

Why do Christians Suffer, Part 2

This is the second part the study about why do Christians suffer. We are going to look at four more reasons why Christians suffer. In our last study, we discovered that the root cause of suffering is sin. I suspect that that was not difficult to figure out.

Then we explored three reasons why Christians suffer. Another reason Christians suffer is to prove whether or not they are truly Christians. Every suffering experience is really a test of one's faith. It proves to ourselves and to others if our faith is genuine. God already knows whether we are real Christians or not.

REASON FOR SUFFERING

– **TEST YOUR FAITH.** We saw from Matthew 13 in the parable of the sower of the seed that everybody is like one of the four soils. We saw from that parable that there is a sower and he sows the word of God. Some people reject the word of God. Some people hear the word of God; some respond to it, some with joy. There are various reasons why people end up leaving the Christian faith. In fact, we saw that for a while they might actually look like a real Christian. Now you might say, "For how long will they look like a Christian? A short time? A long time?" It does not matter; it is for some period of time. If you pay attention to the parable of the tares and the wheat, they can actually look a Christian for a long time, like Judas, then leave the faith.

But the true Christian is characterized as good soil. The seed, or the Word of God, landed on the good soil and brought forth fruit. They brought forth a lot of fruit, spiritual fruit. We are talking about a spiritual response. I want to elaborate on this type of suffering with another illustration from the book of Hebrews.

Turn to the book of Hebrews if you would. In Hebrews 6:10 you are going to find that the Holy Spirit and the writer of Hebrews, whoever that writer is, are actually encouraging these people who are involved in their church and continuing to serve the Lord. The book of Hebrews is written to churches that had people who were Christians and some who were not Christians. You will see in the book of Hebrews at times it is very clear that he is speaking to the non-Christians; at other times he is speaking to the Christians. In this particular passage, it is not clear which group is being addressed. I suspect the author is talking to all of them. We

are told in verse 10,

For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. Hebrews 6:10 (NASB)

The message is that God does not forget your work.

In Verse 11 we read,

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so

as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Hebrews 6:11 (NASB)

Now, there are two things I want you to notice in these three verses. In verse 11, these people are actually encouraged to continue serving one another. The author is gracious and verse 10 says that they were still ministering. But when you look at verse 11 and 12, it is obvious they are not serving very well. They are not being very faithful. In fact, in verse 11 it says they were sluggish. The alternate meaning of the word is actually "lazy." The Greek word can also mean lazy.



The idea is that they are in church and involved in ministry, but they are lazy about it and not very faithful. He uses the term sluggish. It is the idea that someone needs to push them along. He is trying to push these people along to serve the Lord. He tells them to stop being that way. What this points to is a spiritual problem.

In fact, the writer of Hebrews is not sure if some of them are Christians and he keeps encouraging them to hold on, and come on all the way to the faith. For those who have come to the faith, they are supposed to act accordingly, to be faithful and committed to Christ. The book of Hebrews is written to Christians who are really struggling. In fact, it is not even clear who is a Christian in the church because of their behavior. Their behavior is atrocious if they truly are Christians. In chapter 10 and verse 32, we learn that apparently these Christians had really gone through a period of suffering. We are told in verse 32,

But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. Hebrews 10:32-33 (NASB)

They were going through a lot of tribulations. Verse 34 says,

For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. Hebrews 10:34 (NASB)

Then in verse 35 he says,

Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. Hebrews 10:36 (NASB)

The message in verse 36 is come on, you have need of endurance. These Christians were going through some suffering. The whole book of Hebrews is screaming that they are thinking about giving up the faith, or at least the author of Hebrews is concerned that they are going to give up the

faith.

He keeps saying, "Come on, come on, come on." He is encouraging some of them to come to Christ, because they have not come all the way to genuine faith. Others have accepted Christ but seem to be retreating; so there is a question as to whether or not they are real. If you look at verse 23 of the same chapter, chapter 10, he tells them,

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful . . . Hebrews 10:23 (NASB)

They were claiming to be Christians but they were wavering, being tossed back and forth, unstable!

