

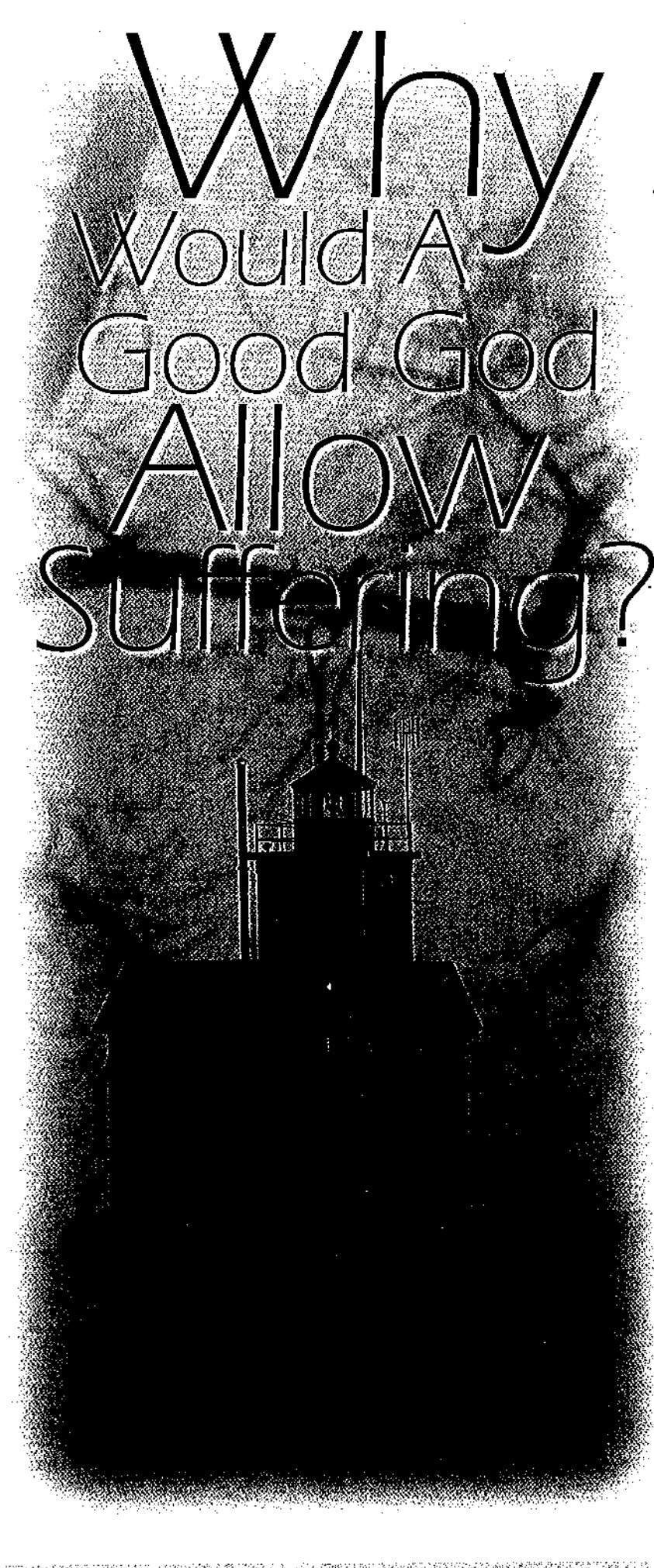


Discovery Series Bible Study

Trials/Suffering

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation."

2 Corinthians 1:3-7



Why Would A Good God Allow Suffering?



Why Would A Good GOD Allow Suffering?

Discovery Series Bible Study

It's an old question. Four thousand years ago, a victim of personal, family, and financial reversals spoke to the silent heavens and pleaded, "Show me why You contend with me. Does it seem good to You that You should oppress, that You should despise the work of Your hands?" (Job 10:2-3). The questions are still being asked. "Does God hate me? Is this why He is allowing me to suffer like this? Why me and not others?"

There are answers. Not exhaustive, but enough to keep our pain in perspective. Enough to show us how to put suffering to work for us. In the following pages, RBC staff writer Kurt De Haan shows us that while heaven may not be answering all our questions, it is giving us all the answers we need to trust and love the One who, in our pain, is calling us to Himself.

Martin R. De Haan II, President of RBC Ministries

Publisher:

Editor:

Graphic Design:

Cover Photo:

Series Coordinator / Study Guide:

Discovery House Publishers

David Sper

Alex Soh, Janet Chim, Ineke

Alex Soh © 2001 RBC Ministries Asia Ltd.

Bill Crowder, Sim Kay Tee

This *Discovery Series Bible Study* is based on the *Discovery Series* booklet "Why Would A Good God Allow Suffering?" (Q0106) from RBC Ministries.

The *Discovery Series* has more than 190 titles on a variety of biblical and Christian-living issues. These 32-page booklets offer a rich resource of insight for your study of God's Word. For a catalog of *Discovery Series* booklets, write to RBC Ministries, PO Box 2222, Grand Rapids, MI 49501-2222 or visit us on the Web at www.discoveryseries.org.



DISCOVERY HOUSE

P U B L I S H E R S *

A member of the RBC Ministries family:
Our Daily Bread, Day of Discovery, RBC Radio, Discovery Series,
Discovery House Music, ChristianCourses.com

ISBN 978-1-57293-090-2

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version, ©1979, 1980, 1982,
Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers.

Copyright © 2001 RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Table Of Contents

Foreword: Why Would A Good God Allow Suffering?	1
Study No. 1	
Elusive Answers	5
Why Would A Good God Allow Suffering?.....	7
Study Guide.....	8
Study No. 2	
Why Suffering? TO ALERT US	10
Study Guide.....	18
Study No. 3	
Why Suffering? TO DIRECT US	20
Study Guide.....	24
Study No. 4	
Why Suffering? TO SHAPE US	26
Study Guide.....	30
Study No. 5	
Why Suffering? TO UNITE US	32
Study Guide.....	36
Study No. 6	
How Can You Help?.....	38
Study Guide.....	40
Better Than Answers.....	42
Leader's And User's Guide	43
<i>Our Daily Bread</i> Ordering Information.....	47
<i>Discovery Series Bible Study</i> Ordering Information	48

WHY WOULD A GOOD GOD ALLOW SUFFERING?

~ Reading for Study No. 1 ~

Elusive Answers

Life can be hard to understand. In trying to come to grips with the cold realities of our existence, we can easily become frustrated. We long for answers to the immense problem of suffering. We may even wonder if we will ever fully comprehend why bad things happen to good people and why good things happen to bad people. The answers often seem to be elusive, hidden, out-of-reach.

Oh, it makes sense that a terrorist would be killed by his own bomb. It makes sense that a reckless driver would be in a serious accident. It makes sense that a person who plays with fire would get burned. It even makes sense that a chain-smoker would develop lung cancer.

But what about the innocent men, women, and children who are killed by a terrorist's bomb? What about the young driver who suffers severe brain damage because a drunk veered over the center line? What about the person whose home burns down due to no fault of his own? And what about the 2-year-old child with leukemia?

It is dangerous, even foolish, to pretend that we have a complete answer as to why God allows suffering. The reasons are many and complex. It's just as wrong to demand that we *should* understand. When the Old Testament sufferer Job realized that he had no right to demand an answer from God, he said, "Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (Job 42:3).

But God *has* given us some answers. Although we may not be able to know why one person gets singled out for a disease, we can know part of the reason why diseases exist. And even though we may not understand why we face a certain problem, we can know how to deal with the situation and respond in a way that pleases the Lord.

"The fact of suffering undoubtedly constitutes the single greatest challenge to the Christian faith."

