

# TOWARD A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF SUFFERING

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## TOWARD A BIBLICAL VIEW OF SUFFERING

Suffering is God's plan for us. In western cultures suffering is seen as very bad, to be avoided at all costs, and sometimes even an indication that something is very wrong. It is considered abnormal. Unfortunately, most western Christian cultures hold an inadequate theology of suffering also. As cross cultural workers in Christian ministry we must move beyond the myths we have received from our culture, and develop a solid biblical view. God's view is absolutely essential to be able to handle suffering well.

God's word clearly shows that suffering is a normal part of the Christian life, especially suffering for Christ. "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for Him" (Phil. 1.29). "To this [suffering] you were called." (1 Pet. 2.21).

This study examines several different aspects of suffering, and looks at many Scriptures on the subject. I urge you to study these references in their contexts, to develop a more comprehensive biblical theology of suffering.

### I. OUR VIEW OF SUFFERING VS. GOD'S VIEW

#### A. Cultural Myths about Suffering

1. As Christians, we should not suffer in this life.
2. When we are living in His will, living godly lives, we should experience few hardships.
3. Suffering means something is wrong. It is an abnormal state.
4. Suffering has no redeeming or positive results.
5. Suffering means we can have no joy. It robs us of the choice to rejoice.
6. Spiritual people don't hurt emotionally when they suffer.
7. If God really loves us He won't let us suffer very much. His love means that He will put a hedge around us to keep terrible trials from entering our lives.
8. When we do suffer, God is punishing us out of anger. He is vindictive and wants us to suffer when He is angry with us.

#### B. How God Views Suffering

1. In fact, we are called to suffer for Jesus. Phil. 1.29, 1 Pet. 2.20-21
2. We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God; we were destined for trials. Acts 14.22, 1 Thess. 3.3
3. Suffering is normal and inevitable in the Christian life. 2 Tim. 3.12
4. God uses suffering for our good, to conform us to the likeness of His Son. Rom. 8.28-29
5. We have a choice to rejoice in our suffering. See Section D below.

6. Spiritual people feel many painful emotions when they suffer. Mark 14.33-34, 2 Cor. 2.4
7. He didn't prevent His own Son from suffering. Rom. 8.32 And He didn't prevent Paul, Peter, John the Baptist, Job, and others He loved from suffering greatly.
8. Suffering may be God's loving discipline, for our good. Heb.12.7-11.

### C. Jesus' Teaching About Suffering

Here are some examples of Jesus' teaching that are in opposition to what we have come to believe as Christians in our culture.

1. "Blessed are the poor in spirit...those who mourn...those who are persecuted because of righteousness... Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me." Mt. 5.3-11
2. "Don't be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul." Mt. 10.28
3. "If anyone would come to me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it." Me. 16.24-25
4. "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Mt. 19.23-24
5. "No one who has left home or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (home s, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life." Mark 10.29-30
6. "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law." Luke 12.49-53
7. "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life-- he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple... In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple." Luke 14.26-17, 33
8. "But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or

contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life.” Luke 21.12-19

9. “I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.” John 12.24-26

#### D. Joy in Suffering

Cultural myth number five says that we can have no joy when we’re suffering. This is an issue which God’s word speaks about often. Here are some examples.

1. “Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Matthew 5.12
2. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance... Romans 5.3
3. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 2 Corinthians 8.2
4. You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 1 Thessalonians 1.6
5. Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. James 1.2-4
6. These [trials] have come so that your faith— of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire— may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Thought you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy... 1 Peter 1.7-8

## II. PURPOSES AND RESULTS OF SUFFERING

God tell us the purposes He has for our suffering, and the beneficial results, both to us and for His glory. He makes it clear that we do not suffer in vain, especially when we suffer for His sake. These two categories are somewhat arbitrary, because the distinction between purposes and results is not always clear.

### A. Purposes of Suffering

Here are some key purposes of suffering as God has revealed them.

1. To share in Christ’s sufferings, becoming like Him in His death. Phil. 3.10
2. To make us rely on God, not ourselves. 2 Cor. 1.9
3. So that Jesus’ life may be revealed in us. 2 Cor. 4.10-11.

