

Meant for Good

Heartaches come to _____ of us, and we wonder how God fits in all this. God is just and His purpose is good, even when we don't understand _____. Today we're exploring how God uses our heartaches for _____. The Scriptures tell us all that we _____ to know to be saved and to live righteously. They reveal God's grace and love, how God watches over us and helps us _____ the struggles and disappointments of life. God is good and He will not put more on us than we can _____. God often uses things we consider _____ to bring about _____. Even when we don't understand, we can _____ God.

When Joseph was just seventeen years old, his father _____ him more than his brothers and made him a coat of many colors. Joseph made a bad report about his brothers, and his brothers _____ him and couldn't speak peaceably to him. God revealed to Joseph some miraculous _____ that showed Joseph in an exalted position and his brothers and parents bowing down to him. These dreams led his brothers to hate Joseph even _____. They wanted to _____ Joseph; but due to Reuben's interference the brothers sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt. Joseph served Potiphar until Potiphar's scheming wife _____ charged him with trying to rape her. Potiphar punished Joseph by placing him in Pharaoh's _____. The hand of the Lord was always with Joseph, and God put him next to Pharaoh in order to save Israel during the famine. Even in the harshest times, God never forsook Joseph.

When their father Jacob died the brothers _____ Joseph might take vengeance on them. But Joseph spoke _____ to his brothers. He explained, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to _____ many people alive" (Genesis 50:20). What the brothers meant for evil, God meant for good. God works His good _____, even when men are at their worst.

Our reading today comes from one of the most beloved Psalms of all time, Psalm 23.

Evil and painful things happen to all of us, and we don't always know the _____ why. Why do the young die? Why are there earthquakes, hurricanes, and tornadoes? Why do the evil men rule over nations? If God is completely good and all powerful, why does He _____ suffering? Is there some reason _____ all these bad things happen? It's not what we know that causes us the greatest _____; it's what we don't know.

God sees what we cannot see and He knows what we cannot know. Some things He _____ in His Word, but other things are secret. Deuteronomy 29:29 says, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may _____ all the words of this law." God reveals what is good for us and what we need in order to do His will, but He doesn't _____ everything to us.

Just because we don't know God's _____ for allowing some hurtful event doesn't mean that there isn't one. We're limited in knowledge, but we may understand many things in the _____ that we can't see in the _____. For instance, we didn't understand much of what took place in our childhood _____ we became parents and had children of our own. Our parents didn't explain

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everything. We couldn't understand everything, even if they had explained. Later in life we _____ that our strict, rule-making parents loved and cared for us far more than we imagined. We can comprehend many things today that we couldn't explain earlier. Loving parents discipline their children because they can see what their children can't see. So it is with God.

Hebrews 12:10-11 says of our earthly parents, "For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed _____ to them, but he [that is, God] disciplines us for our _____, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems _____ rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful _____ of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." We can see that later in life, when the discipline we received early in life became a great _____ for us, but not until later. Because they disciplined us, we learned to discipline ourselves.

When God disciplines us we should _____ it positively and not negatively. Hebrews 12:5-7 says, "'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by him; for those whom the lord _____ he disciplines, and he scourges every son whom he receives.' It is for discipline that you _____; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?" God doesn't discipline us because He's evil or wants to hurt us; He disciplines us to strengthen our character so we might endure.

God can see down the road much farther than we can, and He often allows today's struggles to happen in order to _____ us for the future. David faced a lion and a bear _____ he faced Goliath. Joseph managed a household and a prison _____ he managed Egypt. The _____ that you face today may be preparing you for some greater task tomorrow. Paul confidently told the Philippians in chapter 1, verse 6, "And I am sure of this, that he who began a _____ work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." God is indeed working in our lives and through our lives to bring to completion what He wills.

Paul later urges the church, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good _____" (Philippians 2:12-13). Whatever God does, He does to bring about what is good and right. When we serve God's good pleasure, we know that it _____ to our eternal good.

Not everything that happens to us is _____. We've all had our heartaches and disappointments. We've all faced callous people who unjustly abused us. God has this amazing ability to _____ what is painful at one point in our lives into something that _____ us at another point. The apostle Paul endured as much abuse as any Christian in ancient times, but never once does he engage in a pity party or entertain the notion that God doesn't _____ him. Paul said, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who _____ God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). Paul spoke this at a time when he knew many Christians would suffer and Rome would bring charges against the church.

