

A Prescription for Pain

November 23-24, 2013 - James 1:1-12 - Gary Post

- I. Two Myths About Suffering (James 1:2; John 16:33; Psalm 34:19)
 - A. Christians are immune from hardship and entitled to an easy life
“The implicit but strong cultural assumption of young adults is that God owes all but the most villainous people a comfortable life. This premise, however, inevitably leads to bitter disillusionment. Life is nasty, hard, brutish, and always feels too short. The presumption of spiritual entitlement dooms its bearers to a life of confusion when things in life inevitably go wrong.”
Timothy Keller, Walking With God Through Pain and Suffering
“The good man does not escape all troubles—he has them too. But the Lord helps him in each and every one.” Psalm 34:19 (TLB)
 - B. Hardships and Trials are punishment from God because of sin
“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Rom. 8:1
- II. Where Do Pain and Suffering Come From? Why Does God Allow It?
 - A. From a Creation broken and marred by sin
“...the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption...for the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.” Romans 8:21-22
 - B. From Satan, the enemy of the children of God
“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” I Peter 5:8
 - C. From sinful people, who use their free will to choose to do evil
 - D. From the consequences of our own sinful behavior
“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” I John 1:9
 - E. Why didn't God just eliminate all evil and suffering in the world?
“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8 (NIV)
“this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.” Acts 2:23-24
- III. What Should Know About How God Uses Suffering in Our Lives?
 - A. Everything that happens to us God turns for our “good”
“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.” Romans 8:28-29 (NIV)

“We're like blocks of stone, out of which the sculptor carves the forms of men. The blows of his chisel, which hurt us so much, are what make us perfect. The suffering in this world is not the failure of God's love for us; it is that love in action.”
C. S. Lewis, Shadowlands

B. Understanding who God is what He is doing changes our attitude
“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance [or endurance or steadfastness]. Perseverance must finish its work, so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” James 1:2-4

C. God uses suffering to remove distractions, deepen our relationship
“...the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.” Mark 4:19

D. God uses our example in suffering to lift up His name, draw others
“It's easy to tell the Christians here—they're the ones with hope.”

Sparrow

Cancer Center Nurse:

E. God uses suffering to prepare us for this life—and the next one
“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.” II Corinthians 1:3-4

“In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” I Peter 1:6-7

“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” II Corinthians 4:17

IV. Ken's Story: What I Learned Walking With God Through Suffering

V. How Do We Walk With God Through Suffering

A. Prepare yourself before the crisis

B. Recognize that God is always with you—even if it doesn't feel like it

C. Allow yourself—and others—time and space to grieve and mourn

D. Stay in God's Word every day—whether you feel like it or not

E. Let suffering drive you to prayer and ask God to give you what you need

F. Suffer in community--friends don't let friends suffer alone

VI. Closing Thought from Joni Eareckson-Tada in A Place of Healing

Notes and Quotes

“The sorrows of our lives are in great part His weaning process. We give our hearts over to so many things other than God. We look to so many other things for life. I know I do. Especially the very gifts that He Himself gives to us—they become more important to us than He is. That’s not the way it is supposed to be. As long as our happiness is tied to the things we can lose, we are vulnerable. This truth is core to the human condition and to understanding what God is doing in our lives. We really believe that God’s primary reason for being is to provide us with happiness, give us a good life. It doesn’t occur to us that our thinking is backward. It doesn’t even occur to us that God is meant to be our all, and that until He is our all, we are subhuman.”
John Eldredge, Walking With God

“Yes, I pray that my pain might be removed, that it might cease; but more so, I pray for the strength to bear it, the grace to benefit from it, and the devotion to offer it up to God as a sacrifice of praise. To this point, as I pen this chapter, He has chosen not to heal me, but to hold me. The more intense the pain, the closer His embrace.

He has a plan and purpose for my time on earth. He is the master artist or sculptor, and He is the one who chooses the tools He will use to perfect His workmanship. What of suffering, then? What of illness? What of disability? Am I to tell Him which tools He can use and which tools He can’t use in the lifelong task of perfecting me and molding me into the beautiful image of Jesus? Do I really know better than Him, so that I can state without equivocation that it’s always His will to heal me of every physical affliction? I am His poem, do I have the right to say, “No, Lord. You need to trim line number two and brighten up lines three and five. They’re just a little bit dark.” Do I, the poem, the thing being written, know more than the poet?”

Friend, you may be going through a time of wounding right now and, if you are, take heart, because your heart is being set to God’s, and there is no saving work apart from pain. Your life will produce so much more fruit from it all—fruit that you probably won’t even see or know about. Every day of our short lives—even every hour—has eternal consequences for good or ill. Eternity—and the way we’ll live in it—is somehow being shaped by our moment-by-moment responses to the life we have before us to live right now.” Joni Eareckson-Tada, A Place of Healing

“This is God’s universal purpose for all Christian suffering: more contentment in God and less satisfaction in self and in the world. Every significant advance I have ever made in grasping the depths of God’s love and growing deep with Him has come through suffering.”
John Piper, Desiring God

“The heavenly world comes into us exactly in proportion as all the affairs of earth are emptied out of us, and nothing so perfectly empties us and detaches us as perfect suffering does.”
- G. D. Watson

“If God didn’t withhold from us His very own Son, will God withhold anything we need? If trust must be earned, hasn’t God unequivocally earned our trust with the bark on the raw wounds, the thorns pressed into the brow, your name on the cracked lips? How will he not also graciously give us all things He deems best and right? He’s already given us the incomprehensible”. Anne Voskamp, 1000 Gifts

“Spiritual growth is far beyond the ability of human energy. The Lord places us in situations of utter powerlessness and impossibility, so that He can have His way with us. Then, as we learn to depend on Him, He shows His mercy to us by carrying us through them. In this process of repeatedly being struck down, we learn to know Him. Over a period of time, as our knowledge of Him increases by these daily blows to our outward man, we are able to see how the life of the Lord replaces our life. Yet it is not the increase of life, but the increase of our knowledge of His life—for His life we already have!” Watchman Nee, The Release of the Spirit

Additional Scripture

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”
Philippians 4:6-7

“Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”
Revelation 7:15-17

Recommended Reading

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| <u>Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering</u> | Timothy Keller |
| <u>A Place of Healing: Wrestling With the Mysteries of Suffering, Pain and God’s Sovereignty</u> | Joni Eareckson-Tada |
| <u>The Problem of Pain</u> | C.S. Lewis |
| <u>Miraculous Healing</u> | Henry Frost |
| <u>Walking With God</u> | John Eldredge |
| <u>The Release of the Spirit</u> | Watchman Nee |
| <u>One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are</u> | Anne Voskamp |
| <u>A Path Through Suffering: Discovering the Relationship Between God’s Mercy and Our Pain</u> | Elizabeth Elliott |
| <u>The Power of Suffering: Strengthening Your Faith in the Refiner’s Fire</u> | John MacArthur |
| <u>If God is God: Faith in the Midst of Suffering and Evil</u> | Randy Alcorn |