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# What about Suffering?

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**Matthew 5:10; James 1:2; 1 Peter 4:13; Hebrews 10:24; 2 Corinthians 1:24; 12:9 Philippians 1:19-25; 2:17**

*"My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life." (Psalm 119:50)*

Such dates galvanize us as Americans; perhaps they can even define a generation. This is what had happened with the people living during WWII and what may be happening in our current generation since 9/11. Such dates cause us to ponder, to stop what we are doing, and seek order and purpose in senseless tragedy. No one likes suffering. As much as I try to avoid it, it keeps happening to me. Maybe you know someone who has dealt with this. Perhaps you, too, have suffered through tragedy or loss and have wondered, *why*. Perhaps you have sought an answer or the significance of an event. I have often asked *why*, and have sought a purpose or meaning.

Suffering has a way of getting our attention, and usually our 'why?' and 'how come?' become the all-consuming focus for us, and, of course, a serious, if not devastating, assault to our faith may result. Those assaults of suffering will either build up or destroy our faith in and commitment to Christ. To a non-Christian, this is very tragic indeed. Without a strong foundation of faith and obedience, one will gain nothing from an experience. It will be meaningless and senseless. Yet, God has chosen to make suffering a part of His plan, a plan to help us grow, to learn, to see what life is really about, and to see what is important, versus what is trivial.

Too often we seek the *whys* when we encounter suffering, whether it be from seeing it in the news to personally experiencing a loss. We ask, *why did this happen to me?* Or, perhaps we rush to judgment, blaming someone or something for it, without looking carefully at the situation. We need to consider that sometimes there is no answer, as was in the case of Job. There will be a time when all of our questions will be answered, but, for now, our attention should be on Christ, not on the situation.

In Biblical, Christian theology, we are given a worldview and perspective of life and suffering that does not fit with that of society, or with our own feelings or desires. We are given a purpose that transcends suffering, where the big picture is not on earthly goods and situations, but in relationships, and ultimately in Christ. We are also given a picture that does not mesh with our self-perceptions, because we see ourselves as good and not deserving of suffering. Yet, in God eyes, we are

not good, nor do we deserve good. We do not like such statements. They cause us to be angry—perhaps, even at God. Yet, our anger is misplaced, as God is perfect, and just in His judgment. He is holy, sovereign, and pure. We, by our own free will and choice, sinned against Him, beginning with Adam and Eve, and continuing with all peoples since then. Sin is absolutely heinous in God's sight. So, Christ paid the ultimate price for our sin, that we might enter His presence with our sins covered, having a place securely reserved for us in eternity. That is what *atonement* means. We are under the veneer of His redemption. Even though we are corrupted and full of sin, we are still called to grow and to seek His Will. Whatever you may have been taught, experienced, felt, or thought, nonetheless, our sin is still there. So, we need to understand that our ideas of, *we do not deserve this*, are not rooted in Biblical precepts, but rather in our own mind. That does not mean God does not care or that He does not have a wonderful plan for our life, because He does. It just may not be what we want. However, it is what is best.

We only see a small, small fragment of life and meaning. God sees the whole picture. Our time here is a mere vapor to what is ahead. We do not see the big picture, but only the here and now. He sees us with eternity in mind, so to help us be formed and matured for His purpose. His plan is best. Although it can be a hard and long road for some, it is worth it more than we can possibly imagine! Take this to heart: He is there guiding, loving, empowering, and even carrying us through it!

### **What does Suffering mean?**

As we look at church history, especially in the lives of many Christian saints throughout time, one key theme runs through it all. From the first century Christians to modern China, that theme is **suffering**. Oswald Chambers wrote, *You cannot help suffering; it is a true and needful training for the soul that dares to be true to God*. Suffering is an essential aspect of our Christian growth, whether it is mental, physical, financial, or spiritual. It is the main connection that enables the battery to power us to be the best Christian possible. It is the link between the Holy Spirit and God's perfect plan working in us. Without this vital connection, the power source--our Lord--will not be able to prime us for His service. We may have the ability and the power of the Spirit, but the vital link between them is missing. A spark of truth and service may pass between them that causes us to think we are working and doing fine. But, there can be so much more! So, when that connection is firmly in place, the power will flow the most, and our walk in Him becomes our best. That is why we are encouraged in the Word to hold on tight and be tough to the end. In other words, perseverance knows that our future is in His Hands, in His control, and whatever consequences we may face, we are to look to the rewards to come. Our hope and purpose is to be with Christ in everlasting eternity.

John, chapter nine, records a personal tragedy, a seemingly valid reason to ask *why*. A person was born blind at birth. How could there be anything more

senseless? The Disciples quickly picked up that this could be sin, our original sin that penetrates and corrupts everything in the universe (Rom. 5:12-21). After all, it is classic Jewish thinking to jump to that conclusion, as did the friends of Job. There are situations where sin does infect the innocent. A child with cancer is a prime example, as the cells of our body are not perfect, nor is our environment, so when the two converge, devastation can result. But, in the case of the blind man, sin was not the issue; he was blinded so that God could be glorified. Again, people may cry, *foul*. Why would God do such a dreadful thing, especially to a newborn baby? But, He did not do a dreadful thing. The miracle of Christ willing to work in us and to give us anything, including a limited life, is pure Grace, and not senseless. So, when bad things happen, we are not to see the dilemma, rather what we have left to work with, what we have in front of us to go on, and learn to count it as joy.

God's perfect purpose is to ordain us to flow in His perfect Will. Yet, we do not live in a perfect world. So, He has to work in us--through the sin and corruption of the world, and through our bad choices. This is what Romans, chapter eight, is about. In this, we are to see Him loving us and working in us, regardless of the situation. This is what generates the joy. Our ultimate joy is who we are in Him, not our circumstance, not our experience, not our knowledge, or education, and definitely not our feelings. Our Joy comes from the fact of our free gift of Grace that we did not deserve. Our joy in Christ must supersede all else. It must be the centerpiece in our lives.

