

Why People Suffer (Part II)



DAVE MILLER, Ph.D.



EXISTENCE OF GOD

HUMAN SUFFERING

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Article In Brief...



The Bible provides the only plausible, sensible, satisfactory explanation for the existence of suffering in the world, given in the first installment of this series. In this second installment, two subcauses of suffering are examined: (1) human sin, and (2) the means of spiritual purification.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: The following article is excerpted from Dr. Miller's recently published book, *Why People Suffer*, available through Apologetics Press. **Part I** of this three-part

series appeared in the January issue. Part II follows below and continues, without introductory comments, where the first article ended.]

The Decisions We Make—and Their Consequences

Once we understand the foundational meaning and purpose of life on Earth, we have the necessary vantage point from which to identify within this divinely orchestrated environment several specific subcauses of suffering that are subsumed under the broader, “umbrella” purpose of “soul making.” Among these, perhaps **the #1 cause of human suffering is sin**. This term is used in many different senses in current culture, but the Bible gives a very narrow, precise definition: violation of God’s law (1 John 3:4). Nothing else is sin. For mankind, sin occurs only in terms of human action in relation to the will of God. Only the Bible can inform humans as to what sin is. [NOTE: The New Testament is the portion of the Bible that is specifically applicable to human behavior today. However, though originally addressed to the Israelites, much may certainly be learned from the Old Testament (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13); see Warren, 1974, pp. 41-43].

For example, burning the toast is not sin, but **lying** about it is (Colossians 3:9). Though not intended to be exhaustive, consider the listing of sins on the next page taken from the New Testament that aids in conceptualizing sin properly (Romans 1:29-31; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 4:31; Colossians 3:5-8; Revelation 21:8).

Listing of Sins in the New Testament		
sexual immorality	wickedness	covetousness
maliciousness	envy	murder
strife	deceit	gossip
backbiting	hating God	violence
pride	boasting	inventing evil things
disobedient to parents	untrustworthy	unloving
unforgiving	unmerciful	idolatry
adultery	homosexuality	sodomy
thievery	drunkenness	extortion
lewdness	sorcery	hatred
contention	jealousy	outbursts of wrath
selfish ambitions	dissensions	revelries
bitterness	rage	anger
brawling	malice	uncleanness
evil desire	blasphemy	filthy language
cowardice	unbelief	lying

[NOTE: One must examine Scripture and consult Greek authorities to arrive at accurate definitions of these terms.]

A great deal of suffering, misery, heartache, pain, and unpleasantness is generated by human sin. In fact, like the first human pair (Genesis 3), we bring much, perhaps most, of our suffering on ourselves. Sin is the direct result of free moral agents making choices that violate God's will (Romans 5:12; 1 John 3:4). Sin brought death into the world (Genesis 2:17; 3:16-19; Romans 8:18-23; 1 Corinthians 15:26). Prisons are full of individuals who are there due to their own decisions and their own actions. Likewise, much physical illness and disease is the result of humans making unwise, even detrimental, decisions regarding the use of our bodies (e.g., drugs, alcohol, tobacco, illicit sex, etc.).

Our Own Sin

Suffering from sin comes through two sources. First, we can suffer due to our own sin. When Peter wrote, "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters..." (1 Peter 4:15), he acknowledged that many people, in fact, bring suffering and hardship upon themselves because they murder, steal, commit evil, and interfere in the lives of others. The police may very well shoot and kill or painfully wound a fleeing felon—instant suffering for sin. A person may smoke crack cocaine, receiving instant physical pleasure, but eventually resulting in horrible physical effects and even death. We can "sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind" (Hosea 8:7). We can choose to "sow to the flesh" and thus "reap corruption" (Galatians 6:8). No doubt about it: much suffering in human history has been self-inflicted.

The Sin of Others

The other source of suffering from sin is that which comes due to the sin of others. The drunk driver that careens into a car occupied by a family of dad, mom, and their two small children, killing some of the occupants and maiming the others, not only suffers from his own sin; he also causes the innocent to suffer due to **his** sin. Indeed, the consequences of a person's own sins can wreak havoc on succeeding generations (Exodus 20:5). God explained to the first generation of Israelites out of Egypt that because of their sin—their unwillingness to trust and obey God by entering the Promised Land—they would have to meander aimlessly in the desert for 40 years. As a result, their children would have to "bear the brunt of your infidelity" (Numbers 14:33). The kids had to suffer for the sins of the parents. So it continues. Think of the drunken fathers across our land and the world who cause their battered wives and children to suffer.

