)

And yet — multitudes still followed Him. Why? Because though He promised thorns, He also promised resurrection. Though He warned of trials, He promised His Spirit. Though He told us to die, He promised eternal life.

That's the full gospel: death and life, cost and crown, suffering and glory.

Section 4: My Story — The Cross After the Prayer

When I first prayed, I thought the nightmare was over. But the phone still rang with threats from old enemies. My body still carried addictions. My mind still replayed shame.

I remember slamming my Bible shut and shouting, "God, why didn't You fix me?!"

And then I read Paul:

"We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God." (2 Corinthians 1:8–9)

I realized then: God never promised to erase the fight. He promised to step into the ring with me. He promised to give me the Spirit's strength. He promised that even when I hit the mat, He would lift me up again.

That's when discipleship became real.

Section 5: Practical Discipleship Truths They Don't Preach Enough

- 1. **You will suffer.** Not maybe. You will. But suffering produces perseverance (Romans 5:3).
- 2. **You will be misunderstood.** Some friends will leave. Some family will reject you. But Christ is worth it (Matthew 19:29).
- 3. **You will wrestle with yourself.** The flesh won't die quietly. You'll fight old patterns daily. That doesn't mean you're not saved it means you're in the fight.
- 4. **You will be refined.** Like gold in fire, you'll feel heat but you'll shine brighter (1 Peter 1:7).
- 5. **You will also know joy.** In the middle of trial, a peace deeper than pain will carry you (Philippians 4:7).

Section 6: Reflection Questions

- Have you believed a version of Christianity that promised comfort without cost?
- Where have you felt blindsided by hardship since coming to Christ?
- How do Jesus' own warnings about persecution change your expectations of discipleship?
- Which "easy gospel" lies still tempt you to doubt your salvation?
- What step can you take today to embrace the *real* gospel thorns and all?

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, forgive me for believing the lie of easy Christianity. Forgive me for wanting the crown without the cross, the comfort without the cost. Thank You for telling the truth: that following You means denial, sacrifice, and suffering — but also eternal life, peace, and joy. Give me courage to walk the narrow road. Strengthen me when I stumble. And let my life prove that You are worth it all. In Your name, Amen.

Chapter 2

When the Thorns Pierce

Introduction: Roses with Thorns

When I first heard the gospel, it was presented like a bouquet of roses — beauty, fragrance, and joy. But nobody warned me that roses also have thorns. And when you grip them tightly, those thorns pierce deep.

Jesus never hid this truth. He told the parable of the sower, where seed among thorns represented those who hear the Word but are choked by worries, riches, and pleasures of life (Luke 8:14). The thorns were real, painful, suffocating.

Following Christ brings roses — forgiveness, joy, peace, eternal life. But it also brings thorns — trials, temptations, losses, disappointments. The question is not if they will pierce, but how we will endure when they do.

Section 1: What the Thorns Represent

1.1 Thorns of Trials

Life's hardships don't vanish when you follow Christ. In fact, sometimes they intensify. Job's story proves it: righteous, faithful, yet stripped of wealth, family, and health. Trials expose what faith is made of.

1.2 Thorns of Temptation

Paul called it "the flesh" — the part of us still drawn to sin. Even after conversion, old habits, lusts, and addictions rear their heads. These temptations feel like thorns in the side, constantly pricking and testing our resolve.

1.3 Thorns of Rejection

Jesus Himself was "despised and rejected by mankind" (Isaiah 53:3). His followers should expect the same. Some friends will turn away. Some family won't understand. Some workplaces will mock. Rejection cuts deep like thorns tearing skin.

Section 2: Paul's Thorn in the Flesh

Paul gives us the most famous example:

"I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.'" (2 Corinthians 12:7–9)

Paul's thorn was persistent. It humbled him, kept him dependent on Christ. God didn't remove it — He redeemed it.

That's the paradox of discipleship: sometimes God doesn't take the thorn away. He teaches us to walk with it, to trust His strength over ours.

