

Thirty Biblical Reasons Why People Suffer

Chapter 4

Audio Lesson: Old Testament #49



Objective: To learn many of the reasons given in the Bible that explain why we might experience suffering.



Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

—2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Why do the righteous suffer? That is a question people have asked for thousands of years. Not only does the book of Job address that question, so do many other parts of Scripture. In fact, the issue of suffering comes up in nearly every book in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. The Bible gives many reasons that help us understand why we suffer.

Many people believe and teach that God wants His people never to be sick, poor, or suffering in pain. But that idea is not found in the Bible—or in the experience of Christians throughout history and in the world today. In fact, the difficult trials that biblical characters went through served to build their character, strengthen them, and teach them about faith. There is purpose in our pain. Though suffering is never enjoyable, it can have many benefits for the people of God.



1. True or false? The book of Job is the only book in the Bible that deals with the question of suffering.
2. True or false? Anyone who suffers frequently is not living according to God's principles, because God doesn't allow good people to suffer.
3. True or false? Some letters in the New Testament address the suffering of God's people.
4. True or false? Suffering can have very good results in the life of a Christian.

Unless otherwise noted, choose one answer for each question.

5. Read 1 Peter 1:6-7. What did Peter tell suffering people about the purpose of their suffering?
 - a. They were suffering needlessly.
 - b. Suffering tested and proved their faith.
 - c. They deserved their suffering.
 - d. Holy people make themselves suffer.

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.
—1 Peter 1:6-7

6. Why did James say to “consider it pure joy” when we encounter trials?
 - a. Because suffering is the only way to pay for our sins.
 - b. Because pain is only an illusion.
 - c. Because persevering in trials leads to maturity and the “crown of life” that God promised.
 - d. Because Christians are supposed to be happy all the time, even when suffering.
7. What is the source of all true comfort?
 - a. Other Christians
 - b. Family
 - c. Money
 - d. God
8. When you need someone to counsel you about a problem, what kind of counselor is best?
 - a. Someone who does not have any problems.
 - b. Someone who has experienced the same kind of problem and been comforted by God.
 - c. Someone who has the same problems and does not know how to deal with them.
 - d. It does not matter, as long as that person is a Christian.
9. What did God tell Paul about his weakness?
 - a. Christians should not have weaknesses.
 - b. God would answer if Paul prayed harder.
 - c. Paul had not yet earned an answer to his problem.
 - d. Weakness helped Paul depend on God and display God's strength.

10. Which of the following do we need most for the work of God to be done through us?
 - a. A lot of education.
 - b. Exceptional talents and skills.
 - c. Enough money.
 - d. An understanding of our inadequacy.

11. What does the Bible say about tears?
 - a. They are pointless.
 - b. They are like seeds that will grow and produce a harvest.
 - c. They are only for non-Christians.
 - d. They are only for women and children.

12. When do we experience God's miracles and compassion?
 - a. When everything is going well in our lives.
 - b. When we get holy and righteous enough.
 - c. When we have great needs and cry out to Him.
 - d. When we least expect to.

13. What does it mean when Christians suffer for their own mistakes?
 - a. God is treating them as His own children.
 - b. God has abandoned them.
 - c. They have lost their salvation.
 - d. Satan is punishing them.

Here are 30 reasons God's people suffer. This list is not to be used to point at others, as Job's friends did, but to help you examine and perhaps understand why God is allowing suffering to touch you or those near and dear to you.

1. God sometimes wants His people to make the great discovery that He is the source of a very special quality of comfort. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)
2. God sometimes uses suffering to train, equip, and prepare qualified ministers of comfort. (2 Corinthians 1:5-7)
3. God sometimes wants His people to learn that He is the source of a very special quality of wisdom they must have in their crisis of suffering and to live in this world. (James 1:2-8)
4. God is fiercely committed to our spiritual perfection. (Matthew 5:48; 2 Timothy 3:17)
5. God sometimes wants His people to learn how to access the grace He has made available to all of His people. (2 Corinthians 9:8; Romans 5:2-5)
6. God sometimes wants to grow spiritual character in the lives of people He is calling to difficult but fruitful ministry. (Romans 5:2-5)
7. God sometimes wants His people to develop the drive and motivation that come from their suffering through their suffering through very difficult experiences when they are young. (Lamentations 3:27)
8. Suffering can sometimes be God's "seminary" in which God trains and prepares qualified ministers of the Gospel. (2 Corinthians 6:3-13; 11:23-28)