4. So that our faith may be proved genuine and result in praise. 1 Peter 1.7
5. To keep us from going astray, to obey His word. Ps. 119.67
6. To discipline us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. Heb. 12.10
7. We must go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God. Acts 14.22
8. To be able to comfort others with the comfort we have received from God. 2 Cor. 1.4
9. To prepare for us an eternal glory. 2 Cor. 4.17.

## B. Results of Suffering

The word promises wonderful results of suffering. We need to focus on these when we are going through trials, to remind ourselves that we do not suffer in vain. Here are some of the results of suffering mentioned in the word. Some results are unconditional, i.e., the benefits don't depend on the way we respond in the situation. Other results are conditional, i.e., the benefits depend on why we suffer, or how we respond.

1. Unconditional Results.
  - a. It achieves for us an eternal glory that far outweighs all suffering. 2 Cor. 4.17
  - b. We can comfort others with the comfort we have received from God. 2 Cor. 1.4
  - c. Others will give thanks for answered prayer. 2 Cor. 1.11
  - d. After we have suffered God will restore us, make us strong, firm and steadfast. 1 Pet. 5.10
  - e. God uses it for our good. Rom. 8.28
  - f. It builds perseverance, character, hope and maturity. Rom. 5.3,4, Jas. 1.3-4
  - g. These sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory He will reveal to us. Rom. 8.18
  - h. As God's discipline, it will later produce a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who are trained by it. Heb. 12.11
  - i. We are blessed when we are insulted because of the name of Christ, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon us. 1 Pet. 4.14
  - j. We are blessed when we are persecuted for righteousness. Mt. 5.10-11
  - k. Our reward will be great in heaven. Mt. 5.12
2. Conditional Results, based on why we suffer.
  - a. We are blessed—if we suffer for what is right. 1 Pet. 3.14. See Lk. 6.22
  - b. We are blessed—if we are persecuted because of righteousness. Mt. 5.10-11
  - c. Our reward will be great in heaven—if we are persecuted for righteousness. Mt. 5.12
  - d. We are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon us—if we are insulted for the name of Christ. 1 Pet. 4.14
3. Conditional Results, based on our response
  - a. We will inherit a blessing—if we repay evil with blessing. 1 Pet. 3.9
  - b. We will receive God's approval—if we bear up when suffering unjustly. 1 Pet. 2.19-20

- c. We will be overjoyed when Christ's glory is revealed—if we rejoice that we participate in His sufferings. 1 Pet. 4.13
- d. We will receive the crown of life—if we persevere under trial and stand the test. James 1.12
- e. We will reign with Him—if we endure. 2 Tim. 2.12
- f. Those who slander us will be ashamed—if we keep a clear conscience. 1 Pet. 3.16
- g. Our reward will be great—if we respond lovingly to our enemies. Lk. 6.35
- h. When Jesus is revealed, results will be praise, glory and honor—if our faith has been proved genuine. 1 Pet. 1.7

### III. BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF SUFFERING

We can learn much from examples of suffering in the word. Only a few are mentioned here. Nearly every character described in the Bible experienced great suffering! You are encouraged to study how biblical characters handled suffering, and how God ministered to them.

#### A. Jesus

Jesus is obviously our primary example. "...Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps" (1 Pet. 2.21). He didn't retaliate or threaten, but entrusted Himself to the Father (1 Pet. 2.21-23). For the joy set before Him, He endured (Heb. 12.2). See Isa. 53.3-11, 1 Pet. 4.1,13, 1.11, 3.18, 5.1 and many other Scriptures on Christ's suffering.

#### B. Paul

Paul is another helpful example of suffering in the New Testament. Study his suffering in Acts and in his letters. In 2 Corinthians, for example, you will find at least 45 different kinds of suffering Paul endured. You will also discover at least 15 different emotional reactions to suffering, and 13 ways he chose to respond in Christ's power.

#### C. Job

Job comes to mind immediately when suffering is considered. The book of Job provides a unique study on the theology of suffering as well as other important aspects.

#### D. David

David is probably the most helpful example of suffering in the Old Testament. His Psalms provide abundant teaching on suffering through His example. Psalm 31, for example, demonstrates at least 14 specific ways he chose to deal with his suffering.

#### E. The Prophets

The prophets also provide excellent examples. "Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord" (James 5.10).

