

PRESSING ON...

"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:14

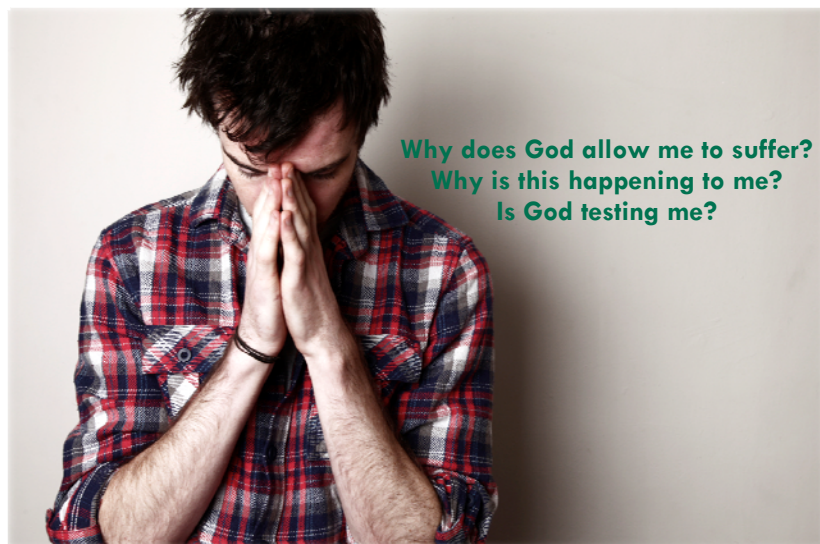


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Why does God allow me to Suffer?

■ by Melvin Jonkman, MDiv, Executive Director



Our clients frequently ask these questions. A while back I was asked to write an article addressing the subject of suffering. I've been thinking about this a lot lately and because it comes up so often, I thought I'd share some of my thoughts with you.

I have noticed and perhaps you have as well that individuals and even families ask these questions not when life is good, not when things are going well, not when they are experiencing blessing, but they only seem to ask these questions when life is going badly, when they hit a bump in the road of life or when things aren't going their way.

If that is true, then perhaps we have discovered the heart of the problem. For some reason many people, perhaps most, believe that if they are a child of God, if they are living for him, if they are good people, then things should go well.

Do any of you believe that? Is it biblical?

What does Jesus tell us about our lives in this world?

As Jesus turns his face toward the cross he prepares his disciples for what is coming. Jesus says in John 16:3, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. **In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.**"

That we will suffer is clear. But why do we suffer in this world? Let me offer 3 reasons:

- We live in a broken world and so we struggle - mentally, emotionally, spiritually and physically.
- There is evil in this world and in us. We and those around us sin. Sin brings suffering.
- God allows suffering, but will bring it to an end when Jesus returns.

What can be accomplished through our suffering?

Philippians 1:29 says, "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him..." I love the first part of that verse, don't you? But the second part - how can it be a privilege to suffer? Paul provides insight in Romans 5:3 "Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance" and in Romans 8:17-18 "Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the

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Marriage: What Every Couple Needs to Pray For

Mommy and Daddy are Getting a Divorce

■ by Anne Mirza (Lockwood), MSW, LCSW

MOMMY AND DADDY JUST TOLD ME THEY'RE GETTING A DIVORCE. I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT A DIVORCE WAS. MOMMY SAID IT MEANS THAT THEY AREN'T GOING TO BE MARRIED ANYMORE AND THAT DADDY ISN'T GOING TO LIVE IN MY HOUSE.



I DON'T LIKE DIVORCE.
CAN MOMMY AND DADDY DIVORCE ME?

I asked them why they have to divorce and if that happens to all Mommys and Daddies. They said that they don't love each other anymore. Will they stop loving me too? Daddy says it will be better for me because I won't have to hear them arguing anymore, but I don't mind, I just want Daddy here. They didn't say it, but I know they get mad when I don't do what I'm supposed to. Maybe that's why they have to get divorced. I told Daddy I would be really good and I wouldn't do any of the bad things that I get in trouble for if he would just stay and live with us. It didn't make him stay.

I don't like divorce. My tummy started hurting yesterday and I don't really feel like playing with my friends at school anymore. I also hit a girl in my class yesterday when she took my hula hoop. I didn't used to do that, but I'm just mad a lot now. Mommy punished me when she picked me up from school. She said I shouldn't hit. I'm trying really hard to be good so Mommy and Daddy will break their divorce, but I just have so much mad in me that it's really hard. When I went to sleep that night I had a very bad dream and even wet the bed. This happens a lot now. It didn't used to before. I don't like divorce.

I don't see Daddy very much now. Daddy said I wouldn't have to hear him and Mommy argue anymore when they got a divorce, but now I hear them on the phone. I don't think Mommy knows I can hear it, but I know they are yelling. I'm trying hard to make my brother be good so that they stop arguing, but he won't listen to me so sometimes I have to hit him to get him to listen. Mommy always reminds me I shouldn't hit, but all that yuck is still inside me and nothing is going my way. Mommy also says that God doesn't want us to say things if they aren't nice, but Mommy and Daddy say mean things about each other so they don't follow their own rule. My Sunday School teacher told me God doesn't like divorce either. Why didn't Mommy and Daddy listen to God? Does that mean I don't have to either? I told my brother that I'm never getting married because I'm never getting a divorce. I don't like divorce.

