

Scriptural Study on Suffering

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Introduction

"Why does God allow so much suffering in the world?" This is a universal question in every culture and in every heart. And the question is reasonable and valid. Lack of a meaningful answer is a barrier to the faith of many. Shallow answers can undermine the faith of any of us. Fortunately, the Bible gives clear reasons that God allows suffering. The reasons may comfort those doubting or already suffering. But, the best time to discover those reasons is before a crisis that may cause our faith to waver. This discussion oriented Bible study will explore the reasons that God allows suffering and prepare each of us for the heartaches that are an inevitable part of life.

What types of suffering can cause us to start asking ourselves, "Why does God allow this?" and "Does God even care?"

How can the issue of suffering cause us to doubt God's plan for our lives?

Can observing the suffering of others cause even more emotional trauma than suffering ourselves? Why or why not?

"The root of all sin is the suspicion that God isn't good. and it's the traumas of life that cause us to question it." (Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost For His Highest*, Dodd, Mead & Company, 1935)

Suffering can take many different forms for many different causes. Frequently suffering is due to a physical affliction such as illness. Many times suffering is due to the emotional aftermath of a tragedy, Or suffering can be the trauma of fear and uncertainty in difficult circumstances, perhaps financial. One of the hardest sufferings to bear can be the helplessness we feel when a loved one suffers or struggles. Whatever form suffering takes, it can be a challenge to keep trusting God for any one of us.

Suffering is a part of Life

"that I might know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." Philippians 3:10

Why do you think many Christians fail to anticipate suffering as part of God's plan?

Many people's goal is to go through life as pain-free as possible. We've got bad news if that's your attitude. A pain-free life is not necessarily God's will for us. The disciples of Jesus would be quick to remind us that pain and suffering went hand in hand with Christianity. To suffer was a natural part of following Jesus. We like the first thoughts of Philippians 3:10, but sharing the *"fellowship of His sufferings"* we conveniently forget. The disciples were surprised not when they did experience suffering, but when they didn't.

"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation." 1 Peter 4:12-13

"The person who expects to escape the pangs of suffering and disappointment simply has no knowledge of the Bible, of history, or of life. Yes, there are clouds of suffering for each one of us but God says, *'I come to you in the thick dark cloud of suffering.'*" Billy Graham Daily Calendar 1999

A shallow response

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28

Frequently, you hear Romans 8:28 used as a general explanation for suffering. Usually the verse is followed by an anecdotal story about circumstances having worked out unexpectedly for the best of those involved. God can use circumstances for good toward individuals. But, history tells us that many Christians have died miserable deaths from starvation, torture, murder, plague or seen their loved ones suffer horrible deaths. The circumstances did not necessarily work out for the specific good of those involved. Rather the correct interpretation of this verse is that God has an ultimate plan for mankind by which everyone can be a beneficiary.

Have you seen situations when this verse was used in an insensitive manner?

What do you think about the "ultimate plan" interpretation?

If you agree, what are some elements of the ultimate plan which could justify suffering in this life?

How could a shallow answer cause more doubt?

God does have purposes for suffering

You hear people say "I can't believe in a God who allows so much suffering." This is a barrier to many putting their trust in God. An even more valid question is when Christians ask as Gideon did in Judges 6:13 *"...if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?"* They reason, "As a parent, I would never willingly allow my children such heartache. Why does our heavenly Father?" These often unspoken questions can undermine our faith and render us ineffective for our Lord. God didn't rebuke Gideon for asking, but God had to build Gideon's faith through some remarkable signs. For us, He has given the Scriptures to build our faith.

"For whatever was written in the earlier times was written for our instructions, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." Romans 15:4

The key to dealing with suffering is to focus on God in faith, maintaining confidence in His ultimate purposes. Indeed, faith of this nature is the key to a victorious Christian life. However, the faith must be in Him and not the purpose itself. For He nowhere promises to reveal His exact purpose to us in a given situation. One reason that God does not necessarily reveal the specific purpose for suffering is that to a person in the midst of suffering, no reason would be good enough anyway. A Christian mother who had lost a child told us, "If God were to say to me that because of my son's death, all of Africa would come to Christ, it would not be a good enough reason." Although God may not reveal His specific purpose in our suffering, He does give us plenty of precedents in scripture to give us comfort and confidence that He does have a purpose.

