

Why Does a Good God Allow Suffering?
Asking for a Friend

Daily Devotions and hC Material

Soul Food Day 1

2 Timothy 1:8-12

⁸ So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. ⁹ He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, ¹⁰ but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. ¹¹ And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. ¹² That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.

When you've got something that is very precious to you, whether it's rare, expensive, or an heirloom, and you don't want it to be stolen, broken, or burned up, you take it to the bank and entrust it to the protection of a safety deposit box.

Even more than a locked box in your bank, whatever you entrust to God, he's going to take care of. You can count on it. He has a track record. Other people may not have a consistent track record of taking care of things for you. But whatever you entrust to God, he will take care of.

So, what do you need to entrust to God today?

I'll tell you what it is — it's whatever you're worrying about. Whatever you're worrying about, you need to entrust it to the safety deposit box of God's love.

Worry is practical atheism, because it's acting like you don't have a Father in Heaven who loves you and who can be trusted, like you're a spiritual orphan. Worry is unbelief; it's saying you don't believe the 6,000 promises God made in the Bible.

The most difficult time for you to put stuff in God's safety deposit box is when you're in pain. When you are suffering, you don't want to trust even God. You want to pull it back and hold it to yourself.

Paul knew this, but he also knew that when you're in pain, that's when you need to trust God the most. He said, *"I am suffering here in prison. But I am not ashamed of it, for I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until the day of his return"* (2 Timothy 1:12 NLT, second edition).

I talk to people sometimes who say, "I'm afraid to give my life to Jesus Christ because I'm afraid I won't be able to keep the commitment."

Let me just be honest with you: You can't keep your commitment. You will mess up! Fortunately your salvation isn't based on your keeping the commitment.

It's based on Christ keeping his promise and taking care of what you've committed to him.

Application

1. What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
2. What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted and challenged?
3. What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?

Adapted from: <https://pastorrick.com/why-should-i-trust-god-with-my-pain/>

Soul Food Day 2

Psalm 23:4

⁴ Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

Christian or not, suffering remains an inevitable result of living in this world.

Human beings often find themselves asking “why?” any time they encounter a terminal illness, a child with birth defects, unjust imprisonment, or any other such tragedy.

Non-Christians have offered several answers to this question, and it is helpful to examine some of them since these replies can influence us. Some non-believers adopt a docetic view of suffering, which denies the reality of pain altogether. Suffering is merely an illusion in this view. The docetic view is held by the Christian Science cult, and it has many affinities with the teachings of Eastern religions.

Our culture has embraced the hedonistic view of suffering more than any other. This worldview seeks to reduce pain and acquire pleasure, at any cost. To dull their physical and emotional pain, men and women turn to sexual infidelity, illegal drugs, gluttony, and other sinful behaviors believing that “if it feels nice, don’t think twice.” The stoic view of suffering says that we have no control over what happens to us externally. All we can do is choose how we will respond internally; the goal here is to let nothing bother us. We should do our best “to keep a stiff upper lip” and to “let nothing get us down.”

Evangelicals have probably been most affected by the stoic view. Regrettably, we are often prone to minimizing the reality of our grief and will act as if the proper way to face suffering is to pretend nothing of any consequence has happened.

But this is not the approach of Jesus; after all, John recorded that He wept (John 11:35). It is not sinful to mourn the loss of a loved one or to admit our pain. Christians ask God “why?” when we suffer, and sometimes we find that it results from the Lord’s discipline (Heb. 12:3–17).

However, Job’s life shows us suffering is not always due to our sin. And as with Job, God may not tell us the “why” of our pain in every case. God is not obligated to give us the reason for our suffering.

Still, whether He is disciplining us or not, we know He is always with us in our pain (Ps. 23:4) to use our suffering for good, redemptive ends and to bring glory to Himself (Rom. 8:28).

Application

1. What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
2. What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted and challenged?
3. What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?

Adapted from: <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/daily-study/2007/08/understanding-suffering/>

Soul Food Day 3

1 Peter 4:12-19

¹² Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶ However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And,

"If it is hard for the righteous to be saved,
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

¹⁹ So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

There are people out there who say God wants everybody to be a millionaire. There are some people who think following God is like having a golden ticket that guarantees you'll be a millionaire, you'll never get cancer, and you won't have any problems in your life.

But the Bible says sometimes suffering is God's will for your life.

