

SUPERIOR

*A Series Of Lessons
by
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Suffering

Douglas L. Crook

This tract deals with a very unpopular subject among many Christians and yet it is a subject on which the Bible has much to say.

In this series of lessons we will consider what the Bible reveals to be the causes of human suffering and God's remedy for that suffering. We will look at suffering in general, at the suffering of the unsaved and the various kinds of misery they experience as well as the reasons for the suffering of Christians, both in and out of the will of God.

In God's Word we find great comfort, joy and hope in times of suffering. The hopelessness and despair that result from human suffering can be so devastating and debilitating. The truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ removes the sting of suffering and gives us an eternal perspective and hope.

The reality of the suffering of man – There is not a place on this globe where you can go and not find people struggling with pain, sorrow, loss and death. There are thousands each year who suffer with birth defects, disabilities and disease. Millions of children die each year by famine, starvation and all its terrifying companions. All around the world there are armed conflicts where soldiers and civilians alike are wounded and killed in the name of war. In the USA alone there are millions of violent crimes committed each year.

Any of you who have spent any time around hospitals and clinics I'm sure have at times been overwhelmed with the pain and suffering that leave so many in despair and without hope. We are so thankful for all the medical breakthroughs that God allows man to discover and that help to relieve so much suffering, yet the numbers of those who suffer are still staggering. Science and technology will never solve all the problems that plague the human race. We must not look to science to understand or deliver us from our suffering.

The list of human suffering includes personal, economical and emotional suffering such as broken relationships, loneliness, rejection, unemployment, poverty and so much more.

Many poets, philosophers and songwriters have written volumes about the sorrows of this life. **William Wordsworth** –

*Action is transitory, - a step, a blow,
The motion of a muscle, this way or that -
'Tis done, and in the after-vacancy
We wonder at ourselves like men betrayed:
Suffering is permanent, obscure and dark,
And shares the nature of infinity.*

Even the Old Testament patriarchs expressed life as being characterized by suffering. **Genesis 47:9** – *few and evil* (full of adversity or calamity) *have been the days of my life.* **Job 14:1** – *full of trouble.* These were men who knew the goodness and blessing of God and yet they were not exempt from the calamities of life.

This is why I feel it so important to understand the causes and remedies to human suffering in this life. I constantly come in contact with people, both saved and unsaved, who are overwhelmed and brought to despair because of the hardships and tragedies of this life.

I meet Christians that at one time swallowed the error of the so-called “faith movement” that promises you that you will never suffer in this life if you have faith, but who have since found that claim to be a lie. They become disillusioned with God and leave off from following Him. God hasn’t failed them or lied to them. He never tells us that we will never suffer in this life. In fact, He tells us quite the opposite. However, He shows us the way of joy and victory despite the suffering and sometimes because of it.

In General – What is the source of human suffering? Where do natural disasters, social problems, wars, hunger, disease come from? If there is a God, some ask, and if He is a God of love, like we Christians say He is, why would He allow such suffering and not put an end to it?

Genesis 2:16, 17 / 3:16 – 19 – The first man and the first woman, Adam and Eve, were placed in a paradise. In the beginning of the human race there was no suffering, sorrow or death. Adam chose to disobey God. His sin brought sorrow, suffering and death with it.

Romans 5:12 – The sorrow of sin is a combination of God’s punishment and simply the nature of sin. When Adam chose to disobey God, he immersed his race into an existence of pain and sorrow. Individuals of Adam’s race continue to make daily choices of disobedience to the will of God and the consequences are the same. Sin has corrupted these human bodies and the planet on which we live and that condition will remain until God makes a new heaven and a new earth. **Romans 8:19 – 22** **II Peter 3:10** – This world stained with sin will one day be dissolved.

No one is immune to the suffering caused by sin in the human race in this life, not even God’s people of faith.

We all have been or will be affected in one degree or another by sickness, tragedy, crime, and physical death.

The Remedy of the Gospel – II Corinthians 5:17

– 21 – The hope that is found in the Bible concerning the suffering caused by sin begins with the truth that those who are in Christ have been made new creatures, members of a new race of men that have been made free from the penalty and power and, one day soon, from the very presence of sin. Jesus became our substitute to die for our sin. He rose again as the Head of a new race that is seen by God in the righteousness of Christ.

Before accepting Jesus as our Savior we were lost in the hopelessness of sin. We were sinners destined for judgment living on a planet destined for judgment. Now we have a new life that is eternal and can never be separated from God. We have a new hope and destiny. We are destined to live with God forever in Heaven.

How does believing this Gospel help in dealing with the sufferings of this life since we are not immediately taken from the presence of sin and are left here to live in a body and world that's contaminated with sin?

Later in the series we will look at the help and comfort in times of suffering that the believer has in this life that leads to the paradox of **II Corinthians 6:10**- as *sorrowful, yet always rejoicing*, but the Good News of the Gospel is that the hopelessness of the suffering caused by sin has been removed. The joy of the Gospel is to know that this life is not my portion. The present sorrow cannot annul the certain, future glory – **Romans 8:18** – *the suffering of this present time is not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.*

Those who would get God's people to focus on being comfortable in this life rather than preparing for

what follows this life have corrupted the Gospel. Though it is certainly true that God cares about our pain and suffering and ministers to us in them and through them and though it is true that, at times, He intervenes miraculously and delivers us from suffering, nevertheless, all that He does in our life He does with eternity in mind.

