

Why do we suffer and have so many trials in our lives?

Introduction-Why me? Why now? What is God doing? **Suffering is a tool God uses to get our attention and to accomplish His purposes in our lives.** It is designed to build our trust in the Almighty, **but suffering requires the right response if it is to be successful in accomplishing God's purposes. Suffering forces us to turn from trust in our own resources to living by faith in God's resources.**

Suffering is not in itself virtuous, nor is it a sign of holiness. It is also not a means of gaining points with God, nor of subduing the flesh (as in asceticism). When possible, suffering is to be avoided. Christ avoided suffering unless it meant acting in disobedience to the Father's will.

(1) How am I responding to it?(2) How should I respond to it?(3) Am I learning from it?(4) Does my response demonstrate faith, love for God and for others, Christ-like character, values, commitment, priorities, etc.?(5) How can God use it in my life?

Suffering Defined-What is suffering? What are these bends in the road that God puts in the path of life that we are to carefully consider? Simply stated, suffering is anything which hurts or irritates. In the design of God, it is also something to make us think. It is a tool God uses to get our attention and to accomplish His purposes in our lives in a way that would never occur without the trial or irritation.

Illustrations of Suffering-“It may be cancer or a sore throat. It may be the illness or loss of someone close to you. It may be a personal failure or disappointment in your job or school work. It may be a rumor that is circulating in your office or your church, damaging your reputation, bringing you grief and anxiety.”⁴⁰ It can be anything that ranges from something as small and irritating as the bite of a mosquito or the nagging of a gnat to the charge of an elephant or having to face a lion in the lions' den as with Daniel ([Dan. 6](#)).

General Causes of Suffering-(1) **We suffer because we live in a fallen world where sin reigns in the hearts of men.**

(2) We suffer because of our own foolishness. We reap what we sow ([Gal. 6:7-9](#)).

(3) We sometimes suffer because it is God's discipline. "For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son He receives." ([Heb. 12:6](#)).

(4) We may suffer persecution because of our faith--especially when we take a stand on biblical issues, i.e., suffering for righteousness sake ([2 Tim. 3:12](#)). Of course, all of these do not apply at the same time. All suffering is not, for instance, a product of our own foolishness, self-induced misery, or sin. It is true, however, that rarely does suffering not reveal areas of need, weaknesses, and wrong attitudes that need to be removed like dross in the gold refining process.

The Nature of Suffering-**SUFFERING IS PAINFUL**-Suffering is hard. It is never easy. Regardless of what we know and how hard we apply the principles, it is going to hurt.

SUFFERING IS PERPLEXING-Suffering is somewhat mysterious. We may know some of the theological reasons for suffering from Scripture, yet when it hits, there is still a certain mystery. Why now? What is God doing? In this, it is designed to build our trust in the Almighty.

SUFFERING IS PURPOSEFUL-Suffering is not without meaning in spite of its mystery. It has as its chief purpose the formation of Christ-like character ([Rom. 8:28-29](#)).

SUFFERING PROVES, TESTS US-“Trials” in [James 1:2](#) refers to that which examines, tests, and proves the character or integrity of something. “Testing” refers to a test designed to prove or approve. Suffering is that which proves one's character and integrity along with both the object and quality of one's faith.

Compare [1 Pet. 1:6-7](#) “put to the test,” “prove by testing as with gold.”

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SUFFERING IS A PROCESS—“We know that **suffering produces perseverance**; perseverance, proven character; and . . .” (Rom. 5:3-4). “Knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect (mature) and complete, lacking in nothing” (Jam. 1:3-4). As a process, it takes time. The results God seeks to accomplish with the trials of life requires time and thus also, endurance.

SUFFERING IS A PURIFIER—No matter the reason, even if it is not God’s discipline for blatant carnality, it is a purifier for none of us will ever be perfect in this life ([Phil. 3:12-14](#)).

SUFFERING PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY—Suffering provides opportunity for God’s glory, our transformation, testimony, and ministry, etc

SUFFERING REQUIRES OUR COOPERATION—Suffering requires the right response if it is to be successful in accomplishing God’s purposes. “We all want the product, character; but we don’t want the process, suffering.”⁴¹ Because of our make up as human beings, we can’t have one without the other.

SUFFERING IS PREDETERMINED AND INEVITABLE—[1 Thessalonians 3:3](#) so that no man may be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. [1 Peter 4:19](#) Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right. The question we must each face is not, “if” we are going to have trials in life, but how will we respond to them.

SUFFERING IS A STRUGGLE—It’s going to be a battle all the way. That’s why they are called “trials” and “testings.” Even when we understand the purposes and principles of suffering, and we know the promises of God’s love and concern given in the Word of God for handling suffering, dealing with the trials of life is never easy because **suffering hurts**. Trials simply give us the capacity to cooperate with the process ([Jam. 1:4](#)). They allow the process to work and allow us to experience inner peace and joy in the midst of the trials.

