THE BELiever’S SALVATION EXPERIENCE  
*(From Beginning to End)*  
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It is my understanding the vast majority of believers do not have a very good grasp of the “entire salvation experience” from beginning to end. They know they are saved, and that one day they will go to heaven, but the "time in-between" is almost always a confusing, frustrating experience for them. So, here in a nutshell is what the Bible teaches concerning the believer’s salvation experience — beginning to end.

God created man in "His image," but when Adam sinned that image in large part was destroyed — Adam not only ultimately died physically, he also died spiritually; that is, he immediately experienced estrangement from God, and no longer possessed the "God life" that he was endowed with at creation — he now only possessed the "Self life." God's plan of redemption was not only to resolve man’s sin problem (by dying on the cross), but also to “re-create” man into the image of Christ. If we were to *diagram* the believer's salvation experience from beginning to end, it would look something like this (all three aspects of salvation are depicted — past, present and future):

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<td><em>The Process of Being Transformed into the Image of Christ</em></td>
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The salvation experience starts with conversion — being “Born Again.” At this stage the believer is still a sinner, but he is now a “Saved Sinner.” From that point on the believer then goes through a “transformational process” whereby he is slowly changed into the image of Christ — this is the present life of the believer, or the “Road to Glory” if you will. It is not until after the believer physically dies that he is “fully conformed to the image of Christ” — at that point every trace of sin and the self-life is removed from him… he no longer inhabits sinful flesh… he is now given a glorified body… and he is now like Christ (1 Jn 3:2).

The "Road to Glory" is the path that every believer must travel in life… and there-in is the difficult part. This transformational part of the journey involves pain, suffering, problems, trials, temptation, sin, failure, tribulation, affliction, the testing of one's faith, and dying to self. You ask, "WHY ALL THESE UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCES?" They are the chief motivational elements that God uses to transform the believer’s character and life — only pain, death and the cross move us toward Christ; such is the "divine economy" that God established to transform us into the image of His Son. There is no other path to glory (and death is never pain-free). The author of Hebrews tells us that “the Author of our salvation (Jesus) had to be made perfect (complete, adequate) through sufferings (the cross)” (Heb 2:10) — the idea of Jesus being “made perfect” does not refer to His being made perfect in His character, but being made perfect as our Savior. In order to purchase our eternal redemption, Jesus had to suffer all the punishment that our sins deserved — it was consistent with the holy character of God that He should suffer, bleed, and die to put away sin. Now if Christ had
to be made perfect through sufferings, how can we expect to be made perfect any other way? (cf. Mt 16:24; Jn 12:24; 2 Cor 1:5; Phil 1:29; Col 1:24; 1 Pet 2:21; 1 Pet 4:1).

By the way, everything God permits the believer to experience in life has "redemptive value;" it is not redemptive in the sense that it "saves" us, but in the sense that it "changes" us. The word "redeem" means to "set free, liberate" — when applied to the believer “spiritually,” it means to free him from the bondage of sin or liberate him from his fleshly nature. Every difficulty the believer goes through in life has redemptive value — or GOD WOULD NOT PERMIT IT. Though the difficulties we go through are often extremely painful (Heb 12:5ff), they are not punitive in nature, but always corrective and instructive. The Bible never speaks of God punishing His children or taking punitive action against them. All of the believer’s “punishment” was born by Jesus upon the cross — ALL OF IT — so every painful trial the believer experiences in this life is permitted by God (it is God’s will for him) because it has “redemptive value” (if it did not, He would not permit it).

The big thing for us as believers is that we learn to “fully accept that fact”... learn to cooperate with God in the process. . . strive to live a life of holiness and seek His kingdom and His righteousness. . . and cultivate intimacy with Him. To not do so is to seek our own “selfish agenda,” and the “self life.” The truth of the matter is, every believer struggles with saying “no” to the self life... it should also be noted that no believer lives FULLY FOR HIMSELF or FULLY FOR GOD. Every believer strives with God in some measure — but some believers are more “self-oriented” and less “God-oriented” than others. Regardless of how much a believer cooperates with God, however, God is at work in him “to will and to do His good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). A part of God’s work is that of “chastening, disciplining and training” His children. God is ever at work training and changing us (in the workshop of life) through the various things He permits to come into our lives — obviously, the more stubborn and rebellious we are, the more severe the level of discipline. . . and the more change God wants to produce in our lives (because of His “unique plan” for us as individuals), the more difficult and painful the training — we do not all have the “same calling” in life (reflect upon the life of Job). So all of the training we are subjected to in life is not just the result of our disobedience and stubbornness. It should also be understood that EVERY BELIEVER struggles with wanting to do his own thing” (that is the norm, and we are all normal!), and DYING TO SELF is a gargantuan task. Furthermore, NONE OF US “DIE EASILY,” contrary to what some would have us believe… and NONE OF US ARE BY NATURE “ONLY GOD-ORIENTED” IN LIFE; that is, none of us are “supra-spiritual” without a flesh problem; any such understanding is totally contrary to the teaching of Scripture. The “pretense” that characterizes so many believers lives is actually very misleading to Christians who are not well-grounded; and such pretense can have devastating effects upon them, because they don’t see themselves as “measuring up.”

Following are some of the more poignant New Testament passages that describe the “painful road to glory” for the believer. Study them carefully —

Matt 16:24 – Stop living for yourself, and take up your cross daily.
John 12:24 – Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it will not bear fruit.
John 16:33 – In the world you will have trials and tribulation.
Rom 5:3-4 – Exult in tribulation, because it produces the character of Christ in you.
Rom 8:17 – The reason for our suffering is that we may one day be glorified.
Rom 8:18 – The sufferings of this age are not worthy of being compared to our future glory.
Rom 8:22 – All of God’s children groan and suffer as they await the redemption of their bodies.
Rom 8:36 – For thy sake we are being put to death all day long.
1 Cor 10:13 – God does not suffer us to be tempted beyond that which we are able.
1 Cor 15:31 – Paul said, “I die to myself daily.”
2 Cor 1:5 – The sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance.
2 Cor 4:17 – Momentary light affliction in this life is producing for us an eternal weight of glory.
Eph 4:22 – Die to your old self.
Phil 1:29 – It has been granted to you not only to believe in Him, but to also suffer for His sake.
Phil 3:10 – Pray that you may know the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings.
2 Tim 2:3 – Suffer hardship as a good soldier of Christ.
Heb 12:5-6 – The Lord disciplines and scourges all of His children.
Heb 12:11 – All discipline from the Lord is painful and seems sorrowful.
Jam 1:2 – Trials and tribulations produce spiritual maturity.
Jam 3:2 – We all stumble in many ways.
1 Pet 1:6-7 – You are distressed by trials that your faith might ultimately be found praiseworthy.
1 Pet 2:21 – You have been called for this purpose, since Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.
1 Pet 4:1 – Therefore, since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourself with this same purpose.
1 Pet 4:12 – Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal you are experiencing; it is for your testing.
1 Pet 5:10 – After you have suffered for a little while, God will perfect, confirm and establish you.