— John Stott

One more thing. I am not going to pretend that I fully understand the suffering that you personally may be experiencing. Although some aspects of human pain are common, the particulars are different. And what you may need most right now is not a four-point outline on why you are suffering or even what to do about it. What you may need most is a hug, a listening ear, or someone who will just sit with you in silence. Sometime along the way, however, you will want and need the truths of God's Word to comfort you and help you to see your plight from God's perspective.

You and I need more than untested theories. That's why in the pages that follow I have tried to include the insights of people who have suffered a variety of physical and emotional pains. My prayer for you is that your faith in God will stand firm even when your world seems to be falling apart.

WHY WOULD A GOOD GOD ALLOW SUFFERING?

~ Reading for Study No. 1 ~



Why Would A Good GOD Allow Suffering?

In our world of pain, where is God? If He is good and compassionate, why is life often so tragic? Has He lost control? Or, if He is in control, what is He trying to do to me and to others?

Some people have chosen to deny God's existence because they cannot imagine a God who would allow such misery. Some believe that God exists, but they want nothing to do with Him because they don't think He could be good. Others have settled for a belief in a kindly God who loves us but has lost control of a rebellious planet. Still others cling tenaciously to a belief in an all-wise, all-powerful, loving God who somehow uses evil for good.

As we search the Bible, we discover that it paints a picture of a God who can do anything He chooses to do. Sometimes He has acted in mercy and performed miracles in behalf of His people. At other times, though, He has chosen to do nothing to stop tragedy. He is supposed to be intimately involved in our lives, yet at times He seems deaf to our cries for help. In the Bible, He assures us that He controls all that happens, but He sometimes lets us be the targets of evil people, bad genes, dangerous viruses, or natural disasters.

If you're like me, you long for some way to put together an answer to this puzzling issue of suffering. I believe that God has given us enough pieces of the puzzle to help us trust Him even when we don't have all the information we would like. In this brief study we will see that the basic answers of the Bible are that our good God allows pain and suffering in our world *to alert us* to the problem of sin, *to direct us* to respond to Him in faith and hope, *to shape us* to be more like Christ, and *to unite us* so that we will help each other.

Elusive Answers



2 Corinthians 5:7—"We walk by faith, not by sight."

Objective:

To recognize the universal struggle with the problem of suffering and the challenge of seeing God's role in that suffering.

Bible Memorization:

2 Corinthians 5:7

Read:

**"Elusive Answers"
& "Why Suffering?"
pp.5-7**

Warming Up

Identify a recent experience—sickness, failure, disappointment, betrayal, trial, suffering—that caused you to wonder if God had been unfair to you. How have you dealt with your questions? What answers have you found?

Thinking Through

Respond to the John Stott quote on page 6. Do you agree? What Scriptures would you use to challenge or to support such an idea?

On page 7, Kurt offers some different views of the character and nature of God. Do you believe God is all-powerful? All-good? Both? Neither? On what do you base your view?

The issue of suffering and the character of God is compared to a puzzle (see p.7). What makes it a puzzling issue to you?

Digging In

Key Text: Job 42:3

What are the events in Job's life (Job 1:13–2:13) that shaped his questioning and complaints?

According to the biblical context of 42:3, what was Job's response to the life-experiences he endured? What was Job's ultimate response (vv.1-6), and why was it a tough admission to make?

In verse 3, Job was left to conclude that if God had the power and wisdom to create this world (Job 38-41), there is reason to trust Him in times of suffering. Why is trusting God during hardship a reasonable response to His creation?

Going Further

Refer

Compare the experiences of Job to those of Joseph (Gen. 37-50). In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different?

Reflect

Think about past tragedies you have witnessed or experienced. What was your response to those events?

Paul wrote, "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). How can you apply this verse to the suffering you see in life?

"You asked, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."

Job 42:3

"We walk by faith, not by sight."

2 Corinthians 5:7

WHY WOULD A GOOD GOD ALLOW SUFFERING?

To Alert Us



Imagine a world without pain. What would it be like? At first the idea may sound appealing. No more headaches. No more backaches. No more upset stomachs. No more throbbing sensations when the hammer misses the mark and lands on your thumb. No more sore throats. But there would also be no more sensation to alert you of a broken bone or tearing ligaments. No alarm to let you know that an ulcer is eating a hole in your stomach. No discomfort to warn of a cancerous tumor that is gathering forces for a takeover of your body. No angina to let you know that the blood vessels to your heart are clogging up. No pain to signal a ruptured appendix.

As much as we may abhor pain, we have to admit that it often serves a good purpose. It warns us when something goes wrong. The *cause* of the misery, rather than the agony itself, is the real problem. Pain is merely a symptom, a siren or bell that sounds when a part of the body is endangered or under attack.

In this section we will see how pain could be God's way to alert us that:

1. Something's wrong with the world.
2. Something's wrong with God's creatures.
3. Something's wrong with me.

Any one of these problems could be the reason for the pain in our lives. Let's look at each possible diagnosis.

1. Something's Wrong With The World

The sorry condition of our planet indicates that something has gone terribly wrong. The suffering we experience and the distress we sense in others indicate that suffering does not discriminate on the basis of race, social status, religion, or even morality. It can seem cruel, random, purposeless, grotesque, and wildly out of control. Bad things happen to people who try to be good, and good things happen to people who enjoy being bad.

The seeming unfairness of it all has struck close to each of us. I remember watching my grandmother as she was dying of cancer. Grandma and Grandpa Blohm moved in with our family. My mother, a registered nurse, took care of her during her final months. Mom administered the pain killer. Grandpa desperately wanted her to be healed. Then the day came when the hearse pulled up and took away her frail, wasted body. I knew she was in heaven, but it still hurt. I hated cancer—I still do.

As I sit here thinking of all the suffering that my friends, co-workers, family, neighbors, and church family have experienced, I can hardly believe the length of the list—and my list is incomplete. So often these people have suffered through no apparent fault of their own. An accident, a birth defect, a genetic disorder, a miscarriage, an abusive parent, chronic pain, a rebellious child, a severe illness, random disease, the death of a spouse or a child, a broken relationship, a natural disaster. It just doesn't seem fair. From time to time I'm tempted to give in to frustration.

"The Bible traces the entrance of suffering and evil into the world to a grand but terrible quality of human beings—freedom." — Philip Yancey

How do we resolve this? How do we live with the cold facts of life without denying reality or being overcome with despair? Couldn't God have created a world where nothing would ever go wrong? Couldn't He have made a world where people would never have the ability to make a bad choice or ever hurt another person? Couldn't He have made a world where mosquitoes, weeds, and cancer would never exist. He could have—but He didn't.

The great gift of human freedom that He has given to us, the ability to choose, carries with it the risk of making wrong choices. If you could choose between being a free-thinking creature in a world where bad choices produce suffering, or being a robot in a world without pain, what would you decide? What kind of being would bring more honor to God? What kind of creature would love Him more?

We could have been created to be like the cute battery-operated dolls that say "I love you" when hugged. But God had other plans. He took a "risk" to create beings who could do the unthinkable—rebel against their Creator.

What happened in paradise? Temptation, bad choices, and tragic consequences destroyed the tranquility of Adam and Eve's existence. Genesis 2 and 3 detail how Satan tested their love for the Lord—and they failed. In biblical terms, that failure is called sin. And just as the AIDS virus infects a body, breaks down the body's immune system, and leads to death, so also sin spreads as a deadly infection that passes from one generation to the next. Each new generation inherits the effects of sin and the desire to sin (Rom.1:18-32; 5:12,15,18).

