

All Christians suffer. Either you have, you are, or you will — “**through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God**” (**Acts 14:22**). This reality is a stark reminder that we have not reached the New Jerusalem of no tears, pain, mourning or death (**Revelation 21:1, 4**). But just because we experience suffering as we await the redemption of our bodies, it doesn’t mean that our suffering is random or without purpose as Scripture tells us how to think about our suffering.

Ecclesiastes 7:14: “In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other....”

- **Grammatical Usage:** “**prosperity**” or in the Hebrew, “tō·w·bāh” means, “bountiful cheer”; “**adversity**” or “rā·‘āh” meaning, “affliction; calamity; displeasure”.
- **Literal Interpretation:** On a good day, enjoy yourself; On a bad day, examine your conscience. God arranges for both kinds of days
- **Contextual/Comparison:** God keeps His Word: God continually uses His Word. What are these bends in the road that God puts in the path of life that we are to carefully consider? Simply stated, suffering is anything which hurts or irritates designed of God it to make us think. It is a tool God uses to get our attention and to accomplish His purposes in our lives in a way that would never occur without the trial or irritation.

General Causes of Suffering

- (1) We suffer because we live in a fallen world where sin reigns in the hearts of men.
- (2) We suffer because of our own foolishness. We reap what we sow (**Gal. 6:7-9**).
- (3) We sometimes suffer because it is God’s discipline. “**For those whom the Lord loves he disciplines, and he scourges every son He receives**” (**Heb. 12:6**).
- (4) We may suffer persecution because of our faith—especially when we take a stand on biblical issues, i.e., suffering for righteousness sake (**2 Tim. 3:12**).

The Nature of Suffering

- (1) Suffering is Painful. Suffering is hard; it is never easy. Regardless of what we know and how hard we apply the principles, it is going to hurt (cf. **1 Pet. 1:6**: “**distressed**” in the Greek is “lupeo” meaning, “to cause pain, sorrow, grief.”)
- (2) Suffering is Perplexing. Suffering is somewhat mysterious. We may know some of the Biblical reasons for suffering, yet when it strikes, there are unknowns. Why now? What is God doing? Suffering is designed to build our trust in the Almighty.
- (3) Suffering is Purposeful. Suffering is not without meaning in spite of its mystery. It has as its chief purpose the formation of Christ-like character (**Rom. 8:28-29**).

(4) Suffering Proves (tests) Us. “**Trials**” in **James 1:2** is the Greek word “peirasmos” and refers to that which examines, tests and proves the character or integrity of something. Therefore, suffering is that which proves one’s character and integrity along with both the object and quality of one’s faith.

(5) Suffering is a Process. As a process, it takes time. The results God seeks to accomplish with the trials of life require time and thus also, endurance (**Romans 5:3-4; James 1:3-4**).

(6) Suffering is a Purifier. No matter the reason, even if it is not God’s discipline for blatant carnality, it is a purifier for none of us will ever be perfect in this life (**Phil. 3:12-14**).

(7) Suffering Provides Opportunity. Suffering provides opportunity for God’s glory, our transformation, testimony, and ministry, etc. (See reasons for suffering given below.)

(8) Suffering Requires Our Cooperation. Suffering requires the right response if it is to be successful in accomplishing God’s purposes. We all want the product: character; but we don’t want the process: suffering. We can’t have one without the other.

(9) Suffering is Predetermined or Appointed (**1 Peter 1:6; 4:12**).

(10) Suffering is Inevitable. The question we must each face is not ‘if’ we are going to have trials in life, but how will we respond to them? (**1 Thessalonians 3:3; 1 Peter 4:19**).

(11) Suffering is a Struggle. It’s going to be a battle all the way, even with a Biblical understanding. That’s why they are called “trials” and “testings.” Compare the blessings of affliction as seen in the testimony of the Psalmist in **Psalms 119**:

Before affliction	Straying and ignoring (v. 67a)
During and in affliction	Learning and turning (v. 71 , cf. v. 59)
When under affliction we need to:	<p>(1) Determine Causes if we can (Is it because of something I have done?)</p> <p>(2) Determine Objectives (What is God wanting to do in my life or in others?)</p> <p>(3) Determine Solutions (How does God want me to handle this?)</p>
After affliction	<p>(1) Knowing and changing (vs. 67b, 97-102)</p> <p>(2) Resting and valuing (vs. 65, 72)</p>

Purposes and Reasons for Suffering

(1) We suffer as a testimony, as a witness (**2 Timothy 2:8-10; 2 Corinthians. 4:12-13; 1 Peter 3:13-17**). When believers handle suffering joyfully and with stability, it becomes a marvelous testimony to the power and life of Christ that we claim and name.

(2) We suffer to develop our capacity and sympathy in comforting others (**2 Corinthians 1:3-5**).

(3) We suffer to keep down pride (**2 Corinthians 12:7**).

(4) We suffer because it is a training tool. God lovingly and faithfully uses suffering to develop personal righteousness, maturity, and our walk with Him (**Hebrews 12:5f; 1 Peter 1:6; James 1:2-4**). In this sense, suffering is designed:

a. As discipline for sin to bring us back to fellowship through genuine confession (**Psalm 32:3-5; 119:67**).

b. As a pruning tool to remove dead wood from our lives (weaknesses, sins of ignorance, immature attitudes and values, etc.) The desired goal is increased fruitfulness (**John 15:1-7**). Trials may become mirrors of reproof to reveal hidden areas of sin and weakness (**Psalm 16:7; 119:67, 71**).

c. As a tool for growth designed to cause us to rely on the Lord and His Word. (**Psalm 119:71, 92; 1 Peter 1:6; James 1:2-4; Psalm 4:1** [The Hebrew of this passage can mean, “You have enlarged, made me grow wide by my distress”]). Suffering or trials teach us the truth of **Psalm 62:1-8**, the truth of learning to “wait on the Lord only” as only He is our true reality.

d. As a means of learning what obedience really means. It becomes a test of our loyalty (**Hebrews 5:8**).

(5) We suffer to bring about continued dependence on the grace and power of God. Suffering is designed to cause us to walk by God’s ability, power, and provision rather than by our own (**2 Corinthians 11:24-32; 12:7-10; Ephesians 6:10f; Exodus 17:8f**). It causes us to turn from our resources to His resources.

(6) We suffer to manifest the life and character of Christ (The fruit of the Spirit) (**2 Corinthians 4:8-11; Philippians 1:19**). It removes from our lives such as indifference, self-trust, false motives, self-centeredness, wrong values and priorities, and human defense and escape mechanisms while affirming trust, peace, joy, stability, biblical values, faithfulness, and obedience in contrast to sinful mental attitudes, blaming, running, complaining, and reactions against God.

(7) We suffer to manifest the evil nature of evil men and the righteousness of the justice of God when it falls in judgment (**1 Thessalonians 2:14-16**). Suffering at the hands of people (persecution, violent treatments) is used of God to “**fill up the measure of their sins.**” It shows the evil character of those who persecute others and the justice of God’s judgment when it falls.

(8) We suffer to broaden our ministries (cf. **Philippians 1:12-14; 4:5-9**).

➤ **Conclusion:** Will I submit in my suffering to God in faithfulness as opposed to resentment?