

TRIUMPH OVER SUFFERING

A Woman's Spiritual Guide To Conquering Adversity



We are the clay;
You are the Potter.
Isaiah 64:8

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With Illustrations by Jenna Julianna Li



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Triumph Over Suffering is a spiritual growth course; it is not intended to replace your physician, counselor, therapist, or other health professional.

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Foreword

We must all face suffering in some form in some season of this life on earth. Jesus promised suffering when He said, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world!” (Jn 16:33). So how do we “take heart”? How do we find peace in our trials and troubles? How do we triumph in our suffering?

I know that a sure heart of peace and joy is found in Christ alone. It is only as we draw close to Him that we are comforted and cared for through our pain. We must stand firm in Christ if we are to be overcomers. It is as we remain in Him that we are strengthened for the journey. But we must cling closely to His heart, to His Word, and to His people in order to stand victorious in our suffering.

There have been many books written about the traumas and tragedies of life, but very few authors have been able to address those who are suffering with the compassion and understanding that Dr. Celeste Li has in this book. I’ve never read anything as poignantly positioned to aid you in triumphing in your suffering. You are about to embark on a journey to more fully understand how God is intimately acquainted with your pain, that He loves you and suffered for you, that He has a perfect plan for you, that He will walk with you through your suffering, and that He alone will help you to triumph over suffering.

Knowing Celeste personally, I have always been drawn to her strong pursuit of God as she humbly serves those who are facing trials at varying stages. Her undying devotion to bring hope and healing through Christ to the downcast and dying has prepared her to perfectly to craft the words you will read here. And I believe, woven throughout this book, you will find evidence of her great faith cultivated in an intimate walk with Christ.

As I poured through her writings, I was reminded of Nancy Guthrie, who lost two infants in three years. She is quoted in USA Today (July 16, 2002) as saying, “The world tells us to run from suffering, to avoid it at all costs, to cry out to heaven to take it away. Few of us would choose to suffer. Yet when we know that God has allowed suffering into our lives for a purpose, we can embrace it instead of running from it, and we can seek God in the midst of suffering.” Oh, that we would all gain a deeper, more thorough understanding of God’s plan for our suffering, that we would become more like Christ because of that suffering; and that we would gain the gift of knowing Him intimately and perfectly through our pain!

I truly believe and pray that you will be encouraged by the many Biblical and contemporary examples Celeste shares of those who have blazed a trail of honor and healing for us all. May our great God refine you on the journey. May He grant you great peace and joy that far surpasses your understanding of your circumstances. May He draw near to you in intimate communion as you find rest in Him. And may our God, in all His majesty, bring you triumphantly through your suffering so you can boldly declare His great love to a lost and dying world that desperately needs to know Him.

Donna Mullins
Christ Fellowship Church

Introduction

We are the clay; you are the Potter. Isaiah 64:8

Take a close look at the Potter on the cover of this book. Study His hands. This picture speaks of His infinite love + absolute sovereignty. You are holding a very deep and daring book, and I am praying that the Potter holds you gently in His nail-scarred hands as He heals you, shapes you, and draws you into intimacy with Him through *Triumph Over Suffering*.

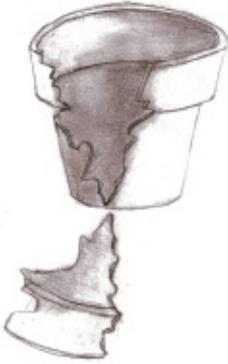
Triumph Over Suffering grew mostly out of my tender compassion for my dear patients, many who could not experience the love of God because of their intense sorrows. As I wrote, God drew from my own personal battles. While I do not believe my suffering comes anywhere close to what you may be enduring, God has taken me, and my family, through seasons of physical suffering as well as emotional and spiritual anguish. God developed in me an intensity of compassion for those who are suffering, and a depth of understanding of where He is in the midst of our pain.

Together, we're going to study what God has to say in His Word about suffering. For you women who want to explore more intensely, don't miss the accompanying *Triumph Over Suffering Workbook*. The workbook complements this book by providing thought-provoking questions, additional Scripture studies that parallel each chapter, and diagrams and pictures to cement the concepts into your mind. Together, we will immerse ourselves in Scripture, discovering that God has much to say in His Word about suffering, for He knew none of us would pass through this life unscathed.