#### IV. GOD IS OUR PRIMARY RESOURCE IN SUFFERING

As with every aspect of the Christian life, God is certainly our most important resource. What He does for us usually comes to mind first, and this is important. But who He is—His essential identity and attributes—is at least as critical to us when suffering, according to the word. His word provides many descriptions of how relevant His identity, attributes and ministry are to us in suffering.

##### A. God's Identity as a Resource in Suffering

Many of these descriptions come from the Psalms, as David went through suffering, and found the Lord's ministry to Him through who He is. For example, He is our. . .

1. Deliverer. Ps. 18.2
2. Fortress. Ps. 18.2
3. Guide. Ps. 48.14
4. Helper. Ps. 54.4
5. Hiding place. Ps. 32.7
6. Hope. Ps. 71.5
7. Horn of Salvation. Ps. 18.2
8. Joy and delight. Ps. 43.4
9. Mighty Rock. Ps. 62.7
10. Refuge. Ps. 46.1, 61.3
11. Shade on our right hand. Ps. 121.5
12. Shelter from the storm. Isa. 25.4
13. Shepherd and Overseer. 1 Pet. 2.25
14. Shield. Ps. 18.2
15. Source of strength. Isa. 28.6, Ps. 18.1
16. Stronghold. Ps. 18.2, 9.9, 37.39

##### B. God's Character as a Resource

As with His identity, what God is like becomes a great resource for us during times of suffering, both objectively (through His grace to us), and subjectively (as we focus on Him). Here are a few descriptions of His character which are particularly important to us in suffering.

1. He abounds in unending love. Neh. 9.17, Ps. 86.5, 103.8
2. He is full of compassion and mercy. James 5.11
3. He is faithful to all His promises. Ps. 145.3
4. He is kind. Rom. 11.22, Eph. 2.7, Tit. 3.4
5. His faithfulness will be our shield and rampart. Ps. 91.4
6. His love is better than life. Ps. 63.3
7. His grace is sufficient for us. 2 Cor. 12.9
8. His power is made perfect in our weakness. 2 Cor. 12.9
9. His power shields us until the coming of salvation in the last time. 1 Pet. 1.5

### C. God's Personal Responses to us

The Lord responds to us very personally when we are suffering, with deep emotions and with attentive eyes and ears. Here are some of the many ways He responds to us.

1. He answers when we cry in anguish. Ps. 118.5
2. His ears are attentive to our cry. Ps. 34.15
3. He cares for us. 1 Pet. 5.7
4. He has compassion on us. Deut. 32.6, Ps. 103.13
5. He hears our weeping, our cry. Ps. 6.8, 10.17, 18.6, 40.1
6. He hears our desire. Ps. 10.17
7. He is for us. Ps. 56.9, Rom. 8.31
8. He knows the anguish of our soul. Ps. 31.7
9. He remembers us. Ps. 115.12
10. He sees our affliction. Ps. 31.7
11. He sympathizes with our weaknesses. Heb. 4.15
12. In all our distress He too is distressed. Isa. 63.9

### D. God's Presence With Us in Suffering

1. His constant presence with us in times of suffering is one of our greatest sources of help and comfort. Over and over God promises never to leave us, especially when we are hurting.
2. He is with us. Ps. 46.7,11, 91.15
3. He is with us like a mighty warrior. Jer. 20.11
4. He is at our right hand. Ps. 18.28
5. He will never forsake us. Ps. 37.28, Heb. 13.5
6. His Spirit rests on us. 1 Pet. 4.14
7. He stands at our right hand when we are needy. Ps. 109.31
8. He surrounds us. Ps. 125.2
9. He surrounds us with His favor as with a shield. Ps. 5.12
10. His unfailing love surrounds us. Ps. 32.10
11. He watches over us. Ps. 32.8, 121.3-4,8-9, 145.20

### E. God's Ministry to Our Personal Needs

The Lord ministers to all of our personal needs in time of suffering, out of His great care for us.

