

The Bristlecone Pine

Some time ago a fascinating article appeared in *Reader's Digest*, telling about a most unusual tree called the "Bristlecone Pine". Growing in the western mountain regions, sometimes as high as two or more miles above sea level, these evergreens may live for thousands of years. The older specimens often have only one thin layer of bark on their trunks. Considering the habitat of these trees, such as rocky areas where the soil is poor and precipitation is slight, it seems almost incredible that they should live so long or even survive at all. The environmental "adversities," however, actually contribute to their longevity. Cells that are produced as a result of these perverse conditions are densely arranged, and many resin canals are formed within the plant. Wood that is so structured continues to live for an extremely long period of time. The author Darwin Lambert says in his article, "Bristlecone Pines in richer conditions grow faster, but die earlier and soon decay." The harshness of their surroundings, then, is a vital factor in making them strong and sturdy. How similar this is to the experience of the Christian who graciously accepts the hardships God allows to come into his life. In Hebrews 12:11 we read that such chastening produces "the peaceable fruit of righteousness." (KJV) For those not rooted in Christ, suffering can be decimating. As Christians we claim glory out of suffering. (by Carlyle Fielding Stewart III from *Joy Songs, Trumpet Blasts, and Hallelujah Shouts*, CSS Publishing Company)

It's hard just to make it past the suffering part!

St. Teresa of Calcutta (Mother Teresa), like some early Christian writers, notes, "suffering has to come because if you look at the cross, Jesus has got his head bending down — he wants to kiss you — and he has both hands open wide — he wants to embrace you. He has his heart opened wide to receive you. Then when you feel miserable inside, look at the cross and you will know what is happening. Suffering, [pain](#), sorrow, humiliation, feelings of loneliness, are nothing but the kiss of Jesus, a [sign](#) that you have come so close that he can kiss you. Do you understand, brothers, sisters, or whoever you may be? Suffering, pain, humiliation — this is the kiss of Jesus. At times you come so close to Jesus on the cross that he can kiss you." But, Mother Teresa added, "I once told this to a lady who was suffering very much. The lady answered, "Tell Jesus not to kiss me — to stop kissing me." (Rev. Paul Andrew)

All You Have to Do Is Look Up

A substitute Sunday School teacher couldn't open the combination lock on the supply cabinet. So she went to the pastor for help. The pastor started turning the dial of the combination lock, stopped after the first two numbers, looked up serenely toward heaven, began moving his lips silently, turned to the final number, and opened the lock. The teacher gasped, "I'm in awe of your faith, pastor." "Really," he said, "it's nothing. The number is on a piece of tape on the ceiling." I wish the answers to all of life's problems were on a piece of tape on the ceiling, don't you? Then, when we hit a difficult time in our life all we would have to do is look up. (by King Duncan from *The Idiot's Guide to Christianity*)

Shrinking and growing angel:

The Russian author Leo Tolstoy once wrote a story about a shoemaker who was making his way home one night when he found a poor man shivering and poorly clad. Moved by pity, the shoemaker took the man home. His wife was not pleased. She complained about the cost of feeding another mouth. As she continued to complain, the stranger grew smaller and smaller, shriveled and wrinkled with every unkind word. But when she spoke kindly to the stranger and gave him food, he grew and became more beautiful. The reason was that the stranger was an angel from Heaven in human form and could live only in an atmosphere of kindness and love. [Fulton J. Sheen, *The Power of Love* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964).] The writer of Hebrews tells us that we are to be hospitable to "strangers for thereby, some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:2).