

Applying Scripture to Life

Topic 8 – Trials and Suffering

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Review

So far, we have looked at the believer's mandate to make disciples, sin and its consequences, the definition of true saving faith and the amazing work of God in the believer's life at salvation, Holy Spirit filling, the powerful Word and its work in the believer, the work of the Spirit and the Word to progressively sanctify believers, the excellencies of God which should take us to our knees in worship, and the role of the body in bringing care to the brethren. Last week we looked at godliness – a heart attitude and mindset that constantly and consistently thinks of God, His Word, His glory, and living in dependence on Him.

Introduction

Each of us knows of someone who is in the middle of some personal difficulty: financial crisis, unemployment, personal serious illness, death of a loved one, chronic illness or painful handicap, grief, heartache, criticism, loneliness, ostracism, etc. This should not be surprising since the Scriptures tell us that all people will experience trouble in their lives

⁷For **man is born for trouble**, As sparks fly upward. (Job 5:7)

¹Man, who is born of woman, **Is short-lived and full of turmoil**. (Job 14:1)

Yet, among God's people there are those that experience particular hardship. Charles Spurgeon noted that God calls some Christians to shoulder extraordinary hardships in this life.

“Spiritual darkness of any sort is to be avoided, and not desired; and yet, surprising as it may seem to be, it is a fact that some of the best of God's people frequently walk in darkness; ay, some of them are wrapt in a sevenfold gloom at times, and to them neither sun, nor moon, nor stars appear. As the pastor of a large church, I have to observe a great variety of experiences, and I note that some whom I greatly love and esteem, who are, in my judgment among the very choicest of God's people, nevertheless, travel most of the way to Heaven by night.” (Charles Spurgeon's sermon on Isaiah 50:10; Sept 25, 1887)

Bringing Biblical care to brethren going through trials or suffering can be very difficult. If someone is sinning, putting off the old self (repenting), renewing the mind with God's Word, and putting on righteousness (walking in obedience) in the power of the Holy Spirit fixes the problem. The sin is dealt with even though the consequences of the sin may remain.

It is entirely possible that a dear brother or sister who is suffering may never experience relief from that suffering this side of heaven. However, they have an incredible opportunity to present the truth of the Gospel to the world (to prove their faith) by how they respond to the suffering. Their life can show that Jesus Christ is true, and He has made supernatural changes to their heart.

Today we will look at glorifying God in suffering.

Hard Times

Suffering entered the world at the Fall (Gen 3). Suffering can be a byproduct of a fallen world, the result of the sin of others, or the result of our own sin. Even so, God is sovereign over all suffering and in His sovereignty, He works ALL things for His glory and our sanctifying good (Rom 8:28). This includes our own sin and the sin of others.

General Suffering

General suffering is a result of sin entering the world either by corrupted creation (disease, disaster, etc.) or as a recipient of a sinful action of another person (assault, murder, etc.). This is difficulty or hardship that comes on a person through no fault of their own (i.e., not because of personal sin) or persecution because for their faith as believers (2 Tim 3:12; 1 Pet 4:12-19). As we will see later, God calls believers who are experiencing this type of suffering to rejoice (James 1:2-4; 1 Pet 1:6-8) and persevere (Rom 5:3-4).

Suffering due to Personal Sin

There is also suffering due to the consequences of personal sin: either the natural consequences of personal sin or God's discipline for sin. E.g., revoked driving privileges because you broke the speed limit (by a lot or many times), marriage difficulty because you have chosen to sin, being fired from a job or demoted because you chose to sin, being church disciplined because of sin, God's conviction of sin, or health issues because of sin.

¹²Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; ¹³but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. ¹⁴If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵**Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler;** ¹⁶**but if anyone suffers as a Christian,** he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. (1 Pet 4:12-16)

⁷It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline? ⁸**But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.** ⁹Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? ¹⁰For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us* for *our* good, so that we may share His holiness. ¹¹All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. (Heb 12:7-11)

Scripture says that sickness and even death could be God's discipline for sin.

²⁹For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. ³⁰**For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.** ³¹But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. (1 Cor 11:29-31)

In other places in Scripture, sickness is not related to personal sin, but to God's glory.