1. He bears our burdens daily. Ps. 68.19
2. He binds us up when we are brokenhearted. Ps. 147.3, Isa. 61.1
3. He comforts us. Ps. 23.4, 71.21, 86.17, Isa. 49.13, Acts 9.31
4. He comforts us when we mourn and are downcast. Isa. 61.2, 2 Cor. 7.6
5. He covers us with His feathers. Ps. 91.4
6. He crowns us with love and compassion. Ps. 103.4
7. He delivers our eyes from tears. Ps. 116.8

8. He delivers us from all our fears. Ps. 34.4,17
9. He encourages us when we are afflicted. Ps. 10.17
10. He establishes our heart. Ps. 2.17
11. His Holy Spirit gives us joy. 1 Thess. 1.6
12. His consolation brings joy to our soul. Ps. 94.19
13. He gives us comfort and joy instead of sorrow. Jer. 31.13
14. He gives us courage. 1 Thess. 2.2
15. He gives us mercy and grace to help. Heb. 4.15
16. He gives us peace. Ps. 29.11, John 14.27, Phil. 4.7
17. He gives us power and strength. Ps. 68.35
18. He gives us refuge under His wings. Ps. 91.14
19. He gives rest for our soul. Ps. 62.1,5, Matt. 11.28-30
20. He gives us strength when we are weary. Isa 40.29
21. He will give us victory over death through Christ. 1 Cor. 15.57
22. He guides our feet into the path of peace. Lk. 1.79
23. He heals us when we are brokenhearted. Ps. 147.3
24. He hides us in the shelter of His presence. Ps. 31.10
25. He holds us by our right hand. Isa. 41.13
26. He holds us fast with His right hand. Ps. 139.10
27. He increases our power when we are weak. Isa. 40.29
28. He is close to us when we are brokenhearted. Ps. 34.18
29. He keeps our lamp burning. Ps. 18.28
30. He lifts up our head. Ps. 3.3
31. He lifts us when we are bowed down. Ps. 145.14
32. He makes us more than conquerors in trials. Rom. 8.37
33. He makes us stand firm in Christ. 2 Cor. 1.21
34. He makes us strong, firm and steadfast. 1 Pet. 5.10
35. He promises peace to us. Ps. 85.8
36. He puts a new song in our mouth. Ps. 40.3
37. He quiets us with His love. Zeph. 3.17
38. He renews our inner nature daily. 2 Cor. 2.16
39. He restores us. Ps. 23.3, 1 Pet. 5.10
40. He says, "Do not fear, I will help you." Isa. 41.13
41. He sends times of refreshing. Acts 3.19
42. He strengthens us. Phil. 4.13, Col. 1.11
43. He surrounds us with songs of deliverance. Ps. 32.7
44. His love supports us. Ps. 94.18
45. He sustains us. Ps. 3.5, 18.35, 54.4, 55.22
46. He teaches us wisdom when we are hurting. Ps 51.6

- 47. He turns our darkness into light. Ps. 18.28
- 48. He upholds us. Ps. 37.17,24, 145.14, Isa. 41.10

#### F. God's Deliverance in the Situation

God often intervenes on our behalf in difficult situations, either to deliver us or to protect us.

1. He brings us into a spacious place. Ps. 18.19
2. He delivers us. Ps. 37.40
3. He delivers our feet from stumbling. Ps. 116.8
4. He delivers us from the hand of the wicked. Ps. 98.10
5. He delivers us from trouble. Ps. 34.19, 54.7
6. He guides us with His hand. Ps. 139.10
7. He guards our life. Ps. 73. 24
8. He helps us. Ps. 28.7, 37.40, 86.17, 118.13, 121.2, Heb. 13.6
9. He keeps us from all harm. Ps. 121.7
10. He knows how to rescue us from trials. 2 Pet. 2.9
11. He lifts us out of the depths. Ps. 30.1
12. He lifts us out of the slimy pit. Ps. 40.1
13. He preserves us. Ps. 31.23
14. He protects us from the evil one. 2 Thess. 3.3
15. He protects us from trouble. Ps. 32.7
16. He ransoms us unharmed from the battle. Ps. 65.18
17. He reaches down and draws us out of deep waters. Ps. 18.16
18. He redeems our life from the pit. Ps. 103.4
19. He rescues our life from the hands of the wicked. Jer. 20.13
20. He rescues the godly from trial. 2 Pet. 2.9
21. He rescues us because He delights in us. Ps. 18.19
22. He saves us out of all our troubles. Ps. 34.6
23. He saves us when we are crushed in spirit. Ps. 34.18
24. He sets our feet on a rock, a firm place to stand. Ps. 40.2
25. He sets us free when we are in anguish. Ps. 118.5
26. He shields us for salvation. 1 Pet. 1.5

#### G. God's Word as a Resource in Suffering

God's word is one of our most powerful resources in times of suffering. This study itself is testimony to the exhaustive manner in which the word deals with this issue. In addition, the word testifies to itself as a resource, as illustrated in these passages.

