

God has given His infallible, inerrant Word to guide us in our trials. It tells us what we need to know about God, His purposes in this world, the meaning of pain, God's answer to evil, and how we are to respond. As we come to God and His ways through the Scriptures we become prepared to walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

This study guide has been designed to assist the student of God's Word in his pursuit of what God has to say about suffering.

*A Study Guide to an Inductive Study of the Scriptures on the  
THEOLOGICAL AND PRACTICAL CONSIDERATION OF PERSONAL SUFFERING*

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*A Study Guide to an Inductive Study  
of the Scriptures on*

**The Theological and Practical  
Consideration of  
PERSONAL SUFFERING**

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## *Preface*

The best way to endure pain and suffering in life is to be prepared beforehand to endure pain and suffering. It is very difficult to concentrate and to do justice to the great truths of God's Word while running a low-grade fever and throwing up one's digestive juices in the process of dying from cancer. The time, energy, and regularity required in the study of the Bible are no easy matter when one's thoughts are preoccupied with doctor's appointments and the side effects of medication. The child of God must be, in the words of James, "quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger." There is no substitute for careful listening to what God has to say as preparation for the time when pain is shouting at the top of its voice. Quick and superficial answers to problems regarding suffering are dealt a killing blow by the wisdom of God. Anger that arises when affliction is encountered is tempered and subdued by God's assurances that He loves us. Yes, He loves us and we know that He loves us because we know what He has said. That is raw faith.

But how is such faith developed? God has given His infallible, inerrant Word to guide us in our trials. It tells us everything we need to know about God, His purposes in this world, the meaning of pain, His

answer to evil, and how we are to respond. As we come to God and to His ways through the Scriptures, we become prepared to walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

This study guide has been designed to assist the student of God's Word in his pursuit of what God has to say about suffering. In order to receive the greatest profit from it, the following is advised: First, there must be a willingness to submit oneself to the discipline of consistent work. An hour spent each week is better than a few minutes tacked together here and there. Second, the answers and all completed work should be shared with someone else. If a husband and wife can work together, that would be especially advantageous. Third, a small group can use this study guide under the direction of a prepared leader who together can interact through the use of the group's answers. Fourth, patience is required. The five lessons in this study guide each build upon the preceding lesson. It is best to work straight through rather than jumping around.

Finally, you will observe that there are three sections in each lesson: *Bible Study*, *Think About It*, and *Application*. The *Bible Study* section is for the purpose of dealing directly with the Scriptures. This is foundational. The *Think About It* section has been structured to stimulate

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thoughtful reflection upon the implications of Scriptural truth.

The *Application* section should create a sense of responsibility through personally applying what one has learned.

A brief caveat is necessary in conclusion. Being prepared for pain and suffering through a biblically renewed mind does not mean that there will be no struggle when affliction knocks at the door. The believer will wrestle with God, get confused, and experience the spectrum of emotions that come with suffering. But he can have a genuine confidence in God as he allows the testimonies of truth to be his counselors (Psa. 119:24).

*"It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes."*

*Psalm 119:71*





## *Lesson One*

### **THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN PAIN AND SUFFERING**

#### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1. To understand the nature of the problem of evil.
2. To determine how the Bible deals with the coexisting realities of an all-powerful God, a wholly good God, and the presence of evil in this world.
3. To understand what is God's relationship to evil in this world.

#### **QUOTATIONS**

*"The issue of God and evil is a most important matter for a proselyte considering the claims of a given religion. He wants to know if the religion commits him to belief in a God who does evil or who fails to do good."*

John S. Feinberg

*"If God were good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty, He would be able to do what He wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore God lacks either goodness, or power, or both."*

C. S. Lewis

*"Either God wants to prevent evil, and He cannot do it; or He can do it and does not want to; or He neither wishes to nor can do it; or He wishes to and can do it. If He has the desire without the power, He is impotent; if He can, but has not the desire, He has a malice which we cannot attribute to Him; if He has neither the power nor the desire, He is both impotent and evil, and consequently not God; if He has the desire and the power, whence then comes evil, or why does He not prevent it?"*

Edward John Carnell

## BIBLE STUDY

### A Biblical Response to the Problem of Evil

*"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?"*

Theologians use the word "theodicy" to describe that process of thought that seeks to "justify the ways of God to man." A theodicy sets forth the rightness of God, worthy of praise and service despite contrary appearances. Many theodicies have been proposed by theologians and philosophers to try to explain what purpose evil could possibly serve in God's universe. But is there a *biblical* theodicy? Does the Bible attempt to provide a rationale for the existence of evil? The following questions are designed to help you arrive at a "biblical theodicy."

1. How did moral (the bad) and natural (the harmful) evil enter the world (Gen. 3:7, 16-19; Rom. 5:12; I Cor. 15:22-23)?

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2. What did God do in answer to the entrance of evil into the world (Gen. 3:15; Rom. 5:8; 8:32; 1 John 4:8-10)?

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3. What does God do for the Christian in his or her relation to the evil in this world?

a. Rom. 12:21; John 16:33 \_\_\_\_\_

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b. Rom. 8:22, 28 \_\_\_\_\_

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c. Col. 1:24; Phil. 3:10 \_\_\_\_\_  
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d. 2 Cor. 12:7-10 \_\_\_\_\_  
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e. James 1:2, 12 \_\_\_\_\_  
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f. Eph. 1:7; 1 John 2:2 \_\_\_\_\_  
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g. 1 Cor. 15:20-24; Rev. 1:18 \_\_\_\_\_  
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4. What will God do for those who have experienced His forgiveness through redemption in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:18; Rev. 7:9-17)?  
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5. How has God revealed Himself in the Bible? When this is discovered, one has a better grasp of not only what we know about our world, but also of what we don't know. What has God shown to be true about Himself in the following circumstances in which evil was an issue?

a. What attributes of God were brought to Job's attention in answer to Job's struggle with the problem of pain and suffering (Job 38:1-7, 31-33; 39:26-30; 40:6-9; 41:1-34)?  
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b. Ex. 32:27-35, 33:19, 34:6 \_\_\_\_\_  
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- c. Nah. 1:1-8 (the impending destruction of Nineveh)

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- d. 1 Pet. 2:23 (Jesus dealing with injustice)

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- e. Rom. 11:33-36 (the rejection of Jesus as Israel's Messiah and its consequences)

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**The Relationship of God to Evil in This World**

*"That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that there is no one besides Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other, the One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity. I am the Lord who does all these."*

Isaiah 45:6-7

1. What action did God take toward Abimelech when he was on the verge of committing adultery (Gen. 20: 3-4, 17-18)?

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How did God use physical pain in this situation?

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2. How is God's relationship to evil to be understood in the following circumstances?

- a. Gen. 2:16-17; 3:6 \_\_\_\_\_

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- b. Deut. 28:1, 15 \_\_\_\_\_

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c. Matt. 23:37 \_\_\_\_\_  
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d. Acts 14:16 \_\_\_\_\_

3. God in His sovereignty determines what direction evil should take.

a. What can God do with evil when it is committed against His children (Gen. 37:26, 27; 39:15-18; 40:9-23; 45:5; 50:20)?

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b. What does God do with the nations who exercise their own evil and selfish intentions in human history (Isa. 14:24-27; 45:7 ff.; Zech. 1:18-21; Prov. 21:1)?

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4. God uses natural (the harmful) evil to further His purposes in the lives of His people. How is that evident in the following cases?

a. Deut. 28:17, 48; 1 Kings 8:37; Amos 4:6

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b. Deut. 28:22-24, 48; 1 Kings 8:35; Amos 4:7-8

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d. Deut. 28:38, 42; 1 Kings 8:37; Amos 4:9

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e. Num. 14:36, 37

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f. 2 Sam. 12:15, 19

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f. Acts 5:5, 10; 2 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16-17

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5. God exercises sovereign control over the actions of Satan, who is an agent of moral and sometimes natural evil. How is this evident in the following cases?

a. When Satan said that Job was worshipping God for selfish reasons, what did God allow him to do as a test of Job's loyalty to God (Job 1:12-19, 2:5-8)?

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b. What limitations did God place upon Satan in his attack on Job?

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c. What did God permit Satan to do in regard to David (compare 1 Chron. 21:1 with 2 Sam. 24:1)?

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d. How did God use David's sin to accomplish His purposes (2 Sam. 24:17-25)? What was the significance of the piece of land that David purchased in the subsequent history of Israel (24:18)?

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e. What did God permit Satan to do in regard to His servant Paul (2 Cor. 12:7)?

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f. How did God turn Paul's seeming disadvantage into an advantage (2 Cor. 12:9-10)?

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g. What was Satan allowed to do in regard to the woman of Luke 13:10-17? How did God overrule this (13:13)?

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6. What relationship to sin does God have as presented in the appearance of the lawless one (the Antichrist) in the coming Tribulation (2 Thess. 2:6-7)?

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7. At what point does God act to turn man over to the full consequences of his sin (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28; 2 Thess. 2:10-12)? Why does God do this?

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## THINK ABOUT IT

### A Biblical Response to the Problem of Evil

*"The questions concerning the relationship between God and suffering arise from two assumptions: the assumptions that God is almighty, and that He is good. If God is almighty, everything happens as He wills it to happen. If people have unpleasant experiences, they nevertheless occur in accord with the will of God. For if God had not willed them, they could not have occurred. On the other hand, however, people also want to cling to the goodness of God. But if God is good, how is it possible for such nasty things to happen? That would not be a problem, of course, if God were not also powerful. In that case, God would not want the nasty things to happen either, but He simply could not do anything about them. However, if God is powerful, He would be able to do something about bad things. But they happen, which raises the question of whether God is good."*

A. Van De Beek

1. The above quote is taken from A. Van De Beek's book, *Why? On Suffering, Guilt, and God*. The author is not questioning

either the goodness of God or His power. What he is doing is raising the questions that have been traditionally associated with the problem of evil. Briefly state in your own words what you think the problem of evil is in the light of the above quote. What questions arise in your own mind as you consider God's power, God's goodness, and the presence of evil?

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2. As mentioned earlier, attempts at providing answers to the "problem of evil" are called theodicies or defenses. Atheists (those who do not believe there is a God) insist that there is no way a theist (one who believes in a God) can solve the problem of evil. They question how evil can exist in a world that was created by an all-powerful and good God. Therefore, there can be no all-powerful, all-loving God. How would you answer such a challenge as this?

