



GrowN
Week 5: THE Path of GrowN – Why Suffering?
2 Peter 3:17-18
October 11th, 2023

9/13 th - The WHY(God's Roles)	(Sp. Disciplines -j 8 weeks)	11/8 th -
9/20 th - The Payback(P.B.A. Prodigal. God's Grace means..)	10/4 th - Meet the Bible	11/15 th -
9/27 th - The Power in Community	10/11 th - Why Suffering?	11/22 nd -
THE Path of GrowN	10/18 th -	11/29 th - ADVENT
	10/25 th -	12/6 th - WNC Tmas Party?
	11/1 st -	12/ 13 th - Family Worship

[Week ? = Understanding the Kingdom of God????]

Series Resources: How People Grow by Cloud/Townsend and Cloud, H., & Townsend, J. (2009). *How People Grow: What the Bible Reveals About Personal Growth*. Zondervan. Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster

Week 2: Bailey, K. E. (2005). *The Cross and the Prodigal: Luke 15 through the Eyes of Middle Eastern Peasants* (Second Edition, pp. 42-44). IVP Books.

Handouts:

Week 1 – God's Roles Chart. Week 2 – Community. Week 4 – The Bible. Week 5- Suffering Verses.

GrowN Concept #1: Quadrant Growth

Luke 2:52 HCSB *And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people.*

Jesus grew: Intellectually ● Physically ● Spiritually ● Socially

GrowN Concept #2: The Inheritance of Reconciliation

The Long-term Goal of GrowN: 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. NLT

***18** And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to Himself through Christ. And **God has given us this task of reconciling people to Him.** ¹⁹ For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And He gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation: ²⁰ So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making His appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" ²¹ For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.*

YES: Reconciling = Living your Life OUTLOUD with others so they may see Jesus in action.

NO: Reconciling ≠ You are going to Hell if you don't accept Jesus. Stop SINNING! Never saying anything. God gives you the abundant life – including lots of \$\$\$ - here on earth.

THE Payback: I have earned this, God ↔ God cannot love me because...I have sinned so...

GrowN Concept #3: God is FOR me – There is no "God cannot love me because..."

Romans 8:31-32

*What then are we to say about these things?^(C) **If God is for us, who is against us?^(B)***

³² He did not even spare His own Son^(B) but offered Him up for us all;^(E)

how will He not also with Him grant us everything? HCSB

GrowN Concept #4: God will PROVIDE for me - I do not have to EARN His love.

Matthew 6:33 (25 – don't worry about your life)

*But **seek first the kingdom of God^(A)** and His righteousness,^(B) and all these things will be **provided** for you.^(C)*

GrowN Concept #5: THE Power in Community

I. The Power of Relationships in Community II. The Power of Acceptance in Community III. The Power of Forgiveness in Community

[**Disciplines: C&T – The Bible.** Role of Suffering&Grief. Righteousness. Discipline. Spiritual Poverty. Obedience. Sin&Temptation. Truth. Activity. Time. **FOSTER** – Meditation. Prayer. Fasting. Study. Simplicity. Solitude. Submission. Service. Confession. Worship. Guidance. Celebration.]

How People Grow – Not a therapy book but a book on the sanctification process. Does not discount therapy (it is being written by two of them!) but ADDS the sanctification process to the therapeutical model.

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2 Peter 3:18

*¹⁷ Therefore, dear friends, since you know this in advance, be on your guard,^(A) so that you are not led away by the error of lawless people and fall from your own stability. ¹⁸ **But grow** in the grace and knowledge^(A) of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity.^{[a](B)} Amen.^[b] **HCSB***

With our FIVE GrowN concepts as a foundation:

- #1. Quadrant Growth.
- #2. Becoming a Reconciler.
- #3. Knowing God is for me.
- #4. Knowing God will provide for me.
- #5. Understanding the POWER in Community.

NOW WHAT do we actually DO?

[**Disciplines: C&T – The Bible.** Role of Suffering&Grief. Righteousness. Discipline. Spiritual Poverty. Obedience. Sin&Temptation. Truth. Activity. Time. **FOSTER** – Meditation. Prayer. Fasting. **Study.** Simplicity. Solitude. Submission. Service. Confession. Worship. Guidance. Celebration.]

Opening:

EXAMPLES OF SUFFERING AND ASK:

- I suffer when:
- An example of suffering is:

BIBLICAL / CHILDHOOD / ADULT / CHURCH

I. WHY?...Sources of Suffering

[Sin. God. Trials. ♥Jesus. Life. Personal Choices. Human Wickedness. Warfare.]

SIN:

Genesis 2:17 ¹⁷ but you must not eat^[a] from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die."^(A)

[Genesis 3:5 HCSB](#)

"In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God,...

[Deuteronomy 30:15 HCSB](#)

See, today I have set before you life and prosperity, death and adversity.

[Deuteronomy 30:19-20 HCSB](#)

I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you today that I have set before you life and...

[Romans 6:23 HCSB](#)

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[1 Timothy 5:6 HCSB](#)

however, she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.

[James 1:15 HCSB](#)

Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives...

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Genesis 3:16-19

14 Then the Lord God said to the serpent: Because you have done this, you are cursed more than any livestock and more than any wild animal. You will move on your belly and eat dust all the days of your life.^(A)

15 I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.^(B)

16 He said to the woman: I will intensify your labor pains; you will bear children in anguish.^(A) Your desire^(B) will be for your husband, yet he will rule over you.

17 And He said to Adam, "Because you listened to your wife's voice and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'Do not eat from it':

The ground is cursed because of you.^(C) You will eat from it by means of painful labor^(D) all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.^(E) ¹⁹ You will eat bread^(F) by the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground,^(G) since you were taken from it. For you are dust, and you will return to dust."

c.

[Genesis 5:29 HCSB](#)

And he named him Noah, saying, "This one will bring us relief from the agonizing labor of our...

[Romans 8:20-22 HCSB](#)

For the creation was subjected to futility —not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it...

[Hebrews 6:8 HCSB](#)

But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless and about to be cursed, and will be...

Romans 5:12 Death through Adam and Life through Christ

12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man,^(A) and death through sin,^(B) in this way death spread to all men,^(C) because all sinned.^(D)

[1 Corinthians 15:21 HCSB](#)

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man.

GOD: [Sin. God. Trials. ♡ Jesus. Life. Personal Choices. Human Wickedness. Warfare.]

John 9:2-3

2 His disciples questioned Him: "Rabbi,^(A) who sinned, this man^(B) or his parents,^(C) that he was born blind?" ³ "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," Jesus answered. "This came about so that God's works^(D) might be displayed in him.

- **All suffering comes within His will**

Eph 1:11 ¹¹ We have also received an inheritance^(A) in Him, predestined^(B) according to the purpose of the One who **works out everything in agreement with the decision of His will,**

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- **Some suffering is for His immediate (not just eternal) glory**

Jn 21:18-19 ¹⁸ *"I assure you:^(C) When you were young, you would tie your belt and walk wherever you wanted. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will tie you and carry you where you don't want to go."* ¹⁹ *He said this to signify by what kind of death^(U) he would glorify God.^{(E)(M)} After saying this, He told him, "Follow Me!"^(U)*

- **Suffering for eternal glory**

Hebrews 11 Heroes of Faith

11 Now faith is the reality^(A) of what is hoped for, [RIGHT HERE IS WHERE SUFFERING LAYS] the proof^(B) of what is not seen.^(A) ² For our ancestors won God's approval by it.

³ By **faith** we understand that the universe was^(C) created by God's command,^{(E)(B)} so that what is seen has been made from things that are not visible.

⁴ By **faith Abel** offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was approved as a righteous man, because God approved his gifts, and even though he is dead, he still speaks through his faith.^(C)

⁵ By **faith Enoch** was taken away so he did not experience death, and he was not to be found because God took him away.^(E) For prior to his removal he was approved, since he had pleased God.^(U) ⁶ Now without faith it is impossible to please God, for the one who draws near to Him must believe that He exists and rewards those who seek Him.

⁷ By **faith Noah**, after he was warned about what was not yet seen and motivated by godly fear, built an ark to deliver his family. By faith he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.^(E)

⁸ By **faith Abraham**, when he was called, obeyed and went out to a place he was going to receive as an inheritance. He went out, not knowing where he was going.^(E) ⁹ By faith he stayed as a foreigner in the land of promise, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, coheirs of the same promise.^(C) ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.^(H)

¹¹ By **faith** even **Sarah** herself, when she was unable to have children, received power to conceive offspring, even though she was past the age, since she^(F) considered that the One who had promised was faithful.^(U) ¹² Therefore from one man—in fact, from one as good as dead—came offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as innumerable as the grains of sand by the seashore.^(U)

¹³ **These all died in faith without having received the promises, but they saw them from a distance,^(K) greeted them, and confessed that they were foreigners and temporary residents on the earth.^(U)** ¹⁴ Now those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they were thinking about where they came from, they would have had an opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But they now desire a better place—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.^(M)

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¹⁷ By **faith Abraham**, when he was tested, offered up Isaac.^(N) He received the promises and he was offering his unique son, ¹⁸ the one it had been said about, Your seed will be traced^(G) through Isaac.^{(Q)(H)} ¹⁹ He considered God to be able even to raise someone from the dead,^(P) and as an illustration,^(I) he received him back.

²⁰ By **faith Isaac** blessed Jacob and Esau^(Q) concerning things to come. ²¹ By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and he worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.^{(R)(I)} ²² By faith Joseph, as he was nearing the end of his life, mentioned the exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions concerning his bones.^(S)

²³ By **faith, after Moses** was born, he was hidden by his parents for three months, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they didn't fear the king's edict.^(T) ²⁴ By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter ²⁵ and chose to suffer with the people of God rather than to enjoy the short-lived pleasure of sin.^(U) ²⁶ For he considered the reproach because of the Messiah to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, since his attention was on the reward.^(V)

²⁷ By faith he left Egypt behind, not being afraid of the king's anger, for Moses persevered as one who sees Him who is invisible.^(W) ²⁸ By faith he instituted the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn might not touch the Israelites. ²⁹ By faith they crossed the Red Sea as though they were on dry land. When the Egyptians attempted to do this, they were drowned.^(X)

³⁰ By **faith the walls of Jericho** fell down after being encircled by the Israelites for seven days. ³¹ By faith Rahab the prostitute received the spies in peace and didn't perish with those who disobeyed.^(Y)

³² And what more can I say? Time is too short for me to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah,^(Z) David, Samuel, and the prophets,^(AA) ³³ who by faith conquered kingdoms,^(AB) administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,^(AC) ³⁴ quenched the raging of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, gained strength after being weak, became mighty in battle, and put foreign armies to flight.^(AD) ³⁵ Women received their dead—they were raised to life again. Some men were tortured, not accepting release, so that they might gain a better resurrection, ³⁶ and others experienced mockings and scourgings, as well as bonds and imprisonment.^(AE) ³⁷ They were stoned,^{(k)(AF)} they were sawed in two, they died by the sword, they wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins,^(AG) destitute, afflicted, and mistreated. ³⁸ The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and on mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground.

³⁹ **All these were approved through their faith, but they did not receive what was promised,** ⁴⁰ **since God had provided something better for us, so that they would not be made perfect without us.**

- **Jesus Christ's suffering produces salvation**

Isaiah 53:10 *Yet the Lord was pleased^(G) to crush Him severely.^{(G)(D)} When^(G) You make Him a restitution offering,^(G) He will see His seed, He will prolong His days, and by His hand, the Lord's pleasure will be accomplished.^(G)*

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Acts 2:23 *Though He was delivered up according to God's determined plan and foreknowledge, you used^(a) lawless people^(b) to nail Him to a cross and kill Him.*

Manser, M. H. (2009). [*Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies*](#). Martin Manser.

- **Suffering is within His plan for us**

Romans 8:26-29

²⁶ *In the same way the Spirit also joins to help in our weakness, because we do not know what to pray for as we should,^(a) but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us^(b) with unspoken groanings. ²⁷ And He who searches the hearts^(c) knows the Spirit's mind-set, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*

²⁸ *We know that all things work together^(d) for the good^(e) of those who love God: those who are called according to His purpose.^(f) ²⁹ For those He foreknew He also predestined^(g) to be conformed to the image of His Son,^(h) so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers.⁽ⁱ⁾*

Is 30:26

²⁶ *The moonlight will be as bright as the sunlight, and the sunlight will be seven times brighter^(a)—like the light of seven days—on the day^(b) that the Lord bandages His people's injuries and heals the wounds He inflicted.^(c) [Is 33:24](#); [Jr 33:6](#); [Hs 6:1-2](#)*

TRIALS: [Sin. God. Trials. ♥ Jesus. Life. Personal Choices. Human Wickedness. Warfare.]

General Trials

James 1:12-13

¹² *A man who endures trials^(a) is blessed, because when he passes the test he will receive the crown^(b) of life that God^(c) has promised to those who love Him.^(d)*

¹³ *No one undergoing a trial should say, "I am being tempted by God." For God is not tempted by evil,^(e) and He Himself doesn't tempt anyone.*

Persecution Trials

Matthew 10:22

²² *You will be hated by everyone because of My name.^(a) But the one who endures to the end will be delivered*

LOVING JESUS: [Sin. God. Trials. ♥ Jesus. Life. Personal Choices. Human Wickedness. Warfare.]

1 Corinthians 4:10-15

¹⁰ *We are fools for Christ, but you are wise in Christ!^(a) We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! ¹¹ Up to the present hour we are both*

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hungry and thirsty; we are poorly clothed, roughly treated, homeless; ¹² we labor, working[Ⓜ] with our own hands.Ⓜ When we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; ¹³ when we are slandered, we respond graciously. Even now, we are like the world's garbage, like the dirt everyone scrapes off their sandals.Ⓜ

LIFE (being human): [Sin. God. Trials. ♡Jesus. Life. Personal Choices. Human Wickedness. Warfare.]

[Being supernatural beings living in this temporary gift of physical life. We miss the gift of this when we focus on hard being a consequence of us doing bad things.]

Matthew 5:44-46

*⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies[Ⓜ] and pray for those who[Ⓜ] persecute you,[Ⓜ] ⁴⁵ so that you may be[Ⓜ] sons of your Father in heaven. **For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.**[Ⓜ] ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same?*

[Job 25:3 HCSB](#)

Can His troops be numbered? Does His light not shine on everyone?

- **Accidents** 2Sa 4:4; 2Ki 1:2; Lk 13:4
- **Sickness** Ge 48:1 See also 2Ki 20:1; Job 2:7; Ps 42:10; Mt 8:6; Ac 28:8; Php 2:27; 2Ti 4:20; Jas 5:14
- **Hunger and want** Ge 12:10; Job 30:3; Isa 5:13; Mt 25:42-43
- **Natural disasters** 1Ki 22:48; Job 1:16,18-19; Isa 29:6; Joel 1:4; Zec 14:5; Mt 24:7; Ac 27:18-20
- **Ageing** 2Sa 19:34-35; Ps 71:9; Ecc 12:1
- **Bereavement** Ge 23:1-2; Job 1:18-19; Lk 7:11-13; Jn 11:33-35; Jas 1:27
- **Anxiety** Pr 12:25 See also Dt 28:65-67; Lk 21:26

PERSONAL CHOICES: [Sin. God. Trials. ♡Jesus. Life. Personal Choices. Human Wickedness. Warfare.]

James 1:14-15

¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own evil desires.[Ⓜ] ¹⁵ Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death.[Ⓜ]

Ps 107:17 *Fools suffered affliction because of their rebellious ways and their sins*

Pr11:15 *If someone puts up security for a stranger, he will suffer for it, but the one who hates such agreements is protected*

Pr. 14:1 *Every wise woman builds her house, but a foolish one tears it down with her own hands.*

Prov 23:29-30

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Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has conflicts? Who has complaints?
Who has wounds for no reason?[Ⓜ] Who has red eyes?