1. It revives our soul. Ps. 19.7
2. It comforts us. Ps. 119.50,52
3. It encourages us. Rom 15.4
4. It gives us hope. Rom 15.4

5. It gives joy to our heart. Ps. 19.8
6. It gives great peace to those who love it. Ps. 119.165

## V. HOW WE ARE TO RESPOND IN SUFFERING

God gives us many commands and examples of how we are to respond when we suffer, both for our benefit and for His glory. He also shows us that even as His children we will experience distress when we suffer.

### A. Our Normal Human Responses to Suffering

Scripture provides abundant teaching on the importance of allowing ourselves to respond with normal human emotions. These emotional responses in no way indicate lack of spirituality. In fact, to deny them can cause great damage to ourselves. Perhaps this is why the Lord gives us so many examples in His word. Only a very few examples are mentioned here, from the lives of Jesus, David and Paul. Study the word for other examples. Notice that there no indication that these emotional responses are wrong.

1. Jesus. As He anticipated being crucified He felt:
  - a. deeply distressed and troubled. Mark 14.33
  - b. overwhelmed with sorrow. Mt. 26.38, Mark 14.34
  - c. distressed. Luke 12.50
  - d. troubled in heart and in spirit. John 12.25, 13.21
2. Paul. Paul experienced many painful emotions, including:
  - a. anguish of heart. 2 Cor. 2.4
  - b. anxiety. Phil. 2.28
  - c. great distress. 2 Cor. 2.4
  - d. fear. 2 Cor. 11.3, 7.5, 12.20
  - e. grief. 2 Cor. 12.21
3. David. A few of David's emotional responses to suffering were:
  - a. agony. Ps. 6.2
  - b. anguish. Ps. 6.3, 31.10
  - c. distress. Ps. 4.1, 18.6
  - d. fear. Ps. 34.4
  - e. grief. Ps. 31.9
  - f. groaning. Ps. 22.1
  - g. sorrow. Ps. 6.7, 13.2, 31.9
  - h. weeping. Ps. 6.6

### B. How to Respond to God During Suffering

God's word says much by command and example about how we are to respond to Him when suffering. This is a critical issue, and one about which we need to know God's heart, in order to please Him and handle suffering well. Here are some ways to respond to Him:

1. Acknowledge His name. Ps. 91.14

2. Ask Him to strengthen us according to His word. Ps. 119.28
3. Be still before the Lord. Ps. 37.7
4. Cast all our anxiety on Him. 1 Pet. 5.7
5. Cast our cares on Him. Ps. 55.22
6. Call on Him. Ps. 17.6, 91.15
7. Cling to Him (our soul). Ps. 63.8
8. Come to Jesus when we are weary and burdened. Matt. 11.28
9. Commit ourselves to our Faithful Creator. 1 Pet. 4.19
10. Commit our spirit into His hands. Ps. 31.5
11. Commit our way to the Lord. Ps. 37.5
12. Consider all His mighty deeds. Ps. 77.12
13. Consider Christ who endured, so we won't grow weary or lose heart. Heb. 12.3
14. Cry aloud to Him. Ps. 3.4
15. Cry out in distress to Him. Ps. 55.17
16. Cry to Him for help. Ps. 18.6
17. Dwell in the shelter of the Most High. Ps. 91.1
18. Examine our ways and test them, and return to the Lord. Lam. 3.40
19. Find rest for our soul in God alone. Ps. 62.1,5
20. Fix our eyes on the Sovereign Lord. Ps. 141.8
21. Fix our eyes on Jesus. Heb. 12.2
22. Glorify Him with thanksgiving. Ps. 69.30
23. Hide ourselves in Him. Ps. 143.9
24. Hope in Him. Ps. 37.9, 42.5
25. Keep His ways. Ps. 18.21
26. Keep our eyes on Him. Ps. 25.15
27. Lift up our soul to Him. Ps. 25.1, 143.8
28. Love Him. Ps. 91.14
29. Make Him our stronghold. Ps. 52.7
30. Make the Most High our dwelling. Ps. 91.9- 10
31. Meditate on all His works. Ps. 77.12, 143.5
32. Pour out our complaint before Him. Ps. 142.2
33. Pour out our hearts to Him. Ps. 62.8
34. Praise Him. Ps. 18.46,49, 71.14
35. Praise God that we bear the name Christian. 1 Pet. 4.16
36. Praise His name in song. Ps. 69.30
37. Pray. James 5.13, Ps. 69.13
38. Rejoice and leap for joy when we suffer for Christ, for great is our reward in heaven.  
Lk. 6.23
39. Rejoice in His salvation. Ps. 13.5

