

Finding Life's Deeper Meaning in Adversity

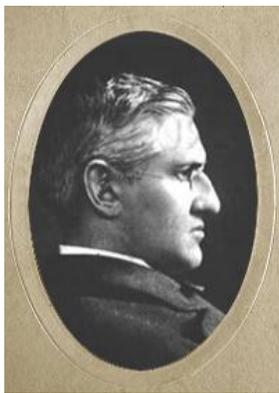
Perhaps you are reading this because you are experiencing some kind of trial or adversity and looking for an answer to help you in your situation, and to see how someone else has dealt with the trials of life and able to overcome them.

We all have had times when we feel we are at our wit's end. Some experience more difficult situations than others, but we all face them at one time or another. I can't help but think of the scripture in Isaiah 43:2 which brings peace to one's soul.

"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."

We think of Job in the scriptures in which he suffered greatly. He lost his children, virtually all his servants, his animals, and his health, and yet he never turned against God.

More recently, one can't help but think of Horatio Gates Spafford and his wife Anna who also lost so much, and yet carried on for the Lord despite the grief they must have endured. The hymn he composed: "It Is Well With My Soul" attests to this. Below is a brief outline of the hardships they endured and what inspired him to compose this hymn. We hope and pray this might be encouraging for others who are going through the hardships and trials of life. If God allows us to go through such deep adversity, we can be sure it is for a greater purpose.



Horatio Gates Spafford was born October 20th 1828 in North Troy, New York. There seems to be very little known about his parentage or early childhood but by October 1871 when the great fire of Chicago occurred he was a very successful lawyer. He and his wife Anna were sincere Christians whose five children were brought up in a godly environment. They were Presbyterians and were friends and supporters of leading evangelicals including D.L. Moody. However, his greatest hymn "It is well with my soul" was not written when things were going well and life was good.

Horatio and Anna had only one son, little Horatio, who when he was only four years of age died from scarlet fever. That was a very dark day.

Using his wealth Horatio purchased a number of properties on the shore of Lake Michigan. He was now a successful lawyer and landlord, but that was not when he wrote: "It Is Well With My Soul".

Sunday October 8th 1871 the great Chicago Fire broke out, and when it was finally over, many of his properties were destroyed. Yet, they had much to be thankful for, their home was spared, and they still had their four daughters. For thousands who had lost everything, those were days of need emotionally, spiritually, nutritionally, and a roof over their heads. Winter was fast approaching and much of the resources they had were used for caring for the needy people.

In 1873 D.L. Moody was in England preaching the gospel. With several factors playing at the same time, it was decided the entire family would go to England for Mr. Moody desired Horatio's help. Anna's health was failing, the loss of their son and properties lay heavily upon them along with the exhaustion of assisting the many in need. By late 1873 they were ready to go as a family, but then, unexpectedly, a business emergency occurred the day they were to leave. Horatio had to return to Chicago from New York but encouraged his wife and girls to go ahead, as he planned to follow a couple of weeks later. It must have been a lovely time of fellowship as Emma Loriaux, other friends and ministers all traveled together across the Atlantic on the steamer "Ville de Havre".

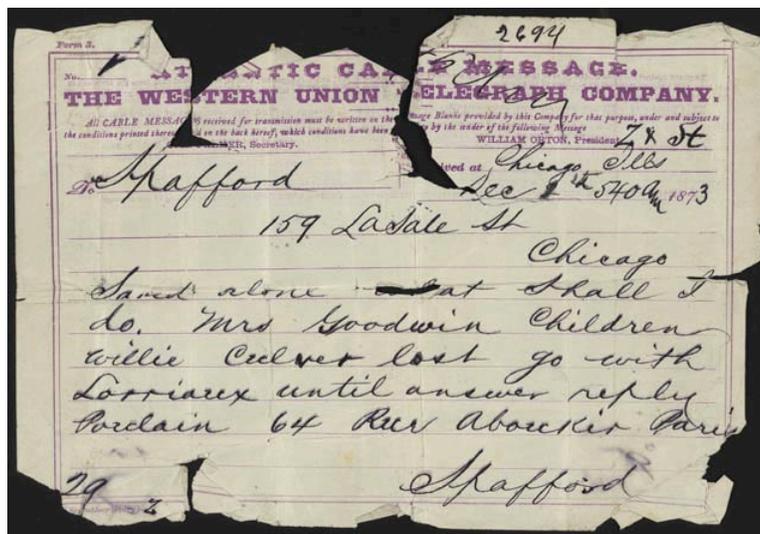
At 2:00 AM on the morning of November 22nd 1878 the "Ville De Harve" was struck by the British ship "Lockhearn", and being split in half, it sank in approximately 12 minutes. Of the 307 passengers on the ship only 81 survived. Standing on the deck was Anna with her four daughters, but with the force of the merciless waters and as heavy debris fell on her arm, little Tanetta was torn from her. All four children drown. That was a dark day and Horatio knew nothing about it for several days. Anna was saved because in the providential dealings of

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God, a plank floated close to her which she grasped, and the next thing she could recall was the splashing of an oar as she lay at the bottom of a little boat. When she came to, and learning the fate of her family, unspeakable grief filled her soul.

One of the ministers traveling with Anna was Pastor Nathaniel Weiss who heard her say: "God gave me four daughters, now they have been taken from me. Someday I shall understand why". In those very dark hours she was conscious of hearing a voice which said: "You were spared for a purpose", and immediately recalled that which had been spoken to her at a previous time: "It's easy to be grateful and good when you have so much, but take care that you are not a fair-weather friend to God."

Anna was taken to Cardiff, Wales where she sent a telegram to Horatio telling of the drowning of their daughters. The telegram said: "**Saved Alone**". Upon receiving the telegram Horatio immediately left Chicago to travel to England. Bertha, a daughter who was born to Horatio and Anna later, recorded that during that voyage the captain of the ship called Horatio to the bridge. He informed him that as close as possible they were over the spot where the Ville de Harve was wrecked.



Nine days after the shipwreck Anna cabled Horatio, "Saved alone. What shall I do . . ."

Returning to his cabin, as Horatio sat alone (and yet he was not alone for the Lord was with him), he penned the following words:

*When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

*Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul!*

*It is well ... with my soul!
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

*My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!*

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On their return to Chicago they began the agonizing work of rebuilding their lives again. In time they had another three children, Grace, Bertha, and a son whom they called Horatio. Who can tell the deep reliving of grief they must have known when Horatio, at only four years of age, died of scarlet fever just as had happened his brother.

With such grief fresh in heart and mind they left Chicago, and in 1881 began life in Jerusalem. There they did again that which they had done after the great fire, they helped the needy, and this time took in homeless children with no other purpose than to teach them the love of Jesus.

Horatio took malaria and died in Jerusalem on Tuesday, October 16th 1888. Anna continued the work they had begun and also died in Jerusalem in 1923. There they both were buried.

What was it that really sustained them in the darkest of hours? I have no doubt it was the knowledge of how deeply they were loved by God, the fulness of the price paid for their redemption, and the assurance that all their sins were gone.

*My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!*

. . . . Gleaned from numerous writings.