³⁰ Those who linger over wine, those who go looking for mixed wine.

[Isaiah 5:11 HCSB](#)

Woe to those who rise early in the morning in pursuit of beer, who linger into the evening,...

[Isaiah 5:22 HCSB](#)

Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine, who are fearless at mixing beer,

Ezekiel 18: 30 *"Therefore, house of Israel, I will judge each one of you according to his ways."*[Ⓜ] *This is the declaration of the Lord God. "Repent and turn from all your transgressions, so they will not be a stumbling block that causes your punishment.*

HUMAN WICKEDNESS: [Sin. God. Trials. ♥Jesus. Life. Personal Choices. Human Wickedness. Warfare.]

- **Murder Ge 4:8** See also Ge 49:5-7; **1Sa 18:10-11**
- **Injury Mt 26:67**
- **Cruelty Ps 71:4** See also Jdg 1:7; Ps 54:3; Am 1:13; Mt 2:16-18; Lk 10:30
- **Rioting 2Ki 7:17; Ac 16:22**
- **Warfare Jer 50:22** See also Ge 14:1-2,11-12; Ex 13:17; Jos 6:20-21; 10:22-26; Jdg 1:4-7; 1Ki 22:35; 2Ki 17:5-6; Zec 14:2; Lk 21:20-24; Rev 6:4
- **Injustice Eze 9:9** See also Ge 39:19-20; 1Ki 21:11-14; 2Ki 21:16; Ps 58:1-2; 64:6
- **Oppression Ecc 4:1** See also Ex 1:11; 1Ki 12:1-4,12-14; Ps 12:5; Jas 5:1-6
- **Adultery 2Sa 12:9; Mal 2:14**
- **Theft Mt 6:19** See also Ge 31:19; Job 1:14-15,17; 24:2
- **Broken relationships Job 19:14-19; Ps 27:10; Pr 16:28; Ac 15:39**
- **Hatred Ps 109:3** See also 2Sa 13:15; Tit 3:3
- **Jealousy Ge 37:4** See also Ge 4:4-5; 16:6; 21:8-10; 1Sa 18:8-9; Mt 27:18
- **Persecution Jn 15:20** See also Jer 38:6; Da 3:4-6; 6:7; Mt 5:10-12; 10:35-36; Rev 6:9-11

The wicked must be punished Ro 6:23 See also Ge 6:5-7; Jn 5:14; 2Th 1:8; Rev 9:4; 20:15

2Thessalonians 1:3-8 God's Judgment and Glory

³ We must always thank God for you, brothers. This is right, since your faith is flourishing and the love[Ⓜ] each one of you has for one another[Ⓜ] is increasing.[Ⓜ] ⁴ Therefore, we ourselves boast[Ⓜ] about you among God's churches—about your endurance and faith in all the persecutions and afflictions you endure. ⁵ It is a clear evidence of God's righteous[Ⓜ] judgment[Ⓜ] that you will be counted worthy of God's kingdom, for which you also are suffering,[Ⓜ] ⁶ **since it is righteous for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you** ⁷ and to reward with rest you who are afflicted, along with us. This will take

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place at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels, ⁸ taking vengeance with flaming fire[Ⓜ] on those who don't know God[Ⓞ] and on those who don't obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.[Ⓞ]

WARFARE: [Sin. God. Trials. ♡Jesus. Life. Personal Choices. Human Wickedness. Warfare.]

The influence of Satan

Ge 3:1 Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You can't eat from any tree in the garden'?"

Lk 13:16 ¹⁶Satan[Ⓜ] has bound[Ⓜ] this woman, a daughter of Abraham,[Ⓞ]for 18 years— shouldn't she be untied from this bondage on the Sabbath day?"

1Jn 5:19 ¹⁹We know that we are of God, and the whole world is under the sway of the evil one.

Rev 2:10; 20:7-8 ¹⁰ Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Look, the Devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will have affliction for 10 days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown[Ⓜ] of life.

The Enemy's methods:

- The encounter with the enemy

Step #1: Dons a disguise (angel of light) that the woman would find acceptable

Step #2: Outwits the inexperienced woman through confusion & distortion.

Did He really say?

Do you think that is what He really meant?

QUESTIONING God's motives.

Step #3: Satan redefines God to Eve.

He cast doubt on God's plan/order/instructions.

QUESTIONING God's character.

(A process he personally knows, he is seeking to distort her image of God.

"He would not want you to do without.")

Step #4: He reconstructed God's directives.

("You will not surely die! You will become....

Step #5: He elevated the role of humanity to be like God.

(Which was his sin = self aggrandizement)

("You will become LIKE HIM!")

Appeals to our flesh, our human nature

1 John 2:16 (Lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, pride of life)

("For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.")

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!Tried same method w/Jesus: (see Matt. 4, Mark 1, and Luke 4).
Temptation of Christ

➤ 1 John 5: 19

“We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.”

➤ 2 Corinthians 11: 14

“And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness.”

➤ John 12:31 (Jesus speaking with the Greeks)

“Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.”

➤ 2 Corinthians 4:4

“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

Revelation 9:4

⁴They were told not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green plant, or any tree, but only people who do not have God’s seal on their foreheads.

II. WHY?...Our Reactions to Suffering Reveal our Core

The wrong reactions to suffering

Job 2:9-10 resentment against God

⁹His wife said to him, “Do you still retain your integrity? Curse God and die!”

¹⁰“You speak as a foolish woman speaks,” he told her. “Should we accept only good from God and not adversity?” Throughout all this Job did not sin in what he said.[Ⓜ]

Job 23:13-15 being terrified of God

But He is unchangeable; who can oppose Him?

He does what He desires.[Ⓜ] ¹⁴He will certainly accomplish what He has decreed for me, and He has many more things like these in mind.[Ⓜ] ¹⁵Therefore I am terrified[Ⓜ] in His presence; when I consider this, I am afraid of Him.

Job 40:2 arguing with God;

Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him?

Let him who argues with God give an answer

Ps 73:3 envying the wicked;

For I envied the arrogant; I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

Ps 73:13 disillusionment

Did I purify my heart and wash my hands in innocence for nothing?

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The right reactions to suffering

- **Reverent submission**

Job 1:21 Naked I came from my mother's womb,^(A)
and naked I will leave this life.^{(A)(B)}

The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away.
Praise the name of Yahweh

Job 28:28 He said to mankind,
"The fear of the Lord is this: wisdom.
And to turn from evil is understanding."

Job 34:12 Indeed, it is true that God does not act wickedly
and the Almighty does not pervert justice.

Job 36:26 Yes, God is exalted beyond our knowledge;^(A)
the number of His years cannot be counted

Job 40:4 I am so insignificant. How can I answer You?^(A)
I place my hand over my mouth.

La 3:40 Let us search out and examine our ways,
and turn back to the Lord

Lamentations 49-50

My eyes overflow unceasingly, without end,^(A) ⁵⁰ until the Lord looks down
from heaven and sees

Mt 10:28 ²⁸ Don't fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the
soul;^(A) rather, fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

"I do not get this but I get God." PO

- **The Reaction of Trust in God**

Ge 18:25 ²⁵ You could not possibly do such a thing: to kill the righteous with the wicked,
treating the righteous and the wicked alike. You could not possibly do that! Won't the
Judge of all the earth do what is just?"

Ps 55:22-23 Cast your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you;^(A)
He will never allow the righteous to be shaken

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Ex 2:23 ²³ After a long time, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned because of their difficult labor, and they cried out;^(A) and their cry for help ascended to God because of the difficult labor.

Ps 56:3-4 When I am afraid, I will trust in You.^(A) ⁴ In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not fear. What can man do to me?

Ps 59:16 But I will sing of Your strength and will joyfully proclaim Your faithful love in the morning.^(A) For You have been a stronghold for me, a refuge in my day of trouble

Ps 62:5 Rest in God alone, my soul, for my hope comes from Him.

Ps 70:2 Let those who seek my life be disgraced and confounded; let those who wish me harm be driven back and humiliated.

Ps 107:6,13,19,28 - Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble; He rescued them from their distress.

Ps 119:50 This is my comfort in my affliction:^(A)
Your promise has given me life.

,153 Consider my affliction and rescue me,^(A)
for I have not forgotten Your instruction

Da 3:17-18 ¹⁷ If the God we serve exists,^(A) then He can rescue^(A) us from the furnace of blazing fire, and He can rescue us from the power of you, the king. ¹⁸ But even if He does not rescue us,^(B) we want you as king to know that we will not serve^(B) your gods^(C) or worship the gold statue you set up."
the trust shown by Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego;

Hab 3:17-18 Though the fig tree does not bud and there is no fruit on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, ¹⁸ yet I will triumph in Yahweh; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation!^(A)

1Pe 2:23 *the example of Jesus Christ*
when He was reviled, He did not revile in return;
when He was suffering, He did not threaten
but entrusted Himself to the One who judges^(A) justly.

1Pe 4:19 So those who suffer according to God's will should, while doing what is good, entrust themselves^(A) to a faithful Creator.

1 Peter 5:7 ⁷ casting all your care on Him, because He cares about you.

[Deuteronomy 32:4 HCSB](#)

The Rock—His work is perfect; all His ways are entirely just. A faithful God, without prejudice,...

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God's reaction to suffering

- **Concern for those who suffer**

Ps 9:12

*For the One who seeks an accounting for bloodshed remembers them;^(A)
He does not forget the cry of the afflicted*

Ex 2:25

God saw the Israelites, and He took notice.

2Ki 14:26

For the Lord saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter.^(A) There was no one to help Israel, neither bond nor free.

Ps 1:6

For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,^(A) but the way of the wicked leads to ruin.^(B)

Pr 33:18-19

*Now the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him—
those who depend on His faithful love^(A) **19** to deliver them from death and to keep them alive in famine.^(B)*

Jas 5:4

Look! The pay that you withheld from the workers^(A) who reaped your fields cries out, and the outcry of the harvesters has reached the ears of the Lord of Hosts.^{(B)(C)}

- **Anger at the wicked**

Ps 11:5

The Lord examines the righteous and the wicked. He hates the lover of violence.^(A)

Hab 2:9,12

Woe to him who dishonestly makes wealth for his house^(A) to place his nest on high, to escape from the reach of disaster!^(A)

12 *Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and founds a town with injustice!^(A)*

[Proverbs 11:28 HCSB](#)

Anyone trusting in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like foliage.

[Jeremiah 22:13 HCSB](#)

Woe for the one who builds his palace through unrighteousness, his upper rooms through...

[Jeremiah 49:16 HCSB](#)

As to the terror you cause, your presumptuous heart has deceived you. You who live in the clefts...

[Obadiah 4 HCSB](#)

Though you seem to soar like an eagle and make your nest among the stars, even from there I will...

[Revelation 18:7 HCSB](#)

As much as she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, give her that much torment and grief,...

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God's response to suffering

- **Deliverance for those who suffer**

Ps 34:19

Many adversities come to the one who is righteous, but the Lord delivers him from them all.^(A)

Job 42:10-12

¹⁰ After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord restored his prosperity and doubled his previous possessions.^(A) ¹¹ All his brothers, sisters, and former acquaintances^(B) came to his house and dined with him in his house. They sympathized with him and comforted him concerning all the adversity the Lord had brought on him. Each one gave him a qesitah^(C) and a gold earring.^(D)

¹² So the Lord blessed the last part of Job's life more than the first. He owned 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys.

Rev 7:13-16

¹³ Then one of the elders asked me, "Who are these people robed in white, and where did they come from?" ¹⁴ I said to him, "Sir,^(A) you know."

Then he told me:

These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation.

They washed their robes and made them white^(A) in the blood of the Lamb.

¹⁵ For this reason they are before the throne of God, and they serve Him day and night in His sanctuary. The One seated on the throne will shelter^(B) them:

¹⁶ They will no longer hunger; they will no longer thirst; the sun will no longer strike them, nor will any heat.^(B)

21:4 *He will wipe away every tear from their eyes.^(A)*

Death will no longer exist;^(B)

grief, crying, and pain will exist no longer,^(C)

because the previous things^(A) have passed away

- **Judgment for the wicked Mal 3:5** *See also Ex 3:19-20; Ps 73:16-18; 141:10; Am 1:3; Na 3:1,19; Hab 2:16; Mt 25:41-46; Jas 2:13; 1Pe 4:18; Rev 18:6-7*

**WE MUST DEFINE SUFFERING WITH THE BIBLICAL DEFINITION
OR WE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO EMBRACE SCRIPTURE AS TRUE. - PO**

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Benefits of Suffering

- **Christian suffering produces good fruits**

Ro 5:3-4

³And not only that,^(A) but we also rejoice in our afflictions,^(B) because we know that affliction produces endurance,^(C) endurance produces proven character,^(D) and proven character produces hope.

2Co 1:9⁹ Indeed, we personally had a death sentence within ourselves, so that we would not trust in ourselves but in God^(A) who raises^(B) the dead.

Heb 12:11¹¹ No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the fruit of peace^(A) and righteousness to those who have been trained by it.^(B)

Jas 1:2-4

² Consider it a great joy, my brothers, whenever you experience various trials,^(A) ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ But endurance must do its complete work, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.

- **Suffering can produce discipline**

Heb 12:7⁷ *Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline?*

Ex 32:35³⁵ *And the Lord inflicted a plague on the people for what they did with the calf Aaron had made.*

2Sa 12:13-14¹³ *David responded to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord."^(A) Then Nathan replied to David, "The Lord has taken away your sin; you will not die."^(B) ¹⁴ However, because you treated^(C) the Lord with such contempt in this matter, the son born to you will die."^(D)*

Ps 119:67 Before I was afflicted I went astray,^(A) but now I keep Your word.,

71 It was good for me to be afflicted^(A) so that I could learn Your statutes.

Pr 3:11-12 Do not despise the Lord's instruction, my son, and do not loathe His discipline;^(A) ¹² for the Lord disciplines the one He loves, just as a father, the son he delights in.^(B)

Heb 12:8-11⁸ *But if you are without discipline—which all^(A) receive^(B)—then you are illegitimate children and not sons.^(C) ⁹ Furthermore, we had natural fathers discipline us, and we respected them. Shouldn't we submit even more to the Father of spirits and live?^(D) ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time based on what seemed good to them, but He does it for our benefit, so that we can share His holiness.^(E) ¹¹ No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the fruit of peace^(F) and righteousness to those who have been trained by it.^(G)*

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III. WHY?... GOOD PAIN or BAD PAIN

“Certain suffering tears down aspects of our character that need to be torn down and builds up new aspects that we need in order to live as we were designed to live.” **Henry Cloud**

“But suffering can also be terrible. Some suffering is not a “wound...to heal.” Such suffering inflicts evil on a person’s heart and soul and is totally outside God’s desire. Although God can bring good out of the experience, the experience itself is no good at all.” **Henry Cloud**

“Suffering is a lot like that. There is therapeutic suffering, and there is destructive suffering at the hands of evil people. **The key is to be able to tell the difference between the two and to apply the right kind of experience to each.** Too often in the church those who have been “mugged” have been told that God is trying to teach them a lesson or that what they are going through is a result of their own sin or that it is part of the growth process.” **Henry Cloud**

We tend to categorize ALL Suffering as evil. PO

- Pain brings growth = Pruning.
- Pain brings health = Exercising.
- Suffering cleans the board for:
- Redemption to be given its due.
- Being pushed beyond your ability.
- Being pushed beyond our capabilities.
- Pain of Discipline v.s. the Pain of Regret

DYING OUT LOUD – 12 Schools in area in middle east they have been living.

SUFFERING PRODUCES SEPARATION...

