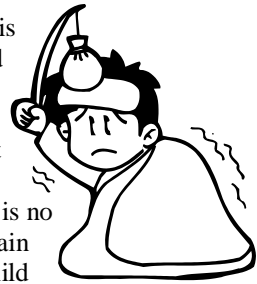


Suffering And Glory

Remember to fill in the Bible references before coming to the study

"If God is good, and all-powerful, why do people suffer?" How often we hear this question! Perhaps we ask it ourselves. Because of the deep feelings it arouses, we need humility and sensitivity, even in attempting an answer. Christians do not claim to know the answer to every question raised by suffering but the Bible does shed much light on the subject. Our thinking about suffering needs to be seen within the framework set out below. It will help to keep us steady in times of crisis.

There will always be details that we do not understand, but that does not mean that there is no explanation God knows many things that we do not, and He is not obliged to explain everything. Nor would we understand if God were to tell us. Could a two-year-old child understand complex science? Here, then, are some helpful signposts:



1. MAN'S SIN BROUGHT SUFFERING TO THE WORLD

God made a good world in which suffering had no part: **look up Genesis 1:31**

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Man used his original freedom to rebel against God and, as a consequence, suffering and death entered the world: **look up Romans 5:12**

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In today's society, suffering is often a direct consequence of human sinfulness and conflict. Sin is evil and inevitably leads to suffering. Behind the scenes, invisible to us, the Devil is at work. He is thoroughly malicious, and aims to inflict suffering on this world (**Luke 13:11 & 16**). The blame for suffering lies squarely both with man and the Devil.

2. GOD HAS ENTERED INTO OUR PAIN AND SUFFERING

God became a man in the person of His Son. He is not indifferent to our pain, but shares in it - supremely so at the cross. He is an example of patient suffering: look up 1 Peter 2:21 and 23

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The readiness of Jesus to suffer should inspire us and silence any tendency to question God. He was willing to suffer - so let us accept it too, unless it can be avoided. We know enough about God to trust Him with the unexplained.

3. GOD COMMANDS US TO HELP THOSE WHO SUFFER

Jesus had compassion on the sick and healed them. He has set us an example to follow. God would have us reduce the effects of sin, wherever possible: **look up James 1:27**

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4. GOD WILL CREATE A WORLD WITHOUT SUFFERING

Christians have something to look forward to. One day God will create a new Heaven and earth, in which suffering has no part: **look up Revelation 21:4**

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5. GOD USES SUFFERING TO MAKE US RELY ON HIM

God may use suffering to bring people to Himself. Suffering, like a surgeon's knife, can be a "severe mercy". Christians are taught by suffering to rely on God and not themselves. Paul's "thorn" of suffering (**2 Corinthians 12:7**) enabled him to prove God's strength: **look up 2 Corinthians 12:9**

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If we bear the five points above in mind we shall not find fault with God when suffering comes.

IN A WORLD OF SUFFERING WHAT CAN CHRISTIANS EXPECT?

1. THEY CAN EXPECT TO SUFFER LIKE OTHERS

Our Lord suffered, and the people of God have always had to endure trials. It is important to grasp this, so that when we suffer we do not think that God has failed us. We are not promised exemption from the general experiences and sufferings of mankind: **look up 2 Corinthians 1:8**

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2. THEY CAN EXPECT GOD'S HELP WHEN THEY SUFFER

Our misfortunes never catch God unawares. Though we may not understand why God is permitting our suffering, we can be sure that He is in control. *Nothing* can separate us from His love (Romans 8:35-39). We may wonder how we can possibly cope, but God never fails: **look up Psalm 46:1**

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3. THEY CAN EXPECT TO GROW THROUGH SUFFERING

We must be open to this possibility. The Devil always hopes we will be angry at God and turn our backs on Him. If we resist this temptation, we will see God working wonders to bring good out of the most distressing circumstances of our life: **look up Romans 8:28**

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The Lord is our Shepherd, leading us into green pastures (**Psalm 23**) - some of which are found in the most unexpected places. He knows what we need, and can teach us many lessons through suffering.

FINALLY: ... HEAVEN

The most important thing of all is to fix our eyes on Heaven before suffering comes. If all our hopes are here in this world, we will be unable to cope when health loved ones and possessions are denied us. Christ has come to prepare us for a better world. To realise this gives us a perspective on suffering. It will not make it more pleasant, but it will help us to keep our balance.

So never forget that Heaven, not this world, is our home (**Revelation 22:3-5**) and to be with Christ is far better: **look up Philippians 1:23**

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God is preparing us for Glory. We are not there yet, but already we can rejoice in what God has in store for us: **look up Luke 10:20**

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Heaven will more than compensate for all the sufferings of this present.