Why do you think God did not rebuke Gideon? (Judges 6:13)

Do you think that some Christians think that they should get preferential treatment from God? Why?

What would you say, if anything, to this mother?

What would you say to yourself, if she had said this to you?

Suffering that God allows for a higher purpose

As you review the following purposes, remember that the real issue is not God's specific purpose for a given situation of suffering, but our knowledge of Him. We think of God as "Our Father." And certainly He is. However, He is a Father with an eternal perspective. God may see our tribulations in much the same manner as a earthly father sees the inoculation of a new baby. A shot is painful, but insignificant compared to a healthy life. But, God is more than our earthly Father. He is also our High Commander in a struggle for the lives and souls of men. Some suffering in this world is related to the next world.

.1. God allows suffering to build character

"Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

James 1:2-4

"And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulation, knowing that the testing of our faith brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope." Romans 5:3-4

"Every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit." John 15:2

Sometimes we wish God wasn't quite so committed to our development. But, we need to remember that His goal is to conform us to the image of His Son.

What sort of character can suffering develop in a person?

Do you know individuals who have suffered greatly and seem to demonstrate the presence of God?

Does pruning involve some suffering? Can you give any examples?

Why do you think that suffering can develop character of this type?

Why do you think our character is so important to God?

2. God allows suffering to put us on the best path

God used suffering through a storm and a fish to restore Jonah to the path he needed to follow. God could have warned Nineveh in some other manner. But He chose to use Jonah. God was committed to Jonah's character and his obedience to His direction.

We 21st century American Christians have lost our historical perspective. For nearly 2,000 years the gospel of Christ has been most readily embraced by those in desperate circumstances, those who were suffering. That is still true across most of our world. The down trodden have always been receptive because Christ offered them a better life to come.

(Please read Jonah 1:2-17.)

How did God use a trial to put Jonah on the right path?

Can you think of any other Old Testament examples when God used hardship to encourage people to follow Him?

Do you know of contemporary people who turned to God in a time of trial?

How could God use suffering to turn people to Him?

3. God allows suffering to individuals for the good of others

A wartime movie theme is endearing to most of us and almost obligatory in our culture. The submarine captain remains surfaced while being strafed and bombed as one sailor frantically paddles to safety back aboard. Miraculously the enemy misses, the Americans escape, and everybody affirms the captain for his bravery and commitment to his men. There is no hint that the ship could have been lost with all hands and probably would have been outside the Hollywood set. Numerous "worth of the individual" themes recur frequently in American literature and cinema. And somehow, it all works out.

However, in real life we may be surprised to learn that God is not like the Hollywood ship captain. Scripture makes it clear that God will sacrifice individuals for the good or safety of the majority. This idea is repugnant to some. It's un-American! Certainly God cares for individuals, enough for Jesus to die for any one of us. But God will do what is best for the most people and for eternal values.

"Son of man, behold, I am about to take from you the delight of your eyes with a blow; but you shall not mourn, and you shall not weep, and your tears shall not come. Groan silently; make no mourning for the dead. Bind on your turban, and put your shoes on your feet, and do not cover your mustache, and do not eat the bread of men." So I spoke to the people in the morning, and in the evening my wife died. And in the morning I did as I was commanded. And the people said to me, "Will you not tell us what these things that you're doing mean for us?"
Ezekiel 24:16-19

Ezekiel had a wife he truly loved. God warned Ezekiel that He would take his wife, "the delight of [Ezekiel's] eyes", to illustrate how to grieve during the Babylonian captivity. How broken Ezekiel's heart must have been. They had just one final day together and then Ezekiel's precious wife died. Clearly, God sacrificed an individual's happiness, Ezekiel's, for the good of others. God used that to get the people's attention and ultimately to prepare the people for the purifying ordeal to come and His fulfilment of His ultimate plan, the coming of the Messiah.