LIST BAD PAIN

Divorce
Death of friend
Death of a spouse
Death of a child
Any abuse
Victimized
Ostracization
War

LIST GOOD PAIN

Birth
Surgery
Being caught when stealing
Being confronted when lying to someone
Being challenged when you’re waffling on a commitment
Being challenged when you’re gossiping
The line between unhealthy habits and addiction
Exercise
Schedule stress when an adult goes back to school
Change – Graduation, New baby, Marriage, Divorce?
Death – Stepping into eternity.

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Notes

The apparent injustice of suffering

Ps 88:5 I am like the slain lying in the grave,^(A) whom You no longer remember, and who are cut off from Your care.

Psalm 88:14 Lord, why do You reject me?^(A) Why do You hide Your face from me

[Psalm 43:2 HCSB](#)

For You are the God of my refuge. Why have You rejected me? Why must I go about in sorrow...

[Psalm 10:1 HCSB](#)

Lord, why do You stand so far away? Why do You hide in times of trouble?

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suffering

The experience of pain or distress, both physical and emotional. Scripture is thoroughly realistic about the place of suffering in the world and in the lives of believers. To become a Christian is not to escape from suffering, but to be able to bear suffering with dignity and hope.

This set of themes consists of the following:

5561 suffering, nature of

5562 suffering, of the

innocent

5563 suffering, of God

5564 suffering, of Jesus

Christ

5565 suffering, of believers

5566 suffering,

encouragements in

5567 suffering, emotional

aspects of

5568 suffering, causes of

5569 suffering, hardship

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The Nature of Suffering

Since the fall, human beings have suffered in various ways. Scripture provides insights into the nature and place of suffering both in the world and in the lives of believers.

#1. Suffering began with the fall

Genesis 2:17¹⁷ but you must not eat^[a] from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die."^(A)

[Genesis 3:5 HCSB](#)

"In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God,...

[Deuteronomy 30:15 HCSB](#)

See, today I have set before you life and prosperity, death and adversity.

[Deuteronomy 30:19-20 HCSB](#)

I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you today that I have set before you life and...

[Romans 6:23 HCSB](#)

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[1 Timothy 5:6 HCSB](#)

however, she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.

[James 1:15 HCSB](#)

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Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives...

Genesis 3:16-19

¹⁶ He said to the woman: I will intensify your labor pains; you will bear children in anguish.^(A) Your desire^(B) will be for your husband, yet he will rule over you.

¹⁷ And He said to Adam, "Because you listened to your wife's voice and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'Do not eat from it':

The ground is cursed because of you.^(C) You will eat from it by means of painful labor^(d)

all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.^(D)

¹⁹ You will eat bread^(e) by the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground,^(E) since you were taken from it. For you are dust, and you will return to dust."

c.

[Genesis 5:29 HCSB](#)

And he named him Noah, saying, "This one will bring us relief from the agonizing labor of our...

[Romans 8:20-22 HCSB](#)

For the creation was subjected to futility —not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it...

[Hebrews 6:8 HCSB](#)

But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless and about to be cursed, and will be...

Romans 5:12 Death through Adam and Life through Christ

¹² Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man,^(A) and death through sin,^(B) in this way death spread to all men,^(C) because all sinned.^(d)

[1 Corinthians 15:21 HCSB](#)

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man.

#2. Suffering is universal

Job 5:7 But mankind is born for trouble^(A) as surely as sparks fly upward.

#3. Different kinds of suffering

- [Physical Pain and Illness](#)

2Ki 20:1 In those days^(A) Hezekiah became terminally ill.^(B) The prophet Isaiah^(C) son of Amoz came and said to him, "This is what the Lord says: 'Put your affairs in order,^(d) for you are about to die; you will not recover.'"

Ps 42:10 My adversaries taunt me, as if crushing my bones, while all day long they say to me, "Where is your God?"

Mt 17:15¹⁵ "Lord," he said, "have mercy on my son, because he has seizures^(a) and suffers severely. He often falls into the fire and often into the water.

Jas 5:14 ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? He should call for the elders of the church, and they should pray over him after anointing him with olive oil in the name of the Lord.^(A)

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Ge 48:1 pp 2Ch 32:24 pp Isa 38:1; **Job 2:7**; **Ps 42:10**; **Mt 8:6**; **Lk 4:38**; **Ac 28:8**; **2Ti 4:20**;

- **Emotional Stress**

Ps 55:4-5 *My heart shudders within me;^(a) terrors of death sweep over me.
⁵ Fear and trembling grip me; horror has overwhelmed me*

See also **Ge 35:18** “Ben-Oni” means “son of my trouble”;

Pr 12:25 Anxiety in a man’s heart weighs it down, but a good word cheers it up

[Psalm 94:19 HCSB](#)

When I am filled with cares, Your comfort brings me joy.

[Proverbs 15:13 HCSB](#)

A joyful heart makes a face cheerful, but a sad heart produces a broken spirit.

[Proverbs 16:24 HCSB](#)

Pleasant words are a honeycomb: sweet to the taste and health to the body.

[Matthew 6:25-34 HCSB](#)

“This is why I tell you: Don’t worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink;...

Jn 11:32-35

³² When Mary came to where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at His feet^(a) and told Him, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died!”

³³ When Jesus saw her crying, and the Jews who had come with her crying, He was angry^(a) in His spirit^(b) and deeply moved. ³⁴ “Where have you put him?” He asked. “Lord,” they told Him, “come and see.”

³⁵ Jesus wept.^(c)

Php 2:27

²⁷ Indeed, he was so sick that he nearly died. However, God had mercy on him, and not only on him but also on me, so that I would not have one grief on top of another.

- **Spiritual suffering**

Ps 22:1 My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?^(a) Why are You so far from my deliverance^(b) and from my words of groaning?^(c) [David]

Mt 27:46 ⁴⁶ About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “*Elí, Elí, lemá^(a) sabachtháni?*” that is, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken^(b) Me?”^{(a)(b)}
Mk 15:34

- **The prospect of death**

Ge 3:19 You will eat bread^(a) by the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground,^(a) since you were taken from it. For you are dust, and you will return to dust.”

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Ecc 12:7 and the dust returns to the earth as it once was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.^(A)

[Genesis 2:7 HCSB](#)

Then the Lord God formed the man out of the dust from the ground and breathed the breath of life...

[Genesis 3:19 HCSB](#)

You will eat bread by the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground, since you were...

[Ecclesiastes 3:21 HCSB](#)

Who knows if the spirit of people rises upward and the spirit of animals goes downward to the earth?

#4. Major causes of suffering

- **The disorder in creation** **Ge 3:17** *See also* **Ge 12:10; Joel 1:4; Mt 24:7** pp **Lk 21:11; Ro 8:22; Rev 11:13**
- **Human cruelty** **Ps 54:3**
Murder: **Ge 4:8; Ex 1:16,22; 1Ki 21:19; Mt 2:16**
Ge 49:5-7
Oppression: **Ex 1:11; Am 2:6-7; 4:1; Mal 3:5**
2Ki 6:25; 19:17 warfare; 2Ch 10:13-14; Job 1:14-15,17; Am 1:3,13; Jas 5:4-6; Rev 6:4
- **Family troubles** **Ps 27:10** *See also* **1Sa 1:7; 2Sa 16:11; Job 19:14-19; Mal 2:14; Mt 10:36; Jas 1:27**
- **Old age** **Ps 71:9** *See also* **Ecc 12:1-7**
- **Satan's activity** **1Jn 5:19** *See also* **Job 1:12; 2:6-7; Lk 13:16; 2Co 12:7; Rev 2:10; 20:7-8**

#5. Aggravations to suffering

- **Memories** **Job 29:2**
- **Fears** **Job 3:25; Heb 2:15**
- **Resentment** **Job 2:9**

#6. Sin and suffering

- **They are not necessarily related** **Jn 9:3** *See also* **Job 2:3; Lk 13:2**
- **They are sometimes closely related** **Ro 1:18** *See also* **Ge 6:5-7; Nu 14:33; Dt 28:15; Ps 107:17; Eze 23:49; Ac 5:5,10; Ro 1:27; 1Co 11:29-30; Jude 7; Rev 2:22**
- **God's final judgment** **Mt 25:41** *See also* **Da 12:2; Mt 8:12; Mk 9:48; Isa 66:24; Rev 20:15**

#7. Effects of suffering

- **Hardness of heart** **Rev 16:9** *See also* **Ex 7:22; Rev 9:20-21**
- **Repentance** **2Ch 33:12; Lk 15:17-18**
- **Blessing** **Ps 119:71** *See also* **Isa 38:17**
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suffering, of the innocent

Scripture does not teach that the wicked will suffer, whereas the innocent and blameless will prosper. It offers insights into the place of suffering in the lives of the innocent, and the apparent injustice of this situation.

The apparent injustice of suffering

- **Hab 1:13** *See also Job 19:7; 24:1,12; Ps 59:3-4; 74:1,11; 88:5,14*

The wrong answers to suffering

The concept that those who suffer must be sinners: Job 4:7; Jn 9:2-3
Eze 18:25 the idea that God is unjust

The wrong reactions to suffering

Job 2:9-10 resentment against God; Job 23:13-15 being terrified of God; Job 40:2 arguing with God; Ps 73:3 envying the wicked; Ps 73:13 disillusionment

The right reactions to suffering

- **Reverent submission Job 1:21** *See also Job 28:28; 34:12; 36:26; 37:19; 40:4; La 3:40,49-50; Mt 10:28*
- **Trust in God Ge 18:25; Ps 55:22-23** *See also Ex 2:23; Ps 56:3-4; 59:16; 62:5; 70:2; 107:6,13,19,28*
Ps 119:50,153; Da 3:17-18 the trust shown by Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego; Hab 3:17-18; 1Pe 2:23 the example of Jesus Christ; 1Pe 4:19; 5:7

God's reaction to suffering

- **Concern for those who suffer Ps 9:12** *See also Ex 2:25; 2Ki 14:26; Ps 1:6; 33:18-19; Jas 5:4*
- **Anger at the wicked Ps 11:5; 59:8; Eze 36:6-7; Hab 2:9,12**

God's response to suffering

- **Deliverance for those who suffer Ps 34:19** *See also Job 42:10-12; Rev 7:16; 21:4*
- **Judgment for the wicked Mal 3:5** *See also Ex 3:19-20; Ps 73:16-18; 141:10; Am 1:3; Na 3:1,19; Hab 2:16; Mt 25:41-46; Jas 2:13; 1Pe 4:18; Rev 18:6-7*

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suffering, of God

See 1135 God, suffering of

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suffering, of Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ suffered on behalf of his people, showing both the reality of his human nature, and the extent of his love for humanity. Those sufferings reached their climax in the sufferings of Jesus Christ upon the cross, through which God chose to redeem the world.

The OT foretold Jesus Christ's suffering

- **NT references to the OT Scriptures Lk 24:25-26** *See also Lk 24:46; Ac 3:18; 17:2-3; 26:22-23; 1Co 15:3*

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- **Types and foreshadowings of Jesus Christ's suffering** Ge 22:2,8,13; Ex 12:22-23; 1Sa 19:5; 2Sa 16:11-12; 1Ki 21:15; Ps 55:12-14; 57:4; Heb 13:11-12
- **Prophetic statements of Jesus Christ's suffering** Ge 3:15; Ps 2:2; 22:1,7-8,12-18; 69:21; Isa 53:3-12
- **Jesus Christ himself foretold his suffering**
Mt 16:21 pp Lk 9:22 *See also* Mt 17:12 pp Mk 9:12; Mt 20:18-19 pp Mk 10:33-34 pp Lk 18:31-32; Mk 9:31; Lk 17:25; 20:13-15 *compare with Naboth (1Kings chapter 21)*; Lk 22:15; Jn 12:27

Aspects in Jesus Christ's suffering

- **The enmity of Satan Ge 3:15**
In the temptation of Jesus Christ: Mt 4:1-3 pp Lk 4:1-3; Mt 4:5 pp Lk 4:9; Mt 4:8 pp Lk 4:5 pp Mk 1:13
Mt 16:23
In entering Judas Iscariot: Lk 22:3; Jn 13:27
Jn 14:30; Rev 12:4
- **The hatred of the world Jn 7:7** *See also* Mt 2:13; Jn 1:10; 3:20; 15:18-20; 1Co 2:8
- **Rejection by his own people Jn 1:11** *See also* Isa 53:1; Mt 23:37; Lk 19:41-42; 24:20; Jn 18:40; Ac 2:36; 3:13; 4:10; 1Th 2:14-15
- **The failure of his disciples Mk 14:50** pp Mt 26:56 *See also* Mt 16:22; 26:40,74-75; Lk 18:34
- **Betrayal by Judas Mt 26:23** pp Mk 14:18 pp Lk 22:21 pp Jn 13:21
- **God's judgment of his Son for the sins of the world Mt 27:46** pp Mk 15:34 *See also* Ps 22:1; Isa 53:5-6,10; Lk 22:42; Ro 3:25-26; 2Co 5:21; Gal 3:13; Heb 2:10,14; 1Pe 2:24
- **Jesus Christ's willing submission to suffering**
Mt 26:42 pp Mk 14:36 pp Lk 22:42 *See also* Isa 53:7,11; Lk 23:46; Heb 5:7-8; 12:2; 1Pe 2:23

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suffering, of believers

Believers ought to expect to suffer as an inevitable part of their calling. To believe is not to evade suffering; it is to face it with new confidence and hope. Rightly approached, suffering develops the character of believers, equips them for more effective service, draws believers closer to Jesus Christ and prepares them for eternal life.

Believers must expect suffering

- **Jesus Christ foretold it Mt 10:22** pp Mk 13:13 *See also* Mt 10:17; 23:34; 24:9; Lk 21:16-17
- **The apostles foretold it Ac 14:22; 2Ti 3:12** *See also* Php 1:29; 1Jn 3:13; Rev 2:10
- **The experience of the OT shows it Ro 8:36; Heb 11:25-26,32-38**

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- **The experience of the NT shows it** Ac 4:3; 5:40; 9:29; 12:1-3; **2Co** 11:23-29; **Gal** 3:4; **1Th** 2:2,14; **1Pe** 4:4; **Heb** 10:32-34

Suffering for Jesus Christ is commendable

Mt 5:10-12 pp Lk 6:20-23 *See also* Ac 5:41; **2Ti** 1:8; **1Pe** 2:19; 3:17; 4:12-16

Suffering is profitable

- **It affirms believers' adoption** Heb 12:7 *See also* Jn 15:19; 17:14; **Ro** 8:17; **Gal** 6:17; **2Th** 1:4-5
- **It is the price of godliness** Heb 12:11 *See also* Ps 119:67,71; **Isa** 38:17; **Jn** 15:2; **1Pe** 1:6-7
- **It is a condition of service** **2Co** 4:10; **Col** 1:24 *See also* Ps 126:5-6; **Ac** 9:16; 20:23-24; **1Co** 4:9-13; **2Co** 1:3-5; **Gal** 4:19; **Php** 3:18; **Col** 2:1; **2Ti** 1:11-12; 2:3,10
- **It develops trust** **2Co** 1:9 *See also* **1Pe** 4:19
- **It develops character** **Ro** 5:3-4 *See also* **Heb** 5:8; **Jas** 1:3
- **It deepens fellowship** **1Co** 12:26 *See also* **Ro** 12:15; **2Co** 1:7; 8:2; **Gal** 4:14-15; 6:2
- **It draws believers to the Lord** **Php** 3:8,10 *See also* **Job** 42:5; **2Co** 4:8-10; 12:9-10; **1Pe** 4:13
- **It prepares believers for heaven** **2Co** 4:16-5:4

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suffering, encouragements in

Believers are encouraged by the loving care and faithful promises of God and by the example, support and prayers of fellow believers. The prospect of heaven helps them to endure.