"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." — C. S. Lewis

Not only did the entrance of sin into the world have devastating effects on the nature of human beings, but sin also brought about immediate and continual judgment from God. Genesis 3 relates how physical and spiritual death became a part of human existence (vv.3,19), childbirth became painful (v.16), the ground was cursed with weeds that would make man's work very difficult (vv.17-19), and Adam and Eve were evicted from the special Garden where they had enjoyed intimate fellowship with God (vv.23-24).

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul described the whole creation of God as groaning and eagerly anticipating the time when it will be freed from the curse of decay and be remade, free from the effects of sin (Rom. 8:19-22).

Disease, disaster, and corruption are symptoms of a deeper problem—the human race has rebelled against the Creator. Every sorrow, grief, and agony are vivid reminders of our human predicament. Like a huge neon sign, the reality of suffering screams the message that the world is not the way God created it to be.

Therefore, the first and most basic answer to the problem of the existence of suffering is that it is the direct result of sin's entrance into the world. Pain alerts us that a spiritual disease is wracking our planet. Many times our troubles may be merely the side-effects of living in a fallen world, through no direct fault of our own.

2. Something's Wrong With God's Creatures

We can be targets of cruel acts from other people or from Satan's rebel army. Both fallen human beings and fallen spirit beings (angels who have rebelled) have the capacity to make decisions that damage themselves and others.

Suffering Can Be Caused By People

As free (and sin-infected) creatures, people have made and will continue to make many bad choices in life. These bad choices often affect other people.

For example, one of Adam's sons, Cain, made a choice to kill his brother Abel (Gen. 4:7-8). Lamech boasted about his violence (vv.23-24). Sarai mistreated Hagar (Gen. 16:1-6). Laban swindled his nephew Jacob (Gen. 29:15-30). Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery (Gen. 37:12-36), and then Potiphar's wife falsely accused him of attempted rape and had him thrown into prison (Gen. 39). Pharaoh cruelly mistreated the Jewish slaves in Egypt (Ex. 1). King Herod slaughtered all the babies who lived in and around Bethlehem in an attempt to kill Jesus (Mt. 2:16-18).

The hurt that others inflict on us may be due to selfishness on their part. Or we may be the target of persecution because of our faith in Christ. Throughout history, people who have identified with the Lord have suffered at the hands of those who rebelled against God.

Before his conversion, Saul was a rabid anti-Christian who did all he could to make life miserable for believers—even working to have them put to death (Acts 7:54-8:3). But after his dramatic turn to the Lord Jesus, he bravely endured all types of persecution as he boldly proclaimed the gospel message (2 Cor. 4:7-12;

6:1-10). He could even say that the suffering he endured helped to make him more like Christ (Phil. 3:10).

Suffering Can Also Be Caused By Satan And Demons

Job's life story is a vivid example of how a good person can suffer incredible tragedy because of satanic attack. God allowed Satan to take away Job's possessions, his family, and his health (Job 1-2).

I cringed even as I wrote the preceding sentence. Somehow, and for His own reasons, God allowed Satan to devastate Job's life. We may tend to compare this to a father who allows the neighborhood bully to beat up his children just to see if they would still love Dad afterward. But, as Job came to realize, that's not a fair assessment when speaking about our wise and loving God.

We know, though Job did not, that his life was a test case, a living testimonial to the trustworthiness of God. Job illustrated that a person can trust God and maintain integrity even when life falls apart (for whatever reason), because God is worth trusting. In the end, Job learned that even though he didn't understand what God was up to, he had plenty of reason to believe that God was not being unjust, cruel, sadistic, or unfair by allowing his life to be ripped apart (Job 42).

**"Shall we indeed accept good from God,
and shall we not accept adversity?" — Job 2:10**

The apostle Paul experienced a physical problem that he attributed to Satan. He called it a "thorn in the flesh . . . , a messenger of Satan to buffet me" (2 Cor. 12:7). Paul prayed to be freed from the problem, but God didn't give him what he asked for. Instead, the Lord helped him to see how this difficulty could serve a good purpose. It made Paul humbly dependent on the Lord and put him in a position to experience His grace (vv.8-10).

Although most cases of sickness cannot be directly tied to Satan's work, the Gospel accounts do record a few examples of suffering attributed to Satan, including a blind and mute man (Mt. 12:22) and a boy who suffered seizures (Mt. 17:14-18).

3. Something's Wrong With Me

Too often when something goes wrong in our lives we immediately jump to the conclusion that God is whipping us because of some sin we've committed. That's not necessarily true. As I indicated in the previous points, much of the suffering that comes into our lives is because we live in a broken world inhabited by broken people and rebellious spirit beings.

Job's friends mistakenly thought that he was suffering because of sin in his life (Job 4:7-8; 8:1-6; 22:4-5; 36:17). Jesus' own disciples jumped to the wrong conclusion when they saw a blind man. They wondered if the man's sight problem was due to his personal sin or because of something his parents had done (Jn. 9:1-2). Jesus told them that the man's physical problem was not related to his personal sin or the sin of his parents (v.3).

With these cautions in mind, we need to deal with the hard truth that some suffering *does* come as the direct consequence of sin—either as corrective discipline from God for those He loves, or punitive action by God upon rebels in His universe.

Correction

If you and I have placed our trust in Jesus Christ as our Savior, we are children of God. As such, we are part of a family headed by a loving Father who trains and corrects us. He's not an abusive, sadistic parent who dishes out severe beatings because He gets some twisted pleasure out of it. Hebrews 12 states:

My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. . . . Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness (vv.5-6, 9-10).

And to the church in Laodicea, Jesus said, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent" (Rev. 3:19).

King David knew what it was like to experience the tough love of the Lord. After his adultery with Bathsheba and his conniving to ensure that her husband would be killed in battle, David did not repent until the prophet Nathan confronted him. Psalm 51 recounts David's struggle with guilt and his cry for forgiveness. In another psalm, David reflected on the effects of covering up and ignoring sin. He wrote, "When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me" (Ps. 32:3-4).

**"My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord,
nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;
for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges
every son whom He receives." — Hebrews 12:5-6**

In 1 Corinthians 11:27-32, the apostle Paul warned believers that treating the things of the Lord lightly—partaking of the Lord's Supper without taking it seriously—will bring discipline. Paul explained that this discipline of the Lord was purposeful. He said, "But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world" (v.32).

Most of us can understand the principle that whom God loves He disciplines. We would expect a loving Father to correct us and call us to renew our obedience to Him.

Judgment

God also acts to deal with stubborn unbelievers who persist in doing evil. A person who has not received God's gift of salvation can expect to receive God's wrath at a future day of judgment and faces the danger of harsh judgment now if God so chooses.

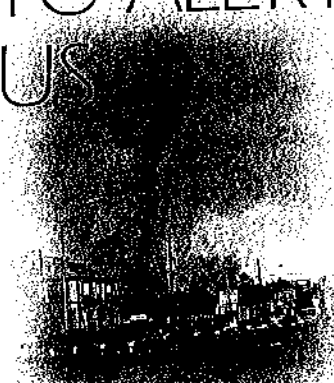
The Lord brought the flood to destroy decadent humanity (Gen. 6). He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18-19). He sent plagues on the Egyptians (Ex. 7-12). He commanded Israel to completely destroy the pagans who inhabited the Promised Land (Dt. 7:1-3). He struck down the arrogant King Herod of New Testament times (Acts 12:19-23). And at the future day of judgment, God will deal out perfect justice to all those who reject His love and rule (2 Pet. 2:4-9).

In the here-and-now, however, we face inequities. For His all-wise reasons, God has chosen to delay His perfect justice. The psalm writer Asaph struggled with this apparent unfairness of life. He wrote about the wicked who were getting away with their evil deeds, even prospering, while many of the righteous were having troubles (Ps. 73). Concerning the prosperity of the wicked he said, "When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me—until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end" (vv.16-17). By thinking of the sovereign Lord of the universe, Asaph was able to get things back into perspective.