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3. One very common approach in the theistic explanation of evil is what is known as "the greatest-way theodicy." This view does not claim that this is the best of all possible worlds (as another theodicy claims), but holds that this evil world is the best possible way to the best world (*The Roots of Evil*, Norman L. Geisler). The idea is that evil has been permitted by an all-loving, all-powerful God in order to defeat evil and to produce a greater good. What is your response to this theodicy? Do you think this might be the best possible explanation of the existence of evil? If you disagree, give your reasons.

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4. Some theists have contended that God is the author of evil, i.e., that He brought evil into existence in order to do good. Do you think that God can do evil? Can God be considered the “author” of evil? See Hab. 1:13; Psa. 34:15-16; James 1:13; John 1:5; 1 Tim. 6:16.

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5. After a careful reading and consideration of the following passages, state what you believe to be a biblical way to approach questions that cannot ultimately be answered as to the reason for the existence of evil.

a. Deut. 29:29 \_\_\_\_\_

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b. Dan. 2:20-22 \_\_\_\_\_

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c. Matt. 11:20-30 (Notice the response of Jesus in vv. 25-30 after having spoken of evil and its judgment in vv. 20-24).

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d. Rom. 11:33-36 (Notice the context in which Paul has dealt with the evil of Israel’s rejection of the Messiah in vv. 25-32).

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6. Through the centuries, God’s people have struggled with the problem of evil in its personal dimension. This is best seen in the questions which are asked of God in those times when God seems to allow evil (especially the wickedness of man) to drag on with apparent impunity. What help do the following experiences of God’s people offer in handling the dilemma of evil?

a. Psa. 13:1-6 (What hope is given in the midst of despair?)

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b. Rev. 6:10-11

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7. Two attempts to explain the world's evil are briefly described as follows. Evaluate each of them in the light of what you know about the biblical response to evil.

a. One view sees this as the best of all possible worlds. It is argued that "a world containing moral and physical evil is better than a world containing only good."

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b. Another view sees God as limited and struggling against evil in hope of conquering it someday.

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8. Cyrus was king of Persia from 550 BC to 530 BC. He organized the soldiery of Media and Persia into an invincible army. He captured Babylon and absorbed the former powers of Assyria, Lydia, and Asia Minor into the Persian Empire. He also issued a decree granting Israel the right to return to her homeland and rebuild her temple in 538 BC. What do the Scriptures reveal about God's part in all of this?

a. Isa. 44:21-28, 45:1-3; Ezra 1:1-11; Jer. 25:12-13

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b. Isa. 45:4-6 (What two purposes are given for God using Cyrus?)

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9. The Bible presents God as permitting moral (the bad) evil and its consequent, natural (the harmful) evil. It may be said that God created creatures with a capacity for evil. Evil is defined as a lack of good (i.e., a good thing gone wrong). But all of this raises several questions:

a. Did God force Adam and Eve to exercise their capacity for evil? Explain your answer.

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b. Is it correct to say that God “ordained” evil?

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c. Is it good that evil exists?

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d. Is it correct to say that the choosing of good is only possible when the choosing of evil is also possible?

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10. Is it right to say that evil is the price that has to be paid for there to be genuine freedom? It has been said that “all suffering is connected with free will and is necessary for the opportunity and attainment of the greatest achievable good.” What do you think of this explanation of suffering?

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11. God’s rule over the evil in this world and His ability to direct it to accomplish His purposes can be seen in the account of Job’s suffering. Theologians have used the word “concurrence” to describe the interaction between the evil actions of men and Satan with the ultimate purposes of God. Concurrence is the concept of the cooperation of divine power

with all subordinate powers. How do you see this working in Job's experience?

a. God's purpose (Job 1:8, 2:3) \_\_\_\_\_

b. Satan's purpose (Job 1:11, 2:5) \_\_\_\_\_

c. The Sabeans's and Chaldeans's purpose (Job 1:14-15, 17)

12. The sovereign control of God over the natural world (Psa. 135:5-7) and suffering of innocent people in earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, and tornadoes constitutes one of the "problems" of evil. In his book, *The Roots of Evil*, Norman L. Geisler gives ten reasons for physical evil as part of an attempt to resolve the problem of natural evil. They are listed as follows:

- 1) Some physical evils come to us directly from our own free choices.
- 2) Some physical evils come to us indirectly from the exercise of our freedom.
- 3) Some physical evils come to us directly from the free choices of others.
- 4) Some physical evil comes to us indirectly from the free choices of others.
- 5) Some physical evil may be a necessary by-product of other good activities.
- 6) Some evils may come upon us as the result of the choices of evil spirits.
- 7) Some physical evils are God-given warnings of greater physical evils.
- 8) Some physical suffering may be used by God as a warning about moral evils.
- 9) Some physical evil may be permitted as a condition of greater moral perfection.
- 10) Some physical evil occurs because higher forms live on lower ones.

In view of the reasons stated above, why do you think God allows physical evil to continue? What would be the consequences if God prevented tornadoes, earthquakes, floods, etc. from happening?

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Does God ever allow Satan to cause harm from natural forces (Job 1:12, 19)?

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13. The world, with all it contains, is constantly under the watchful eye and rule of God, who controls all things (even the evil) in such a way as to bring about His own eternal purpose and plan without failure. This comforting truth is vividly demonstrated in the book of Esther. After a careful reading of the entire book at one sitting, evaluate the following facts showing how God both *permitted* and *prevented* sin to accomplish His purposes.

- a. Vashti's refusal
- b. Decrees of Ahasuerus
- c. Esther's appearance
- d. Esther's relation to Mordecai
- e. Ahasuerus's passion, anger, insomnia
- f. Mordecai's official position
- g. Mordecai's refusal to bow before Haman
- h. Haman's plot to kill Jews
- i. Haman's plot to hang Mordecai
- j. Haman's casting of the lot

What sin did God permit?

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What sin did God prevent?

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## APPLICATION

*“I am not suggesting that when we bring God into the discussion that we automatically solve all the problems. But I am affirming that to leave God out of the discussion is to make the discussion unnecessary. We have problems with evil in this world, not because of our unbelief, but because of our faith!”*

Warren W. Wiersbe

1. To what extent have you personally struggled with the philosophical/theological problem of evil as distinguished from the more experiential aspect of the problem? Was it a factor in bringing you to the Bible for answers before you were a Christian?

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2. Have you ever fought with God over the fairness of some suffering you have had to endure? What were the circumstances? How did you resolve it?

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3. How well do you think you understand the character of God as it is revealed in His Word? Give yourself a test by writing out a brief explanation of the attributes of God and some of their practical implications (e.g., holiness, justice, love, omnipotence, immutability, truthfulness, infinity, mercy, wisdom).

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4. How do the following passages help you better understand the greatness of God?

a. Psa. 77:12-16 \_\_\_\_\_

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b. Dan. 4:34-35 \_\_\_\_\_

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c. Rev. 15:3- 4 \_\_\_\_\_

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5. How has the power and goodness of God helped you personally in dealing with a situation in which you were sinned against (e.g., cheated, slandered) by someone else?

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6. The denial of the reality of evil can be found today in Christian Science as set forth in the writings of Mary Baker Eddy. Make a personal investigation in what Christian Science teaches about evil and offer a brief refutation. You can find help in this assignment by reading the chapter on “Christian Science and New Thought” from Walter R. Martin’s book, *The Kingdom of the Cults*.

- a. Summary statement on Christian Science’s view of evil:

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- b. Assessment of Christian Science’s view of evil:

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7. Many have seen the *Star Wars* movies (*Star Wars*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, *The Return of the Jedi*, etc.). The view of evil that is presented in these movies is known as *dualism*. What is dualism’s explanation of evil, and how is this developed in these movies?

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8. What do you think would happen if God eradicated evil right now? Try to imagine a world in which a hammer would strike a nail but would turn spongy when it hit your thumb. Project this thought to cover the world as we know it.
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9. Have you ever denied the reality of evil by not facing up to the meaning of your own pain and suffering? This can be done by ignoring the lessons that can come from affliction. For example, the death of a close friend could have the effect of bringing someone to a sense of their own need for God and for victory over death in resurrection. To what extent have you or someone you know practically denied the reality of evil?
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10. The annihilation of six million Jews, carried out by the German state under Adolf Hitler during World War II, has been referred to as “The Holocaust.” How would you explain this tragic episode in human history in the light of what you understand about God’s power and goodness, as well as the existence of evil? Answer this in response to the question, “If there is a God why would He let such a thing happen?”
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11. Romans 8:28 is a wonderful promise to God’s people. It certainly speaks to the long-range view of all that takes place in the Christian’s life. Evaluate a period of time in your life in the light of Romans 8:28. How has this verse brought comfort to you as you consider God’s ability to direct even the sin committed against you to accomplish His purposes in your life?
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## *Lesson Two*

### **THE SUBJECTS OF SUFFERING**

#### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1. To understand the original cause of human pain and suffering.
2. To determine the reasons why the non-Christian increases his or her own suffering in this world and the next.
3. To determine the reasons why the Christian experience can bring with it pain and suffering.

#### **QUOTATIONS**

*“Though good and bad men suffer alike, we must not suppose that there is no difference between the men themselves, because there is no difference in what they suffer. For even in the likeness of the sufferings, there remains an unlikeness in the sufferers; and though exposed to the same anguish, virtue and vice are not the same.”*

Augustine

*“The world is a dance in which good, descending from God, is disturbed by evil arising from the creatures, and the resulting conflict is resolved by God’s own assumption of the suffering nature which evil produces. The doctrine of the free Fall asserts that the evil which thus makes the fuel or raw material for the second and more complex kind of good is not God’s contribution but man’s.”*

C. S. Lewis

*“The first sufferings, which were emotional and the immediate consequence of disobedience, were followed by God’s curse, which promised pain, toil, and death.”*

J. I. Packer

## BIBLE STUDY

### The Original Cause of Human Pain and Suffering

*“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned –”*

Romans 5:12

In order to understand the biblical explanation for the presence of pain and suffering in this world, two sources must be examined. Of the first source relatively little is said in comparison to the second originating cause, i.e., the Fall of Man. But both stand as the headwaters of human misery.

