

Hope in Suffering

- **Suffering is a result of the fall**

God warned Adam that eating the forbidden fruit would result in death (Genesis 2). Death (and the accompanying pain and suffering) came as a result of that first sin and our continued sin.

- **God uses suffering for good.**

Thankfully Romans 8 tells us, "That for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose." God never tells us our pain is good, but He uses pain to work for our good in His miraculous and mysterious way. One way God uses pain is to bring us to Himself. Our tendency in times of trial may be to run away from God, become angry with God or idolize worldly comfort. We need to realize that God is in control over all our circumstances...and He is good. We need to open our eyes in our pain and see that our circumstances are taking us right to God

- **We can't always see what God is doing in our pain.**

Augustine wrote of God and our circumstances, "If you understand it, it is not God you understand." We can hardly scratch the surface of the intentionality, creativity and wisdom of God's handiwork. Who can give Him counsel or criticize His work? Proverbs 16:4 says, "The Lord has made everything for its purpose." We can trust that God is always doing more than we can fathom.

- **God uses suffering to mature us in Christ.**

James 1 says, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." Trials can be counted a joy because God is preserving our faith. He is making use more like Christ, and that is always gain.

- **Persevering through suffering allows us to comfort other who suffer.**

God brings us through suffering so we can comfort others who are suffering. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. The best burden-bearers are the ones who've needed someone to carry their burdens in the past.

- **Suffering opens up ministry opportunities you've never dreamed of.**
 Growing up with a healthy body I never know one day my life and ministry would include encouraging the hurting and helping those who care for the hurting. I am in constant pain – each day I feel burning sensations and sharp pains in both of my arms. I can't put on my seatbelt, open a bottle of water, button my shirt or shake hands with my friends. In the past couple of years, I have begun to feel similar symptoms starting in my legs. Some days the pain is agonizing. Most nights I struggle to sleep. Depression has engulfed me on more than one occasion. And yet! God's grace is seen in the bright rays of light that shine through opportunities He has given me to encourage others about His unrelenting love. I never would have chosen or dreamed of a ministry like this – the Lord has done marvelous things.
- **God moves through weakness and suffering, not in spite of it.**
 Christianity teaches that the ultimate goal in life is not to eliminate pain and weakness, but for God to work in and through you in your pain. Paul had a thorn in his flesh and asked God multiple times but it remained. One could wonder how amazing Paul's ministry would be if Paul didn't have his thorn. But God didn't use Paul despite his thorn, but through his thorn. God moves not in spite of our suffering, but through our suffering. Weakness is God's way of moving in this world.
- **Our earthly perspective on the duration of suffering is very different from God's.**
 Noah worked on an ark and waited for a flood. Abraham waited for a child with Sarah for years. Joseph was in prison for years. Moses wandered in the desert wilderness for 40 years. Hannah wept continually for a child. David fled from a wicked king for 13 years in the desert. Jeremiah "the weeping prophet" preached and saw no fruit for several decades. Paul faced imprisonment one after another. 2 Corinthians 4:17 gives us a healthy perspective on persevering in trials, "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison."
- **Suffering can propel us into community.**
 My suffering has caused me to depend on the believing community for help, service, encouragement and prayer. Though seeking help is humbling, it has an added bonus of friendship. I think of all the rides my friends have given me over the years; I think of the ways they have given me encouragement; I think of phone calls and text messages from halfway around the world. When we resist the urge to isolate ourselves God blesses us with sweet fellowship.

- **Christianity has the only solution to suffering.**

All other religions have insufficient means of coping with and resolving pain and suffering. Some present plans of escape from the reality of pain. Some teach ways to placate the gods. Some tout karmic philosophies. Some focus on working for paradise—a place with no pain and unbounded pleasure.

But only Christianity provides true hope for the hurting. Suffering and death is inevitable for all of us but we can have hope because One has gone before us in death. Jesus Christ, truly God and truly man, lived a sinless life in our place. He faced various temptations and trials—betrayal by those closest to Him, mockery, emotional anguish, physical agony, and most of all, judgment by God the Father.

When Jesus hung on the cross bearing the weight of his people's sins, He not only faced the worst earthly death imaginable (reserved for only the worst criminals), He faced the overflowing cup of God's wrath. But the story doesn't end there with the death of Jesus. Three days later he walked out of his tomb; Jesus had risen from the dead. Christ's resurrection means that our pain and our trials and even our death are not the end of the story.

From <https://odb.org/?s=suffering#gsc.tab=0&gsc.q=suffering&gsc.page=1>

- **Joy in suffering**

Even though the way of sorrow is hard, God sends reminders of His enduring presence. To the Israelites expelled from the Promised Land due to disobedience, God made His presence known by sending prophets like Jeremiah to offer them hope—hope for reconciliation through repentance. And to those He leads through times of testing, He shows His presence through a community of believers who “love one another fervently with a pure heart” (1 Peter 1:22). These indications of God's presence during trials on earth affirm God's promise of the living hope awaiting us at the resurrection.

- **Strength through suffering**

Church services often end with a benediction. A common one is taken from Peter's concluding remarks in his first epistle: “May the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you” (1 Peter 5:10). Sometimes omitted in the benediction is the phrase “after you have suffered a while.” Why? Perhaps because it is not pleasant to speak of suffering.