When we struggle with the reality that wicked people are literally "getting away with murder" and all sorts of immorality, we need to remember that "the Lord is . . . longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

The first part of the answer, then, to the problem of suffering is that God uses it to alert us to serious problems. Pain sounds the alarm that indicates something is wrong with the world, with humanity at large, and with you and me. But as we will see in the next section, God not only signals the problems, He also uses troubles to encourage us to find the solutions—in Him.

Why Suffering? TO ALERT US



2 Peter 3:9—“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”

Objective:
**To understand a
positive
contribution of
pain and suffering
to us as it warns
us of danger.**

Bible Memorization:
2 Peter 3:9

Read:
**“Why Suffering?
To Alert Us”
pp. 10-17**

Warming Up

Imagine a world without pain. What would it be like? In what ways is pain a blessing? In what ways is it a curse?

Thinking Through

On page 12, we are told that God “took a risk” in choosing to create us in the way that He did. What was that risk, and how real was it?

Few things have such a far reaching impact as the choices we make. One example is David’s experience discussed on page 16. How can your choices produce suffering for you? For others in your life?

Compare the elements (pp. 15-17) of correction and judgment. How are they similar? How are they different? How do they address the fact that sometimes suffering reveals that something is wrong in your life?

Digging In

Key Text: Hebrews 12:5-6, 9-10

How does the text in Hebrews 12 distinguish between loving correction and brutal abuse? What does discipline demonstrate about your relationship with God? How does His discipline differ from human discipline?

Compare the verbs the writer of Hebrews used to describe correction—*chastening, rebuked, scourges*. What would have been the connotation of those terms in the culture of the first century? What are the applications of those terms in today's world?

Revelation 3:19, Psalm 32:3-4 and 1 Corinthians 11:27-32 are used on pages 15 and 16 to reinforce the assertion of Hebrews 12 that discipline and correction are acts of love. Compare and contrast the circumstances of discipline described in each passage.

Going Further

Refer

Jesus said that suffering is not always a direct result of sin (see Lk. 13:2-5, Jn. 9:1-3). What are some other possible explanations for human suffering? (see Ex. 4:11; Job 1:8-12, 2:3-6; Jn. 9:3; 11:4).

Reflect

Consider times in your life when you reaped the consequences of bad choices. Was it easy to accept responsibility, or did you shift the blame to something or someone else? Why is it so hard to accept that responsibility—even when we know we were wrong?

"You have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives, . . . Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness."

Hebrews 12:5-6, 9-10

"As Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.' "

John 9:1-3

WHY WOULD A GOOD GOD ALLOW SUFFERING?

~ Reading for Study No. 3 ~

To Direct Us



When a person turns away from God, suffering often gets the blame. But strangely, suffering also gets the credit when people describe what redirected their lives, helped them to see life more clearly, and caused their relationship with God to grow closer. How can similar circumstances have such radically different effects on people? The reasons lie deep within the people, not the events.

A well-known and outspoken media leader publicly denounced Christianity as “a religion for losers.” But he has not always felt that way. As a young man he had Bible training, including a Christian prep school. When joking about the heavy indoctrination he received, he said, “I think I was saved seven or eight times.” But then a painful experience changed his outlook on life and God. His younger sister became very ill. He prayed for her healing, but after 5 years of suffering she died. He became disillusioned with a God who would allow that to happen. He said, “I began to lose my faith, and the more I lost it the better I felt.”

**“My grace is sufficient for you,
for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”**

— 2 Corinthians 12:9

What makes the difference between someone like him and a person like Joni Eareckson Tada? In *Where Is God When It Hurts?* Philip Yancey describes the gradual transformation that took place in Joni’s attitude in the years after she was paralyzed in a diving accident.

"At first, Joni found it impossible to reconcile her condition with her belief in a loving God. . . . The turning to God was very gradual. A melting in her attitude from bitterness to trust dragged out over three years of tears and violent questioning" (pp.133-134).

A turning point came the evening that a close friend, Cindy, told her, "Joni, you aren't the only one. Jesus knows how you feel—why, He was paralyzed too." Cindy described how Jesus was fastened to the cross, paralyzed by the nails.

Yancey then observed, "The thought intrigued Joni and, for a moment, took her mind off her own pain. It had never occurred to her that God might have felt the same piercing sensations that now racked her body. The realization was profoundly comforting" (p.134).

Instead of continuing to search for why the devastating accident occurred, Joni has been forced to depend more heavily on the Lord and to look at life from a long-range perspective.

Yancey further says about Joni, "She wrestled with God, yes, but she did not turn away from Him. . . . Joni now calls her accident a 'glorious intruder,' and claims it was the best thing that ever happened to her. God used it to get her attention and direct her thoughts toward Him" (pp.137-138).

This principle that suffering can produce healthy dependence on God is taught by the apostle Paul in one of his letters to the church in Corinth. He wrote:

We do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead (2 Cor. 1:8-9).

A similar idea can be found in Paul's comments about his physical troubles. The Lord told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). Then Paul added, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (v.10).

Suffering has a way of showing how weak our own resources really are. It forces us to rethink priorities, values, goals, dreams, pleasures, the source of real strength, and our relationships with people and with God. It has a way of directing our attention to spiritual realities—if we don't turn from God instead.

Suffering forces us to evaluate the direction of our lives. We can choose to despair by focusing on our present problems, or we can choose to hope by recognizing God's long-range plan for us (Rom. 5:5; 8:18-28; Heb. 11).

Of all the passages in the Bible, Hebrews 11 most reassures me that whether life is grand or grotesque, my response needs to be one of faith in the wisdom, power, and control of God. No matter what, I have good reason to trust Him—just as the great men and women of old hoped in Him.

**"Faith is the substance of things hoped for,
the evidence of things not seen." — Hebrews 11:1**

For example, Hebrews 11 reminds us about Noah, a man who spent 120 years waiting for God to fulfill His promise of a devastating flood (Gen. 6:3). Abraham waited many agonizing years before the child whom God had promised was finally born. Joseph was sold into slavery and wrongfully imprisoned, but he finally saw how God used all the apparent evil in his life for a good purpose (Gen. 50:20). Moses waited until he was 80 years old before God used him to help deliver the Jews from Egypt. And even then, leading those faith-deficient people was a struggle (see Exodus).

Hebrews 11 lists people like Gideon, Samson, David, and Samuel, who saw great victories as they lived for the Lord. But in the middle of verse 35 the mood changes. Suddenly we are face-to-face with people who had to endure incredible suffering—people who died without seeing why God allowed them to undergo such tragedies. These individuals were tortured, jeered, flogged, stoned, cut in half, stabbed, mistreated, and forced to live as outcasts (vv.35-38). God had planned that only in the long-range view of eternity would their faithfulness during hardship be rewarded (vv.39-40).

Pain forces us to look beyond our immediate circumstances. Suffering

drives us to ask the big questions of "Why am I here?" and "What's the purpose of my life?" By pursuing those questions and finding the answers in the God of the Bible, we will find the stability we need to endure even the worst that life can inflict because we know that this present life is not all there is. When we understand that a sovereign God is standing over all of human history and weaving it all together in a beautiful tapestry that will ultimately glorify Him, then we can see things in better perspective.

In Romans 8:18 the apostle Paul wrote, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Paul was not making light of our troubles, but he was telling believers to see our present troubles in light of all eternity. Our problems may indeed be heavy, even crushing. But Paul said that when compared to the incredible glories that await those who love God, even the darkest and most burdensome circumstances of life will fade by comparison.

