**Why do we Suffer**

<https://www.wingclips.com/movie-clips/patch-adams/challenging-god>

this paper is meant to be more of a discussion than a lecture

Matthew 5:10-12 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

As we look at history, we can identify many people who went through great suffering. Sometimes it was a trial (Which could come in the form of persecution) where the people needed to trust in God and see it through and other times it was for correction where the people needed to stop doing something and get back on track with God. It was not always clear, at the time of the suffering, whether it was punishment for sin or a trial to build character. Let’s take a look at a few cases.

* Adam thrown out of the Garden (Punishment?)
* Job lost everything (Trial?)
* Israelites wondered in the desert for 40 years (punishment?)
* David running for his life chased by Saul (Trial?)
* Temple destroyed and Israelites carried away by Babylon (Punishment?)
* Danial Thrown in lion’s den (Trial)
* Paul imprisoned and beheaded (Trial)
* Early Christian Martyrs - Burned or ripped apart by animals in the arena??? (Christians would say trials & Persecution)
* Jews thrown in concentration camps in Nazi Germany??? (the Jews would probably say trials & Persecution)

Now these maybe clear to us looking back on them but how did the people know at the time whether they were being tried or corrected?

How can you tell, when someone is suffering, what caused the suffering?

Josh McDowell gives the following list of 10 Biblical Reasons God Allows Suffering

1. Suffering is the result of mankind’s sin and **rebellion** against God (Adam Eating fruit - Genesis 3).

2. God’s chosen people (the Hebrews) suffered when they **disobeyed** the Law / Mosaic Covenant (Deuteronomy 28).

3. People can suffer from **wrong choices** (self or others), even though God uses the resulting suffering for good (Joseph - Genesis 50:20).

4. Suffering brings faithful believers into deeper understanding and **relationship** with God (Job).

5. Believers may suffer because of the **jealousy and hatred** of certain people who reject the Christian faith (i.e. Persecution - Stoning of Stephen - Acts 7:54-60).

6. Believers suffer as a **testament of faith** to others (Abraham… -Hebrews 11).

7. God allows people to suffer so they will turn to Him in **repentance** and not perish for eternity (Luke 13:1-4).

8. Christians suffer so they can be **conformed** more closely to the character of Christ (Romans 8:28-30, James 1:2-4).

9. Believers suffer so they can **know Christ** more fully (Philippians 3:10).

10. To **prepare** followers of Christ for the glory of Heaven (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Notice sometimes people suffer as a punishment for wrong choices by themselves or by others, and other times it is to build character and a testament to their faith that draws us closer to God.

When you are suffering how do you know which reason you are suffering for. You may find an easy answer if you know that you are sinning and the punishment is a direct result of that sin (such as stealing something and ending up in jail) or Persecution when you are being treated poorly for declaring your faith. but many times, there is no obvious reason (like in a Natural disaster).

Is life just a giant trial and there is no rhyme or reason for peoples suffering? Where do we find the Abundant victorious life promised in the Bible?

John 10:10 … I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

[Deuteronomy 20:4](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deuteronomy+20%3A4&version=ESV) For the Lord your God is he who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory.’

This isn’t something that is understood very well, even by Christians, and therefore not many good answers can be found. God does what he does.

If we look at Job, when God elected to test his character, we see that his friends told him he was being punished for Sin but Job was sure he had not sinned. I myself don’t have that luxury. I would have to ask “which Sin”.

Job wished he had died at birth and asked God to just leave him alone (Job 10:18-19). But In the end Job had to confess that he had no right to question Gods authority to do as He pleased.

In the new testament we find Paul asking God to take away a thorn in his flesh (some suffering God had allowed) but God said no. This was Paul, One of his top disciples!

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, “**My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”** Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. **For the sake of Christ, then, I am content** with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Sometimes all we can do is call on God’s grace to get us through and be content with whatever God gives us or allows to happen to us.

* **You can’t really know the extent of God’s grace until you have received it in the depths of suffering.**

**A Perfect End**

If we think about Joseph who was sold into slavery and then thrown into a Prison, what could you think other than God is punishing me, but then it turns out that it all led up to him being 2nd in charge of all the land of Egypt and saving his family during a famine.

Genesis 50:19-20 Joseph said to them (His Brothers), “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? **You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done**, the saving of many lives.