Sin is far-reaching and extremely pervasive. Consider the decisions made by Arabian slave traders centuries ago to engage in what the Bible calls "manstealing" (1 Timothy 1:10—KJV), or kidnapping, by capturing individuals in Africa, crowding them into ships, and transporting them to America to be sold as slaves. Those decisions were made by people who you and I do not personally know. We had nothing to do with their decisions or their actions. Yet, those decisions, that inflicted immediate

suffering on their victims, eventually led to civil war and thousands of additional deaths, and many years after the fact Americans are still suffering the consequences of those decisions. You and I can suffer for the sins of those who literally lived centuries before us. Such is the destructive, devastating, deadly effect of human sin.

Not Fair!

How are such circumstances fair? They are not. However, they do not reflect negatively on the justice of God or make Him blameworthy. In order to create the suitable environment for soul-making, free moral agency is inherently mandatory. And when humans are free to make their own decisions, they may well make **wrong** decisions. Blame, therefore, rests with the perpetrator—in the above instances, the drunk and the slave trader. Why blame God because persons, of their own free will, chose to drink alcohol and drive, or enslave their fellowman?

The very purpose of the created order would be thwarted if God intervened miraculously to prevent consequences every time humans chose to do wrong. God has literally done everything possible to discourage people from making wrong choices—short of interfering with their free will. He has provided evidence of Himself in nature (Psalm 19:1ff.; Romans 1:20). He has provided written communication (the Bible) that is self-evidently inspired, to define sin and inform people regarding the need to refrain from sinning. Given the nature of man (a thinking being with volition) and the nature of God (a perfect, infinite Being), this world must of necessity include the possibility that people will choose to sin and, in so doing, hurt themselves and others.

To suggest that this vale of soul-making could have been adjusted by God to eliminate pain and suffering while still allowing humans free choice is to suggest the possibility of a round square or a 90-year-old teenager. The very idea is nonsensical and self-contradictory. The atheist or agnostic who insists that God does not exist because of suffering in the world—for if He existed, He would have arranged for pain and suffering not to occur—has taken a nonsensical and self-contradictory viewpoint. As Warren cogently explained:

God is infinite in power, but power meaningfully relates only to what *can* be done, to what is *possible* of accomplishment—not to what is *impossible*! It is absurd to speak of any power (even infinite power) being able (having the power) to do what simply *cannot* be done.... Rather than saying that God *cannot* do such (with the implication that he is *deficient* in *power*, so that if only he had *more* power he *could* do it), one should say that such simply *cannot be done*—that such is *not subject to power*, not even to *infinite* power! (1972, p. 28, italics in orig.).

While God allows humans to exercise their own free will and commit sin, He is grieved by such choices. He desires that all people be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). He “is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). God asked this rhetorical question in the hearing of Ezekiel: “Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should

die...and not that he should turn from his ways and live?" (Ezekiel 18:23). So we cannot indict God. We must admit: much of the pain, hardship, and suffering that we experience and see around us is the result of human sin.

We're Being Persecuted

Some suffering is due to righteous living that evokes hatred and opposition from those who have chosen to live in sin. Why did Cain kill Abel—when Abel had done nothing personally to Cain?

Answer:

And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God (John 3:19-21).

Cain had ample opportunity to get his attitude straight and bring his actions into harmony with God's directives. God even gave him a pep talk: "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it" (Genesis 4:6-7). So why would Cain reject God's words and kill his brother? He despised the light and did not want the light of his brother's obedience to expose his own disobedience. As John further noted: "not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? **Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous**" (1 John 3:12, emp. added).

Much suffering has been levied in human history by the unrighteous against the righteous (cf. Hebrews 11:24). Nero lined the roads leading to Rome with crucified Christians and even provided nighttime illumination by setting them on fire (Tacitus, *Annals*, XV.44). Christians are neither surprised nor bewildered by such treatment. Jesus, in fact, warned the faithful to expect it:

If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, "A servant is not greater than his master." If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also (John 15:18-20).