Why? Because it makes you more like Jesus. It deepens your faith. It brings you rewards in Heaven. It builds your character. It teaches you to worship instead of worry.

There are three kinds of suffering in the world. Common suffering is suffering that's universal — it doesn't matter if you're Baptist or Buddhist or Muslim or atheist or whatever. Everybody suffers certain things. When a hurricane comes into town, it doesn't just pick on Christians. There is suffering in the world that we all share in common.

The second kind of suffering is carnal suffering. That's suffering you bring on yourself from your own sin. If I choose to live an immoral life, one consequence could be a sexually transmitted disease. My choices led to that result, so it's my fault. It's not God's fault. It's not anybody else's fault. Or if I spend more money than I make and go into debt and face bankruptcy, that's my fault, too. I suffer because of my sin and bad decisions.

Not all suffering is from sin. The Bible says sometimes suffering is according to the will of God, because God is more interested in your character than your comfort.

The Bible says in 1 Peter 4:19, *"Those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good"* (NIV).

No matter what arrows are thrown at you, no matter what you suffer in this life because of your faith, God wants you to remain faithful to him and keep on doing good to others. Is that easy to do? Not always. Does it take faith? Definitely. Is it worth it?

Absolutely, because God is guiding you to becoming more like Jesus.

Application

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Adapted from: <https://pastorrick.com/devotional/english/full-post/how-to-remain-faithful-when-suffering>

Soul Food Day 4

James 1:2-4

² Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. ⁶ “Will not all of them taunt him with ridicule and scorn, saying,

When the Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death, we’ve seen that. We’ve seen the lives of those we know and love corrupted and wasted and spent by sin. We’ve felt its destructive tug in our own lives. It is obvious to us that this part of the Bible is true. But when we come to this little letter of James, and we read these lines in 1:2, even our normally believing minds stall and sputter like an ailing car. “Really?” we wonder. We consider. We look at the trial — whatever the trial, “various trials” James says — and we look at joy, and we think, “These two don’t go together!” We think joy comes by avoiding a trial, not by encountering a trial. Joy doesn’t come when you encounter a trial, does it? I guess the answer to that depends on what we’re really living for. If the goal of our lives, above all other goals, is ease, then trials are, by definition, bad.

On the other hand, if we think that God is up to something in our lives then it’s not surprising to us that God wants to change us.

But change is always hard. Change in our language or our loves, our diet or how we spend our days is difficult. And though conversion is an instantaneous work of God’s Holy Spirit in our lives, sanctification is a lifelong process. Sanctification — being made holy — will involve effort today and effort tomorrow. James wrote this letter confronting sinful attitudes in these early Christians that needed to change. Their attitudes toward the poor needed to change. Their attitudes toward the rich needed to change. Perhaps it was their entire understanding of love and willingness to practice it that needed to change.

I can remember times in my life when I have felt overwhelmed by all that needed to change in order for me to continue to follow Christ. Such times didn’t come because I started committing some new sins, but simply because God’s Spirit had patiently worked more understanding in my heart of my own sinfulness and self-centeredness. His quiet work of conviction peels back layers of apparent obedience and lovingly reveals sin. This sin is to be repented of. I must change.

But how can I change? I must have faith. I must believe what God has told me in His Word. I must see that what comes first to my thoughts is not always reality. Those could be fears and worries and anxieties as I think about the new year. Or those could be thoughts of pride and a wrong self-satisfaction as I consider the last year. Faith comes by hearing God’s Word and believing what He says. And that is the key to trials being considered occasions for joy.

Look again at what James wrote in his first chapter: “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:2–4 NASB). God in His lovingkindness sends His children trials in order, ultimately, to make us perfect and complete. He did that with Job and with Joseph. And He does that with us as well.

Embracing trials doesn’t mean that we are to pretend that they are not trials. It simply means that we are not to let our reactions to them be determined by how they first feel to us. How many times do parents have to do this with children? Or doctors with patients? Or good public servants with constituents, if they’re to serve them well? (I live in Washington, D.C., after all!)

And we should be encouraged by remembering that God is glorified by our perseverance in trials. First Peter 4:19 says, “Those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful

Creator in doing what is right.” Through every trial we learn that God is enough. We don’t need this or that good circumstance in order to feel that it’s worthwhile to serve God and to love Him. Like Paul with his thorn, by considering trials as part of our faith in God, we display His strength through our weaknesses. “No pain no gain” is true not just of muscle mass but of our spiritual maturity, our Christian character, and somehow, it seems, even of God’s glory.

