

WHY DOESN'T GOD TAKE AWAY YOUR SUFFERING?

I'm not going to have you turn there, but two weeks ago we finished Colossians 2. In the last few verses of Colossians 2, Paul dealt with the false teaching of **ascetism**. **What** is asceticism? It is the teaching "that one can reach a high spiritual state through the practice of extreme self-denial or self-mortification."

<https://www.christianity.com/wiki/christian-terms/what-is-ascetic-asceticism.html>

Here are some of the examples I gave you: Some people chose to live on pillars...others lived in tiny little huts. Some slept in coffins...some became **literal** "grazers" of grass...and still others voluntarily wore chains that were so heavy they could hardly move—and that eventually gave them sores on their arms or legs.

Why did they do that? In hopes that by hurting their body, they would heal their soul, strengthen their spirit, and have their sacrificial life be credited to them as righteousness—rightness—with God!

But works don't work, do they! **Self-inflicted suffering** doesn't procure **our salvation**; it isn't the way for us to be forgiven and become a child of God! And **self-inflicted suffering** doesn't bring about our **sanctification**—the Bible word for growth in Christlikeness!

But what about **suffering** that is **not** self-inflicted? Sadly—as mentioned a couple of weeks ago—there are those that feel God "owes them" a better **next** life because He has allowed them to suffer so much in **this life**. But God doesn't "owe" anyone anything—and that's not the reason God allows suffering!

As I thought about our church family here—and the various ways and degrees many of you are suffering—my heart genuinely aches. The **compassionate side** of me would like to take away every pain...and fix everything that is **broken**...and solve every problem. In fact, I thought about having a healing svc—but I **can't heal anyone!**

God, on the other hand, **can take away** all your problems—and oftentimes **He doesn't!** Does that make me **more compassionate** than God? Obviously not! God—the most powerful Being in all the universe—is also the most loving! But in addition to being the most **powerful** and most **loving**, He is also **All-Knowing!**

So God allows us to suffer, not because He is **unable to remove it**—and not because He is **unloving and unmoved** by what we are going through! He allows us to suffer because **He is wise** and knows that it is for **our good**—and for **His glory!**

We'll get back to Colossians in the near future, but this week I felt led to consider **some reasons** God allows suffering into our lives. God **does not give** us every reason—but He does give us **some!** That's what we will be looking at today. Next week—unless the Lord leads otherwise—we will be looking at the **remedy** for handling trials.

Take your Bibles and turn to II Corinthians 11. We are going to be moving around a bit this morning, but I am going to keep us in the book of II Corinthians. I will be referring to other verses, of course, and you'll have the references for them on your outline.

1. The difficulties of suffering

What are the difficulties of suffering? What makes suffering so hard?

A. Suffering is painful!

That's one of those "duh Pastor" kind of statements, isn't it? If it was **pleasant**, it wouldn't be **suffering!**

1) It can be physically painful. Notice what Paul says about the **physical** suffering he endured.

--Vs 24. "Five times received I forty stripes save one." In other words, on 5 separate occasions he was whipped 39 times! Anything painful about that? **How** could that **not be** painful, right?

--Vs 25. **Beaten** 3 times=painful. Once **stoned**=painful. **Shipwrecked**—not once, **but three times!** Would that have been painful? Maybe not as bad as being whipped or beaten, but certainly not pleasant!

“A night and a day I have been in the deep.” He obviously wasn’t **underwater** that long—but he was **in the water** that long! Once again, that may not have been as painful—physically—as some of the other things he endured, but it wasn’t fun, either!

--Vs 27. “In weariness and **painfulness**...in hunger and thirst...in cold and nakedness.”

Although none of us have endured the physical pain of beatings...or whippings...or being pummeled with stones, **many of you** have experienced in the past—or are experiencing **right now—significant, physical pain**.

But suffering isn’t just **physically** painful, is it?