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In order to handle suffering with inner joy and tranquility, we must be able to look ahead to God's purposes and reasons for suffering. This requires faith in the eternal verities of God.

We must understand God's chief purpose for our lives is to be conformed to the image of Christ and He has determined in **His plan to use suffering for our spiritual development**. If we are going to endure suffering and the trials of life, however, we must also understand and believe in the other purposes and reasons for suffering as they are related to the chief purpose.

Purposes and Reasons for Suffering

(1) We suffer as a testimony, as a witness ([2 Tim 2:8-10](#); [2 Cor. 4:12-13](#); [1 Pet. 3:13-17](#)). When believers handle suffering joyfully and with stability, it becomes a marvelous testimony to the power and life of Christ that we claim and name.

Suffering provides key opportunities to manifest and magnify the power of God through His servants in order to verify and confirm the messenger and his message

(2) We suffer to keep down pride ([2 Cor. 12:7](#)). The Apostle Paul saw his thorn in the flesh as an instrument allowed by God to help him maintain a spirit of humility and dependence on the Lord because of the special revelations he had seen as one who had been caught up to the third heaven.

(3) We suffer because it is a training tool. God lovingly and faithfully uses suffering to develop personal righteousness, maturity, and our walk with Him ([Heb. 12:5f](#); [1 Pet. 1:6](#); [Jam. 1:2-4](#)). In this sense, suffering is designed:

- **As discipline for sin** to bring us back to fellowship through genuine confession ([Ps. 32:3-5](#); [119:67](#)).
- **As a pruning tool** to remove dead wood from our lives (weaknesses, sins of ignorance, immature attitudes and values, etc.). The desired goal is increased fruitfulness ([John 15:1-7](#)). Trials may become mirrors of reproof to reveal hidden areas of sin and weakness ([Ps. 16:7](#); [119:67, 71](#)).
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- **As a tool for growth** designed to cause us to rely on the Lord and His Word. Trials test our faith and cause us to use the promises and principles of the Word ([Ps. 119:71, 92](#); [1 Pet. 1:6](#); [Jam. 1:2-4](#); [Ps. 4:1](#) [The Hebrew of this passage can mean, “You have enlarged, made me grow wide by my distress]). Suffering or trials teach us the truth of [Psalm 62:1-8](#), the truth of learning to “wait on the Lord *only*.”

- **As a means of learning what obedience really means.** It becomes a test of our loyalty ([Heb. 5:8](#)). Illustration: If a father tells his son to do something he likes to do (i.e., eat a bowl of ice cream) and he does it, the child has obeyed, but he hasn’t really learned anything about obedience. If his dad, however, asks him to mow the lawn, that becomes a test and teaches something about the meaning of obedience.

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- The point is **obedience often costs us something and is hard.** It can require sacrifice, courage, discipline, and faith in the belief that God is good and has our best interests at heart regardless of how things might appear to us. Regardless of the reason God allows suffering into our lives, rarely does it not reveal areas of need, weaknesses, wrong attitudes, etc., as it did in Job. Suffering itself is not the thing that produces faith or maturity. It is only a tool that God uses to bring us to Himself so we will respond to Him and His Word. It forces us to turn from trust in our own resources to living by faith in God’s resources. It causes us to put first things first. Ultimately, it is the Word and the Spirit of God that produces faith and mature Christ-like character ([Ps. 119:67, 71](#)).

In [James 1:2-4](#) and [1 Peter 1:6-7](#) the key word is “proof.” “Proof” is the word which looks at both the concept of testing which purifies, and the results, the proof that is left after the test. The Lord uses trials to test our faith in the sense of purifying it, to bring it to the surface, so we are forced to put our faith to work.

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(4) We suffer to bring about continued dependence on the grace and power of God. Suffering is designed to cause us to walk by God's ability, power and provision rather than by our own ([2 Cor. 11:24-32](#); [12:7-10](#); [Eph. 6:10f](#); [Ex. 17:8f](#)). It causes us to turn from our resources to His resources.

(5) We suffer to manifest the life and character of Christ (The Fruit of the Spirit) ([2 Cor.4:8-11](#); [Phil. 1:19f](#)). This is similar to point (4) above with more emphasis on the process and defining the objective, the production of the character of Christ. This has both a negative and a positive aspect:

- **Negative:** Suffering helps to remove impurities from our lives such as indifference, self trust, false motives, self-centeredness, wrong values and priorities, and human defense and escape mechanisms by which we seek to handle our problems (man-made solutions). Suffering in itself does not remove the impurities, but is a tool God uses to cause us to exercise faith in the provisions of God's grace. It is God's grace in Christ (our new identity in Christ, the Word and the Holy Spirit) that changes us. This negative aspect is accomplished in two ways:
 - a) **When out of fellowship with the Lord:** Suffering becomes discipline from our heavenly Father ([Heb. 5:5-11](#); [1 Cor. 11:28-32](#); [5:1-5](#)). This involves **known sin**, rebellion and indifference to God.
 - (b) **When in fellowship with the Lord:** Suffering becomes the loving and skillful handy work of the Vine Dresser to make us more productive. It involves *unknown sin*, areas we may not be aware of, but that are nevertheless hindering our growth and fruitfulness. In this case, suffering often constitutes mirrors of reproof ([John 15:1-7](#)).

