

Study Eleven



Suffering And Glory

Read the lesson carefully, and fill in the Bible references before coming to the study.

We often hear it said, “If God is good, and all-powerful, why do people suffer?” Perhaps we ask it ourselves. Because of the deep feelings it arouses, we need humility and sensitivity, even in attempting an answer.

Christians do not claim to know the answer to every question raised by suffering, but the Bible does shed much light on the subject. Our thinking about suffering needs to be seen within the framework set out below. It will help to keep us steady in times of crisis.

There will always be details that we do not understand, but that does not mean that there is no explanation. God knows many things that we do not know, and He is not obliged to explain everything. Nor would we understand if God were to tell us. Can a three-year-old child understand the complexities of science?

Here, then, are some helpful signposts:

1. Man’s Sin Brought Suffering to the World

God is good and perfect, and made a good and perfect world in which suffering had no part.

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Genesis 1:31

Man used his original freedom to rebel against God and, as a consequence, suffering and death entered the world.

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Romans 5:12

Suffering is often a direct consequence of human sinfulness and conflict. Sin inevitably leads to suffering. And behind the scenes, invisible to us, the Devil is also at work. He is thoroughly malicious, and aims to inflict suffering on this world (Luke 13:11 & 16). The blame for suffering lies squarely both with man and the Devil.

2. God Has Entered Into Our Pain and Suffering

God became a man in the person of His Son. He is not indifferent to our pain, but shared in it – supremely so at the cross where Jesus suffered.

Jesus is our example of patient suffering.

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1 Peter 2:21 and 23

Jesus' readiness to suffer, silences any tendency to question God. He was willing to suffer, so let us accept it too, unless it can be avoided. We know enough about God to trust Him with the unexplained.

3. God Commands Us to Help Those Who Suffer

Jesus had compassion on the sick and healed them. He has set us an example of care. God wants us to reduce sin's harmful effect.

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James 1:27

4. God Will Create a World Without Suffering

Christians have something to look forward to. One day God will create a new heaven and earth, in which there is no suffering.

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Revelation 21:4

5. God Uses Suffering to Make Us Rely on Him

God may use suffering to bring people to Himself. Suffering is like a surgeon's knife, it can be a "severe mercy" to make us think about our relationship with God. Christians are taught by suffering to rely on God and not themselves. Paul's "thorn" of suffering (2 Corinthians 12:7) enabled him to prove God's strength.

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2 Corinthians 12:9

6. In a World of Suffering What Can Christians Expect?

a) They can expect to suffer like others.

Our Lord suffered, and the people of God have always had to endure trials. It is important to grasp this, so that when we suffer we do not think that God has failed us. We are not promised exemption from

the general experiences and sufferings of mankind.

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2 Corinthians 1:8

b) They can expect God's help when they suffer

Though we may not understand why God permits trials, we know He is in control. Nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:35-39). We may wonder how we can possibly cope, but God never fails.

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Psalm 46:1

c) They can expect to grow through suffering

We must be open to this possibility. The Devil always hopes we will be angry at God and turn our backs on Him. If we resist this temptation, we will see God working wonders to bring good out of the most distressing circumstances of our life.

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Romans 8:28

The Lord is our Shepherd, leading us into green pastures (Psalm 23), some of which are in the most unexpected places. He knows what we need, and can teach us many lessons through suffering.

7. Finally: Heaven

The most important thing of all is to fix our eyes on Heaven before suffering comes. If all our hopes are here in this world, we will be unable to cope when health, loved ones and possessions are denied us. Christ has come to prepare us for a better world. To realise this gives us a perspective on suffering. It will not make it more pleasant, but it will help us to keep our balance.

So never forget that Heaven, not this world, is our home (Revelation 22:3-5) and to be with Christ is far better.

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Philippians 1:23

God is preparing us for Glory. We are not there yet, but we can rejoice in what God has in store for us.

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Luke 10:20

Heaven will more than compensate for all the sufferings of this present life (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).