

I Wish You Enough

How do you imagine God? Is he like Father Christmas? Do you ask him for a string of things? “Please God, find me a parking space, help me pass my exam, let me get this job.” Is he like a headmaster, someone rather distant, all powerful, stern, using long words that you don’t understand?

Is he like the perfect dad, easy to talk to, safe to be with, the solver of problems and encourager of ideas?

I think I treat God as all of these things at different times.

A friend sent me an email, forwarding a story from someone else. The story involved a parting at an airport in America. As a mother and daughter said goodbye at the gate, the mother said, “I wish you enough.” The writer of the story asked her what she meant by that, and she explained it was a blessing that her mother had said to her as she grew up. Here it is:

Run powerpoint

I wish you enough sun to keep your attitude bright.

A few years ago we had the wettest winter, spring and early summer I have ever lived through. My mood is not overly affected by the weather, but that year even I began to contemplate moving to Spain and finding a job in an international school.

After the last few weeks of working and getting things done in endless sun and the heat it brings, I find myself looking forward to the next rain. In England we are used to a balance; we secretly enjoy the fact that the weather is so changeable. It gives us something to talk about. I suspect that if we lived in a climate where we knew it would be dry until the 15th September and then rain until the 10th November, we would be bored.

I hope that most of you, like me, are going away somewhere this summer for a holiday. Whether you are going abroad or staying in this country, going somewhere new or revisiting old haunts, holidays are something to look forward to. They enable us to change our lifestyle, relax, not having to do the mundane tasks of our working lives, giving us time to experience new things, to spend time with friends and family, to stop rushing through an endless to do list that grows longer at the bottom, as fast as we cross things off the top. And sometimes we wish the holiday did not have to end; that we could have a bit longer before we return to “real life” with its deadlines and early morning starts.

But if we were on holiday all the time, how long would it be before the novelty wore off, and we looked forward to having some structure in our lives again. How long before the “what shall we do today?” became a burden and not a freedom?

I wish you enough rain to appreciate the sun more.

Our earth needs sunshine and rain to flourish. The sunshine provides the energy for all that we do, and the rain provides nourishment. We only have to look at our lawns to see what happens when there is plenty of sunshine but too little rain.

Like the weather, we need a balance in our lives; we need variety, for without it the good times would become run of the mill, standard, and therefore no longer good. Good only

exists in partnership with bad. Rainy times give us a chance to take stock, to reflect on the sunny progress we have made, to decide what we will do when the sun comes out again. Too much rain leaves us moping around, stuck inside with not enough interesting things to do. That is why I wish you enough sun to keep you energised and your attitude bright, and enough rain to nourish you, but not too much.

I wish you enough happiness to keep your spirit alive.

Happiness is often recognised once it has passed. We look back at past events and think, “I was happy then.” Perhaps that is because, again, we need to compare it with the not so happy times. One thing I have learned as I have grown older is that life is frequently not happy or sad, but somewhere in the middle. It is standard and run of the mill. It plods along with the routine of work, shopping, running a home. It has high spots of pleasure here and there and on the whole, if someone asked me if I was happy, I would say yes, because I don’t expect to be on a high the whole time. This blessing does not wish me endless happiness, but enough. I have enough and I am thankful for it.

I wish you enough pain so that the smallest joys in life appear much bigger.

Pain is greater than the absence of happiness. It is something that the Western world tries very hard to avoid, or to cure. You only have to look at the number of available painkillers on the supermarket shelves to see that. But pain, both physical and spiritual, is a necessary part of life. It tells us that we are alive just as much as happiness does.

Doctors sometimes make us suffer in order to cure us. When I was small, I used to hate injections and always cried before, during and after the jab. When I was about 5 my parents needed inoculating against something and I asked if I could go with them to the surgery while they had their jabs. They were a bit surprised but took me along.

Afterwards I said disappointedly, “You didn’t cry!” I had wanted to see them cry like I did. As we get older we accept that some medical procedures will be painful but in the end we will benefit from them and save ourselves greater pain or damage in the long run. Some pain is necessary because it enables us to avoid greater pain and suffering later.

God too sometimes needs to let us suffer so that we can learn and change, or see things differently.