¹As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. ²And His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" ³Jesus answered, "***It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.*** (John 9:1-3)

We cannot know if sickness is God's discipline. However, we can know if we are sinning or not. Look at what David says of how his body felt because of ignoring the conviction of sin.

¹How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! ²How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit! ³**When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. ⁴For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.** Selah. ⁵I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord"; And You forgave the guilt of my sin. (Psa 32:1-5)

¹O Lord, rebuke me not in Your wrath, And chasten me not in Your burning anger. ²**For Your arrows have sunk deep into me, And Your hand has pressed down on me. ³There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your indignation; There is no health in my bones because of my sin. ⁴For my iniquities are gone over my head; As a heavy burden they weigh too much for me. ⁵My wounds grow foul and fester Because of my folly. ... ¹⁸For I confess my iniquity; I am full of anxiety because of my sin.** (Psa 38:1-5, 18)

Sin requires repentance! True repentance will be demonstrated by an earnestness, indignation, fear, longing, zeal, avenging of wrong, and doing everything we can to heal relationships and live at peace with all people.

⁹I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to *the point of* repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to *the will of* God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. ¹⁰For the sorrow that is according to *the will of* God produces a repentance without regret, *leading* to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. ¹¹For behold **what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong!** In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter. (2 Cor 7:9-11)

²³Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your offering there before the altar and go; **first be reconciled to your brother**, and then come and present your offering. (Matt 5:23-24)

¹⁸**If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.** (Rom 12:18)

¹⁴**Pursue peace with all men**, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. (Heb 12:14)

❖ Are you quick to repent of sin?

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Most word studies are from preceptaustin.org, blueletterbible.org, and biblehub.com

Once repentance is present, the believer is to understand that the continued experience of the natural consequences of sin are what God has ordained at this time and they are for His glory and our sanctifying good (Rom 8:28). In these situations, God calls the believer again to rejoice (James 1:2-4; 1 Pet 1:6-8) and persevere (Rom 5:3-4).

A suffering believer may never experience relief from that suffering this side of heaven. However, they have an incredible opportunity to present the truth of the Gospel to the world (to prove their faith): Jesus Christ is true, and He has done a supernatural work in their heart. That is the issue – the heart motives and resulting actions through the trial and suffering.

❖ **Are you committed to glorifying God in repenting of all sins?**

Some Key Passages

Romans 8:28-29

The purpose of God’s sovereign plan is His glory (Psa 19:1; Eph 1:4-6, 11-12; Rom 9:23; Rev 4:11). In addition, we see that in working all things for His own glory, God causes all things to work together for the sanctifying good of His children.

²⁸And we know that **God causes all things to work together for good** to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; (Rom 8:28-29)

“Good” means beneficial, profitable or useful (from God’s perspective). What an incredible promise! In the midst of the most wonderful or most dark circumstances, we can know that God is working this for His glory and my sanctifying good.

❖ **Is this a promise that is constantly on your mind?**

James 1:2-4

²Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4)

“Consider” is a command calling for action. It denotes deliberate and careful judgment stemming from external proof, not subjective judgment based on feelings.

“Joy” is the deep-down sense of well-being that abides in the heart of the person who knows all is well between himself and the Lord. It is not an experience that comes from favorable circumstances, but even occurs when those circumstances are the most painful.

“When” carries the idea not just of possibility, but inevitability.

“Encounter” means falling into, usually unexpectedly.

“Various” means various kinds. It stresses the diversity not the quantity of trials.

“Trials” means trial, try, tempt, and prove in either a good or a bad sense. Depending on the context, it may either mean enticing to sin or difficult times.

“Testing” describes both the process of determining the genuineness of one’s faith or specifically the genuineness of one’s faith as the result of testing.

“Endurance” means steadfastly and unflinchingly bearing up under a heavy load and describes character which does not allow one to surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial. The picture is that of steadfastness, constancy, and endurance.

“Let ... have” is a command, putting the readers on guard against allowing the chain of results to be interrupted.

“Perfect” means mature, fully developed, full grown, complete soundness.

