



# God's Sovereignty and Suffering

His Plan in Our Trials



Memory Verse

*"It was good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes."*  
PSALM 119:71



## Discussion starter:

- Why is suffering necessary? It feels cruel in some cases. How can it be good?

*"To suffer as a Christian is to suffer because there is an essential difference between you and the world which rouses the contempt of the world, and the disgust and hatred of the spirit that is in the world. To suffer as a Christian is to have no answer when the world's satire is turned on you, as it was turned on Jesus Christ when He hung upon the cross, when they turned His words into jest and jeer. They will do the same to you. He gave no answer, neither can you."*—OSWALD CHAMBERS

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## Why Do People Suffer?

This has probably been one of **the most frequently asked questions in life** among *saved* and *unsaved* people alike. Its complexity has aroused emotions from *anger* to *confusion*, in people both young and old. Before we consider how God's sovereignty and our suffering relate, let us find out some biblical answers to this question: Why do people suffer?

### A. Some people suffer because of wrongdoing.

- **1 Peter 3:17**—*"For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong."*
- **1 Peter 2:20**—*"For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God."*

### B. Some people suffer because of unwise involvement in the affairs of others.

- **1 Peter 4:15**—*"Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler."*

### C. Some people suffer because they are identified with Christ.

- **1 Peter 4:16**—*"but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name." (See also Matthew 5:11; 10:22; Luke 6:22-23)*
- **Acts 9:16**—*"for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."*

#### D. Some people suffer as a test of their faith.

- **1 Peter 4:12**—“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you.”
- **Revelation 2:10**—“Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

#### E. Some people suffer according to the will of God.

- **1 Peter 4:19**—“Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.”

Suffering according to the will of God speaks of the suffering that occurs for which there is no direct cause like sin, disobedience, or unwise choices. It is a part of God’s divine purposes to protect, prepare, or teach His people about His character and power in a way that brings Him glory.

#### Examples of suffering according to God’s will

1. Read John 9:1-3. Why did Jesus say that this man suffered blindness from birth?

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2. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-9. What type of suffering was Paul experiencing?

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3. Why did God allow this to happen to Paul? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Read Isaiah 53:10-11. What was God’s will for the Messiah? Why?

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#### How Does Suffering Relate to God’s Sovereignty?

Let’s go back to our definition of God’s sovereignty and ask some questions.

God’s sovereignty is the exercise of His absolute control over all things as Creator, whereby He causes or allows everything (including man’s choices) to work together to accomplish His purposes.

- **Isaiah 45:5-7**—“I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; that men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, the One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.”

With this definition in mind, how would you explain the following?

- When a baby is born deformed or dies at birth
- When you get into a car accident
- When a terrorist blows up an airplane with innocent people aboard
- When a company closes down and people lose their jobs
- When a friend is diagnosed with cancer

A proper understanding of God's sovereignty does not answer "Why?" or "How?" for all of these questions, but it does assure us that the God of creation is in control and has a plan in mind.

- **Jeremiah 29:11**—"*For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.'*"

## What Are God's Purposes in Suffering?

### A. To display His faithfulness and righteousness

- **Psalm 119:75**—"*I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.*"

### B. To prepare some to comfort others

- **2 Corinthians 1:3-7**—"*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 will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort.*"

### C. To wean us from worldly things and renew our eternal hope

- **Hebrews 10:32-35**—"*But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.*"

### D. To teach us His Word

- **Psalm 119:71**—"*It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes.*"

### E. To help us identify with the suffering of Christ

- **Philippians 1:29**—"*For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.*"

**F. To witness to the world of the hope/reality of the Christian life**

- **1 Peter 4:16**—“but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.”

**G. To expose the world’s sinful ways**

- **John 7:7**—“The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil.”

Review 4.1

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**Question 1 of 1**

Do you recall the reasons people suffer?

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- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



**What Should Be Our Response in Times of Suffering?**

A. How should we respond when suffering for wrongdoing? (*2 Corinthians 7:9-10; 12:19-21; 13:5*)

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B. When suffering for unwise involvement in others’ affairs, how should we respond?