They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service.... These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world (John 16:2,33).

Peter even stated that Christians ought to expect and anticipate hardship and suffering, and not be bewildered by it when it arrives—

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, **as though some strange thing happened to you**; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified (1 Peter 4:12-14).

The three Hebrew youths, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, were ordered to worship the idolatrous image King Nebuchadnezzar had erected or be burned alive in a furnace of fire. When they refused, they were brought before the king to offer an explanation. What they said on that occasion ought to be the attitude of every faithful follower of the God of heaven in the face of persecution:

O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up (Daniel 3:16-18).

These three men were sufficiently convicted of the reality of God that they recognized that it might not be His will to intervene and deliver them from the persecution of the king. They might have to die. Nevertheless, they still refused to deny spiritual reality and behave as if God does not exist. Their suffering was an insufficient pretext for denying God.

We ought to be like the farmer's mule that fell into a pit. The farmer did not have the physical means to extract the mule, which would surely die a slow, agonizing death. So the farmer commenced to bury the mule by shoveling dirt into the pit. However, the stubborn mule refused to be buried. He shook each shovel full of dirt from his back and packed the dirt beneath him by stomping it with his hooves. Eventually, sufficient dirt accumulated under the mule's hooves that he was able to simply step out of the pit. The mule refused to give up and be buried. We ought to have the same determination as we face the hardships of life. Shake 'em off!

Self-Improvement: I Can Be a Better Person!

But there are other subcauses of suffering. Consider the old blacksmith who was a collector of iron. On a typical day, he would select a piece suitable to his purpose and begin his work by holding the metal among flames until it turned white from the intense heat. Placing it in this super-heated condition on an anvil, he would strike the piece of iron with his hammer. This initial treatment of the iron was a test—a test to see if the metal would “take temper” and thus be capable of being fashioned

into a useful object. If the initial test was unsuccessful, the hunk of worthless metal would be tossed onto the scrap heap. If the initial test was successful, the piece of iron would next be plunged into water, and then once again subjected to the flames. Now the smithy could begin his work, repeating the cycle over and over again—heating, striking, and cooling. With time, patience, and hard work, the formless hunk of metal gradually emerges from the arduous, seemingly endless process as a meaningful, valuable article for use.

Isn't life like that? It's painful, prolonged, and painstaking. Life can feel hot, life can feel cold, and life can feel like we are being beaten down. But those very aspects of life can result in value, meaning, and capability that cannot be secured in any other way. The hardships of life can **improve and perfect us—preparing us for eternity**—if we will allow them to. We ought to beg God to enable us to take temper, endure the difficult process of molding and shaping, and not to throw us on the scrap heap as useless and incorrigible.

Furnace of Affliction

A common metaphor used in the Bible to describe life's adversities is that of the smelting process of "extractive metallurgy." When raw ore is mined from the ground, it must be refined and the impurities removed. Historically, the process by which this objective is achieved entails tremendous heat, although now chemical reducing agents are also used to decompose the ore, separating it from the silver, iron, copper, and other base metals. Reducing the ore to a liquid state in a furnace of fire allows the pure metal to separate from the dross or impurities.

God frequently alluded to the necessity of subjecting the ancient nation of Israel to this process, figuratively speaking. They had a history of defiance and rebellious rejection of God's will for them. Israelite prophets forewarned their people of the impending disaster, insisting that the coming captivity was deserved. The foreign aggressor would be God's rod of chastisement. But this calamity would also serve a useful purpose, figuratively represented by the smelting process.

Referring to the wickedness of Judah and the capital city of Jerusalem, Isaiah conveyed God's intentions: "Therefore the Lord says...I will turn My hand against you, and thoroughly purge away your dross, and take away all your alloy" (Isaiah 1:24-25). "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction" (Isaiah 48:10; cf. Jeremiah 9:7). Zechariah announced: "I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested" (13:9). Malachi asked:

But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness (Malachi 3:2-3).

The psalmist summarized the principle by describing the process from beginning to end:

Oh, bless our God, you peoples! And make the voice of His praise to be heard, Who keeps our soul among the living, and does not allow our feet to be moved. For You, O God, have tested us; **You have refined us as silver is refined.** You brought us into the net; You laid affliction on our backs. You have caused men to ride over our heads; We went through fire and through water; **but You brought us out to rich fulfillment** (Psalm 66:8-12, emp. added).