I Thessalonians 1:9, 10 / 5:9 – 11 – We find comfort in knowing that we will live with God forever in eternity, forever hid and protected by the blood of Jesus from the wrath of God. Our present suffering can't cancel this hope. The moment you lose your eternal perspective is the moment you will begin to be overwhelmed by your suffering. I rejoice in knowing that I'm on the winning side. Pain, sorrow and death are not going to have the last word in my life because Jesus made me a new creature that possesses a new and eternal life and an everlasting hope – **Revelation 21:3 – 7**

Is it possible to be too Heavenly minded to be any earthly good?

We've all heard this famous saying, but does it agree with the Scripture? It is true that we can be too religious, too sentimental, too superstitious to be any earthly good. However, the Bible teaches us that the only way for us to be any good to God or to man in this life is to be completely heavenly minded. **Colossians 3:1**

2 The hope of Heaven will give this present life perspective and meaning. You will realize that you are left here for a purpose. This life is a preparation to learn to rule with Christ in eternity. We are here on earth as God's ambassadors to minister to a lost, hurting and dying world.

God doesn't want us to be insensitive to the suffering around us. Do all that the Lord enables you and leads you to do to clothe the poor and feed the hungry and minister to the sick. But if we fail to point them to Christ

we have only put a Bandaide on a raging cancer and we have left them in their hopelessness and despair.

We have what a suffering humanity needs. *Isaiah 61:1 – 3* – The mystery of the Gospel is Christ in me the hope of glory. *Colossians 1:27* Don't be ashamed of the promise of the coming of the Lord and of the Heaven that He has prepared for us. This assurance of your eternal home is sufficient to give strength and hope in a life that is full of pain, suffering and death.

So, we understand, by the Word of God, that human suffering in general is the result of Adam's choice of sin. He plunged his race into the sorrow and suffering of sin. Much of what we suffer is not necessarily the result of our individual choices, but of Adam's choice.

"Not fair!" you may say. Well, think about the glory that will be revealed in us. It will not be because of our choice, but God's choice of us. It won't be by our works, but the work of Christ on the cross. Be careful when you accuse God of being unjust. Are you going to demand justice on your own merit or by God's grace?

The Suffering Of Unbelievers Because Of Their Ongoing Choice of Sin

Now let's briefly look at the suffering of the unsaved individual who suffers because of their individual choices of sin. Man is a sinner by nature and therefore he is a sinner by practice. The practice of sin brings added suffering to the individual. A quick look at the lives of some of our family members, co-workers or neighbors will reveal the pain and sorrow caused by choices of sin made in rejection of the sovereignty of God and His Son.

Proverbs 13:15 – The way of the transgressor or deceiver is hard. The one who says there is no God is deceiving himself. *Proverbs 22:5* – Their path is full of

thorns and snares. **Proverbs 4:19** – They stumble around trying to find their way to happiness, satisfaction and contentment, but all they end up with are painful bruises. They go from one broken relationship to another. They destroy themselves with addictions and lifestyles that only magnify their pain and sorrow instead of alleviating it.

Why? – **Romans 1:18 – 32** – man multiplies his suffering by continuing to run further and further from God and His will. You cannot take the oil out of the engine of a car and expect it to run smoothly. It can only cause damage. The longer the engine runs without oil the greater the damage. You cannot reject the Creator, the Source of life and expect to have life and life more abundant.

The answer is to accept God's saving grace that not only delivers you from the penalty of sin, but also from its power – **Titus 2:11 – 14**. God's grace will teach you a new way of living. He will enable you to make choices of godliness. Instead of walking further and further from God, you can learn to walk closer and closer to Him and enjoy the benefits and joy of fellowship with God as your Father.

Ephesians 4:17 – 32 – Faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ will save you and transform you. It will keep you from the sorrow of the choices of sin.

The Suffering Of Christians Outside The Will Of God

Now, let's consider the suffering of Christians. There are many degrees of suffering among God's people and many different reasons for that suffering. Christians, as we have already seen, are not exempt from suffering. The wonderful promise to those who fear the Lord is that we need never fall prey to the hopelessness and despair of

suffering. The sufferings and losses are only temporal and passing when we walk by faith.

The area of suffering that we are going to consider now is an area that every believer can and should avoid. It is the suffering that comes from disobedience to the will of God.

Romans 12:1, 2 – We need to understand that the will of God is a haven of rest and security for us. In the will of God you will find everything you need to be successful for time and eternity. The will of God is **Good** – beneficial, **Acceptable** – pleasing, and **Perfect** – complete. Obedience to His Word, His standard of right and wrong, is what brings happiness and fulfillment to life. Our lives, homes, families, relationships or job will never be what they ought unless we conform our lives to the revealed will of God.

Example – Why is it that when you place a child in a fenced back yard and stock it with swing sets, toys, balls and every imaginable toy for their protection and enjoyment, when you turn your back for a minute, that child tries to climb the fence or escape through the gate to play in the alley or the street? Outside the fence there are many dangers, hurts and sorrows that await the disobedient and curious child. Even if the child tries to play outside of the fence with some of the things provided for him, the good things within the fence, once thrown outside the fence, become dangerous and destructive. Playing with a ball on a busy street can get you killed.

