

The Problem Of Suffering



Trying To Understand And Deal With Suffering

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To God Be The Glory!

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The Problem Of Suffering

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The Problem Of Suffering

Why Does God Allow It?

INTRODUCTION

1. There is a question which is as old as the first tear, and as recent as the latest newscast:

“Why? Why does God allow suffering, sorrow, heartache, and death, even among His own children?”

2. This question was asked by Job, and has been asked by every person who has walked upon the face of the earth and who believes in God

3. It was asked by a Christian whose wife...

- a. Received in a car wreck a broken arm, ribs, back, pelvis, leg, and over 200 fractures in her skull
- b. Required over a month in ICU, and more than a year for complete recovery!

4. The answer he received from the Word of God were such an encouragement to me that I would like to share them with you...

[Our purpose in this lesson is not to determine the **origin** or **cause** of suffering (that we will do later), but to better understand:

- Why God allows it
- Why Christians can even rejoice in the midst of trials!

The first reason suggested by this Christian was...]

I. SUFFERING KEEPS THIS WORLD FROM BECOMING TOO ATTRACTIVE

A. THE BIBLE TELLS US THAT WE ARE “PILGRIMS” AND “SOJOURNERS”...

1. This world is not truly our home
2. God has prepared something better for us
3. Consider the following passages: **1 Pe 2:11; He 13:14; 2 Co 5:1,5**

B. IF THERE WAS NO SUFFERING...

1. No one would want to leave this temporary world
2. No one would desire the “eternal” home, and therefore prepare themselves for it

C. BUT THE AFFAIRS OF THIS LIFE ARE SO ORDERED...

1. That the world soon loses its attraction
2. Most young people may want to live forever...
 - a. But by the time a man reaches his “three score and ten”
 - b. He begins to desire something better

II. SUFFERING CAN BRING OUT OUR BEST

A. THE MAN WHOSE WIFE WAS SERIOUSLY INJURED SAW THIS...

1. In the constant support by friends
2. In the preparation of food
3. In the financial support

B. WE SEE THIS OCCURRING QUITE FREQUENTLY...

1. In times of natural disaster
2. When someone loses a house to fire, tornado, etc.
3. In times of terminal illness

C. THIS MAY BE ONE REASON WHY EARLY CHRISTIANS REJOICED IN THEIR TRIALS...

1. They understood that tribulations could develop character
2. As Paul wrote in **Ro 5:3-4**

III. SUFFERING GIVES AN OCCASION TO SILENCE THE ENEMIES OF GOD

A. REMEMBER THE STORY OF JOB...?

1. Satan wanted to prove God wrong about Job, that he served God only because God had blessed him
2. But Job's patience under suffering silenced Satan!

B. LIKEWISE, GOD DESIRES THAT WE SILENCE "FOOLISH MEN" - 1 Pe 2:15

1. Who ridicule the teachings of Christ as foolishness
2. Who say we are Christians only for what good we can get out of it

C. BY PATIENTLY ENDURING, OR DOING GOOD IN TIMES OF SUFFERING...

1. The value of being Christians really shines through
2. In the faith we have that sustains us in suffering, and in the love we show towards those who suffer

IV. SUFFERING MAKES US APPRECIATIVE

A. WE ALL RECEIVE SO MANY GOOD THINGS IN THIS LIFE...

1. It is easy for us to become prone to take them for granted
2. Instead of receiving them with gratitude toward God

B. SUFFERING CAN HELP US APPRECIATE MORE FULLY...

1. Good health
2. Good friends, and a loving family
3. A good example of how suffering can make one appreciative is the apostle Paul when he was in prison - cf. **Ph 1:3-8**

V. SUFFERING MAKES US MORE DEPENDENT UPON GOD

A. TOO OFTEN, WE THINK OURSELVES SELF-SUFFICIENT...

1. "But when a dozen of the most skilled men in their profession tell you they have done all

- they can and it is completely out of their hands...”
2. “...you suddenly realize how much you depend on God.”

