

**Suffering in the Christian Life:
When We are Tempted to Cry Out,
'Why Me?'**

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The LWML Fall Workshops

**Sept. 11 – Freeman, SD
Sept. 12 -- Mansfield, SD
Sept. 25 – Blackhawk, SD
Sept. 26 – Presho, SD**

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***“But the LORD is in His holy Temple,
Let all the earth be silent before Him.”***

(Habakkuk 2:20)

***“The only cure for suffering is to face it head on,
Grasp it around the neck, and use it.”*** (Mary Craig)

Suffering in the Christian Life: When We are Tempted to Cry Out, ‘Why Me?’

The Apostle Peter encourages the Church – **1 Peter 1:6-7, 1 Peter 4:12-13**
(The Devotion for August 28 in the “*Portals of Prayer*”)

1. What comes to mind when you hear or think of the word **“suffering?”**

We also have our “stories” of our own life experiences. What if we were to take time to ask all of you gathered here today to share “your life story” of your experiences with suffering? How many and how varied would the stories be? And what accounts of God’s gracious provision would we hear about?

2. What have others said to you or someone else who is dealing with a difficult situation or trial?
3. So, what are we going to consider, talk about, study, in our time together?

The Sources of Suffering What about **Romans 8:28**?
The “Kinds” of Suffering, i.e., physical, emotional, spiritual
The “Results” of Suffering in the life of a Christian
The Will of God. God’s determinate will and His permissive will. Or, does God
“send” suffering into the lives of believers? unbelievers?
Prayer and Suffering
The Psalms (and other Scripture) when suffering
How does the Christian “make sense” of suffering?
Is there a “purpose” in suffering (from our perspective; God’s perspective)

Rabbi Kushner asks the question, “Why?” (the title of his book):
“When Bad Things Happen to Good People”

Rev. Harry Wendt (in his “Crossways” Bible study series), asks:
“Why Do Good Things Happen to Bad People?”

Hymn (LSB) # 765 ***“God Moves in a Mysterious Way”***
By William Cowper (1731-1800)

- 1 God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform;
 He plants His footsteps in the sea And rides upon the storm.
- 2 Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, But trust Him for His grace;
 Behind a frowning providence Faith sees a smiling face.
- 3 His purposes will ripen fast, Unfolding ev’ry hour;
 The bud may have a bitter taste, But sweet will be the flow’r.
- 4 Blind unbelief is sure to err And scan His work in vain;
 God is His own interpreter, And He will make it plain.

5 You fearful saints, fresh courage take; The clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy and will break In blessings on your head.

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And, what about this man who wrote the hymn, William Cowper?
(some thoughts from a book called **Amazing Grace**, p.25)

Consider the following quotation regarding the avoidance of pain:

“One of the most common obstacles to celebrating life fully is our avoidance of pain. We dread pain. We fear pain. We do anything to escape pain. Our culture reinforces our avoidance of pain by assuring us that we can live a painless life. “Advertisements constantly encourage us to believe that life can be pain-free (but) to live without pain is a myth ... To live without pain ... is to live half-alive, without fullness of life. This is an unmistakable, clear, unalterable fact ... Many of us do not realize that pain and joy run together. When we cut ourselves off from pain, we have unwittingly cut ourselves off from joy as well.” [Clyde Reid, Celebrate the Temporary; quoted in You Gotta Keep Dancin’, by Tim Hansel, pp. 44-45].

“You must carry the chaos within you in order to give birth to the dancing star.”
-- Nietzsche

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I. **Suffering and Agony Began in a Perfect Garden**

A. **“Prophesied”** [warning and prohibition]

Genesis 2:16-17 What was God’s prohibition?

B. **“Fulfilled”**

Genesis 3 and 4 What “voice” did Eve (and Adam) listen to?

What were the results of their rebellion?

How did the results carry over to their children? (Gen. 4:8)

In the rebellion (and sin) of Adam and Eve, how does God show His lovingkindness and promise(s)?

Genesis 3:8
Genesis 3:15
Genesis 3:21

Adam’s “Garden” would now yield thorns and thistles.

Conclusion: Suffering is the direct result of sin. God is not the Author or source of sin, nor did God cause our first parents to sin. Therefore, in our own life

experience, we cannot blame God for our trials or our suffering, and we can't excuse ourselves and say (as did Flip Wilson a few years ago), "The devil made me do it!"

II. Suffering and Agony Begins to Make Sense in Another Garden

A. Prophesied

Genesis 3:15 – the promise (including suffering)

Isaiah 53:4-6 – the description of this suffering

B. Fulfilled

Matthew 16:21 – Jesus telling of this suffering

Matthew 26:38 – Jesus speaks of this suffering

Luke 22:44 – Jesus experiences this suffering

Hebrews 5:7-9 – suffering as “training,” even for our Savior

Philippians 2:8 – obedient unto death

Philippians 3:8-11 – “...the fellowship of His suffering”

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III. Suffering and Agony in the “Garden” of the Christian Life

Suffering for Christ's Sake:

A. Prophesied

What do the following references tell us about what Christians can expect from the world?