God causes all things, good and bad, to _____ together for good. God uses even our heartaches to _____ some good blessing. We may not know what or how or when, but we know _____ can cause good. We know this by _____, because we know the God who makes the promise keeps the promise. Paul denied that their suffering separated them from the love or the blessing of God. Paul said, "Who will _____ us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, 'For Your sake we're being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' But in all these

things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who _____ 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 _____ to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35-39).

Far from separating us from the love of God, suffering may _____ us to a greater love for God. Paul gives us a little insight into _____ God uses our struggles and heartaches to bless us. “Not only that, but we _____ in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s _____ has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Romans 5:3-5). Christian suffering produces the ability to endure, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope. Suffering is the means by which we _____ in our faith and love for God. Suffering may not be pleasant, but it is for our eternal good. It provides a necessary _____ ground to build us up.

First Peter 5:8-10 says, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the _____ prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of _____ are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you’ve suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal _____ in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.” God permits suffering, but He’s also the God of all grace who both tests and restores us.

We all face suffering, but we don’t all _____ to suffering the same way. No one likes to suffer, but _____ we react to it determines our relationship with God. Some learn love and compassion from their suffering, while others harden their hearts or become _____. We can’t always control what happens to us, but we can _____ how we will respond to what happens. James 1:2-4 says, “Consider it all _____, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in _____.” That struggle or heartache that you face may be just the _____ that matures you in Christ and equips you for greater _____. God may be blessing you through this struggle. Consider what God is doing for you and in you as something joyful. See the good.

God may be fitting you for a service to _____ the lives of many. Paul said, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and that God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the _____ of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our _____ is abundant through Christ” (2 Corinthians 1:3-5). We all need someone who has “been there” to _____ us through our struggles. Your heartache and God’s comfort may be equipping you to _____ others who’re going through the same heartache that you’re facing. You understand your heartache in ways that others don’t, and that understanding helps to comfort others in their affliction. You can let your _____ make you bitter or make you better; which will it be.

Can God be both loving and yet _____ suffering? How can a loving Father permit suffering? Many people _____ that love and suffering are mutually exclusive. That if God permits suffering, some _____ that God could not possibly love us. We have to pause here and ask, “What if that suffering demonstrates _____? What if someone chooses to suffer in order to demonstrate his love?” What if a loving person in order to achieve good for others is willing to suffer?

What if loving people are willing to sacrifice now in order to bring about something better in the future?

Suffering is not simply a _____ matter; God also knows what it means to suffer. The God who permits us to suffer also permitted His _____ to suffer. Jesus was willing to suffer the cross as a means to _____ His love. On the cross He demonstrated His love for His _____. Speaking of His death on the cross Jesus said, “so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do _____ as the Father commanded Me” (John 14:31). Jesus earnestly prayed, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my _____, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). Jesus despised the shame of the cross but was willing to endure the suffering and _____ the will of the Father because He loved the Father.

God our Father loved mankind enough to sacrifice His Son Jesus, so that He could _____ for our sins. God said through the prophet, “But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own _____; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall upon Him” (Isaiah 53:5-6). God sent His Son to this earth to sacrifice Himself, so that He might bear the punishment for our _____ and we might be forgiven. By His scourging we are healed. He took the chastening for our well-being.

Love acts and sacrifices out of a determination to do what is _____ for somebody else. Real _____ includes sacrifice and puts the needs of others before its own needs and desires. Far from being mutually exclusive, true love always has some _____ of sacrifice or suffering! A loving person is willing to give of himself in order to _____ the greater good for someone else. The Lord Jesus demonstrates His undeniable love for you in His death on the cross.

You may be going through a really rough _____. Please don't give up on God; don't let your heartache make you _____. There's hope for something better. The last chapter of your life hasn't yet been written, and there is a life to come. One day God will right every wrong, make good prevail, and dry every tear. God has a _____ for you in heaven, if you'll put your trust in Him and obey Him.

The apostle Paul, speaking about his troubled life wrote, “We're afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our _____” (2 Corinthians 4:8-10). He knew that whatever happened to him in this life could not take away the _____ of God in the next life. He said, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth _____ with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18). We need the hope of Christ in our lives!

How do we get that hope? We get it through trusting and obeying the Lord. Believe in the Lord Jesus with all your heart, repent and forsake your sins, confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, and be baptized into Christ. Baptism is an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ so that God may wash away your sins. When you're baptized the Lord will add you to His church and make you His child. Christ suffered greatly to bless you and to show you just how much He loves you. Show your love by serving Him.