Many of God's people wonder why they are not enjoying the blessings of God on their life, but they don't understand that they have climbed over the fence of His will and are suffering the consequences. God's will and instruction for our lives, found in the Bible, are like a fence of love, protection and provision. In His loving will

we have everything we need. Don't go looking outside of His will. Don't throw the good things of life that God has provided outside the confines of His will. It will lead to pain and sorrow.

There are two reasons why disobedience to God's will brings suffering. **We have an enemy** – Sadly, in our society today, you can't take your eye off your children for a moment because there are evil men and women who will harm them in an instant. We constantly read of assaults on children left unattended or who have wandered off from the watchful eye of a parent.

We too have an evil enemy who wants to bring us harm and cause God's people to suffer. **Psalm 23:5** – God has prepared a banqueting table full of good things to eat. His will is like this table prepared with good things to eat. Everything is delicious and nutritious. His will satisfies and brings contentment. But notice where the table is spread. In the presence of our enemy.

The picture painted for us in the 23rd Psalm is that of a Shepherd preparing a field for his sheep to graze. He goes ahead of them and removes all the poisonous weeds and as the flock feeds, he keeps a close eye open for any predators that may be near by. As long as the sheep stay in the field he has prepared and stay close to the Shepherd they will be safe and prosperous. The moment they wander off into another pasture, they expose themselves to all kinds of dangers.

As long as we stay at the table the Lord has prepared for us, we are under His protection and enjoy His provision. The moment we leave the table of His will, we expose ourselves to the attacks of our enemy. Examine every area of your life in the light of the Word and will of God. Conform your life to His loving instruction. To look for your portion outside the will of God is to expose yourself to the thief. – **John 10:10**

The account of the prodigal son illustrates these truths perfectly. **Luke 15:11 – 16** – Disobedience ruined this young man's life. He goes from a young man who had so many blessings and privileges to a miserable young man with no dignity or any true friends. He was lonely and full of despair.

I know this is a familiar parable, but I see it play out in individual's lives over and over and over again. Young people, don't leave the table of God's will to eat the junk food of disobedience. You won't like where it leads.

When you see your friends eating of the pleasures of the flesh and the world and they invite you to eat, let them know that you are full and overflowing with the will of God for your life. May the words of your mouth, your actions and activities, your goals, desires and relationships all be found in the confines of His loving will for your life. You will never regret it and you will be spared from horrible suffering.

I can tell you by experience that there is no regret in choosing to remain in the will of God. I've never had any desire to throw open the gate and run away from God's will for my life. Oh, I've cut and bruised myself from time to time by climbing the fence and reaching as far as I could for what was outside His will for me, but I've never wanted to go off on my own and abandon God's will for my life.

God placed the desire for His will in my heart from a very early age. I can't take credit for the desire or the wisdom of His will or the benefits that come from His will, but I can thank Him for His love and grace that taught me to walk in His ways.

God has kept me from the sorrows that I have seen the vast majority of my generation suffer. He has kept

me from the sorrow of broken relationships and broken homes. He has kept me from the devastation of addictions. He has kept me from the delusions and false hopes of the philosophies, religions and the wisdom of men. He has saved me from the loneliness and despair that comes from living a life that is void of meaning, importance and significance.

This is what God has done for me. My boast is in God and His ways, not in my own goodness or wisdom. The reason I boast in God and His ways is that you may know that what He has done for me He will do for you. All you need to do is stay at the table that He has prepared for you in the presence of your enemy.

Discipline – there is another aspect to the suffering of a child of God outside the will of God. It has to do with the chastening of the Lord.

I once heard a preacher say that no suffering of any kind comes from the Lord and that Satan is the one who brings all the suffering into our life. He said that if God made us suffer, He would be a cruel and evil Father. We will clearly see from Scripture that whether in or out of the will of God it is not always Satan who causes us to suffer. God is good and all that He does is for our good, but what is best for us is not always pleasant.

Hebrews 12:5 – 13 – Chastening is from God, not Satan. It is for our profit. God uses it to bring us back to obedience to His will. His discipline at times consists of some painful loses and loving blows.

Hosea 6:1 – Israel has suffered devastating things because of their rebellion. **I Corinthians 11:27 – 32** – Is God evil for striking His rebellious people with such painful blows? The losses and suffering that God brings into our life for our chastening are to prevent us from continuing in our rebellion that will lead to greater and eternal losses and suffering. He is a loving Father who

makes His child feel a measured degree of pain in order to keep him from greater and eternal loss.

The remedy for the suffering caused by disobedience is repentance – Luke 15:17 – 24 It is so important to recognize the error of sin. Too many make excuses or ignore it as if it never happened, but that is not repentance and that doesn't bring forgiveness and restoration. I John 1:9, 10 – God will forgive and strengthen you to walk in His will. There may be scars that linger from your disobedience, but His grace will give you strength and wisdom to deal with them on a daily basis. They need never overwhelm you.

If we will submit ourselves to the pain of His chastening, it will lead us back to His will. I'm glad my Heavenly Father doesn't let me get away with sin. I'm glad my earthly parents spanked me when I was disobedient and taught me that there are painful consequences for disobedience. That loving, measured pain kept me from overwhelming and devastating pain. God's loving discipline will also keep you from suffering the eternal consequences of sin when yielded to.

The Suffering Of Christians Not Living In Sin, But Not Enjoying The Benefits Of Living In Obedience To His Will

This is an area of suffering that falls in between the suffering considered in our last section that dealt with Christians living outside the will of God and our next section that deals with the suffering of believers who are living in the will of God.

