

JCI 133 FEBRUARY 2013

Getting the Most from What we Like the Least

The Seasons and Stewardship of Suffering

Suffering. The Bible contains 672 verses referring to suffering, sorrow, pain, and hardship.

Suffering comes in many forms and all of them painful: Physical... emotional... mental... spiritual. And rarely does suffering fit only one category.

Suffering brings out a multitude of questions in the mind of the sufferer. The book of Job (the first book penned in scripture) is the account of extreme suffering in the life of the godliest man then alive. Job teaches us so much regarding suffering... so much, but not everything! Job asked question after question about his suffering. God's eventual reply to Job's anguished questions was to ask him in 75 questions in return. And the answers to God's 75 questions to Job could only be answered by "No", "I don't know", or "God." In the final analysis, what Job needed more than answers, was for God to show up in his suffering. That good news is still true today. God is here in our suffering!

Since Adam and Eve rebelled in the garden, and the curse of sin descended on all mankind, it brought with it many and varied consequences. Among the many consequences of the curse is the reality of suffering in this world. Yet, God is still sovereign, and God is still purposeful, and God is still merciful. We, as His people, can learn to understand and embrace our temporary, necessary suffering so that it brings glory to Him and growth to us, into His likeness.

So let's be clear at the outset: This little study will not provide all the answers to all the questions that flood the mind and heart of the sufferer. Instead, it is intended to help us discover how to benefit from the suffering that God entrusts us with. Yes, I said "the suffering God entrusts us with." (Philippians 1:29) Suffering in the life of the obedient believer is both "for a season" and "for a stewardship." Suffering is not merely a matter of chastisement for sin in the life of the disobedient. Job's friends had to learn that lesson, so let's learn it as well. The godly suffer sometimes more than the ungodly in this life. But that suffering is temporary and beneficial for the child of God. (Psalm 73)

We may have no choice about experiencing suffering. But we do have choices regarding our response to that suffering, and to the God who has allowed it to come to us.

I do not share this little Bible study as one who has experienced great suffering...yet. But I share this brief study as one who, like you, knows that God's word is true no matter what our experience may be. It is my sincere prayer that the truths you see in the scriptures will strengthen, comfort, encourage and enable you to "get the most out of what we like the least," ... *SUFFERING!*

So, fellow pilgrim, let's survey some of the most helpful passages of scripture on how to benefit from this season and stewardship of suffering. Read the scriptures and answer the questions straight from the text. As you discover truth, share your discoveries with others. (2 Cor 1:3-4)

Is suffering a normal part of life as God's child?

Revelation 1:9

1 Peter 5:10

Phil 1:29

John 16:23

Psalm 73

Does suffering prove that God is displeased with me?

Job 1:8

Mark 14:33-34

Hebrews 5:7-9

Rev 2:10

Acts 9:16

Is God in control of my suffering?

Job 1:12; 2:6

Isaiah 48:10

Acts 9:16

1 Peter 1:6

1 Peter 2:21-23

1 Peter 4:12

1 Peter 4:19

1 Peter 5:10

Revelation 2:10

Could God prevent my suffering?

Job 1:10

Does God enjoy seeing us suffer?

Lamentation 3:32-33

Isaiah 63:9

Is my suffering permanent as a believer?

Rev 21:4

What are God's commands for me in my suffering?

2 Timothy 2:3; 4:5

James 5:10-11

1 Peter 4:1

1 Peter 4:19

Psalm 119:49-50

Psalm 119:92

John 14:1

Philippians 4:4-9

Must I consider suffering a good thing in itself?

(That is, do I need to desire suffering?)

Revelation 21:4

2 Corinthians 4:17-18

Is it wrong to pray that my suffering be relieved or removed?

Mark 14:33-39

2 Cor 12:7-10

If I have enough faith, will my suffering be taken away?

John 21:18

2 Cor 12:7-10

Rev 2:10

Where can I find the strength to go on in my suffering?

Heb 4:14-16

2 Cor 12:8-10

James 4:6-10

What are common reactions to suffering?

Psalm 73:1-14

2 Corinthians 4:8-10

John 14:1

Job 3

In what ways did Christ suffer like I suffer?

Hebrews 2:17-18

Hebrews 4:15

Hebrews 5:7-9

Mark 14:33-39

In what ways did Christ suffer that I will never suffer?

2 Corinthians 5:21

Isaiah 53:5,6,10

Psalm 22:1

Why does God allow His children to suffer?

or to put it another way...

What benefits might I receive from suffering?

Psalm 119:67

Hebrews 2:18

Hebrews 5:8

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

2 Corinthians 4:17-18

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Romans 12:12

Job 23:10

Psalm 116:3-6

Isaiah 48:10

James 1:2-4

1 Peter 1:6-7

1 Peter 4:12-13

Romans 5:3-5

Psalm 73

Does my suffering separate me from God's love?

Romans 8:35-39

Remember, no matter how severe the suffering, it has no power to sever your relationship with Christ. If God allows the suffering, it is to deepen and strengthen your relationship with Him.

Self Check:

What two or three truths were most helpful to you as you read these scriptures on suffering?

What other questions come to mind that were not addressed in this study?

For further study:

Psalm 73 See how the Psalmist in Psalm 73 came through his intense suffering and heartache to a closeness with and desire for God he never knew before the suffering came. Walk with him verse by verse. This Psalm is a gold mine of real comfort for the suffering saint.

Psalm 46 How does the Psalmist find comfort in the chaos of suffering he is in?

Read again the words of the old hymn below and consider God's grace in your season of suffering

How firm a foundation
When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of woe shall not thee overflow;
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.
When through fiery trials thy pathways shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.
The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake.

"O Sovereign Sufferer, You suffered more than any man ever can or will. You drank that bitter cup of suffering wrath so that I might drink the sweet cup of Your mercies. Give me the grace to drink the bitter cup of temporary suffering as a faithful steward. I need Your presence and promises to give me strength to stay faithful and true in this season of suffering. Sanctify this suffering to me that I might grow thereby, and be a blessing to Your church and a glory to Your name until the burden is lifted and suffering is no more. In Thy Great Name I pray, Amen"

Remember, you are very special to us and we pray for you.

Living with leaving in view.... Jn 9:4 Ron & Val

Seeing The Invisible, embracing The Unapproachable, declaring The Unexplainable,
changed by The Immutable, running after The Irresistible
with inexhaustible joy in our inexpressible sorrows,
spending our time on eternity,
owning nothing yet possessing everything
that matters and lasts.

We are Pilgrims in Paradox.

Welcome to THE JOURNEY