The encouragement of God's love

- **The care of the Father** Ps 103:13 *See also* Ps 86:17; **Isa** 50:10; 64:8-9; **Lk** 18:6-7; **Jn** 16:27; 17:11,15; **Ro** 8:32; **2Co** 1:3
- **The sympathetic understanding of Jesus Christ** Heb 2:18 *See also* **Isa** 40:11; 42:3; 53:5; **Lk** 4:18; **Isa** 61:1; **Jn** 14:27; 16:22; **Ro** 8:35-39; **Heb** 4:15; 7:25; 12:3
- **The comfort of the Spirit** **Jn** 14:16-17 *See also* **Lk** 11:13; **Ro** 5:5; 8:26; **Gal** 5:22-23; **Eph** 3:16; **1Pe** 4:14
- **The promises of God** Ps 119:50; **Ro** 8:28; **2Co** 12:9 *See also* **Isa** 41:10; 43:2-3; **Mt** 6:31-33; **Ro** 15:4; **Php** 4:7; **1Pe** 5:10

The encouragement of the fellowship of believers

- **Examples from the past** Heb 12:1 *See also* Ps 102:17-18; **Jer** 20:11; **Php** 4:11; **Heb** 11:25-26; **Jas** 5:10-11
- **Support from other believers** **1Th** 5:11 *See also* **Ru** 2:13; **Job** 42:11; **Ac** 28:15; **Ro** 16:4; **2Co** 7:6-7; **Php** 4:14; **Col** 4:11; **1Th** 2:11-12; 4:18; **2Ti** 4:9,11; **Phm** 13; **Heb** 10:25

The encouragement of looking ahead

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- **The assurance of victory Ro 8:37** See also **Ro 16:20; 1Co 15:20,25,55-57; 1Th 4:16-17**
- **The prospect of glory Ro 8:18** See also **Job 19:25-26; Isa 65:17; 2Co 4:17-5:1; 2Th 1:6-7; 2Pe 3:13; Jude 24-25; Rev 7:16-17; 21:1-4**

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suffering, emotional aspects of

Suffering gives rise to inner distress, on account of a sense of injustice, frustration, loss or anger. Christ himself provides an example of such suffering to believers.

Causes of emotional suffering

- **A sense of injustice Ps 119:53** See also **Job 19:7; Ps 82:2**
- **Frustration Job 19:8** See also **Job 23:8-9; 1Th 2:18**
- **Loss Ge 27:34** See also **Ru 1:20-21; Pr 5:11-14; La 1:12**
- **Bereavement 2Sa 18:33** See also **Ge 23:1-2; 37:34-35; 50:1-3; Ex 12:30; Dt 34:8; 2Sa 19:4; Mt 2:16-18; Jer 31:15; Jn 11:32-35**
- **Childlessness Ge 30:1** See also **1Sa 1:4-8**
- **Parting from loved ones Ac 20:38** See also **1Sa 20:41; 2Ki 2:12; SS 5:6-8**
- **Spiritual loss Lk 13:28** See also **Jdg 2:4; Mt 25:11**
- **Great fear Ge 45:3** See also **Ge 20:8; 32:7-8; Ex 20:18-19; 1Sa 17:24; 1Ki 19:3-4; Isa 21:2-4; Da 5:8-9; Lk 21:26**
- **Guilt Mt 27:3-4** See also **Ge 3:8; Jn 16:8; Ac 2:37; Heb 10:2,22**

Emotional suffering in the Lord's work

- **Jesus Christ's suffering Isa 53:3** See also **Mt 26:38** pp **Mk 14:34**
- **The apostles' suffering 2Co 11:28-29** See also **Ro 9:1-4; 1Co 15:31; 2Co 1:8-9; Gal 4:19**

Expressions of emotional suffering

- **Sadness Ne 2:1-3; Ps 107:39; 116:3; Mt 26:22** pp **Mk 14:19**
- **Weeping and groaning Jer 9:1**

Joseph wept as he saw his brothers again: Ge 42:24; 43:30; 45:1-2

2Sa 15:30 Covering the head and going barefoot were also signs of sorrow; Ezr 3:12-13; Ne 1:4; Ps 6:6-7; 32:3-4; 137:1; Isa 15:5; Jer 14:17; Mt 26:75 Peter wept bitterly after disowning Jesus Christ; Jn 11:35

- **Anger Jnh 4:1** See also **Ex 32:19-20; 2Sa 6:8; Rev 16:10-11**
- **Bitterness Ex 17:3; 1Sa 30:6; Job 3:1; 7:11; Jnh 4:3; Ro 3:14**

God's response to the emotional suffering of believers

- **He comforts them 2Co 1:3-4**
- **He has delivered them through Jesus Christ Isa 53:4**

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- **Jesus Christ gives them rest Jn 14:1** *See also Mt 11:28-30; Jn 14:27*
- **There is no suffering in heaven Rev 21:4** *See also Isa 35:10; Rev 7:17*

The proper response of believers to emotional suffering

- **Assessing the problem before God Ps 73:16-17; 119:78; Ro 8:28**
- **Controlled emotion before God Jdg 20:23; Ps 22:1-2; 62:8; 74:1**
- **Prayer Heb 5:7** *See also Ge 18:22-25; 32:9-11; Nu 16:22; 2Sa 12:15-17; Ps 38:9; 77:1-9; Jnh 2:1; Mk 5:22-23; Jas 5:13*
- **Continuing to do what is right Job 1:20-22; Eph 4:1; Php 1:27**

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suffering, causes of

The ultimate cause of suffering is sin, which has brought violence, disease and death into the world. All suffering, however, is under the sovereign purpose of God, who is able to use it for his glory.

The ultimate cause of suffering is sin

Ge 3:14-19

It need not be the result of particular sins: Job 1:1; Jn 9:1-3

Job 5:6-7; Ro 5:12-14

Suffering as a result of human wickedness

- **Murder Ge 4:8** *See also Ge 49:5-7; 1Sa 18:10-11*
- **Injury Mt 26:67**
- **Cruelty Ps 71:4** *See also Jdg 1:7; Ps 54:3; Am 1:13; Mt 2:16-18; Lk 10:30*
- **Rioting 2Ki 7:17; Ac 16:22**
- **Warfare Jer 50:22** *See also Ge 14:1-2,11-12; Ex 13:17; Jos 6:20-21; 10:22-26; Jdg 1:4-7; 1Ki 22:35; 2Ki 17:5-6; Zec 14:2; Lk 21:20-24; Rev 6:4*
- **Injustice Eze 9:9** *See also Ge 39:19-20; 1Ki 21:11-14; 2Ki 21:16; Ps 58:1-2; 64:6*
- **Oppression Ecc 4:1** *See also Ex 1:11; 1Ki 12:1-4,12-14; Ps 12:5; Jas 5:1-6*
- **Adultery 2Sa 12:9; Mal 2:14**
- **Theft Mt 6:19** *See also Ge 31:19; Job 1:14-15,17; 24:2*
- **Broken relationships Job 19:14-19; Ps 27:10; Pr 16:28; Ac 15:39**
- **Hatred Ps 109:3** *See also 2Sa 13:15; Tit 3:3*
- **Jealousy Ge 37:4** *See also Ge 4:4-5; 16:6; 21:8-10; 1Sa 18:8-9; Mt 27:18*
- **Persecution Jn 15:20** *See also Jer 38:6; Da 3:4-6; 6:7; Mt 5:10-12; 10:35-36; Rev 6:9-11*

Suffering as a result of misfortune

- **Accidents 2Sa 4:4; 2Ki 1:2; Lk 13:4**
- **Sickness Ge 48:1** *See also 2Ki 20:1; Job 2:7; Ps 42:10; Mt 8:6; Ac 28:8; Php 2:27; 2Ti 4:20; Jas 5:14*
- **Hunger and want Ge 12:10; Job 30:3; Isa 5:13; Mt 25:42-43**
- **Natural disasters 1Ki 22:48; Job 1:16,18-19; Isa 29:6; Joel 1:4; Zec 14:5; Mt 24:7; Ac 27:18-20**

Suffering through old age and death

- **Ageing 2Sa 19:34-35; Ps 71:9; Ecc 12:1**
- **Bereavement Ge 23:1-2; Job 1:18-19; Lk 7:11-13; Jn 11:33-35; Jas 1:27**

Suffering through anxiety

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Pr 12:25 *See also* Dt 28:65-67; Lk 21:26

Suffering through foolishness

Ps 107:17 *See also* Jdg 11:34-36; Pr 10:1; 11:15; 14:1; 23:29-30; Lk 15:17

Suffering through Satanic activity

- The influence of Satan Ge 3:1 *See also* Job 1:12; 2:6-7; Lk 13:16; 1Jn 5:19; Rev 2:10; 20:7-8
- Demon-possession Mt 8:28; 12:22; 15:22

Suffering brought about by God himself

- All suffering comes within his will Jn 9:3; Eph 1:11
- Some suffering is for his immediate glory Jn 21:19
- Jesus Christ's suffering produces salvation Isa 53:10 *See also* Ac 2:23
- Christian suffering produces good fruits Ro 5:3-4; 2Co 1:9; Heb 12:11; Jas 1:2,3
- God's people must be disciplined Heb 12:7 *See also* Ex 32:35; 2Sa 12:13-14; Ps 119:67,71; Pr 3:11-12; Heb 12:8-11
- The wicked must be punished Ro 6:23 *See also* Ge 6:5-7; Jn 5:14; 2Th 1:8; Rev 9:4; 20:15

Suffering accepted voluntarily

- By Jesus Christ 1Pe 2:21 *See also* Isa 53:3-5,10; Lk 9:22
- By his people 2Co 12:15 *See also* 2Co 4:10-12; Php 3:10; Heb 11:35
- For the good of others Jn 15:13 *See also* Ro 5:7; Phm 18

See also

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suffering, hardship

Scripture provides examples of types of hardship which people may expect to encounter.

Different kinds of hardship

- Poverty Pr 10:15 *See also* Dt 15:11; Job 24:5-11; Mt 26:11 pp Mk 14:7; Jn 12:8
- Hunger and thirst Ps 107:4-5 *See also* Ge 41:53-57; Ex 15:22-24; 16:2-3; 17:1-3; Nu 11:4-6; 1Ki 17:7-12; Ne 5:1-5; Mt 4:2 pp Lk 4:2
- Hard labour Ge 3:17-19 *See also* Ge 31:38-42; 2Ch 10:3-4; Ecc 2:21-22; 1Th 2:9
- Oppression Job 35:9 *See also* Ex 1:11; 2:23; 5:8-9; 2Ki 4:1; Ps 12:5; 31:9-13; Ecc 4:1; Jer 6:6; Am 3:9; Jas 5:4
- Danger Ne 4:21-23 *See also* Ex 18:8; 1Ki 2:26; 1Ch 11:15-19; Ac 27:27-44

Examples of those who suffered hardship

- Israel Dt 28:47-48 *God's people suffered under his chastisement. See also* Dt 8:15 *their suffering in the wilderness; Dt 26:6-7 their suffering in Egypt*
- David was oppressed by his enemies Ps 132:1
- Paul suffered in serving the Lord 2Co 6:4-5

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God's people must endure hardship

- **The example of Jesus Christ** *See also 2Co 8:9*
- **The suffering of believers** **Ac 14:21-22** *See also 1Co 4:11-13; 2Co 1:8-9; 11:23-29; Php 4:11-14; 2Ti 2:3; Heb 10:34; 11:37-38; 12:7; Rev 2:3*
- **The need for faith, courage and endurance** **2Co 1:9; Heb 3:6; 10:36; Jas 1:12; Rev 1:9; 14:12**

God helps his people through hardship

- **He provides for them** **Dt 8:16; 1Ki 17:2-9; 2Co 1:10; Php 1:19; 4:19**
- **He comforts them with his love** **Ro 8:35-39; 2Co 1:3-4; Heb 13:5**
- **He sets heaven before them** **Rev 7:16-17**

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NOTES:

No Pain, No Gain: The Role of Suffering and Grief

“Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

Grief is the one pain that heals all others. It is the most important pain there is.

I hate exercise, but I do it. I hate lifting weights and riding my exercise bike, but I do it. I do it because, if I do, I will be healthier, will live longer, and will feel better. Plus I (Henry) have an eleven-month-old daughter who would like to have a father who lives long enough to know her children. My love for her makes me exercise to stay healthy.

Why bring up exercise in a chapter on suffering and grief? Well, first of all, it shows you that I am naturally lazy. But seriously, I bring it up because physical exercise and suffering is analogous to personal growth and suffering. ***Pain can bring health.*** As we go through the pain of exercising our bodies, we gain strength and good things happen. But there is something else at work.

Physiologists tell us there is a reason I am sore after I lift weights; in fact, as I write this, I am really sore, as I just resumed weight lifting after several months off. I am sore because I have worked my muscles past their ability; I have stretched their capacity. After my workout they recreate and rejuvenate and grow back to a higher level of development than before. I tear down to rebuild. And through the process of pain, growth happens. I hate it, but it is good.

The same God who designed and created our muscles designed and created our souls. He also created the process of growing them and rebuilding them from their fallen, crippled state. Just as we stretch our muscles to make them stronger, God stretches our souls to grow them into something stronger and better. Sometimes he literally “wounds” and “heals” (Isa. 30:26). And it is true that “blows and wounds cleanse away evil, and beatings purge the inmost being” (Prov. 20:30). Certain suffering tears down aspects of our character that need to be torn down and builds up

¹ Manser, M. H. (2009). [*Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies*](#). Martin Manser.

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new aspects that we need in order to live as we were designed to live. So suffering can be good. It can take us to places where one more season of “comfort” cannot.

But suffering can also be terrible. Some suffering is not a “wound...to heal.” Such suffering inflicts evil on a person’s heart and soul and is totally outside God’s desire. Although God can bring good out of the experience, the experience itself is no good at all.

I sometimes use this analogy when I speak: “If one of you walked out of this meeting and a guy with a mask walked up to you in the dark parking lot, took out a knife, stabbed you in the stomach, took all your money, and left you in an unconscious state, you would call him a mugger. Someone would call the police, and they would try to find the perpetrator.

“But if you left this meeting, drove down the street to the local hospital, and a guy with a mask came to you in a brightly lit room, took out a knife, cut your stomach open, took all your money, and left you in an unconscious state, you would call him a doctor and thank him for helping you. One is a mugging, and the other is surgery.”

Suffering is a lot like that. There is therapeutic suffering, and there is destructive suffering at the hands of evil people. The key is to be able to tell the difference between the two and to apply the right kind of experience to each. Too often in the church those who have been “mugged” have been told that God is trying to teach them a lesson or that what they are going through is a result of their own sin or that it is part of the growth process.

This is what happened to Job. His suffering was not the result of some sin he had done; in fact, he suffered because he was doing such a good job in life. God pointed Job out as an example of righteousness (Job 1:8), and then God allowed him to suffer for his purposes (see also John 9:2–3).

But his friends did not know that. In fact, what they told him regarding his suffering reminds us of some things we hear in churches today. **He was told that he did not have enough faith, did not trust God enough, had sin in his life, did not know God’s Word well enough, and so on.** All the reasons for his suffering were based on something being “wrong” with his spiritual state. And God was angry about the advice Job’s friends gave to him, declaring that they were not right (Job 42:7).

So the first thing we want to do is to distinguish between the muggings and the “growth sufferings.” When life mugs someone, we need to give him or her healing, support, love, and comfort. We need to give strength and life support to those who are weak from things that have happened to them (1 Thess. 5:14). We are to “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2 NASB) and help each other through tough times. (Chapter 14 goes into this in more detail.) We hurt, and we need help.

When dealing with your own suffering or that of others, therefore, first ferret out hurt and suffering that needs healing and support. Get that for yourself, or give it to those you are helping. Make sure you are not getting the wrong advice—advice that does not in anyway fit the pain. This is “worthless” medicine, and it would be better if your friends would just be quiet (Job 13:4–5). Also check yourself before giving advice to others who are suffering. Make sure you are not ascribing fault where there is none. God does not like that, and neither will the recipient. In fact, it may even drive him or her away from God. As Job said, “For the despairing man there should be kindness from his friend; so that he does not forsake the fear of the Almighty” (Job 6:14 NASB).