1. Who came to Eve in the Garden of Eden in order to draw her and her husband, Adam, away from God into disobedience (Gen. 3:1-7; 2 Cor. 11:3; Rev. 12:9)?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. To whom does the Bible attribute sin in the universe with all its disorders (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8)?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What penalty was attached to God’s command to Adam and Eve to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16-17)?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. In what ways did Adam and Eve experience this penalty when they disobeyed God and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?
  - a. Gen. 2:17; Rom. 5:12 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Gen. 3:16 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

c. Gen. 3:17-19 \_\_\_\_\_

d. Gen. 3:19, 22-24 \_\_\_\_\_

5. What were the results of the Fall of Adam on the human race?

a. Rom. 5:12, 19; Gen. 5:3, 6:5, 11-12, 8:21

b. Rom. 5:16, 18 \_\_\_\_\_

c. Rom. 5:12, 15, 17; 1 Cor. 15:21-22; Gen. 5:5, 8, 11

6. When man became a sinner, his alienation from God brought many social consequences. What were some of these?

a. Gen. 3:12 \_\_\_\_\_

b. Gen. 3:13 \_\_\_\_\_

c. Gen. 4:8 \_\_\_\_\_

d. Gen. 4:19 \_\_\_\_\_

7. What effects did the Fall of Man have upon his environment (Gen. 3:16-19; Rom. 5:12; 8:20, 22)?

### **Compounded Suffering for the Non-Christian**

When Adam sinned, he plunged the entire human race into alienation from God, a dysfunctional relationship with his fellow man, and environmental decay. All men are born into a fallen world that is out of harmony with its Creator. Because of his separation from God, man makes choices that only compound his pain and misery in this world.

1. Romans 1:18-32 demonstrates how man the sinner brings upon himself most of his own misery. What sequence in man's rebellion against God leads to the complications of moral failure?
  - a. Rom. 1:18b \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Rom. 1:21-22 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Rom. 1:23 \_\_\_\_\_
2. God turns man over to the full experience of this chosen path of evil as an act of divine retribution (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28). What are the chosen consequences of man's rebellion against God according to Romans 1:24-32?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Identify the chosen miseries of the following nations due to their having rejected the revelation of God. In certain instances, these were miseries perpetrated upon other nations.
  - a. Moab (Isa. 16:6-8) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Egypt (Isa. 19:1-2) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Ammon (Amos 1:13) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Babylon (Hab. 2:6-15) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - e. Edom (Obad. 1:10-14) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - f. Assyria (Nah. 3:1-4) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## Compounded Suffering for the Christian

Those who have put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin are not exempt from the pain that comes from living in a fallen world. Christians get sick, die in airplane crashes, get robbed, have their homes destroyed by tornadoes, and have automobile accidents. But suffering may become even more intensified for the believer in Jesus Christ for a variety of reasons.

1. How does the Christian's unique relationship with Jesus Christ result in suffering (John 15:18; 2 Cor. 1:5; 1 Pet. 4:13; Matt. 5:10-12; 1 John 3:13)?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. In what way does Satan play a role in compounding the Christian's suffering (1 Pet. 5:8; Eph. 6:10-18; Rev. 12:10, 2:10)?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. How does the Christian's relationship with fellow Christians result in greater suffering (1 Cor. 12:26; Rom. 12:15)?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. How else can the Christian increase his hardships in this world?

a. 1 Pet. 4:15 \_\_\_\_\_

b. Num. 20:1-13 \_\_\_\_\_

c. 2 Thess. 3:6-15 \_\_\_\_\_

d. 1 Tim. 5:13 \_\_\_\_\_

e. 1 Cor. 6:18 \_\_\_\_\_

## THINK ABOUT IT

### The Original Cause of Human Pain and Suffering

1. When God created the world, what did He say about its moral and natural quality (Gen. 1:31)? Why would this evaluation not allow for any sin in God's creation?

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2. How do you explain the presence of evil in the serpent (the devil) when he tempted Eve, after God had pronounced the creation "very good?"

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3. When God told Adam and Eve that they would die if they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, what did such a death mean? In answering this question, you must consider what the very nature of death is, i.e., separation. How did death manifest itself in the following relationships?

- a. In relation to God (Gen. 3:8; Rom. 3:11)

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- b. In relation to the serpent and the entire animal kingdom (Gen. 3:14; Rom. 8:20)

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What was the significance of the animal skins (Gen. 3:21) and animal sacrifices (Gen. 4:2, 4), in view of the effects of the Fall of Man on nature?

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- c. In relation to Satan (Gen. 3:15; Heb. 2:14)

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What is to be Satan's part in the suffering in this world?

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4. Explain how human suffering is finally traceable to man's broken relationship with God.
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5. How does sin that is not forgiven through faith in Jesus lead to eternal pain and suffering (Heb. 9:27; Rev. 20:11-15)?
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6. Untold misery has come into the human race through the enslaving nature of sin (Rom. 6:17; Prov. 5:22). How is this evident in the following cases?

a. Abraham (Gen. 12:10-20; Gen. 20)

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b. David (2 Sam. 11:4, 13, 15)

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7. Did God create thorns, mosquitoes, parasites, and viruses, or did they develop in some other way as a consequence of the entrance of sin into the human race?
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### **Compounded Suffering for the Non-Christian**

1. Every man is born into this fallen world with a sinful heart which is capable of a whole host of evils. These evils in turn work to increase personal pain and suffering. What are some of these self-induced afflictions that man brings upon himself?

a. Matt. 15:19 \_\_\_\_\_

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b. Gal. 5:19-21 \_\_\_\_\_

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2. There is a cause-and-effect relationship involved in sinful thoughts, words, and deeds (Gal. 6:7-8). One implication of this fact is how one sin can spawn so many miseries. What kind of suffering can be brought on by the following sins?
- a. Adultery (Ex. 20:14; Prov. 5:1-23; 1 Cor. 6:18)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Covetousness (Ex. 20:17; Rom. 7:7; 1 Tim. 6:9-10)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Drunkenness (Gen. 9:20-27, 19:30-38; Prov. 23:29-35)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Lying (Gen. 12:10-20; 27:18-29)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. One sin that is not as readily acknowledged as others is laziness. Laziness is the refusal to do what one ought to do. Therefore, it is possible to be very busy yet be lazy. What kind of suffering results from laziness?
- a. Prov. 6:9, 10 \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Prov. 10:26 \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Prov. 18:9 \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Prov. 22:13, 26:13 \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. Prov. 24:30-31 \_\_\_\_\_
4. Suffering and misery can be multiplied as sinful practices are passed on from one generation to the next (Ex. 20:5; Num. 14:18, 33; 2 Kings 17:14; Jer. 7:26; 1 Kings 21:29). Explain some of the ways in which suffering can increase from one generation to the next due to the cumulative effects of sin.

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5. How will the unsaved person bring the *full* effects of chosen independence from God upon himself (Rev. 20:11-15; 22:15)?

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### **Compounded Suffering for the Christian**

1. The Christian has been called of God to be a light bearer in this sin-darkened world (John 8:12; Matt. 5:14). However, bearing the light of the gospel in the person of Christ means that there is a price to be paid. What is that price, and how does the Christian suffer because of it (John 3:19-20; Eph. 5:11, 13)?

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2. In what ways did the following believers experience suffering from doing good?

- a. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego (Dan. 3)

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- b. Paul (Acts 27; 2 Cor. 11:25; Acts 16:22-24; 2 Cor. 11:23-24)

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- c. Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25-30)

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3. What are some specific ways in which a Christian can be persecuted for living a holy and godly life (2 Tim. 3:12)?

- a. John 21:18; Heb. 11:37-38; Rev. 6:9-11

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b. Matt. 10:16-23, 34-37; John 7:1-5

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c. 1 Pet. 4:3-5; Psa. 31:16-18; Luke 23:35-37

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4. A very popular approach to life in our day is hedonism. It may be defined as “a world view that has as its basic principle the belief that the good and the evil are defined in terms of pleasure and pain.” Those who subscribe to a hedonistic view of life (all of us are capable of living life this way) see their ultimate purpose in life as living for pleasure and avoiding pain. How does this attitude compare with what Jesus said is involved in the Christian life (Matt. 10:38, 16:24-26; Luke 9:23-25)?
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5. On occasion, it will be said by certain Christians that the reason for their particular season of hardships is due to Satan’s personal attacks. The following will help you to evaluate the possibilities of Satan’s contribution to the affliction of a believer.

a. Can Satan, on certain occasions, be allowed to inflict physical pain upon the believer (Job. 2:1-10; Luke 13:10-17; 2 Cor. 12:7)?

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b. How did Satan participate in Paul’s suffering in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:18; Acts 17:6-8)?

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c. What kind of pressures (i.e., temptation) can Satan exert on the believer?

- Acts 5:3, 4 \_\_\_\_\_
- 1 Cor. 7:5 \_\_\_\_\_
- Luke 22:31 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 Cor. 2:10-11 \_\_\_\_\_

6. The frequency of pain and suffering in the Christian's life is often determined by the degree to which he is involved in the lives of other Christians (1 Cor. 12:22-26). What are some of the afflictions that come as a result of ministry to one another?

- a. Dan. 9:20- 21 \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Phil. 2:27 \_\_\_\_\_
- c. 2 Cor. 11:28 \_\_\_\_\_
- d. 2 Tim. 4:10 \_\_\_\_\_
- e. 2 Cor. 8:1-2, 13-15 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- f. 1 Thess. 4:13 \_\_\_\_\_

7. Christians can bring trials and misery upon themselves. What kinds of problems can a believer create for himself that cannot be attributed to righteous living?

- a. 1 Pet. 4:15 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- b. Num. 20:1-13 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- c. Luke 22:54-62 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



d. 1 Thess. 3:6-15 \_\_\_\_\_  
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e. 1 Tim. 5:13 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

f. 1 Pet. 2:18-20 \_\_\_\_\_  
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## APPLICATION

*“A man’s own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the Lord.”*

Proverbs 19:3

1. Do you think that the design of the world as a whole is more toward good than evil (e.g. is sunshine more for health than sunstroke)? What examples from nature can you think of?

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\_\_\_\_\_

2. How would you explain the reason for earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, volcanoes, and lightning bolts to an eight-year-old child?

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\_\_\_\_\_

3. How do pain sensors in your body help protect you from injury? Why does your body need pain?

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4. What were some of your earliest encounters with death (e.g. the death of a friend or loved one)? How was death explained to you by adults?

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5. What are some of the evidences in nature that we live in a dying world (e.g. extinct species of animals)? How would you explain this to someone who believes in the theory of evolution?

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6. What evidence can you see in your own behavior and that of others that suggests that something is terribly wrong with human nature?

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7. How has your experience with work been one of pain and misery?

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8. List some of the illnesses you have experienced in your life. Also include some of the physical pains you have suffered (e.g. a cut foot).

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9. List some of the kinds of emotional pain you have suffered in your lifetime (e.g. depression).

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10. Could you ever tell a non-Christian that her suffering was working together for good (Rom. 8:28)? How would you explain the meaning of her suffering to her if she asked?

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11. Can you think of a time when you have personally observed someone suffering because of his or her own sinful decisions? Briefly describe the circumstances.