John 16:33 ***“I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”***

Matthew 10:22 ***“... and you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”***

John 15:18

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before it hated you.”

What does our Lord say of Saul (Paul) when He calls him to faith and to be His Apostle? see **Acts 9:15-16** (esp. vs. 16)

B. Fulfilled

What does Luke tell us in **Acts 8:1-4** about suffering in the Church? (and persecution of the Church?)

In his two letters, Paul encourages young Timothy.

What can Timothy expect in his serving his Lord? see **2 Timothy 3:10-11**

What can we expect from the world? see **2 Corinthians 4:7-12**

or even from unbelieving family members?

What does Jesus mean in **Luke 14:27** about carrying "**his own cross?**"
Does Jesus mean something different than our trials that we call "crosses?"

IV. **Now, getting practical about our "everyday" life experiences: Suffering as the result of the rebellion of Adam and Eve; our thorns and thistles**

**"You purchase the pain with all that joy can give
and die of nothing but a rage to live."** -- Alexander Pope

***"Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am pining away;
Heal me, O Lord, for my bones are dismayed
And my soul is greatly dismayed;
But Thou, O Lord – how long?"*** (Ps. 6:2-3; NASB, 1973)

A. Let's make our own list of the **SOURCES** of suffering (things that bring about or cause suffering in our lives):

The first on the list would be the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh (We could call these the "unholy" three).

Now let's get more specific. What sufferings, trials, do we experience?

A story of "poor planning" -- the "source" of suffering.

B. Let's consider what we could call **"KINDS"** of suffering

ex. suffering when given a "not so good" prognosis about one's health

other:

C. Let's try to distinguish between God's **determinate** and His **permissive** wills

First we distinguish between the Revealed will of God and what we call his Hidden or Secret will.

The Revealed will of God is His revelation to us in His Word, the Bible.

The Bible also talks about those things that God has not revealed to us:

Deuteronomy 29:29:

"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." (ESV)

and,

Romans 11:33-34:

[33] ***Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!***

[34] ***"For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?"*** (ESV)

Since we don't know the "secret" things of God, we must talk about His revealed will. When we do, we distinguish between His **Determinate** and His **Permissive** wills.

Determinate: means those things that God "determines" to do.

Ex.: 1 Timothy 2:4 ***"who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."***

Galatians 4:4 ***"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law..."***

Permissive: means those things that God permits; ex., God allowing Satan to attack and afflict Job; Job 2:6:

"And the Lord said to Satan, 'Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life.'" i.e., God "permits" or "allows" Satan to afflict Job.

So, should you get a serious illness, does God send that, or determine that you have it and afflict you with it, or does He allow it?

As Christians, we understand that these "afflictions," "sufferings" in life, in fact all sufferings, are a result of the rebellion (and sin) of Adam and Eve.

Caution: We want to avoid the phrase or sentence, and I would hope others don't try to comfort us by saying it, ***"Well, it was the will of God!"*** [as if it was God's determinate will that someone die from a car accident, for example]. And I want to respond, ***"How do you know?"***

Rather, comfort another by saying, ***"God promises to be with us and promises never to leave us nor forsake us."***

Another rather "less than helpful" phrase: ***"Well, I guess his time was up!"***

D. Let's look at some scripture references and listen to God speaking to us about Suffering

Job 1 & 2; then Job's responses; ex. Job 13:15; Job 19:23ff

Psalm 77 What was the writer's "problem" or suffering?

It is all right to cry out to God, even complain, as this writer did?

Did God speak to him with any new insight?

John 16:33 "*tribulation*" = persecution; affliction; distress (Souter's Lex.)

1 Peter 1:3-9 Peter's opening Doxology in which he mentions "trials"

What trials, in the 1st century, did these Christians face?

1 Pet. 4:12-19 "...do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you..." (NASB)
"the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing ..."
"sufferings" – "an evil experience, evil treatment" (Souter)

How much rejoicing do you do when you accidentally hit your thumb nail rather than the "ten penny" nail?

How can we rejoice in trials, tragedies, ill health, death (of a loved one)?

1 Peter 5:8 "... like a roaring lion..."

Hebrews 12 (after a long catalogue of faithful people)

This catalogue of believers is now called a "cloud of witnesses"

What imagery do we find in the words, "...let us run with endurance..."?

What does it mean to be "fixing our eyes on Jesus"? (vs. 2)

Jesus is first of all our Savior. Secondly He is an ex_____!

With Jesus' example, what is the encouragement?

What do you think God's Word means in vs. 4?
Against what are they "striving"?

These Christians haven't shed blood (yet) in their resisting.