Then he says,

. . . and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds . . . Hebrews 10:24 (NASB)

One of the reasons that you come together as Christians is to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. He makes that point in verse 25. He says,

. . . not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some . . . Hebrews 10:25a (NASB)

The message is that there were some who were claiming to be Christians but were not even faithful to come to church and gather with other saints. Then he says,

. . . but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near . . . Hebrews 10:25b (NASB)

The book of Hebrews is written to a church and it is unclear who the Christians are. Why? Because they have been going through some suffering. This is an example of why God allows suffering in our lives.

One of the reasons God allows suffering in our lives is to prove who the true Christians are. How do you respond? The message is that if you are not a real Christian when suffering occurs, all of a sudden, church will not be a priority and little by little, you will back away from spiritual things.

You will retreat into a world that is all about you and you will be consumed with yourself. It will become obvious after a while whether or not you are a Christian.

REASON FOR SUFFERING – BECAUSE YOU ARE SINNING. The second reason Christians suffer is because they are sinning and are unrepentant about their sin. Because they are unwilling to deal with their sin, God brings suffering into their lives to motivate them to deal with their sin.

REASON FOR SUFFERING – MOTIVATE YOU TO NOT SIN. The third reason that Christians suffer is to prevent them from sinning. We saw that with the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul was given a thorn in the flesh, and I always find it interesting that Paul prayed three times asking God to remove the suffering, and three times God said, “No, no, and no! I am not removing the suffering.” The reason for the suffering was to prevent Paul from becoming a proud person. So God can allow suffering into our lives to motivate us to not sin. I think it is important if you are in a period of suffering to recognize that God may have allowed the suffering to motivate

you to not sin. You need to ask yourself, is there something that I have been involved in or I am doing that God does not want me to repeat? You just need to be aware that this is one of the reasons that God allows suffering in our lives.

REASON FOR SUFFERING – SPIRITUAL GROWTH. The next example of suffering we want to talk about is a Christian suffering for spiritual growth. In other words, God may allow you to suffer for the purpose of spiritual growth. James 1:2 says,

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. James 1:2 (NASB)

I want you to look at the phrase “various trials” at the end of verse 2. “Various trials” means “different trials.” That is, there are different kinds of trials that come into our lives. You say, “Which ones?” Well, I think it depends on the person. I think God tailors the trials to each person depending on what rough edges He wants to remove. It depends on what area in your life He wants to work on, in which area you need to grow spiritually. Consequently, the trials will differ.

I think that if we fail a test or trial, God will actually revisit you with that test or a test similar because He is working on you in particular areas of your life. So, the trials will vary and the trials will be repeated until you learn your lesson. You say, “What kinds of trials?” Well, how about the

death of a loved one?

I know a number of people who had someone die in their life and it was a severe blow to them, a major blow. How about a church crisis? That is very common. I think almost everybody has gone through a church crisis. How about an illness?

That is very common

too! There are only a few people that I have discovered in my entire life that have said they had never been ill in their entire life. How about work? Trials at work? Maybe trials finding a job? How about personal comfort? You say, “Personal comfort is a trial?” Yes, I think so! I think personal comfort can be a trial because that is what you want, so you pursue it. You may believe there is not much suffering in that; that might be true, but it is still a trial.

James 1:2 in talking about trials states, “Consider it all joy my brethren when you encounter various trials.” Now, obviously, most of the trials that are in view in verse 2 are about suffering. Most of the trials here in this passage are about suffering, but there are trials that are not suffering, but



instead are tests. They test you. How you respond will cause you to grow or not grow.

Then I want you to notice the first part of verse 2. It says,

Consider it all joy . . . James 1:3 (NASB)

The word for “joy” is *chara* in the Greek. It just means joy or rejoice. You ask, “Am I supposed to rejoice and be happy in my trial?” Yes, but let me change the wording. It is not that you are to be joyful about the trial, but that you can be joyful about what the trial will accomplish in your life. Do you understand the difference? Yes, the trial can be bad; in fact, you will see later in the book of Ecclesiastes that a trial is called evil. Do not think that trials should be glamorized somehow and become some kind of a spiritual haze where you claim it is wonderful? No, the trial itself may be evil. But the point is - what does the trial accomplish in your life? It all depends upon how you respond.

Verse 3 says,

. . . knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

James 1:3 (NASB)

There is the correct response! You know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. The word for “testing” is interesting in the Greek. It has the idea “to prove.” The New American Standard Bible says “testing.” I would like to read it this way, “Knowing that the proving of your faith produces endurance.”

