

## It Is Well With My Soul

God's definition of thankfulness and mine are often a universe apart. God says we should give thanks in everything. I struggle with that. Can God mean that literally? It is easy to give thanks for the things that bring me joy and cause me happiness, but can God really mean to be thankful in times of severe sickness, sorrowful problems, frustrating circumstances, or maddening relationships?

Horatio Spafford was a 43 year old lawyer. He lived in a north side suburb of Chicago with his wife, Anna, and his five children. In 1871 his only son died. A few months later, the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 consumed Spafford's real estate investments. He lost his entire life savings. Two years later, Spafford and his family decided to take a vacation to Europe. However, Spafford was delayed by last minute business. He sent his wife and four daughters on the S.S.Ville Du Havre as scheduled, promising to follow in a few days. On November 22, 1873 the ship was struck by an iron sailing vessel, and it sank in 12 minutes. Two hundred twenty-six people were killed. When the survivors of the shipwreck landed in Europe, Anna Spafford cabled her husband, "Saved alone. What shall I do?" Spafford immediately left Chicago to bring his wife home.

In the midst of his sorrow, while sailing near the place of his daughters' death, he wrote the words to the hymn, "It Is Well With My Soul." In spite of their tragedy in 1881 the Spaffords moved to Jerusalem to meet the needs of the people. Through their service the Spaffords were able to share Christ with the local Muslim and Jewish communities.

After learning about Horatio Spafford, I return to my original question, "Can God really mean give thanks in everything?" We all have our own story; although it may not be as traumatic as the Spafford's, or perhaps it is even more, each of us has suffered in one way or another. "It Is Well With My Soul" has been my favorite hymn for years, but I never knew the story behind the author and his life. I know you may find this shocking, but being in Lutheran ministry doesn't always bring peace like a flowing river. In fact, it often feels like a journey on a billowing sea. At times, I have lost sight and have forgotten to give thanks to God for everything. God really does mean it...Give thanks in all circumstances. When issues on earth seem too overwhelming to bear, remember the love and sacrifice of our personal Savior, Jesus Christ as well as the words of Spafford,

"Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say,

It is well, it is well with my soul."