9. God sometimes desires to give His children “miracle milestones” while they are suffering, that will encourage them and inspire them to believe as they confront present and future challenges to their faith. (Psalm 23:1-6; 3:3-8)
10. God needs a “highway” on which He can travel into this world and show the people of this world His salvation through the way His people live when they are suffering. (Isaiah 40:3-5, Luke 3:4-6)
11. God sometimes uses suffering to turn the weakness of His people into a showcase in which He can exhibit His power and His strength. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10; 3:5; Galatians 4:13-15)
12. God sometimes reveals the inadequacy of His people as a prerequisite before He proves His own adequacy to His people and through His people. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)
13. God sometimes wants His people to forsake their pride and learn humility. (Proverbs 8:13; 2 Corinthians 12:7)
14. God sometimes wants to use the tears His people shed, in their experiences of suffering, as precious seeds God is sowing in the garden of their lives that will yield much fruit for them and for their God. (Psalm 126:5-6)
15. God sometimes uses suffering as a “cutback” even though it may appear to be a “setback.” (John 15:1-5)
16. God wants the whole world to know that a great Treasure lives in His people and that great Treasure is responsible for all the mighty works that are accomplished through His people. (2 Corinthians 4:4-10)
17. God sometimes wants His people to experience growth in their eternal, inward man, while their merely temporal, outward man is perishing. II Corinthians 4:4-10
18. God wants to teach His people the difference between earthly treasures and heavenly treasures. (Hebrews 12:26-29, 1 John 2:17)
19. God is preparing His people for eternity by burning out of His people everything that is contrary to the spiritual, holy and eternal essence of His nature. (Hebrews 12:29; 1 John 3:3)
20. God’s people are sometimes reaping a harvest of corrupt seeds they have planted in the garden of their lives. (Galatians 6:7-8)
21. God sometimes uses suffering to chasten His children when they are living in sin and disobedience. (Hebrews 12:5-13; John 1:12-13; Jeremiah 29:11-14)
22. God sometimes uses suffering when the risen, living Christ is standing at the door of a person’s life, patiently knocking through His rebuke and chastisement in order to have an intimate, lordship relationship with those who call Him Savior. (Revelation 3:19-20)
23. God’s people sometimes suffer in the “hog pen” provided by their loving heavenly Father to bring them to their senses as prodigals and turn them in repentance toward their Father’s home. (Luke 15:11-20)
24. God’s people sometimes suffer chastisement because God wants to give them a share in His holiness. (Hebrews 12:10; 2 Peter 1:15; 4:1)
25. God’s people sometimes suffer because this world hates Jesus Christ and persecutes those who represent and proclaim Jesus Christ to this world. (Matthew 5:10-12; Philippians 1:29; 2 Timothy 3:11-12; Revelation 2:10)
26. God sometimes wants to purify the faith of His people. (2 Peter 1:1-7)
27. God’s passionate followers of Jesus Christ sometimes suffer because it is their calling to follow the example of their suffering Savior. (2 Peter 2:21)

28. God's people sometimes suffer because they are entering the Kingdom of God through the door of tribulation. (Acts 14:22; John 3:3, 5)

29. God uses sickness and death sometimes to show His people that only Jesus Christ can solve life's two most unsolvable problems. (John 11:1-45)

30. God is sometimes establishing His relationship with His people by using the shepherd's staff of suffering to make His people lie down in green pastures, in this life and in the life to come. (Psalm 23)



Have trials and suffering helped you grow as a Christian? In what ways? Now that you have had this lesson, how will you respond differently next time you suffer?



Thank God for the many ways that your trials can help you grow closer to Him and how they give Him an opportunity to work in your life. Ask Him to help you stand firm and be encouraged in the midst of your suffering. Ask Him to show you someone who is suffering who you can encourage and help.



Going Deeper

1. As you examine all of these Biblical explanations for the suffering of God's people, why would you say God has given us all these explanations? _____

2. Does God promise us that we will understand everything as we walk with Him? (Consider Isaiah 55) Why or why not? _____

3. Do you think we should love God for allowing the hard reality that His people do suffer? Explain your answer. _____

4. As we consider these 30 Biblical explanations, should we consider this to be an exhaustive list? Why or why not? _____

5. How should we use this list ourselves and how should we share this list with those we know who are suffering? _____

6. Why should we not tell them, "The explanation for your suffering is number 21, 22, or 24"?

7. Why should we prayerfully consider these explanations and encourage others to do the same, asking God to show us which of these explanations may be relevant in our suffering? _____
