



The Purpose of Suffering

*"But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, [make you]perfect, [and] establish, strengthen, and settle you"
(1 Peter 5:10, NKJV).*

Many books have been written on the problem of suffering, so I will not presume to say all that has been well said by others. The purpose of suffering in the lives of God's people, however, is an important subject. If we have lived very long we have suffered, and many of us have grappled with the question of why Christians suffer. Why is this happening? Where is God in all of this? Is there purpose in my suffering? Scripture has some answers.

Suffering does have purpose. For the Christian, God is at work every moment in it and through it. The Apostle Peter has given us an explanation of God's purpose for suffering. God wants to perfect us, establish us, strengthen us and settle us (1 Peter 5:10). By God's grace and our cooperation with Him, we can come out on the other side of suffering stronger spiritually. Our attitude toward suffering is key, because Satan also is standing by wanting any opportunity to derail God's good plan for us. Satan, in fact, is author of much of the suffering in the world; his goal is destruction. However, God can use even what Satan intends to destroy us and turn it for our blessing. What reaches the child of God has done so by God's permission—and can be used for our good.

The kinds of suffering mentioned in Scripture include afflictions, troubles, persecutions, distresses, and tribulations, and we see that God's people experience sufferings of many kinds. Some new Christians are surprised when they face persecution or trouble. Some have believed this would not be so. Other Christians may face sufferings or afflictions so severe or long that they begin to think God has abandoned them or betrayed them.

Paul wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica "that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this" (1 Thessalonians 3:3, NKJV). The Thessalonians were experiencing severe troubles and afflictions and Paul was greatly concerned about them. He was so concerned that when he "could no longer endure it," he sent someone to them. He said, "I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain" (1 Thessalonians 3:5, NKJV). Paul was concerned their afflictions might cause them to lose their faith.

Paul would still be concerned today about our faith.

R.T. Kendall, an American who pastored in London, England for 25 years, said every Christian will experience a time of seemingly being "betrayed" by God. He says it is inevitable. He also says that 9 out of 10 Christians do not pass this test successfully. According to Kendall, only 1 out of 10 will press through this "betrayal" experience with faith in God strong. The majority have not understood God, His ways, His purposes. They have not understood that God loves us too much to leave us imperfect, weak, unsettled, and unestablished—all of which are produced in us as we endure suffering and affliction in faith.

God said, "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction" (Isaiah 48:10, NKJV). Job said, "When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10, NKJV). God uses affliction to purify us, for it is sure that any ugly thing inside of us will surface in prolonged troubles. That's how gold and silver are refined—by fire. Under the master refiner's

care—all is well. If we endure, God will remove the impurities from our lives. He will care for us and superintend the process closely.

God is not uncaring nor detached while His people suffer. David said, “For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither has He hidden His face from him, but when he cried to Him, He heard” (Psalm 22:24, *AMP*). God hears and helps us when we cry to Him in the middle of our afflictions. We must have His help to endure. We should ask often for strength to endure to the end of the trouble with our faith stronger than before.

I admit that many of my prayers in affliction have been for God to end it! I don’t like trouble. I don’t know many who do. However, God reminded me over and over what James said—“Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience” (James 1:2-3, *NKJV*). Then I read what David wrote: “Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word” (Psalm 119:67, *KJV*). Also—“I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me” (Psalm 119:75, *NKJV*). It is in faithfulness that God afflicts me.

So, I now pray for strength to endure. I want to make it through every affliction in order to receive what God intends for me. I want God to make me stronger than whatever trouble I must face. We can have that. I will say with Jeremiah that God is “my strength and my fortress, my refuge in the day of affliction” (Jeremiah 16:19, *NKJV*).

Afflictions, troubles, persecutions do not last forever. I am happy for that. So was Isaiah. He wrote: “Sing, O heavens! Be joyful, O earth! And break out in singing, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted His people, and will have mercy on His afflicted” (Isaiah 50:1, *NKJV*). David too wrote about the end of troubles: “The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles” (Psalm 34:17, *NKJV*). Also—“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all” (Psalm 34:19, *NKJV*). I quote these verses to encourage myself in the middle of affliction.

It also helps me to remember that God allowed and even ordained that His Son would suffer. Isaiah wrote prophetically about Jesus: “He was oppressed and He was afflicted” (Isaiah 55:7, *NKJV*). Jesus endured more than any person, and it was for us.

More could be said about suffering. For example, Paul said, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17, *NKJV*). Considering all Paul suffered, that he calls it “light affliction” is amazing. However, let me leave you with one last verse.

Read this verse as though God were speaking directly to your soul. It is a promise and revelation to you. God says with strong passion:

“O [My] . . . afflicted one, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold I will lay your stones with colorful gems, and lay your foundations with sapphires” (Isaiah 54:11, *NKJV*).

I pray God will do His work of perfecting, strengthening, establishing and settling you and that He will make you beautiful in spirit and soul. **SH**

GOD’S WORD FOR TODAY

Teaching Letter 19

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