Throughout this book I have interlaced many real life stories to illustrate the major points of each chapter. These are all true testimonies, given to me by people I know and cherish. Almost all of these stories are published with real names; a few have names and other details changed to protect privacy. My family and friends have contributed some stories. My patients in HIV/AIDS Clinic have contributed some stories. Some stories of my own are also here, for I am living in triumph over suffering.

Living in triumph over suffering does not necessarily mean the trial will end. When we conquer adversity, suffering has no hold on us, no power over us; suffering has lost its sting. This book will take you on a journey of triumph over suffering. It will help you to understand why you are facing this agony, it will inspire you to grow closer to God and to face forward, and it will guide you to understand and seize God's purpose for you through your suffering. Not despite your suffering, but *through* your suffering, *because* of your suffering. Trust Him. It is in your darkest times that He is doing His most awesome work.

*I will be praying for you
as you triumph over suffering.*



Chapter 1

“In This World You Will Have Trouble”

Pain. Suffering. Physical diseases, mental illness, emotional anguish. Loss of loved ones, loss of health, loss of financial security, loss of career. Fractured families, suffering children, abuse. Natural disasters, poverty, war. Persecution, rape, murder.

“In this world you will have trouble.”

Jesus' words in John 16:33

The word trouble literally means great afflictions or tribulations. “In this world you will suffer.” We can all attest to that truth. No one passes through this life unscathed.

Did you ever notice how people avoid you when you're suffering? Pretend you don't exist? They seem to think what is going on in your life may be contagious and they had better stay away.

Those who do venture to come near have some interesting comments. Here are some that I have heard:

- “You must have done something to rouse the wrath of God. God uses these things to punish us. What is God punishing you for? What is God trying to tell you?”
- “God never wants anyone to suffer. Just believe it, and claim the victory over your suffering!”
- “The Bible says to be joyful in everything and to give thanks in everything. Are you thanking God for this situation?”
- “You are suffering because your faith is just not strong enough.”

People have said these things to me, and I’m sure they have to you also.

If you are suffering, you have lost something – your health, your job, your possessions, a relationship, a loved one. I want to give you permission to grieve over your loss, to feel angry and depressed and hopeless and afraid, to experience deep spiritual pain, to feel abandoned by God. Grief is the *normal, healthy, natural* response to suffering. No one can tell you how grief should look, because it will be different for each person. Grief is simply reaction to loss.

Admit it. We don’t want to be in any of those painful emotional states. We live in an instantaneous age – we want instantaneous healing. However, our relationships with God cannot be defined or experienced in instantaneous terms. They will require much time and much diligence.

Let’s take a look at the stages of grief, described by

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross¹ in 1969. Understand that these five stages are neither wrong nor right, but are simply the natural human responses that most people travel through when they have experienced a loss. These stages are normal, expected, and part of the healing process.

- **1st Stage:** Denial. Refusing to accept your situation. Thinking that if you ignore it, it will somehow go away. Passing through this stage involves complete honesty in all aspects, not only about your pain, but also about all the emotions that come with it.
- **2nd Stage:** Bargaining. Trying to cut a deal with the Lord. “If You heal me, I will sell all I have and become a missionary.” “If You cure my cancer, I will quit smoking.”
- **3rd Stage:** Anger. The stage many of us want to pretend we successfully skipped over. Yet we would not be human if we were not angry about our hardships. We will discuss anger in depth in Chapter 2.
- **4th Stage:** Grief. Mourning your loss, mourning that life will never be the same again.
- **5th Stage:** Acceptance. Peace. Trusting that the Lord has a plan, a specific plan, for you.



Excerpt from Chapter 3

God loves you so much. He loves you so, so much. You are His treasured possession. He wants to impress this message into your soul: “I love you so deeply.” God is overflowing with love for you. Don’t build a wall around yourself in an attempt to keep His love out. Throw open the door and let His love flow in, and He will lead you on your journey from anger, pain, and guilt to peace, comfort, and acceptance.

I want you to know that it is much harder for our compassionate God to stand by and let us suffer than it would be for Him to remove our suffering. How do I know this? Let me show you.

So the sisters (Mary and Martha) sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love (Lazarus) is sick.” When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.”

