

Suffering

The Bible is an answer book. It doesn't specifically address each situation you find yourself in. But it contains principles that can be applied to any human situation. But those principles are not helpful if they remain in the Bible. We must learn and understand those principles before we can apply them.

A few weeks ago I was asked a question about a dear relative who had died. This relative, as far as she knew, was not a believer. The question was, "Will I see her in heaven?"

The first part of the answer is that we do not always know if someone has believed. I know of countries in the world in which to announce you have just believed in Jesus as savior is an instant death sentence. Even in the US, some people believe and keep it a secret. Some may have believed as a child and forgotten. Once saved always saved. So we do not always know if someone was a believer.

The basic answer is found in the Gospel of John:

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

John 3:36 He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

God has made salvation incredibly easy. Just believe in Jesus as Savior. The alternative is not heaven.

Suffering
Romans 5:3

Jesus gave a real life example.

For the main answer to the question, I deferred to Jesus Himself. In Luke chapter 16, in the story of Lazarus and the rich man. The rich man was an unbeliever. When he died he went to Torments waiting for the final judgment and condemnation to the Lake of Fire. He had relatives, five brothers, who he wanted to be saved. He didn't want them to suffer the same result that he did. Jesus, in the context of the dispensation of the Law gave the following answer.

Luke 16:29 But Abraham *said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'

Luke 16:30 But he (the rich man in Torments) said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!'

Luke 16:31 But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"

Anyone who is positive toward consciousness of God will be given the gospel. In some cases that has been a copy of the Gospel of John. I met a man that read John chapter 3 and became a believer.

Today we continue with Romans. There is a single word in Romans 5:3 that is the topic: "tribulations." It can also be translated by various words associated with suffering.

Romans 5:3 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance;

Suffering
Romans 5:3

Romans 5:4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; (Today the topic is only “suffering.”)

Romans 5:5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Suffering is universal. Everyone suffers at one time or another. Some more than others. It is a frequent topic in the Biblical epistles.

It could be caused by “evil” sins.

1 Thessalonians 2:9 There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek,

1 Thessalonians 2:10 but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

1 Thessalonians 2:11 For there is no partiality with God.

We are not to fear suffering, but to embrace the opportunity to mature in our faith.

Romans 5:3 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance;

Suffering
Romans 5:3

Romans 5:4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;

Romans 5:5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

This leads us to the Greek words for suffering. One of the most prevalent is *thlipsis*.

“Usage: The term "thlipsis" is used in the New Testament to describe a state of severe distress or suffering, often due to external pressures or persecution. It conveys the idea of being under pressure or in a state of affliction, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual. In a biblical context, it often refers to the trials and hardships faced by believers as a result of their faith.¹”

There is a second word that is focused on “testing.” That is *peirazó*. This is included because testing often involves suffering. Job is an example of this.

“Usage: Peirazó is a verb used in the New Testament to describe the act of testing or trying someone or something. It can refer to both positive testing, such as examining the quality or faithfulness of a person, and negative testing, such as tempting someone to do evil. The context in which it is used often determines whether the connotation is positive or negative. In a positive sense, it can refer to God testing the faith of believers to strengthen them. In a negative sense, it can refer to Satan or evil forces tempting individuals to sin.²”

Then there is the noun form from the verb, *peirasmós*

1 <https://biblehub.com/greek/2347.htm>

2 <https://biblehub.com/greek/3985.htm>

Suffering Romans 5:3

“Usage: In the New Testament, "peirasmos" primarily refers to a situation or process that tests a person's character, faith, or endurance. It can denote both external trials and internal temptations. The term is used to describe circumstances that challenge believers, either through persecution, hardship, or enticement to sin. The context often determines whether the emphasis is on testing or temptation.³”

I’ll add one more of the words for suffering, *diógmōs*

“Usage: The term διωγμός (*diógmōs*) refers to the act of pursuing someone with the intent to oppress, harass, or cause suffering, particularly because of their beliefs or identity. In the New Testament, it is often used to describe the persecution faced by early Christians due to their faith in Jesus Christ.⁴”

It seems that every pastor has his own list of “why we suffer.” Here is a list from Robby Dean⁵ that provides good perspective. Remember that lists like this are developed by different pastors and are ...different. But that provides for a variety of perspectives. So if you already have a list concerning suffering, you can add this one for another perspective.

1. “The first is because of Adamic responsibility. It’s the result of sin. We live in a fallen world where corruption has entered in and it is not the world it should be.”
2. “The second reason we saw that we suffer is because of individual volitional responsibility. We make bad decisions and we suffer the consequences.”

3 <https://biblehub.com/greek/3986.htm>

4 <https://biblehub.com/greek/1375.htm>

5 <https://deanbible.org/new-testament-menuitem/1-thess-menuitem/message/14-trusting-god-doctrine-of-suffering-part-2-b/read> & <https://deanbible.org/new-testament-menuitem/1-thess-menuitem/message/13-trusting-god-hope-doctrine-of-suffering-part-1-b/read>

Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.

3. “In addition to reaping the consequences of our sinful and foolish decisions, we also may encounter divine discipline. God may intensify the suffering that is in our lives as a result of our bad decisions in order to teach us a lesson and to get our attention so we will focus on Him.”

Hebrews 12:6 For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives.”