GOOD PAIN

AS WE JUST SAID, some pain is “good for nothing” and should not be treated as if it has purposeful value. Our character does not grow in the same way, although we may develop the fruit of faith, perseverance, and a deep capacity of empathy for others.

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But other suffering does have value and produce growth. I call this “good pain.” Dan is an illustration of how good pain can lead to growth.

Dan was a success in life. He had built a big business, made many “friends,” and had a beautiful family. He was respected in his community and was a leader in his church. To many, Dan had it made.

Then two unexpected things wounded Dan deeply. First, he experienced business problems. He had highly leveraged himself for some growth opportunities right before a major downturn in the market. Without warning, he found himself on the brink of insolvency. His behavior became erratic. He lost his temper with the people he worked with. Concerned about his leadership—as well as for him as a friend and a person—his colleagues went to his board of directors to let them know that all was not well. At first the board was divided on what to do. A few men on the board were “yes man” types for Dan, and they were very reluctant to intervene and tell him that he was wrong.

But then something else happened. Dan’s wife, Abi, left him. During the crisis at work, Dan’s erratic behavior had spilled over into his home. He frequently lost his temper and then withdrew from his wife more and more. For a long time Abi had been dissatisfied with the marriage. Dan had always worked too much, and he had always been perfectionistic and difficult to get close to, but she had felt these things were not important enough to leave her for.

Yet now the situation had gotten much worse. The more stress Dan felt at work, the more he exploded at home with her and the children. More than his usual distance, a real wall had been erected between the two of them. She felt she could no longer make the marriage work. So one day she decided to leave. She packed up, took the kids, and flew to her parents’ home five hundred miles away. She left a note that said, “I’m safe, but I just can’t take it anymore. I’ll call you. Don’t call me.”

These developments at home put Dan over the edge at the office, so finally the board stepped in. They told him they were relieving him of his duties immediately, both because of the company’s performance as well as the staff’s complaints. Dan hit the roof. He screamed betrayal. He fought and lobbied the board members to allow him to keep his responsibilities. They held the line. They told him they were open to his coming back, but only after he got his temper under control.

Dan’s anger turned to despair. He did not know what to do with a situation he could not control or perform himself out of. His charm and salesmanship were not working, on either his board or his wife. He pleaded and begged. But nobody was listening. He became more and more depressed and finally stopped going out of the house.

At this point one of Dan’s advisers suggested he call me. When he did, I recognized his name. I had heard about his life and career, and he was an impressive figure. During the initial phone call I did not ask him what was happening, but just agreed to see him and his wife as he requested.

When I met with them, I could tell this meeting had not been his wife’s idea. His adviser had talked Abi into coming in with him, but she had very little hope for the relationship. She said she had tried for years to reach him, to no avail. “Why would it be any different now?” she asked. As she told her side of the story, she surprised herself at how disgusted, hurt, and hopeless she felt. Having always tried to be the “good Christian wife,” she had never let herself realize how bad things really were.

When Dan told his side of the story, he was full of promises to Abi of being different and wanting her back. This is standard behavior for a previously oblivious husband shocked into reality by a potential divorce.

What I saw was the depths of dysfunction into which this “pillar” of leadership had sunk in a few short months. Not long before, people had sought his friendship, advice, and company. Now he was a wreck. He hid from everyone who cared about him.

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As I asked him about his background, I began to understand the “whys.” His father had died when he was very young, and his mother was an angry and difficult woman. Early on, he had learned to nurture himself and use his talents, brains, and charm to make it through life. His being a star athlete in high school and college had led to good connections later, and hard work had parlayed those into business success. And having been in a religious culture that valued status more than true spiritual maturity, he had risen in the ranks of leadership in his church as well.

What I saw was an entire life, identity, and security base built on sand—the sands of performance, admiration, and status. (The Bible refers to these things as wood, hay, and stubble.) When the difficulties came, this foundation could not withstand the winds and the rains of tribulation. And the house crumbled (see Matt. 7:24–27). This is what had happened to Dan.

So, in spite of his difficult nature, worthless panic-driven bargaining, and defensiveness, I empathized with him. I knew he had become who he was by trying to hold things together the best he knew how. But I knew something else that was very good news indeed.

As I reflected on Abi’s rhetorical question of “Why would it be any different now?” I had an answer for her. While Abi and Dan had had difficult times in the past—**what I would call “bad pain,” that is, pain that produces no change**—this time would be different. For what they were both going through now was something **I would call “good pain.” This time Dan had been reduced to a place where his old coping methods no longer worked. They were all gone.**

Dan used to make up for the emptiness inside by performing, winning, and charming others into admiring him. One victory after another kept him afloat emotionally, but he always needed another fix. This time another fix was not coming, and he was trapped; the pain and lack of an internal life had caught up with him. All of the struts that had propped him up for years had been taken away. And Abi, who had always been there to make him comfortable and secure without his relating or getting close, was no longer playing the placating role. So Dan was left with his pain.

Abi did not have to worry about his old coping methods coming back to haunt her. **The old Dan was dying. God himself was putting him to death. But whenever God crucifies one of his children, he resurrects them to glory. This is what I thought was happening to Dan, to her, and to their relationship if they could stay the course and let suffering do its work.**

At first, Dan wanted me to make it all go away. **I had to “convert” him to the idea that the only way “out” was “through.”** He was going to have to face some painful realities, and if he did that, he would never have to do it again. In the end, he would not be standing on sand, but on solid ground.

So we went to work. Dan had to face the pain of his isolation. He had to face the anxiety of giving up all his controlling behaviors. He had to face the pain of the losses and hurts he had been hiding for all those years. He had to deal with strong underlying feelings of inferiority for which he was always trying to compensate with his performance.

It took a while, but in the end, Dan got to a much more “complete” state than if he had never crashed. He and Abi learned to connect at much deeper levels. For the first time he found more satisfaction in going on a walk with her than in making that next business deal. He also learned how to work in a saner fashion and to treat people better at work. The ways that he dealt with stress changed completely. As a result, he was able to go back to work and do it all very differently this time. He retained his talents, but he lost his former driven style.

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I was reminded of the words of James: **“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything”** (James 1:2–5).

Dan did not “consider it pure joy” when it all first hit him and his life became a world of trials. He thought he was going to die. And he was right, just not in the literal sense. What would die were his old character patterns. It was God’s design for those to die. As a result, Dan was resurrected into a new life, one that truly was “the life of God” (Eph. 4:18). In many ways, because of the death he died, he was alive for the first time.

As James puts it, when Dan persevered through the trial of the breakdown of his old ways of coping, he worked through the issues and was made “complete.” He got to a place where he was not “lacking anything.” He now had love within his soul and the ability to connect with others, to be real, and to find healing. The fiery trial had done its work. Although his own patterns caused his downfall, God organized the circumstances that would force him to face them.

This suffering is like that caused by the surgeon, not the mugger. Dan was not a healthy man, stabbed and left for dead and in need of a Good Samaritan. Dan was a sick, incomplete man in need of major surgery. And that is what God did in his life. The circumstances were the “wounding” from the surgeon’s knife; the deep work in the soul was the constructive surgery itself. In the end, Dan was put back together much better than before.

STRETCHING THE SOUL AND PUSHING THROUGH

WE ALL HAVE COPING mechanisms that cover up pain, help us deal with fear, enable us to cope with relational inabilities, and help us hold it all together. Trials and suffering push those mechanisms past the breaking point so we find out where we need to grow. Then true spiritual growth begins at deeper levels, and we are healed. Righteousness and character take the place of coping.

This kind of suffering is good. It breaks down and stretches the “weak muscle” of the soul and replaces it with stronger muscle. As Paul tells us, “We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Rom. 5:3–5). **In this suffering, the prize we win is character—a very valuable prize indeed.**

When we exercise, we have to push through. The runner feels as if she cannot take another step, but she keeps going to reach a higher level. The weight lifter does not think he can take another repetition, but he keeps pressing to get to a new level.

The same thing is true in character growth: We stretch to grow. We push through the fear, the vulnerability, and the pain. We embrace suffering to reach a higher level. We have to ask others and ourselves to push through some very painful and scary things:

- Reaching out from a vulnerable heart
- Making a vulnerable heart available to be known
- Confessing sin and failure to oneself and others
- Facing hurt and pain and allowing others to see it and be there in it
- Taking risks in new areas of performance
- Taking risks to be more honest
- Taking risks in relational confrontation
- Dealing with trauma and pain from the past
- Becoming assertive
- Becoming active in life to get one’s needs met

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- Taking responsibility for our weaknesses and growing beyond them
- Learning to grieve
- Learning to forgive
- Learning to ask for forgiveness and to make amends
- Learning to reconcile difficult relationships

The list goes on and on—to just about as many areas as there are verses in the New Testament! God requires a lot from us. In fact, he requires it all. Maturity and completion are our goals. He does say that we will not get there completely, but at the same time he tells us to press on toward those goals at all times (Phil. 3:12; Eph. 5:13–16). This is good pain—pain that leads somewhere. As we have pointed out elsewhere, discipline does not seem joyful for the moment; it seems painful. But in the end it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness (Heb. 12:11). What was true for Jesus is true for us:

During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (Heb. 5:7–9).

Suffering is the path Jesus modeled for us, and he modeled how to do it right. He went through it all without sin and with obedience. This is the difference between those who suffer to a good end and those who suffer to no good end at all.

Every day a million Dans go through the kind of suffering he did, with no good end at all. They do not do it according to the will of God. They do not do it as Jesus did, being obedient all the way to death.

In our lives, as Dan found, the death of certain aspects of character has to happen to get to the healing we need. Jesus modeled going the distance, even to death. He modeled facing suffering with an eye toward his father, knowing that he could deliver him if he desired, but that God had a greater purpose in having him go through the process instead. This is what our attitude toward suffering has to be as well.

So, as you are working through things in your own life or are helping others, make sure that you teach and value this kind of suffering. Have people look at their trials with the question, “What can I learn through this?” As James 1:5 says, have them look to God for wisdom to find out what steps of maturity and growth have to happen in their lives. If those steps are taken and completed, they will not have to take the same course again.

BAD PAIN

BAD PAIN COMES FROM repeating old patterns and avoiding the suffering it would take to change them, because many times people suffer because of their own character faults. Then other people come alongside them and give them comfort or a spiritual pep talk about how God is with them in this testing. They usually frame the experience as the testing of an innocent person. “Keep the faith,” these people say, “and God will reward you for persevering.”

The problem is that these people don’t tell the sufferers that the suffering is the fruit of their own character and is of no value unless they see it as a wake-up call. This is false martyrdom. It happens when the divorce recovery group comes to the aid of the “victim” of that “bad ex” instead of making the person see the patterns he or she needs to face to keep from repeating them in a new marriage.

It happens with the false support that people get when they lose a job because of performance issues and their friends and family see them as a “victim” of a bad boss or company. The friends would do well to say instead, “Have you thought about what is true about what they said? Have you thought about the pattern in your life of work and

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jobs that is not going well? Have you thought about the fact that you are the common denominator with all of those 'bad' bosses?"

Bad pain is basically *wasted* pain. It is the pain we go through to avoid the good pain of growth that comes from pushing through. It is the wasted pain we encounter as we try to avoid grief and true hurt that needs to be worked through. It is the wasted pain of trying to get a person to love us or approve of us instead of facing the loss of this love and moving on.

But in too many support circles, people are supported in ways that do not make them face the growth steps they need to take to keep from repeating their mistakes. They are seen as victims and are then set up for failure all over again. Here are some examples of "bad pain":

- Pain that comes from avoiding pain, such as psychological depression that comes from avoiding grief, and anxiety that comes from not facing troublesome things inside one's soul.
- Pain that comes from not facing a character pattern that needs to be changed. Codependent people, for example, who lack boundaries and allow themselves to be used, suffer wasted and needless pain.
- Pain that comes from picking the wrong kinds of people to be close to, in friendship or romance. This pain usually comes from not facing patterns of denial in one's own life and then having relationship blindness when looking at others.
- Pain that comes from repeating failing patterns in work and performance. This comes from not facing weaknesses, irresponsibility, or undeveloped skills or talents.
- Pain that comes from addictions and other clinical syndromes.
- Pain that comes from avoiding growth in general. Life makes demands, and if we stay immature, we can't make life work.
- Pain that comes from not separating from destructive family of origin patterns, the "sins of the fathers." Thus, patterns are repeated for another generation.
- Pain that comes from lack of forgiveness and not letting go of bad relationships and injuries.
- Pain that comes from desiring things from the past that will never come true.
- Pain that comes from isolation and not learning how to become interdependent.

The list goes on. But the point here is that a lot of pain comes from not facing our own issues that repetitively cause pain. As the Bible says, "As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly" (Prov. 26:11). Or as Jesus said, "When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first" (Luke 11:24–26).

As Jesus implies, something needs to happen inside this man's house. He needs to fill his house with spiritual growth, and then there will be no room for darkness to come back in. Not facing the growth that we have to face always leads to further suffering—and the further suffering is usually progressively worse. If a person is not facing things, the dynamics and symptoms and relationships get worse as time goes on.

HOW TO AVOID BAD PAIN AND EMBRACE GOOD PAIN

FOR THOSE GROWING AND for those who minister to them, the call is threefold. First, *do not refer to pain and suffering caused by character patterns as "growth pain."* Unless you can use this pain as a wake-up call, it is worthless. If you see it as valid suffering God is putting someone through, or as God's testing someone's faith, or as someone being the "victim" of someone else's mistakes, the pain will be wasted, and it will continue or return. It is not legitimate suffering. It is the fruit of a lack of growth.

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Not long ago I ran into a friend of mine, who caught me up on someone I hadn't seen for ten years. His was a sad story. He basically was stuck in the career misfires he was in the last time I had seen him. What stood out for me was a particular character pattern. Literally every conversation I had ever had with him was dominated by his talking about how someone else was to blame for whatever was going on in his life. It was his last boss or his graduate school professor or his church or certain friends or people in the community who had done him wrong. It was *never* him. Never. I never once heard him say that any of his problems had anything to do with his performance, his procrastination, his lack of initiative, or his lack of action. It saddened me that he had not learned his lesson, and it did not surprise me that he was still stuck ten years later.

None of the pain and loss he had experienced for the last ten years was redemptive. None of it had taught him anything. But it could have, just like Dan's, if he could have seen the lessons his troubles could teach him. Part of the blame probably belonged to the people around him, including his wife, who were not pointing out those lessons to him. The Bible tells us that if we do not confront people to take ownership of their problems, we share in the guilt of those problems (Ezek. 3:18–21; Lev. 19:17).

The second call is, *help people own worthless pain so that it can be redeemed and turned into "good pain."* If people can see the character patterns causing their pain, they can redeem and change them. If a pattern can be owned, a pattern can be changed. But as long as we mistakenly see it as "legitimate suffering by a victim," nothing good can happen.

This kind of redemption happens frequently in codependency movements. When codependents recognize that they are suffering from lack of boundaries and poor choices, they often join a group where group members can help them confront their codependent patterns and own them. Then they go into the legitimate suffering of making difficult changes in themselves and their relationships. When they do that, they can transform their worthless suffering into the suffering of growth, and good things happen.

This brings us to the third call: *Help convert worthless suffering into redemptive suffering.* In other words, help them resolve the issues. Help others see that they are not just victims like the man in the story of the Good Samaritan. Help them to see instead that their suffering is coming from trying to avoid the legitimate suffering of growth, and help them with *these issues*. It is a very human trait to try to avoid the suffering of discipline and growth. We all do it. But the wiser we become, the more we value the pain of growth and despise the avoidance patterns in our lives. Help them face what must be faced and deal with it.