The references to “the net,” “affliction on our backs,” men riding “over our heads,” and going through “fire and water” are likely figurative allusions to the very real threat of Assyrian conquest during the days of Hezekiah, which placed the nation in extreme danger and duress (2 Kings 18-19). All these references liken life’s difficulties and hardship to a furnace in which the recipients are subjected to intense heat. Pain? Yes. Torment? Yes. Anguish? Yes. But surviving and coming through the adversity results in renewal, reassurance, and fortitude for the future. Our spiritual defects are purged that we may be made fit for life and divine service.

The Great Physician

Another metaphor for suffering is taken from the field of medicine. Though Job’s friends fell short of their friendship responsibilities, they sometimes stumbled upon valuable nuggets of truth. Eliphaz was correct when he insisted that God can use adversity the same way a surgeon uses a scalpel: “Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects; therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty. For **He bruises, but He binds up; He wounds, but His hands make whole**” (Job 5:17-18, emp. added). When you think about it, what surgeons do is rather violent and seemingly barbaric—cutting the human body open, pounding, sawing, scraping—inflicting orchestrated, organized trauma upon a human being. The cardiologist that slices the chest and pries back the rib cage of the heart patient is inflicting considerable shock and distress that, without anesthesia, would be unbearable. Yet his actions are wholly calculated to save life and make well. Can we not see God in the same light?

Many Bible passages reinforce this reality. Paul, who endured many difficulties in life, was able to “glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts” (Romans 5:3-5). James said something very similar: “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (1:2-4). So hardships and suffering in life literally alter us in good ways! We become more patient, more able to endure, more able to cope. Our character is shaped and improved. We grow stronger and mature—so much so that Paul actually gloried in tribulations, and James said we could consider suffering a joyous event. And this ongoing process is monitored and sustained by “the love of God poured out in our hearts.”

The Great Parent

Yet another metaphor comes from the family. Parental discipline operates on this same principle. If parents are fulfilling their role properly, they dispense two forms of discipline regularly to their children, delineated by Solomon: “The **rod and rebuke** give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother” (Proverbs 29:15, emp. added). Verbal admonition and instruction as well as corporal punishment are both indispensable to a well-rounded upbringing (Proverbs 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15,17). Likewise our cosmic parent—the “father of our spirits” (Hebrews 12:9)—is deeply interested in bringing us to spiritual adulthood. Again, as Solomon encouraged: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction; for whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights” (Proverbs 3:11-12).

Expounding on this very passage, the author of Hebrews explained:

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but **He for our profit**, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (12:7-11, emp. added).

Sound reasoning! The person who whines or complains about chastening in life is like the prideful, resentful child that resists and rejects parental love and training. If we will submit ourselves to be trained by it, the unpleasant, even painful, suffering of life engenders “the peaceable fruit of righteousness.” This fact highlights again the purpose of the created order being a vale of soul-making. The ranting atheist who rails against God is the picture of childish arrogance and stubborn pride—the opposite of thoughtful humility. God can speak through the suffering that people receive—but will they listen? Are they looking in the right places for answers? Or, sadly, do they “refuse to retain God in their knowledge” (Romans 1:28)?

The fact is that God **wants** us to survive life’s hardships: “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, **that you may be able to bear it**” (1 Corinthians 10:13, emp. added). He does not test us in order to cause us to fall (James 1:13). That is Satan’s desire and intention—not God’s (Matthew 4:1-11). The words translated “temptation” and “tempt” in these verses mean to “put to the proof” and “to test.” They do not carry any idea of trying to trip someone up or cause them to fall. A person may well fail a test—but neither the test nor the one who presents the test is blameworthy.

I Choose Pain?

But the fact is that we humans do not see **any** form of pain or suffering as desirable. As American civilization deteriorates morally and spiritually, the population has cultivated a voracious appetite for entertainment, amusement, pleasure, and physical stimulation. Hence, an avoidance syndrome characterizes many people in which they fill their lives with “fun and games” in order to distance themselves from anything that is deemed difficult, harsh, arduous, or unpleasant. Drugs and alcohol often become the “buffer” that many choose to shield themselves from psychological, emotional, and even physical suffering. But this evasion is destructive.