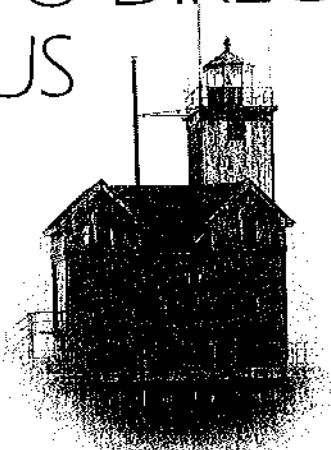
We need to take time to look at one more example, perhaps the most significant illustration we could consider. The day that Christ hung on the cross is now referred to as Good Friday. At the time, it was anything but a good day. It was a day of intense suffering, anguish, darkness, and gloom. It was a day when Jesus felt all alone. It was a day when God seemed absent and silent, when evil seemed to triumph, and hopes were dashed. But then came Sunday. Jesus rose from the grave. That awesome event put Friday in a different light. The resurrection gave a whole new meaning to what happened on the cross. Instead of being a time of defeat, it became a day of triumph.

**"Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help,
whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made heaven and
earth, the sea, and all that is in them." — Psalm 146:5-6**

We too can look ahead. We can endure our dark "Fridays" and be able to look on them as "good" because we serve the God of Sunday.

So when troubles strike, and they will, remember this: God uses such situations to direct us to Him and to the long-range view of life. He calls for us to trust, to hope, to wait.

Why Suffering? TO DIRECT US



Romans 8:18—"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Objective:

**To understand
the ways that
suffering can
draw us to God.**

Bible Memorization:

Romans 8:18

Read:

**"Why Suffering?
To Direct Us"
pp.20-23**

Warming Up

The idea that suffering can either drive us *from* God or *to* Him is a sobering thought. Examples of both responses are given on pages 20-21. Can you think of any other examples? Can you give examples from your own life?

Thinking Through

Why do you think it was comforting to Joni (p.21) when she discovered that God understood completely the pain she suffered and that Jesus had suffered that pain Himself?

Consider the change of heart that allowed Joni to view the paralyzing accident as a "glorious intruder" (p.21). How does this model the redirecting of her heart away from bitterness and to faith and hope in God? If not a "glorious intruder," what two words would you use to describe your suffering?

It is impossible to think very long about the issue of suffering without turning to the cross and seeing the suffering of Christ. How does that suffering, and its ultimate vindication in the resurrection, illustrate Paul's wonderful declaration in Romans 8:18? How do you respond to that declaration?

Digging In

Key Text: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

In the context of chapter 12, we are confronted with Paul's suffering for the gospel in chapter 11. How does this suffering differ from his "thorn in the flesh" in 2 Corinthians 12:7?

In verse 8, Paul described his prayers for deliverance—prayers that were answered in the negative. What is it about grace that makes it a better answer to Paul's prayer than healing would have been?

What is it that enabled Paul to say that he took "pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses"? (v.10).

Going Further

Refer

As you look with hope for God's ultimate response to pain and suffering in the world, it is helpful to consider "the rest of the story." Look at Revelation 21:1-5 and describe how it relates to Paul's words in Romans 8:18.

Reflect

Do you live life with an outlook of hope or an outlook of despair? What steps of personal growth are you willing to experience to see that hope formed in you?

"Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Romans 8:18

WHY WOULD A GOOD GOD ALLOW SUFFERING?

~ Reading for Study No. 4 ~

To Shape Us



Athletic coaches like to use the phrase “No pain, no gain.” As a high school track star (Okay, maybe I wasn’t that great, but I tried hard!), I heard coaches remind us again and again that the tough practice sessions would pay off when we began to compete. They were right. Oh, we didn’t always win, but our hard work did produce obvious benefits.

I learned a lot about myself during those years. And now I’m learning even more as I discipline myself to jog daily. Many days I would just as soon forget it. I don’t want to have to feel the pain of stretching exercises. I would rather not push my body’s “radiator system” to the extreme. I would just as soon not have to battle fatigue as I go up the hills. So why do I do it? The gain is worth the pain. My blood pressure and pulse rate are kept low, my middle isn’t expanding, and I feel more alert and healthy.

Exercise may have obvious benefits, but what about pain that we don’t choose? What about illness, disease, accidents, and emotional agony? What kind of gain can come from those? Is the gain really worth the pain?

Let’s consider what a fellow-sufferer had to say in Romans 5:3-4. The apostle Paul wrote, “We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

Paul introduced his statement about the benefits of suffering by saying “we also glory in tribulations.” How could he say that we should rejoice or be happy

that we are having to endure some painful tragedy? He certainly was not telling us to celebrate our troubles; rather, he was telling us to rejoice about what God can and will do for us and for His glory *through* our trials. Paul's statement encourages us to celebrate the end product, not the painful process itself. He did not mean we are to get some sort of morbid joy out of death, cancer, deformity, financial reversals, a broken relationship, or a tragic accident. All these things are awful—a dark reminder that we live in a world that has been corrupted by the curse of sin's effects.

The apostle James also wrote about how we should rejoice in the end result of our troubles. He said, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (Jas. 1:2-4).

As we combine the truths of these two passages, we can see how the good and praiseworthy products of suffering are patient perseverance, maturity of character, and hope. God can use the hardships of life to shape us to be more mature in the faith, more godly, more Christlike.

When we trust Christ as our Savior, the Lord does not suddenly zap us so that we become perfect people. What He does is remove sin's penalty and set us on the road that leads to heaven. Life then becomes a time of character development as we learn more about God and how we are to please Him. Suffering has a way of dramatically forcing us to deal with the deeper issues of life. By doing so, we grow stronger and gain maturity.

"Let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." — James 1:4

My grandfather, Dr. M. R. De Haan, spoke about the shaping process of our lives in his book *Broken Things*. He wrote:

The greatest sermons I have ever heard were not preached from pulpits but from sickbeds. The greatest, deepest truths of God's Word have often been revealed not by those who preached as a result of their seminary

preparation and education, but by those humble souls who have gone through the seminary of affliction and have learned experientially the deep things of the ways of God.

The most cheerful people I have met, with few exceptions, have been those who had the least sunshine and the most pain and suffering in their lives. The most grateful people I have met were not those who traveled a pathway of roses all their lives through, but those who were confined, because of circumstances, to their homes, often to their beds, and had learned to depend upon God as only such Christians know how to do. The grippers are usually, I have observed, those who enjoy excellent health. The complainers are those who have the least to complain about, and those dear saints of God who have refreshed my heart again and again as they preached from sickbed-pulpits have been the men and women who have been the most cheerful and the most grateful for the blessings of almighty God (pp.43-44).

How have you responded to the difficulties of life? Have you become bitter or better? Have you grown in your faith or turned away from God? Have you become more Christlike in your character? Have you let it shape you and conform you to the image of God's Son?

How Do All Things Work Together For Good?

Perhaps the most quoted part of the Bible during a time of pain and suffering is Romans 8:28. It reads, "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." This verse has often been misunderstood and perhaps misused, but its truth can bring a great deal of comfort.

The context of Romans 8 emphasizes what God is doing for us. The indwelling Holy Spirit gives us spiritual life (v.9), reassures us that we are children of God (v.16), and helps us with our prayers during our times of weakness (vv.26-27). Romans 8 also puts our sufferings in the bigger picture of what God is doing—that God is working out His plan of redemption (vv.18-26). Verses 28 through 39 reassure us of God's love for us, that no one or no thing could ever keep God from accomplishing what He wants to do, and that nothing could ever separate us from His love.

Properly viewed in the context of Romans 8, then, verse 28 powerfully reassures us that God is working on behalf of all who have trusted His Son as Savior. The verse does not promise that we will understand all the events of life or that after a time of testing we will be blessed with good things in this life. But it does reassure us that God is working out His good plan through our lives. He is shaping us and our circumstances to bring glory to Himself.

