

Why does God allow me to Suffer?

■ by Melvin Jonkman, MDiv, Executive Director



**Why does God allow me to suffer?
Why is this happening to me?
Is God testing me?**

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 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. ■



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