The path to following God's Will and seeing that joy is not always an easy path, is a path filled with potholes and highwaymen. Yet, the modern church considers suffering negative, because it does not line up with happiness, peace, and joy. Some even teach that suffering is a sign that you are out of God's Will and have unredeemed sin. However, this is not Biblical. It is a difficult journey, but take heart; our sufferings are very temporary in the scheme of our eternal existence. Check out John 16; 33; Romans 8:18 and 1 Peter 4:19.

### **Understanding the 'whys.'**

**Why, why, why? we ask! Yet, it is not so much a question of how we answer the question of suffering (what is called the *problem of suffering* theologically), the *why it has happened to me*.**

It is not about how we can get an answer, seeking the *why* from God. Job discovered that the *why* is not important. Rather, it is about *how* we live our lives, regardless of our circumstances. God understands that even though we may have buried a loved one, we cannot bury our feelings. We need time to mourn and vent—and even invent ways of coping with the loss in our lives. (Hence why there are so many conflicting theories in psychology!) God records in His Word that people in biblical days were in no hurry to rush through the process of grief. But, they did eventually get on with their lives! *"A time to kill and a time to heal, a time*

*to tear down and a time to build"*, (Ecc. 3:3). The *why* is not the solo quest we are to seek. *Why* is not the place we are to live our lives and concentrate our devotions. Dwelling on the *why* will keep us from learning, and take our eyes off Him. It even interferes in His healing grace, because, when we are so full of *whys*, there is no room for Christ!

Remain faithful and enjoy the ride of life even when you hit a pothole and bump your head.

**Suffering has five main themes to it:**

1. Our God is good. Our pain allows us to identify with our Lord, who suffered for our sin in our place, being without fault and undeserving of the suffering. So, why should we expect better? It draws us closer to and more intimate with Him. God will actually enter into the pain with us. So if there is no healing, He is just working harder in us!
2. God will use our suffering for the greater good that is His purpose. Consider it fertilizer to the garden of life. Giving our burden to God through prayer, as Paul did, will allow us to grow in greater depth spiritually.
3. Remember, God is working even when we do not feel it! The chief purpose of God's Will for us is to grow us closer to Him! It is not about money, or power, or our bodies, or work, or anything else! The focus on Christ and His character will perfect our character to be more Christ like and be in His will.
4. Suffering is not being a martyr; rather, it is valuable for our living as we learn to surrender everything to Him. Never force suffering on yourself for attention, as this does not glorify God, only yourself!
5. When we are filled with joy, even in the mist of suffering, we mirror to the world the character of Christ. The main theme of suffering is not how we answer the *ways* and *whys*, but how we live our lives so to still give God the glory! How do we allow Him to use us, and then share our experiences for the benefit of others, such as people like Joni Erickson Tada?

Suffering is a choice, not of will we go though it or not, but how will we deal and learn from it. That is what is important! When we trust in Him, He will not forsake us, leave us, or abandon us. He is always there. Remember, Jesus Himself suffered the most on our behalf--the Person, the God who cares for us! He took our place of suffering and bore our sins so we could have meaning, purpose, and a place in Heaven.

We need to take to heart that when life is at its darkest, God is there. He understands, and loves and carries us though it. We need to accept the fact that God is in control, even if we do not understand. It is by faith we can endure it. We

can place such faith in Him because of the assurance we have through His Word, even when we do not understand. Our true home and purpose is not here; it is still to come. We are not made for this world, we are just here to learn all we can, and with what Christ has given to us, make the best and most of the situations in which we find ourselves. Then, one day, we will be called to our true home in eternity, in Heaven. So, let us cling to the hope we have, not the things we experience!

**For further help please see our articles on: [God Really does have a Purpose behind your Problems!](#) and [Growing through Difficult Times of Waiting and Confusion](#).**

**Some further comforting verses:** Psalm 31:9; Psalm 119:50; Isaiah 41:10; Romans 8:18; 28-29; 35-37; James 1:2-3; 12; John 9; 14:1; Colossians 1:24; 1 Thessalonians 1:6-7; 1 Peter 4:12-19; Hebrews 10:34; Revelation 21:4.

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*“The Holy Spirit longs to reveal to you the deeper things of God. He longs love through you. He longs to work through you. Through the blessed Holy Spirit you may have: strength for every duty, wisdom for every problem, comfort in every sorrow, joy in His overflowing service.” T.J. Bach*

## **God Really does have a Purpose behind your Problems!**

### **God is our refuge and strength!**

As a pastor I hear this lament all of the time, sometimes it even comes from my own lips, "Why doesn't God help me in my troubles?" This is a legitimate question to ask. A lot of Christians tend to be afraid of asking God why, or earnestly seek to resolve their crisis. Thinking I do not have enough faith or I would not go through this. Or I do not want others to know, for they would think bad of me or that I caused it. Or we use the crisis to grab the attention ourselves.

**Why, why, why we ask! Yet, it is not so much a question of how we answer the problem of suffering, the why it has happened to me.** It is not always about how we can get an answer, seeking the 'why' from God, the why this has happened to me. The why is not always important as Job found out. Rather it is about how we live our lives regardless of our circumstances. God understands that even though we may have buried a loved one, we cannot bury our feelings. We need time to mourn and vent—and even inventing ways of coping with the loss

in our lives. God records in His Word that people in biblical days were in no hurry to rush through the process of grief. But, they did eventually get on with their lives! *"a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build"*, (Ecc. 3:3). The 'why' is not the solo quest we are to seek. 'Why' is not the place we are to live our lives and concentrate our devotions too. By dwelling on the 'Why' will keep us away from learning, takes our eyes off Him, it even interferes in His healing grace, because we are so full of 'whys' there is no room for Christ!

