

WHY DO THE GODLY SUFFER?

“Why Do the Godly Suffer?” This is one of the age old questions. Many people do not understand it and that is why I am delighted to talk about it. I believe that perhaps I can help you to understand suffering a little better.

I. TYPES OF SUFFERING

I want to begin by sharing with you, some types of suffering. Not all suffering is the same. If we do not understand why we are suffering, we certainly do not understand what we can do about it.

A. There is suffering because of Adam’s original sin. (Luke 13:1-5)

So this kind of suffering is not your fault. All men suffer as a result of Adam’s original sin. Unbelievers also suffer. You could be a monkey and still be suffering. You could be a tree and you would still be suffering. Because all of creation suffers due to Adam’s original sin.

“Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, ‘Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them -- do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.’” (Luke 13:1-5).

Those people that were standing there and talking when suddenly a tower fell on them -- Was that because they were so much worse than the other people who were just standing a hundred feet further? Jesus said, “No.” It is part of the original sin. It is part of our fallen world and fallen society.

But I have some good news for you: A believer may be partially redeemed from this. Not completely, but partially or occasionally. Our active faith nullifies certain parts of the original sin. And God, on occasions, does special miracles for us. Therefore original sin does not have as strong a hold on us believers as on all the other people. So with this type of suffering you do not have to panic. You do not have to say, “Oh, what did I do wrong? Oh, how terrible.” It happens to all people: to the just and the unjust alike.



B. Suffering because of personal sin. James 4:17

Things you have done wrong, come back to hurt you. In James 4:17 we read, “Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.” Now all of us know how to do good. All of you men know to get out of bed first before your wife does. But some mornings you say, “Hey, why don’t you get up? I am tired, I want to lay a little longer.” If you know what is good and you do not do it, that is sin. You know that you should do your homework as soon as possible, and if you wait until the very last evening, that is sin.

Jonah sinned. He did not want to do what God wanted him to do. So he had to go for a swim. Jacob sinned. He lied to his father. He caused an argument with his brother and then later on others deceived him, and he suffered for it. We read in 2 Samuel about all the glorious things that King David did. Then he sinned. And we read about how he had to pay over many, many years for the sin that he committed.

Now the Bible tells us that not all men suffer equally for the same sin. If you are a prominent person, like King David was, you have to suffer more for certain sins than if you were just an ordinary person from the street.

C. Suffering because Satan attempts to make us backslide. Matt. 4:1-11

In Matthew 4:1-11 we have the temptation of Jesus. Jesus wanted to serve God, and before He began, Satan wanted to sidetrack Him. "Why go this long difficult way? Yes, you will receive glory, you will receive worship of all the kingdoms, but if you just worship me I will give you the glory of all the kingdoms now." So that is a separate category of suffering. It is a special attack. You cannot help it. Satan has selected you to attack you in this special way. He did that with Eve, even before the original sin of Adam.

You cannot avoid Satan's attacks, but you can have peace, because you know that you are not guilty, it is not personal sin. As a matter of fact, if you were not doing anything for Jesus, there is a pretty good chance that Satan would not be attacking you. The Bible says, "*In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*" (2 Timothy 3:12). So you must be doing something right. "Well praise God! I am doing something right, because the devil's getting mad at me." Do you see that there can be some element of joy, in recognizing where the suffering comes from, and why it is here?

Now notice that these types of suffering are listed from the lowest to the highest level of suffering. So there are different levels of suffering. And some sufferings must be learned to be recognized as a privilege.

D. Suffering because of purification purposes by God. Hebrews. 5:8

Suffering because of purification purposes by God has nothing to do with Adam's original sin, or with our fallen nature. It has nothing to do with us doing something bad. It has nothing to do with being attacked from Satan. This suffering is from God, because God wants to do something special in your life.

Listen to Hebrews 5:8. It talks about the Lord Jesus; "*Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.*" Now you would not think that Jesus had any reason to suffer. Yet we read here that Jesus had to learn obedience. Problems were allowed in His life, so that He could show the people and prove to God, "I will obey You, no matter what." It is like burning away the dross. When you melt gold, you burn off the impurities so that only the pure gold remains.

Now I think you can see that this is a much higher level of suffering than all the other levels we have talked about. What is your reaction going to be? Are you going to shake your fist at God? "What are you trying to do to make me obey you? Are you trying to make me pure?" Not many of us would want to do that. So if you are suffering for that reason, your reaction to suffering will be completely different than it would if you had to suffer because of some of these other types of suffering we discussed earlier.

E. Suffering for the sole purpose of glorifying God. John 9:1-13 and 11:4

This is an even higher level of suffering. Nobody has done anything wrong. It is just that God wants to do something beautiful. God wants many people to say, "Oh, that was God."

