

Suffering

God's purposes in trials and afflictions

Suffering remains one of life's most perplexing realities and one of faith's greatest tests. The Bible neither minimizes suffering's pain nor offers simplistic explanations for every instance. Instead, Scripture acknowledges suffering's reality, reveals God's sovereign purposes within it, and provides resources for endurance. "In the world ye shall have tribulation," Jesus plainly stated, yet immediately added, "but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Christian faith does not promise escape from suffering but provides meaning and hope within it.

The **reality of suffering** affects all humanity—believer and unbeliever alike—as consequence of living in a fallen world. Sin's entrance through Adam's disobedience subjected creation to futility, bringing physical decay, natural disasters, disease, and death. Moreover, personal sin produces additional suffering through its natural consequences and divine discipline. Christians face unique trials: persecution for righteousness' sake, spiritual warfare against demonic forces, and refining afflictions designed for sanctification. The Bible never promises earthly ease but rather guarantees that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12).

God's **purposes in suffering** prove multifaceted and redemptive. Suffering develops character: "Tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope" (Romans 5:3-4). It refines faith, burning away dross to reveal genuine trust. "The trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7). Suffering produces dependence, teaching believers to rely on God rather than self-sufficiency. It creates compassion, enabling those comforted by God to comfort others. It redirects priorities, loosening attachment to temporal things and strengthening desire for eternal realities.

Christ's example provides the supreme pattern for suffering. "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). He suffered unjustly yet without retaliation, committed Himself to the Father's will, and trusted the righteous Judge. His sufferings proved redemptive—accomplishing salvation through substitutionary death. While believers' sufferings do not atone for

sin (Christ's work being complete and sufficient), they do participate in "the fellowship of his sufferings" (Philippians 3:10), identifying with Christ's rejection and sharing in His ultimate glorification.

The **comfort God provides** sustains through trials. "The God of all comfort... comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). This comfort comes through Scripture's promises, the Spirit's presence, the body of Christ's support, and assured hope of future glory. God does not always remove suffering but provides sufficient grace for endurance. "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Many believers testify that their sweetest communion with God occurred during their darkest trials.

Responding rightly to suffering requires **specific attitudes and actions**. Believers should maintain faith, trusting God's goodness despite perplexing circumstances. They should practice patience, avoiding both passive resignation and angry rebellion while actively waiting on God's deliverance. They should seek spiritual lessons, asking "What is God teaching me?" rather than merely "Why is this happening?" They should remember eternal perspective, viewing present affliction as "light" compared to eternal glory (2 Corinthians 4:17). They should pursue holiness, allowing trials to expose and eradicate sin. They should support fellow sufferers, bearing one another's burdens.

Special considerations apply to **grief and loss**. Death's sting, though defeated by Christ's resurrection, still pierces deeply. Scripture validates mourning—Jesus wept at Lazarus's tomb—while providing hope that transcends despair. "Sorrow not, even as others which have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Christians grieve, but not as those without resurrection hope. God promises ultimate restoration: "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying" (Revelation 21:4). Until that day, grief remains real but never final.

The ultimate resolution to suffering awaits **Christ's return and the new creation**. Present sufferings, however severe, constitute temporary affliction in light of eternity. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17). This comparison—light versus weighty, momentary versus eternal—provides perspective that enables endurance. The Christian does not suffer as one without hope but as one confident that present groaning will give way to future glory, present tears to eternal joy, and present pain to everlasting peace. "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time

are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

Purpose of Suffering

Why God allows suffering

Romans 5:3-4 — Tribulation works patience

And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

James 1:2-4 — Trying of faith produces patience

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

2 Corinthians 4:17 — Light affliction, eternal weight of glory

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

1 Peter 1:7 — Trial of faith more precious than gold

That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

Comfort in Suffering

God's comfort in trials

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 — God of all comfort

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

Psalms 23:4 — Walk through valley of shadow

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Isaiah 41:10 — Fear not, I am with thee

Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

Christ's Example

Following Christ in suffering

1 Peter 2:21 — Christ suffered for us

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

Hebrews 12:2 — Looking unto Jesus

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Philippians 3:10 — Fellowship of His sufferings

That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

Grief

Mourning and sorrow

Psalms 34:18 — The LORD is nigh unto them of a broken heart

The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

Matthew 5:4 — Blessed are they that mourn

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

John 11:35 — Jesus wept

Jesus wept.

Psalms 30:5 — Weeping may endure for a night

For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 — Father of mercies and God of all comfort

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

Revelation 21:4 — God shall wipe away all tears

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 — Sorrow not as others who have no hope

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

Psalms 147:3 — He heals the broken in heart

He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.

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