If given the choice to go to a funeral or to go to a party or ballgame, who would choose the funeral? Yet, wise Solomon set the record straight when he asserted:

Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for **that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart**. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance **the heart is made better**. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth (Ecclesiastes 7:2-4).

Who can believe it? The Puritans were correct in discouraging too much leisure time (Miller, 1939). These three verses express profound truth and meaning regarding life. Mourning and sorrow—more specifically, the circumstances and occurrences that cause mourning and sorrow—are of tremendous value in living life in preparation for the end of life on Earth. Yet these are the very things that so many people use as their justification for dismissing God and rejecting Bible religion!

Paul articulated the same concept in a discussion of his own hardships and sufferings: “Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). Strength, i.e., moral and spiritual courage so necessary to living life peacefully, with confidence and contentment, comes through physical weakness and trauma? Absolutely. Paul insisted: “**then** I am strong.” Indeed. You don’t get diamonds without tremendous pressure. We are strongest and most valuable to God when we are subjected to hardship that brings us to our knees before the Supreme Ruler of the Universe—when we are “weak” from a human perspective.

Proving Grounds

As a child, during the summer months, I would accompany my father on his Borden milk route which took us west from Phoenix, Arizona to rural grocery stores and restaurants in need of dairy products. On one occasion, I observed that the purple mountains in the distance had what appeared to be white streaks or gashes on them. My father informed me that the land was part of International Harvester’s 4,000 acre Phoenix Proving Grounds to test their trucks and earth-moving equipment built by the Harvester’s industrial power division (operational from 1947 to 1983). The

massive earthmovers would gouge the earth, turning over the soil to expose the limestone rocks and dirt beneath—hence, the white streaks.



International Harvester 27-75 earthmover being demonstrated in front of a grandstand at International Harvester's Phoenix Proving Ground in 1953 (Credit: Wisconsin Historical Society. Image ID 39941)

Why would Harvester go to the trouble and expense of purchasing thousands of acres of land in a hot, rugged desert to create a “proving grounds”? Well, it’s one thing to conceive of and build a truck or tractor; it’s quite another to build one that is top quality and durable. Harvester sought to test their trucks and construction equipment under harsh desert conditions, putting their vehicles through torturous, rugged, merciless contact with rocks, boulders, cacti, and dry, hard ground. If their earthmovers could withstand that kind of torture, they would prove themselves as worthy to be sold to customers who would return again and again to purchase such quality, long-lasting, well-tested products. Indeed, the worth of the vehicles was evaluated by just how well they withstood the jarring, jagged, rock-strewn, abusive terrain to which they were subjected.