PETER: THE RELUCTANT SUFFERER

I WAS TALKING TO a group of about a hundred experienced pastors and church growth leaders in a training seminar. The topic for the day was how to help people grow spiritually in ways that affect real life. I began by giving them a hypothetical problem to solve.

"If you had to arm your parishioners with protection from sin, how would you do it? What do you think is the best armor they could wear? What do you think would best equip them to not act out sinful patterns in their lives?"

Hands went up. I called on them one by one.

"I would teach them to pray."

"That's good," I said. "Prayer is good."

"I would teach them to stay in the Word."

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“That’s good, too,” I said. “Being strong in God’s Word is a big part of the picture. Any others?”

“Fellowship.”

“Not placing themselves in temptation.”

“Getting lots of support.”

“Those are all good,” I said. “Those are very important aspects of spiritual growth and becoming strong. But there is one aspect of spiritual growth that is particularly stated to be ‘armor’ against sin. Anyone know what that is?”

No one raised a hand.

“That’s okay!” I said. “I did not notice it for a long time either. But let me read it to you. It is from 1 Peter 4:1–2: ‘Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.’ What the Bible says is that having an attitude of embracing suffering will protect against sin. Let me tell you how that works.”

What I told them was the story of Peter, the reluctant sufferer.

The apostle Peter changed from a man who avoided suffering to one who valued it. In the beginning he was not into the idea of suffering at all. When Jesus said that he was going to suffer and die, it was Peter who told him there was no need for that (Matt. 16:21–22). Jesus promptly told him, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

Jesus did not stop there. He taught a profound lesson on the value of suffering: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it” (vv. 24–25).

Right in the midst of Peter’s attempt to get Jesus to avoid the suffering he came to do—the suffering he came to model for us as the path to resurrection—Jesus calls us not to avoid suffering, but to embrace it. He says that we must forsake the pattern of trying to save ourselves and instead pick up our cross and die. Think of what this means in terms of growth.

Dan had tried for years to “save himself.” He thought he could perform his way around the growth needed in his soul. He thought he could avoid the pain of facing his hurts, losses, and character patterns. Depending on his wit and abilities, he thought, would get him through and offer healing and salvation for life. Instead, Jesus’ words proved true. Dan’s attempts to save himself were the very ones that ended up costing him everything. His attempts to avoid his pain and save himself by performing promoted the growth of the cancers eating away at his soul, his career, and his marriage. And he was close to losing it all.

When Dan decided to pick up his cross and follow Jesus, he “learned obedience from what he suffered” (Heb. 5:8). As he faced his cross and went through the death experience of things he had lost and the character patterns that needed to die, he found life as he had never known it before. By suffering, by picking up his cross and being obedient to the suffering of growth and character change, he experienced salvation from his sin.

This is exactly what Peter found out. The same Peter who, like Dan, thought suffering and death should not be included in the plan later said, “Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, *arm yourselves also with the same*

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attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God” (1 Peter 4:1–2).

Peter came to see suffering as *armor!* He came to see suffering as *protection* against sin. He came to see that if we go through the suffering we need to go through, then we are “done with sin” (or at least the sin that had to do with that particular growth step). As for Dan, he had no armor against the pressures of marriage and stress. Because he had never done the necessary suffering of growth, he was vulnerable to the failures of the cracks in his soul and character. But when he learned to embrace the suffering, he was done with the patterns that were wrecking his life. This is the lesson that I had hoped the friend I had not seen for ten years would have learned.

THE REAL SUFFERING OF CHRIST

“ARM YOURSELVES ALSO WITH the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.” Most likely we will not face a brutal execution as Jesus did. So how are we to identify with the sufferings of Christ? How can we arm ourselves with his attitude and purpose? How can we help others to do so? There are many ways, but a few are intimately connected to the growth process.

The Kenosis, or Emptying Experience of Godhood

The first way to arm ourselves with the attitude of Christ is to “empty” ourselves. Jesus emptied himself by giving up “equality with God.” Paul describes this emptying (*kenosis* in Greek) this way:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

but made himself nothing,

taking the very nature of a servant,

being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself

and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Phil. 2:5–8)

It is a humbling, suffering, lifelong experience to empty ourselves of the wish to be godlike. We saw in chapter 2 what happens when we try to play God. We cannot “grasp” being the source of life to ourselves, or being in control of everything, or being the boss, or being the judge, or writing the rules, or any of the other aspects of Godhood. It is impossible for us to play God, yet we try. *To humble ourselves constantly and to take the role of God’s bondservant is the path of all growth.* When we become a servant and take the obedient position, we grow by getting smaller. We ascend by descending. This begins it all. Assuming the humble position of bowing to God instead of trying to be him starts the process. We first obey the Spirit of Grace by accepting his love and forgiveness. We then continue by humbling ourselves to obey the rest of his desires and will for us.

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It was a suffering, humbling experience for Rich and Stephanie (whom we met in chapter 3) to give up their “godlikeness” to grow. But it saved their marriage because *God designed marriage—and the rest of human life—for humans, not for himself*. Life only works when we are being human. It does not work when we are playing God.

“Not My Will, But Yours Be Done”

The second way to arm ourselves with the attitude of Christ is to submit to God’s will. We can identify with Jesus’ suffering by identifying with what Jesus experienced in the garden of Gethsemane. When Jesus realized that the time of his crucifixion was drawing near, he sweat “like drops of blood” and in deep anguish asked God for his suffering to end. He did not want to go through what he had to go through. Yet he submitted to the path God had placed before him and went through it. This submission to suffering was the key. He prayed to God to be relieved, yet he said, “Not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42).

In all growth we have to bend the knee to God’s path for us rather than going our own way. Just as Jesus could have bailed out on going through what he had to do, so can we. And we often do. But if we don’t—if instead we submit to God’s will—then we grow.

The most basic means of choosing our own way and not God’s is to decide not to suffer. Instead, we choose our own way by taking Satan’s solution and giving in to the temptation to medicate the pain instead of dealing with it. Sex, substances (the lust of the flesh), performance (the pride of life), and materialism (the lust of the eyes) help us avoid suffering. But none of these serves as the armor we need. They lead to suffering that is not redemptive, and eventually they cannot carry the weight of the problems they try to mask. To choose God’s will, not our own, is to turn from those options directly to the problems themselves.

A more subtle way we choose our own way and not God’s is to rely on our old defensive maneuvers. Adam and Eve used a fig leaf to hide from what was inside (as well as outside), and we continue to do that. To choose God’s will and not our own is to face our defense mechanisms and give them up. When we do so, we find that we have to deal with our problems. Then some of the deepest character growth happens.

Tony found this to be true. He came to counseling to find out why he had never been able to sustain a romantic relationship all the way to marriage. He had had some wonderful girlfriends, but for some reason, with each one he would always lose interest and move away from the relationship.

The more we looked at Tony’s patterns of relating, the more we saw something. Whenever a woman Tony was dating would confront him, he would argue with her and become defensive. To ward off the criticism, he would label her “controlling” or “demanding” or “critical.” I watched him go through a few relationships, and the pattern was clear. He was seeing as “controlling” and “demanding” women who were not even close to this description.

As this pattern emerged, I asked him to take a close look at it. At first he fought me. He said that I just did not see what his girlfriends were really like, because if I did, I would agree with him. I could not get Tony to see that he was distorting his relationships with women. So instead of that route, I took another one.

“Tony, let’s say that you’re right,” I said. “So what? So she is being critical. How does that justify your getting argumentative and withdrawing from the relationship? Every woman is going to do something you don’t like.”

“Yeah, but this is really bad,” he retorted, trying to justify his pattern. “This still doesn’t change the fact that you are acting like a baby,” I said. “What is your problem that you cannot stand there when you are being criticized and deal with it? Why do you have to run? Who is the man in the relationship? I thought you were supposed to be the strong one.”

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He at first tried to justify his defensive behavior, but finally I got him to see something important: *Just because someone else does something wrong does not mean that I have to.* Jesus taught us this lesson in his handling of relationships. He did not return “evil for evil.” Instead, no matter how he was being treated, he responded in grace and truth.

So I got Tony to see that even if his girlfriends were being critical and controlling, this did not give him the excuse to be that way. If he were going to get well, he was going to have to get “righteous”!

But Tony did not want to get healthy in this relationship, he told me. He thought that I was asking him to put up with a critical woman. I reassured him that I was not asking him to marry anyone. I was just asking him to be who he was supposed to be and see what he learned. It did not matter if he married her or not, I explained. He still was under the command to learn how to relate as God wanted him to.

Tony worked on his defensiveness. He had to suffer to say, “Not my will, but yours.” He had to confess that his pattern of defensiveness was not what God wanted of him, no matter how the other person was acting.

So he suffered—through many interactions. He had to confess his patterns of detaching when things got heated and of withdrawing when things got uncomfortable. And when he did, he found out some things. Underneath all of those defensive character patterns were fear and hurt. He had been hurt and controlled a lot when he was young, and three things had happened. First, he had never faced the wounding and fear inside of him. Second, he had learned some maladaptive ways of handling relationships to keep women away from him and feel a false sense of power. Third, he had never learned the right way to feel powerful in a relationship, which is to stand there and be honest.

When he decided to suffer and say no to his defensive character patterns, doing God’s will and not his own, Tony found his soul. But he was not happy at first. He found a soul that had to face its hurt, weakness, and fear. It also had to face its inability to relate directly with conflict and had to develop some new skills. In the process, some other things changed as well.

As he became stronger and less wounded, Tony saw women differently. They were not so threatening. He was able to take criticism and stay in a conflict. He stopped withdrawing defensively and learned to be direct and honest. He even learned to own it when his woman friend was right and apologize instead of just seeing the criticism as part of a “controlling woman’s” problems.

It was not long before Tony fell in love, this time for good. He met a wonderful woman and got married.

What is really interesting to me is that the woman he married was much stronger than many of the others he had dated. This time, when she would get upset or assert herself, he would see it as cute, or he would empathize with how she must be feeling and try to do something to help. But he never saw her as controlling or demanding. He just loved her and contained all of her strong reactions. Not only did he not run in a defensive way, but he now was strong enough to do what Jesus did in tough situations: “the will of God.”

Not Returning Evil For Evil

The third way to arm ourselves with the attitude of Christ is to not retaliate. We saw the way Tony discovered the dynamic of not “returning evil for evil.” The breakthrough for him did not come by my helping him to see that the women he dated were good and not bad. Although this was an important insight, it was not the most important one. For even if he could have seen that, which he could not (see Matt. 7:5), it would not have helped in the long run. What would have happened if that “good” woman had ever done anything not so good? Then he would have thought he was justified in his own dysfunctional, defensive, and even sinful responses. It would have just set him up for

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more broken relationships in the future, because he would have needed “goodness” from the other to be good himself.

What he had to see was this: *His level of health and maturity could not be dependent on someone else’s. If it were, he would be a slave to someone else’s immaturity.*

I had to show Tony that regardless of how he was treated, he had to give back better than he received. He had to overcome evil with good, and in that lay his “salvation” from other people’s problems. It did not matter how “controlling” someone else was or wasn’t. As Paul said, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21).

The only question Tony had to be concerned with at that time was his ability to deal with conflict and relationship. My challenge to him was this: “If every time a woman is upset with you, you get defensive and run away, you don’t have a chance of ever getting married. You are a dependent child, and children should never get married.”

Ultimately, we are only as healthy as our ability to relate as God relates. He is honest, loving, and forgiving, communicates well, is able to be vulnerable, and so on. This is health. This is righteousness. Good relating equals good health. So if I can be drawn into sick patterns or sick relatedness by someone else’s sick patterns, then I am not healthy at all. I am dependent and at the mercy of whatever treatment I am receiving at the moment.

This is one of the main problems with people leaving marriages without working on the issues from their own side of the equation. Many marriages break up because one spouse determines that the “other” is making her miserable, or is too difficult, and leaves. As a result, two things happen. First, the person never grows past her need to have another person be healthy for her to be okay and to relate well. Second, the marriage does not have a chance to work because she did not work on her patterns that could have changed the entire relationship and brought the other person around.

We have received testimonies and talked to thousands of people who have read our book *Boundaries* and who have learned to relate as God would have them relate and, as a result, have turned a hopeless marriage around and saved a family by changing themselves.

Jesus suffered through the dysfunction of others and did not allow it to turn him into one of them. The Bible is clear about our need to do the same as we follow his example of suffering:

For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.

*“He committed no sin,
and no deceit was found in his mouth.”*

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly (1 Peter 2:19–23).

Jesus was concerned with doing the right thing, no matter what was done to him. If we would identify with that suffering, we would get well and grow much faster than not. We would transcend the immaturity around us and grow in spite of what is thrown at us. And we would save some others in the process.

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Picking Up the Cross

As we saw above, when Peter tried to get Jesus to forgo suffering, Jesus told us two things. One is that each person will have to pick up his cross; the other is that if a person tries to save himself, he will lose, but if he loses himself for Jesus' sake, he will gain his life. This is the essence of the suffering of Christ as we have looked at it here. We have to identify with that cross. We have to be obedient to the suffering that will bring about holiness. We have to give up our own defensive and offensive attempts to save ourselves.

Identifying with Jesus' suffering has meant many things to believers over the years. For some it has meant giving it all and dying for their faith. For others it has meant leaving the comforts of this world and going to faraway and difficult places on mission fields. For still others it has meant persecution in various ways for taking a stand.

But for all, no matter what the "outside life" brings in suffering, the internal suffering of character growth is a constant for everyone who does it his way. It means that we humble ourselves and give up playing God. It means we are able to say "not my will, but yours." And it means we will not return evil for evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21). All of these responses are a very real part of how people grow.

GRIEF: GOD'S CURE FOR WHAT ISN'T RIGHT

GRIEF IS THE TOUGHEST pain we have to deal with. It is not the worst human experience, because it leads to resolution, but it is the most difficult for us to enter into voluntarily, which is the only way to get into it. The rest of our human experience just happens "to us." Hurt, injury, anxiety, alienation, and failure all break through, and we suffer. Grief does not "break through." It is something we enter into.

But its voluntary nature is not the only thing that sets grief apart from other kinds of suffering. The other difference is that *grief is the one that heals all the others. It is the most important pain there is.* This is why God calls us to enter into it voluntarily. It heals. It restores. It changes things that have gone bad. Moreover, *it is the only place where we get comforted when things have gone wrong.* So, God tells us and our counselors tell us, "Go there." Listen to Solomon: "Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure" (Eccl. 7:3-4).

Why is that? What is so special about grief? Why is it the "pain that heals"? Because grief is God's way of our getting finished with the bad stuff of life. It is the process by which we "get over it," by which we "let it go." And because of that, because it is the process by which things can be "over with," it becomes the process by which we can be available for new, good things. The soul is freed from painful experience and released for new, good experience.

The soul is designed to finish things. It is designed to grieve. Just as a computer is programmed to run a particular path, so our soul is designed to go down the path of grief. Therefore, since it is the way we are made, Solomon tells us, basically, to "get on with the program." Be sad, and your heart can be made happy. Cry it out, and it will get out. It will be over.

So what is this process that we are wired to do and that can save our hearts from misery? What does it look like? Let's take a look:

The Loss Itself—Reality

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For grief to occur, something bad has to happen. Everyone is wired for grief and is a candidate for healing, because bad things happen in life. As Jesus said, “In this world you will have tribulation” (John 16:33). It is a reality in everyone’s life. Here are some examples:

- Death of a loved one
- Death of a dream
- Death of a season of life (caring actively for children, employment, and so on)
- Death of a relationship
- Death of a plan
- Failure
- Not attaining the love or approval of a significant person
- Not being the person one wishes he or she were (loss of the ideal self)
- Not getting what we want
- Loss of health due to illness
- Financial reversals
- Death of anything we need, want, or desire, good or bad

Protest—I Don’t Want This to Be True

The second thing that happens is that we protest the reality. One way we protest is by becoming numb or denying what is happening. Often when people lose a loved one, they initially feel “unreal.” They feel that “this isn’t really happening.” Their emotions have not caught up with the reality. These feelings are a form of protest. We naturally do not want what has happened to be true.