It is the idea of proving. But in this case, this is a Christian being tested and the trial continues to prove that you are a Christian and in the process produces endurance or steadfastness in the Christian faith. That is, you hang in there. That was one of the problems with the Hebrews. The Hebrews were not hanging in there. They were looking shaky. The writer of Hebrews, the Holy Spirit, was saying, “Come on, are you real? Come on, come to faith, be a Christian. Are you real or not?” Someone else has said that a person can respond to suffering like an egg or like a potato. A potato goes into the boiling water hard and comes out pliable. An egg goes into the boiling water soft and comes out hard. The

question for you, if are a Christian, is how are you coming out? Are you coming out pliable or are you coming out hard?

I have found that Christians, as they get older and older, are more pliable. They show meekness. They show kindness. They show warmth. There is a softness to them. If they truly are a Christian, they have been responding to trials correctly. You ask, “How should I respond to trials?” Well, the verse talks about endurance and the actual Greek means that you bear up under the trial. In other words, when a trial comes you submit to it and go through the trial. You do not look to get out of it. You are thankful for what God is teaching you.

That is what James is talking about. The trial occurs and you submit yourself to it, and you go through it as opposed to screaming and yelling, “God, get me out of this. This is not fair. You do not love me!” The idea is that you actually submit and go through it. If you fight it and fight it, you come out harder and eventually you become very hard. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to be joyful because of what you will learn through the trial.

Perhaps you have heard of A.W. Tozer. He said,

It is doubtful that God can use any man greatly until He has hurt him deeply.

Wow! What a comment! A.W. Tozer should know what he is talking about. He said that he was doubtful God can use any man greatly until He has hurt him deeply. You ask, “Wait a minute, God wants to hurt me deeply?” You will find out in a little bit that God actually wants us to suffer. Why? Because that is the way He grows and matures every Christian in the faith. That is the way He matures us spiritually. We must look to Him and depend on Him as we go through the trials.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote,

Men will never be great in theology until they are great in suffering.

May I ask you this question? Are you great in suffering? Someone else has written, “A Christian is like a teabag, not much good until it has gone through hot water.” I like that

one. You have to go through the hot water before God can really use you.

That is the idea of endurance. The Greek word is hupomone. It has the idea that you go under, bear under, and go through your trial rejoicing all the way. The verse says, "Consider it all joy." Chara – "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance" - the ability to go through your trial. Verse 4 says,

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

The message is that you are supposed to go through your trial and look to God to do a perfecting work in your life so that at the end you will lack nothing. God has a purpose in putting us through trials.

I think of the man called Job. Remember Job? Remember good old Job? Job had major problems. In Job 1:6, we are told that the sons of God along with Satan go up to heaven. They have a discussion with God. Satan makes the point that Job is somebody he has not been able to touch. God makes the comment that Job is a righteous man. I find it interesting that God tells us that Job was a righteous man. Then Satan says,

Does Job fear God for nothing? Job 1:9 (NASB)

Satan is saying the reason that Job is being a good man is because God is blessing him. Then Satan said,

Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that

he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face. Job 1:10-11 (NASB)

Then the Lord said to Satan,

Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him. Job 12 (NASB)

Satan departed from the presence of the Lord. I want you to notice that Satan said, "You are protecting Job. I cannot get to him." Then God said, "Okay. All right. You can get

at Job. You can do anything you want to him. But you cannot touch his body!" So, what happened? From verse 13 through almost all the rest of the chapter, Satan is allowed to take away everything that Job owned, including his children. All that remains is Job



and his wife. His wife is not exactly a help. In chapter 2 we are told,

Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord. The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it." 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. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause." Job 2:1-3 (NASB)

Why did Job suffer? Oh, he sinned! No, he did not! Before the suffering started and after the suffering, God said Job was blameless and upright, and turned away from evil.

Watch this! Job did nothing wrong. Absolutely nothing wrong and yet he suffered. Some of us could be suffering even though we did not do anything wrong. You ask, "Is that possible?" Yes, that is possible. You could be suffering even though you did nothing wrong. Satan answered the Lord and said,

Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life.