If we are going through tough times, we need to know why, and what we should do when we are in them. If not we become confused, frustrated and disillusioned. At the same time we cannot be consumed with the why! Yet in the Psalms we see David go through so much and still trust and obey more than most of us could ever do. And he does this without the New Testament at his disposal, or the scores of resources and places to seek help that we have. Yet David does ask God the hard questions, but he did not stop there. David also knew God intimately and trusted him wholeheartedly even in times of severe trials, and even going through them again and again. Just read through the Psalms, and see David's passion and conviction to God's call.

We must first adjust the way we perceive life. Even as Christians sometimes we have faulty views and expectations we pick up by listening to bad teaching and bad advice and then there is the influence of our culture. First of all bad things do happen! And they happen to good people (in the way we see good, in God's eyes of course all have sinned and there is no good, except what Christ brings us). We will go through trials, troubles, and tribulations. So what we have to do is figure out what we do when it happens.

**Read Psalm 46: 1** What lesson do we learn from it, how do we grow better so we do not become bitter. We need to see His promise is:

God does not look upon trouble as we do. Where we see stress He sees opportunities. Where we see crisis, He sees growth and betterment. God's purpose in times of crisis and trouble is to teach His children precious lessons. They are intended to educate, and build us up. And when we learn from them and ride out these storms of life, we will see the great promise fulfilled. His glorious recompense will come to us throughout eternity. We need to see the joy and opportunities through times of problems. Because we will learn that there is a sweet and wonderful joy we can have here too. We do not have to wait until Heaven. We can learn to make our life joy filled by seizing the crisis and growing from it. To become the person that we are capable of being for our benefit and His glory!

So when God tests you, or bad stuff happens, we need to see it as a time for you to learn and to trust Him by changing what is wrong with you while putting His promises in your heart and feet. And when it is over we can look back and see that our trials have been necessary. We are better, He is glorified!

I do not like going through trials, for many years I would try my hardest and get out of a trial. And then be thankful that it was over. But they kept happening and happening, so I had to rethink my strategy from my purpose to what has revealed in His Word. And that is to recognize the crisis as a challenge from God to learn valuable lessons to make me grow in maturity and strength. And then I was receiving a better blessing than I ever had before. As stated in I Chron. 4:9-10, as the ministry He entrusted me with grew and grew. I can praise His name in deep suffering and delight in the blessings. And when those storms of trials and crisis come, I'm prepared, because I now see them as opportunities to gain more strength and maturity, and even obtaining a larger measure of Divine grace. Thus our adversity can and will become our tools to grow and learn to be our best for His highest. So things that are seemingly against us, He will turn around in His time and way. We have to get out of His way and allow Christ to work. And this is how we become more than conquerors through Him who loved us. (Rom 8: 37-39)

To be a content Christian and happy with life, we need to see life as a series of problem solving and learning opportunities. Because the problems we face will either overwhelm and overpower us or grow and develop us. Thus, the path of joy is determined by how we respond to them. Unfortunately, most people including Christians will fail to see God's hand in their life. Choosing instead to focus on their problem and allowing it to take over their lives: Like a terrorist holding them at gunpoint and refusing to allow the help to rescue them.

God wants to use our problems for good, to make us better and stronger for our personal development and in turn for us to be able to help others in their lives. So the unhappy, confused and disillusioned Christian will react irrationally with their problems rather than taking the time through spiritual discipline to see the advantage they bring them. So what can we do to refocus ourselves onto the right path?

### **The Coming Storms of Life**

Unexpected crises are a part of life, they are like storms. At this moment you are in one of three storm categories; either you just came out of a one, or you are in a one right now, or you are headed into one. Such as it is with crises, they cannot be escaped, even if you hide in the storm shelter it is still there pounding away! Thus we need to learn how to prepare and ride them out. As with crises, we must learn to prepare and ride them out by learning and maturing from them.

One of the great illustrations of both crises and storms in the Bible is in Acts. Paul is headed from one prison in Jerusalem to one in Rome for an appeal to Caesar. Paul and 275 of his companions were headed straight to the biggest storm and crisis of their lives. It lasted many days, and they lost all hope, until Paul through the visit of an Angel reassured the crew.

**Read Acts 27** From this passage we get three insights on how to guide us through the storms of life:

### **1. Determine the reason for your storm.**

Bad weather happens for scientific reasons, they are caused by low pressure zones, evaporation cycles and jet streams all converging. Our crises in life too have a root cause. So what is the cause for yours? To make this determination you must dig below the surface of your fears and experiences. You have to uncover things you may not want to face, but have to, to be able to get through them.

For Paul he had three reasons. 1. The ship captain did not listen to Paul's godly advice and focused on greed from the ship's owner, in effect bad advice. 2. They also let the bad advice escalate to the crew and their lust for profit and speedy return to the homeport. 3. They relied on their greed and impatience to cloud a sound logical look to their circumstance and the right decision to make. Such as the captain, owner and crew knew that storms accrue where they were headed at that time of the year. So they relied on luck and misplaced hope rooted in greed, by a vote of public opinion that led to disaster. One bad decision escalated by another and so forth.

For us we need to be aware of relying on just what we know. Because it will cause us to get impatient and then we will not listen to good advice or even seek it, thus we will make bad decisions. So when the storm clouds begin to form, it is not a time to be impatient and ignore it, hoping it will go away. It is a time to seek His face in surrendered devotion and prayer.

Use the time to seek the reason. Maybe a bad decision you made? Bad advice you received? Sin? Or perhaps you are not growing in faith and practice, and God needs your attention. Maybe you cannot find the reason, Job was never given one. So if you took a careful look inside yourself, immersed yourself in prayer and sought Godly advice, and still no reason, then don't get hung up on seeking the reason. Maybe He does not want you to know it, or you are not ready for it. But in most cases it is there in plain sight, you just need to get the distractions of fear, your will, and expectations out of the way to see it.