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12. Describe how a modern nation is experiencing suffering and deprivation due to either its economic, political, or religious system. In other words, how has communism brought untold suffering to its victims? Consider also some of the consequences of such religious systems as Hinduism, which teaches that people who die are reincarnated in the form of animals.

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13. What relation do you see between the increase in sexually-transmitted diseases in our country and the biblical prohibition against immorality? Do you think man will ever discover a final cure for all diseases? Explain your answer.

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14. Have you ever experienced persecution because of your faith in Jesus Christ? What were the circumstances (e.g. criticism and rejection because of a moral stand)?

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15. Describe a time when the affliction of a close friend resulted in your own pain and suffering.

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16. Can you think of a time when you brought adversity upon yourself through disobedience to God's Word? What did you do that was wrong and what were some of the painful consequences?

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17. What bad habits have you developed that have created physical problems?

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18. Take a recent edition of your local newspaper and go through it with a highlighter and circle all the suffering that is attributable to human decisions (don't forget man's contribution to the pollution problem).

19. Name a Christian martyr in the twentieth century, and briefly describe the circumstances of his or her death. You may want to ask your pastor for assistance or consult a book such as *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya* by Ruth A. Tucker.

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## *Lesson Three*

### **THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST**

#### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1. To understand the full range and depth of the sufferings of Christ.
2. To grasp the meaning of the sufferings of Christ as to how His death on the cross answers the question of the problem of evil.
3. To determine how Jesus became an example in dealing with the problem of pain and suffering.

#### **QUOTATIONS**

*“God responded to the question of unfairness not with words, but with a visit, an Incarnation. And Jesus offers flesh-and-blood proof of how God feels about unfairness, for he took on the ‘stuff’ of life, the physical reality at its unfairest. He gave, in summary, a final answer to all lurking questions about the goodness of God.”*

Philip Yancey

*“The suffering of Jesus was multiple because the extent of evil in the world is a vast complex. Every effect of every sin was placed upon Him. To carry this dreadful burden was His vocation. To bear all pain and disease was His mission. The magnitude of this horror is beyond our understanding. But He understood it because it was His to bear.”*

R. C. Sproul

#### **BIBLE STUDY**

##### **Jesus’s Experience of Suffering**

*“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”*

Hebrews 4:15

1. The humanity of Jesus Christ was real. He was no bionic man, immune to pain. He was subject to a great variety of sufferings. If His humanity was not real but just the “Christ idea” or incomplete humanity, with a true human body but no human soul or spirit, He could not have paid the price for our sins, i.e., death.

a. What descriptive terms and names were used of Jesus that would indicate that He was truly human?

- Luke 2:12, 43 \_\_\_\_\_
- 1 Tim. 2:5 \_\_\_\_\_
- Mark 6:3 \_\_\_\_\_
- Heb. 2:14 \_\_\_\_\_

Compare with Matt. 16:17.

b. What elements of true humanity did Jesus possess (1 Thess. 5:23)?

- John 2:21 \_\_\_\_\_
- John 12:27 \_\_\_\_\_
- Luke 23:46 \_\_\_\_\_

c. What human emotions did Jesus display?

- John 11:35 \_\_\_\_\_
- Isa. 53:3 \_\_\_\_\_
- Mark 3:5 \_\_\_\_\_
- Matt. 9:36 \_\_\_\_\_

d. What human limitations did Jesus experience?

- Matt. 8:24 \_\_\_\_\_
- John 4:6 \_\_\_\_\_
- John 19:28 \_\_\_\_\_

e. What one aspect of our humanity did Jesus not possess?

- Heb. 4:15 \_\_\_\_\_

Why is this not essential to human nature?

2. The genuine humanity of Jesus Christ made Him capable of suffering and death. In Hebrews 4:15, we are told that He was tested “in all things as we are...” Jesus was subject to suffering throughout His incarnation experience. He saw it, empathized with it, and was afflicted by it. He was no stranger to pain, willingly submitting Himself to it in a way in which no other human being ever could.

a. Jesus’s subjection to temptation was a part of His suffering experience. Satan put extraordinary pressure upon Jesus for the purpose of drawing Him away from His messianic mission. Though there were temptations throughout the earthly experience of Christ, only three specific ones are recorded in the Gospels (Matt. 4:1-11; Lk. 4:1-13). What kind of temptation occurred in each case and how was each a special form of suffering?

- Matt. 4:3 \_\_\_\_\_
- Matt. 4:6 \_\_\_\_\_
- Matt. 4:8-9 \_\_\_\_\_

What made the temptation of Jesus unduly painful in comparison to our temptations?

b. Jesus suffered in the humiliation of being rejected by a variety of people at different times and in different ways. Identify some of these rejections.

- Luke 4:14-30 \_\_\_\_\_
- John 7:1-5 (Mk. 3:31-35, 6:3) \_\_\_\_\_
- Matt. 26:56 \_\_\_\_\_
- Luke 22:54-62 \_\_\_\_\_
- John 8:48 \_\_\_\_\_

c. Jesus suffered grief over the loss of friends in death. For whom did he grieve and why?

- Matt. 14:13 \_\_\_\_\_
- John 11:33 \_\_\_\_\_

g. The sufferings of Jesus in His cross work were the deepest depth into which He plunged in the experience of pain. The death of Christ on the cross was the full measure of all



that sin could do to one person. Identify the following six areas of Christ's suffering on the cross.

- Luke 22:42-44 \_\_\_\_\_
- John 13:21-30 \_\_\_\_\_
- Mark 14:66-72 \_\_\_\_\_
- Matt. 27:41-43; Mark 15:29-30 \_\_\_\_\_
- Isa. 53:4-7; Matt. 27:26, 30 \_\_\_\_\_
- Matt. 27:46; Psa. 22:1; 1 Pet. 2:24; 2 Cor. 5:21 \_\_\_\_\_

3. What was the meaning of Christ's suffering? Did Jesus die merely to give us an example of courage for a good cause? Was it to simply display the great love of God and so motivate us to love as Jesus loved? Was His suffering and death a tragedy of failure and betrayal? In order to understand the significance of the suffering of Jesus, four theological concepts must be mastered.

a. The first concept is substitution. Look up the following verses and write in the space provided the key word or words which show that in the death of Jesus a substitution took place:

- Isa. 53:5 \_\_\_\_\_
- Mark 10:45 \_\_\_\_\_
- 1 Pet. 3:18 \_\_\_\_\_

Now express in your own words how Jesus's death was one of substitution for us. In other words, who was He suffering for and why? The Incarnation can never be fully understood and appreciated apart from the representative nature of Christ's death.

b. The second concept is redemption. Look up the following references and note how the word *redemption* is used:

- Rom. 3:21-25 \_\_\_\_\_
- Rev. 5:9 \_\_\_\_\_
- Gal. 3:13 \_\_\_\_\_

- 1 Pet. 1:18 \_\_\_\_\_

Redemption is a picture word in that it was taken from an ordinary use in the first century world and turned into a highly descriptive term for what Jesus did on the cross. That ordinary use was the release of a prisoner by means of a ransom. A price had to be paid to secure the freedom of a slave, and such an action was called redemption. But also important is the idea of redemption in the Old Testament. Look up the following passages and explain how the concept worked in each case.

- Lev. 25:47-55 \_\_\_\_\_
- Ex. 13:11-14; Num. 18:15-16 \_\_\_\_\_

Now state in your own words how Christ's work on the cross was one of redemption. As you do this keep in mind that man's *sin* required an act of redemption.

- c. The third concept is propitiation. The sin of man is an offense against a holy God and results in His wrath (Deut. 6:14; John 3:36; Rom. 1:18). Therefore something has to be done about the anger of God toward man's sin.
  - What is necessary if the wrath of God is to be turned away (1 John 2:2; 4:10)?
  - What did it cost Jesus in order for God's wrath to be satisfied (Rom. 3:25)?
- d. The fourth concept is reconciliation. As a result of the price that Jesus paid (redemption) and the placating of God's wrath (propitiation), God's face is turned toward the world and the sinner is savable, i.e., people are now able to be saved (2 Cor. 5:18).
  - Why does man need to be reconciled toward God (Rom. 5:10)?

- What was the cost to Jesus to put the world in a savable position before God (Rom. 5:10)?
- e. The abolition of death was accomplished through the death of Jesus Christ. According to Revelation 21:4, there will come a day when “there shall no longer be any death ....” How can such a promise be made? The answer will be found as you respond to the following questions:

- What did the fall of Adam bring upon all men (Gen. 3:19, 5:5; Rom. 5:12)?

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- What did the death of Christ do (2 Tim. 1:10)?

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- What effect does Christ’s death have upon man’s spiritual condition (Eph. 2:1-3)?

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- What effect does Christ’s death have upon man’s physical condition (1 Cor. 15:20-28, 54-57)?

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- What effect does Christ’s death have upon man’s eternal condition (Rev. 20:6)?

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- What effect will Christ’s death and resurrection have upon creation (Rom. 8:20-21; Col. 1:20)?

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- f. The death of Christ and hope in suffering

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ offer hope to the sufferer. But this hope does not come automatically. There is one thing that you must do if you are to receive God’s forgiveness and eternal life.

What is that one thing that you must do (John 3:16; Rom. 3:22; Acts 16:31)?

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Have you done this?

4. Jesus and the problem of evil

- a. Did Jesus during His earthly ministry address the problem of evil? That is, did He say anything about the “why” question? The cup of suffering that He drank at Calvary is a loud, eternal yes to the badness and pain in this world, but did Jesus comment on the cause of harmful things (natural evil) that happen to people? There are three occasions in which Jesus spoke about the cause of human suffering. Identify each and briefly explain what contribution it makes to the question, “Who is responsible for suffering?”

- Luke 13:10-17 (note especially verse 16) \_\_\_\_\_
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- John 9:1-12 (The disciples looked upon this man’s condition as a theological problem.) \_\_\_\_\_
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- Luke 13:1-9 (What was Jesus’s response to the cause of these two disasters?) \_\_\_\_\_
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- b. There is one other response of Jesus to the problem of why bad things happen to people (cancer, hurricanes, etc.). It is found in the thirty-five miracles of Jesus recorded in the Gospels.

- Miracles of healing (Matt. 8:14-15; Lk. 7:11-17; Mk. 10:46-52): What do Jesus’s miracles of healing tell us about His relationship to the problem of pain?

- Miracles of nature (Matt. 8:18-27; Mk. 6:45-52; Lk. 10:9-17): What do Jesus's miracles in the realm of nature tell us about the problem of natural evil (harmful things)?

## 5. Jesus's example in suffering

In a subsequent chapter we will examine in some detail a biblical response to personal suffering, but at this point it will be instructive to see Jesus as the model sufferer. We have seen the kinds of suffering He endured and have pondered the degree to which He suffered, but *how* did He suffer? Peter, who observed some of the afflictions of His Messiah, says that we are to arm ourselves with the same attitude that He had.