However, put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face. Job 2:4-5 (NASB)

Guess what happened. God says, "Okay. You can touch his body only, you cannot kill him." That is exactly what happened. It turns out that Job ended up with boils all over his body. Verse 8 says,

And he took a potsherd to scrape himself while he was sitting among the ashes. Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!" Job 2:8-9 (NASB)

She is saying, "Why suffer? Just get it over with." Job responded to her and said,

You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity? Job 1:10 (NASB)

Wow, what a comment! He says, "Oh, so you only want to accept the good times and not adversity? Am I supposed to curse God and die because I cannot stand the suffering? The suffering is unacceptable and so I will accept only good from God but not the difficult times in life?"

Some of us are like that. The difficult time comes along and we want to die. Have you ever asked God to take your life and take you to heaven? "Oh, I cannot stand this place, just kill me, take me." I have had people ask me, "Is it okay to commit suicide?" I have told them it is a sin. They respond, "Oh, will it send me to hell?" and my answer is no! We are told that in all this Job did not sin with his lips.

REASON FOR SUFFERING – TO GIVE GLORY TO GOD.

Job is a good example of a Christian who suffered for the purpose of spiritual growth. That introduces us now to the fifth reason for suffering. The fifth reason Christians suffer is to glorify God, and Job is a good example of that. Job is a good example of suffering, and also he is a great example of giving glory to God. In Job 40 we discover that God has been talking to Job. The conversation started in chapter 38.

In chapter 38, God was asking Job one question after another. For example, "Who created this constellation? Who created these stars? Who created the foundations of the world? Who did this? Who did that?" In chapters 38 and 39, God just keeps asking questions and Job has no answers. When you get to chapter 40, Job honors God. Job glorifies God and we are told,

Then Job answered the Lord and said, "Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You? I lay my hand on my mouth. Once I have spoken, and I will not answer; even twice, and I will add nothing more." Job 40:3-5 (NASB)

You know what Job does? He glorifies God as a result of his suffering.

Now, think about this. How did the suffering for Job start? When Satan came to God and said that the reason Job suffers to God the way he does, is because God has been protecting him. Then what happened? God said, "Okay, you can have at him." God did that twice. It was like a contest between Satan and God, and how did Job respond? In the middle part of the book, which we did not read, Job did sin. But at the end what happened? Job glorified God and he only ended up sinning in response to his three bad counselors. Otherwise, he was fabulous. It was like a contest. Did Job end up responding correctly to God? The answer is yes! In a sense we could say that God won. Job ended up glorifying God. I am sure Satan was unhappy with Job's response. Job's response was fabulous at the end. Now, that is a good illustration of someone who glorified God in response to their suffering.

The principle was also illustrated for us in John 9 where we are told that there was a man who was born blind. The

disciples asked Jesus, "Why was this man born blind? Was he born blind because of something he did or because his parents had sinned?" And Jesus said, "No!"

There is another example of God receiving glory from suffering and that is with Lazarus. Lazarus had died and Jesus made a very important comment about Lazarus' death. Listen to John 11:4.

But when Jesus heard this, He said, "This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it." John 11:4 (NASB)

Did you know that one of the reasons that you might suffer is to bring glory to God?

A woman from our church was hospitalized some years ago. She shared a room with another lady. During the time that the two women were together, she told this lady about our church and the Lord and gave her a church business card. About one year later, the lady gave me a call. God used the original discussion in the hospital room in this woman's life and that woman came to believe in Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior after additional conversation with myself.

God the Holy Spirit used that event to help the woman understand who Jesus was and she ended up coming to faith. That is exactly the message of Romans 10. How will they hear without a preacher? Someone needs to preach. Someone needs to go. Someone needs to be committed to share the good news about Jesus Christ so that others will hear the gospel and respond to God. That is the message of Romans 10. Our sister was suffering physically and was hospitalized among other reasons to share the gospel with a woman who later came to faith. At times, God might actually allow you to suffer to bring Him glory.

In Philippians 1:6, we are told,

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:6 (NASB)

The message is that God began a good work. He is continuing to work and He will work in us into the future.

When God brings suffering into our lives, we need to trust him. We need to trust Him that He knows what He is doing; He is doing a work in our lives. Sometimes it may not be actually for us. On some occasions it may actually be for somebody else. That might be the reason that we suffer - for somebody else.