### **2. Determine what the result of the crisis may be. Read Psalm 76:16**

The crew knew the risk of shipwreck and death, but greed clouded their sight. Paul warned them of the result, but they would not listen. So God used their bad judgment to open up further opportunities as stated in Acts 28.

What will be the consequences and possibilities for our direction and decisions? So we need to learn and grow from our crisis, to see the opportunities



to enlarge our perspective, sharpen our skills, and develop our character. And we need to do this in our preparation and not wait until the end to figure things out. Because when we have the attitude of learning through it, the storms are not so tough, and we receive the blessing and maturity with less stress and struggle. Look ahead, plan accordingly through your prayer and walk with Him.

### 3. Determine your response

We need to ask ourselves how do I respond to the crisis, what is the best thing I could do? There are 3 elements that make a Godly and correct beneficial response.

1. **Deal with the problem.** You cannot solve any problem by ignoring it! This is not an easy process, because it requires us to give up of ourselves and self will and put our focus on Christ. To be able to focus on Christ the lens must be moved from our will to His. Then the proper perspective will come by prayer and His Word, and listening to others and comparing what they say to the Word. Know that God will give you the strength and perseverance, because what gets us through is not our strength, but His!
2. **Confess Sin.** Many times we bring these crisis onto ourselves. We do this by deliberate sin, or just making bad decisions and listening to bad advice. So we have to determine our part and correct it. Seek His forgiveness and others if necessary. We have to be big enough to allow the Holy Spirit to live in us, and we become big not by food, but by confession, admitting our mistakes and then be willing to correct them. We cannot seek to blame others or make excuses. Yes people will do stuff to you and ruin your life; there too we have to seek our part for allowing it to happen, or by looking at our motives and behavior. Being responsible may not be the thing certain ex-presidents do, but it is what a Godly disciple of Christ does. This is the mark of a genuine leader and emotional maturity!
3. **Take God's Promises to heart.** Pick up one of those promise books at a Christian bookstore. Then go over the verses in the category that you are dealing with. Then pray through those verses. There are over 7,000 Bible promises that come directly from our Lord and Savior! You need to see them like a credit card with no spending limit and that you do not pay back, except by your love, trust and obedience. So charge away at those verses, see His love is guiding you. This is the way to use His building materials so your home will become storm proof. So when the crises come you will ride them out to be better, stronger and more content to be the person that Christ called you to be!

But why must I go through this stuff, is there not an easier way? Yes, we can ignore Him and live as a heathen, undisciplined, ignorant, confused, unhappy and purposeless. Then after this very short time on earth we are in Heaven for eternity,

our reward, our character, our relationships will be determined by what we have learned here in this life!

**Read James 1:2-3** During my times of adversity I have learned five ways God will use the problems in your life:

1. **God uses problems to Examine you.** People can be like canned food without the label; if you want to know what's inside, just open them up! Does God need to open you up? When has God tested your faith with a problem? How did you respond? What did you learn? What do you think going through problems will reveal about you? Is your will and desire ruling over you or is Christ the true Lord of your life?
2. **God uses problems to Lead you in the right Direction.** Sometimes God needs to slap us in the face to wake us up. Without such wakeup calls we will blindly fall onto the wrong path that leads to greater disappointment and ruin. We will not see it coming, because our will is in the way of His. But know this, God is there leading and protecting us, even when we do not see Him! And be warned if your will is in the way of His, He will light a fire under you to get you moving. If He didn't, it would show He does not love you! Just as a parent will discipline their child out of love. Problems will point us in a right direction if we surrender our will over to His. His love is there to motivate us and change us into the best path and plan, much better than we could ever come up with! Is God trying to get your attention? Sometimes it takes a painful situation to make us change our ways. Pr. 20: 30
3. **God uses problems to Discipline you.** Sometime the only way to learn the lessons in life and to make us better is only by suffering and failure. It is like as a child being told by it's parents not to touch a hot stove. And we all have touched that hot stove! Thus we learned by being burned. Now know this, God is not up there getting His jollies by infecting us, not at all! He loves us so much He will resort to what He has to do, to bring us up closer to Him. Remember He sacrificed His own Son and the extreme pain Jesus went through for us. Pain is a part of life, so it is best we except and learn from it so we do not have to keep getting burned. Most people only learn the value of something, such as health, money, or relationships by losing them. It was the best thing that could have happened to me, for it taught me attention to your laws. Ps 119:71-72
4. **God uses problems to Shield you from greater harm.** Problems can be a blessing in disguise, because they can prevent us from being harmed by something more severe. Such as a car breaking down just before is reaches the railroad tracks as a train is zooming by. Car breakdowns are stressful and costly, but the train is even more so. Just as the story of Joseph, he suffered needlessly from our perspective, but God protected him and turned it into incredible good. "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good..." Gen 50:20 (NIV)

5. **God uses problems to Refine and Improve you.** Problems are the main ingredients for us to build character. The key to these building materials is that they need to be used in the right way to be able to fit and function correctly. And that right way is how we respond and learn. God is far more interested in our character than our comfort. In the grand scheme of things, the meaning of life, the reason we live the life we are given is our relationship with God, and then others around us. So the most important thing we have in those relationships is our character, the only two things we will take into eternity, is relationships and character.

*"We can rejoice when we run into problems ...they help us learn to be patient and patience develops strength of character in us and helps us trust God more each time we use it until finally our hope and faith are strong and steady."*  
Rom. 5:3-4 (LB)

**Read Gal 2:20-21; Phil 1:6; 3:10** Remember this main point: Suffering and problems are not a personal attack from our God, He may bring us through circumstances to make us better and more of use to Him. So be assured that God is at work in your life, even when you cannot see Him. We will go through trials and suffering because of the sin that has infected the world and us. We will grow best for His glory by recognizing and confessing sin. Then we can grow even more when we learn and mature from those experiences. You will have far more contentment and joy in your life when you cooperate and allow God's love to rule in your life, and surrender your fears, desires and pain over to Him.