“Complete” means having the entire allotment, complete in all its parts, and in no part unsound.

“Lacking in nothing” means literally “in nothing being left behind”; not falling short, not being destitute or in need.

There are inevitable varieties of hardships that will fall upon each of us unexpectedly (from our viewpoint). When this occurs, we must make a deliberate decision of the will to evaluate the truths from God’s Word concerning trials and joyfully accept hardship. We know that God has a perfect plan to use the hardship to display the genuineness of our faith and mature us in our relationship with Christ.

❖ **Do you view hardship as a blessing or curse?**

1 Peter 1:6-8

⁶In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷so 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; ⁸and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, (1 Pet 1:6-8)

“Greatly rejoice” is an intense, expressive term that means to be supremely and abundantly joyful. It is not based on circumstances or superficial feelings. It always refers to spiritual rather than temporal joy and usually has reference to a relationship with God.

“Necessary” is a matter of perspective, in the case of trials the necessity is God’s.

“Distressed” refers not only to physical pain, but also to mental anguish, including sadness, sorrow, disappointment, and anxiety.

“Various trials” have the same word meanings as James 1:2

Trials are a necessity from God’s perspective. We are to greatly rejoice knowing that trials are for a short time (in relation to eternity). For the believer who desires to glorify God in the trial it results in the proof of their faith and glory to God.

❖ **Do you view hardship as God’s means of maturing you and proving your faith?**

Romans 5:3-4

¹Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. ³And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; ⁴and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; (Rom 5:3-4)

“Exult” combines the ideas of jubilation and confidence into one word to describe “joyful confidence”; which believers are to be continually (present tense) practicing.

Believers are to first “exult” in the hope of the glory of God (v2) – in the certainty of our salvation. Then we are to “exult” in tribulation (v3). Then we are to “exult” in God through our Lord Jesus Christ (v11).

“Tribulations” originally expressed sheer, physical pressure on a person. It is a strong term which does not refer to minor inconveniences, but to real hardships, either outward difficulties or also inward emotional stress.

“Perseverance” is translated “endurance” in James 1:3-4

“Proven character” is similar to “testing” used in James 1:3 having the idea of being shown proven, authentic, or genuine.

“Hope” is confident expectancy.

Believers with a God-centered perspective exult in their tribulations. The result of tribulation is perseverance, proven character, and hope; a demonstration that we are a true child of God.

❖ **Do you exult in tribulation?**

God’s Purposes for Difficult Times

1. To test the strength of your faith.

⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, **that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction.** (Ex 16:4)

⁶In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷so 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;** ⁸and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, (1 Pet 1:6-8)

❖ **Do you purpose to pass the test of genuineness when undergoing hardship?**

2. To humble you

⁷Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, **to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh**, a messenger of Satan to torment me--to keep me from exalting myself! (2 Cor 12:7)

❖ **Are you proud?**

3. To teach you to trust God and not in yourself

⁸For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; ⁹indeed, **we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead;** (2 Cor 1:8-9)

❖ **When you go through a hardship, in whom do you trust: yourself or God?**

4. To remind you of your future glory

¹⁸For I consider that **the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.** (Rom 8:18)

❖ **Do you focus on the end during hardship or on the present circumstances?**

5. To develop godly character and strength

³And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that **tribulation brings about perseverance; ⁴and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; ⁵and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Rom 5:3-5)**

²Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³knowing that **the testing of your faith produces endurance.** ⁴**And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.** (James 1:2-4)

¹⁰Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; **for when I am weak, then I am strong.** (2 Cor 12:10)

❖ **When in the midst of hardship, do you focus on glorifying God and growth?**

6. To enable you to better help others in their trials

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴**who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.** (2 Cor 1:3-4)

❖ **Are you self-focused?**

7. To allow you to receive help in time of need

¹⁶Therefore **let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.** (Heb 4:16)

❖ **Do you draw near to God in hardship?**

8. To cause you to learn more of God's Word

⁷¹It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes. (Psa 119:71)