Why is it hard for Americans in particular to accept a God who would sacrifice Ezekiel's beloved wife?

What was the result of the sacrifice of Ezekiel's wife?

Can you think of others in the Bible whom God sacrificed for the good of others?
Hint: Among many others Joseph, Ester, Jesus

.4. God allows suffering to teach us

"It was good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes." Psalm 119:71

Scripture is clear that God will use tribulation to teach us and build qualities into our lives. We do not need to look for pain. At the same time, we don't want to waste any suffering. This sounds self-serving, perhaps. But our attitude should be that we'll try to learn the lesson God has for us the first time. We don't want to force God to put us into more pain to accomplish His purpose.

"God never wastes pain. He always uses it to accomplish His purpose. And His purpose is for His glory and our good."
Cynthia Heald, *Becoming a Woman of Excellence* 1996 NavPress

Do you think that suffering can deepen our understanding of God? How?

Does suffering help us to appreciate the death of Christ on the cross?

How can suffering encourage us to follow God's direction and learn what He teaches in the Bible?

Someone has said, "I don't want to waste any trouble." What do you think this means? How would you apply this in a time of trouble?

.5. God allows suffering to increase our ability to comfort and strengthen others

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." Luke 22:31-32

Have you ever been comforted by others who have gone through suffering?

Do you think that the suffering must be exactly the same? Why or why not?

How do you suppose Peter was able to strengthen others after his own suffering? How can God use our suffering to tenderize our own hearts?

"One of the results of suffering in my life was to develop the ability to comfort others. Once you suffer you don't forget. I know what pain feels like. I know what it means to have a dream go unfulfilled and I also know how to get to the other side of suffering. One of our temptations is to think that others can't share our pain unless they are in the same situation. Scripture says that we should be able to comfort others in ANY affliction, because of God's comfort in our own life. Pain is pain and comfort is comfort. A large step in my recovery was to not give in to the idea that others can never know how much I've suffered. God has taught me that pain, to a large degree, is generic."

Kit Coons

6. God allows suffering to demonstrate God's works

"And as He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind' Jesus answered, 'It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was in order that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of Him who sent me.' " John 9:1-4

Suffering of others allows us to do the work of God and demonstrate God's love. This makes us God's partners in His ultimate plan. In a fashion, this is how we minister to God Himself in gratitude for all that He has done for us.

"And if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him." Romans 8:17

"Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God."
2 Timothy 1:8

"The kind of faith that overcomes the world because it trusts and obeys, no matter what the circumstances. The world does not want to be told, the world must be shown." Elisabeth Elliot. *Keep A Quiet Heart*, Wine Books, 1995.

7. God allows suffering as part of His ultimate plan

"...in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."
Matthew 5:45

The story of Job illustrates another aspect of God allowing suffering. God wants His children to love Him for Himself not just for His blessings. Christians are going to be subject to suffering like everybody else. Matthew 5:45 and the story of Job show that suffering (and blessings) may be distributed without merit. Otherwise, on judgment day, somebody would be able to say, "Of course they loved You. You favored them. I would have loved You too, had you favored me." Therefore all of us, regardless of our love and obedience for God, will share the common experience of tragedy. The story of Job demonstrates how God's ultimate goodness and our genuine love for Him is being tested. This is part of His complete plan for judgment and redemption.

(Please read Matthew 25:35-40.)

Why do you think that God wants us to participate in the relieving of suffering to others, when He could simply do it Himself?

What are some ways in which we can relieve suffering in God's name?

When people are afflicted and Christians help them, what message does this give to the world?

When God changes lives through the Christian message, what does this tell the world?

How can joining Christ and Paul in suffering serve for the gospel?

(Please read the story of Job in Job 1&2.)

Describe the contest in which God is engaged with Satan.

How does the example of Job fit into God's contest with Satan?

If God were to show obvious preferential treatment to Christians, what would be some results?

Suffering that God allows people to bring on themselves or others

Any of us, Christians or non-Christians may bring unnecessary pain on ourselves or make suffering worse as we will see in this section.