**Read Ecc. 8:14 So what happens if I messed up? What can I do to recover from the Adversity's of Life? What should I do when tragedy strikes?**

Our primary goal is to learn from our mistakes and experiences, so we can grow in our faith and practice for His glory.

1. **Ask God to ease your grief.** This is not denying it or ignoring your crisis, you are going through it for a reason. But as David did, tell God exactly how you feel. Use this to enhance your relationship with Him. (Ps.34: 18; Ps. 62:8)
2. **Be willing to receive help from others.** Don't isolate yourself. Christianity is not a solo sport, it is a team effort filled with relationships and opportunities. Find your support in a good and solid church family. If you are in a big church get in a small group, do not be alone or anonymous! Gal. 6:2
3. **Refuse to be bitter.** You have a choice: become better or bitter. (Job 21: 25 Heb 12:15) How can I avoid bitterness? Accept what cannot be changed. (Job 11:13,16) Focus on what you still have, not what you have lost (1 Th. 5:18)

4. **Remember what is important in life.** And guess what, it is not our things and stuff. It is not the career, cars, boats, toys, education, looks, power, or status. It is Relationships, not things that matter. (Luke 12:15 | Tim. 6:7)
5. **Focus on Christ.** - This is the secret reservoir of strength we have access to. This gives us the perseverance in tough times. (Phil. 4:13)

### **How do I do this?**

- **Place your trust and reliance upon Christ;** this is where your stability comes from. (Isa. 26:3 Ps.112: 6.7; 125:1)
- **Learn to Listen.** To our Lord through your prayer and devotions. And to godly advice. This is where our direction comes from. (Jer. 29:11)
- **Look to Christ for salvation!** "God is our Redemption, so because of what He did, we can draw our strength from Him and rest in His protection. Remember He always helps in times of trouble, if you do not see it, then you are not looking. (Ps. 46:2)

Some comforting verses: Psalm 31:9; Psalm 119:50; Isaiah 41:10; Rom 8:18; 28-29; 35-37; James 1:2-3;12; John 14:1; I Pet 4:12-19 ; Rev. 21:4!

## **Growing through Difficult Times of Waiting and Confusion**

Oswald Chambers wrote, *"You cannot help suffering; it is a true and needful training for the soul that dares to be true to God."*

Suffering is an essential aspect of our Christian growth, whether it is mental, physical, financial, or spiritual. It is the main connection that enables the batteries to power us to be the best Christian possible. It is the link between the Holy Spirit and God's perfect plan working in us. Without this vital connection, the power source of our Lord will not be able to prime us for His service. We may have the ability and the power of the Spirit, but the vital link between them is missing. A spark of truth and service may pass between them, so we think we are working and doing fine. But there can be so much more! So when that connection is firmly in place, the power will flow the most, so our walk in Him becomes prepared to be the best that we can be.

That is why we are encouraged in the Word to hold on tight and be tough to the end. In other words waiting is perseverance, which is knowing that our future is in His Hands, in His control. Thus, whatever the situation or the consequences we may face, we are to look to the rewards to come. Our hope and purpose is to be with Christ in eternity everlasting.

## How would you define Perseverance?

The dictionary defines perseverance as a *“continuance in a state of grace to the end, leading to eternal salvation.”* However, it is one thing to read about someone persevering through times of great adversity, and another thing being the person who is going through difficult times trying to persevere. Especially when you feel safe thinking nothing is or else can go wrong, then BAM your world falls apart!

We are encouraged in the Word to take comfort and strengthen ourselves in the Lord. If we belong to Christ, then the connections we have with people, and the events we face and trials of our lives are in His hands. From the greatest triumph to the loneliest tragedy, our great comfort is knowing that our God is still sovereign.

In I Peter: 6-7 our Lord lays it out for us, *“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”*

## A Look into Psalm 62 Growth through Waiting

This is a Psalm of waiting as David wandered in the real physical desert of Judah while in his own personal desert of despair. David's world had come crashing down on him. Having faced severe adversity in the past and overcame it to become King, now once again David flees for his life. Saying in effect “Hey God, haven't I done this before?” And this time it is not from corrupt power seeking individuals, King Saul. It was from his own son Absalom (I Sam. 24). I do not believe we can understand David's true pain and plight. All that he accomplished, all that he lost, his highs and lows, his tragedies and triumphs and then once again at a ripe old age to go through it again. Once again David wanders the desert of waiting and despair, as he flees for his life. But even in the scorching heat of waiting, David has an ace up his sleeve! David is not just waiting on the circumstances to get better, nor is he allowing this tragedy to rule his faith and life. David is waiting on God, his rock and salvation even in the mist of shifting sands and the chaos of life. God is his defense that cannot be moved or thwarted.

- During times of waiting and confusion what do you do?
- How do you handle yourself, your family, work, school, and strangers?
- And most important how do you handle God?
- Do you wait for an answer with confidence from our Lord, or do you fret in circles throwing yourself in chaos and confusion resulting in anger and hopelessness?

- Why does God make us wait? Is there a plan that might make us stronger and better?
- How can you seek the quiet of trust and obedience to our Lord? That even through the deserts of despair when your world is crashing around you, how can you learn the lesson He gives us and praise His name as David did?

There was no water in the desert for David as he fled from his own son and his death squad. His mouth was parched, his lips were dry, his muscles ached in pain; yet his spirits were with joy. Because David knew of God's faithfulness. He had already experienced it. Even though he is literally going through the same trial again he experienced with Saul, David's confidence was in God's sovereignty and control. He knew he was loved and a better plan was unfolding before the hot sands under his feet, more than he could ever fathom. The lips that were chapped and parched praised His name. The flesh that ached in pain lifted up its arms to His name. The soul that experienced such a severe letdown and pain is satisfied in joy. Because in the end God wins, your life may be lost as the worst case may be, yet this life is a mere dress rehearsal to what is to come.