Author Ron Lee Davis writes in his book *Becoming A Whole Person In A Broken World*, "The good news is not that God will make our circumstances come out the way we like, but that God can weave even our disappointments and disasters into His eternal plan. The evil that happens to us can be transformed into God's good. Romans 8:28 is God's guarantee that if we love God, our lives can be used to achieve His purposes and further His kingdom" (p.122).

"But," you may ask, "how can God be in control when life seems so out of control? How can He be working things together for His glory and our ultimate good?" In his book *Why Us?* Warren Wiersbe states that God "proves His sovereignty, not by intervening constantly and preventing these events, but by ruling and overruling them so that even tragedies end up accomplishing His ultimate purposes" (p.136).

As the sovereign Lord of the universe, God is using all of life to develop our maturity and Christlikeness, and to further His eternal plan. In order to accomplish those purposes, however, God wants to use us to help others, and He wants other people to help us. That's what the next section is all about.

Why Suffering? TO SHAPE US



James 1:2—"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials."

Objective:

To see how pain and suffering can be an instrument to form us into the image of Christ.

Bible Memorization:

James 1:2-4

Read:

**"Why Suffering?
To Shape Us"
pp.26-29**

Warming Up

Have you, like Dr. De Haan (pp.27-28), known sufferers who experienced great joy and peace? Have you also known people with great physical and material well-being who constantly complained? Where do you fit on that scale?

Thinking Through

In the analogy between athletic training and suffering (p.26), we see the "no pain, no gain" philosophy fully portrayed. Does this philosophy work equally well in the realms of illness, natural disasters, accidents, failures, and betrayals? Why or why not?

On page 27, it says, "When we trust Christ as our Savior, the Lord does not suddenly zap us so that we become perfect people." Why not? Why is God's strategy of growth more significant than "instant perfection"?

Think about Warren Wiersbe's comment, on page 29 that God "proves His sovereignty, not by intervening constantly and preventing these events, but by ruling and overruling them so that even tragedies end up accomplishing His ultimate purposes." Can you validate that statement by your own observation of tragic events? By the record of tragedies in the Bible

Digging In

Key Text: Romans 8:28

"All things" is an all-encompassing phrase. Why is it more important that all things would work together for good than that all things would actually *be* good?

Using the context (vv.26-28), explain how Paul described the Holy Spirit's role in this process of building our lives through "all things." Also, how does verse 28 relate to what God has done and is doing for us as described in Romans 8:16-39?

Paul also used the phrase "all things" in verse 32. Is there a connection? If so, what is it? How does Christ's suffering on our behalf assure God's ultimate goal (which is seen in v.29)?

Going Further

Refer

Compare Romans 8:28 with Genesis 50:20, Ephesians 5:20, and 1 Thessalonians 5:18. What are the common principles found in these Scriptures? What comfort or assurance do they offer you?

Reflect

How have you responded to the difficulties of life? Have you become bitter or better? Have you grown in your faith or turned away from God? Have you become more Christlike in your character? Have you let them shape you and conform you to the image of God's Son?

"We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

Romans 8:28

"As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."

Genesis 50:20

"Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Ephesians 5:20

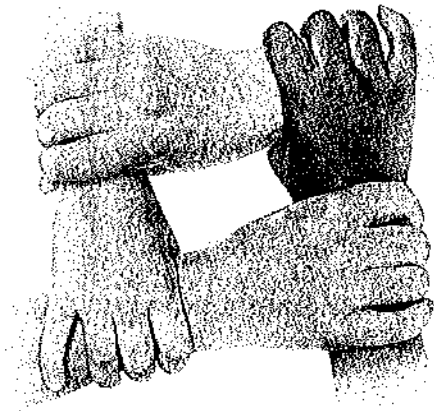
"In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

1 Thessalonians 5:18

WHY WOULD A GOOD GOD ALLOW SUFFERING?

~ Reading for Study No. 5 ~

To Unite Us



Pain and suffering seem to have a special ability to show us how much we need each other. Our struggles remind us how fragile we really are. Even the weakness of others can bolster us when our own strength is sapped.

This truth becomes very real to me each time I meet with a small group of church friends for prayer and fellowship. During those regular times together, we have shared one another's burdens for a sick child, the loss of a job, workplace tensions, a rebellious child, a miscarriage, hostility among family members, depression, everyday stresses, an unsaved family member, tough decisions, neighborhood crime, battles with sin, and much more. Many times at the end of those meetings I have praised the Lord for the encouragement we have given to one another. We have been drawn closer and we have been strengthened as we have faced the struggles of life together.

These kinds of personal experiences in light of Scripture remind me of two key truths:

1. Suffering helps us to see our need of other believers.
2. Suffering helps us to meet the needs of others as we allow Christ to live through us.

Let's take a look at each of these ways God uses pain and suffering for the purpose of uniting us with other believers in Christ.

1. Suffering Helps Us To See Our Need Of Other Believers

In describing the unity of all believers in Christ, the apostle Paul used the analogy of a human body (1 Cor. 12). He said that we need one another to function properly. Paul described the situation this way: "If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually" (vv.26-27).

**"If one member suffers,
all the members suffer with it." — 1 Corinthians 12:26**

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul spoke of Christ, "from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. 4:16).

When we begin to recognize what other believers have to offer us, then we will realize how much can be gained by reaching out for their help when we are going through a time of struggle. When troubles seem to knock out our strength, we can lean on other believers to help us find new strength in the Lord's power.

2. Suffering Helps Us To Meet The Needs Of Others As We Allow Christ To Live Through Us

In 2 Corinthians 1, the apostle Paul wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (vv.3-4).

As we saw in the previous section, we need one another because we have something valuable to offer. We have spiritual insights and wisdom that we have learned as we have undergone trials of all sorts. We know the value of the personal presence of a loving person. When we experience the comfort of God during a troubling situation, we then have an ability to identify with those people who undergo similar situations.

While preparing to write this booklet, I read about the experiences of people who have suffered greatly, and I spoke with others who were familiar with pain. I searched to find out who helped them most in their time of trouble. The answer again and again has been this: another person who had undergone a similar experience. That person can empathize more fully, and his or her comments reflect understanding that comes by experience. To someone who is burdened down, it often sounds shallow and patronizing to hear another say, "I understand what you are going through," unless that person has gone through a similar situation.

Even though the best comforters are those who have undergone similar situations and have grown spiritually stronger through them, that does not mean that the rest of us are off the hook. All of us have a responsibility to do all we can to empathize, to try to understand, to try to comfort. Galatians 6:2 tells us, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." And Romans 12:15 states, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep."

**"In short, there is no magic cure for a person in pain.
Mainly, such a person needs love,
for love instinctively detects what is needed."**

— Philip Yancey

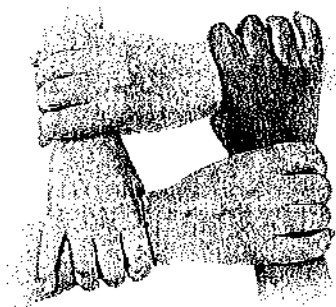
Dr. Paul Brand, an expert on the disease of leprosy, wrote, "When suffering strikes, those of us standing close by are flattened by the shock. We fight back the lumps in our throats, march resolutely to the hospital for visits, mumble a few cheerful words, perhaps look up articles on what to say to the grieving.

"But when I ask patients and their families, 'Who helped you in your suffering?' I hear a strange, imprecise answer. The person described rarely has smooth answers and a winsome, effervescent personality. It is someone quiet, understanding, who listens more than talks, who does not judge or even offer much advice. 'A sense of presence.' 'Someone there when I needed him.' A hand

to hold, an understanding, bewildered hug. A shared lump in the throat” (*Fearfully And Wonderfully Made*, pp.203-204).