"For it is better, if God should will it so, that you should suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong." 1 Peter 3:17

"Seek suffering to make you more like Jesus," some people say. To them we reply, "Then put a rock in your shoe." They are technically correct, of course. God will attempt to use suffering to conform us to the likeness of Christ even if the source is a rock in our shoe. But it is far preferable to suffer under God's control rather than self-inflicted suffering. The Bible, in I Peter 3:17, exhorts us to suffer for the right reasons, and to not bring it on ourselves. God created humans with a free will. Only that way could they experience the deepest voluntary relationship with Him. A free will requires the ability to make choices. Poor choices can lead to suffering. Were God to eliminate the suffering, then free will would not be all that God intends.

Have you seen examples of people actually seeking suffering, perhaps because it made them feel more spiritual?

.8. God allows suffering to show the consequences of sin

"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption" Galatians 6:7

Much of the hardship in people's lives is unnecessary. It could be avoided by following God's instructions.

Give some examples of how sin can cause suffering in a person's life.

How could God use these consequences in the person's life?

How could God use the consequences of one person's sin in other's lives?

.9. Incorrect theology brings suffering

"Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings." Hebrews 13:9

What we believe and use as a guide for our lives does matter. Rather the Bible tells us many places to seek wisdom. Lack of wisdom leads to poor choices in life.

Can you think of incorrect theology which has caused suffering? Hint: Think of snake handlers or those who don't believe in seeing doctors. Historically, think of witch trials or the Inquisition.

Recognizing that none of us understands everything perfectly, what are some keys to finding wisdom? One Hint: Avoid those who think they do understand everything perfectly.

Have you ever met someone who felt guilty, unless they were suffering?

.10. Suffering that individuals bring to others

“For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me.” Exodus 20:5 (part of the 10 commandments)

As Americans, we do not want individuals to suffer for the transgressions of others. However, as part of the gift of free will, God allows people to do evil and to hurt others. Just read any newspaper to see everyday examples of people suffering because of others. Although Ex 20:5 is a difficult passage to interpret and apply, one thing is clear, God will allow individuals to suffer from the actions of others. God will definitely hold the person causing the hurt accountable. But, the suffering remains.

Can you think of examples from the Bible where people directly suffered because of the sins of others?

What are some contemporary examples of individuals suffering because of someone else.

What are some ways that we can minimize the possibility that others will suffer from our actions?

Our Response to Suffering is Critical

Scripture includes many other reasons for suffering. But now we're going to change our focus. Because suffering is something we all experience, we need to know how to deal with it.

Unfortunate Responses - Making the situation worse

Have you ever accidentally hit your thumb with a hammer? Perhaps the first person who attempted to console you got a surprise. In severe pain, we may lash out at innocent bystanders or even those whom we love the most. Stress brought on by suffering can also lead to bad decisions. People in pain often go to unusual or even ill-conceived methods to relieve their suffering. In fact, we don't have to go far in scripture to find an example of a difficult situation made worse by one of the spouses. In Genesis, God promised Abram that his descendants would be a great nation. This is a significant promise, but one for which waiting was required.

Let's look at some general areas where people can respond poorly to suffering, perhaps making it more severe.

.1. Guilt

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

1 John 1:9

Sometimes individuals torture themselves with guilt from a bad choice or an oversight. Thankfully, God has provided us with His forgiveness and a chance to begin again.

.2. Obsessing about the past or the future

After a tragedy, we are only human when we dream and wonder what our future could have been. But if we allow ourselves to be consumed by these thoughts, we will destroy the life that God has given us. Planning for the future, daydreaming about what could be, and visualizing a life that at this point doesn't seem possible, are all things that cause added suffering. The pain, if not dealt with, can destroy our lives.

(Please read Genesis 16:1-5.)

Sarai was tired of waiting. How did Sarai in her doubt and suffering make the situation worse?

Have you seen contemporary examples of individuals seeking to escape suffering, but making the situation worse?

Have you ever met a "crisisaholic", or a person who makes everything into a crisis?

How can we avoid adding regret over additional mistakes to our suffering?

Give some examples of guilt causing more suffering.