2) It can be emotionally stressful. Notice what it says in **vs 26**. **Eight** times in this verse Paul uses the word “perils.” “Peril” means **danger; the threat** of something **bad** happening—regardless of whether or not it actually happens!

None of us ever experience **emotional** stress, do we? **We never worry** about “what if’s,” like “what if” **my health** never improves...or “what if” my loved one’s **surgery** doesn’t go well...or “what if” I can’t **pay my bills**...or “what if” I’m **out of work** too long. **I’m being facetious**, of course! Oftentimes we “stress out” about the “what if’s” in our life! And “emotional stress”—aka **worry**—can cause just as much suffering as **physical** pain, can’t it?

So suffering can come in the form of **physical** pain—and **emotional** stress. And yet a third way is...

3) It can be spiritually distressing. We see that in vs 28 “Besides those things that are without”—that are going on outwardly around me—“that which cometh upon me daily, **the care** of all the churches.”

--**How** many churches? Probably dozens!

--**What** was going on in the churches that caused Paul concern and distress? It would probably take a whole sermon to cover them all, but here are just a **few examples** from the letters to the Corinthians.

--In I Corinthians 1:10-12, Paul dealt with **divisions** in the church. In I Corinthians 3:1-3, Paul dealt with some of them being **controlled by their sinful nature** instead of the Holy Spirit. In I Corinthians 5:1-5, Paul deals with **sexual immorality**. In I Corinthians 12-14, he deals with their **misunderstanding of spiritual gifts**.

And **right here** in II Corinthians 11—verses 13-15—we see him dealing with **false prophets!**

Although I have only **one church** to care for—and although **the issues** within our church might be different, I can very much relate to the **spiritual concern** Paul had for people in the church!

Without being too specific, here are some thoughts I often have: Is so-and-so **saved?** Why doesn’t so-and-so **come to church** more? Why does **this** person seem so **apathetic**—and **that** person seem so **unhappy?**

Do I need to go **visit this person** because I see something I’m concerned about in their life? Do I **actually encourage** people—spiritually—when I visit them, or is it just a “social” visit?

How many of our people **really love God**...and spend **time in His Word**... and **pour out their hearts** to Him in prayer? Am I **stressing the importance** of that enough—and am I **demonstrating the joy** that it brings?

I could go on, but I think you get the picture. And I know **I’m not the only one** who has **spiritual concerns** for people. **Some of you** do, too! You want family members...and co-workers...and neighbors to **be saved**. And you want **saved friends** and family members to **live whole-heartedly for God**—just like you are striving to do!

Not only is suffering painful, **B. Suffering is perplexing!**

Ever ask the question, “**Why** is this **happening** to me?” I don’t believe there is a person in the world—above the age of 12 and not mentally compromised—that **hasn’t asked** that question! Some of you may be surprised to know that that is actually a question in the Bible!

Psalm 42:9 “I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? **why go I mourning** because of the oppression of the enemy?” (See also Psalm 43:2)

Sometimes we know **why** we are suffering, but oftentimes **we don’t!**

Randy Alcorn in his book entitled “*If God is Good*,” wrote: “Consider what our lives would be like if God **regularly explained to us** why He allows everything that disappoints us.”

He then gives a **hypothetical conversation** between God and a teenage girl whose “suffering” consisted of not going to prom because she got pneumonia. Is it “life-altering” not to go to prom?

Alcorn suggests that it **may impact a lot more** than we think! Here’s the hypothetical conversation.

God: *I let you get pneumonia so you wouldn't bond with that young man who wouldn't be right for you, and so your parents would go get you your favorite dessert, where they'll see a help wanted poster and tell you so you apply and get the job, and meet the girl who will become your best friend and help you twenty years from now when your husband gets cancer and...*

The girl interrupts: "Whoa! My husband? What's he like? And why would you let him get cancer?"

God replies, *In order to make you more Christlike and help you become more of a servant and...*

The girl cuts God off again and says, "But I don't want to be a servant. And cancer terrifies me!"