Daddy brought me to somebody called a therapist today. I just called her Anne, though. She was ok, I guess. Daddy says I should talk to her about my feelings, but Mommy and Daddy don't talk about their feelings. Why should I? Anne has a lot of toys in her office and I like that because that means I don't have to talk about my feelings if I don't want to. She says I can show her my feelings with the toys and games too. Anne asked me to draw a picture of what I want, so I drew my family together and me getting hugs from my Mommy and Daddy. I told Anne that nobody in the picture was scared that their Mommy and Daddy wouldn't love them anymore and nobody was yelling or being mean. She said that she wants to work with God to try to help my picture come true even if Mommy and Daddy are divorced. Anne said that she is going to talk to Mommy and Daddy too so they can help me with my feelings and my tummy aches. Maybe she'll talk to them about their feelings too. I don't like divorce, but maybe it won't always feel quite this way, maybe God will make it better. ■

This letter, written from the perspective of a child, demonstrates some of the typical behavioral and emotional responses experienced by children during a divorce. Parents are often confused or overwhelmed by the changes observed in their child during or after a divorce. This letter is intended to assist parents entering into a divorce to understand how to be aware of their child's responses and to partner with them in the family's healing process.

~ Anne (Lockwood) Mirza, LCSW



Anne Mirza is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. She sees clients in our Chicago (Edgewater & South Loop) locations.

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:: marriage tip series ::

Pray for Understanding and Wisdom

■ by Marilyn Ciaramitaro, MSW, LCSW



Marriage is a sacred bond. A bond worth preserving, fighting for, maintaining and doing the maintenance work on. Yes, there is maintenance work to keep a marriage healthy and thriving. Just like there is maintenance work as a homeowner that needs to be done daily, weekly etc. Relationships need similar attention or the relationship loses its brightness.

Virginia Satir (family therapist and educator par excellence during the 70's & 80's) author of "Making Contact," "People Making" and more, spoke at St. Mary's University in Notre Dame/South Bend, Indiana in 1986. I had just graduated from the University of Michigan, graduate school of social work and wanted to hear her since

her reputation was wonderful. Fate would have it that I walked in late and had to sit in the 1st row, aisle seat. Thus, when she asked for a volunteer, I jumped up and was on stage, playing the mom role. She's known as a "communications therapist." She essentially believed most family/marital problems resulted from miscommunications and misunderstandings.

Virginia Satir did a lot of family sculpting and would have families role play a common problematic scenario that would reoccur at home. She would then interrupt their "cybernetic loop" (which they were destructively repeating) with a constructive refreshing "application" or intervention to help them see the issue differently and thus UNDERSTAND each other's position more clearly. She would give them new words and phrases to say to each other to express their points without creating a defensive reaction. That part is key: communicating without creating a defensive reaction. The other key point is that she would help them achieve a "NEW UNDERSTANDING!"

All you good Judeo-Christians know that what King David prayed for was UNDERSTANDING and WISDOM. Even though King David fell at times, he knew that UNDERSTANDING and WISDOM were two of God's greatest gifts. Without UNDERSTANDING and WISDOM marriages and family life easily go off track. UNDERSTANDING and WISDOM are extremely powerful VIRTUES! If your marriage or family lives are faltering in any way, please do yourself a big favor and pray together for UNDERSTANDING and WISDOM. I guarantee you'll have more peace and harmony. If you make a habit of praying for and cultivating these virtues as a couple, your marriage will stay vibrant because these virtues nurture and renew us spiritually. ■



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Our Mission Statement

Promoting health and wholeness through professional counseling, consultation and education from a Christian perspective.

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Suffering: Why Lord?

glory that will be revealed in us."

In Colossians 1:24 Paul writes, "Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what was still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church." What can be lacking in the afflictions of Christ? Certainly it isn't the payment for sin. Only Christ could accomplish that and that payment was made in full. Paul, as part of the body of Christ, suffers on behalf of others as did Christ and through his suffering he may alleviate or reduce the suffering of others. If they are willing to hear his message of God's love, their suffering will be reduced.

Suffering amplifies the message of God's love and grace.

If a preacher talks to you about God's love, what impact does that have on you? But if a person in their final hours of life, as they

waste away racked with pain because of cancer talks of God's love, what impact does that have? If someone driving a Lexus has a license plate that says "Blessed" how impressed are you? But if someone searching through a dump in India says "I'm so blessed", how do you react? Suffering amplifies the message of God's love and grace. The great apologist C. S. Lewis wrote: "We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

You and I will suffer in this world. We shouldn't look for it, but we should be prepared for it. We should be prepared to bless the name of Jesus in the good times and in our suffering, and in that way call others to share in the victory won for us by our suffering Savior.

If you are suffering right now, let me point you to the cross. Dr. Timothy Keller in his

series *The Reason for God* says this: "Two things can happen when you suffer. One is you think, 'I'm being punished.' But the cross says, no, Jesus took your punishment... The second question comes up, 'Well maybe God doesn't care.' But the cross says, God does care, he's lost a child out of love for you."

The cross demonstrates that God loves you deeply. If you are willing to partner with Him in your suffering, I believe that God will use whatever happens in your life for your good and the good of those around you. I pray that God will use your suffering to amplify the message of His love and grace for someone else. ■



*Mel Jonkman, MDiv
Executive Director*