There were probably hundreds of different paths Joseph’s life could have taken, some good and some bad, but only one path, that required some unpleasant things, led to a place where he would be able to save His family. This family became God’s chosen People, Israel, from which Jesus would come.

Sometimes God may lead us **through** suffering to prepare us for something down the road that we would otherwise be un prepared for.

James 2:5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?

**Refining Faith**

1 Peter 1:6-8 In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the **proven genuineness of your faith**—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—**may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed**. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,

Peter talks about our Faith being worth more than gold refined in a fire. The Refining process is used to remove all of the impurities. You don’t notice the impurities until the gold is melted in the fire. The more that gold is refined the more value it has. So, it is with our faith. Isaiah 48:10 says Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. It is not a pleasant process and often we will cry out “Oh God! why me?” But the end result is a stronger and more refined faith that is more precious than gold or silver.

All of our prayers are usually directed at getting us out of the fire as soon as possible, and we try to keep as much of our impurities as we can, for as long as we can. Then we wonder why we have so little faith. We wonder why our prayers are ineffective.

Jesus never promised that we, as Christians, would never suffer. Quite the opposite he promised we would suffer. life is not about being comfortable all the time and avoiding every possible situation that may lead to discomfort. The world will always seek comfort at all cost. **As Christians we are to seek Christ no matter what the cost!**

Many Churches like to preach a message of prosperity saying if you will follow Christ, he will bless you and you will live a good and easy life. This is not the message in the Bible. Just look at the prophets and disciples they did not live easy lives.

John 16:33 I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world **you will** have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

Jesus even tells us: “In this world you will have trouble…”. Many times we come to Christ thinking he is going to make life easy for us but that is not the message in the Bible. He will guide your life down a path which may include great blessings but it may also require great suffering.

Romans 8:17 tells us that We must share in Christ suffering if we want to share in his glory. Our suffering here in earth will be short compared to the eternal Glory we will have in heaven.

So, it is not a question of whether God is punishing us or putting us through a trial, it might just be the path that God has chosen you to follow. Now you may make that path easier or more difficult by questioning God’s choices and/or going in the wrong directions, fighting God all the way.

Think of it like a parent taking a Child for a shot knowing that it will protect him down the road from greater pain and suffering (i.e. a little suffering now to protect from greater suffering down the road.)

James 1:2-3 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

**Trusting God**

If you think about it’ it is human nature to want to avoid all suffering. We want to avoid anything that causes us discomfort. But God’s call to us, to take up our cross, is a call to a life of discomfort. To go the extra mile despite the cost to our own happiness. If we can find joy in Christ even when things are going horrible wrong then we must be walking in the same Spirit as the Martyrs, Disciples and Christ himself.

So, we just need to be like George Mueller who said “*I am satisfied with the will of my Heavenly Father, I seek by perfect submission to His holy will to glorify Him, I kiss continually the hand that has thus afflicted me.”*

**If your trials and suffering glorify God then we should be content and keep pressing forward.**

# Romans 8:28-30 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Jesus suffered the Cross even though he never sinned. He could have cried out “this isn’t fair” but he trusted his father completely. Does Jesus call us to do the same?

# 1 Peter 2:20-21 For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

In Luke 9:23 We are told to deny ourselves (What we think we deserve) take up our cross daily (Choose to accept whatever God gives us) and follow Christ.

We just need to Trust that God knows what is best and take whatever path he leads us to.

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

**🡪The deepest level of worship and the greatest level of testimony is praising God in spite of Pain and Suffering.**

Psalm 23:4 though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

If you are suffering today or know someone who is, Ask God to show you any sin that may have caused the suffering or to bring wisdom and hope to refine your faith and guide you through the Trial that you may glorify God.

1 Peter 4:12-13, 19 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. -- 19 So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

Note: People are only willing to suffer, to any great length, for those things they care deeply about.

Example:

* The early church and the spread of Christianity
* Freedom (End to Slavery, Birth of the USA)
* Owning a Bible or just being a Christian (Socialist countries)

**Count your blessings**

I started this study because I was struggling to understand why a good and merciful God would allow so many people to suffer so greatly. I called out to God quoting James 1:3 where we are told that If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. So, I prayed and the answer I received was; How could you truly understand the totality of all your blessings without seeing how great the suffering of others that allowed you to have those blessing. This is so very sad but very true.

As I read about people around the world suffering great persecution for just owning a Bible or meeting to share their faith, I realize how much I take for granted. I am truly blessed and should be taking advantage of those things that others have suffered so greatly for, like Reading my Bible, sharing my faith and gathering together.

