



Why Do Bad Things Happen to God's People?

“After you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation.” (1 Peter 5:10, NLT)

Every Christian probably asks at one time or other, “Why does God let bad things happen to his children?” You may know someone who has a serious illness, had an accident, is handicapped or is part of a broken family. God’s people do suffer because there is evil in the world. You will never fully understand how God uses suffering because the Bible tells us that God does not think as we think or do as we do. (Isaiah 55:8, 9) There are secrets you cannot know. However, there is one thing you can know. If you love God and are called according to his plan, God will take the things that happen to you, even when there is nothing good about them, and fit them into a pattern for good – his good and your good. However, you must love God and demonstrate your love by being called according to *his* plan.¹ (Romans 8:28) How willing are you to suffer for your good and God’s glory?

It also will help you understand suffering if you know God’s ultimate plan for every believer. *“For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son.”* (Romans 8:29, NLT) Your heavenly Father is in the process of transforming you to be like his Son. One way he does this is by permitting suffering in your life. You might call it part of “boot camp” training. Think about it. If you were to join the army, your training would be agonizing.. At the end of a day, your muscles would hurt; every bone ache and you would crash with exhaustion. However, when you complete your training, you would be a real soldier, trained and equipped for battle. In a similar way, God trains you through suffering.

Suffering and character development

Suffering develops character in your life. You reveal your true character by how you act when no one is watching. God wants you to have an inner strength to help you do right, even under pressure. God permits suffering in your life to help you learn endurance.

Whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested, your endurance [patience, perseverance] has a chance to grow...when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything. (James 1:2-4, NLT)

Endurance means to hang in there no matter what the hardship might be. In the Bible, Paul and Barnabas took a young man, Mark, with them on a mission trip. When things got tough, Mark left and went home. However, we know Mark must have learned endurance from this experience. Later, he went on another mission trip successfully with Barnabas and wrote the book of Mark. In what area are you struggling? Will you “hang in there”? Why not thank the Lord and let your trouble become an opportunity for joy?

Suffering and ministry preparation

God sometimes allows suffering to prepare you for a ministry. How does he do that? Here is a true example. A young boy grew up with an alcoholic father, who, when he came home at night, dragged the sleeping boy out of bed and beat him. His parents struggled in their marriage. In his heart, the boy knew what his Dad did was wrong. He determined that when he grew up, he would do something about it. He went to college, and God led him to become a Christian marriage counselor. For years, he has shared his faith and helped hundreds of troubled marriages, some caused by alcohol. God used the boy’s suffering to prepare him for the ministry he had planned for him.

Suffering and the Comforter

Occasionally God permits his children to suffer because he wants them to know him as the great Comforter. When you are suffering, perhaps depressed or even suicidal, you may pull away from people who could help you. God wants you to discover that he is always there, ready to comfort you. He has promised never to leave you.

Praise be to God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4, NIV)

As you receive his comfort and come to know him as the great Comforter, he will bring people to you who are suffering in a similar way. God wants to use you as a comforter!

Suffering and sin

Does God allow suffering for your past and present sins? Are there consequences to your choices? Isn’t that like asking, “Will you get burned if you hold your hand in a flame?” There is a law of sowing and reaping. Do you remember King David, a man close to the Lord? Because of his sins of adultery and murder, his baby died and his own household rebelled against him. His sins terribly affected him, his family and his nation. Yet David did not dwell on his sins; he returned to God, accepted his forgiveness and began his life anew. God richly blessed him. David wrote the Psalms. Jesus is his descendant!

Paul wrote this explanation (which no one wants to hear) to the suffering Galatians.

Don't be misled. Remember that you can't ignore God and get away with it. You will always reap what you sow! Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful desires will harvest the consequences of decay and death. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit. (Galatians 6:7, 8, NLT)

Paul is saying that you can bring suffering on yourself. It is easy to think that as a teenager your choices do not matter. However, if you choose to drink alcohol or take drugs, your brainpower could be diminished the rest of your life. Scientists now know that your brain does not fully develop until age 25. If you commit sexual sin, you could catch a disease or damage your future marriage. If you cheat in school instead of studying, your SAT scores may not be high enough to get you into college. Think now about your choices! Be careful of the "crop" you sow. God probably will not answer a prayer for "crop failure," but he will forgive you, never leave you and give you strength.

Suffering and God's discipline

Suffering may be God's discipline. *"My child, don't ignore it when the Lord disciplines you, and don't be discouraged when he corrects you. For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes those he accepts as his children."* (Hebrews 12:5b-6, NLT)
Discipline is a sign of a Father's wonderful love and confirms that you are his child!

Suffering and persecution

God's children often suffer because of their Christian faith. Did you know that more Christians were killed for their faith in the twentieth century than all the other centuries combined? They endured to the end. Jesus said, *"When you are reviled and persecuted and lied about because you are my followers – wonderful! Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a tremendous reward awaits you up in heaven."* (Matthew 5:11, 12, LB)

There are many more reasons God permits suffering. If you are suffering, be quick to receive his comfort and strength that you might learn to endure. Determine as Job did (who lost his wealth and children in one day), *"Though he slay me, yet will I trust him."* (Job 13:15, NIV) Because Job trusted, God blessed him with more wealth and children than before. Although you may never understand, will you trust and thank God, for the "good" he plans to bring out of your suffering?

Attitude Check:

- What attitude do you choose when suffering comes into your life?

Explore:

- Read, "If God is so Good, Why Do Bad Things Happen to His People?" (Romans 5:1-5)
- Record one new characteristic that you learned about God from this devotional in your journal.

Talking with God:

- Father, because of the good you will produce in my life and the glory it will give you, remind me to trust and rejoice in you when trials and problems come.

¹ *Thirty Biblical Reasons Why God's People Suffer*, p. 1, Dick Woodward, International Cooperating Ministries