- Identify the ways in which Jesus responded to unjust suffering. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 1 Pet. 2:22- 23; John 19:9; Prov. 17:27 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Lk. 22:66-71, 23:1-5; John 18:28-38 (Notice what Jesus said about Himself in these passages.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Lk. 23:34, 39-43; Rom. 12:18; Matt. 5:9 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 1 Pet. 2:24; Rom. 5:8, 10, 12:20 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 1 Pet. 2:23b; Heb. 5:8; Lk. 23:46 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## THINK ABOUT IT

### Jesus's Experience of Suffering

*“God did come. He entered humanity, and believe me, He saw and felt for Himself what this world is like. Jesus took on the same kind of body you and I have. His nerve fibers were not bionic – they screamed for pain when they were misused. And, above all men in history, Jesus was surely misused. This fact of history can have a large effect on the fear and helpless despair of sufferers. It helps us to cope with pain.”*

Philip Yancey

*“What does the Cross of Jesus Christ teach us about suffering? To begin with, the Cross makes it clear that suffering and love are not incompatible.”*

Warren W. Wiersbe

1. How does the humanity of Jesus Christ affect your understanding of how He may have suffered as a child and young man?  

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2. Do you think that Jesus ever became ill as a child?  

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3. According to Hebrews 2:10 what is the relationship between Jesus' sufferings and the believer's salvation?  

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4. Could Jesus have atoned for our sins if He had not been fully human? Explain your answer.  

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5. According to Hebrews 2:17-18, Jesus is able to come to the aid of those who suffer because He suffered. In what role does He carry this out?  

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6. What do you think was the greatest pain that Jesus had to endure in His death on the cross?

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7. There are some who teach that the Christian, through affliction, adds to the vicarious (substitutionary) suffering of Christ. They use Colossians 1:24 in their attempt to prove this (“...filling up that which is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.”). How would you refute the idea that our sufferings can add merit to the sufferings of Christ on the cross and thus help to atone for the sins of others? See Col. 2:14; John 19:30; Heb. 10:11-14; 1 John 1:9.

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8. Part of the dark night of Jesus’ soul was spent in those hours in the garden of Gethsemane in anticipation of the pain He was to endure on the cross (Lk. 22:39-46). Why did Jesus face such a deep conflict in the shadow of the cross?

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9. In what ways was Jesus’s suffering on the cross unlike any suffering we will ever experience?

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10. Many Jews in Jesus’s day thought that all suffering was because of sin, and some even believed that suffering was the result of some specific sin. But Jesus challenged this idea when He healed the man born blind (John 9:1ff.) and was asked about two disasters that had recently occurred (Lk. 13:1ff.). According to these responses of Jesus, what is the initial effect which any pain should have upon the sufferer?

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11. What specific effect should a tragedy have upon a non-Christian (Lk. 13:1ff.)?
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12. How did God overrule the unrighteous judgment carried out against Jesus (1 Pet. 2:23)? What lesson can be learned from this for those who suffer unjustly?
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13. What makes it possible for the example of Christ in suffering to be followed? A key to understanding the answer to this question is found in what Jesus accomplished in His death (1 Pet. 2:24; Rom. 6:2ff.).
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14. How would you answer someone who objected to the possibility of following Jesus's example in suffering since He was God and we are not?
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## APPLICATION

1. Since the sufferings of Jesus Christ qualified Him to be “a merciful and faithful high priest” (Heb. 2:17), how can going to Him in prayer be an encouragement in your times of temptation and suffering?
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2. How do the sufferings of Jesus help you to better understand your own sufferings and their significance?
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3. Do you have a fear of death? What did the suffering of Jesus in His death do to resolve this fear (Heb. 2:14, 15)?

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4. How does the resurrection of Jesus Christ help you in solving the problem of suffering? Someone has said that Jesus “transformed death from a hole into a door, from an end into a beginning.” What difference does the resurrection of Jesus Christ mean to you as you experience pain and affliction?

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5. Name an injustice that you have suffered and then compare your response to that of Jesus (See “Jesus’s example in suffering”). What differences were there? How will your response have to be more like that of Jesus?

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6. Jesus saw His enemies and His sufferings in the light of the Father’s purpose for Him here on earth (Lk. 22:69, 70; Heb. 12:2). How does His example help you to cope with your own experience of suffering?

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7. Have you ever experienced loneliness and fear while in a time of illness? Jesus had the same experience in the Garden of Gethsemane as He faced death for us (Lk. 22:39-46). How does this help you to better handle the struggle that comes in your own walk through the valley of the shadow of death?

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8. When a terrible tragedy takes place such as an earthquake, tornado, automobile accident, or disease epidemic, do you think that it was deserved in some way? How should you view bad-news stories?

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9. It has been said that Jesus paid a debt He didn't owe because we had a debt we couldn't pay. In order to pay this debt, He had to suffer and die as our substitute. You and I are offered eternal life, a permanent cure for sin and the judgment it incurs. What have you done about this? Have you looked to God and accepted His provision of forgiveness of sin and victory over death by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ? If you have never done this, why don't you bow your head and ask to receive Jesus Christ as your Savior this very moment? Write down the time and place you have done this.

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## *Lesson Four*

### **THE PURPOSE OF SUFFERING**

#### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1. To understand the reasons for pain and suffering in the life of the non-Christian.
2. To understand the reasons for pain and suffering in the life of the Christian.

#### **QUOTATIONS**

*“When He exposes us to adversities, it is either to prove our perfections or correct our imperfections.”*

Augustine

*“But pain insists upon being attended to, God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”*

C. S. Lewis

*“Severe trouble in a true believer has the effect of loosening the roots of his soul earthward and tightening the anchor-hold of his heart heavenward.”*

Charles H. Spurgeon

*“What is the purpose of our afflictions? It is to make us feel our sins; and it is a very noteworthy point from which we can gather a mighty useful doctrine...for we know that afflictions are so irksome to us that every one of us frets as soon as he feels the flow of the rod of God’s hand, and we cannot comfort ourselves or hold ourselves in patience. Therefore, so much the more it behooves us to note well the doctrine that when God permits us to be tormented, even unjustly, with respect to men, even then He is procuring our salvation, in that He wills to make us feel our sins and to show us what we are. For in time of prosperity we are blind; in fact shall not know rightly what is contained here, unless God brings us to it by His chastisements.”*

John Calvin

## BIBLE STUDY

### The Purpose of Suffering for the Non-Christian

*“I tell you, no, but, unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”*

Luke 13:3

1. There are occasions in Scripture when God brought suffering and pain to non-Christians to accomplish a specific purpose. What was that purpose in each of the following instances?

- Ex. 7:5, 9:14-17, 10:2, 18:11

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- 1 Sam. 5:1-7, 6:1-6

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- Dan. 4:19-27

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- Rev. 6:12-17

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2. How did the unsaved respond in each of the above situations?

- Ex. 7:22-23; 8:8; 9:7, 28; 12:31-32; 14:8-10

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- 1 Sam. 6:7-12, 7:7

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- Dan. 4:28-37

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- Rev. 6:16, 9:20-21

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3. When the unsaved person experiences pain and the variety of miseries that come with living in a fallen world, what ultimate good can be achieved in his or her life? In order to answer this question, examine the following encounters in which non-Christians had to face their own pain and possible death. What was the response of each one?

- Rahab, the prostitute (Josh. 2:9-11; Heb. 11:31; James 2:25)

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- The Philippian jailor (Acts 16:25-34)

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- The man born blind (John 9:1-3, 11, 17, 27, 33, 38-39)

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- The criminal on the cross (Lk. 23:39-43)

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4. Some have objected to God's dealings with Pharaoh by accusing God of being unfair in hardening Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 4:21). Did God give Pharaoh an opportunity to obey Him by letting Israel leave Egypt? Did God bring adversity upon Pharaoh and the Egyptian people merely for the purpose of reinforcing their unbelief?

A well thought-out answer to these questions is important for several reasons. In the first place, such questions could imply criticism of God's character. Second, it might be suggested by some that Pharaoh never really had a chance to repent and turn to God. Finally, human suffering (the ten plagues upon the Egyptians) could be construed as cruel and unusual punishment upon those who are not "God's favorites."

a. What evidence can you find in the following verses which would indicate that Pharaoh hardened his own heart against God?

- Ex. 5:2 \_\_\_\_\_
- Ex. 7:13-14, 22; 9:7 \_\_\_\_\_
- Ex. 8:15, 32; 9:27ff \_\_\_\_\_
- Ex. 8:19 \_\_\_\_\_
- Ex. 9:27, 35 \_\_\_\_\_

b. At what point in the sequence of the ten plagues is it said that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 9:12)?

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c. What happens to people when they turn from the clear revelation God has given of Himself (Rom. 1:24ff.; 2 Thess. 2:10-12)?

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d. What kind of opportunity was God giving Pharaoh, the Egyptian people, and surrounding nations through the display of His power as seen in the plagues (Ex. 9:16; Josh. 2:9-11)?

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## **The Purpose of Suffering for the Christian**

*"All 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."*

Hebrews 12:11

In studying the purpose of suffering in the life of the non-Christian, we have seen it as having the potential of bringing the person to a sense of his or her need for God's forgiveness in Christ. The affliction of the unsaved can become the occasion for the new birth. But what of the Christian? Does pain have any redeeming virtue in the life of a child of God? What lessons are to be learned in the school of affliction?

1. Can suffering have a valuable purpose in the life of a Christian? How do the following verses help in answering this question?

- Gen. 50:20 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Psa. 119:71 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Rom. 8:28 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 1 Cor. 3:21-23 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 1 Pet. 4:12 \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. Suffering for the purpose of chastisement

Some suffering in the Christian's life may be due to the need for corrective discipline. When sin has been committed and repentance has not followed, God will come calling.

a. What are some of the reasons given for God's correction in the following passages?

- 1 Sam. 11:1-4; Psa. 32, 38, 51 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Josh. 7:15 \_\_\_\_\_
- Acts 5:1-11 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 1 Cor. 11:29 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Rev. 3:14-22 \_\_\_\_\_  
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b. What should the Christian do when he commits a sin? Psa. 32:5, 38:18, 51:1-2; Matt. 6:11-12; 1 John 1:9

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c. What are some of the means that God may use in the discipline of His children?

