



Why Is There Suffering?

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

A. The Reason For This Study

1. Suffering in many forms (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual) occurs all around us each day and inevitably touches the lives of each and every one of us.
2. The question of why God can let things like wars, disease, crime, relational abuses, and death happen to those close to us is often asked, especially as it is laid out as a proof that there is no God.
3. Even to those who believe, strongly even, there is always the human weakness to ask, "Why me?"
4. The purpose of this study is to explore some of the reasons why there is suffering, especially since there is a God. In most cases you are going to find it is not God to blame, but us.

B. Suffering is Natural When Standing for the Truth

2 Corinthians 1:5-10 -- For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance so also our comfort is abundant through Christ... and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort... indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.

1 Peter 4:13-16 -- 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. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you... if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God.

1. Several things about suffering as a Christian are evident from these passages. One is that suffering is accompanied also by much comfort.
2. Another is that suffering is to help us learn to depend on God. People who do not suffer are deluded into thinking that they are self-sufficient.
3. Also, for the Christian, PROPER suffering is a sign of authenticity that you are numbered among those taking a stand against evil. This is a blessing.

C. Suffering is Allowed by God for Our Own Good

Job 1:8-12 -- And the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil."...Then the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him."

Romans 5:3-4 -- ...but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;...

James 1:2-4 -- 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.

1. Suffering also tests our character, refining it and making it useful to us and to useful to God.
2. Suffering helps make one complete. An Arabic proverb says: "All sunshine makes a desert." A completely joyful life can leave one shallow.

D. Normal for this World's Circumstances (To Reflect On)

Romans 8:18-22 -- *For I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.*

Luke 13:1-5 -- *Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And He answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered this fate?...or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but, unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."*

1. People have had all sorts of strange notions about suffering. Some suppose that all suffering is the result of God's punishment for wrong doing. This is not so. If it were so, what did Jesus do wrong? Why did He suffer?
2. First, God subjected creation to a struggle. Pitting ourselves against things makes us stronger. Failures teach us valuable lessons. Discipline helps us grow in the right direction.
3. Suffering can also just come from the natural order. Storms, volcanoes, earthquakes, fires, floods and other natural disasters are how the earth renews itself. It is happenstance, ignorance or caprice that then puts us in harms way.
4. There are also other forces besides God working in the world. There is the evil done by Satan and men. There are mean animals and men who act like mean animals. Much of suffering comes not from God, but from the absence of God.

E. But Can Be Punishment for Wrongdoing

1 Corinthians 10:5-11 -- *Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things happened to them as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved. And do not be idolaters...nor let us act immorally as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell on one day. Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble...*

Colossians 3:5-6 -- *Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come.*

Romans 2:9-10 -- *There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

1. Much of this lesson is an apology to say that things like the deaths of babies and the cruelty of men are not God's work.
2. On the other hand, God does take a hand in punishing evil-doers, and warns us all there is a day a judgment for any who do not do what is right.
3. Suffering is not a time to disbelieve God, but a time to fear and obey Him.

F. A Closing Thought

For whatever befalls us it is inevitably our own fault and not God's. Twice before God has given us an opportunity to live in better circumstances. We had it good in the Garden of Eden and decided we wanted none of it. God gave us a second chance with the Nation of Israel (He provided manna and quail and water, their clothes didn't wear out, and He protected them from their enemies), but men turned quickly to idols. Even now He has given us a Kingdom truly of heaven where all tears can be wiped away, but we insist on bringing the world into it. Maybe if we stew in our own juices long enough we will finally learn to trust God.