God continues, *...and teach your husband to depend on me, and draw your children and grandchildren closer to you, and...*

The girl then says, "I'll have children and grandchildren? How many? Girls or boys? But how will they deal with their father's cancer?"

Alcorn then writes: "Do you see where this is going? It's just one 'simple' event.... The God of providence weaves **millions of details** into our lives and into all the lives around us. Maybe He doesn't have **one big reason** for bringing a certain person or success or failure or disease or accident into our lives; in fact, He may have **hundreds of little reasons**. In order to understand God's explanations, we would have to be God." (349)

Not sure about you, but I found that hypothetical conversation rather thought-provoking!

But suffering is not only painful and perplexing, C. Suffering can be persistent

Notice I didn't say "permanent." **Suffering in this life**—if you are a blood-bought, born-again child of God—**will end!** It will **not continue**; it will **cease to exist** in the next life! **Revelation 21:4** "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." And **all God's people said...**

But although suffering is **not permanent**—for the believer—it can be **persistent**. In other words, it can last a long time—even a lifetime! **Joni Eareckson Tada** has been **suffering**—although she would not call it that—as a quadriplegic for nearly 60 years! **Ciara Dierking** has lived without arms and legs since January 2024—and will never fully be able to do all that she used to do this side of glory. And although maybe not as severe as these two ladies, **many of you** have suffered from physical ailments for years!

We're in II Corinthians 11; look at chapter 12. In vs 7, we read of Paul's "thorn in the flesh." What exactly it was, we can only speculate. But we **do know this**: Paul **didn't want it**—and asked God three times to **remove it!** But God **never removed it**—at least that we are told—and it is quite likely that this ailment **remained with Paul** until he left this earth and went home to heaven!

The other day while reading my Bible I came across **II Kings 13:14a** "Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died." Did you catch that? Elisha—God's prophet—"fell sick" of some kind of sickness that he **lived with** until he **died from** it!

Am I "being mean" in bringing these things up? Not at all! The **most loving thing** I can do is **prepare you for eternity**—not give you false hope that whatever you are suffering from in this life will for sure be removed in this life!

Next, let's consider... **2. The declarations regarding suffering**

God has much to say about suffering—way more than we can cover in half a sermon! I'm going to give you four declarations—four truths—that God makes regarding suffering.

A. Suffering is promised

--**Jesus** said in **John 16:33** "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world **ye shall**—not might or may—**have tribulation**: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

--**When Paul** wrote his first letter to the new believers in Thessalonica, he reminded them "...when we were with you, we told you before that we should **suffer tribulation...**" (II Thess 3:3-4; also Acts 14:22; II Tim 3:12)

--**James 1:2** "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers (various) temptations—meaning trials."

James didn't say **if** you experience trials—he said **when** you experience trials!

--And Peter reminds those he wrote to—and by extension, he reminds us—**not to be surprised** when trials come! 1 Peter 4:12 “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:”

B. Suffering is purposeful

What is the **purpose** of suffering? What are **God’s reasons** behind it? As already mentioned, oftentimes we don’t know—and God is **not obligated to tell us!** That—in a nutshell—is what the book of Job is all about.

But God does give us some reasons; here are **four**. I obviously won’t be spending much time on them, though.

1) To purge us. Jesus used the word “purge” in John 15:2 “every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth it...” Just as a vinedresser cuts off the dead stuff to make the vine healthier, God cuts the “dead stuff” out of our life. He prunes us...He purges us...He refines us. We earlier sang the song “How Firm a Foundation.” Stanza 3 has these words: “*The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.*”

--God got “the Jacob out of Jacob” by wrestling with him—and taking his hip out of joint!

--God got “the Joseph out of Joseph” by letting his brothers sell him—and then letting him wrongly be thrown into prison for a couple of years!

--And God got “the Moses out of Moses” by sending him to the backside of the desert for 40 years!