It's clear—God made us to be dependent on one another. We have much to offer those in pain, and others have much to offer us as we endure troubles. As we develop that unity, we will experience greater comfort when we recognize that God uses suffering to alert us to the problems of sin, He uses difficulty to direct us to Him, and He can even use problems to make us more like Christ.

Why Suffering? TO UNITE US



Galatians 6:2—"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

Objective:

To explore the ways that suffering can pull us together as a body of Christ and as fellow human beings.

Bible Memorization:

Galatians 6:2

Read:

**"Why Suffering?
To Unite Us"
pp.32-35**

Warming Up

If you had to call someone at 3:00 a.m. to share your troubles, who would that be? Why?

Thinking Through

The biblical analogy of a human body illustrates the interrelatedness of believers (see p.33). How does that metaphor display for us the way we should relate to one another as Christians?

Why is it dangerous to tell people that you know how they feel when you have not shared their experience? What are alternative ways you can offer comfort and support when you do not understand the specifics of a person's suffering?

Respond to the quote from Dr. Paul Brand on page 34. How can this kind of support and concern fulfill the biblical command to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ"?

Digging In

Key Text: 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

In verse 3, what three descriptions of God did Paul praise Him for? Why is each one important in your life as a child of God? How can these truths about God help us when we suffer, and help us help others in their suffering?

According to verse 4, what is the reason God “comforts us in all our tribulation”? What, then, is our responsibility once we have been comforted by God?

What does verse 7, when viewed in light of Romans 12:15, say about the ministry of the body of Christ?

Going Further

Refer

The Gospels are filled with times when Christ displayed the comfort and mercy of God in His ministry. Identify at least two such incidents for each of these areas of suffering—physical suffering, emotional suffering, spiritual suffering, family suffering.

Reflect

Reflect on an occasion when God used someone to encourage you when you were on the verge of throwing in the towel. What did that person do that was helpful? Identify two people you know to be suffering right now. In what specific ways can you share God’s comfort with them this week?

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.”

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

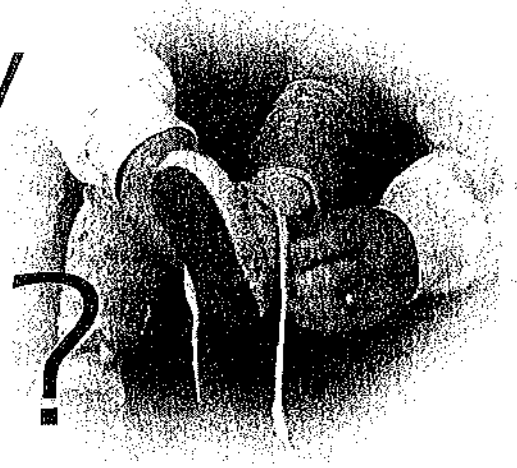
“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.”

Romans 12:15

WHY WOULD A GOOD GOD ALLOW SUFFERING?

~ Reading for Study No. 6 ~

How Can You Help?



Right now you may be overwhelmed by pain. The thought of trying to help someone else may seem impossible. At some point along the way, though, as you receive God's comfort, you will be ready to give comfort (2 Cor. 1). In fact, reaching out to help others may be an important part of the process of your own emotional healing.

Or maybe you have read this booklet with the hope that you will be better able to help a hurting friend or loved one. The suggestions in this section are designed for you as well.

Helping others is risky. Our help may not always be welcomed. We may sometimes say the wrong things. But try to help we must. Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37) reminds us that we are responsible to help the hurting people we encounter. Here are some suggestions:

- Don't wait for someone else to act first.
- Be physically present with them if possible and touch their hand or give an appropriate hug.
- Focus on their needs and not on your own discomfort with not having adequate answers.
- Allow them to express their feelings. Don't condemn their emotions.
- Learn about their problem.
- Don't pretend that you never struggle.
- Keep your words brief.

- Avoid saying, "You shouldn't feel that way," or, "You know what you should do."
- Assure them of your prayers.
- Pray! Ask God to help you and them.
- Keep in touch.
- Help them dispel false guilt by assuring them that suffering and sin are not inseparable twins.
- Help them find forgiveness in Christ if they are suffering due to sin, or if they become aware of some sin as they reflect on their lives.
- Encourage them to recall God's faithfulness in times past.
- Focus on Christ's example and help.
- Remind them that God loves us and cares for us and that He is in control.
- Encourage them to take one day at a time.
- Encourage them to reach out for the help they need (friends, family, pastor).
- Help them to realize that coping with troubles takes time.
- Remind them of God's shepherding love (Ps. 23).
- Remind them of God's control over the universe, both the big and small events of life.

**"Rejoice with those who rejoice,
and weep with those who weep."**

— Romans 12:15

- Don't ignore their problem.
- Don't be artificial in trying to "cheer them up." Be genuine. Be the friend you were to them before trouble hit.
- Show them the love you would like other people to show you if you were in their situation.
- Be a good listener.
- Acknowledge how much they hurt.
- Give them time to heal. Don't rush the process.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?



2 Corinthians 1:3—
“Blessed be the God and
Father of our Lord Jesus
Christ, the Father of
mercies and God of all
comfort.”

Objective:
**To develop
strategies for
becoming involved
as God’s
instruments of
comfort during the
struggles of
others.**

Bible Memorization:
2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Read:
**“How Can You
Help?”
pp.32-35**

Warming Up

In a huge world filled with billions of people separated by languages, nationalities, oceans, and borders, is it reasonable to believe that one person really can make a difference in other peoples’ lives? Why? Why not?

Thinking Through

How difficult is it for you to move from the role of “comforted” to “comforter”? How can the experience of God’s comfort help in that transition?

Which of the expressions of comfort that are listed on pages 38-39 do you find threatening? Which do you find comfortable?

Many people choose not to help others because of the high price and high risk involved. What are those costs and risks? What are the benefits of involvement? Do you think the benefits of involvement outweigh the risks? Why or why not?

Digging In

Key Text: Luke 10:25-37

At this moment, with whom do you most identify in the parable? The wounded man? The robbers? The priest? The Levite? The Samaritan? The innkeeper? Why?

What was the root issue that separated the response of the Samaritan from the responses of the priest and the Levite? When was this same issue displayed by Christ in His earthly ministry?

This passage contains at least eight ways that the Samaritan showed his concern for the suffering man. What are they and how would each one look in today's world?

Going Further

Refer

Identify at least five places in the Gospels where Jesus is described as being motivated by compassion for those who were suffering.

Reflect

How has this study helped you in your handling of hardship in life? What life principles can you apply on a daily basis, not only in your own experience but also in your ministry to others who are hurting?

" 'A certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where [the wounded man] was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' " So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves? And [the lawyer] said, 'He who showed mercy on him.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.' "

Luke 10:33-37

Better Than Answers

We cry out for complete answers. God offers Himself instead. And that's enough. If we know that we can trust Him, we don't need full explanations. It's enough to know that our pain and suffering are not meaningless. It's enough to know that God still rules the universe and that He really does care about us as individuals.

The greatest evidence of God's concern for us can be found by looking at Jesus Christ. God loved our suffering world so much that He sent His Son to agonize and die for us, to free us from being sentenced to eternal sorrow (Jn. 3:16-18). Because of Jesus, we can avoid the worst of all pain, the pain of separation from God—forever. And because of Christ, we can endure even the worst of tragedies now because of the strength He puts within us and the hope He sets before us.