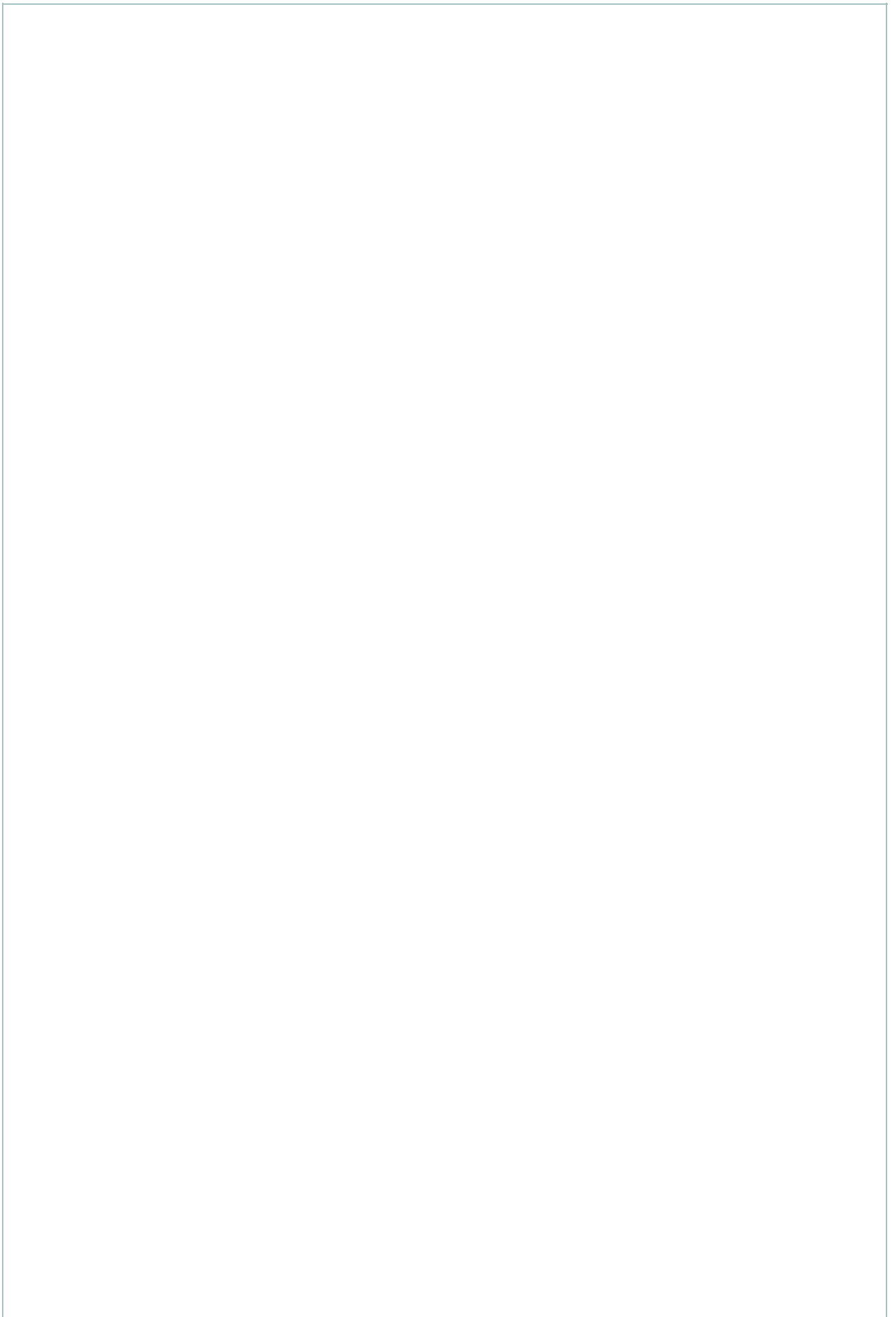
That’s a portrait of human life! That’s what you and I are enduring right now! This life is **our** proving ground. We are being tested, tried, and proved. We are undergoing harsh, rugged conditions—the hard knocks, jagged rocks, and searing heat of life’s trials and obstacles. We must face many hindrances and impediments, a host of stumbling blocks and barriers, and a multitude of snags and straits.

Consider for a moment what Paul faced as an apostle of Christ:

Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).