For God to try us and to display His strength through our weaknesses is a wonderful privilege — even if it doesn’t always seem like it at first.

Application

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Adapted from: <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/daily-study/2005/01/no-pain-no-gain/>

Soul Food Day 5

1 Peter 1:3-5

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

I have seen hopelessness face-to-face.

I have seen cancer leave its calling card on ravaged bodies. I have seen dementia claim the lives of tortured souls. I have felt the destructive force of mental and physical abuse. I have seen and experienced suffering. It is a pitiless force of nature, sweeping aside all in its inexorable path. We can't escape its grasp. We can never run fast enough. We can never shut our eyes tight enough. We know, if we live long enough, that one day it will come knock at our door.

Thankfully, the Bible is no stranger to these things. Peter's response in 1 Peter 1:3 sounds glib to the modern ear. "Bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." How helpful is that to Jane battling cancer? Or what about John whose father was killed in an accident at work? Why should they, and we, be blessing God? What have we got to bless God for?

According to Peter, we ought to bless God because of His great mercy to us in rescuing us through Jesus. He has given us new birth. We may not feel it, but our salvation is an act of God's great mercy. We deserve death, yet He gives us life. We deserve punishment, yet He has achieved a great reward for us. We should bless God that our souls are safe in His hands. That is something that far outweighs all of our slight and momentary troubles. We have a God who has rescued us, even when we don't feel rescued.

But there's more. Peter writes,

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1:13)

Some people fill in their lottery tickets, lie back on their sofa, and hope their numbers will finally come in. But such a hope is uncertain, and it is temporary even if it comes to pass. Our hope is so certain that it actually lives. Our joy and certain hope for the future are tied up in the fact that He rose again (1:20–21). Don't forget, Peter was a guy whose whole life was crushed when Jesus was killed. All of Peter's greatest hopes died with Jesus. But then he heard the news of the resurrection and went running to the tomb to see for himself. Despite Peter's denial of Christ, our Lord came to Peter in the upper room and once again his hope rose with Him. Like Peter, we have a living hope that is:

*Eternal
Can never be defiled
Will never fade
Kept in heaven for us*

Compare that to our earthly experiences. We live for an age and then we die. Not so our inheritance from God. It never decays. It is completely indestructible. That's why the Lord encourages us in Matthew 6:19–20:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Several years ago, a Scotsman won about six million British pounds from the lottery. Within ten years, it was gone, squandered on bad deals. As a result, he was left penniless. Our inheritance, on the other hand, can never be used up. It is an inexhaustible, eternal treasure trove. How so? Because what has been secured for us is stored in the safest and most secure place imaginable. It is impregnable. Even though we will only fully receive it on the last day, it is ready for us even now. It is finished, perfect, and unchangeable. And it is reserved for each of us who have been chosen according to His great foreknowledge and love.

Whatever else we lose in this life; we cannot lose our salvation. It is cancer proof. It is abuse proof. It is even death proof. These are the truths we run to when life kicks us in the teeth. When a relationship is shattered, when the dreams of what we wanted to be in life have been eaten away and eroded by the sands of time; when our health fails, when we feel like nobody cares anymore, when all seems lost—the Christian still has reasons to hope. We hang fast to Jesus. Keep our eyes fixed on Him. We have a wonderful Savior. He will never let us down. He's done all the hard work and one day we will cash in—even if for a little while we have troubles.

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 5:10–11)

Application

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hC Material

1. Have different readers read the Bible passage from 2 or more different translations.

2. Reflect & meditate between each reading

3. Scripture:

1 Peter 1:3-9

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

4. Application

1. What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
2. What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted and challenged?
3. What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?
4. Share any of the above discoveries with your houseChurch. Ask each other, "What is your nugget?"

5. Discussion Questions

- 1) Notice that we do not *hope* our way into a new life; rather, the gift of new life flowers into hope. To what does that hope point? According to verses 6–9, how should Christ's future work impact us in our present suffering?
- 2) We often view suffering as an impediment to joy, but Peter insists that trials can result in "inexpressible" joy. How is that possible?
- 3) Peter compares suffering to the smelting of metallic ore. How does this metaphor help us understand how to rejoice in hard times?

Now talk to Jesus...