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C. When suffering because of Christ, how should we respond? (*1 Peter 4:13; Acts 5:41*)

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D. When suffering as a test of faith, how should we respond? (*1 Peter 4:12; James 1:2-5*)

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E. When suffering according to the will of God, how should we respond? (*Psalms 62:5-8*)

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## Application

Skillful application of divine truth for the glory of God

Jeremiah was known as “the weeping prophet” because of the response of God’s people and their rebellion in the face of judgment and affliction. In Lamentations—which means a cry of lament—he offers instruction and hope to the survivors:

- **Lamentations 3:22-41**—*The LORD’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul, “Therefore I have hope in Him.” The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, To the person who seeks Him. It is good that he waits silently for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man that he should bear The yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone and be silent Since He has laid it on him. Let him put his mouth in the dust, Perhaps there is hope. Let him give his cheek to the smiter, Let him be filled with reproach. For the Lord will not reject forever, For if He causes grief, Then He will have compassion According to His abundant lovingkindness. For He does not afflict willingly Or grieve the sons of men. To crush under His feet All the prisoners of the land, To deprive a man of justice In the presence of the Most High, To defraud a man in his lawsuit—Of these things the Lord does not approve. Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, Unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and ill go forth? Why should any living mortal, or any man, Offer complaint in view of his sins? Let us examine and probe our ways, And let us return to the LORD. We lift up our heart and hands Toward God in heaven.”*

### Key things to remember regarding suffering and God’s sovereignty:

- Silence, rather than complaining, helps. (vv.25-28)
- Accept it, knowing that God is in control. (vv.28-29)
- Yield to whatever lessons God may be seeking to show you about yourself or His character. (vv.29-30)
- When grief comes, compassion follows. (vv.31-32)
- God receives no pleasure from your pain. (vv.33-36)
- God is in charge, so you can have hope. (vv.37-38)
- Don’t complain; you are not getting anything close to what you deserve. (v.39)
- Examine your heart and your ways and return to God. (v.40)
- Lift your heart in prayer and your hands in praise. (v.41)

Your response to suffering is key to experiencing God in the midst of it and growing spiritually through it. Don’t miss God!



## Serving Under the Sovereignty of God

Can you serve God while hurting emotionally and spiritually?

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**Principle to practice:** You can serve God while you are hurting. Robert Murray McCheyne once said, "It's not great talent God blesses as much as great likeness to Jesus." Surrender, let Christ have His way in your heart, and keep pressing on.



# Singing Under the Sovereignty of God in Suffering

Hymns to help you worship

**Profile:** HENRY F. LYTE (1793-1847)

- Scottish theologian, poet, and hymn writer
- Ministered in a small fishing village and established a Sunday School for Sailors
- Visited homes and ships to provide both traditional education training and for discipleship
- Wrote the popular, intensely personal, and contemplative hymn, "Abide with Me"

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## JESUS, I MY CROSS HAVE TAKEN

Jesus, I my cross have taken  
All to leave and follow Thee;  
Destitute, despised, forsaken,  
Thou from hence my all shalt be.  
Perish every fond ambition,  
All I've sought, and hoped and known;  
Yet how rich is my condition.  
God and heav'n are still my own!



*Are there any parts of your life in which you are reserving the right to exercise control?*

Let the world despise and leave me;  
They have left my Savior, too.  
Human hearts and looks deceive me;  
Thou art not, like man, untrue.  
And while Thou shalt smile upon me,  
God of wisdom, love and might,  
Foes may hate and friends may shun me.  
Show Thy face and all is bright.



*In what ways does our endurance in the midst of rejection or opposition strengthen our witness?*

Hasten on from grace to glory,  
Armed by faith and winged by prayer;  
Heav'n's eternal days before me,  
God's own hand shall guide me there.  
Soon shall close my earthly mission,  
Swift shall pass my pilgrim days;  
Hope shall change to glad fruition;  
Faith to sight, and prayer to praise.

## TAKEAWAY FOR TODAY:

The hymnist reminds us in the second stanza that we must be prepared for the persecution that will come because of our relationship with Jesus. The line in the third stanza, "Heav'n's eternal days before me, God's own hand shall guide me there," is the believers hope. While friends and family may despise you just as they first despised the Savior, God will never leave nor forsake you and has promised to bring you to your eternal home. Ask God that you might come to a deeper knowledge of the Savior through your suffering for His name's sake.

## Answer Key

### Why Do People Suffer?

#### Examples of suffering according to God's will

1. so that the works of God might be displayed
2. thorn in the flesh/physical suffering
3. to keep him from exalting himself
4. to crush Him; to justify the many

### What Are God's Purposes in Suffering?

*Review 4.1*

#### Question 1 of 1

1. wrongdoing
2. unwise involvement in the affairs of others
3. because they are identified with Christ
4. as a test of their faith
5. according to the will of God

### What Should Be Our Response in Times of Suffering?

- A. examine, test yourself, repent
- B. repent
- C. rejoice
- D. expect it and repent
- E. trust Him

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