Example – Let's again use our example of a child playing in a fenced yard stocked with toys and swing sets and everything needed to satisfy the child. There are children who seem to have to climb over the fence and

play in the street and suffer the consequences. Then there are children who happily play inside the fence and enjoy all the things that are provided. And then there are those who represent our next group of believers who are inside the fence, but sitting in the corner pouting and not playing with the other kids and not enjoying the good things afforded them by their parents' love and generosity.

I'm talking about those Christians who are suffering spiritually and emotionally and not enjoying the joy, peace and contentment that is promised God's children. They are not living in open sin, in fact for the most part they are faithful Church-goers, but they are not experiencing the blessings of God in their life on a personal, daily basis. Many are overwhelmed with fears and anxieties. Some sit in a corner with insecurities, some full of self-pity or bitterness. Some are discouraged and overwhelmed. They are in Church, but miserable and suffering.

This kind of suffering is the result of God's people failing to rest in the truth of the Word of God and a failure to apply it to their lives in every situation.

Let's look at a Scriptural illustration of this kind of suffering believer in the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:25 – 32. We have already seen the foolishness of rebellion and the suffering it brings as well as the restoration and forgiveness that repentance brings in the example of the life of the younger son. Now, let's look at the lessons that are illustrated for us in the life of the older son.

There are lessons here to be learned about compassion and learning to rejoice with those who rejoice, but I want to draw our attention to the older son who had faithfully remained in his father's house, but had never learned to enter into all the benefits that were his. When

he sees the younger brother enjoying his father's generosity, he becomes jealous, angry, bitter and miserable.

The older son could have had a feast anytime he desired. The father said, "*all that I have is yours.*" It wasn't the father's fault his oldest son was miserable. He served his father out of mere duty, habit, tradition or sentiment but never fully understood or appreciated his privilege as his father's heir.

He never understood his father's love and generosity or he would not have been angered at his father's response to the repentance of the younger son. If he had truly known his father, he would have anticipated and expected his father's response.

He lived with his father all those years, but never took time to get to know him and to understand his heart and mind. He dutifully did what he felt was expected of him, but never stood in awe of his father's love, wisdom and grace. He had not purposed to be like his father. He never took advantage of all that his father had to become like his father and a reflection of his purposes, love, wisdom and grace.

There are too many Christians sitting in Church today who are miserable and suffering with fear, anger, bitterness, discouragement and discontentment because they haven't learned to rest in who they are and what they have in Christ Jesus. They have never really taken time to consider the Father and His eternal purposes and will for their lives. They don't stand in awe of Him or desire to be like Him in every area of their life. They don't appreciate His love and generosity that have provided everything we need to be like Him and enjoy His fullness in this life and in eternity.

I'm not content to just be a faithful Church-goer or

even to try to be the best preacher I can be. I want to get to know my Father and my Elder Brother. Whether in the pulpit or out of it, I want to be like them and be a reflection of who they are and of their will and purposes. I want to fully enter into all the privileges and blessings that their love and generosity have afforded me because when I do, I bring them glory.

God has provided me everything in Christ that I need to become like Him. Everything in my life is made to serve me and my eternal well-being. In the Father's will I find every provision to possess and enjoy peace, contentment, joy, direction, protection, power and glory. I don't want to be found pouting in a corner of fear, self-pity, defeat and inactivity. I want to be found busy enjoying the good things of God that I might bring glory to His love and grace that has provided all things for me.

If you are reading this tract and you find yourself suffering from discouragement, self-pity, fear, anger, bitterness or anything else that robs you of your peace and joy as a child of God, I want to point you to a passage of scripture that if you will rest in and apply to every area of your life, you will be able to enjoy the blessings of God in your life. You will be a glorious reflection of your loving Father and you will bring Him glory. *Philippians 4:4 – 9*

Rejoice In The Lord Always – I have found by experience, observation and Scripture, that the fastest way to discouragement, defeat and misery is to focus on myself. Self-centeredness is one of the believer's greatest obstacles to victorious, godly living.

I have also found that it is impossible to remain discouraged, disappointed, fearful, bitter and miserable when I take time to meditate on God and His Son. The next time your circumstances begin to overwhelm you, take time to contemplate who God is. Focus on Christ as

the One by whom and for whom all things were created. Then rest in the truth that they love you with an everlasting love.

“Behold what manner of love...” I John 3:1 “If God be for us who can be against us.” Romans 8:31 “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” Psalm 23:1 How can we not rejoice in the Lord? The only way is when we stand in awe of our problems, needs or wrongs suffered rather than standing in awe of the Lord of Glory.

Let your gentleness, moderation, forbearing spirit be known to all – A yielding spirit. The exhortation is to let our willful submission to the will of God characterize our life so that everyone around may see it. The truth that inspires our willful submission or gentle surrender to the will of God is the nearness of the Lord, both in the sense of His ever-present help as well as His soon return to catch us away home to glory.

Hebrews 13:5, 6 Philipians 4:11 – 13 – Resting in these truths along with the promise of His coming to take us home to heaven will lead to a joyful, gentle, peaceful surrender to whatever His will holds for you in this present moment.

