

The Good Benefit of Suffering

Suffering is used by God for good purposes. We should not view suffering as pointless or always bad, but as something that can contribute to good character.

(Psalm 119:71, 67; Romans 8:28-29; Hebrews 12:11; I Peter 1:6-7, 5:10)

Though suffering was not part of God's original creation, God decided to use suffering as the means to express his love. God gave a purpose to suffering that brings temporary and eternal benefits—good character and salvation from sin.

1. List some of the ways that you have suffered in the last year. How can God use those experiences in your life to make you more like Jesus Christ?
2. How have your sufferings changed your character?

We are commanded to endure and sometimes even embrace suffering to demonstrate the love and power of Christ, just as he endured and embraced suffering in the same way.

(Romans 8:17; II Corinthians 12:10; Philippians 1:29-30; II Timothy 3:10-12)

Throughout history the people we admire the most are the ones who have endured great hardships and suffering. We recognize that perseverance in suffering is a character trait to be honored and imitated.

1. Think through the list of things you have suffered in the last year. How can you turn those experiences into way to inspire and help those you love?

We cannot become like Jesus without experiencing suffering.

(Romans 8:17, 28-29; Philippians 3:10; I Peter 2:21, 4:13)

Since Jesus suffered for us we can expect that at some time in our lives we will have to suffer for him if we want to obey his word. Jesus said we should expect to suffer if we follow him.

1. How has following Jesus caused suffering in your life?
2. Do you think the suffering you might experience for following Jesus is worth the sacrifice?

God's Character & Man's Ethics, Study #8

The Good of Suffering

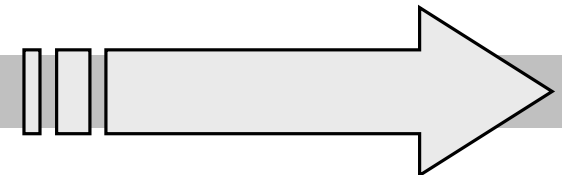
There are some philosophies, which teach that suffering is the root of all man's problems. If you can eliminate your suffering, and the desires that bring about suffering you can attain a state of enlightenment. Under such mistaken philosophies, suffering is seen as evil, without good purpose. No one who embraces such a philosophy sees any value in suffering.

Suffering is a hard thing. Everyone hates to suffer. Yet the Bible encourages us with three facts about suffering:

1. Suffering is only a temporary condition for the Christian,
2. Suffering is used by God to bring good,
3. Suffering will one day be eliminated.

Though everyone recognizes the hardship of suffering and that it is undesirable, the Bible offers a perspective on suffering that to some people seems like insanity. It presents a picture of the eternal God who created the universe, who is all-powerful, and whom nothing can hurt, embracing suffering, and submitting himself to suffering on our behalf. In fact, the Bible teaches that God chose suffering as the primary means of ensuring we could have eternal life. Why is it that God's ideas about suffering are so different from ours?

In this study we will examine the role that suffering plays in the Christian life, and why God not only warned us about suffering, but also made a way for us to embrace suffering as part of becoming the kind of person he desires.



God and the Nature of Suffering

God created the universe without suffering, but the advent of sin brought suffering to God's created order.

(Genesis 1:31-3:24)

Though the world is beautiful and filled with many good things, the world is also corrupted by sin. Sin causes suffering. This means that we experience turmoil and discord in life that is contrary from God's original design. God's design was for man to enjoy a perfect creation and relationship with him; but our sin has separated us from God's perfect order, resulting in various kinds of suffering

1. Since sin is the first cause of suffering, what do you think you need to alleviate the cause of most suffering?

Though God does not suffer in his being, he has chosen to experience suffering as the means to demonstrate his love and great power.

(John 15:13; Romans 5:8; Philippians 2:5-8; I Peter 1:18-20)

Love cannot be fully expressed without sacrifice and suffering. God's love is greater than man's. Therefore God presented the ultimate expression of his love by becoming a man in Jesus Christ, and suffering on our behalf.

1. Can you think of a greater example of love than the eternal God who created the universe becoming a humble man and accepting the abuse and being murdered for us?

One day God will eliminate all suffering for all eternity, and those who know him will be like him in that they will never experience any degree of suffering for all eternity.

(Isaiah 25:8, 65:16-17)

God's expression of love was not merely a simple expression. It was part of a plan to do away with suffering caused by sin. There will come a day in the future when all who know him will experience eternal life without suffering, sin, or pain.

1. Do you believe in a hopeful future where you will live for eternity with no suffering, sin or pain?

Jesus: The Suffering Servant

Jesus was born into a universe that suffers because of the corruption of sin. By becoming a man, he chose to embrace suffering for his good, and for our good.

(Romans 8:20-23; Philippians 2:5-8; Hebrews 5:8)

As Jesus grew up he learned through a process of suffering. But he also embraced greater suffering through the cross that we might be brought into a right relationship with God. In this way we see that suffering is not always bad, but can be used by God for good.

1. Jesus Christ willingly suffered a painful death on a cross for you. How have you embraced his example of suffering?

Jesus chose to accomplish our salvation by experiencing suffering as the means to demonstrate his love and great power—and he set an example for us.

(Psalm 22; Isaiah 53:5; Luke 24:46, II Corinthians 1:5)

Since Jesus Christ is our example for behavior and ethics, we should imitate that which is seen in his character. Jesus did not avoid or speak against all suffering. His mission was to embrace suffering on our behalf.

1. How can you follow Jesus' example of suffering in your relationships with others?

At the end of all things, Jesus will rule a new Heaven and new Earth where there will be no sin and no suffering.

(Revelation 21:4)

The period of suffering, sickness, and persecutions we endure now are only temporary. Because Jesus Christ is risen from the dead he is our guarantee that his promises about our future reward are true.

1. How do you think you should conduct your live with the knowledge that Jesus has promised to one day end our suffering? How should you behave toward others as a result of this knowledge?