Good parents know they need to discipline their children and set boundaries for them. God is our father and He wants us to grow to be the people He wants us to be.. Paul tells the Hebrews this:

But you have forgotten that the Scriptures say to God's children, "When the Lord punishes you don't make light of it, and when he corrects you, don't be discouraged. The Lord corrects the people he loves and disciplines those he calls his own.

Be patient when you are being corrected! This is how God treats his children. Don't all parents correct their children? God corrects all of his children, and if he doesn't correct you, then you don't really belong to him. Our earthly fathers correct us, and we still respect them. Isn't it even better to be given true life by letting our spiritual Father correct us?

Our human fathers correct us for a short time, and they do it as they think best. But God corrects us for our own good, because he wants us to be holy, as he is. It is never fun to be corrected. In fact, at the time it is always painful. But if we learn to obey by being corrected, we will do right and live at peace. (Hebrews 12:5 – 11)

God always keeps us moving on as gently and lovingly as he can, and the method he uses depends on our cooperation and humbleness. God longs to make something good out of our bad experiences by working beneath the layer of suffering to extract his grace, turning our pain and difficulties into wonderful and divine moments when he approaches and causes all things to work together for good

Other peoples' pain can be the motivator for us to do something about it, to make a difference, be involved with the world. Live Aid became a huge force to relieve the suffering of people in Africa because a few people saw it for themselves and decided to do something about it.

In Doctor Who, the Cybermen were originally created from good intentions. Their creator wanted to take the pain away from peoples' lives so he took away all their feelings. But when you lose the good as well as the bad, you become a robot, unable to connect with others. I'm sure the Doctor Who fans amongst you would agree that the Cybermen route is not the way forward.

If God did not allow us to suffer it would indicate that we do not need to improve, but even Jesus was asked to suffer. If Jesus is our role model, how can we expect not to feel pain, both physical and emotional. Peter writes in his first letter, *Christ suffered here on earth. Now you must be ready to suffer as he did, because suffering shows that you have stopped sinning. It means you have turned from your own desires and want to obey God for the rest of your life. Dear friends, don't be surprised or shocked that you are going through testing that is like walking through fire. Be glad for the chance to suffer as Christ suffered. It will prepare you for even greater happiness when he makes his glorious return. If you suffer for obeying God, you must have complete faith in your faithful Creator and keep on doing right.* (1 Peter 4:1, 2, 12, 13,19)

When we have a pet, such as a dog, we must train it to behave in a way acceptable to humans, such as going outside to relieve itself. This behaviour is not natural to the dog, and our treatment of the dog while training it can seem harsh. But we know the reasoning behind it, and the dog continues to love us unconditionally through the process. Some of our perceived suffering could be God's way of training us. And we need to love him unconditionally and trust that as He loves us, *God is always at work for the good of everyone who loves him.*(Rom 8:28)

Evil exists in our world. It is a fallen world. Not all people accept the principles of caring for one another. There is greed, violence, hatred in all parts of our world. Sometimes we wish God would intervene and protect individuals from natural disasters, or violence or emotional damage. Some people find this particularly challenging when the damaged person is someone close to them, or someone they identify with strongly. Why doesn't God stop pain when it is inflicted by other people.

I watched some of the Big Cat week last week, and the final programme looked at the making of the last 10 years of programmes. Several times the presenters talked about film clips where some of the animals they had followed for years were in danger of being killed

by other animals. Often this fate awaited the cubs, as they were inexperienced, powerless and defenceless. But they had a policy of simply recording nature and not interfering with it. Watching a lion cub being attacked by a warthog, knowing you could do something to stop it, but also knowing it would be wrong to do so was very painful for the humans, but they know it would be wrong to start “playing God.” Surely God also feels this agony but knows He must let His children do things their own way, even if that way causes pain and suffering.

We also find it hard to understand why children, like the lion cubs can be harmed by adults, even to the point of death.

On Monday, the times ran an article on Josie Russell.

JOSIE RUSSELL, the only survivor of a hammer attack by Michael Stone ten years ago, has spoken for the first time about her traumatic experiences and hopes for the future.