B. AT NO OTHER TIME...

1. Is one more likely to realize that we depend upon God for our very breath!
2. As Paul proclaimed: “in Him we live and move and have our being” - **Ac 17:28**

VI. SUFFERING HELPS PURIFIES US

A. CONSIDER THE IMPORT OF TWO PASSAGES...

1. **1 Pe 1:6-7** - Suffering can be like fire purifying gold
2. **Ja 1:2-5** - Maturity can be developed through trials

B. TO ILLUSTRATE HOW, CONSIDER THE MAN WHOSE WIFE WAS INJURED...

1. “Many times I searched my own life during these past six weeks in order to confess my every failure and shortcoming to God.”
2. “I surely did not want my own sins to stand in the way of God hearing my prayers for Jane.”
3. “It was absolutely necessary to be truthful with God and myself, and I am a better man today than before.”

VII. SUFFERING MAKES US SYMPATHETIC

A. PAUL WROTE OF THIS VALUE OF AFFLICTION...

1. To the church at Corinth, in his second epistle - **2 Co 1:3-4**
2. It helps us to be better able to comfort others in their affliction

B. WE MAY THINK WE CAN SYMPATHIZE WITH SOMEONE...

1. But until we have been there personally, there is no true understanding of their hurt
2. Experiencing suffering...
 - a. Makes us more likely to “weep with those who weep” - **Ro 12:15**
 - b. Better enables us to serve others

VIII. SUFFERING TEACHES US HOW TO PRAY

A. WE ALL MAY BE A PRAYING PEOPLE...

1. We pray at the right times
2. We pray for the right things

B. BUT IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING WE LEARN HOW TO PRAY...

1. “Earnestly”
2. “Perseveringly”
3. “With groanings which cannot be uttered” - **Ro 8:26**

C. AS OUR FRIEND SAID...

1. “I have been a praying man since I became a Christian. But never like this.”
2. “I have learned more about prayer in the past six weeks than in the previous twenty years. My prayers will be different for the rest of my life.”

CONCLUSION

1. Can we begin to see why a **righteous** and **merciful** God would allow suffering, even to the innocent?
2. If we look at suffering purely from **man's point of view**, we will not understand why suffering is permitted
3. But remember what God said through the prophet Isaiah:

*“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD.
“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways,
and My thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isa 55:8-9)*

4. When we look at suffering from **God's point of view**, from the viewpoint of His plans for us in preparation of eternity, then we can begin to appreciate why He would allow suffering to occur...
5. And never forget those words of Paul, which reminds us of God's never failing love:

*“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
(Ro 8:35-39)*

May God be praised!

The Problem Of Suffering

Who Or What Causes It?

INTRODUCTION

1. In the previous lesson, we saw through the eyes of one suffering Christian that **suffering** can often bring about very positive results:
 - a. It keeps the world from becoming too attractive
 - b. It can bring out our best
 - c. It gives an occasion to silence the enemies of God
 - d. It makes us appreciative for things often taken for granted
 - e. It makes us depend on God
 - f. It can purify us
 - g. It makes us sympathetic
 - h. It teaches us how to pray-- **In light of these, perhaps we can begin to understand why God would allow suffering to exist**

2. In this lesson, we shall cover an even more difficult question: **“Who or what is responsible for the suffering which God allows to exist?”**
 - a. Is it the work of God Himself?
 - b. Is it Satan?
 - c. Or is it simply natural consequences in a world of cause and effect?

3. In dealing with this, I do not propose to have all the answers; but I share with you those thoughts which I believe are in harmony with the Word of God...