Too many times we needlessly suffer discouragement and fear because we surrender ourselves to the unpleasantness of our present circumstance rather than yielding ourselves to the sweetness of the presence of the Lord and the hope of His coming. Instead of being characterized by gentleness and willful submission to God’s will we become rash, harsh and bitter. When that happens we suffer and everyone around us suffers.

Rejoice and rest in God’s faithfulness. Gently submit to His purposes in your present circumstances. Don’t kick, scream, fret, murmur and complain because of your situation. Rejoice in the Lord and know and

experience the sweetness of His presence that will sustain you and strengthen you and prepare you for His coming.

Anxious for nothing – prayer and supplication, thanksgiving – God is not glorified and we are miserable when we fail to obey this simple exhortation. If we don't learn to cast our burdens on the Lord and leave them there in His Almighty hands, they will crush us.

I Peter 5:7 – When our words and actions express fear and anxiety about our needs and trials, we are manifesting a doubt concerning God's faithfulness in caring for us. When we make our request known to God in faith, our words and actions will express confidence in God to do what is in our best interest in time and in eternity.

That leads to a spirit of thanksgiving instead of despair and complaining. A complaining spirit is a suffering spirit. A thankful heart is a rejoicing heart full of hope and confidence. If you are suffering today with fear, confusion and despair, it might be time to stop complaining about your circumstances and start thanking God in and for all things. It takes faith in His faithfulness, His love and His grace, but He is able to make all things work together for your good.

By faith, start thanking God for His faithfulness. Your situation may not immediately change, but the sting of the suffering will be removed. Your life will begin to be characterized by gentle submission to God's loving will instead of by bitter suffering that comes from complaining and resisting God's purposes in and through your circumstances.

Peace - The result of your rejoicing in the Lord, gentle submission to God's will and your casting your cares on Him with thanksgiving will be the experiencing of His peace that passes understanding. This peace

protects your heart and mind from the suffering of fear, confusion, anger, complaining and murmuring.

This peace is only one of the many good things that can be found only in the will of God and only when we rest in His Word and daily apply it to our lives. It's a calmness and assurance that comes from knowing that the Almighty is in control and that He loves you.

Think on these things – Many of God's people are joyless and defeated because they are focused on all the wrong things. The mind is going to dwell on something. We have the power and responsibility to choose to make it dwell on the right things.

I'm not talking about positive thinking or denying and ignoring the negative things. I'm talking about thinking about everything in your life from the Biblical perspective. You are to think about yourself, others, family, work and the local assembly in the light of the Word of God. Focus on what God has declared to be right and good in all of these areas and then conduct ourselves accordingly.

There will always be things in and around us that are bad, unjust and disappointing. We can choose to focus on them and suffer the pains of a complaining spirit or we can choose to dwell on the good things that God wants to do in us and through us even in the midst of unpleasant unwanted circumstances. Such a Scriptural perspective on things will lead to serving the Lord with gladness.

Examples – Job- “*the Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord.*” Job knew the Sovereignty of God and His ultimate blessing on those who love Him. He didn't focus on the present loss, but on the enduring Sovereignty and faithfulness of God.

Abraham asked to sacrifice Isaac – Abraham didn't dwell on the horrible sacrifice that he was asked to

make, but on God's promise that in Isaac was the promised seed.

Moses at the Red Sea – Moses didn't meditate on the impending doom of being slaughtered by Pharaoh's army when trapped against the Red Sea, but trusted God to make a way for them to get to the Promised Land.

Joseph – Joseph didn't dwell on the injustice done to him by his brothers, but on the faithfulness of God to fulfill His purposes in him and through him.

What are you thinking on today? If you constantly meditate on the wrong things, you are going to suffer in this life and miss out on God's best. Meditate on your life and your circumstance in the light of the Word of God and it will lead to peace, joy, contentment and hope.

The Suffering Of Christians In The Will Of God

We've all heard the question, "why do bad things happen to good people?" Many Christians have been overcome with discouragement by the realities of adversities in their life even though they are living a life of faith and obedience to the will of God. "Why continue to serve a God who would let such terrible things happen to those who serve Him so faithfully?"

We must understand that in the will of God we will and, at times, must experience adversity and suffering. God not only allows His children to suffer various kinds of trials and difficulties, but also at times ordains such adversities.

Those who oppose that truth argue that God is good and there is no evil in Him. To that we say, "Amen." Where they make their mistake is in thinking that all adversity is evil, for the purpose of harm and destruction of all that is good and pleasant. Since they claim that all suffering is evil, Satan must be the source

and cause of all suffering. That simply is not so. Nature itself teaches us that not every adverse thing is inherently bad.

Examples – I don't want to minimize the genuine destruction of these elements of nature, but I do want us to understand they can have a dual affect and result.

High winds can be at the very least annoying and at times quite destructive. However, those winds cause some trees to grow deeper roots making them stronger and more stable. Those same winds that cause branches to fall can be nature's way of pruning some trees to make them healthier and more fruitful.

Floods – We normally think of floods as only destructive and never as good and beneficial. Where are the most fertile fields for crops to be found? Flood plains. The strength of the Egyptian empire was dependent on the annual flooding of the Nile. They wanted it to flood.

Let's take it one step further – God is Sovereign and is able to use instruments, circumstances and even Satan to bring about His eternal good in the lives of His children. These instruments that He may use may be very destructive and harmful outside of the confines of His use of them, but within the confines of His control those same instruments become God's tools to bring about His will in our life.