Miss Russell, now 19, had her skull smashed during the frenzied assault by Stone, who killed her mother, Lin, little sister, Megan, and dog, Lucy. She spent several months recuperating and at one point doctors feared that she would be brain-damaged for life.

The teenager has chosen to break her silence on the attack in Nonington, Kent a decade ago, two months after leaving the home she shared with her father, Shaun, and weeks before she begins an art and design degree.

She said she thought her mother would be proud of how she had rebuilt her life, adding that she tried not to dwell on the events of July 9, 1996, when Stone attacked the family as they walked home from school.

“I don’t really think about the past that much at all now. I just get on with things. But there are times when I wonder how life would be if nothing had happened to us. I don’t have nightmares any more. I don’t think about anything except now. I try not to think too much, because sometimes if you think you get upset. My little sister would be 17 now and I sometimes wonder what she would look like.”

When police arrived at the murder scene ten years ago they thought both children and their mother had been murdered. But one officer realised that Josie still had a pulse and said: “There’s a flicker of life here.” She was taken to King’s College Hospital, London, where her father, an academic, was waiting. Over the next few months Josie had a metal plate inserted in her head to cover the area where her skull had been smashed. Part of her brain tissue was so damaged it had to be removed. She used sign language to communicate for the first few months.

Her father gave up work to care for her and they moved to a small cottage in a Welsh valley. In May this year she moved out of the home into her own two-bedroom house bought with money she received from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.

In an interview with *The Sun* Miss Russell, who has a Saturday job stacking shelves in a supermarket, said that she hoped one day to become a fashion designer. “I love doing crafts so I will just go with the flow and see what happens,” she said. “I would love a little stall to sell my own accessories. I love fashion. I’m sure Lin would be proud of what I’m doing. She used to do a lot of sewing.”

The teenager said her other passions were animals — she is involved with the Born Free Foundation — and music. She has also been seeing a boyfriend, Iwan, 19, for the past seven months.

Referring to a psychiatric dossier on Stone, which could be released after a High Court ruling on Wednesday, she said: “I just think he is totally deranged. Normal people don’t do things like that. I remember him asking Lin for money. He tied us up and said he would just leave us but he didn’t.”

Miss Russell, whose recovery led to her being called the bravest girl in Britain, said that she just wanted to be a normal teenager. “There are so many people in the world who are braver and need to be helped more than me,” she said. “I just like being normal and don’t like a big fuss. Of course, I sometimes think to myself, ‘Why us?’ But if it was someone else they would say that.”

There is no reason in God’s plan why people should suffer at the hands of others. He didn’t plan for Josie to be attacked. That is the fault of other people, to whom God has given the free will to choose how they live and who they help or hurt. But I am sure God has had a hand in supporting Josie during the last 10 years.

With the right love and support, we have the capacity to rebuild our lives after the most severe trauma. God can give all those that believe in Him the right love and support. He can surround us with people who will help us, sharing in our pain, as He does, and giving us the strength to continue. I believe that God works through the people He surrounds us with.

When James first had his stroke I prayed for him to recover fully, and as part of this, I attended a healing service at St Michael le Belfrey in York. I went up to the front for healing and as the other person prayed for James and me, I clearly heard God say that James would not be healed, but that God would always be with me through every difficulty that the stroke brought about. When God makes his intentions clear, the blessing that comes from hearing Him far outweighs the fact that his answer to your prayer is actually no. God has been very generous to me in this respect.

A couple of years after Verity was born I began to want another baby. I prayed about it, but as we were trying to move house, God said, “Wait until you have moved.” I waited, we moved, and my broody feelings steadily increased to an all-consuming intensity. I prayed again. “Lord, we’ve moved and settled in. Now can I have another baby?”

God’s answer was no, that it would be too much to manage, but He told me in such a gentle and loving way that instead of feeling let down or cheated, I felt special, peaceful and accepting of his decision. He was right, of course, and I have never regretted the decision.

When God speaks to us, through our thoughts, our dreams, our prayers or other people, it is a very special moment and one that we can take out and polish and treasure for the rest of our lives. We can also take heart from other peoples special moments, which is why I think other peoples’ testimony is so important. When we have baptisms here, one person

told me she always feels splashed again by God. We can share in the rejoicing of others and it can make a difference to our lives too.