I. SUFFERING MAY BE “THE RESULT OF OUR OWN ACTIONS”

A. GOD HAS CREATED A WORLD GOVERNED BY NATURAL LAWS...

1. Laws of cause and effect
2. Laws of action and reaction
3. Laws of sowing and reaping

B. IF WE VIOLATE THESE LAWS, THE CONSEQUENCES ARE OFTEN GRAVE...

1. Like stepping off a ten story building
2. Or running out in front of a truck
3. Or feeding one’s body constantly with “junk” food
4. Or exposing oneself to contagious diseases, dangerous chemicals, pollution, etc.

C. IN SUCH CASES, SUFFERING IS EXPERIENCED...

1. Because, whether knowingly or unknowingly, some natural law has been violated
2. It is not because we are evil or because we are good (i.e., there is no moral significance to this suffering)

D. WHAT REALLY HURTS, HOWEVER...

1. Is when we suffer because **someone else** violates a natural law

2. E.g., a car wreck caused by someone else's carelessness
2. E.g., child abuse by an alcoholic parent

[This explains much of the suffering endured in our lives. Some would say that **all** suffering is the result of violating natural laws, and that God or Satan have absolutely no hand in suffering whatsoever. I believe the Bible teaches otherwise...]

II. SUFFERING MAY BE “THE WORK OF SATAN”

A. THE BIBLE PRESENTS SATAN AS A CAUSE OF SUFFERING...

1. As in the case of Job - **Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6**
2. As in the case of persecuted Christians - **1 Pe 5:8-9**
3. Satan's objective: that we might curse God (as some do when they experience suffering)

B. BUT WHY DOES GOD ALLOW SATAN TO TEST US SO...?

1. Because God is able to use such suffering to make us better!
 - a. E.g., Paul and his “thorn in the flesh” - **2 Co 12:7-10**
 - b. Remember **Ja 1:2-4**, that the trying of our faith can produce good results
2. Also, consider what God will do for those who endure Satan's “shenanigans”:
 - a. He will perfect and establish us - **1 Pe 5:10a**
 - b. He will strengthen and settle us - **1 Pe 5:10b**

C. WE CAN ALSO TAKE CONSOLATION IN KNOWING THAT SATAN HAS HIS LIMITS...

1. As in the case of Job, God will let Satan go only so far
2. As promised in Paul's letter to the Corinthians:
 - a. God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able - **1 Co 10:13a**
 - b. God will provide a way of escape, enabling us to bear the trial - **1 Co 10:13b**

[So Satan is often permitted to bring suffering upon the righteous. His purpose: to devour us, to get us to curse God. But by the grace of God we are able to use that suffering to perfect, establish, strengthen and settle ourselves as the children of God!

Is there ever a time when God Himself may bring suffering upon His children? I believe the Bible teaches there is...]

III. SUFFERING MAY BE “THE CHASTISEMENT OF GOD”

A. THAT GOD CHASTENS HIS CHILDREN IS TAUGHT IN BOTH TESTAMENTS...

1. In the Old Testament:
 - a. “You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the LORD your God chastens you.” - **Deu 8:5**
 - b. “My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction; for whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights. - **Pro 3:11-12**
2. In the New Testament:
 - a. “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.” - **Re 3:19**
 - b. “And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: ‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by

Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.' If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons." - **He 12:5-8**

B. WHAT WOULD BE GOD'S PURPOSE IN CHASTISING HIS CHILDREN...?

1. Certainly not because He delights in doing so - cf. **Lam 3:31-33**
2. But because it may be necessary...
 - a. To correct - **He 12:9**
 - b. That we may be partakers of His holiness - **He 12:10**
 - c. That we may yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness - **He 12:11**
3. Only so we will not be condemned with the world - **1 Co 11:32**

C. WHEN WOULD GOD CHASTEN US...?

1. Only when we do not correct ourselves! - **1 Co 11:31**
2. Only when we are in danger of being condemned with the world! - **1 Co 11:32**