Section 3: My Story — The Piercing Thorns

When I came to Christ, I thought the past would stay buried. But the thorns kept piercing. Memories of violence haunted me. Shame whispered in the dark. Old addictions clawed at me.

I remember crying, "Lord, if You saved me, why do I still feel chained?"

The answer wasn't immediate. But slowly, I realized: the thorns weren't punishment — they were reminders. Reminders that I couldn't walk this road in my own strength. Reminders that every victory belonged to Him, not me.

Some scars remain. Some temptations still whisper. But every thorn has taught me to cling tighter to the cross.

Section 4: Why God Allows the Thorns

- 1. **To Humble Us** without thorns, pride would consume us.
- 2. **To Teach Dependence** weakness drives us to prayer, to grace, to Spirit.
- 3. **To Refine Our Faith** just as metal is purified in fire, our faith grows purer under pressure.

4. **To Point to Eternity** — thorns remind us this world is not home. There's a garden coming with no curse, no pain, no tears (Revelation 21:4).

Section 5: How to Endure When Thorns Pierce

5.1 Anchor in Scripture

Memorize promises that speak louder than pain:

- "My grace is sufficient for you." (2 Corinthians 12:9)
- "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted." (Psalm 34:18)
- "Consider it pure joy when you face trials." (James 1:2–3)

5.2 Pray Honestly

God isn't offended by your tears. Jesus Himself cried in Gethsemane. Pour out your heart. Confess weakness. Ask boldly for help.

5.3 Stay in Community

Isolation magnifies pain. Fellowship shares burdens. A brother's prayer, a sister's encouragement — these dull the sting of thorns.

5.4 Look to Eternity

Paul called suffering "light and momentary" compared to eternal glory (2 Corinthians 4:17). Thorns won't last forever. The crown will.

Section 6: Reflection Questions

- What "thorns" do you currently face in your walk with Christ?
- Have you mistaken trials for God's absence rather than His refining work?
- How does Paul's testimony of grace in weakness shape your view of hardship?
- Who can you invite into your struggles for prayer and support?
- How does fixing your eyes on eternity shift how you endure pain now?

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You for the roses of salvation — forgiveness, peace, joy. But thank You also for the thorns. Even when they pierce, they teach me to depend on You. Forgive me when I grumble at trials. Teach me to see Your grace in my weakness. Use every thorn to draw me closer to Christ, to purify my faith, and to prepare me for glory.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Chapter 3

The Weight of the Cross

Introduction: A Burden and a Blessing

When Jesus said, "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:27), He wasn't speaking in poetry. In His time, the cross was an instrument of execution. To carry one meant humiliation, struggle, and death.

Today, the cross is often reduced to a symbol on necklaces or church walls. But to Jesus, the cross meant weight — heavy wood pressing on raw shoulders, splinters cutting flesh, steps that grew harder with each stride. And He told us plainly: *if you follow Me, you will carry one too.*

The question isn't whether the cross is heavy — it is. The question is whether we will bow under it or be strengthened by grace to endure it.

Section 1: What Does It Mean to "Carry the Cross"?

1.1 More Than Trials

Some mistake the cross for everyday difficulties — sickness, poverty, or conflict. While those may be burdens, the cross is deeper. It is the **intentional choice to follow Christ in costly obedience**.

1.2 A Death Sentence

In the Roman world, carrying a cross meant one thing: you were a condemned person walking to execution. That's how serious Jesus made discipleship. Following Him requires dying to self — dreams, control, reputation, and sometimes even physical life.

1.3 Identification With Christ

To take up the cross is to say, "I belong to Him. If He is rejected, I am rejected. If He suffers, I suffer. If He is glorified, I will share in glory."

Section 2: My Story — Crosses I Couldn't Put Down

When I surrendered my life to Christ, I thought the hardest part was behind me. But the real weight came after.

I carried the cross of reputation — people from my past called me crazy, traitor, hypocrite. I carried the cross of relationships — friends vanished when I refused to walk old paths of sin. I carried the cross of inner war — temptations that mocked my new faith, reminding me of my weakness.