- Do you struggle with peace and quiet in your soul and mind?
- Does the Spirit in you knock on your door while the noises of your frustrations are so loud you cannot hear His leading?
- Do you see waiting as a loss? That opportunities and blessings are passing you by?
- Do you grow angry with God that He will allow this to happen to you?
- How can you turn your despair around to you see His hope and love?
- How can you lift up your worn and aching lips and arms with praise?
- Can you see Him directing your path? If not what is in the way? Perhaps your fears, your expectations, relying on your limited knowledge and experience and not our Lord?

Waiting on God is not sitting on the couch in front of the TV and doing nothing. Waiting is not being idle, just as with a car it is useless if it does not go anywhere, if it just starts and idles in one place, what good will it be? Waiting is a process where we assess what is going on our life through continuous prayer, the Word and Godly counsel. Thus, when we wait we are growing even closer in our personal relationship with Christ and those around us. It is a fortifying time of learning and growth. It is also one of the keys to being a committed disciple and child of the Lord. Because one of the main aspects of life is who we are in Christ. And knowing who we are in Christ helps us put life in perspective. And that perspective is that we are here in our life and relationships to learn and grow for God's glory. This is the meaning of life! He loves us and died for us! Everything else that happens that we think is so important such as career, material things, power, position, looks, and such is not even secondary in God's eyes.

- What is important to you in life?

- Can you write out a list of everything of value to you such as material goods, job, and relationships? What would the list say?
- Now write the same type of list, but this time as God would write it.
- What are the differences?
- What do you need to work on?
- How can you get the right Godly counsel to help you through those difficult times?
- Can you do it better alone?
- Who are you in Christ, that is what did He do for you and what do you owe Him?

To Him what is important is our learning and growth in Christ, being the person in relationship to Him and then to others representing Him. As Chambers says so well, “our utmost for His highest:” which means to be our best for His glory no matter what. And sometimes the only way to get that growth is to captivate our attention by adversity. It is a honing process and it is a very temporary process that lasts mere moments in the scope of His time of eternity.

Waiting can be harder than working! Waiting is how we are perfected!

- How often has God had to get your attention? If not, will He have to?
- So what can you do to be a person who waits on God?
- How do you learn?
- Do you know for certain that whatever you face is temporary?
- How can this help you?
- People commit suicide because they lose hope; they see no other way out of their situation. How can you see the hope in yours?
- How are you perfected in time of trials?

The Psalm encourages us when we wait we are to do it silently (vs. 1,5) That we can and must seek Godly counsel, but not use it as an excuse to draw attention to ourselves. Even in the deserts of despair our travesties are not about us, they are about growing in Him. The attention belongs to God and Him alone. It is a time for us to listen, not a time to do all of the talking and griping!

- One of the problems when we go through tough stuff is we let everyone know about it by creating a ‘pity party’ for ourselves. Yes we need to let others in (being totally private is unbiblical as we are meant to be in relationship with others), but when does the line get crossed from council and support to attention seeking and the poor me attitude?

The Psalms also encourages us to wait continually (vs. 8; Psalm 31:15; Isa. 26:3). This is not easy for most of us in our fast food and fast paced culture. We want results yesterday, while He wants us to settle down our anxiety and rely on Him. We have to conform to His schedule, and not expect God to follow our flawed reasoning and limited insight.

- In times of stress how can you learn to refocus on Christ and His schedule?
- How can you do this continually so you are covered in the Spirit, and not trapped in your own anxiety?
- How do you suppose that waiting will free you from stress and anxiety?

### **Growth through hardship, adversity and joy**

For David God was not an idea or some obscure philosophy that he engaged in with academics; God was his salvation, and his defense. God was real and active in his life, no matter what the option, opportunity or obstruction may be.

- How can you learn to ride out the storms of life, so you will not be moved?
- Do you “*flounder on the fence,*” struggle between the life that was promised to you and the life that you have experienced?
- Do you kick people when they are down? If so why, and is that a God centered act?
- Have you experienced others kicking you when you are down? If so, why do they do that?
- Do you feel that God is kicking you when you are down?
- How can you be not consumed with the blessings of the wicked when you think you have so little?
- What are the true treasures in life?

Perhaps you can trust Him when things go well, but when you lose a job, a sickness, a death in the family or total ruin as David had, where does your trust and hope lie?

Do you struggle with experiencing affliction inwardly, yet are seeking the higher ground of His deliverance because He promised his loving kindness? Then you are not alone, because that is exactly how David felt! What we feel and what we experience can be light years apart from each other and reality.

- Once you have gone through a trial do you feel better prepared for the next one?
- Once you have gone through a trial do you feel better prepared to be a person who listens, sympathizes and helps others?
- People who never experience hardship, and get everything they want and feel they deserve it; what kind of people are they?

Can you go to them when you have a problem or need a listening ear? Are they able to know Christ deeply as He calls us to do? Why or why not? My experience is that when we skip out on life’s lessons we end up weak, selfish, and good for nothing. Unable to be the person He has called us to be! Sorrow will remove shallowness! Shallowness can never approach God, nor receive grace effectively.



- Can you start to see the purpose in our trials? That they are there not to attack us personally, but make us better?
- How can you see the joy in trials? That is, can you see the over all purpose of God for you in the midst of your life?
- If not what do you need to do to see God's perspective over yours?

Our trials do not make us better themselves, they only allow Him to make us better!!