**"We cry out for complete answers.
God offers Himself instead."**

The first step in coping realistically with the problem of suffering is to recognize its roots in the universal problem of sin. Have you recognized how much Jesus suffered on the cross for you to free you from the penalty of sin? Put your trust in Him. Receive His free gift of forgiveness. Only in Him will you find a lasting solution to the problem of pain in your life and in the world.

Discovery Series Bible Study Leader's And User's Guide

Statement Of Purpose

The Discovery Series Bible Study (DSBS) series provides assistance to pastors and leaders in discipling and teaching Christians through the use of RBC Ministries *Discovery Series* booklets. The DSBS series uses the inductive Bible-study method to help Christians understand the Bible more clearly.

Study Helps

Listed at the beginning of each study are the key verse, objective, and memorization verses. These will act as the compass and map for each study.

Some key Bible passages are printed out fully. This will help the students to focus on these passages and to examine and compare the Bible texts more easily—leading to a better understanding of their meanings. Serious students are encouraged to open their own Bible to examine the other Scriptures as well.

How To Use DSBS (for individuals and small groups)

Individuals—Personal Study

- Read the designated pages of the book.
- Carefully consider and answer all the questions.

Small Groups—Bible-Study Discussion

- To maximize the value of the time spent together, each member should do the lesson work prior to the group meeting.
- Recommended discussion time: 45–55 minutes.
- Engage the group in a discussion of the questions, seeking full participation from each of the members.

Overview Of Lessons

Study	Topic	Bible Text	Reading	Questions
1	Elusive Answers, Why Would A Good God Allow Suffering?	Job 42:3	pp.5-7	pp.8-9
2	Why Suffering? TO ALERT US	Heb. 12:5-10	pp.10-17	pp.18-19
3	Why Suffering? TO DIRECT US	2 Cor. 12:7-10	pp.20-23	pp.24-25
4	Why Suffering? TO SHAPE US	Rom. 8:28	pp.26-29	pp.30-31
5	Why Suffering? TO UNITE US	2 Cor. 1:3-7	pp.32-35	pp.36-37
6	How Can You Help?	Lk. 10:25-37	pp.38-39	pp.40-41

The DSBS format incorporates a "layered" approach to Bible study that includes four segments. These segments form a series of perspectives that become increasingly more personalized and focused. These segments are:

Warming Up. In this section, a general interest question is used to begin the discussion (in small groups) or "to get the juices flowing" (in personal study). It is intended to begin the process of interaction at the broadest, most general level.

Thinking Through. Here, the student or group is invited to interact with the *Discovery Series* material that has been read. In considering the information and implications of the booklet, these questions help to drive home the critical concepts of that portion of the booklet.

Digging In. Moving away from the *Discovery Series* material, this section isolates a key biblical text from the manuscript and engages the student or group in a brief inductive study of that passage of Scripture. This brings the authority of the Bible into the forefront of the study as we consider its message to our hearts and lives.

Going Further. This final segment contains two parts. In *Refer*, the student or group has the opportunity to test the ideas of the lesson against the rest of the Bible by cross-referencing the text with other verses. In *Reflect*, the student or group is challenged to personally apply the lesson by making a practical response to what has been learned.

Pulpit Sermon Series (for pastors and church leaders)

Although the Discovery Series Bible Study is primarily for personal and group study, pastors may want to use this material as the foundation for a series of messages on this important issue. The suggested topics and their corresponding texts are as follows:

Sermon No.	Topic	Text
1	Why Would A Good God Allow Suffering?	Job 42:3
2	Why Suffering? TO ALERT US	Heb. 12:5-10
3	Why Suffering? TO DIRECT US	2 Cor. 12:7-10
4	Why Suffering? TO SHAPE US	Rom. 8:28
5	Why Suffering? TO UNITE US	2 Cor. 1:3-7
6	How Can You Help?	Lk. 10:25-37

Final Thoughts

The DSBS will provide an opportunity for growth and ministry. To internalize the spiritual truths of each study in a variety of environments, the material is arranged to allow for flexibility in the application of the truths discussed.

Whether DSBS is used in small-group Bible studies, adult Sunday school classes, adult Bible fellowships, men's and women's study groups, or church-wide applications, the key to the strength of the discussion will be found in the preparation of each participant. Likewise, the effectiveness of personal and pastoral use of this material will be directly related to the time committed to using this resource.

As you use, teach, or study this material, may you "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18).

Reflections



OUR DAILY BREAD

Delivered right to your home!

You can make *Our Daily Bread* part of your regular time with God. Every month, you can receive a new booklet of devotional articles. Each day's topic is timely and lively and filled with wisdom and reliable instruction from God's Word.

To receive *Our Daily Bread* each month at home, just write to us at the address below or visit us at www.odb.org/sample to order online.

As part of the *Our Daily Bread* family, you'll also get opportunities to receive Bible-study guides and booklets on a variety of topics including creation, the church, and how to live the Christian life.

For program listings and other information about RBC resources, write to RBC Ministries at:

USA: PO Box 2222, Grand Rapids, MI 49501-2222

CANADA: Box 1622, Windsor, ON N9A 6Z7

RBC Web site: www.rbc.org



Support for RBC Ministries comes from the gifts of friends like you.
We are not funded or endowed by any group or denomination.

DISCOVERY SERIES BIBLE STUDY GUIDES

UNDERSTANDING BIBLE TEXTS • KNOWING THE BASICS OF THE FAITH
LIVING AS A CHRISTIAN • RELATING TO YOUR FAMILY • GETTING TO KNOW GOD
SHARING YOUR FAITH • LEARNING ABOUT BIBLE CHARACTERS

LEARNING ABOUT BIBLE CHARACTERS



JONAH: The Failure Of Success

Most of us are familiar with the story of Jonah, but we usually don't read it from the standpoint of success and failure. This study, however, examines the life of the Old Testament prophet Jonah and discovers someone who succeeded at failure and failed at success. Jonah's life drives home the lesson that those who are forgiven much should love much, and that those who have received mercy should be merciful.

#FSU-Z7368

EVE AND RAHAB:

Learning To Make Better Choices

Choices—life is full of them. We have to make them, but how do we make good choices? For help in wise decision-making, we can turn to the Word of God and learn by precept and example. This study by Alice Mathews looks at Eve and Rahab—two women in the Bible who wrestled with problems that are surprisingly similar to those we all face. And as we examine the choices they made, we will find principles to help us make better choices in our lives.

#FSU-VN103



MARY AND MARTHA:

Balancing Life's Priorities

Author Alice Mathews uses the experiences of her life and heart to bring fresh perspective to the biblical accounts of Mary and Martha. It takes a busy woman to understand the heart of Martha—a busy, overworked woman. It also takes a reflective woman who loves to learn at the feet of her Lord to understand the heart of Martha's sister, Mary. Alice is just such a woman. This study of Mary and Martha provides timeless wisdom on balancing life's priorities.

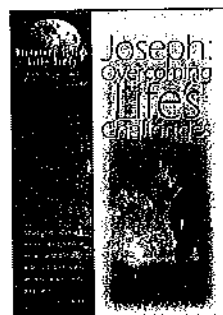
#FSU-VE820

JOSEPH:

Overcoming Life's Challenges

Joseph's life was filled with injustice. Yet each time he was confronted with an unfair life experience, Joseph responded with faith, hope, and confidence in the God who is always in control. In this study, we walk with Joseph through his life's disappointments and learn with him about the goodness and faithfulness of God.

#FSU-ZY507



OVER 18 ADDITIONAL BIBLE STUDY GUIDES AVAILABLE!

Order online at www.dhp.org/biblestudyguide

Order by credit card at (800) 653-8333

(Hours: 7:30 am–7:00 pm EST M–F; 9:00 am–5:00 pm EST Sat.)