"Why Do We Suffer?"

Why would a loving, all-powerful God allow us to suffer. Hello, I’m Phil Sanders and this is a Bible study In Search of the Lord’s Way. A close look at Jesus Christ helps us to see another side to suffering. Stay with us.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord’s Way, we’re here to search God’s Word for His will. The Lord’s way is the right way to deal with every hurt, every problem, and every disappointment in life. The Bible is God’s Word and has the spiritual answers that we need to deal with life’s greatest problems. It opens for us God’s heart and God’s way. Thanks for joining us today; we want to be a part of your life each week.

The problem of suffering is universal. Everyone has either faced it, is facing it now, or will face it in the future. For some this is a real stumbling block to their faith, but it doesn’t have to be. As a minister I’ve spent many years at hospitals, nursing homes, and funeral homes with hurting people. I know how difficult it is to suffer illness or to lose a loved one. And it’s natural to say in our hearts, well you know, “If there is an all-powerful God in heaven that loves me, why did He allow this to happen? Why couldn’t he have stopped this and kept me from so much pain?”

My friend, the Lord knows the deep pain that you feel and loves you. We may not know why this particular event has happened, but we do know that God has not forgotten or overlooked you. We often assume love means preventing anything that might hurt a loved one. We assume suffering cannot be compatible with love, but is that always true? Could love and suffering coexist? Can suffering somehow be a blessing to us? If it can be shown that suffering is not all bad but can lead to a greater good, we might see our suffering as a building block rather than a stumbling block to our faith.

We offer the information about suffering on this program free. If you’d like a printed copy, a CD of our study, mail your request to In Search of the Lord’s Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or by e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free phone number, 1-800-321-8633. We also stream this program on our website www.searchtv.org. If you are looking for a church home, let us know. We’d like to help you find a church of Christ near you that’s sound and good. They support this broadcast and would love to meet you.

Larry Owsley will now lead the Edmond church in song, and then we’ll read from Romans 8:37 to 39.

Our reading today comes from Romans chapter 8 verses 37 to 39. The Romans Christians at this time were enduring terrible persecution and it would get worse. But, Paul wants to reassure them of God’s love.

But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This should reassure our hearts of God’s love. Let’s pray together. Oh Father we’re thankful that even in the hardest times of our lives that You have not forsaken us. But love us each day. Father be with and help us and may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Suffering is hard. We hate to hear about cancer, heart disease, hurricanes or fires. Sometimes people assume that the only way God can be “good” is to prevent what hurts us, but we question that. Isn’t God’s love and power seen just as clearly in how He helps us through a struggle as in whether He prevents it? Paul said in Romans 8 and verse 28, “And we know that God causes all things to work
together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” Now not everything that happens is good, but God is powerful enough to take the hurtful things in our lives and turn it into something that leads to good.

The rough bumps in life can give us the courage and determination to make life smoother for others. You can’t have lemonade without lemons. There are many things of comfort and good in this life, because somebody had suffered and then felt the need to make things better. Good arose out of hurt and disadvantage. When people are challenged, they learn to rise above the challenges. I think of Joseph, whose brothers cruelly sold him into slavery in a foreign land. Later Joseph was falsely accused by Potiphar’s wife and spent many years in Pharaoh’s prison. But through it all “the Lord was with Joseph” (Genesis 39 and verse 2). My friend, you may be going through tough times, but God can help you too.

Years later, Joseph’s brothers moved to Egypt along with their father. And when their father, Jacob died, these guilt-ridden brothers were afraid and they, they begged for forgiveness. But Joseph said to them in Genesis 50 verses 19 to 21, “Do not be afraid, for am I in God’s place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.” So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. Joseph didn’t take vengeance, he didn’t blame God, he didn’t lose faith, and he grew into a spiritual giant in spite of all of his suffering. Life going sour doesn’t mean God has abandoned you.

In our pain, we often focus only on what has happened to us, not knowing that God may have a greater plan. Joseph had had dreams, but he didn’t know how God would work out that dream. Becoming a slave and then a prisoner seemed to be exactly the wrong direction for a person who was to be exalted. Well the Lord did not exalt him until He was ready and until Joseph could do the job. Slavery and imprisonment actually prepared him for service to the Pharaoh. He suffered for years before God acted. He didn’t know it at the time, but he later understood that God meant it for good—slavery and imprisonment. Yes even slavery and imprisonment.

Joseph never grew bitter, as some people do. He never got angry at God but found the grace that he needed to forgive his guilty brothers. Rather than wonder why bad things happen to us, perhaps we should set our focus on what value this suffering has for us. Our suffering may be shaping and equipping us for some greater purpose that we may not now understand. It’s an assumption on our part that ease and happiness are the greatest good in life. Rather than doubt God’s love, we should ask what God is shaping you and me to be and what He wants us to do in His service. Suffering, though it’s painful, may have a value to our lives and may be the very thing that leads to life.

Some "good things" can only be brought about in our lives by suffering. The pearl, for instance, exists as a result of suffering. Suffering can actually bless us. It can help a person know himself and learn what is really important or valuable. It can build character by challenging one to stretch and to grow. It can also help him understand what he can do to bless others. Suffering teaches us to be thankful for our blessings and for others who helped us through a tough time. It teaches compassion. Oh walking the road of sorrow helps a person guide another who may find himself forced down the same road.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 1 verses 3 to 5, “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 will be able to comfort (others,) those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is
abundant through Christ.” Now this passage encourages me. Paul is not bitter toward God, not angry for all his burdens, but maturely understands that God’s comfort in his affliction equips him to comfort others when they are afflicted. God’s people help others when their lives are filled with pain.