It should not surprise us, however, when suffering comes our way. The apostle Paul, who knew well what it was to suffer, wrote: "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12).

If we live a life of submission to God (1 Peter 5:6) and resisting the devil (v.9), we can expect to be maligned, misunderstood, and even taken advantage of. But the apostle Peter says that there is a purpose for such suffering. It is to "restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast"

God's path for our Christian growth often leads us through difficulties, but they fortify us to withstand life's future storms. May God help us to be faithful as we seek to boldly live a life that honors Him.

From <https://www.cru.org/us/en/blog/life-and-relationships/hardships/how-to-find-hope-in-the-midst-of-suffering.html>

- **This is what the book of Job teaches me. Our suffering, whether big or small does have a point. And not only a point, but deep significance.**

Job constantly screams out to God. His eyes are ever upward in anger and in hope. "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him; yet I will argue my ways to His face." – Job

Is Job honored simply because he doesn't curse God? No, Job is honored because he positively pours out his soul before his maker. He voices all his anger, all his rage, all his questions, leaving no stone unturned. We can reflect in our distresses of the love of a Father, the loyalty of a Son and the power of a Spirit. We can suffer well, ever bringing our pain to our Father who honors us, and says, "My child speaks true of me."

We often will not know what our hurt is accomplishing, but Christ's death is our guarantee that God won't waste a tear.

Our tenacious belief in a relational God who is good is our only hope through and in our hurt. But this tenacity doesn't come from us, for we are extremely weak. Tenacity is achieved by very real nails driven through very real wrists on a very real cross. And today Jesus prays for us without ceasing before his Father and we are filled with the Holy Spirit to suffer as well.

If we look to Job, the Cross and the Spirit, we can know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that our suffering is never insignificant. We will be drawn through our temporary sufferings into glories unfathomable. God is worth it.

From <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-inexplicable-life>

- **The only explanation is hope.**

Have you ever been troubled by 1 Peter 3:15 the way I have? “Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” Why would they ask that question? Why would they look at our lives and ask about hope? Because the life Peter is calling for can only be explained by a hope the world does not know. Here are four examples:

1. In 1 Peter 1:6–7, Peter calls us to rejoice in suffering. What makes sense of that? Hope beyond this life!

. . . so that the tested genuineness of your faith — more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire — may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Note the incomparable reward of glory and honor at the coming of Christ.

2. In 1 Peter 3:5–6, Peter calls Christian wives to “do good and not to fear anything that is frightening.” What makes sense of that?

This is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves.

The Christ-exalting fearlessness of a Christian woman is only explained by hope that goes beyond this world — hope in God.

3. In 1 Peter 3:9, Peter commands us, “Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless.” What makes sense of that? The hope of everlasting blessing.

“Because to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.”

Returning good for evil, when it may cost us our lives in this world, is possible because we put our hope in a blessing beyond this world.

4. In 1 Peter 4:13, Peter calls for the counter-intuitive behavior: “Rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings.” What makes sense of that? The goal is “that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.”

So, I say again: Woven through this entire letter is Peter's repeated call to think and feel and act in a way that can only be explained by an unshakable, all-satisfying hope beyond this life — the hope of being with God, seeing and sharing his glory. And what is that peculiar way of thinking and feeling and acting that only makes sense in the light of hope beyond the grave? It is a joyful, humble willingness to suffer wrong and serve, rather than return evil for evil.

1 Peter 2:20 — “What credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.”

1 Peter 3:14 — “Even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed.”

1 Peter 3:17 — “It is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.”

1 Peter 4:1 — “Since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking.”

1 Peter 4:19 — “Let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”

This is the strange, counter-intuitive way of life Peter calls for that causes people to ask a reason for the hope that is in us: a joyful, humble willingness to suffer wrong and serve, rather than return evil for evil. Another name for this is love.

From <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/suffering-that-strengthens-faith>

- **Suffering that strengthens faith**

Strange as it may seem, one of the primary purposes of being shaken by suffering is to make our faith more unshakable.

Faith is like muscle tissue: if you stress it to the limit, it gets stronger, not weaker. That's what James means here. When your faith is threatened and tested and stretched to the breaking point, the result is greater capacity to endure. He calls it steadfastness.

God loves faith so much that He will test it to the breaking point so as to keep it pure and strong. For example, he did this to Paul according to 2 Corinthians 1:8–9,

“We do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.”

The words “but that was to” show that there was a purpose in this extreme suffering: it was in order that — for the purpose that — Paul would not rely on himself and his resources, but on God — specifically the promised grace of God in raising the dead.

God so values our wholehearted faith that He will, graciously, if necessary, take away everything else in the world that we might be tempted to rely on — even life itself. His aim is that we grow deeper and stronger in our confidence that He himself will be all we need.

He wants us to be able to say with the psalmist, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Psalm 73:25–26).

Books to read on this topic:

- “Walking With God Through Pain and Suffering”
By Timothy Keller
- “Cries of the Heart - Bringing God Near When He Feels So Far”
By Ravi Zacharias
- “Broken For Good - How Grief Awoke My Greatest Hopes”
By Rebecca Rene Jones
- “Surprised By Suffering”
By RC Sproul
- “If God Is So Good – Faith in the Midst of Suffering and Evil”
By Randy Alcorn
- “A Grace Disguised – How the Soul Grows Through Loss”
By Gerald L. Sittser