

FIRM FOUNDATION CLASS



How To Benefit From Suffering Lesson 9

HOW TO COPE WITH SUFFERING

Suffering has been the universal experience of mankind since the fall. We know that God's original will was perfection - perfect fellowship with Him, perfect union in purpose, perfect mental abilities, perfect physical frames, perfect nervous systems, etc. However, God created man with a will of his own. He did not want love and worship from His creatures because they *had* to love and worship Him. He did not create man as a robot.

Man chose evil. The result? Sin, suffering, shame! Many skeptics look at this condition in the world and blame God by asking, "Why, God?" No doubt a grieved God looks at man, who has caused his own downfall and shame, and asks, "Why, man?"

God's original will was that there should be no suffering. Yet man chose to disobey and caused his own suffering. C. S. Lewis likens this picture of man with a mother and her children. Says Lewis,

"But anyone who has been in authority knows how a thing can be in accordance with your will in one way and not in another. It may be quite sensible for a mother to say to the children, 'I'm not going to make you tidy the bedroom every night. You've got to learn to keep it tidy on your own.' Then she goes up one night and finds the Teddy bear and the ink and the French Grammar all lying in the grate. That is against her will. She would prefer the children to be tidy, but on the other hand, it is her will which has left the children free to be untidy."

In the same way it is not God's original will that suffering should take place, but since He gave us the responsibility to obey Him, and we did not, His will has made it possible.

Yes, there is suffering now, but we must realize God's will eventually brings the world back to His original will. Satan will be cast into the lake of fire, and all suffering will end. But in the meantime, how do we, as God's people, understand and cope with suffering?

I. WE MUST REALIZE THAT AS CHRISTIANS WE ARE NOT EXEMPT FROM SUFFERING

- A. "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (*Matthew 5:11-12*).
- B. "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." (*Romans 8:18*).
- C. "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him," (*Philippians 1:29*).
- D. "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (II *Timothy 3:12*).
- E. "Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise." (*James 5:13*).

II. WE MUST REALIZE THAT SOME OF GOD'S GIANTS HAVE BEEN MEN WHO HAVE SUFFERED

A. Job

"As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy." (*James 5:11*).

Job is the all-time example for those who suffer. He suffered ridicule from his wife, scolding from his friends, loss of his property, the death of his children, the loss of his influence, and the loss of his health. Yet, God called Job a perfect man and one who hated evil. - *Job 1:1*

We do not understand why, in all its aspects, God allowed this to happen to Job. Yet, we do know that *God was in control* and would not allow Satan to go further than Job could bear. "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." (*I Corinthians 10:13*).

We will be ever in debt to Job for his example to us. In him we see one who cried in faith, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." (*Job 12-15*).

B. Joseph

One of the greatest verses in Scripture is Joseph's insight into God's dealing with him, even in trying circumstances and suffering. When he revealed himself to his brothers, he said, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." (*Genesis 50:20*).

1. Joseph was hated by his brethren. - *Genesis 37:4*
2. Joseph was sold into slavery by his brethren. - *Genesis 37:28*
3. Joseph was put into prison because of a lie, "But the Lord was with Joseph. . ." (*Genesis 39:21*).
4. Joseph was forgotten by those he helped. - *Genesis 40:14, 23*

Nothing seemed to go right for Joseph. In the world's eyes all that he did went astray. He suffered terribly! Yet, God meant it for good - *Genesis 50:20*. By his sufferings, the Israelite race was saved.

C. Paul

No one suffered more than the Apostle Paul - *I Corinthians 4:9-13; II Corinthians 11:23-33*. Yet he could say, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." (*I Corinthians 11:1*).

There is a type of Christianity, which preaches the "gospel" of health, wealth, and prosperity. They feel only the "unspiritual" suffer. If this is true, mark Paul, the disciples, and Jesus as being "unspiritual" for all, with the exception of John the Beloved, died a martyr's death!

D. Jesus

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (*Mark 15:34*). That is the agonizing question of Jesus as He hangs on the cross. He suffered physically. He suffered the rejection of His own countrymen *John 1:11-12*. Yet, it was all for a glorious purpose: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (*Hebrews 12:2*).

E. The Disciples

As already indicated, all suffered a martyr's death, according to church tradition, except John the Beloved.