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- o **Positive:** When believers live under suffering joyfully (i.e., they endure and keep on applying the promises and principles of the faith), Christ's life or character will be more and more manifested as they grow through the suffering ([2 Cor. 4:9-10](#); [3:18](#)). This means trust, peace, joy, stability, biblical values, faithfulness and obedience in contrast to sinful mental attitudes, blaming, running, complaining, and reactions against God and people.

(6) **We suffer to manifest the evil nature of evil men and the righteousness of the justice of God when it falls in judgment** ([1 Thess. 2:14-16](#)). Suffering at the hands of people (persecution, violent treatments) is used of God to "fill up the measure of their sins." It shows the evil character of those who persecute others and the justice of God's judgment when it falls.

(7) **We suffer to broaden our ministries** (cf. [Philippians 1:12-14](#) with 4:5-9). In the process of producing Christian character and enhancing our testimony to others, suffering often opens up doors for ministry we could never have imagined. Paul's imprisonment (chained daily to Roman soldiers in his own house) resulted in the spread of the gospel within the elite imperial praetorian guard. The Apostle was undoubtedly continuing to rejoice in the Lord, but if he had been complaining, sulking, and bitter, his witness would have been zero.

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Bible Verses about Suffering/Tests/Trials

Romans. 5:3-4

We know that **suffering produces perseverance**; perseverance, proven character; and . . . “Knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect (mature) and complete, lacking in nothing

Romans 8:18-23

For I consider that **the sufferings of this present time** are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope read more.

Philippians 1:29

For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but **also to suffer for His sake**.

Philippians 3:10

*that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His **sufferings, being conformed to His death**.*

James 5:13

Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.

1 Corinthians 12:26

And if **one member suffers, all the members suffer with it**; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

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1 Peter 1:6

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now **for a little while**, if necessary, you have been distressed by **various trials**.

1 Peter 2:20-21

For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if **when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.**

For you have been called for this purpose, since **Christ also suffered for you**, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.

1 Peter 3:14&17

But even if you should **suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed.** And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, for it is better, if God should will it so, that you **suffer for doing what is right** rather than for doing what is wrong.

1 Peter 4:1

Therefore, since **Christ has suffered in the flesh**, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because **he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.**

1 Peter 4:13-14

but to the degree that **you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing**, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If **you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed**, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

1 Peter 4:16&19

but if **anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed**, but is to glorify God in this name. Therefore, those also who **suffer according to the will of God** shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

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1 Peter 5:8-10

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert Your adversary, *the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. After you have suffered for a little while*, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

Colossians 1:24

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.

Romans 8:18

For I consider that the **sufferings of this present** time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Philippians 1:29

For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but **also to suffer for His sake**,

2 Timothy 2:9

for which **I suffer hardship** even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned.

Hebrews 2:10

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.

Romans 8:17

and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we **suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.**

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2 Thessalonians 1:5

This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed **you are suffering**.

John 16:33

These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world **you will have tribulation** but take courage; I have overcome the world."

2 Timothy 2:3

Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

Acts 9:16

for I will show him how much **he must suffer for My name's sake.**"

2 Corinthians 1:4

God, who **comforts us in all our affliction** so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Hebrews 5:8

Although He was a Son, He learned **obedience from the things which He suffered**.

2 Timothy 1:12

For this reason **I also suffer these things**, but *I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed* and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.

2 Corinthians 4:17

For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.

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Colossians 1:24

Now I **rejoice in my sufferings** for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.

2 Corinthians 1:5

For just as the **sufferings of Christ** are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.

2 Timothy 2:10-12

For this reason, I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory. It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us.

2 Thessalonians 1:3-5

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater; therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that **you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering.**

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ENCOURAGEMENT – PSALMS 139 VERSES

1-5,10,13,16,17,23,24

- Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me.
- You know when I sit down or stand up, you know my thoughts even when I'm far away.
- You see me when I travel and when I rest at home.
- You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head.
- I can never get away from your presence.
- Your hand will guide me and your strength will support me.
- Everyday of my life was recorded in your book.
- How precious are your thoughts about me O God, they cannot be numbered.
- Search me O God, and know my heart, test me and know my anxious thoughts.
- Point out anything in me that offends you and lead me along the path of everlasting life.