40. Remember Him when our soul is downcast. Ps. 42.6
41. Remember His deeds and His miracles. Ps. 77.11
42. Remember His great love, unfailing compassion and great faithfulness. Lam. 3.21-23
43. Seek the Lord. Ps. 34.4, 63.1
44. Set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts. 1 Pet. 3.15
45. Set our hope on Him. 2 Cor. 1.10
46. Sing to the Lord. Ps. 13.6
47. Sing of His strength and love. Ps. 59.16
48. Speak of His righteousness and praises all day long. Ps. 35.28
49. Speak of His faithfulness and salvation. Ps. 40.10
50. Take refuge in Him. Ps. 5.11, 7.1, 11.1
51. Tell Him our trouble. Ps. 142.2
52. Trust in Him. Ps. 25.2, 31.14, John 14.1
53. Trust in His unfailing love. Ps. 13.5
54. Trust in His word. Ps. 119.42
55. Trust in the name of the Lord. Ps. 20.7, 33.21
56. Wait for the Lord. Ps. 27.14
57. Wait in hope for the Lord. Ps. 33.20
58. Wait patiently for Him. Ps. 37.7, 40.1
59. Wait quietly for His salvation. Lam. 3.26
60. Watch for God our Strength. Ps. 59.9

### C. Ways to Talk to God When Suffering

In hard times our first response is usually to ask God for help and to get us out of the situation. And this is a healthy, biblical response. But we often forget to talk to Him in other ways. Scriptures give us many examples of how to talk to Him when we're suffering. Here are just a few examples from the Psalms. I encourage you to study these and others you will find in the word.

1. I trust in you, O Lord; I say, "You are my God. My times are in your hands..." Ps. 31.14-15
2. You are my hiding place. Ps. 32.7
3. I wait for you, O Lord; you will answer, O Lord my God. Ps. 38.15
4. You are my help and my deliverer. Ps. 40.17
5. When I am afraid I will trust in you. Ps. 56.3
6. In you my soul takes refuge. Ps. 57.1
7. You are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble. O my Strength, I sing praise to you... Ps. 57.16-17
8. O my Strength, I watch for you. You, O God are my fortress, my loving God. Ps. 59.9-10
9. Show me the way to go, for to You I lift up my soul. Ps. 143.8

#### D. Ways to Talk to Ourselves When Suffering

Most of us know that our self-talk greatly determines our attitudes in any situation. What we say to ourselves does make a difference in how we handle suffering. Self-talk that takes our eyes off the problems and focuses on God is very powerful. Here are a few examples of healthy, God-honoring self-talk during suffering. I encourage you to learn some of these Scriptures to quote when under trial.

1. The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to Him in song. Ps. 28.7
2. Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God. Ps. 42.5
3. My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from Him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I will never be shaken. Ps. 62.1
4. Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from Him. Ps. 62.5
5. I will praise God's name in song, and glorify Him with thanksgiving. Ps. 69.30
6. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for Him." Lam. 3.21-24.

#### E. Other Ways to Respond During Suffering

This is a very fruitful area of teaching in God's word. We handle suffering better when we respond in the ways He has taught us. Being able to endure relates directly to how well we learn what He has to say about this, and how faithful and diligent we are to apply His teaching.