Again God speaks to us **enough** to see us on our way. We would all like more, but if it happened all the time, would it become like an endless holiday; would the excess take away from the specialness of each encounter with God.

I wish you enough gain to satisfy your wanting.

Those of you who have read or seen Charlie and the Chocolate Factory will remember Veruca Salt, the girl who is allowed to have anything she wants. Apart from being a horrible person to spend time with, she is clearly not happy. Having everything does not satisfy our wanting, because instant gratification takes away the pleasure of finally getting something that you have been working towards for a long time.

We have an electronics teacher at our centre, who spends the rest of his time working in a mainstream school. He says he teaches delayed gratification and patience to our students, which is a very good description. Our students have very little patience and want our time and attention **now**. They want the finished product quickly because they do not know how to enjoy the process of creating something. They become frustrated and angry if the finished product is not perfect, because they do not find the process of gaining and improving a skill a satisfying one.

As children and young people, some of us are overwhelmed by wanting all the products that the media bombard us with; clothes, the latest phone, an MP3 player, the best skateboard, nail extensions, you can write your own list. As we grow older we realise that we can't have all these things at once, and often when we do get them we find that they are not as good as we thought they were anyway.

Mick Jagger summed it up well when he sang,

You can't always get what you want, but if you try sometime you find you get what you need.

In Matthew ch 6, Jesus tells us not to worry about money, about where the next meal will come from or what we should wear. He says that God will provide it for us. Sometimes this is hard to accept in our modern world where it can be difficult for some families to provide the necessary basic needs for their children, but I think the point of the passage is to turn us away from making money and possessions our prime motivator in life. God wants us to put Him first, before all those other earthly wants. If our main want is to know God more, then the other wants will become less, because we will see that they are not important in the long term.

I wish you enough loss to appreciate all that you possess.

People who are burgled often describe feeling violated, that the burgler has attacked them physically when they home was invaded and spoiled. People sometimes feel they must move house because they cannot rid themselves of the bad feelings this violation caused. Others are relieved that no-one was hurt; that possessions can be replaced.

Loss of property can also be caused by the weather; flooding can ruin homes and their contents, as well as taking peoples lives.

And yet losing things can enable you to see how much friends and family care for you. The support and help you can receive after a trauma can enrich your life even more than the trauma damaged it.

When James had his stroke we lost our familiar way of life, and our existing relationship. We also lost some friends who could not manage to deal with his disability. But we gained more friends than we lost. We rebuilt a different, yet satisfying relationship, we had a daughter, that we would not have had without his stroke. In April 1993, when Verity was baptised, we gave a party to celebrate her life, and also James' life. As well as our friends and family, we invited all the people who had walked beside us in our journey since the stroke, including doctors, speech and physiotherapists, the staff from the building society who had always taken the time to talk to James and make him feel a valued customer. It was a great party, and it certainly helped me to appreciate all that we possessed.

I wish you enough hellos to get you through the final good-bye.

Death is the ultimate pain for some people. Saying goodbye for the last time can be painful beyond belief. The pain can last for many months and years. How much worse is that pain when someone dies and you know you have neglected them. You haven't made the time to call them, visit them, let them know that you care about them.

We never know when the end will come for anyone, but we can hope that when it does come they will know that we care because we will have told them frequently, in words, in time spent with them, in letters, cards or emails sent. If people die knowing that they are loved, and that they are going to be with their Father who loves them even more, we may miss them hugely, but they are going to a better place.

In Revelation, John writes about Heaven, *God's home is now with his people. He will live with them, and they will be his own. Yes, God will make his home among his people. He will wipe all tears from their eyes, and there will be no more death, suffering, crying, or pain. These things of the past are gone forever.*

Heaven is a good place to be. When we believe that the people we love are there, **we** may be very sad for ourselves, the pain of missing them may be consuming, but **they** are now free from pain and sadness. I hope that when we are each faced with final goodbyes, we can hold on to that fact and take comfort from it.

So, I wish you enough sun, rain, happiness, pain, gain, loss and hellos to see you through the coming days, weeks and months. Remember that the good things are only appreciated because of our experience of the no so good.