- Ex. 4:24-26 \_\_\_\_\_

- Psa. 32:3-4, 38:3-12 \_\_\_\_\_

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- 2 Sam. 24:1-17 \_\_\_\_\_

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- 1 Cor. 11:30; James 5:13-15 \_\_\_\_\_

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- Rev. 2:5, 16; 3:3 \_\_\_\_\_

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d. What kind of response should the Christian have if he thinks his suffering may be due to unconfessed sin? The following verses represent a biblically-desired sequence of action.

- 1 Cor. 11:32; Heb. 12:5 \_\_\_\_\_

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- Psa. 51:1-3; James 5:15-16; 1 John 1:9 \_\_\_\_\_

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- Heb. 12:10-11; John 15:2 \_\_\_\_\_

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### 3. Suffering as the occasion for spiritual growth and maturity

God sends chastisement to His children in order to bring them back into the full enjoyment of fellowship with Him. But what about the suffering that enters the life of the believer other

than for chastisement? Most of the affliction that is encountered in life is not associated with a specific unrepentant condition. So the Christian asks, “What does God want to do in my life through my pain?” Thankfully, Scripture is not without an answer to that question.

Following is a study of some of those purposes that God can accomplish through our suffering.

- a. What basic purpose does suffering have for the Christian according to Gal. 4:19, James 1:2-4, Heb. 12:10, 1 Pet. 1:15-16, 2 Cor. 4:8-10? It will help you to keep in mind that this is also God’s fundamental objective for every believer.

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- b. What can trials help to develop according to James 1:3? See also Rom. 5:3, Heb. 12:2, 2 Cor. 1:6b, 6:4.

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- c. What contribution to the Christian’s spiritual growth can trials make, according to James 1:5 (Psa. 119:71; Prov. 2:10)?

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- d. What can suffering produce, according to 2 Cor. 12:8-10 and James 1:10? In the James passage, notice that James is talking to the wealthy believer. What will losses experienced by any believer, whether poor or rich, teach him?

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- e. What can suffering provide the opportunity for, according to Matt. 25:14-23, 1 Cor. 3:10-15, James 1:12, and Rev. 2:10?

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- f. What can suffering prove regarding the Christian's faith (1 Pet. 1:6-7; 2 Cor. 1:9)?

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- g. Christlikeness in the believer's life can be seen to the extent that the fruit of the Spirit is evident in one's life. Read Galatians 5:22-23 and list the fruit of the Spirit.

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In order to see another purpose of suffering in the Christian's life, look up the following references and identify the particular fruit of the Spirit that can be produced through trials.

- 1 Pet. 1:6, 8a \_\_\_\_\_
- John 14:27 \_\_\_\_\_
- Rom. 12:12 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 Cor. 1:6 \_\_\_\_\_
- 1 Pet. 4:9-11 \_\_\_\_\_
- 1 Thess. 3:7-8; 2 Cor. 4:8-9  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Rom. 12:13-14 \_\_\_\_\_
- 1 Pet. 4:7 \_\_\_\_\_

- h. Suffering can become the occasion for what, according to 2 Tim. 2:9, Phil. 1:12-13, 1 Pet. 3:15?

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- i. What can the Christian learn in times of affliction (Phil. 4:11-13)?

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- j. What can suffering teach the believer, according to 2 Cor. 1:4?

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In what way was this expressed in 1 Thess. 3:6-7 and 2 Cor. 7:6-7?

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- k. Read Phil. 3:10 and fill in the blanks.

“that I may know Him, and the \_\_\_\_\_ of the resurrection and the fellowship of His \_\_\_\_\_, being conformed to His death;”

What can suffering demonstrate in the child of God to others (1 Thess. 1:6-8; 2 Cor. 12:10)? To help you answer this, reflect back upon such episodes in Israel’s history as Jericho (Josh. 6) and Gideon (Judg. 7) and the unusual methods of victory.

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- l. Suffering can create confusion and can become the occasion for panic (e.g., “Why is God letting *this* happen?). But it is in times of affliction that a valuable lesson can be learned. What is that lesson, according to Hebrews 5:8, Philippians 2:8 (Jesus’s example) and Job 13:15? Joseph (Gen. 45:1-8, 50:20) and Habakkuk (Hab. 3:17-19) are also good examples of those who learned this lesson.

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- m. There are some purposes in suffering that may remain unknown to the Christian. One of those is found in Job's experience (Job 1:11, 2:5, 42:1-6). Job was unaware of this dialogue between God and Satan in which God's righteous character was questioned. What purpose did the suffering of Job have in the light of Satan's accusation? For further background to this, read Ephesians 6:10-12; Revelation 12, and Daniel 10:10-20.

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- n. Suffering has another purpose that may remain unknown to the sufferer. Read Revelation 12:10; Job 1:9-11, 2:3-6, and 42:1-6. What can affliction accomplish when the believer's faith is called into question by Satan?

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- o. All the purposes of suffering converge at one point, and that too is found in Job's suffering experience. Read the two responses that God gave to Job (38:1-40:2, 40:6-41:34) after everyone had had their say about the Creator's ways. What truth about Himself did God reveal to Job?

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- p. What kind of response came from Job (42:1-6)? Notice especially 42:2a, 3c, and 5b. What effect did the affliction of Job have upon him in his relation to God? See also Psa. 18:30, 73:25-26, and 1 Pet. 4:19.

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## THINK ABOUT IT

### The Purpose of Suffering for the Non-Christian

*“... every man that is not sorely pressed by the hand of God slumbers at ease in the midst of his sins, as if God were favourable and reconciled to him. This involves a double fault; for when God chastises any one before our eyes, he warns us of his judgments, that each of us may examine himself, and consider what he deserves. If he spares us for a time, we are so far from having a right to have such kindness and forbearance as an opportunity for slumber, that we ought to regard it as an invitation to repentance.”*

John Calvin

1. In the above quote from John Calvin, what two messages should come through to the non-Christian when he either sees the suffering of others or personally experiences it?

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2. It has been said in relation to trials that the same sun that melts the snow bakes the clay. What two different effects can the same experience of suffering have on non-Christian people?

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3. Suffering is a form of revelation in that it communicates something about the kind of world we live in. What are some of the possible conclusions that may be drawn by a non-Christian as he observes all the misery and pain in this world?

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4. The religion of the Egyptians came under divine attack through the plagues preceding Israel's exodus (Ex. 7:14-12:36). How did the ten plagues demonstrate to the unsaved Egyptian people and Pharaoh the impotence of their gods? See Ex. 8:18-19 and 12:29.

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5. What effect did the misery and pain experienced by the prodigal son have upon him (Lk. 15:17ff.)?

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6. How can God use the suffering of Christians to get the attention of non-Christians (Jonah 1:4-17; 1 Pet. 4:17-19)?

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7. Briefly evaluate the following quote from Peter Kreeft's book, *Making Sense Out of Suffering* (pp. 172-173). How would your non-Christian friends explain the meaning of their suffering in this life?

*“Hell as well as heaven helps to explain suffering. Not all suffering is a way to God; some is a foretaste of hell. Suffering is a reflection of death, a reminder of mortality. Death, in turn, is the distant echo in our lives of hell. Hell’s eternal and objective separation from God sends its ambassadors into our lives: repentable and volitional separations from God in the form of sins. Thus by a deathly chain, suffering is the remote echo of hell. Modernity cannot understand suffering very deeply it does not believe in suffering’s ultimate source. Hell, sin, and even death do not form a part of modernity’s habitual vision of life.”*

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8. Evolution explains man's existence in the universe as the result of time plus chance. How would such a belief affect one's explanation of suffering (“Why me?”)?

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## The Purpose of Suffering in the Life of the Christian

*“They [Christians] will not refuse the discipline of this temporal life, in which they are schooled for life eternal; nor will they lament their experience of it, for the good things of earth they use as pilgrims who are not detained by them, and its ills either prove or improve them.”*

Augustine

1. When he suffers, how can a Christian know whether or not it is chastening for a past sin? How do Prov. 28:13, Eph. 1:7, and 1 John 1:9 help in your answer?

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2. How would you explain God’s forgiveness of David and the death of his child (2 Sam. 12:13-19)?

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What was David’s twofold response to God’s chastisement (2 Sam. 12:16, 20)?

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3. Can the sin of a Christian leader bring discipline upon those for whom he is responsible (e.g. pastor of a church)? Would it be discipline upon them or merely the consequences of the sin of another (2 Sam. 24:10-25; Ezek. 18:1-22)? In Ezekiel 18 the Jews in Jerusalem and Babylon were complaining that they were suffering for the sins of their fathers. The prophet, as God’s spokesman, responds to that complaint.

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4. In 2 Samuel 24 David sins against God by conducting an unlawful census of Israel and Judah to determine the strength of his fighting forces. He was to have put his confidence in the Lord and not in military advantage (Deut. 17:14-17; Psa.



30:6). David confessed his sin but was chastened by God. How did David handle his discipline?

- 2 Sam. 24:17a \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 Sam. 24:17b \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 Sam. 24:24 \_\_\_\_\_

What lessons can be learned from David's experience of discipline?

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\_\_\_\_\_

5. The history of Israel is one long lesson in the relationship between disobedience, unrepentance, and chastisement. Because of God's covenant with Israel, there were special obligations if Israel was to experience God's blessing. Failure to meet these responsibilities would result in "covenant chastenings." Compare the following verses and identify the particular chastening involved.

- Deut. 28:17, 48; Lev. 26:26, 29; 1 Kings 8:37; Amos 4:6  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Deut. 28:21-22, 27, 35, 59-61; Lev. 26:16, 25; 1 Kings 8:37; Amos 4:10  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Deut. 28:25-26; 49-52; Lev. 26:17, 25, 33, 36-39; 1 Kings 8:33; Amos 4:10  
\_\_\_\_\_

You will notice in the listing of the chastenings in Deuteronomy 28:15-68 that there is a gradual increase in the intensity of the suffering. What lesson might be gained from this observation as one seeks to understand the way in which God applies His disciplinary measures to His people? What function did this increase in pain serve?

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6. God can and does use death as a means of chastisement. From a careful reading of the following verses, answer the questions as they relate to chastening by death: Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16; James 5:19-20.

- Is it particular sins or an unrepentant condition that leads to death?

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- Why did God swiftly judge by means of death in the case of Ananias and Sapphira?

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- Can the Christian know what sins are punishable by swift death? What is his or her obligation to other Christians caught in a trespass that may be fatal?

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7. Hedonism is an approach to life that views pleasure as good and pain as evil. How does this attitude compare to what is involved in following Christ (Matt. 16:24-28; John 15:20; Acts 14:22; 1 Thess. 3:3)?

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If pain is an inevitable part of the Christian life, is there sin in enjoying pleasure and being free from pain? Explain your answer.