Hebrews 12:7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

Hebrews 12:8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

4. “The fourth reason I said we suffer is because we’re connected to someone involved in either reason number two or number three.”
5. “Then the fifth reason that we saw that we suffer is because we live in the cosmic system. We live in a world that is dominated by fallen people and philosophies that are erroneous. We live in a world where the ways of living are fallacious and are morally antagonistic to God. The result is that there are just a lot of horrible things that occur because we live in the cosmic system.”

Suffering
Romans 5:3

6. “God may be bringing some suffering or adversity into an unbeliever's life so that He will have their attention and it will be an opportunity for us to communicate the gospel to that person.” The example that Robby Dean gave was the Corinthian jailer. There was an earthquake during which the doors to the jails were opened. As a result, the jailer practically begged Paul and Silas to give him the gospel. I encourage you to read Acts chapter 16. But now, understand that God controls events on earth. As such, the earthquake was a way to get the jailer's attention and get him to focus on the question, “What happens when I die?”
7. “A seventh reason that we suffer is because it motivates us in the Christian life. Suffering motivates us to trust in God and learn the Word.”
8. “An eighth reason that we suffer is so that we can be a testimony to others. We can be a witness not only to human beings but also to angels who are watching us. There are things they long to look into in terms of how Christians respond to the adversities of life because they learn about God's love and God's grace from us in ways that angels were never able to learn.”
9. “A ninth reason is similar to that but instead of being a witness to other human beings, we are a witness in the angelic conflict. We are a testimony to the angels of God's grace and mercy and love.”

Ephesians 3:8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,

Ephesians 3:9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages

Suffering
Romans 5:3

has been hidden in God who created all things;

Ephesians 3:10 so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

“The phrase “rulers and authorities in heavenly places” is a term related to the hierarchy of the angels. There are various authorities within the angels. Sometimes they’re referred to as principalities and powers. Other times they’re referred to as rulers and authorities. This relates to the hierarchy and the chain of command of the angels.”

“Not just the elect angels. Not just the elect or holy angels who are the angels who maintained their loyalty to God and their faithfulness to God. But this also refers to the fallen angels, those who chose to follow Satan in his rebellion from eternity past. They also learn, although negatively. They learn from our testimony about the grace of God. It’s just another plank in the indictment against them as they see us respond positively to the grace of God.”

10. “Then the tenth reason I have listed for suffering is that we go through these adverse situations so we can comfort others as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1:4, “With the comfort with which we have been comforted.” As we go through difficult times and challenges, then we apply the Word of God. God the Holy Spirit comforts and strengthens us with the Word of God. Then we, in turn, can encourage others who are going through similar circumstances.”

OK, so we suffer. What now?

Suffering
Romans 5:3

First, you need to ask yourself, “Am I in status quo sin?” If so, then acknowledge your sin and get back into faith dependence on the Holy Spirit. Use the promises in “faith-rest.”

Hebrews 4:1 Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.

Hebrews 4:2 For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

1 Peter 5:6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,

1 Peter 5:7 casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

You can pray that God will lighten the suffering. Yet, if there is a divine purpose for the suffering as Job experienced, then you must just continue to walk by faith. Like Paul.

2 Corinthians 12:7 Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!

Suffering
Romans 5:3

2 Corinthians 12:8 Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me.

2 Corinthians 12:9 And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

2 Corinthians 12:10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

James says something similar

James 1:2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,

James 1:3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

James 1:4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

This leads us inevitably to the Faith-Rest technique/life. Much of what follows is taken from my presentation of the Faith-Rest technique of 2017⁶.

⁶ <https://www.springvalleybiblechurch.org/Audio/Speakers/notes/20170108GuestSpeaker153.pdf>

Suffering
Romans 5:3

““R.B. Thieme, Jr. developed the doctrine of the faith-rest drill early on in his ministry. The term faith rest describes the way of life of the believer in the Old Testament and faith rest is one of the spiritual mechanics in our lives as believers in the Church Age.⁷””

“The faith-rest, briefly described, is that principle taught in the Word of God by which we enter a divinely provided dynamic rest from struggling to live for God. This is done by believing the promises of God’s Word, which releases God to work in and through us with His mighty power and wisdom. Even the indispensable means of living the Christian life called “walking in the Spirit” is appropriated by believing God’s promises of the Holy Spirit’s ministry to us.⁸”

“The first step in the faith-rest drill is to mix faith with a promise. The second step is to think through the doctrinal rationales that are embedded in that promise. We come to a certain conclusion, and the conclusion isn't simply a statement of that proposition. We come to the conclusion that God is in control.⁹”

Romans 12:9 *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.*

Romans 12:10 *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;*

Romans 12:11 *not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;*

Romans 12:12 *rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,*

7 https://kukis.org/Doctrines/faith_rest.pdf

8 Lindsey, H. (1986). *Combat Faith*. Toronto ; New York: Bantam Books. Page 34

9 <https://deanbible.org/new-testament-menuitem/3-john-menuitem/message/2003-3john-013/read>

Suffering
Romans 5:3

Romans 12:13 contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.

You can go to a lesson I taught a few years ago on faith-rest.

<https://www.springvalleybiblechurch.org/Audio/Speakers/notes/20210627GuestSpeaker332.pdf>