❖ **Do you saturate yourself with God's Word when in hardship?**

9. To give you opportunities for service.

¹²Now I want you to know, brethren, that **my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel**, ¹³so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, ¹⁴and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. (Phil 1:12-19)

❖ **Do you use hardship as an opportunity to minister to others?**

God's Hope in Difficult Times

1. The trial may never end this side of heaven, but glory awaits the true believer.

¹⁸For I consider that **the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us**. (Rom 8:18)

❖ **Where do you set your hope?**

2. The hope of glory is an anchor for your soul.

¹⁷In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, ¹⁸so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. ¹⁹**This hope we have as an anchor of the soul**, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, (Heb 6:17-19)

❖ **What is your hope in hardship?**

3. God is sovereign and is working all things for His glory and your sanctifying good.

²⁸And we know that **God causes all things to work together for good** to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; (Rom 8:28-29)

❖ **Do you rest in this promise?**

4. God has given you everything you need to glorify Him through the trial.

²Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; ³seeing that **His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness**, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. ⁴For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. (2 Pet 1:2-4)

❖ **Do you avail yourself of that power through the Holy Spirit?**

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5. God will not allow more trials (temptations) than you can bear through His strength.

¹³No **temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man**; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. (1 Cor 10:13)

❖ **Are you enduing in Christ?**

6. The Word can equip you to glorify God in the trial.

¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷**so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.** (2 Tim 3:16-17)

❖ **Are you feasting on the Word?**

7. Saturation with the Word gives you peace.

¹⁶⁵Those who love Your law have great peace, And nothing causes them to stumble. (Psa 119:165)

❖ **Are you consistently in God's Word to prepare you to glorify Him in hardship?**

8. Prayer gives you peace.

⁶Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And **the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** (Phil 4:6-7)

❖ **Do you have great peace in hardship?**

9. Cast the burden on God and He will care for you.

²²**Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you;** He will never allow the righteous to be shaken. (Psa 55:22)

⁶Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, ⁷**casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.** (1 Pet 5:6-7)

❖ **Where do you cast your burdens?**

10. Perseverance results in blessing, maturity, and the crown of life (more glory for God).

¹²Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. (James 1:12)

❖ **Do you see growth through trials?**

Apply it

Yourself: You are in your 40s now. You have been healthy all your life except for normal sickness and injuries, but you have never had a “disease”. At your normal physical, the doctor finds something (could be cancer, could be something else) that he thinks is wise to have checked out by a specialist who orders several tests (some invasive). In your mind, this is just to “rule out” the cancer. At the consultation after the tests, the specialist tells you that you indeed have cancer.

1. What first response would best glorify God?
2. What will be your purposes as you work through treatment?
3. Through this difficult time, what opportunities will you have to glorify God and display Him in the world?

Someone Else: A coworker seems distant and [his/her] performance is slowly degrading. After a meeting where [he/she] has an angry outburst, you ask [him/her] out to lunch and question [him/her] about what is going on. [He/She] is reluctant to share, but finally tells you about [his/her] spouse’s declining health and also the family’s financial instability due to medical bills. You know [he/she] attends a church in town.

1. What is the most important thing for you to know about your coworker at this time?
2. After that, where would you begin as you seek to bring Biblical care to this coworker?
3. What other care might you offer?

Extended Physical Pain/Illness

God has given humans incredible mental capabilities and ingenuity through which we have developed the medical sciences. Because of this, many people in our modern world tend to think that any malady can be overcome with medical treatment (medicine, surgery, etc.).

There are some physical ailments that may be alleviated with medical treatment but cannot be overcome. For example: lingering pain from accidents or the treatments of other diseases; injuries like back, neck, knee, and shoulders; diseases like rheumatoid arthritis, Parkinson’s disease, and multiple sclerosis; cancers, etc. Apart from God’s supernatural healing, it is entirely possible that a dear brother or sister who is suffering physically may never experience relief this side of heaven.

❖ **What words do you often use to describe your or someone else’s chronic ailment?**

What are some things we need to recognize when we are faced with chronic ailments?

1. It is NOT God’s will that every pain/disease be supernaturally healed. It is good and right to pray for healing from God, but this may not be according to His perfect sovereign will. This was evident with the apostle Paul.