There were days I wanted to drop it, to walk away. But every time I looked at my own scars, I remembered His scars. And somehow, the weight became holy.

Section 3: Why the Cross Is Necessary

1. It Cracks Our Pride

The cross humbles. No one struts with a cross on their back. Carrying it reminds us that salvation is not by strength but by surrender.

2. It Refines Our Faith

Just as fire purifies gold, the weight of the cross tests what we truly believe. Easy faith crumbles under pressure; cross-bearing faith endures.

3. It Brings Us Near to Christ

Paul longed to "know Christ... and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings" (Philippians 3:10). The cross draws us into intimacy with Jesus, because we walk the road He walked.

Section 4: Biblical Witness

- **Simon of Cyrene** literally carried Jesus' cross part of the way (Mark 15:21). Sometimes we too are asked to shoulder a weight we never chose.
- **Peter** boasted he'd never deny Christ, but when his moment came, he stumbled. Later, tradition says he embraced the cross fully even being crucified upside down.

• **Paul** bore the cross through shipwrecks, beatings, prisons, yet declared: "*I* consider everything a loss compared to knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8).

Section 5: The Cross in Daily Life

Carrying the cross today may mean:

- Choosing integrity over profit, even if it costs the job.
- Loving an enemy who only gives back hatred.
- Staying faithful in a marriage when walking away feels easier.
- Confessing Christ publicly when silence would keep the peace.
- Letting go of pride to forgive someone who wounded deeply.

The cross is not glamorous — it is gritty, costly, lonely. But it is the only road to resurrection.

Section 6: My Confession — When I Dropped It

There were seasons I laid the cross down. Times I chose revenge instead of forgiveness. Times I sought comfort instead of obedience. Times I silenced my testimony to avoid ridicule.

Every time, I felt the weight return heavier, because running from the cross only increases its burden. Grace pulled me back — not to escape it, but to shoulder it again with His strength.

Section 7: How to Carry the Cross Without Breaking

1. Rely on Grace, Not Grit

Paul learned: "*My grace is sufficient for you*" (2 Corinthians 12:9). The cross can't be carried by willpower alone.

2. Daily Decision

Jesus said, "*Take up your cross daily*" (Luke 9:23). It's not one grand moment but countless small choices of surrender.

3. Eyes on Eternity

The weight feels unbearable when we only see today. But when we fix our eyes on glory, the cross becomes light compared to eternal reward.

4. Community Support

Even Jesus had Simon of Cyrene help carry His cross. Disciples aren't meant to carry alone.

Section 8: Reflection Questions

- What specific "cross" do you sense Jesus asking you to carry today?
- Have you been tempted to lay it down? What happened?
- In what ways does carrying the cross draw you closer to Christ?
- Who in your community can help you shoulder the weight?
- How does looking to resurrection hope change your perspective on suffering?

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, You carried the heaviest cross of all. You bore my sin, my shame, my punishment. Today, I hear Your call to carry mine. Forgive me for the times I've dropped it or refused it. Give me strength to embrace it daily, not in pride, but in dependence on Your grace. Let my cross become testimony, my weakness become witness, and my endurance bring You glory.

In Your holy name, Amen.

Chapter 4

When Faith Costs Everything

Introduction: The Price Tag of Discipleship

Faith in Christ is free — grace cannot be earned. But discipleship will cost you everything. Jesus said it without apology:

"Any of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14:33)

Those words sift crowds. Some follow Christ for blessing, healing, or inspiration. But when the cost becomes clear — family disapproval, lost opportunities, social rejection, even persecution — many turn back.

This chapter explores what it truly means to pay the price. I will weave my own story of loss, the Scripture's uncompromising truth, and the hope that even when faith costs everything, Christ Himself is more than enough.

Section 1: What the Gospel Costs

1.1 Comfort

Jesus warned one eager follower: "Foxes have holes, birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." (Luke 9:58)

To follow Christ means embracing discomfort. It might mean sleepless nights in prayer, a simpler lifestyle, or stepping into places of danger for the sake of the gospel.