D. HOW DOES GOD CHASTEN HIS CHILDREN...?

1. Consider how God tried to correct the erring nation of Israel - cf. **Amo 4:6-12**
 - a. These were not miraculous or supernatural events
 - b. But acts of nature brought on by the providential working of God!
2. If God would use His Providence in an attempt to get the nation of Israel to repent before it was too late...
 - a. Would not the same loving God use His providential workings to chastise His erring children today?
 - b. Does He love us any less? - cf. **1 Co 11:30-32; Re 2:20-23**
3. I know of no scriptural reason why God could not or would not use His Providence to bring about events in our lives which can hopefully serve to:
 - a. Wake us up
 - b. Cause us to reflect on our lives and our relationship to God
 - c. Encourage us to repent and turn back to Him if we are straying

CONCLUSION

1. The gist of what I am saying is this: When we experience suffering in our lives...
 - a. **It may be we have violated some law of nature**
 - 1) In this case, there is no moral significance involved
 - 2) It is not because one is good or bad
 - b. **It may be the work of Satan**
 - 1) In this case, it is because we are righteous in God's sight
 - 2) And Satan is trying to devour us, to get us to rebel against God
 - c. **It may be the chastisement of God**
 - 1) If so, it is **only** because...
 - a) He loves us
 - b) He sees that we are heading in a direction which if left unchecked would result in the damnation of our souls!
 - 2) God won't stop us from sinning, but through His providential workings in the affairs of this world He might try to get us to reflect upon what we are doing!

2. **How can we determine** when any particular suffering is from God, Satan or neither?
 - a. I don't believe we can
 - b. Unless, of course, one's sin is so blatant...

3. **How then shall we react** to suffering?
 - a. **If** in every case of suffering we approach it from the viewpoint that it **might** be God in love chastening us...
 - b. And **if** we use the occasion of suffering to:
 - 1) Examine our lives and our relationship with God
 - 2) Draw closer to God...
 - c. **Then...**
 - 1) If it is from God, it **fulfills** His purpose!
 - 2) If it is from Satan, it **frustrates** his purpose!
 - 3) If it is neither, it still **brings us closer to God!**

Our final study will consider how we can best prepare for suffering...

The Problem Of Suffering

How Can We Prepare For It?

INTRODUCTION

1. In our study of the problem of suffering thus far...
 - a. We have looked at why God allows it to exist
 - b. Also, we have examined some of the possible causes of suffering
2. Even so, I still admit there is much we may not understand...
 - a. But perhaps we are closer to being able to use suffering in our lives for good
 - b. To use suffering to the glory of God, and for the betterment of ourselves!
3. In this final lesson, I wish to suggest some ways we can prepare ourselves for suffering that might come our way

[There are several things that we can develop in our lives which will help us to deal with the problem of suffering. The first is...]

I. DEVELOP TRUST IN GOD THROUGH AN ACTIVE “BIBLE LIFE”

A. SCRIPTURES ABOUND WITH PROMISES THAT GOD IS WITH HIS CHILDREN IN THEIR TROUBLES...

1. In the Old Testament, cf. **Psa 46:1-3; 55:22**
2. In the New Testament, cf. **Ro 8:35-39; 1 Pe 5:6-7**

B. TO RECEIVE THIS WONDERFUL HELP OF GOD IN TIMES OF TROUBLE...

1. We must **trust** in Him!
2. As the prophet Nahum implied in **Nah 1:7**
3. As promised in the song written by Isaiah in **Isa 26:3-4**

C. HOW DO WE DEVELOP SUCH TRUST...?

1. Faith (a synonym for trust) comes through the Word of God! - **Ro 10:17**
2. Those who read and meditate upon the Word develop that sort of **trust** which sustains them in all things - cf. **Psa 119:165**
3. This is just another reason why we need to be diligent in our daily reading of the Bible!
4. Then we can be like that “blessed” man described in the first three verses of the Psalms - **Psa 1:1-3**

[At the same time, we need to...]