Another way we protest is by screaming, “No! This cannot be happening!” We have all seen traumatized people who lose someone and their first response is to scream, “No! No!” It is the natural protest against that which is bad. It is the “anger phase” of the grief process.

Then we usually try to change reality. We try to make it not so. The protest turns into bargaining. We try to bargain our way out of the reality. We do everything we can to make it all not be true. Many people have seen a loved one being led out by a doctor who is saying, “It’s over. There is nothing more we can do. He’s gone.” And the family member naturally protests the reality. “Keep trying. Keep shocking him.” It can’t be true.

We all recognize this normal, common protest. Less recognizable is the protest and bargaining of less tangible losses. For example, if someone does not feel loved by a parent early in life, he or she might live many years “bargaining” to make that reality not be true. “If I were to perform more, the love will be there. If I were prettier or thinner or smarter, the love would be there.” Then he or she finds other people with whom to live out that bargain, hoping to ward off the reality of what was lost a long time ago.

Despair or Depression—The Giving In

When our protests and bargaining do not work, we realize that what has happened is really true. It is hopeless. It is not going to change. This is the beginning of grief proper; it is an embracing of the loss.

Despair in this sense does not mean a total loss of hope—a state of hopelessness—but rather a loss of hope that this is really not happening. We become aware that this reality is not going to change, no matter how much we bargain, wish, or try to make it so. It is reality. When we realize that, we hit bottom.

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We have the wish and the reality at the same time. We wanted it, and it is gone. This is a death experience, a real loss. It is giving up the hope that this is not going to be true. And this is the experience no one wants. It is the truth. It is the sadness of the reality itself kicking in.

So we ward this one off, either by reverting to more bargaining or protest, or by acting out in some way. We try drugs, a new relationship, a return to an old one, more trying to perform, or whatever other mechanism is available to us to get away from that truth. The wish raises its head for one more round when it should bow its head to the reality instead. When we bow to this reality, all the air goes out of the balloon.

Sadness, Loss, and Grief Proper—Letting Go and Saying Goodbye

When we hit bottom, when we realize that this really is true, we “lose it.” We break. And we cry. This sadness is the letting go of the reality. It is saying good-bye to what can never be.

But it is the beginning of true healing as well. It is the aspect that Solomon was talking about when he said, “A sad face is good for the heart.” The emotional investment in whatever was lost is being given up. The wish and desire are being “counted as loss,” as Paul said. We are letting go of what cannot be. Reality and our heart, mind, and soul have all come together, and we cry. Tears are shed, and after many, many tears, we let go. “I will never have it, so I will let go of the wish.” And like a leaf falling into a stream, free of the tree that lost it, it goes away.

Resolution and Resurrection—Understanding and Becoming Available

The sadness does go away. And, as Solomon said, then the heart is happy. It is happy because it is now available for new things: new desires, new attachments, new hope, new energy, and everything that springtime brings. Winter has past, and it is the time for sowing new seeds of life.

We also bring to the new year the learning and understanding and experience that we learned in the old. Whether good or bad, what was lost was an experience, and from it we take understanding and wisdom for the rest of life. The process is complete, the person has grown, and the past is now the past and is not affecting the present, except in greater wisdom or the pleasant memories of a loved one who has passed on. The death experience has given way to the resurrection of a new life.

If Grief Is So Good for Us, Why Don't We Grieve?

If grief is the answer to so many of life's problems, why don't we just do it? If a sad face can make a heart happy, why don't we have “sadness parties”? Well, we do. They are called funerals. They are gatherings where we can be sad and begin to process our grief. Funerals were a regular part of God's family practices with the children of Israel, and we have continued that practice, although we have limited funerals severely. In Israel there was a prescribed period of mourning and people were assigned to carry out the task. “The Israelites grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days, until the time of weeping and mourning was over” (Deut. 34:8). The phrase “time of mourning” is one that appears several times. The Israelites saw it as the right thing to do. And Solomon says, there is a time “to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance” (Eccl. 3:4).

We usually hold funerals only when someone dies, but we also need to grieve other things. The problem is that we don't often see those experiences as losses. So we stay in denial or protest for a long time. Tony, for example, was still protesting that he did not have the “all loving mother” in each and every girlfriend he encountered. He continued to stay in the protest and bargaining phase, and therefore he never could get to a new life.

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TIPS FOR GROWERS:

- Examine your view of suffering to see if you have “muggings” and the suffering of growth figured out. Determine whether you have been blamed for the muggings of life or have not seen the value of growth sufferings. Examine the counsel you have received.
- Make sure you have space for “good pain” in your view of life so that you can embrace it.
- See if there are specific changes you need to make in the list we mention on pages 213–14. Which ones do you relate to?
- Determine if there is bad or worthless pain in your life that you need to face and see differently. Convert it to helpful suffering. Take a look at what issues you should embrace.
- Make sure that you are not seeking consolation for things you need to change.
- Look for repetitive patterns in your life that you should own up to.
- Convert to Peter’s attitude toward suffering—that it is armor.
- See whether the roles of the suffering of Christ are present in your life: kenosis, not my will, facing pain and stopping medicating or using defenses, not returning evil for evil.
- Take an inventory of the grief you need to face. Get the support you need and go through it.

TIPS FOR FACILITATORS:

- Examine your view of suffering to see if it is balanced. See whether your view has room for suffering that is totally innocent as well as for suffering that is needed. Examine the experiences people have had in which they might have been blamed for the muggings of life.
- Teach the value of good pain, and develop a culture that is open to entering into it. Provide contexts and activities that promote it.
- Provide teaching and contexts for facing the issues in the list we provide on page 207–8.
- Confront bad pain squarely. Provide contexts and activities in which bad pain can be confronted and converted into good suffering.
- Confront repetitive patterns. See them as destructive, and communicate that. Call people to repentance.
- Teach what Christ taught Peter and what Peter teaches us—that suffering is armor against sin. Offer that protection.
- Provide experiences and contexts for the sufferings of Christ: kenosis, not my will, facing pain and stopping medicating or using defenses, not returning evil for evil.
- Teach the value of the grief process and make contexts available for people to go through it. Make grief normal and teach it as a powerful tool to resurrection. Build the support systems that can make this happen.

Another important reason people cannot grieve the way they need to is that they lack resources. In short, grief is a letting-down and a letting-go. And we cannot let down and let go if we are not being held up. If there is not enough love to sustain us, both inside and out, then we cannot let go of anything, even something bad.

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This is the answer to the age-old question that people ask every day, “Why doesn’t she just let it go?” Or, “Why doesn’t he just get over it?” The reality is that often they can’t because they don’t have the resources, either internal or external, to do it. A good analogy is the trapeze: You can only let go of one trapeze if there is another to grab on to. Or surgery: You can only go under the knife if there is life support keeping you alive while the surgeon does her work.

We basically need two things for grieving. First, we need love, support, and comfort. As Paul says, “Mourn with those who mourn” (Rom. 12:15). The Bible recognizes that grief is only done in community. Otherwise we stay stuck in the despair or the wishing because we do not have the love to hold us up in order for us to let go of what we have lost. You don’t throw even rotten food away in a famine. But if a new truck of food shows up, you can let go of the stuff that has died.

Second, we need structure. We need time and space for grieving. We need structured activities. This is why good support groups that meet at a regular time and do regular tasks are effective in getting people through grief. There is a time, a place, a space, and some tasks to do that structure the experience.

This is why I tell people that God put our tear ducts in our eyes. Grief is a relational experience, and our pain has to be seen eye to eye with another person. Someone should be looking at us when we are crying, and we should be looking at him or her. Then we know that we are not alone and our tears are seen and heard. Then, as Jesus tells us, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matt. 5:4). Being heard, empathized with, understood, and supported gives the life support needed to go through the surgery of grief.

I wish that I had understood this process when I was younger. When I lost my dream of playing golf, I did not enter into grief soon enough. If I had, I would have saved myself a lot of pain. Instead, I tried to protest by finding a new life without grieving for the old. I tried to find a new dream. I tried to find new meaning. But until I found the God who designed grief and got me into the support and structure I needed to face my losses, I did not have losses—I *was* lost. Then, when I found the process of grief, with the support and structure that God and his Body gave me, I could finally have losses. I could process them, and then I was found.

So in your own life and the lives of the people you help, grief may be the answer to your rut. You may be denying a reality lost long ago. You may be protesting something that will never come true. Maybe it is time to give it up. Maybe it is time for you to mourn so that your heart can be made happy again.

To do that, however, you are going to need to get out of the vacuum. You have to have support and structure to get to a new life. If you do, the dead truly are raised. The mourners truly are comforted. The Psalmist was right when he said, “Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning” (Ps. 30:5). The Bible affirms it and commands it, and science proves it to be true. There really is such a thing as “good grief.”²

² Cloud, H., & Townsend, J. (2009). [*How People Grow: What the Bible Reveals About Personal Growth*](#). Zondervan.

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SUFFERING — agony, affliction, or distress; intense pain or sorrow. Suffering has been part of the human experience since people fell into sin (Genesis 3). The Psalms, one-third of which are laments, include graphic descriptions of suffering (Psalm 22). A theme of the Book of Job is the problem of suffering and why God permits the righteous to suffer.

The Bible makes it clear that some suffering is the result of evil action or sin in the world. This type of suffering came upon people after the FALL in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:16–19). But some suffering is not related to the past. It is forward-looking in that it serves to shape and refine God’s children (1 Pet. 1:6–7; 5:10). The Book of Hebrews declares that Jesus learned obedience by the things He suffered (Heb. 5:8), and that He was perfected through suffering (Heb. 2:10). Suffering has the potential of demonstrating God’s power (2 Cor. 12:7). Those who suffer are in a position to comfort others (2 Cor. 1:3–6).

Suffering also helps believers to identify with Christ, which is more than suffering *for* Christ. Through persecution and tortures, people have suffered for the sake of Christ and His kingdom (Phil. 1:29; 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 3:12). To suffer *with* Christ, however, is another matter. Paul speaks of the “fellowship of His [Christ’s] sufferings” (Phil. 3:10). Believers share in the suffering of Christ in the sense that through suffering they identify with Christ. To be a disciple involves suffering like the Master. Christ as Lord and His believers as disciples are bonded even further through the experience of suffering.

Another type of suffering is that endured for the sake of others. The prophet Isaiah portrayed the Suffering Servant as sin-bearer when he declared, “By His stripes we are healed” (Is. 53:5). Jesus announced repeatedly that His suffering was His mission (Matt. 17:12; Luke 24:46). Looking back to the cross, Peter explained that “Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet. 3:18).³

SERVANT OF THE LORD — a theological concept in the Book of Isaiah that points forward to Jesus the Messiah. Passages in the book that express this idea are Isaiah 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; and 52:13–53:12.

But even before Isaiah’s time, the concept of God’s servant was deeply rooted in the history of the nation of Israel. The term “servant” was frequently applied to those who performed some service, task, or mission for the Lord. It was applied to Abraham (Gen. 26:24), Isaac (Gen. 24:14), Jacob (Ezek. 28:25), and Moses (Deut. 34:5), as well as many of the prophets of the Old Testament.

But in the “Servant Songs” of his book, the prophet Isaiah used the phrase “Servant of the Lord” in a specialized or messianic sense. The Servant of the Lord not only would encounter and accept suffering in the course of His work, but He also would realize that His vicarious suffering would become the means by which He would give His life as a ransom for others.

The New Testament writers are unanimous in stating that the Servant of the Lord is a messianic figure and that Jesus is that Servant. The first of Isaiah’s “Servant Songs” (Is. 42:1–4) was quoted by Matthew as being fulfilled in Jesus (Matt. 12:18–21). The Book of Acts emphasized

³ Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., & Harrison, R. K., Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds. (1995). In [*Nelson’s new illustrated Bible dictionary*](#). Thomas Nelson, Inc.

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the suffering and hostility the Messiah underwent to accomplish redemption (Acts 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30). In these passages Jesus is referred to as “His Servant Jesus” (Acts 3:13, 26) and “Your holy Servant Jesus” (Acts 4:27, 30). The violent treatment suffered by Jesus was precisely what the “Servant Songs” of Isaiah prophesied about God’s Servant. Jesus saw His role as that of a servant (Mark 10:45, in fulfillment of Isaiah 53:10–11). He taught His followers to view His mission, and theirs as well, in terms of servanthood. Thus the Servant of the Lord, spoken of by Isaiah the prophet, is preeminently Jesus Himself.

According to Isaiah, the Servant of the Lord would “bring forth justice to the Gentiles” (Is. 42:1) and establish “justice in the earth” (Is. 42:4). He would bring Jacob back to the Lord (Is. 49:5) and would be “a light to the Gentiles” (Is. 49:6). He would not hide His face from shame and spitting (Is. 50:6). He would be the sin-bearing Servant, giving His life for the redemption of His people (Is. 52:13–53:12).

Through Jesus the ancient mission given by God to Abraham—to be a blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:1–3)—is now entrusted to the church. The church’s responsibility is to preach the gospel to Jew and Gentile, bondsman and freeman, male and female, rich and poor. To be a servant of God is to serve Him continually (Dan. 6:20). As His mission was that of a servant, so must ours be (Mark 10:42–45).⁴

⁴ Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., & Harrison, R. K., Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds. (1995). In [*Nelson’s new illustrated Bible dictionary*](#). Thomas Nelson, Inc.

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PSALM 119

Delight in God's Word

□ Alef

¹ How^[a] happy are those whose way is blameless,^(A)
who live according to the Lord's instruction!^(B)
² Happy are those who keep His decrees^(C)
and seek Him with all their heart.^(D)
³ They do nothing wrong,^(E)
they follow His ways.
⁴ You have commanded that Your precepts^(F)
be diligently kept.
⁵ If only my ways were committed
to keeping Your statutes!^(G)
⁶ Then I would not be ashamed^(H)
when I think about all Your commands.
⁷ I will praise You with a sincere heart^(I)
when I learn Your righteous judgments.
⁸ I will keep Your statutes;
never abandon me.^(J)

□ Bet

⁹ How can a young man keep his way pure?
By keeping Your^[b] word.^(K)
¹⁰ I have sought You with all my heart;^(L)
don't let me wander from Your commands.^(M)
¹¹ I have treasured Your word in my heart^(N)
so that I may not sin against You.
¹² Lord, may You be praised;
teach me Your statutes.^(O)
¹³ With my lips I proclaim
all the judgments from Your mouth.^(P)
¹⁴ I rejoice in the way revealed by Your decrees^(Q)
as much as in all riches.
¹⁵ I will meditate on Your precepts^(R)
and think about Your ways.^(S)
¹⁶ I will delight in Your statutes;^(T)
I will not forget Your word.