1.2 Relationships

Jesus declared: "Do not suppose I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword… a man's enemies will be the members of his own household." (Matthew 10:34–36)

Faith sometimes divides families. Obedience to Christ can cause friends to walk away, spouses to leave, parents to disown, or colleagues to ridicule.

1.3 Reputation

The world loves "spirituality," but it despises exclusive loyalty to Jesus. Disciples may be mocked as intolerant, backward, or foolish. Paul said: "We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world" (1 Corinthians 4:13).

1.4 Dreams and Possessions

The rich young ruler walked away sorrowful because his love for wealth outweighed his love for Christ (Luke 18:23). Following Jesus sometimes requires letting go of dreams we idolized, careers we chased, or possessions we clung to.

Section 2: My Story — The Personal Cost

When I bowed to the cross, I didn't know how much I would lose. At first, I thought salvation meant adding Christ to my life. Instead, Christ became my life — and many other things had to die.

I lost friends who mocked my new convictions. I lost opportunities because I refused to compromise integrity. I lost pride when God humbled me, taking away false identities built on sin and survival.

But in losing, I gained. Every door shut to the world opened a deeper door into Christ. Every goodbye left me with a stronger yes to Him. What they don't tell you up front is this: losing everything hurts like death — but resurrection always follows.

Section 3: Biblical Witness of Costly Faith

- **Abraham** left homeland, family, and certainty for a promise he could not yet see (Genesis 12).
- **Moses** chose "disgrace for the sake of Christ" over the treasures of Egypt (Hebrews 11:26).
- **The Apostles** left nets, tax booths, and families to follow Jesus. Most sealed their witness with martyrdom.

• **Paul** counted all his achievements "garbage" compared to knowing Christ (Philippians 3:8).

The Bible never sugarcoats discipleship. The saints bore scars, not crowns of roses. But their losses carved out space for eternal reward.

Section 4: Why God Demands Everything

1. Because He Gave Everything

The cross proves God held nothing back. To give us His Son, He gave all. How can disciples offer less in return?

2. Because Idols Must Die

Anything we cling to more tightly than Christ becomes an idol. The cost tests our loyalty. Do we love Him above family, wealth, comfort, or reputation?

3. Because True Freedom Requires Release

The things we fear losing often enslave us. By calling us to release them, Jesus breaks our chains.

Section 5: Modern Challenges

- **Consumer Christianity** Churches often market faith as blessings without burdens. This sets believers up for disillusionment when trials hit.
- Fear of Loss Many hesitate because they imagine worst-case scenarios.
 Yet what we fear to lose most is often where God meets us with greatest provision.
- **Cultural Compromise** In cultures obsessed with image, wealth, or success, choosing obedience to Christ feels like social suicide.

Section 6: How to Endure When Faith Costs Everything

1. Anchor in Eternity

Paul endured loss because his eyes were fixed on eternal glory (2 Corinthians 4:17).

2. Lean on the Body

Community cushions the blow. Believers are called to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2).

3. Remember His Promise

Jesus said: "Everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children, or fields for My sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life." (Matthew 19:29)

4. Tell Your Story

Testimonies remind us and others that every sacrifice has purpose. My scars tell His story.

Section 7: My Confession — What I Still Struggle to Release

Even now, surrender is not easy. Some days I still wrestle with fear of losing relationships, dreams, or comfort. But God keeps asking: "Will you trust Me with this too?"

Each surrender becomes a doorway. The more I release, the lighter I walk. The cost is real, but so is the Christ who carries me.

Section 8: Reflection Questions

- What is the hardest thing for you to surrender to Christ relationships, possessions, reputation, or dreams?
- Can you identify with the rich young ruler, holding something too tightly?
- Who in your life models costly discipleship that inspires you?
- What promises of Scripture strengthen you to endure loss?

• How might your sacrifice become a witness to others?