Example – Is fire good or bad? A fire out of control can be very destructive, but when it is controlled it becomes very useful and productive. A fire raging in the walls of your home is not a good thing, but controlled on your stovetop or in your furnace fire is a very desirable thing. The properties of the uncontrolled fire and the controlled fire are the same. The difference is one is controlled and the other is not.

A knife in the hands of a violent criminal is a

dangerous thing. A scalpel in the hands of a trained surgeon brings healing. Both instruments are sharp and cut flesh, but the difference in results is due to the one in control.

The child of God, living by faith, in submission to the will of God, can rest in the truth that everything we experience in life, the pleasant and the adverse is all under God's loving and wise control.

The suffering of one in the will of God may appear to be the same as someone outside God's will or even one who is not saved, but there is a vast difference.

Romans 8:28 – This well-known verse is sandwiched between two passages that help us to understand that the “all things” include adverse things. The preceding verses speak of suffering and groaning in this life. The end of the chapter contains a list of difficult, unwanted things that we experience in this life that would appear to separate us from the love of God.

Romans 8:35 – 39 - Because we know all things work together for our eternal good, we know that we are not conquered by these adverse things, but rather we are more than conquerors in them and through them. It doesn't say that we won't experience any of these things, it says that even when we do, they do not separate us from the benefits of the love of the Almighty God.

For this truth to comfort you, you must always have an eternal perspective on your life. The adversity, pain and sorrow of our experiences are very real. There are losses and tears and they are real in this life, but the eternal results of everything a child of God, in the will of God, experiences is good and beneficial. **II Corinthians 4:16 – 18** – They work for us for a greater degree of glory.

Look at the eternal glory not the present suffering.
Romans 8:18 – Our present suffering is not worthy to be

compared to the glory that will be revealed in us.

How does suffering bring good? – The suffering in the will of God brings about our eternal good in several different ways.

Identification – First, there is a suffering that comes from being identified with Christ. Such suffering gives us opportunity to choose faithfulness to the Lord that will be rewarded in eternity.

Purification & Deeper Fellowship – Secondly, God uses trials to draw us closer to Himself and to reveal His love to us in a more personal and intimate way. Trials have a way of exposing things in our hearts and lives that need to be judged in order that we might be drawn closer to God.

Identification – *Philippians 1:29* tells us that we have been “given,” granted as a gift, the privilege to suffer for Christ’s sake. *II Timothy 3:12* – “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”

We live in a world governed by Satan, both of which reject and despise the Sovereignty of Christ. God has allowed Satan to rule for a time and purpose. The obvious result of identifying yourself with Jesus and His will is that you make yourself a target of rejection, persecution and ridicule. God knows all about it and tells us He has allowed it and we are to expect it.

In Paul’s day, and still in parts of the world today, there are those who would torture and kill you just because you believe and promote the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is becoming more prevalent in our own society that to be a Bible-believing Christian is to be labeled a fool and a detriment to the progress of society. If you stand in the way of progress, you are going to get run over.

Such adversity is not pleasant, but it should not

surprise us or overwhelm us. **I Peter 4:12 – 16, 19** – His power and glory will rest on you now in this life and give you strength to endure and remain faithful to Christ and His will.

But remember, we must keep the eternal perspective. The good that comes from suffering persecution will be fully manifest at the coming of Christ.

Romans 8:16, 17 – Our willingness to be identified with Christ now invites the hostility and adversity of Satan and those of this world, but it will be rewarded with Christ's willingness to share His fullest glory with us in eternity.

Okay, we can expect to be resisted and persecuted as Christians, but what about suffering and tragedies that are not the direct result of the persecution by the ungodly?

My first response is to warn you not to think other kinds of suffering are not the persecution of the enemy. Satan will use anything and everything to try to discourage you and keep you from serving the Lord and bringing Him glory.

Make no mistake about it, Satan has one purpose in mind when he attacks God's people. It is always His intent to rob, kill and destroy. However, God's purposes overrule the enemy's and God's purposes are always eternally good for those who walk in the light of His Word.

Example – Let's think of Satan as being a knife or scalpel. As a knife, his thought is, "I want to cut flesh, see blood and bring death." Now, let's think of God as a kind and wise surgeon. The surgeon uses the knife to perform his healing procedure. During the surgery the knife thinks he has accomplished his desires, but doesn't realize that he was used to accomplish the purpose of the surgeon which was to bring about healing and life. "*You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.*" **Genesis**

50:20

Why did Job suffer all the losses of wealth, family and health? Satan's purpose was to get him to quit living for the glory of God. Satan didn't have him beat up for preaching righteousness. He caused him to suffer in almost every other area of his life.

But Job knew an important truth. His life was not in Satan's hands. **Job 1:1, 20 – 22** – God gave and God took away. God had a purpose in bringing Satan's attention to Job.

Purification, Deeper Fellowship – God described Job as perfect, blameless, complete. This doesn't mean that Job was sinless in every area of his life. It doesn't mean that he never had any thoughts or attitudes that weren't pleasing to the Lord. It means that his life was characterized by soundness. He feared the Lord. It was always his desire to please the Lord and when he failed the Lord in any degree he would repent of that thing and return to sound living.

As I look at the suffering of Job, I believe that God was refining and purifying His servant Job. I don't believe that God called Satan's attention to Job just so Satan could attack him before God could bless Job with twice as much. God could have doubled Job's blessings without making him suffer.