¹⁴This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, **if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.** ¹⁵And if we know that He hears us *in* whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him. (1 John 4:14-15)

⁷Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! **8Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me.** ⁹And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor 12:7-10)

❖ **Do you submit yourself to God’s sovereign will regarding healing?**

2. Believers can be tempted to place their trust in medicine instead of God in the midst of difficult medical situations.

⁶Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with the saving might of his right hand. **7Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.** (Psa 20:6-7) (ESV)

❖ **Where do you place your trust?**

3. Believers may be tempted to despair in the midst of such chronic difficulty.

⁴My heart is in anguish within me, And the terrors of death have fallen upon me. ⁵Fear and trembling come upon me, And horror has overwhelmed me. ⁶I said, “Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. ⁷“Behold, I would wander far away, I would lodge in the wilderness. Selah. ⁸“I would hasten to my place of refuge From the stormy wind *and* tempest.” ... **22Cast your burden upon the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.** (Psa 55:4-8, 22)

❖ **In difficulty, are you sustained by the Lord as you cast your burden on Him?**

4. Believers may be tempted to move their focus from heavenly things to themselves when faced with chronic pain/disease.

¹Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Col 3:1-4)

❖ **Where is your focus?**

What encouragement does the Bible give to believers who are experiencing painful suffering?

1. God is sovereign in the pain/disease. There is a purpose for this time – to glorify God. There is hope for this time – your sanctifying good.

²⁸And we know that **God causes all things to work together for good** to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; (Rom 8:28-29)

❖ **What is your moment-by-moment purpose?**

2. The time of the believer's stay on earth is short by comparison to eternity. Your home is heaven. You are aliens and strangers on the earth.

⁴“Lord, make me to know my end And what is the extent of my days; **Let me know how transient I am.** ⁵“Behold, You have made my days *as* handbreadths, And my lifetime as nothing in Your sight; Surely every man at his best is a mere breath. (Psa 39:4-5)

²⁰For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; ²¹who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. (Phil 3:20-21)

¹¹Beloved, **I urge you as aliens and strangers** to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. (1 Peter 2:11)

3. The sufferings of this present short time seem like the most devastating thing in the world. But the truth is that it is nothing in comparison to the glory awaiting you in heaven which is only a short time (compared to eternity) away.

¹⁸For I consider that **the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.** (Rom 8:18)

¹⁶Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷**For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,** ¹⁸while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Cor 4:16-18)

❖ **Do you have an eternal perspective on this life?**

4. God provides enabling grace.

⁷Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! ⁸Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. ⁹And He has said to me, “**My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.**” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that **the power of Christ may dwell in me.**

¹⁰**Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.** (2 Cor 12:7-10)

²Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; ³seeing that **His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness,** through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. ⁴For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. (2 Pet 1:2-4)

¹²I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. ¹³**I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.** (Phil 4:12-13)

❖ **Do you view God's grace as sufficient?**

5. As long as God gives life, it will mean fruitful labor.

²¹For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²²But if *I am* to live *on* in the flesh, this *will mean* fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. (Phil 1:21-22)

❖ **Are you committed to fruitful labor during all your days?**

Each believer has a precious opportunity to present Christ to the unbelieving world. This can only be done if we seek to honor God in the trials of life including in pain and disease.

Death

All people, without miraculous intervention (e.g., Enoch in Gen 5:24 and Heb 11:5, Elijah in 2 Kings 2:11, or raptured believers in 1 Thess 4:17), will taste death and judgment (Heb 9:27). Death is the end of physical life when the soul is separated from the body (James 2:26) with no loss of our consciousness (Luke 16:19-31; Rev 6:9-11). For the believer, death means to immediately “be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord” (Luke 23:43; Phil 1:23; 2 Cor 5:8).

²⁷And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, ²⁸so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him. (Heb 9:27-28)

²⁶For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead. (James 2:26)

Each person will pass from this life into eternity; either eternity with God or eternity separated from God. Now in this life, the believer has been set free from the fear of death.