□ Gimel

¹⁷ Deal generously with Your servant^(U)
so that I might live;
then I will keep Your word.
¹⁸ Open my eyes so that I may contemplate
wonderful things from Your instruction.
¹⁹ I am a stranger on earth,^(V)
do not hide Your commands from me.
²⁰ I am continually overcome
with longing for Your judgments.^(W)
²¹ You rebuke the proud,
the ones under a curse,^(X)
who wander from Your commands.^(Y)
²² Take insult and contempt away from me,^(Z)
for I have kept Your decrees.
²³ Though princes sit together speaking against
me,^(AA)
Your servant will think about Your statutes,^(AB)
²⁴ Your decrees are my delight
and my counselors.^(AC)

□ Dalet

²⁵ My life is down in the dust,^(AD)
give me life^(AE) through Your word.
²⁶ I told You about my life,
and You listened to me;
teach me Your statutes.^(AF)
²⁷ Help me understand
the meaning of Your precepts
so that I can meditate on Your wonders.^(AG)
²⁸ I am weary^[c] from grief;
strengthen me through Your word.^(AH)
²⁹ Keep me from the way of deceit
and graciously give me Your instruction.
³⁰ I have chosen the way of truth;
I have set Your ordinances before me.^(AI)
³¹ I cling to Your decrees;
Lord, do not put me to shame.^(AJ)
³² I pursue the way of Your commands,
for You broaden my understanding.^{[d](AK)}

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□ He

³³ Teach me, Lord, the meaning^[e] of Your statutes,

and I will always keep them.^{[f](AU)}

³⁴ Help me understand Your instruction,^(AM)

and I will obey it

and follow it with all my heart.^(AN)

³⁵ Help me stay on the path of Your

commands,^(AO)

for I take pleasure in it.^(AP)

³⁶ Turn my heart to Your decrees^(AQ)

and not to material gain.^(AR)

³⁷ Turn my eyes

from looking at what is worthless;^(AS)

give me life in Your ways.^{[g](AT)}

³⁸ Confirm what You said to Your servant,^(AU)

for it produces reverence for You.

³⁹ Turn away the disgrace I dread;^(AV)

indeed, Your judgments are good.

⁴⁰ How I long for Your precepts!^(AW)

Give me life through Your righteousness.

□ Vav

⁴¹ Let Your faithful love come to me, Lord,^(AX)

Your salvation, as You promised.^(AY)

⁴² Then I can answer the one who taunts me,^(AZ)

for I trust in Your word.

⁴³ Never take the word of truth from my mouth,

for I hope in Your judgments.^(BA)

⁴⁴ I will always obey Your instruction,

forever and ever.^(BB)

⁴⁵ I will walk freely in an open place^(BC)

because I seek Your precepts.^(BD)

⁴⁶ I will speak of Your decrees before kings

and not be ashamed.^(BE)

⁴⁷ I delight in Your commands,

which I love.^(BF)

⁴⁸ I will lift up my hands^(BG) to Your commands,

which I love,

and will meditate on Your statutes.^(BH)

□ Zayin

⁴⁹ Remember Your word to Your servant;

You have given me hope through it.

⁵⁰ This is my comfort in my affliction:^(BI)

Your promise has given me life.

⁵¹ The arrogant constantly ridicule me,

but I do not turn away from Your instruction.^(BJ)

⁵² Lord, I remember Your judgments from long

ago

and find comfort.

⁵³ Rage seizes me^(BK) because of the wicked

who reject Your instruction.^(BL)

⁵⁴ Your statutes are the theme of my song

during my earthly life.^[h]

⁵⁵ Yahweh, I remember Your name^(BM) in the

night,^(BN)

and I obey Your instruction.

⁵⁶ This is my practice:

I obey Your precepts.^(BO)

□ Khet

⁵⁷ The Lord is my portion;^{[i](BP)}

I have promised to keep Your words.

⁵⁸ I have sought Your favor^(BQ) with all my heart;

be gracious to me^(BR) according to Your promise.

⁵⁹ I thought about my ways^(BS)

and turned my steps back to Your decrees.

⁶⁰ I hurried, not hesitating

to keep Your commands.

⁶¹ Though the ropes of the wicked^(BT)

were wrapped around me,

I did not forget Your instruction.^(BU)

⁶² I rise at midnight to thank You^(BV)

for Your righteous judgments.^(BW)

⁶³ I am a friend to all who fear You,^(BX)

to those who keep Your precepts.

⁶⁴ Lord, the earth is filled with Your faithful

love;^(BY)

teach me Your statutes.^(BZ)

□ Tet

⁶⁵ Lord, You have treated Your servant well,
just as You promised.

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66 Teach me good judgment and discernment,^(CA)
for I rely on Your commands.

67 Before I was afflicted I went astray,^(CB)
but now I keep Your word.

68 You are good,^(CC) and You do what is good;^(CD)
teach me Your statutes.

69 The arrogant have smeared me with lies,^(CE)
but I obey Your precepts with all my heart.^(CF)

70 Their hearts are hard and insensitive,^(CG)
but I delight in Your instruction.^(CH)

71 It was good for me to be afflicted^(CI)
so that I could learn Your statutes.

72 Instruction from Your lips^(CJ) is better for me
than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

□ Yod

73 Your hands made me and formed me,^(CK)
give me understanding

so that I can learn Your commands.^(CL)

74 Those who fear You will see me and rejoice,^(CM)
for I put my hope in Your word.^(CN)

75 I know, Lord, that Your judgments are just
and that You have afflicted me fairly.^(CO)

76 May Your faithful love comfort me
as You promised Your servant.

77 May Your compassion come to me^(CP)
so that I may live,

for Your instruction is my delight.^(CQ)

78 Let the arrogant be put to shame^(CR)

for slandering me with lies;
I will meditate on Your precepts.

79 Let those who fear You,
those who know Your decrees, turn to me.

80 May my heart be blameless regarding Your
statutes^(CS)

so that I will not be put to shame.

□ Kaf

81 I long for Your salvation;^(CT)

I put my hope in Your word.^(CU)

82 My eyes grow weary
looking for what You have promised;^(CV)

I ask, "When will You comfort me?"

83 Though I have become like a wineskin dried by

smoke,

I do not forget Your statutes.

84 How many days must Your servant wait?
When will You execute judgment on my
persecutors?^(CW)

85 The arrogant have dug pits for me;^(CX)
they violate Your instruction.

86 All Your commands are true;
people persecute me with lies—help me!^(CY)

87 They almost ended my life on earth,
but I did not abandon Your precepts.

88 Give me life in accordance with Your faithful
love,

and I will obey the decree You have spoken.

□ Lamed

89 Lord, Your word is forever;^(CZ)
it is firmly fixed in heaven.

90 Your faithfulness is for all generations;^(DA)
You established the earth, and it stands firm.^(DB)

91 They stand today in accordance with Your
judgments,^(DC)

for all things are Your servants.^(DD)

92 If Your instruction had not been my delight,
I would have died in my affliction.^(DE)

93 I will never forget Your precepts,
for You have given me life through them.^(DF)

94 I am Yours; save me,^(DG)

for I have sought Your precepts.^(DH)

95 The wicked hope to destroy me,^(DI)

but I contemplate Your decrees.

96 I have seen a limit to all perfection,

but Your command is without limit.

□ Mem

97 How I love Your instruction!^(DJ)

It is my meditation all day long.^(DK)

98 Your commands make me wiser than my
enemies,^(DL)

for they are always with me.

99 I have more insight than all my teachers
because Your decrees are my meditation.^(DM)

100 I understand more than the elders^(DN)

because I obey Your precepts.^(DO)

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101 I have kept my feet from every evil path^(DP)
to follow Your word.

102 I have not turned from Your judgments,^(DQ)
for You Yourself have instructed me.

103 How sweet Your word is^(DR) to my taste—
sweeter than honey in my mouth.

104 I gain understanding from Your precepts,^(DS)
therefore I hate every false way.^(DT)

□ Nun

105 Your word is a lamp for my feet^(DU)
and a light on my path.

106 I have solemnly sworn^(DV)
to keep Your righteous judgments.

107 I am severely afflicted;
Lord, give me life through Your word.^(DW)

108 Lord, please accept my willing offerings of
praise,^(DX)

and teach me Your judgments.^(DY)

109 My life is constantly in danger,^(I)

yet I do not forget Your instruction.^(DZ)

110 The wicked have set a trap for me,^(EA)
but I have not wandered from Your precepts.^(EB)

111 I have Your decrees as a heritage forever;
indeed, they are the joy of my heart.^(EC)

112 I am resolved to obey Your statutes
to the very end.^{(k)(ED)}

□ Samek

113 I hate those who are double-minded,^(EE)
but I love Your instruction.^(EF)

114 You are my shelter and my shield;^(EG)
I put my hope in Your word.^(EH)

115 Depart from me,^(EI) you evil ones,
so that I may obey my God's commands.^(EJ)

116 Sustain me as You promised,^(EK) and I will live;
do not let me be ashamed of my hope.^(EL)

117 Sustain me so that I can be safe^(EM)
and always be concerned about Your statutes.^(EN)

118 You reject all who stray from Your statutes,^(EO)
for their deceit is a lie.

119 You remove all the wicked on earth
as if they were^(I) dross,^(EP)
therefore, I love Your decrees.^(EQ)

120 I tremble^(m) in awe of You,^(ER)
I fear Your judgments.

□ Ayin

121 I have done what is just and right;^(ES)
do not leave me to my oppressors.

122 Guarantee Your servant's well-being;^(ET)
do not let the arrogant oppress me.

123 My eyes grow weary^(EU) looking for Your
salvation

and for Your righteous promise.

124 Deal with Your servant based on Your faithful
love,^(EV)

teach me Your statutes.

125 I am Your servant,^(EW) give me
understanding^(EX)

so that I may know Your decrees.

126 It is time for the Lord to act,^(EY)
for they have violated Your instruction.

127 Since I love Your commands^(EZ)

more than gold, even the purest gold,

128 I carefully follow^(I) all Your precepts^(EA)
and hate every false way.^(EB)

□ Pe

129 Your decrees are wonderful;^(FC)
therefore I obey them.^(FD)

130 The revelation of Your words^(FE) brings light
and gives understanding to the inexperienced.^(FF)

131 I open my mouth and pant^(FG)

because I long for Your commands.

132 Turn to me and be gracious to me,^(FH)

as is Your practice toward those who love Your
name.

133 Make my steps steady through Your
promise,^(FI)

don't let any sin dominate me.^(FJ)

134 Redeem me from human oppression,^(FK)
and I will keep Your precepts.

135 Show favor to Your servant,^(FL)

and teach me Your statutes.^(FM)

136 My eyes pour out streams of tears^(FN)

because people do not follow Your instruction.

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□ Tsade

137 You are righteous, Lord,^(FO)
and Your judgments are just.
138 The decrees You issue are righteous
and altogether trustworthy.^(FP)
139 My anger overwhelms me
because my foes forget Your words.^(FO)
140 Your word is completely pure,^(FR)
and Your servant loves it.^(FS)
141 I am insignificant and despised,^(FT)
but I do not forget Your precepts.^(FU)
142 Your righteousness is an everlasting
righteousness,
and Your instruction is true.^(FV)
143 Trouble and distress have overtaken me,
but Your commands are my delight.^(FW)
144 Your decrees are righteous forever.^(FX)
Give me understanding, and I will live.

□ Qof

145 I call with all my heart; answer me, Lord.
I will obey Your statutes.^(FY)
146 I call to You; save me,
and I will keep Your decrees.^(FZ)
147 I rise before dawn and cry out for help;^(GA)
I put my hope in Your word.
148 I am awake through each watch of the night
to meditate on Your promise.^(GB)
149 In keeping with Your faithful love, hear my
voice.
Lord, give me life in keeping with Your justice.^(GC)
150 Those who pursue evil plans^{[q](GD)} come near;
they are far from Your instruction.
151 You are near, Lord,^(GE)
and all Your commands are true.^(GF)
152 Long ago I learned from Your decrees
that You have established them forever.^(GG)

□ Resh

153 Consider my affliction and rescue me,^(GH)
for I have not forgotten Your instruction.^(GI)
154 Defend my cause and redeem me;^(GJ)
give me life as You promised.

155 Salvation is far from the wicked
because they do not seek Your statutes.^(GK)
156 Your compassions are many, Lord,^(GL)
give me life according to Your judgments.
157 My persecutors and foes are many.^(GM)
I have not turned from Your decrees.^(GN)
158 I have seen the disloyal^(GO) and feel disgust^(GP)
because they do not keep Your word.
159 Consider how I love Your precepts;
Lord, give me life according to Your faithful
love.^(GQ)
160 The entirety of Your word is truth,
and all Your righteous judgments endure
forever.^(GR)

□ Sin/ □ Shin

161 Princes have persecuted me without cause,
but my heart fears only Your word.^(GS)
162 I rejoice over Your promise^(GT)
like one who finds vast treasure.
163 I hate and abhor falsehood,^(GU)
but I love Your instruction.^(GV)
164 I praise You seven times a day
for Your righteous judgments.^(GW)
165 Abundant peace belongs to those^(GX)
who love Your instruction;
nothing makes them stumble.^(GY)
166 Lord, I hope for Your salvation^(GZ)
and carry out Your commands.
167 I obey Your decrees
and love them greatly.^(HA)
168 I obey Your precepts and decrees,
for all my ways are before You.^(HB)

□ Tav

169 Let my cry reach You, Lord;^(HC)
give me understanding according to Your
word.^(HD)
170 Let my plea reach You;^(HE)
rescue me according to Your promise.^(HF)
171 My lips pour out praise,^(HG)
for You teach me Your statutes.^(HH)
172 My tongue sings about Your promise,^(HI)
for all Your commands are righteous.^(HJ)

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173 May Your hand be ready to help me,^(HK)
 for I have chosen Your precepts.^(HL)
 174 I long for Your salvation, Lord,
 and Your instruction is my delight.^(HM)
 175 Let me live, and I will praise You;^(HN)

may Your judgments help me.
 176 I wander like a lost sheep;^(HO)
 seek Your servant,^(HP)
 for I do not forget Your commands.^(HQ)

Footnotes

- a. [Psalm 119:1](#) The stanzas of this poem form an acrostic.
- b. [Psalm 119:9](#) Or *keeping it according to Your*
- c. [Psalm 119:28](#) Or *I weep*
- d. [Psalm 119:32](#) Lit *You enlarge my heart*
- e. [Psalm 119:33](#) Lit *way*
- f. [Psalm 119:33](#) Or *will keep it as my reward*
- g. [Psalm 119:37](#) Some Hb mss, Tg read *word*
- h. [Psalm 119:54](#) Lit *song in the house of my sojourning*
- i. [Psalm 119:57](#) Lit *You are my portion, Lord*
- j. [Psalm 119:109](#) Lit *in my hand*
- k. [Psalm 119:112](#) Or *statutes; the reward is eternal*
- l. [Psalm 119:119](#) Some Hb mss, DSS, LXX, Aq, Sym, Jer read *All the wicked of the earth You count as*
- m. [Psalm 119:120](#) Lit *My flesh shudders*
- n. [Psalm 119:128](#) Lit *I therefore follow carefully*
- o. [Psalm 119:150](#) Some Hb mss, LXX, Sym, Jer read *who maliciously persecute me*

Cross references

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>A. 119:1 : Ps 101:6; Pr 11:20
 B. 119:1 : Ps 128:1; Mc 4:2
 C. 119:2 : Ps 25:10; 119:10, 22, 168
 D. 119:2 : Dt 4:29; 10:12; 11:13; 13:3; 30:2
 E. 119:3 : 1Jn 3:9; 5:18
 F. 119:4 : Dt 4:13; Neh 9:13; Ps 19:8
 G. 119:5 : Dt 12:1; 2Ch 7:17; Pr 4:26
 H. 119:6 : Jb 22:26; Ps 119:80
 I. 119:7 : Ps 119:62, 106
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 AAA. 119:43 : Ps 119:49, 74, 81, 114, 147
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 CCC. 119:45 : Pr 4:12
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KKK.	119:53 : Ezr 9:3; Neh 13:25; Ps 119:158	MMMM.	119:99 : Ps 119:15
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NNN.	119:55 : Ps 42:8; 92:2; Is 26:9; Ac 16:25	PPPP.	119:101 : Pr 1:15
OOO.	119:56 : Ps 119:22, 69, 100	QQQQ.	119:102 : Dt 17:20; Jos 23:6; 1Kg 15:5
PPP.	119:57 : Ps 16:5; Lm 3:24	RRRR.	119:103 : Ps 19:10; Pr 8:11; 24:13, 14
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