Vs. 5 includes a quotation from the OT (Job 5:17 & Proverbs 3:11)

What do you think when you hear, “The discipline of the Lord?” (NASB)
 (“chastising,” or “chastisement” – KJV)

Vs. 9 – the example of our “earthly fathers”

Vs. 11 – the “understatement” of the Bible

Vss. 12-13 – the encouragement (God to us and Christian to Christian)

E. Let’s consider the **BENEFITS of suffering**

“The Little Hut” – a story

1. When the Law convicts [so that a gracious God can bring His comfort]

A spiritual suffering occurred for Paul when the Law spoke to him regarding his sin and spiritual helplessness: **Romans 7**

Another who suffered when the Law spoke; King David; **Psalm 51**

Both King David and the Apostle Paul needed to be confronted by the Law, to hear and to “suffer” (in their guilt) so that their hearts were prepared to receive, by faith, the Good News of God’s forgiveness.

2. When, in everyday life, God allows suffering into our lives

Story: A ‘yanitor’ in a Looteran Church; and a high school diploma

“Without trials ... a person can know neither Scripture nor faith, nor can he fear and love God. If he has never suffered, he cannot understand what hope is.”
 [Martin Luther]

F. So, what could we say are **the basic purposes** of suffering in the Christian life [borrowing from Pastor Randy Jeppesen’s little book, *“The Age-Old Question ‘Why’”*]

1. **To show us our weaknesses** [Hebrews 12]
2. **To build trust and hope in a gracious God** [1 Peter 1]
3. **To discipline and correct us** (God convicts, forgives, and re-directs our lives)
 [again, Hebrews 12]
3. **To strengthen our faith [and to keep us in faith]**

“Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:12)

5. To lead us and help us to grow in faith (understanding)

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” (Luke 22:31-32)

Again, Hebrews 11 (the example of the faithful)

6. To prepare us for a special task, a “new” opportunity, another way to serve our Gracious God and our neighbor

Ex.: Moses in the wilderness, taking care of sheep, etc., until God called him to a “new” mission.

Ex.: David, the shepherd boy, who learns to know His Shepherd, and by his experience(s), learns to lead (and to write Psalm 23)

7. To train us in “Holy Living” [

“Furthermore, this passage (Genesis 14:16) makes us aware that devout Christians will always suffer in this world. Their lives are filled with problems, but it’s precisely those problems that help them to become more holy and righteous. All things, even problems and troubles, work together for the good of those who love God – those whom He has called [Romans 8:28]. Suffering kills the corrupt nature, strengthens faith, and allows the gifts of the Holy Spirit to multiply.” (M. Luther)

“So when we are being disciplined and feel sad, we shouldn’t fight against our troubles, but rather remind ourselves, ‘I will not die, but live’ (Ps. 118:17). Even when the opposite seems to be true, we should be able to say, ‘Whenever I feel helpless, I can put my trust in God, who is able to make everything out of nothing. When I am totally devastated, no one can lift me up again the way He can. “The more severe the suffering, the greater the wonderful benefits to God’s holy people. Being tested through suffering is a sure sign of God’s kindness and mercy to His faithful people. When they faithfully cling to God’s promises, unbelievable blessings result. James says, ‘Blessed are those who endure when they are tested. When they pass the test, they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him’ (James 1:12).” (M. Luther)

G. Let’s review God’s Reassuring Words and Our Learning to Cope with Suffering

So, do you have **a favorite Bible** verse through which God has comforted you when in trial/suffering/tribulation?

And if not a favorite, at least **one that has especially spoken to you when you needed it?**

1. **God's Word speaks** in POWER and COMFORT (hope; peace; grace)

Romans 8:28: *“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”*

“I will never leave you, neither will I ever forsake you.”

(Hebrew 18:5b, quoting Deut. 31:6)

*“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me;
Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me...”* (Ps. 23:4)

“... that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 1:7)

“Be still and know that I am God ...” (Ps. 46:10)

“Lo, I am with you always...” (Matthew 28:20)

Romans 8:28-38 Psalm 50:15 (God's invitation to prayer)

Romans 5:1-5 Romans 12:9-16 (“... weep with those who weep...”)

2 Corinthians 12:9 *“My grace is sufficient for you ...”*

Revelation 3:10 Revelation 21:1-5 Revelation 22:1-5

2. The **Comfort and Encouragement** of **God's People together**

Galatians 6:10 Hebrew 10:25 *“... but encouraging one another ...”*

“But the Christian law is that the strong must bear the weak ... So it is in the Church. It is like a hospital, where there are the strong and the weak, bones and flesh. One bears another's burdens. The Christian life therefore is a mixture of strength and weakness. One supports the other. This is indeed a comforting situation.” [M. Luther]

“In His marvelous and mysterious way, God keeps shaping us until He can see Himself in our lives. The process is long, arduous, complex, and certainly not painless, but it's worth it. And we need not wait until the conclusion to celebrate. We can, if we choose, genuinely celebrate the process.” (Tim Hansel, p. 143-144)

*“There is no box
made by God
nor us*

*But that the sides can be flattened out
and the top blown off
to make a dance floor
on which to celebrate life.* (Kenneth Caraway, quoted by T. Hansel)