We know that Job's suffering was not punishment for some gross hidden act of sin. His accusers continually made that accusation and were ultimately severely rebuked by God.

I believe that God looked on His servant Job and saw a man in whom God was well pleased. Job was perhaps the godliest man on the earth at the time. God loved Job. Job probably knew God and understood His ways better than anyone else alive at the time. God loved

Job so much that He wanted to draw Job even closer to Himself. He wanted to reveal more of His love and His ways to Job.

For Job to be drawn closer there was going to have to be some refining done. Job had not committed any gross act of sin. He understood God's ways better than His comforters, but there were some thoughts, attitudes and ideas that only God could see until the fire of suffering brought the dross to the top.

Purification and refining for the purpose of better understanding God and His ways was Job's own testimony of the purpose of His suffering - **Job 23:8 – 12**. Job was not living in sin and rebellion. He knew God would justify him in the end, but he also knew the process of the trial was purifying him. Job started out as a valuable brick of gold. Hidden to the naked eye was the alloy of the flesh. The fire of the trial did not damage the gold. It only made it more valuable by burning off the dross of the flesh.

You cannot read God's response to Job in chapters 38 and 39 and not detect a rebuke or burning of the dross of things in Job's heart that were not pleasing to the Lord. But they were things between the Lord and Job. It was a matter of understanding and fellowship. **Job 42:1 – 6**

We should not be overwhelmed by the fire of trials when living in the will of God. The fire cannot harm the divine life of Christ in us. It can only purify us and draw us closer to God. Knowing God through Christ is that which is eternal and gives life. Everything else is going to burn up anyway. If we suffer loss or adversity now in this life and by it God draws us closer to Him, we should be thankful for the opportunity to be drawn closer to Him.

It has been in the heat of fiery trials that the dross of my own flesh has been exposed and I've been made to see it as God does. It has been in the depth of sorrow that

I have most personally experienced the strength and sustaining power of the love of God.

II Corinthians 12:7 – 10 – No matter how you try to twist this passage, if you examine the clarity of the text, you have to understand that Paul suffered from some kind of physical infirmity.

We know it was unpleasant for he prayed for its removal. We know why it was given; that he would not exalt himself because of the revelation. We know the instrument used to bring about Paul's suffering was a messenger of Satan. The question is, who ordered the thorn? Who did not want Paul to exalt himself, God or Satan? God did not want Paul to exalt himself because of the revelation, therefore we know that God ordered Paul's thorn.

Boast in, Take pleasure in, Well content – “*to think well of, to approve.*” Once Paul understood that God was not going to remove the thorn by a miracle, and once he realized that God was using it to work something greater and far more eternal in his life, he could actually think well of his suffering.

He knew the strength of the Lord would be seen in him through his weakness. Paul accomplished all that he did, not because he was so physically able to do it, but because the Holy Spirit enabled him to accomplish the will of God.

God can glorify Himself through you too. If He chooses not to glorify Himself by a miracle, then think well of your suffering for through it you will be drawn closer to God and enabled to accomplish the will of God for His glory and your good. **I Peter 1:3 – 9**

Comfort in the Tragedies of Life

The following is a message that was delivered on a Sunday morning after the funeral of a 1 year old boy who died after having been accidentally run over by his father.

In view of the recent tragedy of the death of little Wyatt that has overtaken one of the families in our meeting and that has impacted us all in one degree or another, I felt it would be appropriate to take time this morning to search the Bible for the comfort, wisdom, understanding and direction we need in such times as these times of overwhelming sorrow and tragedy.

All of us at one time or another have faced or will have to face the cruelty and sorrow of an unwanted, unexpected tragedy of life. For some it may be the death of a child, for others some catastrophic injury that leaves you or a loved one severely disabled or impaired. For others it may involve being the innocent victim of some unspeakable crime or injustice. The list of the tragedies of life is quite long and each tragedy inflicts its own varying degree of sorrow.

When we are faced with a tragedy of life, it is always accompanied with a flood of questions that inundate our hearts and minds. We are tempted to wrestle with questions that would persuade us to doubt ourselves and our faith in God. At the top of the list of questions, if not in our own minds, at least in the minds of others, is how can we justify our faith in a loving and gracious God who would allow such a tragedy to come into the life of one of His children?

Our comfort in times of such overwhelming heartache is not found in some pat answer or some quick explanation of the immediate circumstances. Often there

are simply no appropriate or satisfying explanations or answers for the calamities of life.

Our comfort, strength and guidance in times of great sorrow and tragedy are not found in having all of our questions answered, but in our understanding of who God is and what He has purposed for all those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ.

This is one reason why it is so important to be grounded in God's Word and to dedicate yourself to honoring the Lord and learning more of Him and His ways. Your understanding of God and His love will be your anchor in the midst of the storms of life. It will be your cleft in the rock that shields you from the crushing avalanche of the troubles of life.

Those who are not grounded in their spiritual walk with the Lord through an understanding of the truth of God's Word will be swept away by the floods of tragedy. One day they are on top of the world enjoying all the good things of life without a care in the world, and the next day their life is left without meaning or purpose. But for those who fear the Lord, there is always hope, strength, comfort and guidance.

Air knocked out of you – When we experience one of the many tragedies of life, it's like having the wind knocked out of you. When you literally have the wind knocked out of you, you collapse and fall to the ground. For a moment your thoughts are confused and scattered. Your lungs are burning with pain.