Isaiah 48:10 “Behold, I have **refined thee**, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the **furnace of affliction.**”

2) To prevent pride. We’re still in II Corinthians 12; look again at vs 7. Twice—in the same verse—Paul recognizes that his thorn in the flesh was to keep him from being “exalted above measure”—which means to keep him from becoming proud.

3) To prepare us to help others. Turn to II Corinthians 1:3-4. Here Paul says that God comforts us in our tribulation (sufferings) so that we are able to help comfort others.

4) To bring praise to God and point others to Him.

--What happened **when Stephen** not died for his faith, but prayed for those who was killing him?

God’s name was glorified; it was lifted up—and I believe it eventually led to the conversion of Saul!

--What happened when **Paul and Silas** sang praises to God while in prison?

God’s name was glorified; it was lifted up—and the Philippian jailer got saved!

--What happens when women like **Joni Eareckson Tada** and **Ciara Dierking** live joy-filled lives in spite of their physical challenges? God’s name is glorified; it is lifted up—and people are challenged to be **faithful to God** and **serve God** regardless of what they are going through!

--And you and I can bring glory to God as He props us up—and others see **His** strength in **our** weakness!

C. You have partners in suffering

You are not the only sufferer, are you? **Paul** talks about his suffering here in chapter 1—and **Peter** has a lot to say about suffering. Notice on your outline **1 Peter 5:8-9** “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: ⁹ Whom resist stedfast in the faith, **knowing that the same afflictions** are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.” The word “afflictions” here is “sufferings”—and other believers experience the same suffering you do.

But fellow believers aren’t your only partners in suffering—**Jesus Himself suffered!**

--Jesus endured **physical** suffering as His beard was plucked off...and when He was punched in the face...and when a crown of thorns was beaten onto His head...and when He was whipped...and when nails were pounded through his wrists and feet...and when He died the slow, excruciatingly painful death by crucifixion.

--Jesus endured **emotional** suffering when the disciples left Him—and the crowds mocked Him!

--And Jesus endured **spiritual suffering** when He was made sin for us and He cried out from the cross, “My God; My God; why hast thou forsaken Me?”

God knows about suffering because He came to earth in the form of man and suffered just like we do—only more so! **Hebrews 2:19** “For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted [tested]. He is able to succour [help] them that are tempted.”

D. You have promises to cling to in suffering

1) The promise of a way to escape. I Corinthians 10:13 “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”

Can going through suffering tempt us to sin? It sure can! We can doubt God’s love and goodness...and grumble against Him...and not seek Him or serve Him because we are having a pity-party.

But we don’t have to sin—even while suffering! There is a way of escape!

2) The promise of Christ’s presence. In **Mt 28:20**, Jesus says “...and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” **Heb 13:5b** “...for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”

Does Jesus care? *“O yes, He cares—I know He cares; His heart is touched with my grief. When the days are weary, the long nights dreary, I know my Savior cares.”*

And because He cares for us, we need to cast all our care upon Him! **I Peter 5:7** “Casting all your care upon him; for He careth for you.” Are you doing that?

So what would God have us do in light of His Word this morning?

1. First and foremost, do you **have** Christ?

--Not, do you believe in His existence.

--And not, do you know certain things about Him.

Do you have Him; do you possess Him? Are you trusting Him—and only Him—as the payment for your sins?

--**If so**, the suffering in this life—regardless of how hard and how long—will end! This **is the worst** it will get!

--**If not**—if you don’t have Christ and are not a child of God—this life on earth is **the best you** will have!

Your next life—if you die without Christ—will be eternal separation from God. It will be the absence of all that is good! It will be outer darkness—a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth and suffering and torment!

2. For those of us **that do** have Christ, remember that He cares! Cast your care upon Him because He cares for you.

In just a moment, we are going to sing a closing hymn. Please turn to hymn 419 “Yield Not to Temptation.”

Why this song? Notice the chorus:

“Ask the Savior to help you—Comfort, strengthen, and keep you. He is willing to aid you; He will carry you through.”

If you are not in the habit of “asking the Savior to help you,” I would encourage you to start doing that today!