How does God want us to deal with mistakes we may have made which brought on suffering?

Have you observed examples of people in hardship obsessing about the future?

What are some ways that we can focus on the present?

3. Bitterness

“See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.” Hebrews 12:15

Bitterness may do more long lasting damage to a person than the original suffering.

What destructive effects can bitterness have on a person?

How can bitterness affect other relationships?

4. Blame

“And do not pass judgement and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you shall not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned.” Luke 6:37

In the context of suffering, it's quite natural to look for someone to blame. And who is the most convenient to blame?

The people to whom we are closest. If you are married, your spouse is convenient to blame. Sometimes couples openly blame each other. However, more frequently they may inadvertently create an environment of blame, perhaps criticizing each other for unrelated reasons.

Why do we have a tendency to blame others?

How can blame affect other relationships?

When does blame especially affect marriage relationships?

5. Beware of Depression

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.” John 16:33

Almost anyone who has been sick for an extended period can testify that prolonged suffering or unhappiness can wear down even the most faithful. Most of us have limited emotional reserves. Trouble and pain can exhaust those reserves and leave us vulnerable to depression.

What are some symptoms of depression?

What practical steps can a suffering person take to avoid depression?

Appropriate Responses - Developing Confidence in God

Fortunately, God has gives us straightforward ideas how to deal with our suffering.

.1. Give up the right to know why

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."
Isaiah 55:9

"Maturity is the willingness to bear uncertainty and to carry within oneself unanswered questions." Elisabeth Elliot, *Passion and Purity*, 1984. Published by Fleming H. Revell.

Why do we frequently feel like we have the right to know why?

How can an an insistence on knowing why lead us to frustration?

"We can be confident that God has a reason for suffering and scripture gives many of those reasons. Yet, nowhere does scripture promise that God will reveal to us which specific reason might apply to our situation. When people undergo suffering their first reaction is to ask why? Why this? Why now? Why me? As we deal with the pain, we think that if we just knew why, somehow it would all be easier to handle. But let me ask you, what reason would be good enough? We flatter ourselves when we think, "If I just knew why this has happened to me, then it would be OK." The truth is that frequently no reason is good enough when we're in pain. And the more severe the pain the less likely any reason would be good enough. What reason could possibly make sense of the loss of a child, being diagnosed with a terminal disease, or dealing with infertility?

Instead of asking Why? We should ask Who? Who controls all that comes into my life? Who loves me more than anyone else ever will? Who can be trusted to give me everything I need? Those questions lead us to God and that's just exactly were we need to be. We must be content to know that God, whose wisdom is perfect, has His reasons, even if we do not necessarily know what all the reasons are." Kit Coons

"The secret is Christ in me, not me in a different set of circumstances." Elisabeth Elliot, *Keep A Quiet Heart*, Wine Books, 1995.

.2. Survival Mode

"Another thing we have learned is a concept called 'Survival Mode.' There are times of suffering in our lives when all we should expect from ourselves is to survive; to go on with daily life, in the midst of pain, a time to give grace to yourself and to one another. To give yourself the freedom to heal on your own timetable. Obviously, you can't continue in grief or depression for an unreasonable amount of time, but we need to learn how to put away our own expectations of 'everything returning back

to normal' and work through our pain without adding more pressure to our lives. Drew has often encouraged me by reminding me that this was a time just to survive. That if I was doing that much, he would be happy with me and God would be happy with me, which gave me the freedom I needed to put the pain behind me on my own timetable."
Kit Coons

Have you ever had a period when you felt like just getting through the day was all you could possibly manage?

Did you feel guilty at the time?

After a period, were you able to take a broader interest in life?

.3. Be reassured of your inheritance

What are some things that we should count on as an inheritance from God?

" But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him."
Romans 5: 8-9

"Romans 5 tells us of the love that compelled Christ to give His life for ours. Occasionally, we read in the newspaper about a person who in a crisis sacrifices his own safety to help others, a "hero." September 11th, 2001 redefined the word "hero" for many of us. A hero is a man or woman who knowingly puts his or her life at risk for others. Perhaps people are living the remainder of their life because a fire-fighter or policeman made the ultimate sacrifice for them. Surely their life has more meaning now because of the huge investment that someone else made in it. That's exactly what God, in Christ, has done for us. Our lives have a new worth and new value, because of the investment Christ has made on our behalf. Our lives are no longer ours alone; they have a far greater purpose now.