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8. How would you explain the difference between God's promises of health, prosperity, and success for obedience in the Old Testament (Ex. 15:25-26; 23:25-26; Lev. 26; Deut. 28-30) and the expectation of suffering in the life of the child of God in the New Testament (2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 4:12)?

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9. Was the idea of suffering as instructional and redemptive absent in the Old Testament (Gen. 15:13-16; Deut. 8:5; Prov. 3:11-12; Psa. 94:12, 119:67, 71, 75)? How did Jacob learn from his experience in affliction (Gen. 42:36, 45:26-28)?

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10. Someone has said that “from heaven the most miserable earthly life will look like one bad night in an inconvenient hotel.” How would you evaluate that statement in the light of such passages as Romans 8:18 and 1 Peter 3:17-22?

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11. What do you think Paul learned in his experience of Epaphroditus’ near-death while he was with Paul in Rome (Phil. 2:25-30)?

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12. What had Paul’s sufferings taught him in the following instances?

a. 2 Cor. 4:8, 16-18 \_\_\_\_\_

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b. Phil. 4:10-13 \_\_\_\_\_

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c. 2 Cor. 6:1-10 \_\_\_\_\_

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d. Acts 21:31-33, 22:1-16, 26:1-23, 28:23-24 \_\_\_\_\_

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e. Acts 18:1-11; I Cor. 2:1-5 \_\_\_\_\_

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13. What had Peter's suffering taught him (John 13:36-38; Lk. 22:31-34, 22:54-62; 1 Pet. 5:5-11)?

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14. Are God's purposes in our pain and affliction always fully known? How does Job's experience with suffering help in answering this?

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### **APPLICATION**

1. Think back to your first experience with pain, either yours or someone close to you. Did it make you wonder "why?" How did you handle the questions you had at that time?

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2. When you suffer a painful loss of some kind, is your first reaction that God is disciplining you for a certain sin? Is there one particular sin from your past that you think about frequently? What do you think you should do about this in a biblical way?

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3. When you are trying to comfort someone who is suffering, what approach do you take? Do you think you have to have right answers and an immediate explanation? What could you do to better prepare yourself for those times when you are sitting next to a hurting person?

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4. As you reflect on a time of special trial in your own life, what lessons do you think God taught you through it?

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5. Have you ever known anyone who turned to God and was saved as a result of a personal illness, a death, loss of job, or some traumatic disaster? Has your spiritual life been significantly affected by a personal or family tragedy (e.g. a more disciplined prayer life as a result of a chronic illness)?

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6. Which of the following statements would best express what you believe about suffering? “All pain and suffering comes from God as a lesson to us.” “All pain and suffering can become the opportunity for God to teach us something.” Explain your answer.

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7. What motivates you? Do you consistently make decisions to avoid any pain, inconvenience, or sacrifice that might be involved in a course of action? What have you done in the last month for someone other than yourself that cost you something either materially or physically?

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8. What do you think it means to “rejoice in suffering?” Do you see this as primarily an emotional state or a way of looking at hardships? What would you expect to see in someone who was experiencing joy in the midst of their suffering?

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9. Have you ever had an opportunity to witness to someone about Jesus Christ while in the hospital or going through some deep hurt? Can you think of a time when you have been persecuted because you were a Christian (e.g. a demotion at work because you would not do something unethical)? Did it give you an opportunity to explain your decision and how it related to your faith in Christ?

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10. Think of someone you could go to (personally, by phone, or by letter) who is going through a hard time for the purpose of encouragement. How could your own struggles in times of suffering be the occasion of ministry to them? What steps can you take to be a more sympathetic person?

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11. Briefly state in your own words how this lesson on the purpose of suffering has changed your outlook on affliction.

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## *Lesson Five*

### **A BIBLICAL MODEL FOR RESPONSE TO SUFFERING**

#### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1. To identify and understand unbiblical responses to personal suffering.
2. To determine the attitudes and actions that constitute a Scriptural response to personal suffering.

#### **QUOTATIONS**

*“Of all things, let us avoid the false refuge of a weary collapse, a hopeless yielding to things as they are. It is the life in us that is discontented. We need more of what is discontented, not more of the cause of the discontent. Discontentment, I repeat, is the life in us that has not enough of itself, is not enough to itself, so calls for more. He has the victory, who, in the midst of pain and weakness, cries out, not for death, not for the repose of forgetfulness, but for strength to fight, for more power, more consciousness of being, more God in him.”*

George McDonald

*“...the loveliest thing of all about the creative attitude towards suffering is that, if you are able to rise to it, not only do you develop your own character (for that might be a subtle form of spiritual egotism), but you become a source of blessing and of strength to others.”*

James S. Stewart

*“All the writers who wrote about prison but who did not themselves serve time there considered it their duty to express sympathy for prisoners and to curse prison. I . . . have served enough there. I nourished my soul there, and I say without hesitation: ‘Bless you, prison, for having been in my life!’”*

Alexander Solzhenitsyn



## BIBLE STUDY

### Unbiblical Responses to Personal Suffering

*“Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure, and washed my hands in innocence; for I have been stricken all day long, and chastened every morning.”*

Psalm 73:13-14

Identify the wrong responses to suffering that are found in the following biblical passages:

1. Job 8:4; John 9:2 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Psa. 73:13-14; 1 Kings 19:4 (who is speaking and what were his circumstances?); Jonah 4:8 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Gen. 3:12; Ex. 14:11-12, 16:3 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Matt. 16:21-23; 1 Pet. 4:12 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Ex. 15:24, 16:2; Phil. 2:14 \_\_\_\_\_  
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### A Biblical Response to Pain and Suffering

*“Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful creator in doing what is right.”*

1 Peter 4:19

How should a Christian suffer? In order for the believer to know how to handle adversity in a Christ-like way, he must understand how the Scriptures answer this question.

1. As a part of the initial response of a Christian to suffering, what effect should it have upon his or her relationship to God?

a. Job 5:8

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b. What is the possible adverse effect that pain and suffering may have upon the Christian?

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c. Jonah 4:7-9 (How did Jonah react when he lost his comfortable place?)

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d. It is only natural for the question “why?” to arise when one enters a time of affliction. Look up the following passages and write down the way in which the “why” question was asked.

- Psa. 10:1

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- Psa. 22:1

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- Hab. 1:3, 13

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- Job 3:11-13, 16, 20

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e. What two possible ways can the Christian ask “why?” As you answer this you will summarize the right response and the wrong response to God when suffering comes.

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2. How should the Christian respond to suffering according to James 5:13?

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a. What ministry is Jesus Christ presently fulfilling in heaven that offers help and comfort to the believer in his or her times of trials (Heb. 4:15-16)?

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b. What did Paul do when he experienced pain and suffering (2 Cor. 12:8)?

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c. What did Hezekiah do when he became ill and was told he was going to die (Isa. 38:2)?

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3. What attitude should the Christian have when he or she encounters trials (James 1:2; Phil. 4:4)?

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a. Why can the believer have this kind of attitude (1 Pet. 1:6, 8; Heb. 10:34, 12:2)?

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b. What are some of the circumstances in which the Christian is to have this attitude?

- Acts 5:40-42 \_\_\_\_\_
- Matt. 5:11-12 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 Cor. 6:10 \_\_\_\_\_
- Heb. 10:34 \_\_\_\_\_
- Acts 16:25 \_\_\_\_\_
- Phil. 2:17-18 \_\_\_\_\_
- 1 Pet. 4:13 \_\_\_\_\_

4. What attitude should the Christian have when working through the despair and hurt that come with suffering, according to Psa.42:5, 11; 43:5; 71:14, and Lam. 3:24?

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- a. How can the believer have this attitude (Psa. 46:5; Acts 24:15; Col. 1:27; Rom. 5:2; Titus 2:13)?

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- b. What opportunity can having this attitude give the believer while he is enduring trials (1 Pet. 3:15)?

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5. The Christian's handling of suffering should be marked by a certain quality that is basic to turning adversity into an advantage. Different words are used in Scripture to describe this quality. Identify these words in the following passages.

- 2 Cor. 6:4; Heb. 10:36; James 1:3; 1 Pet. 2:20 \_\_\_\_\_

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- Jer. 10:19 \_\_\_\_\_

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- Heb. 12:5c \_\_\_\_\_

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- Rom. 12:12; 2 Thess. 1:4; Rom. 5:3, 4 \_\_\_\_\_

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- a. Now that you have identified the variety of words used to express this response to suffering, how would you summarize it?

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- b. Who has modeled this kind of response to pain and suffering according to James 5:10, 11?

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- c. Where does the Christian get his or her ability to respond this way to affliction (1 Cor. 10:13; Rev. 1:9; Eph. 3:20)?

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6. Pain and suffering can cause the Christian to become preoccupied with himself and his problems. But part of a biblical response to pain and suffering requires what according to 1 Peter 4:8? What were the circumstances of those to whom Peter was writing (1 Pet. 1:6, 2:19, 4:12, 5:9)?

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- a. What forms of expression would this take?

- 1 Pet. 4:9 \_\_\_\_\_

- 1 Pet. 4:10, 11 \_\_\_\_\_

- 1 Pet. 3:8, 9 (list all eight) \_\_\_\_\_

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- Rom. 12:17, 20, 21 \_\_\_\_\_

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- b. How did the following individuals exhibit genuine concern for others while enduring their own affliction?

- The widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-24) \_\_\_\_\_

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- Joseph (Gen. 39:1-9, 23; 47:20; 50:21) \_\_\_\_\_

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- The Thessalonian church (1 Thess. 1:6-8) \_\_\_\_\_

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7. When affliction comes to the Christian there is one fundamental response to the God who has allowed it that is required. It is necessary if the child of God is to bring glory to God, i.e., display His reality before others. It is stated in the form of an imperative in 1 Peter 4:19. What is it?

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The Greek word from which this word is translated was a banking term that meant “to deposit.” It was used by Jesus in Luke 23:46, where it is translated “commit.” But in order to understand exactly how the Christian is to fulfill such a responsibility, some examples must be examined. In each of the following cases, explain how the sufferer related to God in circumstances that brought great pain.

a. Job

Read Job chapters 1 and 2. Then read Job 42:1-6. In Job 3-37, a series of dialogues occur between Job and his friends. They attempt to explain Job’s suffering. In chapters 38-42 God reminds Job of His unexcelled knowledge and incomparable power. In the light of the experience of Job and your understanding of the entire book answer the following questions.

- According to the biblical record, did Job ever understand why he had suffered as he did?  

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- What was one of Job’s first reactions to all the pain he had had to endure (Job 3:11, 21)?  

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- What were some of Job’s other reactions to his suffering (Job 1:21, 22)?  