II. DEVELOP COMMUNION WITH GOD THROUGH AN ACTIVE “PRAYER LIFE”

A. THE BIBLE TEACHES US TO PRAY IN TIMES OF SUFFERING (Ja 5:13)

1. Jesus certainly did during His greatest trials
 - a. In the garden of Gethsemane - **Mt 26:36-44**
 - b. While on the cross at Calvary - **Lk 23:34,46**

2. We find the early church fervent in prayer when their leaders were being persecuted - **Ac 12:1-5,12**

B. THIS IS BECAUSE IN PRAYER...

1. We receive the inner peace necessary to sustain us in our trials - **Ph 4:6-7**
2. But the **time** to develop our “prayer life” is **now!**
 - a. **Before** suffering comes - cf. **Jer 12:5**
 - 1) If our strength is small when dealing with the **minor** frustrations of life...
 - 2) ...then how will we be able to be strong when faced with **major** difficulties that suffering often brings?
 - b. So God will already be a **friend** with Whom we are close, and not a **stranger!**

[We also need to...]

III. DEVELOP CHRISTIAN FRIENDSHIPS THROUGH AN ACTIVE “CHURCH LIFE”

A. THE “PREACHER” IN ECCLESIASTES WROTE OF THE VALUE OF HAVING FRIENDS (Ecc 4:9-12)

1. They can help each other in their troubles
2. But “woe” to those who must face suffering alone!

B. GOD INTENDED FOR THE CHURCH TO PROVIDE THIS KIND OF MUTUAL ENCOURAGEMENT...

1. As members together in the body of Christ, we are to have the same care for one another - **1 Co 12:24-27**
2. Those who are strong are exhorted to help those who are weak - **1 Th 5:14**

C. THE BEST WAY TO DEVELOP SUCH HELPFUL RELATIONSHIPS...

1. **Take an active part** in the “family life” of the local church
 - a. Become involved
 - b. Make your presence felt
 - 1) By frequent and consistent assembling with the church
 - 2) By voluntary participation in the work of the church
 - c. Visit the sick, help the needy, encourage the weak, assimilate the new members
 - 1) Helping others in their time of suffering can “soften” the shock of suffering in your own life
 - 2) E.g., visiting the sick in hospitals, or the bereaved at funerals will make it easier for you when it comes your turn
 - d. So become more than just a “pew-warmer”!
2. Those who do such things will never lack support in their time of trouble!
 - a. I.e., if you are not diligent to visit others in their time of need...
 - b. ...don’t be surprised if others are not quick to come to your side when the need is there (not that they shouldn’t, but it can be difficult to effectively assist those who choose to remain aloof in their relationship with others)

CONCLUSION

1. By developing...
 - a. Trust in God through an active “**Bible life**”

- b. Communion with God through an active **“prayer life”**
 - c. And Christian friendships through an active **“church life”**
- ...we can go a long way in preparing ourselves to deal with adversity

2. Burdens can either shatter or strengthen our faith...
- a. Which it will be for us depends upon how well we have prepared ourselves
 - b. Jesus taught that the key to overcoming the “storms” of life lies in laying the proper foundation, one created by both **hearing** and **doing** His Word - **Mt 7:24-27**

Are we preparing ourselves for the days of suffering that most of us will likely face...?

<p><i>To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, And a time to die; A time to plant, And a time to pluck what is planted; A time to kill, And a time to heal; A time to break down, And a time to build up; A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, And a time to gather stones;</i></p>	<p><i>A time to embrace, And a time to refrain from embracing; A time to gain, And a time to lose; A time to keep, And a time to throw away; A time to tear, And a time to sew; A time to keep silence, And a time to speak; A time to love, And a time to hate; A time of war, And a time of peace.</i></p>
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(Ecc 3:1-8)

Though this may be true, let’s remember the encouraging words of the writer to the Hebrews:

“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all [points] tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (He 4:14-16)

May we all find that wonderful **“mercy”** and **“grace”** in our times of need!