1. Arm ourselves with Christ's attitude to suffering. 1 Pet. 4.1
2. Bear up under the pain of unjust suffering, conscious of God. 1 Pet. 2.19
3. Be alert for Satan's attacks. 1 Pet. 5.8
4. Be content. 2 Cor. 12.10, Phil. 4.11-12
5. Be faithful. Rev. 13.10, 14.12
6. Be glad and rejoice in His love. Ps. 31.7
7. Be glad as we take refuge in Him. Ps. 5.11
8. Be patient in affliction. Rom. 12.12
9. Be strong and take heart. Ps. 31.24
10. Be upright in heart. Ps. 97.11
11. Consider our sufferings not worth comparing with the glory to be revealed to us. Rom. 8.18
12. Delight in hardships, persecutions and difficulties for the sake of Christ. 2 Cor. 12.10
13. Do good. Ps. 37.3, 1 Pet. 4.19
14. Endure hardship as discipline. Heb. 12.7 See Rev. 2.3
15. Endure hardship as good soldiers of Christ. 2 Tim. 2.3, 4.5

16. Endure when suffering for doing good. 1 Pet. 2.20
17. Entrust ourselves to Him who judges justly. 1 Pet. 2.23
18. Fix our eyes on what is unseen, for it is eternal. 2 Cor. 4.18
19. Hold unswervingly to the hope we profess. Heb. 10.23
20. Joyfully accept the loss of our possessions. Heb. 10.34
21. Long for a better country, a heavenly one. Heb. 11.16
22. Live by faith during suffering. Heb. Chapter 11
23. Patiently endure. Rev. 13.10
24. Persevere. Heb. 10.36, James 1.12, 5.10-11, Rev. 2.3
25. Prepare our minds for action. 1 Pet. 1.13
26. Rejoice in our sufferings. Rom. 5.3, James 1.2
27. Resist the devil, standing firm in our faith. 1 Pet. 5.9
28. Rejoice that we participate in Christ's sufferings. 1 Pet. 4.13
29. Run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Heb. 12.2
30. Set our hope fully on the grace to be given when Christ is revealed. 1 Pet. 1.13
31. Sing for joy as we take refuge in Him. Ps. 5.11
32. Strengthen our feeble arms and weak knees. Heb. 12.12
33. Throw off everything that hinders, and sin... Heb. 12.1
34. Turn from evil. Ps. 37.27

#### F. How Not to Respond During Suffering

The Lord not only teaches us how to respond, but now not to respond when we are suffering. Here are some ways He mentions.

1. Don't be afraid, for He is with us. Isa. 41.10. See John 14.27, 1 Pet. 3.14
2. Don't be ashamed to suffer as a Christian. 1 Pet. 4.16
3. Don't be dismayed, for He is our God. Isa. 41.10
4. Don't be fainthearted, because the Lord goes with us. Deut. 20.3
5. Don't be overcome by evil; overcome evil with good. Rom. 12.21
6. Don't be surprised at painful trials, as though something strange were happening to us. 1 Pet. 4.12
7. Don't complain. Num. 11.1
8. Don't disown God. 2 Tim. 2.12
9. Don't do evil by turning away from God. Ps. 18.21
10. Don't fret, because it leads only to evil. Ps. 37.8
11. Don't fret when the wicked succeed. Ps. 37.7
12. Don't get angry. Ps. 37.8
13. Don't grumble. Ps. 106.25
14. Don't let our hearts be troubled. John 14.1
15. Don't shrink back. Heb. 10.39
16. Don't throw away our confidence. Heb. 10.35

### G. How to Relate to God's Word in Suffering

God's word is a wonderful resource when we are hurting. But we must consciously make use of it, in ways the Lord shows us in it. Here are some ways God teaches us to relate to His word.

1. Delight in it. Ps. 119.92,143
2. Don't forget it. Ps. 119.61,83,109
3. Don't forsake it. Ps. 119.87
4. Don't stray from it. Ps. 119.110,157
5. Find comfort in it. Ps. 119.52
6. Keep His commands. Ps. 119.115
7. Hope in it. Ps. 119.81,114, 130.5
8. Let His promises comfort us in suffering. Ps. 119.50
9. Love it. Ps. 119.165
10. Meditate on it. Ps. 119.78
11. Ponder it. Ps. 119.95
12. Remember the word of encouragement. Heb. 12.5
13. See the promises and welcome them from a distance. Heb. 11.1
14. Tremble at it. Ps. 119.161

### H. How to Minister and be Ministered to During Suffering

God never intended that we suffer alone. He designed the body of Christ in such a way that we are to minister to each other's needs. 1 Cor. 12.24-26 says in part, "But God has combined the members of the body . . . so that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it . . ." See Rom. 12.4 and 1 Cor. 12.12-27. We not only need to consider how we receive help from others, but how we can reach out to them when they are going through difficult times. Here are a few examples of ways we can give and receive care during suffering. See the "one another" passages for others.