Example: Let me tell you a story from John 9:1-13. There was a young couple; they discovered something. They discovered that he was male and she was female. They fell in love. They had a beautiful wedding. And they were dreaming of living happily ever after. Shortly afterwards this young couple was expecting a baby. Everything was good. The baby was born. Praise God.

Then some months later the young mother held the baby close to the window and saw that the baby, her first born son, did not blink his eyes in the bright sunlight. She was scared. She did not say anything to her husband. She tried for another two weeks with her fingers in front of the little boy's eyes. But there was no reaction. One day the young husband comes home, he is whistling, he opens the door, "Honey I am home!" And he finds her on the floor sobbing. Her dress is wet from the tears. He says, "Oh, Honey, what is the matter? What is the matter?" She said, "It is John. John is blind." He said, "No, it cannot be!" "Yes. Yes. I have known it already for three weeks. It is for sure, he is blind." All the hopes of living happily ever after together went out of the window that evening. They knelt down together to pray, and only one word came across their lips, "Why, Why, Why?"

There was a little boy who could not go and play outside. He always had to have somebody holding him. The neighbors wanted to avoid this little boy. He could not play with the other three year old children. It came time to go to school, but John could not go to school. He had to stay at home. He never learned to read. He could not do mathematics.

Later on he grew up. He reached puberty, nobody wanted to be with him. Other boys were playing sports, he had to sit on the side. A few years later he was a teenager. He attended other people's weddings. He

heard boys and girls laughing together. He could even hear some young people kissing each other. For him there never would be a wedding. For him there would be nobody to love him. He would have to go through life alone. There was nobody to nurture him and care for him. He could not respond to anybody or be a husband, or be a father.

The parents wanted to retire. They were old already. No retirement for them. They had to work. They had to take care of him. They could not just relax together nice, in a nice apartment, and enjoy their retirement years and sit on the balcony and rock in a rocking chair. There was no privacy for them. No enjoyment of the golden sunset years.

And why did all of this happen? The Bible is very, very clear about that. Because God wanted to glorify himself. The Bible says: *"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," Jesus said, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.'*" (John 9:3). A life time of suffering and of shame. A ruined life, as far as we know, as far as we can see. Then Jesus came and healed him. His parents had to struggle their whole life long, just so God could do a miracle. God wanted to do a miracle. For many years, even before his birth God had begun to work on this miracle.

Would you like a miracle in your life? Would you like to have a blind child so that God can do a miracle? Would you like to wait thirty to forty years? I think that God could not trust me with a miracle like that. But he trusted that mummy and that daddy with a miracle. They did not curse him. They did not deny him. They did not throw out the blind boy and desert him. They did that which was right all the time, until God was ready to do a miracle for them.



Lazarus' death was also an example of suffering for God's glory. Jesus told Mary and Martha, *"It is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."* (John 11:4)

Another example is Job. Now Job lived so good, nobody could find anything bad about him. And God said, 'Hey, did you notice Job? Did you see him? Pretty good guy, huh? As a matter of fact he is the best person that I have in the whole world. He is the best one.' And then Job was tested. Satan said, "Ha. Yes, of course." And Job was tested for the simple reason that he was the very best Christian there was. What a privilege, to be tested because you are the best Christian in the whole world.

II. ATTITUDES IN SUFFERING

Let us look now at some attitudes that we should develop toward suffering. I will list five different types of attitudes here. I hope I can show you, by these five different types of suffering, that not all suffering is bad. So if we understand these five types of suffering, then we can determine what our attitude should be in suffering.

A. Suffering to glorify God is a definite part of our calling and service for the Master

It is a definite part of our Christian lifestyle. Therefore it is a privilege. It is an opportunity. It is a chance. Job had that special privilege because he was the best Christian. There was nobody else that God could trust with these problems except Job. So actually there is nothing to complain about. There is only to heave a big sigh of relief, "Oh, I am the best Christian in the whole world!" That is something completely different. That sheds a whole new light on the issue.

B. It is a Christian's responsibility to elevate all suffering to the 5th level--of glorifying God

How do you do that? We must, *"give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."* (1 Thessalonians 5:18). The Bible tells us many times, that we must always give praise to God. By doing that we are blocking the attacks of satan, and the problems of original sin, and we are elevating them to the point of glorifying God.

I am reminded here of one of my acquaintances in America. He was an evangelist. He lived on the same street for, I think ten or fifteen years, and had been witnessing to his neighbor with no result. One time in the middle of the night, his house went up in flames. He and his wife and family, escaped with a blanket and



stood in the street and watched the house burn down to the ground. The neighbor came to him, "How can you possibly stand here so calm, so quietly, while your house is burning down? If this were me I would be yelling and screaming. I would be running up and down the street." A week later that neighbor became a Christian.