### **Growth through Trust and Refuge**

Waiting on God is what we do sometimes as His child. When things happen that we cannot explain, and when we are full of pain and hurt we cry out in anguish for answers or justice. It is there in our personal deserts of despair that we seem to see no answer or reason for our plight. God is silent, and we wonder why. God never tells Job why He did what He did. We may not receive those answers that we seek, because the answer is not the reprieve, it may soothe for a moment in time but that is it. Our answer is found in our relationship to Him, what we learn and how we respond to make the most out of our situation. So no matter the hurt or pain we are in or the cry of anguish we say, our purpose and answer is to fix our eyes on our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our example is David. We can follow David's example as Scripture encourages us to wait. We can also look to the humanity of our Lord and how we persevered through His difficult times on this Earth. We also have comfort in that we are not alone. We have true examples to follow, and most of all He is there beside us all of the time!

### **Salvation becomes expectation**

David persevered because he placed his confidence in the Lord and not in his situation. What happens with most of us is that we cannot see past our situation. We allow the bad stuff and our unfulfilled expectations to rule over us and not Christ. The travesties of life become the setting and focal point of our life. Such as a debilitating illness we become the person who is known for being sick, not the person growing in Christ through the sickness. The choice is ours to be the person we can be, better and stronger or to be dependent on the travesty as our lord, so it occupies all of our time and mind. Then we cannot grow beyond our situation, and be what we can be. So the expectant wait on God then God molds us to be shaped in His way and purpose, to give us His hope.

- Have you or have you known people who define their life from a certain incident, such as being a widow, being poor, being disabled, a car crash...?
- What can you do to place your eyes upon our Lord alone?
- How do you learn confidence in God?

- What is the balance between self esteem that is good and total reliance on God?
- When does self esteem go awry from Gal 2:20?

We can develop trust by training ourselves to avoid the distractions around us. Like the blinders that a racehorse has on that keeps them on the course so they do not get distracted and run off. So you will not be distracted by created things and stay focused on the Creator?

- How can you make 'blinders' for yourself?

David said he will not be "*greatly moved.*" This is like a naval term referring to a ship moored during a storm, being held in place by its anchor, so it does not crash away. For us it means our faith and relationship and our circumstances will not be cut off from our Lord's hand. We may still be rocked by the tides and waves, but our Anchor keeps us firm in what is important and what is true.

- How certain are you that you will not be moved at all?
- Do you praise Him for your waiting?

How do these words from this Psalm soothe you? If not how can they?

1. Salvation? 2. Glory? 3. Rock? 4. Strength? 5. Refuge? 6. Defense? 7. Mercy?

Our expectation is in Him!

### **Distractions verses Trust and Reality**

We have to be on guard from those who would steer us in the wrong direction with flattery as well as blatant deception. There will be friends who disappoint us, and enemies who surprise us. There will be letdowns; disappointments, travesties and the one thing you can trust is that at some point in your life, you will face disillusionment. However, the main thing is that even though we will all receive those letdowns, Christ is there holding us as the great Comforter. People may let us down, but He will not. We may think God is the great provider of misery, the Creator of despair, the killjoy of our promise and plans. But that just means His plan is better than ours, and we are blinded from seeing it, either from His reasoning or our own distractions. Everyone may be against us, but our Lord is there for us, what more could we possibly ever need!

- We can have no real hope in human promise or material goods!
- Are you able to trust in Him at all times?
- If so what is the foundation for that belief?
- Is your VCR and TV more important than your devotions and growth in Him?
- If so what can you do to keep the main thing the main thing?
- If not what is in the way?

- Why do most people place their focus on their problems only and forsake the One who is the divine blessing?

We must be able to turn our fears and expectations upside down, and inside out, so our Lord can reformat us in His image. I downloaded an update for my computer recently, and it crashed it completely, so I was not able to even boot it up. I am no stranger to computers, so I desperately tried everything to restore my computer. I called the tech people, checked in books, asked some experts I knew. And I was not able to fix it. The only thing I could do was reformat my hard drive and erase everything that was on it, and start over. I did not want to do that because the loss of all my programs and settings that took months to accumulate. So I had to let go of my fears and programs and start over. Or be left with a useless computer.

- What are the problems you have faced in the past and are not problems now?
- What happened to them so they are not being problems anymore?
- Can you see that the problems you have now will not be with you forever?

When we have a sin or a problem we did not cause it may require us to reformat our personal hard drive. This is the process of letting go of our fears, expectations and anything that gets in the way of us operating in His presence. To be our best by learning and growing in this life. To be our best by being surrendered and poured out before our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Gal, 2:20; Phil. 1:6; 3:10). The result with my computer was that the problem was fixed by being wiped clean, and then it not only booted up, but it ran much better than before. The same lesson I had to learn when I went through my deserts of despair. Yes I lost a lot of programs and data, but what was important I had backed up. In life He is not our backup He is our life. And in my deserts I lost a lot there too, but again our losses can be our gains in what we learn and grow closer to Him.

Our thoughts, sorrows, plans and sins must be let go. We have to discharge anything that gets in the way of us growing deeper in the walk of life (His life), our journey into His presence. We cannot bottle it in, nor can we let it out so it affects others. It must be a controlled burn as we give it all to the foot of the cross. So when people form up against you remember they are just that people, mere dust in action. And our trust cannot, and must not be in dust, but firmly planted in truth. Our only path is the trust and reliance on our Lord, what He has done for us through it all.

- What is the reality of man (people in general, friends, family) in your life? (v.9)
- What is the reality of money in your life? (v.10)
- What is the reality of power in your life? (v.11)
- What is the reality of mercy in your life? (v.12)
- What can you do to make these realities God centered in your life?

Notice all of the 'my's' in this Psalm! David seizes God with passion and conviction. He does not see the hot sands and problems literally at his feet, he sees his Lord. David from a small child learned the importance of faith. David also has experienced major success and major travesties and disappointments throughout his life. Yet throughout the extreme highs and lows his passion never failed. He did not allow kings to be against him, nor let his own sin triumph over him.

