



Suffering: Why Me?

■ by Linda Ostlund, MA, LCPC, CAGCS

The Case of Job

There was a man who lived in the land of Uz. He was a man who feared God and lived a blameless life. He had seven sons and three daughters and was wealthy with servants and livestock. He was known to be wise, pious, generous, industrious, and prosperous. Yet Job experienced severe suffering. In a matter of minutes, he lost all his material possessions, all his children, and his health. His wife gave him no support, for she suggested he end his misery by cursing God. Then, adding anguish upon anguish, his friends condemned him rather than consoled him. Furthermore, God seemed to be ignoring Job, refusing for a long time to answer him and rise to his cause.

Why Me?

Many of you can identify with Job. Your distress is agonizingly prolonged and so seemingly unfair. Many of you wonder why you should undergo affliction, why you should experience tragedy, heartache, and adversity. Suffering is hard to comprehend, but especially so when it strikes whom we would consider the undeserving, as in the case of Job.

Suffering is a universal human experience and is challenging to cope with; it does not neatly wrap in a one-size-fits-all package. It arrives in a variety of forms and can be either physical, emotional, positional, or spiritual. Suffering can result from your own poor decisions, through evil done against you, or as a result of natural processes gone wrong.

In a broad sense, suffering may be an experience of unpleasantness or aversion, associated with the perception of harm or threat of harm. Synonyms of suffering are distress, misery, and agony. Suffering can be caused by various factors such as illness, injury, poverty, loss/grief, or natural disasters. So, you ask the question: Why must I suffer? Why does God allow suffering?

God Allows Suffering: Four Truths

There are four truths about why God allows suffering:

Truth #1: God is not the creator of suffering. In the beginning, God created a world absent of suffering. God looked over his creation and declared it “very good” (Genesis 1:31). It was not his original plan that suffering would take place. So, what happened? Genesis 3 records man and woman rebelling against their Creator God—their actions brought sin, evil, and suffering into the world. It was man’s rebellion and disobedience and its effect that resulted in suffering. There is good news, however: God enters into your suffering in his pursuit of you. Hope is not lost. God in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is restoring creation to his original design, an eternal state absent of suffering (Revelation 21:4-5).

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Truth #2: Though suffering is not good, God uses it for good. God is in the business of redeeming suffering. God is working all things, even the bad things, for your benefit (Romans 8:28).

Consider a 17-year-old girl in 1966 who dove into shallow water and broke her neck. Her spinal chord was severed, and she became paralyzed from the shoulders down, forced to use a wheelchair over these past 50 years. How did God redeem this terrible tragedy and suffering? What was the good? In 1979, this young woman launched a Christian ministry called Joni & Friends. It reached out to the disabled community worldwide providing hope, comfort, and support, and the ministry continues in 2024.

Truth #3: All suffering is temporary. Suffering is coming to an end. Yet, in our finite thinking, we ask, Why is God taking his time? God tells us through the prophet Isaiah, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways" (Isaiah 55:8). God's ways and purposes, even in your suffering, are higher than yours—and you won't always figure out his plan.

This is what Job had to come to terms with: God is Sovereign! To ask why to your suffering is not wrong, as Job did, but to insist that God explain your adversities is inappropriate, for it places you above God and challenges God's sovereignty. Also, it may be that God is waiting. He is being patient, because in his love, he desires that no one would perish, but that everyone would be reunited with him (2 Peter 3:9). God's warning is that there is a judgment day coming (Hebrews 10:30). How about you? Are you united with him?

Truth #4: Suffering can drive you closer to God, resulting in praise and trust, or it can cause you to ignore God and withdraw yourself from his love and help. While there are sometimes other responses, these two are common. If you choose to withdraw from God, suffering becomes a very lonely journey. What you need to understand is that God did not spare himself from suffering. In the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, he entered into suffering, a horrific suffering: crucifixion for the sins of the world (Mark 15, John 3:16). Again, the prophet Isaiah prophesied of a Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53). That prophecy was fulfilled in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He knows what you are experiencing, and he wants to walk the journey of suffering with you. Why not draw near to him, and he will draw near to you (James 4:8)?

Conclusion

God is asking you to let him be the center of your suffering. Trust him to redeem your suffering for his glory and your good. As you draw near to him, you will find meaning and purpose in the midst of your suffering.

Job was a man who endured severe suffering, losing all: his material possessions, his children, and his health. He wanted to know why he was experiencing such afflictions when he had lived an upright and blameless life. He actually wanted to face God in a court of law and cross-examine God as to why he should be unjustly afflicted. It was not wrong for Job to ask why, but to insist that God explain one's adversities is inappropriate, for it places man above God and challenges God's sovereignty.

Job's story ends with an encounter with the Sovereign God, resulting in deep humility on Job's part. Job did not receive explanations regarding his problems, but he did come to be in awe of the majesty and loving care of God. Thus, he came to trust him more fully, knowing that his ways should not be challenged. Though often mysterious and unexplainable, God's plans are good and beneficial.

Suffering—why me? Suffering is a universal human experience; to emotionally express suffering and its pain is a healthy and appropriate response. Finally, God did not spare himself: he entered into suffering. "Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18). Let your heart and mind embrace the Suffering Servant—Jesus. ■



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