“ Kit Coons

.4. Support one other

Give some examples of when someone has lifted you up.

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But, woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone?"

Ecclesiastes 4: 9-11

How can spouses be particularly suited to support one another?

If we are married our spouses are particularly needed to lift us up when we have fallen. This verse has been applied to many teamwork situations. But it is particularly relevant to marriage. Look at the last part, "if two lie down together they keep warm." With whom do you want to keep warm? At no time does a couple need to love and support one another more than when dealing with suffering.

.5. Focus on joy not happiness.

Can a person really have joy in unhappy circumstances?

"Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things" Philippians 4:8-9

Give some examples you have observed or experienced.

Happiness is dependent on circumstances. Joy is dependent on confidence of God's control in our lives.

6. Service to others

"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress ..."

James 1:27

Have you ever tried a diet plan to lose or maintain weight?

Low fat, low carbohydrate, no sugar, and high protein are among many different formulas debated as to their effectiveness. Probably no one diet plan is best for every individual. But, all of the plans have one thing in common: "Eat less and exercise more" is the key to success with every plan. To be sure, there are various food combinations and times that you eat them that may be important. But, ultimately all of the plans involve less calories and more exercise. There is just no other way.

In the same manner, the only way to happiness is to discover a sense of purpose. This is the way God made us. The most fulfilling purpose is that which positively affects others especially with an eternal value. Like diet plans, there is just no other way.

How can serving others get our focus off of ourselves?

When can having a higher purpose in life help to make our suffering seem less severe?

7. Reshape your goals

"Where there is no vision, the people perish." Proverbs 29:18
(King James Version)

"Dealing with our pain includes reshaping our goals. Positive change is brought into our lives by a new job, the birth of a baby, or a new home. Our whole focus is shifted. We see the world differently. Life will not be the same again. This is also true when we experience a loss. The difference being that this change was not planned or welcome. Our lives have been forever changed in an instant and it can take a long time to adjust.

Our temptation is to think "I'll never be happy again." One way to help us move through those changes is to set new goals. We need to be willing to use these goals to serve others. Reshape your goals around helping others, strengthening your own marriage, if married, or developing new skills." Kit Coons

What are some instances in which a tragedy or suffering may necessitate a reshaping of goals or expectations?

How can new goals help us to deal with suffering?

.8. Put your suffering in perspective

Getting perspective in the midst of suffering may be very difficult. However, the old saying, "I was sad that I had no shoes, until I met a man who had no feet." is appropriate.

Regardless of how we feel, "suffering" is relative. In Africa, there were many suffering the effects of polio, blindness due to measles, AIDS, and leprosy all without the network of care available to Americans. To them, most of our emotional and even physical traumas might not seem as significant as it does to us. One way to get perspective is to focus on our foundation for life.

One way to get perspective is to focus on our foundation for life.

"And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life." I John 5:11-13

Why is it so hard to put our suffering in perspective?

What are some steps to help us do so? Hint: This Bible study is one.

.9. Be Proud of the Way You Handled This

"Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart."
Psalms 37:4

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope."
Jeremiah 29:11

It is acceptable to take joy in having doing well in difficult circumstances. God wants us to remember with fondness when we put our faith in Him during suffering. These things help us to deal with future instances of hardship which are an inevitable part of life.

What are some ways you can handle suffering that will give you joy when you remember them later?

How can this be a testimony to others?

Would it make you look forward to additional suffering? Probably not. But, would it give you more confidence in God?

"God does many things which we do not understand. Of course He does - He is God, perfect in wisdom, love and power. We are only children very far from perfect in anything. At times faith must rest solidly in His character and His Word, not on our particular convictions of what He ought to do."

Elisabeth Elliot, *My Heart For God* 1995 Gateway to Joy.

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