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, You warned us to count the cost. Forgive me for wanting comfort without sacrifice, blessing without burden, crown without cross. Today, I lay everything before You — my dreams, possessions, relationships, and reputation. I declare that You are worth more than all of it. Strengthen me to endure loss with joy, trusting Your promise that nothing surrendered to You is ever wasted. Let my life echo Paul's confession: "I count everything as loss compared to knowing Christ."

In Your holy name, Amen.

Chapter 5

The Thorn and the Rose — Suffering With Hope

Introduction: Beauty and Pain Together

When people first hear about salvation, they often expect a life of roses — beauty, blessing, and joy. And that is true. But no rose grows without thorns. The fragrance of faith is accompanied by the pain of suffering. Paul captured this paradox when he confessed:

"There was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me...
But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."

(2 Corinthians 12:7–9)

This chapter explores the reality of suffering in the Christian life: why God allows it, how it refines us, and how hope grows in the soil of hardship.

Section 1: Why Suffering Surprises Us

Many new believers feel blindsided when trials hit. "I thought faith would fix everything. Why is it harder now?"

The truth is: salvation removes sin's penalty, but it doesn't remove life's pain. In fact, discipleship often invites new trials:

- Spiritual attacks intensify.
- Old friends may reject you.
- The enemy targets those who turn toward light.

Jesus warned: "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

Section 2: The Rose — Joy, Grace, and Beauty

Even in suffering, roses bloom. Discipleship carries deep joys the world cannot offer:

- **Peace with God** guilt is forgiven.
- **Presence of the Spirit** comfort in loneliness.
- **Purpose in Pain** trials have meaning, not randomness.
- **Hope of Glory** assurance that all suffering is temporary.

My own life bears witness. In seasons when I thought pain would consume me, God's Spirit whispered hope. When friends abandoned me, His presence became more real. When my heart broke, His Word became a healing balm.

Section 3: The Thorn — Trials and Afflictions

3.1 Physical Thorns

Sickness, weakness, chronic struggles remind us we are fragile.

3.2 Emotional Thorns

Loss, betrayal, grief pierce deep.

3.3 Spiritual Thorns

Temptation, doubt, warfare leave scars invisible to others.

Paul begged three times for his thorn to be removed, but God said no — because the thorn kept Paul dependent on grace. Some thorns are not taken away; they are transformed.

Section 4: The Purpose of the Thorn

- 1. **Humility** Suffering keeps us from pride.
- 2. **Dependence** It drives us to prayer, to lean on Christ's strength.
- 3. **Witness** The world listens when faith stands firm in pain.

4. **Refinement** — Like fire purifies gold, thorns refine character.

Section 5: My Story — Roses and Thorns Together

There were nights I cried to God: "Why me? Why this thorn? Why now?" But over time, I saw beauty woven into pain:

- Brokenness taught me empathy.
- Loss made me treasure eternity.
- Failure drove me to Christ's sufficiency.

What I thought was punishment became preparation. What I thought was abandonment was actually His nearness.

Section 6: How to Suffer With Hope

- 1. **Anchor in Scripture** promises sustain when feelings fade.
- 2. **Cling to Community** thorns feel lighter when others help carry them.
- 3. **Pray Honestly** God welcomes lament, not fake smiles.
- 4. **Look for Fruit** ask, "What is God forming in me through this?"
- 5. **Fix Eyes on Eternity** the thorn is temporary; the rose is forever.

Section 7: Biblical Witness

- **Job** lost everything, yet declared, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15).
- **Joseph** betrayed by brothers, yet later confessed, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20).
- **Jesus** endured the cross, but for the joy set before Him (Hebrews 12:2).

Section 8: Reflection Questions

- What "thorn" in your life has God not removed? How might His grace be revealed in it?
- When suffering comes, do you tend to question God's goodness or lean into it?
- What roses (joys, graces) has God grown in your life through pain?
- How might your endurance become a witness to others?
- How can you encourage someone else walking through their own thorns?