. . . So then he told them (his disciples) plainly, “Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

. . . When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. “Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied. Jesus wept.

John 11: 3-4, 14-15, 32-35

Jesus wept. Jesus wept. He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. Why? Why did Jesus weep? He knew

what He was about to do. He knew He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead. He knew He was going to unite Mary and Martha with their brother in a matter of moments. So why did He weep?

Scripture doesn't say, but I believe Jesus was weeping for Mary and Martha. I believe He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled because of their pain, the pain that He knew He caused them by staying where He was for two more days. Even though He knew that this miracle was going to take their already huge faith and grow it in a massive way, even though He knew that nothing else could even come close to expanding their faith and knowledge of Him the way this miracle would do, He wept for the pain He was causing them during this trial. He wept for their suffering. His heartache was immense. He felt their pain. We are one with Jesus, just as the Son and the Father are one (Jn 17:22-23). He feels our pain.



Jesus wept. The shortest verse in the Bible, but perhaps the most significant for we who are suffering. **Jesus wept.** I do not want you to forget that verse.

Take a moment to be still and know that He is God. Bow your head, close your eyes, open your heart, and give Him time to speak to your soul, to tell you, beloved of God, how much He loves you.



Excerpt from Chapter 7

Diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS), I walk slowly with a cane, dragging one leg. It won't be long before I am in a wheelchair.

I am a fiercely independent woman, but the MS has humbled me and made me physically dependent on other people. I recently had to move in with my daughter – how I resisted that move! However, God has truly given me peace about living with my family. I don't look back. I have honestly learned that things and people are great, but God is the greatest of them all. He is always there when I need Him. Although I struggle with anger, frustration, and depression, I know that through this disease, God is teaching me dependence on Him. Physical dependence translating to spiritual dependence.

The purpose of my MS is to grow me closer to God, to change my entire attitude, to bring me to understand that His master plan is more important than my own wishes and dreams. The results of this are twofold: I am driven to share the gospel with as many people as I can, and God has breathed new life into my prayer time. I treasure this work He gives me as His ambassador, and I treasure this time alone with Him that would never have been possible in my previous state of independence.

*Betty
North Palm Beach, Florida*

We think we are powerful as humans, but it is such a fallacy! The devil's own lies have been seared into our conscience. The truth is what *we* can accomplish on earth is nothing . . . nothing of eternal value. Yet what *God* will accomplish on earth through us, if we are willing to humble ourselves and depend on Him, is a power that is **the working of His mighty strength** (Eph 1:19). Paul describes this in Corinthians:

For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

2 Corinthians 4:6-9

Only when we are completely humble and dependent upon Him, only when we turn away from pride and independence and admit that we truly are fragile, insignificant jars of clay, will God fill us with His Holy Spirit, His treasure, that will keep us from being crushed or destroyed.

Pride and independence are powerful strongholds. Paul recognizes that. Listen to what it took for God to demolish those strongholds in Paul and Timothy:

(During) the hardships we suffered . . . we were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

2 Corinthians 1:8-9

Are you over your head in trials? I call this “multitasking sufferings.” Perhaps the hardships, far beyond the human ability to endure, are to teach you not to rely on yourself but on God. There may be simply no other way to learn this.

Has Suffering Crushed You? Does God Even Care?

Do not live defeated by suffering : allow God to use this book to guide you on your journey to victory. Written for women and packed with Scripture, this book can transform your view of hardships and revolutionize how you handle afflictions.

As you learn to live victoriously, you will also:

- Grasp why you suffer as you process your emotions
- Grow closer to God through your trials
- Uncover God's purpose for you *through* your suffering
- Discover that God really *does* care

There are many books about the tragedies of life, but very few authors address those who suffer with the compassion and understanding that Dr. Celeste Li does.

- Donna Mullins, Christ Fellowship Church

Celeste Li, M.D. birthed this book from her experience with her beloved patients with HIV and AIDS, and from her own battles with adversity. Dr. Li taught this study in the classroom and on the Internet, and now brings it to print. Stamped on every page is her passion for Christ and her desire to bring the message of hope in Christ to those burdened with suffering.

God has used *Triumph Over Suffering* to walk many from pain to victory. He is calling you: what are you waiting for?