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- What was the one basic response of Job to God in all his unexplained suffering? For help in answering this read Hebrews 11:1-2, 35-40.  

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b. Habakkuk

The prophet Habakkuk is another study in the real issue that is at stake when the Christian is beset by painful and confusing experiences. Habakkuk struggled with what seemed to be the silence of God in the face of rampant evil

in the covenant community of Israel. He was even more dumbfounded when he learned that God was going to use the evil empire of Babylon to chasten Israel (Hab. 1:1- 2, 12-17).

- What final response did Habakkuk have to God in view of the affliction that must be endured (Hab. 3:17-19)?

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- What did God tell Habakkuk was necessary, in contrast to the arrogance of the Chaldeans (Hab. 2:4)?

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c. Asaph

Asaph, the writer of Psalm 73, bared his soul as he struggled with the problem of pain and suffering. The prosperity of the wicked (“when good things happen to bad people”) and the suffering of the righteous drove him to the edge of despair. He became confused concerning the ways of God. The process by which he worked through his perplexity is revealed in this psalm and exemplifies the kind of response to God that the believer must experience.

- What kind of wrong thinking brought Asaph to the brink of despair (Psa. 73:3a, 12)?

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- What steps did Asaph take to overcome his doubts and to arrive at the conclusion that “God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart”?

- Psa. 73:15-16 (notice the “if”)

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- Psa. 73:16-17 (Where did he go?)

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- Psa. 73:17 (What did he learn from the symbols in the tabernacle, e.g., the Ark of the Covenant?)

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- Psa. 73:18-24 (How did he come to see things as they really are?)

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- Psa. 73:25ff. (What did he discover about God?)

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d. Jesus Christ

Though the manner in which Jesus endured suffering has been studied in a previous lesson, there yet remains another aspect of His example in response to pain that must be examined. No one has ever experienced the kind of relationship which Jesus had with the Father (John 17:21). This relationship, the kind of suffering Jesus endured, and *the way He related to the Father* in His darkest hour show us what it means to entrust one's soul to a faithful Creator.

- What did Jesus do instead of retaliating against those who were afflicting Him (1 Pet. 2:23b)?

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- What did Jesus believe the Father would do as a result of letting Him bear the shame and pain of suffering for our sins?

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- When Jesus took on the limitations of humanity in His incarnation, He, like we, had to rely on the Scriptures (Matt. 4:4), prayer (Luke 22:41-46), and the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:16). Explain how each of these enabled Jesus to entrust "Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Pet. 2:23). Keep in mind that Jesus



voluntarily turned Himself over to the injustice of His tormentors.

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e. Paul

The Apostle Paul is also an example of a sufferer who, when faced with unrelieved pain, expressed his love to God by exercising that attitude that God so highly values.

- What was the response of Paul to God when God did not remove his affliction (2 Cor. 12:10, 4:18; Heb. 11:1)?

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## THINK ABOUT IT

### Unbiblical Responses to Personal Suffering

*“The fact is that in different lives, suffering produces strangely different effects. One man loses his wife, and the loss makes him far more tender and gentle. Another faces the same loss, and it makes him hard and sullen. One woman has a great sorrow, and it turns her to God. Another passes through a similar experience, and she is never inside a church again. It is all very well talking about the blessed ministry of trouble; but it does not always end in blessing....What we have to recognize is that trouble, in itself, is neither positive nor negative: it is neutral; whether it is going to become positive or negative depends on the human reaction.*

James C. Stewart

1. Discouragement often accompanies times of trial, as seen in the lives of David (Psa. 42:6), Elijah (1 Kings 19:4), Jeremiah (Jer. 15:10), Job (Job 10:1), Moses (Num. 11:14-15), and Rebekah (Gen. 27:46). What can discouragement lead to if not dealt with biblically?

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2. When suffering brings one to the end of his resources so that he is on the edge of despair, what steps can be taken to remedy this? Examine carefully Paul's statements in 2 Corinthians 4:1-2, 8-11, 16-18.

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3. What did Jesus tell the disciples to help them deal with their discouragement in the face of trials (John 14:1-4)? He gave them three truths to hold on to.

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4. How did Jesus correct Peter's attempt to deny the necessity of suffering in Matthew 16:24-28? How did the future fit into Jesus's teaching?

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5. How does Asaph evaluate the kind of thinking he engaged in when suffering first came to him (Psa. 73:22)? What had made him bitter when he compared his pain with the apparent prosperity and ease of the wicked?

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6. Israel complained to God about her hardships and disappointments during the days of the prophet Malachi. What was her criticism of God (Mal. 1:2)? What was God's answer (Mal. 1:3-5)?

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7. What promise does God give to those who are despondent over the severity of the tests they have to endure, according to 1 Corinthians 10:13? What does God do for the believer to help him survive his or her trials?

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8. What does Agur ask God for in relation to the circumstances of life (Prov. 30:7-9)? Compare this to the request in the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:13. Should the Christian ask God to protect him from tests which Satan might instigate?

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9. According to Solomon, what effect can the adversities of life have upon those who do not have God in their lives (Eccle. 4:1-16, when life is not fair)?

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### **A Biblical Response to Pain and Suffering**

*"If you're planning to suffer any time in the near future- and none of us is, though most of us will- then you'd better be sure that your theology is correct. Our response to suffering is determined by our understanding of God. What we think about God will influence how we respond to trials in this lifetime.*

Don Baker

*"Am I, for instance, just sidling back to God because I know that if there's any road to H., it runs through Him? But then of course I know perfectly well that He can't be used as a road. If you're approaching Him not as the goal but as a road, not as the end but as a means, you're not really approaching Him at all. That's what was really wrong with all those popular pictures of happy reunions 'on the further shore;' not the simple-minded and very earthly images, but the fact that they make an End of what we can get only as a by-product of the true End."*

*A Grief Observed, C. S. Lewis*

1. In your evaluation of the above quote from C. S. Lewis, and from an understanding of Jonah's anger at God when he lost his comforts (Jonah 4:8), how does one's thoughts about God affect his reaction to pain and suffering? What expectations

may we have about God and His plan that can result in our bitterness toward God when things go wrong?

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2. In the process of struggle with an affliction or disappointment, is it wrong to ask God, “Why?” What is more important than getting an answer to our questions about the ultimate purposes behind pain and suffering (Rom. 11:33-36; Job 5:9, 11:7, 15:8)? Notice the way in which the psalmist resolved his question (Psa. 22:1a, 4, 5b).
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3. According to James 5:13 the Christian should pray in response to his or her suffering. But the question remains, “How is one to pray when trouble comes?”

- a. What is to be the main motive and chief concern when one prays about his or her hardships (John 14:13)?
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- b. What is a possible motive in praying that results in unanswered prayers (James 4:3)?
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- c. Is it wrong to pray that the pain and suffering might be removed (2 Kings 20:1-11; 2 Cor. 12:8)? Is God obligated to remove physical pain in response to our prayers (1 John 5:14-18; 2 Cor. 12:9-10)?
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- d. Can God remove affliction in some cases in answer to prayer (James 5:14-18; Isa. 38:1-5)?
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- e. What should the Christian ask God for when he or she experiences affliction (James 1:5)? Why does he or she need it?

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4. When the Christian is told that he must “consider it all joy” when he encounters trials, he may think a good feeling is required. Why is that not an accurate understanding of the command in James 1:2?

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5. How do the following two sets of words help to explain the relationship between a person’s values and his or her attitude toward trials? For help see also Philippians 3:8-11 and Job 23:10.

- Comfort, material/physical, present
- Character, spiritual, future

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6. Promises regarding the future figure prominently in giving God’s people hope in the midst of suffering. What promises about the future are used in the following passages to encourage those experiencing trials?

- a. Isa. 40:1, 53:4-5 (Israel in exile in Babylon)

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- b. Zech. 14:1-4, 9 (Israel suffering in the coming Great Tribulation)

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- c. 1 Thess 4:13-18 (Christians grieving over dead loved ones)

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- d. Rev. 3:10 (Christians being persecuted for their faith)

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7. Why is perseverance (patience or endurance) such an important part of the Christians response to tribulations (Rom. 5:3-4; James 1:3; Heb. 6:12, 10:36)?

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8. How did the churches of Macedonia express their love for other believers, even though they were experiencing severe trials (2 Cor. 8:2)? What was a part of their suffering?

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9. In his book, *Why Us? When Bad Things Happen to God's People*, Warren W. Wiersbe writes that "The worst thing that can happen to you is not the death of a loved one, a prolonged illness, or a painful accident. The worst thing that could happen to you would be to suffer *for nothing*, die, and be lost forever." What do you think of this statement? How is it possible to suffer for nothing in this life?

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10. What is the difference between acceptance of suffering and resignation to suffering? Which is to be the Christian's response?

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11. It has been said that the Father always prepares the believer for what He prepares for the believer. This being true how can the Christian prepare himself for trials?

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## APPLICATION

*“Why should I tremble at the plough of my Lord, that maketh deep furrows in my soul? I know He is no idle husbandman; He purposeth a crop.”*

Samuel Rutherford

1. What tends to be your worst response when you experience pain?

Why do you think you react this way? What can you do about it?

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2. What steps can you take to guard against bitterness when experiencing a trial?

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3. How would you explain suffering and death to a six-year-old whose parent has recently died? How would you explain to him or her the need to trust God?

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4. How would you respond to a victim of rape who asks you, “Why did God let this happen?” If this victim were a Christian, what counsel would you give them in how to handle such a horrible experience?

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5. What should you do if, when you have been diagnosed with a life threatening illness, you pray for healing and it does not come?

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6. How could you become part of the problem rather than part of the solution when trying to help someone respond to an affliction?

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7. What could your church do to help one of its members to work through a time of serious physical illness?

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8. How could you have been more patient the last time you experienced adversity?

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9. What crisis of suffering has tested your love for God and trust in Him more than any other? Why was this so?

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10. How could you be more sensitive to the needs and hurts of other when you yourself are in pain?

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11. When has the Christian hope of the return of Christ ever brought real encouragement to you in a difficult time? How did it change your disposition and treatment of others?

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12. Do you lose your sense of humor when you encounter pain? It has been said that “happiness depends on what happens to us, while Christian joy goes deeper and is independent of the circumstances.” Can you honestly say that you have experienced true Christian joy in your suffering? How would you know you have?

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13. What could you praise God for when you are enduring a painful loss? Pick a psalm (e.g. Psa. 96) and spend time thanking God for His blessings to you and ask Him for the enablement to do this the next time a trying set of circumstances afflict you.

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14. Write down the reasons for suffering which have been discussed in lesson four and memorize one verse with each one. How else could you prepare yourself for any tragedies that might come to you?

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