¹⁴Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵**and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.** (Heb 2:14-15)

❖ **Do you fear death?**

For the believer who is approaching death or fears death, reviewing the Bible's description of heaven can be encouraging and hope inspiring. The Scriptures portray a wonderful, blessed view of heaven. The believer's citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20) which is where we long to be (2 Cor 5:8). This sure, steadfast hope set before us is anchor for our soul.

¹⁸so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, **we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.** ¹⁹**This hope we have as an anchor of the soul,** a *hope* both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, (Heb 6:18-19)

❖ **What is your view of heaven? How imminent do you view it?**

In heaven...

You will have full knowledge of God.

¹²For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. (1 Cor 13:12)

You will have fullness of joy.

¹¹You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever. (Psa 16:11)

You will have personal intimate fellowship with God.

³And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, (Rev 21:3)

You will be busy worshipping God.

¹⁴I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵"For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. ¹⁶"They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; ¹⁷for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes." (Rev 7:14-17)

You will not be alone.

²²But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, ²³to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. (Heb 12:22-24)

The ravages of sin which you now endure will be wiped away – tears, death, mourning, crying, and pain:

⁴and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." (Rev 21:4)

For the believer whose death is imminent:

1. They have a wonderful opportunity to learn to trust God.

⁹indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; (2 Cor 1:9)

❖ **Are you learning to trust God?**

2. They have a wonderful opportunity to cherish Christ in the time remaining.

²¹For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (Phil 1:21)

❖ **Have you accepted this truth at the heart level?**

3. They have a wonderful opportunity to grow wise in Christ-likeness.

¹²So teach us to number our days, That we may present to You a heart of wisdom. (Psa 90:12)

❖ **Have you learned to number your days (to see how few are remaining)?**

4. They have a wonderful opportunity to not grieve like the world who has no hope.

¹³But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. (1 Thess 4:13)

❖ **Do you grieve like the world?**

5. They have a wonderful opportunity to purpose to finish the race well.

⁶For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷**I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;** ⁸in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. (2 Tim 4:6-8)

❖ **Have you purposed to continue to press, to excel still more, to finish the race well?**

6. They should know that their passing is precious to their Lord.

¹⁵Precious in the sight of the Lord Is the death of His godly ones. (Psa 116:15)

❖ **Do you view the passing of a believer as a precious thing in God's eyes?**

Apply it

Yourself: Recently, you have been feeling fatigued, waking up with morning stiffness lasting several hours, and been having joint pain and stiffness in your hands. Your doctor has diagnosed you with rheumatoid arthritis. The prospects of increasing pain for the rest of your life seem daunting.

1. What first response would best glorify God?
2. What will be your purpose as the disease progresses? How will you maintain it?
3. What opportunities will you have to glorify God and display Him to the world?

Someone Else: A late thirty-something man who attends your church is battling cancer. This is the second round after being in remission for several years. The treatment is radiation and very strong chemotherapy. In addition to battling the cancer, he is despairing about the future for his stay-at-home-mom wife and their three young children.

1. What is the most important thing for you to know about him at this time?
2. What truths would you begin with regarding this man and his family's situation?
3. What other care might you offer?

All Scripture are from the NASB '95 Update unless noted.

Most word studies are from preceptaustin.org, blueletterbible.org, and biblehub.com

Conclusion

We will all experience trouble in life—this side of glory. God is sovereign over this trouble. In all the troubles of life, the believer’s purpose is to glorify God as they are filled with the Spirit and exhibiting the life of Christ flowing through them. Everything we experience is for God’s glory and our sanctifying good. Chronic pain and disease and imminent death are significantly challenging individually and as we seek to minister to others. Yet in the midst of suffering God is sovereign, faithful, good, loving, wise, and gracious and equips His children to honor Him in the difficulty.

Additional Study

Read Psalm 20:6-8

⁶Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with the saving might of his right hand. ⁷Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. ⁸They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright. (Psa 20:6-8) (ESV)

Make a list of things that believers may be tempted to trust in other than the Lord when going through hard times:

Re-read the verses in this study.

List out the things that are true about God and His work in the midst of difficulty.

Do you desire to finish your life well? What is your plan to finish the race well?