To recover you have to lie still for a moment, make yourself try to breathe, despite the pain, and little by little, begin to pick yourself up as you regain your thoughts and strength to stand again.

Sometimes we feel like that spiritually and emotionally when we are hit with a traumatic experience of life. The pain, sorrow and confusion we experience are

real and intense.

If we are going to stand again and be strong spiritually and be able to continue to walk with the Lord, we must begin to make ourselves breathe again our spiritual air, despite the pain and effort that it requires. Jesus declares that the words that He speaks are spirit (breath) and life. **John 6:63**

In those times when I have found myself reeling from a tragic blow from life and overwhelmed with all the “why” questions that flood the mind in such times, I’ve found comfort and strength in returning to the basics of the truth of God’s Word.

To dwell on the “why” questions only continues to suck the spiritual life out of you. We need to breathe again the spiritual, life-giving breath of God’s Word.

Please, read **Psalm 33:1 – 22** Our God is God, Creator, Sovereign and Judge. As God, He is worthy to be praised. Those who fear Him, trust in His mercy and find everlasting hope.

Psalm 144:3, 4 asks the question, “what is man, that God should be mindful of him?” In the light of who God is and who man is, why should God be concerned at all with a mere speck of dust in His universe? Man has come to expect and demand things from life and from God, things like health, wealth, family, friends and success. If we don’t have these things or if we lose them, we become angry, bitter or depressed and despondent. We need to remember that God doesn’t owe us anything.

Job declares in **Job 1:21, 22** that we were born with nothing, and we’ll leave with nothing. The Lord gives and takes away things in this life, but blessed be the name of the Lord for He is God.

Remembering that we are dust and will return to dust, and remembering that we as a human race sinned

against and rejected our Creator will help us remember that not only do we not deserve any special favors from God, but rather we deserve His wrath. **Romans 3:10 - 18**

But those who fear Him, and acknowledge Him as God have learned to trust in His mercy and find hope in every situation in life because they understand Him and His purposes of Grace.

John 3:16, 17 – Despite the reality that we are insignificant specks of dust in His universe, despite the fact that we rebelled against Him as our Creator and are worthy of eternal separation and destruction, God has revealed His love for us in sending us His Son to die for our sins and to give us eternal life.

Remembering this glorious revelation will remind me that God is not out to get me by sending me calamity, He loves me so much that He sent His Son to die for my sins. Furthermore, since accepting Jesus as my Savior, I am His child. If He loved me when I was His enemy, how much more does He love me as His child? **Romans 5:6 - 11** – My standing before God is one of eternal favor.

Taking in this breath of truth, meditating on God's love for me, gives me strength to gather myself to begin to stand again when my spiritual legs have been knocked out from under me.

But then the second wave of questions comes flooding in. If God loves me so much as one of His children, how could He allow such a tragic and sorrowful thing come into my life?

Many today teach that if you have faith, since God loves you, you will never experience any pain, sorrow or loss. The promise of God's Word is that none of the tragedies of life can separate you from the love of God, from His commitment to your eternal well-being.
Romans 8:35 - 39

Christians are not exempt or immune to the calamities of life, but we are given the benefits of the provisions of God's love in this life as we await the fulfillment of God's eternal purposes for us and in us.

Hebrews 4:14 - 16

God promises us that He will give wisdom in the trial to those who ask. **James 1:5** He will guide them by His Spirit. **John 14:16—18** He will give peace that passes understanding and joy that cannot be fully described or explained. **Philippians 4:6, 7** **I Peter 1:8**

God's Word also promises that the things that we suffer in this life, as difficult, hard and unpleasant as they may be, when we look to Him in faith, are working for us for our eternal glory. **II Corinthians 4:16 – 18**

This morning I can't answer the question, why did God allow this crushing tragedy to occur in this family? But I find hope, peace and strength in knowing that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to die for our sins and give us a home in heaven. I find great peace in knowing that little Wyatt is safe in the arms of Jesus this morning because of the sacrifice of Jesus that was sufficient to cover the little ones of a sinful race. I take comfort in knowing that the all-wise God is working something of eternal value in the lives the family, friends and acquaintances. Several at the funeral indicated that they had asked Jesus into their heart as a result of being faced with this tragedy.

None of us have promise of tomorrow. This life is only a quickly passing vapor. Anything that makes us number our days and think of our eternal and spiritual condition is a good thing and a manifestation of the mercy of God. **Psalm 39:4, 5 / 90:12**

Life is not about having friends, family, money, health or wealth. It's about knowing God through faith in

Jesus Christ and honoring Him and worshipping Him and preparing to live and rule with Him for eternity. Nothing else has any value apart from this purpose of life.

The real tragedy of life is not the loss of natural life, health, family, friends or wealth, but to go through life not knowing God or His love that was made manifest on the cross of Jesus Christ. The real tragedy of life is when believers in Jesus Christ selfishly live a life of carnality and indifference to the will of the Lord who died that they might have eternal life and that they might have the opportunity to know the fullness of God. That's real tragedy.

For all the other tragedies of life I take comfort in knowing that God's grace will be sufficient. **II Corinthians 12:9 – 10** But most of all, I take comfort in knowing that the sorrows and sufferings of this life are only temporal and passing, but the promised glory is eternal. **Romans 8:18, 19 / Revelation 21:3, 4**

And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." NKJV

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