Why did that Christian have to suffer like that? It was his way of glorifying God. He could glorify God in that situation. Yes, the neighbor could have been saved the week before, but he did not want to. But when he saw the attack. When he saw the suffering. And he saw the Christian taking this suffering and bringing it up to the fifth level of glorifying God, he recognized, "That is a supernatural action." And he said, "I need a supernatural element in my life."

What I am trying to teach you today is: Whenever you experience suffering, you must resist the temptation of having a natural reaction, and you must develop a **supernatural reaction**. And when you develop a supernatural reaction, that is not a normal human response but comes from the Holy Spirit, then you are glorifying God.

C. Glorifying is done through verbal praise to God, amidst the suffering. Hebrews 13:15

"Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise -- the fruit of lips that confess his name." (Hebrews 13:15). **Praise in the midst of suffering, that is where it is at.** 1 Thessalonians 5:18 tells us the same thing. Philippians 4:4 says, *"Rejoice in the Lord always."* In the Psalms it is mentioned several times. This is God's will in your life. This is not normal; it is supernatural. This is a habit you should develop in your life.

D. This means, more suffering shows up more pure godliness, or holiness

So it is like a scale. You put on suffering, and the scale goes down. You put on more godliness on the other side and the scale balances. Panic, negativism, bad language, any of those things have no place during a difficult period for a Christian.

E. This makes suffering thus a positive experience, not a negative or a fearful one

Now that you have learned to give praise to God in the middle of your problems. Now that you have learned that this is possible, and that it can actually be almost delightful at times, you have learned a supernatural reaction to a time of difficulty. Now you are ready to say, "Oh, here comes a problem. Thank you Jesus! I see that you want to do something in my life. I see that you want to accomplish something through me. I praise you and I adore you. Show me how I can have a **supernatural reaction** to this problem. Give me boldness and power to successfully produce a miracle out of this seemingly hopeless situation." What a difference in your attitude. Instead of going around constantly being afraid of, "Well something bad may happen. How terrible that would be. Oh I am afraid," you can float through life knowing that God loves you more than you love yourself. God wants nothing but the very best for you. God does not want anything bad for you.

III. SUFFERING IS NON-OPTIONAL

Maybe you wish you could avoid it. Well you cannot.

A. Christ gave us definite commands as to what our conduct should be under persecution/suffering. (John 15:20, Matt 5:10-12 & 44-48, Luke 6:22-23, Rom 12:14)

Jesus said, "I had to suffer. How can you imagine that you, the lesser, will not have to suffer when the master has to suffer?" *"If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also."* (John 15:20).

1. Rejoice

Jesus said, *"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness... Rejoice **and be glad**, because great is your reward in heaven"* (Matthew 5:10&12). Now that is pretty strong language. Rejoicing is something special. In case you did not get it, he added, "and be glad."

In Luke 6:22-23 he said, *"Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven."*

2. Bless

And in Romans 12:14, *"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse."* Yes, we do have friends and then we have some other people also.

3. Love

"Love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44).

4. Pray

"Pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). That is the perfect answer God has.

5. Be perfect

"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48). Suffering has a good cleansing effect on us. All people must suffer from time to time and in certain ways. Even the very Son of God had to bear this responsibility.

B. Personal examples:

1. Christ set a personal example.

"For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."
(1 Peter 3:18)

2. The disciples set a personal example.

In Acts 5:41 we read, *"The Apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace in the Name."*

3. Paul set a personal example.

God told the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* When God told Paul this, what was Paul's reaction? "Oh, shucks, that is not what I want." Not quite! Listen to this, here is Paul's reaction: *"Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."* (2 Corinthians 12:10).

C. Suffering as a measuring stick of effectiveness (2 Tim 3:12, 1 Thessalonians 2:13-15)

How can we use suffering as a measurement to see if we are developing the right attitude?

In 2 Timothy 3:12 we read about using suffering as a measuring stick of effectiveness, *"In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."* There is no escape. If you do not experience any sort of suffering, maybe there is something wrong with your Christianity.

1 Thessalonians 2:13-15 also talks about that: *"And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea... You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displeased God and are hostile to all men."* This is another example of the apostle Paul emphasizing that suffering is a measurement of our effectiveness.

D. God considers suffering as a special treat. (Philippians 1:29)

A special treat from God. Something He does **for** you, not against you. Something He allows to happen in your life for a special purpose. We read in Philippians 1:29, *"For it has been granted to you on behalf of*

Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.” It is a special privilege. God has given it particularly to you, over and above simply believing in Him.