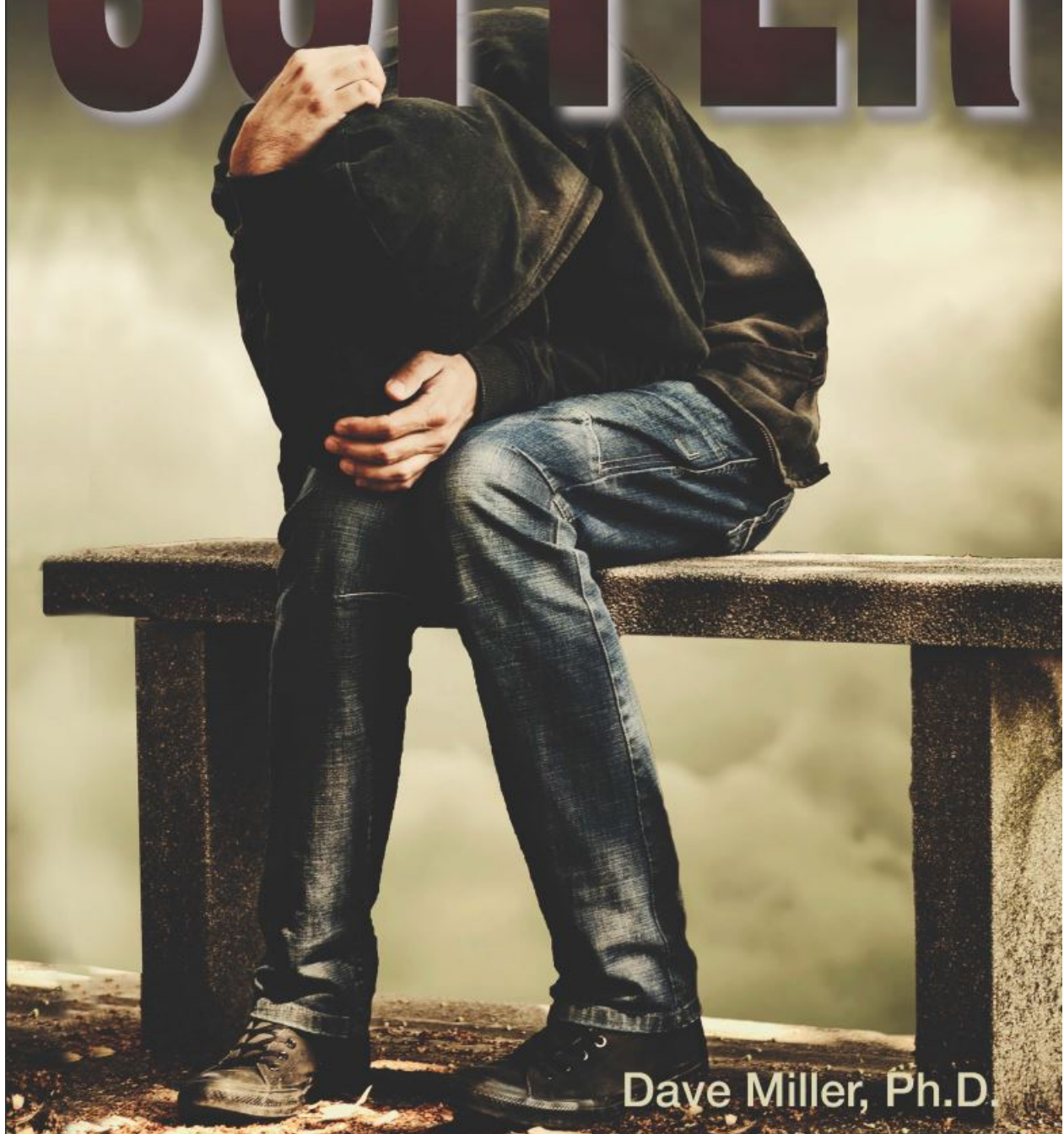
Have you and I experienced such hardship? Will we ever? Yet observe Paul's attitude about it all: "We are hard pressed on every side, **yet not crushed**; we are perplexed, **but not in despair**; persecuted, **but not forsaken**; struck down, **but not destroyed**" (2 Corinthians 4:8-9, emp. added). Yes, some seem to be beset with more tribulations. We cannot know all the "whys and wherefores" in such cases. But we can know that **everyone** faces hardship and suffering. It is part of life, part of being human. And the point is that we can make it! We can allow life's adversities to propel us to our intended destiny. And be reminded of Paul's earlier observation: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is **common to man**; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able." You and I will not go through any adversity that others have not already gone through. Adversity is "common to man"—everyone faces it and people have been facing it for the entirety of human history. But God is trustworthy; we can count on Him to see us through the testing. "For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, **He is able to aid those who are tempted**" (Hebrews 2:18, emp. added).

Farmers Get It!



WHY PEOPLE

SUFFER



Dave Miller, Ph.D.

Farmers understand these principles. They literally live their lives in limbo. For most of American history, the average citizen lived on the farm. Hence, the average American understood firsthand the principle of endurance in the face of hardship. The farmer must sweat, toil, and work hard. But he has no guarantee that the fruit of his labors will be forthcoming. Many variables potentially threaten the outcome (weather, pestilence, etc.). For months, the farmer (and his family) must hope and pray that their arduous efforts will be rewarded. Their uncertainty and anticipation are forms of suffering. No wonder James used the farmer's plight as an appropriate example of what life entails:

Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand (James 5:7-8).

So as we go through life, being tossed about by the unpleasant circumstances that come our way, we must ever be reminded that this is our proving grounds. We are being shaped for eternity. The old adage, "Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people" is accurate. We are being prepared—if we will yield ourselves to the disciplinary processes that facilitate that preparation.

[to be continued]

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