

WHAT GOOD IS THE SUFFERING I ENDURE?

1. I believe that Scripture clearly articulates tangible reasons for why God allows hardship, pain and struggle into the life of the Christian. They may not be the precise reasons for what people are going through in life. They will not answer every question they have for God. Obviously, they will not remove the emotional heartache that people experience. However, it's reassuring to know that God has left us reminders—reasons that are scattered throughout the Word of God. Think about it, if God never gave one single reason why we face bad things—we might have reason to doubt whether He has a plan. But He has revealed reasons! Each of these reasons are lovingly left to remind the believe that God is with them! He has a purpose for this season in your life! The following are a list of at least six specific reasons given by Scripture for possible good for suffering or tough times.
- 1) GOD MAY ALLOW HURTFUL TIMES TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PURPOSES. Genesis 50:20 says, “*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*” God does not create sin but merely the possibility of free choice! When God created a world full of people who have free choice there existed the possibility that people would use that free choice for evil! God didn't cause Joseph's brothers to hate him or to sell him into slavery. Joseph clearly said to his brothers, “You intended to harm me”. They were the choices by flawed people within the sphere of Joseph's life. However, it is also very clear that in His ultimate wisdom God decided to use some very tragic and unfair things for a greater purpose within the life of Joseph. First, God's purposes can extend past our own lives. In other words, God's objective & plans extends well past the scope of our personal experience. At any moment in our lives the Lord is trying to weave a global montage that achieves bigger issues. Second, God may be preparing us for something greater in the future. The simple reality is that the purpose of our life is not simply our happiness! God has and will sometimes allow affliction/difficulty in the life of the Christian as a basis for some future work.
- 2) GOD MAY ALLOW HURTFUL TIMES TO REMOVE OUR SELF-SUFFICIENCY. 2 Corinthians 12:7 says, “*To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.*” We are never told the identity of “Paul's thorn in the flesh”! However, there was something in his physical body that wasn't pleasant. It was painful, annoying and confusing! However, there seemed to be a purpose for it! It was designed to keep Paul from having an elevated perception of himself. It was designed to remind him that “God was in control even if he wasn't”. For many people a portion of the human spirit and the human condition gravitates toward places of comfort and self-reliance. We want things to go smooth in life or to be in control of life. Difficulties, trials, pain reminds us that we must ultimately rely on God. Sometimes God uses the bumps in the road of an imperfect world to keep us “awake” as we doze off at the wheel! Sometimes God uses the turns and corners and steep hills of our path in life to urge us to nestle ourselves as close as we can to our heavenly Father!
- 3) GOD MAY ALLOW HURTFUL TIMES TO DEVELOP OUR FAITH. First Peter 1:6,7 says, “*In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*” This passage is not just telling us that we live in an imperfect world. It's saying that God has placed us in an imperfect world because He values the growth of our faith. Hurtful, difficult and disappointing times are part of the natural development in our spiritual life. They are absolutely necessary! We often long dreamily for days without difficulty, but God knows better. The easier our life, the weaker our spiritual fiber. Strength can only grow by exertion. However undesired they are within our lives, these difficult seasons are used by God to develop that part of our lives which struggles through the imperfectness of life itself.
- 4) GOD MAY ALLOW HURTFUL TIMES SO THAT WE CAN COMFORT OTHERS. SECOND CORINTHIANS 1:3-5 SAYS, “*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴ 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. ⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.*” History reminds us that God does indeed care about the plight of humanity. The painful steps of Jesus in this world give ample testimony

to how much He cares. He took suffering upon Himself. But in addition to that, God actually empowers those around us as a powerful reminder that He cares. That's part of His master plan to continually remind people that He cares! He wants us to be His agents to care for people in our world! He's given us the chance to pass on His divine care & compassion.

- 5) GOD MAY ALLOW HURTFUL TIMES TO BRING US CLOSER TO HIM. Job 42:1-5 says, *“I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. ³ You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?’ Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. ⁴ ‘You said, ‘Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.’ ⁵ My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you..”* We all remember the horrific story that was the OT character of Job. For a protracted period of time everything bad that could happen did! No answers from God; no explanations or nothing! Ultimately, after God began to explain Himself as the Creator of the world, Job forgot his cry for vindication since he had received something much better: a revelation of the person of God and renewed fellowship with God. He had lost everything but in that moment he was reminded of what he had found--God Himself! Most of us don't know where to retreat when things become difficult because, quite frankly, we're not used to retreating into God's presence or being in His company. In fact, we're not comfortable with bringing our pain and our frustration into His presence. We all have faced times when we ask “why”, “why me”, “what are you doing?” God's okay with that! He's not intimidated by this! However, in the heart of the suffering God provides us an opportunity to hold onto God's goodness.
- 6) GOD MAY ALLOW HURTFUL TIMES TO MAKE US PERFECT. 1 Peter 5:9 says, *“Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.”* Corrie ten Boom made this penetrating observation, “Life in Ravensbruck took place on two separate levels, mutually impossible. One, the observable, external life, grew every day more horrible. The other, the life we lived with God, grew daily better, truth upon truth, glory upon glory.”
- 7) GOD MAY ALLOW HURTFUL TIMES TO PURIFY US. Hebrews 12:11-13 says: *“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. “Make level paths for your feet,” so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.”* As Dr. Jones stated in his class lectures, “Plan A for your life is that God will bring you into regular periods of suffering so that we can be more like Him. There is no Plan B! Through the process of purification we can discern God's will & direction for our lives as well as the surpassing glory and worth of heaven.
- 8) GOD MAY ALLOW HURTFUL TIMES TO PROVE US. 2 Thessalonians 1:4 says, *“Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. ⁵ All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.”* We are people with desires...lusts...God created us with strong desires! People, Possessions, Positions or Pleasures...but the only thing to lust for is God and His kingdom. God is actually interested in getting us to change our minds about certain things. Through our life in this imperfect world, God is making us “praise worthy”. In other words, He is waiting for us to say, “You know this is really hard but I am going to trust God that you are the real deal.” Our greatest hour is not when things are going the best! Our finest hour is when in the midst of everything—I decide that I will still honor the Lord!