1. We can cheer up the anxious with a kind word. Prov. 12.25
2. We can sustain the weary with a word. Isa. 50.4
3. Pleasant words are sweet to our soul and healing to our bones. Prov. 16.24
4. We can carry other's burdens and allow them to carry ours. Gal. 6.2
5. We can comfort and be comforted by others. 2 Cor. 1.3-4
6. We can encourage and be encouraged by others. Heb. 3.13, 12.25, 1 Thess. 5.14
7. We can help in practical ways, and let them help us. 2 Tim. 1.18
8. We can help the weak and receive help when we are weak. 1 Thess. 5.14
9. We can mourn with others and allow them to mourn with us. Rom. 12.15
10. We can pray and be prayed for by others. 2 Cor. 1.10-11
11. We can refresh and be refreshed by others. 2 Cor. 7.13, 2 Tim. 1.16
12. We can share in their troubles by meeting needs. Phil. 4.14-15

13. We can sympathize with others, and let them sympathize with us. Heb. 10.34

### I. How to Avoid Bringing Suffering on Others

Unfortunately, a significant part of suffering from believers comes from fellow Christians. This can especially be true in cross-cultural situations. Let's be sure we aren't the cause of others' suffering! Here are just a few things the word tells us to avoid in order to not cause others to hurt.

1. Don't be "miserable comforters" by preaching, condemning, etc. Job 15.2
2. Don't bite and devour each other. Gal. 5.15
3. Don't gossip about each other. Proverbs 11.13, 16.20, 16.28
4. Don't grumble against each other. James 5.9
5. Don't hate each other. Tit. 3.3
6. Don't judge each other. Rom. 2.1-3, 14.4, 14.13
7. Don't lie to each other. Col. 3.9
8. Don't provoke and envy each other. Gal. 5.26
9. Don't show favoritism. James 2.1
10. Don't slander or speak against each other. Titus 3.1-2, James 4.11, 1 Pet. 2.1

### J. How to Relate to Those Who Cause Our Suffering

1. Be on our guard. 2 Tim. 4.15
2. Bless them. Lk. 6.28, Rom. 12.14, 1 Pet. 3.9
3. Do good to them. Lk. 6.27,35
4. Don't be afraid of them. Mt. 10.26,28
5. Don't curse them. Rom. 12.14
6. Don't fear their threats. 1 Pet. 3.14
7. Don't repay evil for evil. Rom. 12.17, 1 Thess. 5.15
8. Don't repay insult with insult. 1 Pet. 3.9
9. Don't resist them. Mt. 5.39
10. Don't take revenge. Rom. 12.19
11. Forgive them. Lk 23.34, Acts 7.60
12. Love them. Mt. 5.44, Lk. 6.27-28
13. Turn the other cheek. Lk. 6.29

## SUMMARY

Serving God in cross-cultural situations increases the probability that we will suffer. This means we need to be "experts" in understanding God's view of suffering, and in knowing how to suffer according to biblical principles. Many Scriptures have been presented to give you a better biblical view of sufferings. To make greatest use of them, I encourage you to consider following these steps.

1. Use this study as a checklist, to discover areas of suffering you may need to grow in understanding, or in applying God's word. Go through the study and prayerfully look for these areas. For example, you may discover that you need to grow in responding better when you are suffering.
2. Look up the Scriptures noted in a specific area. Study and meditate on them in context. Prayerfully consider ways you can apply the principles, or grow in your understanding of them.
3. Engage in additional study in that area. Begin by discovering other Scriptures to study and meditate on. Then you might want to look for books which speak to the issue.
4. Begin to keep a journal related to suffering. For example, If you are looking at relating to God during suffering, write down how you relate to Him when you are hurting, and in what specific ways you might relate to Him more effectively. Keep a record of how your heart responds as you relate to Him in different ways.

### Suggested Reading

Many books have been written on suffering. Some of these may be helpful to those who are suffering. But remember that God's word should be our first recourse, and primary source of wisdom on the subject.

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 Phillips, J.B., Your God is Too Small. MacMillan, 1987.  
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 Yancy, Philip, Where is God When it Hurts. Campus Life Books, 1981.