- How many my's are in this passage?
- How many my's do you have in Him?
- How can you turn you fears into faith?

Have you considered that we wait for a reason, and that reason is to make us better, stronger and nearer to His presence and to be enhanced for His service? That God allows harsh stuff to happen and even takes us through some not as a personal attack upon us, but because He loves us and wants us to grow in maturity for our betterment?

Learning to let go of our fears and expectations is one of the keys for true success!

- So how can you put together a life of distinction even in the midst of adversity?
- Finish this sentence, "*the Power belongs to...*" So how shall you then live your life?

The Psalm clearly states that no matter what we face God is there as our Rock through it all! That Rock is the encircling guard, not a prison guard, but like a concerned and loving mother watching her small child as it learns to walk. A good parent does not allow harm to come, nor let the child wander off by itself. God is the loving rock who guards us with encircling love. He may allow us to fall, only to make us better and stronger, and as long as our eyes are upon Him we will not wander off.

### **So how do you think God sees time?**

Waiting as we see it is all about time. We base our life in terms of a 'linear time frame'. That means everything has a beginning and ending, a start and finish. And in that linear time frame things are supposed to happen in a certain way, a certain place and in a certain time. Such in the small things, such as a movie or TV show we will expect it to start and finish in a certain time frame, if it is interrupted we become upset. In the grand scheme of life we are supposed to get our drivers license at 16, graduate High School at 18, spend 4 years in college, get married, have a career, children and so forth. We do not expect that schedule to be interrupted or skewed either. Yet it often is. Most people take more than 5 years to get through college and end up in massive debt doing so. The quest for the American dream is interrupted with job loss and stock market crashes. Marriage

has its up and downs, and most statistics tell us 50% will get divorced. While most singles long to be married and see marriage as the answer to all of their troubles. Loss and death as well as promotions and unexpected surprises happen suddenly like a coke can hitting a ceiling fan. You do not know where it will end up.

We also see time and events in a very limited perspective. As the old illustration goes you can't see the forest through all of the trees. That means if we are just focused on one tree we do not see all of the others, we may not even realize we are in a forest. The same goes in our relationships with people and God, as well as events in our life. We do not always see how everything is interconnected, and our lives touch so many others and so forth. We do not see God working behind, beside, and even in front of us when the tree is in the way. So take a look back, get a handle on the big picture. See how your life is interconnected and how you can use that for His glory.

### **What is time like to us?**

To a baby time is like a very short instant gratification, seconds are a lifetime.

To a 4 year old time is a long time for just 15 minutes and several hours is a lifetime.

To a 10-year old time is viewed in large segments and events: How long until Christmas? Birthday? Halloween? Thanksgiving? Christmas? Going to grandmas house?

To a 15-year old time is like a lifetime for just one year equal, the Romeo and Juliet Syndrome that they are unable to see beyond their limited time thinking.

To a 20-year old time is like they have all the time in the world.

To a 30-year old time is starting to move faster, concentrating on life's relationship goals, priorities and settling down.

To a 40-year old time is moving very *fast*, regrets tend to pile up, thinking it is better do it now or never, life is half over, mid life crisis, time to buy a Harley!

To a 60-year old time is becoming a blur everything blends into one continuous stream of events.

To a 70- year old time is seen from a reflective point of view of the end of activities not much time left.

To God His view of time is eternity, perpetuity, that all things are purpose directed, organized and orchestrated. God lives outside of space-time. Time is circular and continual all leading to eternity with Him.

How do these time perspectives help us? We are focused on the here and now, or the past, or concern for the future. Thus we need to learn to wait and still seize the opportunities when they do come. To learn all we can as our life, even when and especially when things do not go our way. As our life is preparing us for a greater prize than we can conceive or believe, yet we will achieve it!

- Read Psalm 130 how can you apply vs. 5-6 so it is your lifestyle?

### **What do you do when you cannot remove the hardship you are going through?**

We live in an age of quick fixes. If I think my computer is too slow I will get a new one, if I'm hungry and do not feel like making dinner I will go to McDonalds. When something breaks we get it fixed or buy a new one. But what happens when we are broken and we cannot be fixed or replaced?

- John 5:1 We need to become like Him. My cross is the yoke that is light we have an easy burden. Compared to Him our yoke is easy even if we are paralyzed. There is nothing greater than knowing the Savior. There are people who are under unthinkable suffering because of pain, disease, accidents, and psychological stress.
- We need to also see there are always people who are in greater distress than us.
- We cannot lose our perspective, our attitude, our humor, or our hope. God is glorified through our suffering. We showcase our Lord by pointing to Him, by relying on Him.
- Nothing gets our attention more than circumstances that cause us to look up and not at ourselves. When we realize that God's power sustains us and if being cut down a notch or two may be the only way for us to learn this precious marvel, then embrace it!

God is against the proud and self-reliant, when we rest in God we have the ultimate grasp on what life is all about. We are diminished and nullified so we can become great.

- Our God is bigger when we need Him more. The weaker we are the stronger we are in Him, the stronger we are for eternity!

Let our human strength hemorrhage, and embrace what He has for you. Do not waist your afflictions, embrace them, and welcome them as a weird and wonderful friend. If you never face being hurt, passed by with a promotion, a hurtful relationship, felt rejected or forsaken not enough money to buy food. Then



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Richard Joseph Krejcir is the Director of 'Into Thy Word Ministries, 'a Missions and discipling ministry. He is the author of several books including, Into Thy Word as well as numerous articles, curriculums and solid Biblical resources. He is also a pastor, teacher, speaker and a graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena California and currently completing his Ph.D in practical theology. He has amounted over 20 years of pastoral ministry experience, mostly in youth ministry, including serving as a church growth consultant.