Remembering that part of being a Christian is suffering: giving up what you want to do for what Christ wants you to do. Remember that verse about taking up your cross daily.

Luke 9:23 And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

Take advantage of the liberties God has given you and thank him daily for all the blessing he has poured out on you but don’t forget to pray for all the Christian brothers and sisters who have suffered greatly so we can share our faith freely with others so they can come to know Christ.

1 Peter 5:8-10 Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

**Final thoughts:**

This is a hard message to give and probably even harder to receive but remember God prepares us for his service and not everyone is called to go through extreme torture or to give up their life for their faith.

In Ephesians 4: I -2 Paul tells us to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.

God calls some people to a life of suffering and others may live a life of blessing. If God calls you to suffer then do it well. If God calls you to a blessed life then use your blessing & prayers to support those who are suffering. Whatever He calls you to do give it everything you have and let your actions glorify God. You may only be called to give up a weekend helping others or to share your faith. It may cost you a friend or two or you may have to give up something you would rather be doing. If that is the suffering God calls you to do, take it willingly knowing others have suffered far more.

When dealing with persistent problems, view them as an opportunity to learn something new. Science has shown that people become complacent when they are comfortable but when challenged they learn to adapt and grow.

There is so much we can learn through adversity. It is like working out or practicing something over and over or studying a new subject. We suffer through School so we can get a good job. We suffer through continuous practicing to become good at a sport or talent. The more you suffer (practice or study) the better you get. You may even have to give up other things you want to do. It is not fun at the time but in the end, if you are persistent, it is worth the results. In the same way the difficulties, that we face in life, are purifying our faith and drawing us closer to God so we can receive His reward!

So, Ask God to open your eyes to see what he is trying to accomplish through the problems in your life. Then when you understand the opportunity the problems will lose their impact. Then you can Thank God for the problems in your life and turn them into opportunities to glorify Him.

Before every resurrection there has to be a crucifixion. If you are suffering today just wait the resurrection is just around the corner. The reward comes in the end!

So, if you are going through trials and suffering. The best advice I can give is make sure you are following Christ to the best of your ability, hating all your sin, following whatever path God has set before you, **praying “**Lord your will be done.” Ask others to pray for you and then Hope!!! You reward will come.

**The suffering of this world last for just a moment in time were the joy of eternity in heaven last forever!**

2 Corinthians 4:8-10 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBvHI1awWaI>

<<<<Assignment Read through Job 30>>>>

**Thoughts on Religious Persecution**

John 15:20 (Jesus Said) Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.

It has been found that in countries, where they experienced Religious persecution, that people, young and old alike, would memorize large amounts of the scripture, travel miles just to meet in secret to worship together or deliver Bibles under the threat of imprisonment and possible death but once the Persecution ended so did these practices. People felt little need to memorize or meet on regular basis. Example How many Bibles in our country sit on the shelve and never get read.

China has the fastest growing Christian community and yet Christians there are persecuted there. If all someone has to do to avoid Religious persecution is to be quite about their faith or deny it all together then why are so many willing to accept pain, suffering and even death? Is it the stubbornness of man or conviction of the Holy Spirit?

**🡪Could persecution be the soil in which Christianity grows best? If so, shouldn’t we then desire it?**

The Bible tells us in Matthew 10:33 But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

We find a good example in Daniel who was willing to go to the lion’s den rather than praying to anyone but God. In this case Daniel lived which caused the king to issue a decree that everyone in the kingdom must fear and reverence the God of Daniel (Daniel 6)

On the other hand, Peter denied Jesus 3 times (Luke 22:54-62) before Jesus went to the cross. Later Jesus did restore him (John 21:15-17) and eventually he did die for his faith but only after building Christ Church (Matthew 16:18).

This brings the question: Is it better to live another day to bring more to Christ knowing that God will forgive you or to die a Martyr in hopes of bringing your persecutors or others to Christ? We just have to trust God that we will do the right thing.

Jesus does tell us in Matthew 16:25 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.

If you are not going through persecution or suffering then take time to pray for those who are. Remember that Persecution is a way of life for millions of believers around the world. (According to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom's 2020 report, Christians are persecuted in Burma, China, Eritrea, India, Iran, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Vietnam and others.)

**Psalms 23**: The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name’s sake.4 Yea, **though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.** You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.