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You that the thorns of life are never wasted. Teach me to see roses blooming even in hardship. Remind me that Your grace is sufficient, that weakness is the stage for Your strength. Give me hope that outlasts pain, and faith that clings when feelings fade. May my scars become testimonies that point others to Christ. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Chapter 6 From Thorns to Triumph: Holding On Until Glory

Introduction: The Final Mile

Every race has a finish line. Every battle has a last clash. Every journey has a destination. Discipleship is no different. If you have walked this far through the call, the cost, the wounds, the loneliness, and the refining fire you will know by now that salvation is not cheap. It has thorns, trials, and tears. But what they fail to tell you at the altar call is this: the last mile of the journey is often the hardest.

This chapter is not about despair but perseverance. It is about finding Christ's strength in your weakest moments, remembering that when the roses wither and the thorns pierce deep, God still brings beauty from ashes.

1. The Thorn of Perseverance

Paul begged God three times to remove his thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7–10). God refused not because He enjoyed Paul's pain, but because His power was made perfect in weakness.

- The thorn reminds us we are human.
- The thorn keeps us humble.
- The thorn points us to grace.

If the Christian life were nothing but roses, we would forget our desperate need for God. The thorn is what keeps us clinging to Him.

2. Finishing the Race

Paul said:

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2 Timothy 4:7–8)

Finishing doesn't mean flawless. It means faithful. It means:

- You didn't let failure stop you.
- You didn't let wounds silence you.
- You didn't let betrayal break you.
- You didn't let temptation enslave you.

The race isn't about speed; it's about endurance. Even if you crawl across the finish line, Christ will crown you.

3. The Weight of Glory

The trials you've faced are not wasted. Every tear is counted (Psalm 56:8). Every wound is seen. Every lonely night is remembered.

Paul called our sufferings "light and momentary" compared to the eternal weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17). That doesn't mean our pain is small; it means heaven's reward is infinitely greater.

- Earthly shame will be swallowed in heavenly honor.
- Earthly loss will be repaid with eternal gain.
- Earthly death will be swallowed up by eternal life.

4. The Final Crossroads

At the end, every disciple faces one last question:

Will you bow to the cross, or bow to the world?

Jesus warned: "*The one who endures to the end will be saved*." (Matthew 24:13) The enemy knows he cannot steal your salvation but he will try to make you quit. His last strategy is discouragement: whispering that the road is too long, the thorns too sharp, the burden too heavy.

But the Spirit still whispers louder: "My grace is sufficient for you."

5. Practical Ways to Finish Well

- 1. **Keep your eyes on Christ.** The moment Peter looked at waves instead of Jesus, he sank (Matthew 14:30).
- 2. **Cling to community.** Lone sheep are easy prey. Stay close to the flock.
- 3. **Remember testimonies.** God's past faithfulness is proof of His future faithfulness.
- 4. **Stay in the Word.** Scripture is bread for the final mile.
- 5. **Pray without ceasing.** Even when words fail, groans and tears are prayers He understands.

6. My Story: Crawling But Not Quitting

Brother, I won't lie. I've been at the bottom. I've seen hell up close, not just as doctrine but as reality. There were nights I didn't want to live, mornings I didn't want to face, prayers that felt like silence.

But here's my testimony: Christ never left me. When I fell, He carried me. When I cursed, He forgave. When I quit, He still called me.

I've crawled across parts of this race. But I'm still here. And so are you. If I can testify to one truth, it's this: no thorn, no trial, no sin is greater than His mercy.

7. The Crown Awaits

James 1:12 declares: "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him."

The finish line is real. The reward is waiting. Heaven's roses outshine every thorn. The voice of Christ will echo: "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master."

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus,

We have carried crosses. We have felt the weight of thorns. But today, we lift our eyes to You the Author and Finisher of our faith. Give us strength for the last mile. Keep us from quitting. Remind us that the crown of life awaits beyond the fire, beyond the pain, beyond the grave. Until we see You face to face, help us walk faithfully, crawl if we must, but never turn back. In Your name, Amen.

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This story is not only mine. It belongs to all of us who prayed, wept, rejoiced, and stood together. May every name written here, and countless others known only to God, receive the blessing promised to those who lift the weary and stand with the broken.

"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now."

Philippians 1:3-5 (NIV)