III. WE MUST REALIZE THAT GOD USES SUFFERING FOR HIS OWN HIGHER PURPOSES

- A. "...who (God) comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." (*II Corinthians 1:3-4, 7*).

It is true that we cannot best comfort one unless we have been through the *same* extreme trial. For example, who can better comfort one who has lost a child than another who has lost a child? Who can better comfort one who has just lost his wife in death than another man who has gone through the same terrible tragedy?

Paul is saying here that God can turn our worst affliction into a source of comfort to others.

B. *II Corinthians 12:7-10*

God allowed Paul some type of impediment (a thorn in the flesh) to keep him from exalting himself. Though Satan was its messenger (12:7), God still allowed it for Paul's safety and God's glory! Some would have told Paul to send \$5.00 to such and such an address; they would pray for him and he would not need to suffer!

But God told him to accept his infirmity and to quit asking for healing! It is not *always* God's will to heal. Paul says, ". . . Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick"- (*II Timothy 4:20*).

C. "Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel." (*Philippians 1:12*).

Paul, at the time of this writing was in prison - suffering. Yet, God allowed him to see a higher purpose - that The Gospel would "progress." In fact, *Philippians 1:13* shows us that the Gospel was penetrating to Caesar's guard and "everywhere else" *and* (verse 14) others were preaching more boldly due to Paul's suffering.

There are times that God can only get us where he wants us by "de-motion," not promotion; by suffering rather than shining; by enduring rather than enjoying. Let us be alert to God's will in our setbacks. Let us ask, "Can I get the Gospel out better because of my, 'de-motion,' because of my set-back, because of my sufferings?"

D. But God disciplines or chastens us ". . . for our good, that we may share in his holiness." (*Hebrews 12:10*).

The Psalmist David said, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word." (*Psalms 119:67*).

God does not always chasten His children by suffering. In fact, God gives His children the chance to chasten themselves-I *Corinthians 11:31-32*. But when we do not heed His instructions God *can* use any measure, including suffering, to awaken us to our drifting state. More than once one has said, "If I had only obeyed God when He first spoke, I would have not needed to go through this affliction, loss etc."

E. *Romans 8:28 - 29*

All Christians realize that God is at work in our lives causing *all things* as a unit, not just one isolated incident, to work together for good.

God is making a beautiful cake. He needs to put many ingredients into the bowl of our lives to produce a beautiful end-product. Just as we cannot eat dry flour, or a raw egg by itself, yet, when we combine them and put them into the fire, the "all things" turn out wonderful. The Christian life is no different. *Romans 8:29* tells us God's ultimate purpose in our lives is to be Christ-like, conformed to the *image* of His Son. All ingredients, including suffering, are necessary. Do not judge the end purpose by one isolated affliction." . . . *All things* work together for good. . ." (*Romans 8:28*).

IV. WE MUST REALIZE THAT ". . . OUR PRESENT SUFFERINGS ARE NOT WORTH COMPARING WITH THE GLORY THAT WILL BE REVEALED IN US." (*Romans 8:18*). **ALSO, "...THE REDEMPTION OF OUR BODY"** (*Romans 8:23*).

One can bear the shame of riding in a beat up car if he realizes he will soon own a Cadillac.

One can bear the pain of sickness if the doctor tells him he will soon be cured.

In the same way we, as Christians, can bear misunderstanding and suffering if we know that Jesus is coming back to right all wrongs and to give us a new life and a new glorified body. (*II Corinthians 5:1; 1 John 3:1-3*)

V. WE MUST REALIZE THAT GOD HAS PROMISED TO DESTROY ALL SUFFERING, PAIN, AND DEATH

"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (*Revelation 21:4*).

When the Rev. David Seamands was in India as a missionary, his son, Steve, was born with a clubfoot. In order to correct this condition, the Rev. Seamands was instructed to twist Steve's foot in the opposite direction for a certain length of time each day. The pain was excruciating for little Steve. His father said he felt like his son hated him at times. He knew that Steve did not understand why his father made him go through such pain. Yet, today Steve is a healthy boy without any impediment. He can play ball and run like normal boys and girls. He now appreciates what his father did, even though he did not understand his sufferings then.

Can we not see as Christians that God is as loving and as wise? Let us trust God in our sufferings. Let us realize that He has a purpose - even though we may not see it. Let us sing with the songwriter, "For I know what'er befall me, Jesus doeth *all things* well!"