

SUFFERING - *Who needs it?*

Fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ should expect to suffer for their faith in Him (2 Timothy 3:12). Even Jesus, wasn't spared suffering (Hebrews 2:9). Jesus described suffering as a normal part of discipleship. Some are called upon to walk more difficult paths, some during different seasons of life, but few suffer martyrdom. No suffering believers endure is outside of God's Control. He is sovereign and the suffering that touches our lives does so with His permission. There is no meaningless suffering. Suffering may be undeserved, but it is not without purpose (Job 23:10). God uses suffering to get our attention, redirect our lives, fill the emptiness in our hearts, draw us closer Himself and produces an unceasing dependence upon Him. Suffering causes us to deal with the deeper issues of life, rethink our values, goals and priorities and ask the most important questions of life: ***Why am I here? What am I here for?***

The most grateful people I know have experienced the most suffering and learned to totally depend upon God. They developed a divine perspective on difficult problems and followed in Jesus' footsteps. We are to do likewise.

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps (1 Peter 2:21).

4 GOD GLORIFYING PURPOSES FOR SUFFERING

(1) God uses suffering to teach us the greatest good of the Christian life is not the absence of pain, but Christlikeness.

Through suffering we learn that God is more concerned with our character than our comfort. He uses suffering to refine us and mold us into His image. He is the Master Craftsman, sanding, shaping, cutting and pruning to develop patience, perseverance, strength of character and hope in us (Romans 5:3-4). It is in God's woodshed that we develop holiness (Hebrews 12:10) as He removes the

dead wood from our lives, increases our fruitfulness (John 15:1-7) and purifies us for Himself (Titus 2:14). Suffering is not to be pursued to become holy, but is encountered and experienced on our pathway to holiness as we walk in obedience to God's will.

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 (James 1:2-4).

(2) God uses suffering to produce humility

God loves us and wants what is best for us. We read in Jeremiah 31:3, *"I have loved you with an everlasting love. Therefore, I have continued to extend faithful love to you."* Extending His faithful love often involves tough love that includes suffering to remove pride from our lives because He hates it (Proverbs 16:5) and knows that it will lead to our destruction (Proverbs 16:18).

Brokenness brings openness to God's plans for our lives because He knows those who trust in their own plans are fools (Proverbs 28:26). Because humility brings teachability, we learn to humbly depend upon God and not ourselves (1 Peter 5:6-7). The Apostle Paul related that his "thorn in the flesh" was to keep him from becoming conceited (2 Corinthians 12:7) and allowed Christ's power to be seen in his weakness.

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9a).

(3) God uses suffering to prepare us to comfort others who are suffering.

Feeling isolated and all alone is one of the hardest parts of suffering. Those who have experienced similar situations are in a unique position to come along side those who are suffering and minister to them with words of comfort, encouragement and

understanding. Suffering develops compassion, mercy and tender hearts toward those who suffer so that they can bring comfort in ways that someone who has never known their pain cannot.

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 (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

(4) God uses suffering to win the lost.

Jesus said, “Come, follow me.” It is through suffering we unknowingly do our part in God’s work of saving others---a salvation achieved through His suffering. When God’s life and power are demonstrated in our weakness, it brings Him glory and causes unbelievers to realize their need of salvation. Unbelievers see the light that shines in us is not our own, but His (2 Corinthians 4:6). Nothing attracts an unbeliever like a saint suffering victoriously.

I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory (2 Timothy 2:10).

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies (2 Corinthians 4:7-10).

Never ever think God allows suffering because He is angry with you. His sacrifice on Calvary demonstrated His great love for all who come to Him. The questions should not be, “*Who needs it?*” or “*How do I get out of it?*”, but “*What can I get out of it?*” We want God to remove our suffering, but He wants to perfect our lives. He may not change our situation while we suffer because He wants to change us.

We have a choice when it comes to suffering. We can blame God, have a “woe is me” attitude, become self-absorbed, go through it alone and become bitter. Or, we can draw close to the Lord, focus on the principles found in His Word, listen to His voice, strengthen our faith, and become better. Responding rightly allows God to accomplish His purposes in our lives and brings Him glory.

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 (1 Peter 5:10).

Teach Me Your Way, O Lord, Teach Me Your Way by *Mansell Ramsey*

When I am sad at heart, when earthly joys depart,
teach me Your way!
In hours of loneliness, in times of dire distress, in
failure or success,
teach me Your way!
When doubts and fears arise, when storm clouds fill
the skies,
teach me Your way!
Shine through the wind and rain, through sorrow,
grief and pain; make now my pathway plain,
teach me Your way!
Long as my life shall last, where'er my lot be cast,
teach me Your way!
Until the race is run, until the journey's done, until
the crown is won,
teach me Your way!



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