

AO Devotional #7 – “Suffering in a Godly way”

Have you ever wondered why God is letting you go through a tough time? Have you struggled in your faith because of this tough time? Today is the day to learn how we as Christians should suffer in a Godly way.

The idea of suffering is something many Christians want to ignore because they want to focus on the good times in life. I have been one of those people and when I went through a hard time, I found myself completely caught off guard and needing answers. Today, I want to answer a few questions for you.

The first one is why God allows us to deal with sufferings. I want to start off by saying a tough time and sufferings are completely different. A tough time could mean being low on money for food and necessities while suffering could mean almost starving to death. Both are bad, but one is more involved than the other. Let's start to understand the answer of this question by realizing that God is not the creator of suffering and evil.

Genesis 1:31 says,

“God saw all that all he had made, and it was very good.”

If God is not the creator of suffering, then who is? God gave us freewill to do as we please, and the first sin started with man, so we are the ones who brought suffering into this world. You may ask yourself, “Couldn't God have foreseen all of this?” and I'm sure he did, but just imagine if you were to raise a kid. It would be foolish to think if you have a kid that they would not have to deal with any pain or disappointment. If you knew all of this, then why have kids in the first place? The reason is the potential for having joy, love, and wonderful memories. That's how God feels about us! The next point is, though suffering isn't good, God can use it to accomplish good!

Romans 8:28

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

Notice how God promises good for us, but only if we're following him. This promise is not for everyone. There is also not a timeline for this promise to be held.

2 Peter 3:9

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

My next point is that our suffering will pale in comparison to the good things God has in store for his followers. My favorite passage to go to for dealing with suffering is Romans 8:18-30, so I will stick with that trend.

Romans 8:18

“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

Remember, this was written by Paul who went through beatings, imprisonment, hunger, thirst, homelessness and many other things. He went through far worse than most of us will ever have to deal with and yet he still looks toward the future. If we had to suffer our whole life for Christ would that not still be worth it if we got to spend eternity with him in heaven? We can't deny that present sufferings are hard in the moment, but we have to look toward what the future holds. My last point to answer the first question is, we decide whether to turn bitter or turn to God for peace and courage.

John 16:33

“I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. But be courageous! I have conquered the world.”

In this passage he has offered us two really important things when we're hurting: peace to deal with our present and courage to deal with our future. God has conquered the world! We need to remember Jesus has taken everything on the cross for us, so we don't have to be held down by the world anymore. Let's turn to God!

The last question we still have to answer is how do we handle suffering and remain faithful through it? To answer this question, I turned over to Psalm 88. I will not post the whole scripture to save space, but I highly encourage you to go read that right now and then finish the rest of this.

Psalm 88 is one of two Psalms that end on a bad note. The other one is Psalm 39. It is not uncommon for Psalms to be filled with the prayers of suffering people, but almost all of them end on a note of hope, except these two. That makes these two Psalms even more intriguing to learn about, but I will only be focusing in on Psalm 88. In this passage darkness is mentioned 3 times and is clearly the overall arching theme of the passage. This prayer ends with, **18 “You have taken from me friend and neighbor- darkness is my closest friend.”** What kind of prayer ends with “darkness is my closest friend” and how much suffering has this person had to deal with? Maybe even a better question is why is this prayer even in the Bible? Couldn't God just have left this one out? This passage teaches us a number of things.

- Darkness can be something that lasts a long time for a believing Christian.
 - The Psalmist mentions, **15 “From my youth I have suffered and been close to death; I have borne your terrors and am in despair.”** He has clearly been suffering a while. He is suffering inwardly and outwardly as well because he feels like God isn't hearing him out. He is in a state of turmoil in this prayer. This teaches us we can still suffer even if we are a strong Christian and that God hears our prayers in the dark times.
- There is no better place than to learn about the grace of God in dark times.
 - To start with, this man is not praying as much as he is interrogating God. For example, when he says, **10 “Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do their spirits rise up and praise you? 11 Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in destruction?”** These are sarcastic rhetorical questions. The Psalmist is saying he wants to tell the world about God, but how could he do that if he's dead?! He wants answers. He is being disrespectful to God. He is saying all of these things because he is fearful and in despair. His emotions when writing this are dictating how he thought

he felt his whole life. It's almost irrational what he is saying. At the end when he says, "darkness is my closest friend" that summarizes his emotions in one sentence. He is saying darkness is more comforting than God. That's an overreaction, but it shows how we can be irrational when we get emotional. I say all of this to show the suffering this man has dealt with and how we can learn from it. A quote by Derek Kidner explains better what I have been trying to convey. He said, "The very presence of this prayer in scripture is a witness to God's understanding. God knows how men speak when they are desperate." This tells us God put this scripture in the Bible to identify with those who pray like this. He is the God of grace and knows how we speak when we are desperate.

- There is no better place to become a person of greatness than in dark times.
 - This man says a lot of things that he really shouldn't be saying to God, however, he is saying them to God, so he is partially correct in what he is doing.
 - This passage can be related to the book of Job in a way. The devil is telling God that Job is using him because he is getting blessings from God. He is saying Job is in a transactional relationship with God, not one out of love. He says once God stops giving Job things, Job will turn his back on God. The author of Job is trying to say that to us as well. Do we love God because he gives us things, or do we love him for himself? A lot of times we go to God because we want or need something. We need to go to God for God. That means we need to pray to him in our worst moments. Often times when Daniel was presented with a problem he went straight to prayer. We need to have that heart to go to God immediately and get healing from him no matter what emotions we are going through.
- Darkness can be relativized.
 - This Psalmist believed that his darkness was permanent. We know he is wrong. His suffering actually was relative or temporary. God really was there for him and he was pretty much being dramatic. We know he was overreacting because the author of this Psalm was named Hemen. He wrote many of the Psalms and the book of Psalms is one of the greatest works of literary history in the history of the world. Christians and non-Christians agree on it. That means he wrote some of the greatest literary in the history of the world. He didn't know it would be so successful at the time, but millions of people have been helped because of his work. Just like pressure can turn a piece of coal into a diamond, through this man's suffering he was turned into a great artist. He couldn't see God working at the time, but God was still working through him. God hasn't abandoned us and has a plan for us we just have to trust him.

I know this subject may not be the most encouraging subject ever to do a bible study on, but it is a necessary part of being a Christian because we are told we will have to suffer in this world. Understanding how to deal with these sufferings can help us to prevent disconnecting with God or becoming bitter with him. I hope this helps you to deal with anything that is thrown your way so you can praise God through the troubled times!

"You cannot fully understand peace until you have first experienced suffering. In time, this suffering will lead to wisdom and growth, all you have to do is follow God first."

-Hunter