Romans 5:3 tells us, *“Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”* You want character? Well here it tells you how to get it.

We read some beautiful verses from 1 Peter 2:19-23, *“For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”*

And again in chapter 1 Peter 4:12-16&19 we read: *“Dear friend, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or a thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.”*

Meditate on James 1:2&3: *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know the testing of your faith develops perseverance.”*

CONCLUSION

So what is the conclusion of these Bible verses? There is only one conclusion you can come to if you are honest about it. Christ is giving you opportunities and privileges to show Christ in a unique way that He cannot trust others with. He trusted me with my little five year old boy having a very serious car accident. He trusted the parents in John 9 with giving them a blind child. He maybe has trusted you with a specific family problem. He is trusting somebody else with another problem. Why do not all people get the same problem? Because God cannot trust all of us with the same problems. He knows what He can trust me with. He knows what He can trust you with. He knows how you can give Him glory. He knows under what difficult circumstances you will pray to Him. So in conclusion we need to ask ourselves a few important questions.

A. We need to learn to ask, “Why not?” “Why not me?” Luke 24:25-26

We should begin with asking, “Why not?” instead of why. We read in Luke 24:25-26, where Christ was talking to His disciples after His resurrection, they were upset, discouraged, and they were not praising God at all. So Jesus said to them, *“How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”* “Did the Bible not explain that? Did the Old Testament not say so? Then why did you not believe it? Then why do you feel sad? Then why are you not happy? Then why are you not glorifying God? Then why do not you have a supernatural reaction?”

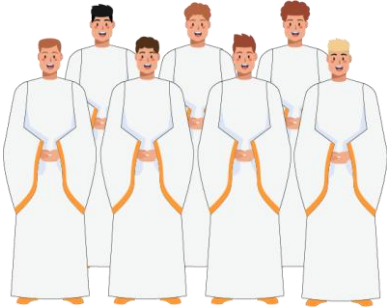
Do you see how wrong it is to ask “Why?” instead of “Why not?” “Why actually should the other person suffer and not me?” Somebody must suffer. It is part of human life, and when you say, “Why me?” It is just the same thing as saying, “God you should have given this problem to somebody else. Somebody else’s father should have died. Somebody else’s child should be sick.” That is why we need to learn to ask, “Why not me?” instead of “why?”

“Why should your child have a car accident, and not my child?” “Is it fair?” “Why should I have it better than others?” “Why should you give special privileges of suffering for Jesus to other believers and not to me?” You need to ask yourself, “Am I being fair in my reasoning, in my mental processes, with the rest of the world?” Of course, war is normal, sickness is normal, death is normal. “But do not touch me!” Is that fair? Is that proper?

B. Face the problem, “We want an easy life.”

This is one of our main human frailties. We need to learn to look ourselves in the face and realize; we want to have a soft life. This is not bad. We must not be a masochist and seek suffering.

C. Now God wants us to focus on the final result. Rev 7:9-17, Rev 6:9, Matt 5:12



He gives us a picture in the book of Revelation, as to what that final result looks like. There we read in chapter seven, verse nineteen: *“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that nobody could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and they were holding palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’ All the angels... fell down on their faces... saying, ‘Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!’ ...These in white robes... are they who have come out of the great tribulation... they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he*

who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Revelation 7:9-17).

And then we read in Revelation 6:9, “When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and the testimony they had maintained.”

That is why Jesus said, “We are going to do this in heaven, and I want you to start practicing down here on earth.”

Let us close by looking at Matthew 5:11-12, *“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.”* And in Philippians 4:4 Paul says, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

Blessings to you, our dear friends!

We are happy to present the video, audio and paper materials that have been prepared by **New Life for Churches**. You have the privilege *upon completion of your practical assignment* to use this lecture with others.

Practical assignment

Completed

➤ Fill in the blanks for each of the following relating to your ministry life:

☐

1. In my ministry life I am suffering
2. This suffering comes from (write in the reason according to the descriptions given in the lecture)

3. What am I going to do about this suffering? (i.e. repent of my sin, glorify God)

➤ Fill in the blanks for each of the following relating to your personal life:

☐

1. In my personal life I am suffering
2. This suffering comes from (write in the reason according to the descriptions given in the lecture)

3. What am I going to do about this suffering? (i.e. repent of my sin, glorify God)

➤ Fill in the blanks for each of the following relating to your family life:

1. In my family life I am suffering
2. This suffering comes from (write in the reason according to the descriptions given in the lecture)

3. What am I going to do about this suffering? (i.e. repent of my sin, glorify God)