In 2 Corinthians 11:23 to 27 Paul says that he had been in “far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I (he says I) received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.”

Well, I don’t know about you; but if anyone had a right to complain about his sufferings, Paul certainly did. Yet he didn’t complain. He was suffering not for doing something wrong but for doing what was right, for preaching the gospel! God wanted him to share the good news with the Gentile world, and all Paul found was insults, and persecution, and problems. Well, why didn’t God keep him from any suffering, so he could work? Well, God didn’t prevent the devil’s hindrances. In fact, Paul faced just about every problem that anyone could face; but he never gave up, he never got angry at God, and never took it out on others. What did he do? He drew closer to the Lord.

Paul knew this life is not all there is. Though he suffered much, he did not give much weight to his suffering. In Romans 8 and verse 18, he said, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” When, when we get to heaven, we’ll not be so concerned with all the aches and pains of this life. Our suffering will be over. The glory of being a child of God, of being in heaven, and, and of the love of God will be so wonderful we’ll say “it was worth” every sacrifice. This life is brief, and eternity is forever and ever and ever. One simply cannot compare with the other. And no one will feel cheated in heaven.

Someone says at this point, well, “Phil, you, you just don’t understand. I’m hurting. If God really loved me, He wouldn’t let me hurt like this.” Are you sure? Is the only way God can love you be to remove your struggles? You know some lessons and advantages of life only come through pain. How can I protect my children from disease painlessly? Do I love them the more by refusing to give them the vaccinations they need, just because I don’t want them to cry over a shot? You see, the, the little pains we suffer today may keep us from the big pains we could suffer tomorrow. Is all pain really bad? Would the Marine Corps follow that rule of preventing pain in order to make a better soldier?

You see one way that we grow stronger, more patient, more compassionate, and more steadfast is by going through struggles which challenge us. Paul found that even the worst pains could teach him something. In 2 Corinthians 12 verses 7 to 10 Paul said, “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! Concerning this (Paul says) I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness. (Then he says) Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

God used Paul as a great evangelist and apostle; but to keep him humble, God sent a messenger of Satan to be a thorn in his flesh. That thorn was sharp and painful. There was no aspirin in those days,
no Tylenol, no ibuprofen, and no relief. Three times Paul implored, entreated, asked God to take it away; and God said no. Paul didn’t get angry and quit on God.

He learned God’s grace was sufficient. God’s grace helps us through our struggles too. He didn’t take Paul’s thorn away, but God taught him to rely on the strength and comfort of His power. Paul was tempted to become proud. He had to learn that the power to do his work was not in Paul’s keen wisdom or intellect but in God. It was God’s Word, not Paul’s ability, that won people to Christ and made the difference in people’s lives. Paul needed to know that along with this thorn was also the power of God to continue in spite of it. God’s grace really proved sufficient.

Now, God won’t allow Satan to “buffet” or beat us up beyond our ability. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10 and verse 13 that, “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.” Our problems and sufferings aren’t stronger than God who stands beside us. He knows how much we can bear and He provides His grace to help us bear it. If it becomes stronger than we can stand, even our suffering as well as the temptations, God will provide a way of escape, so that we can endure. I’m really thankful for this promise of help in hard times. Our loving God does indeed stand beside us to help us.

Now to understand love and suffering, nothing is more valuable than recalling the cross. Jesus despised suffering and He begged the Father to “let this cup pass from me” at Gethsemane. Well, in the end, Jesus prayed that the Father’s will be done. Peter said that while He suffered, He kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously (1 Peter 2 and verse 23). Trust gave Him the power to endure what He suffered on the cross. His last prayer was, “Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). Jesus never got angry with His Father for commanding Him go to the cross. Jesus willingly suffered to free us from sin.

Jesus had the confidence and the courage to yield to His Father in times of suffering. And He endured the agony of the cross by entrusting Himself to the Father. We can also put ourselves into the Father’s hands with confidence. Peter said in 1 Peter 4 and verse 19, “Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.” I tell you our souls are His, regardless of what may happen to our bodies. The Lord will give us the endurance to bear any burden, to live with any affliction. And remember we belong to Him, and He will keep our souls. Let’s pray together. Oh Father we’re thankful though the good times and the hard times that Your love never vanishes. But that You can help us to bear up under the burdens. Help us to do Your will always. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

God demonstrated His great love in the death of His Son Jesus. And Jesus demonstrated His amazing love by suffering an agonizing death on the cross for our sins. You see, suffering and love are not incompatible. Jesus himself said, “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you” (John 15 verses 12 to 14). You see giving love to others may cost us dearly too, if we love as Jesus loved us. Taking up our cross and following Him will mean that we too will suffer.

Jesus' death on the cross, however, teaches us that suffering doesn't last forever; and death is not the end. When God’s people suffer, the Father is near them, sharing their pain, and holding them in His hands. Whether a Christian lives or dies, he never leaves the love of a caring Father in Heaven. He will always be with you. God will strengthen you for whatever problems may come your way.
I hope that your soul is right with the living God. If you want God to take care of you, then devote yourself to Him. Believe Him and His Word, repent of all your sins, confess the name of Jesus before others, and be baptized (immersed in water) in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins just as Acts 2:38 teaches. When you’re baptized, the Lord will wash away your sins (Acts 22:16), the Lord will make you His child (Galatians 3:26 and 7), and the Lord will add you to His church (Acts 2 and verse 47). Oh, we hope that you’ll be obedient to Him today.

We hope that you’ve been blessed by today’s study of God’s Word. If you want a free printed copy, a CD, of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord’s Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or by e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org.

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