



SUFFERING AND GLORY

DAN ALLENDER

(Job 9:28)

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he Bible does not hesitate to describe the human condition and the reality of living in a sinful world. Suffering is an inescapable part of that reality. The Book of Ecclesiastes teaches, "For in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow" (Eccl. 1:18).

No one is immune to suffering. Suffering may come as a result of personal sin and failure. For example, some people may suffer financially by not carefully budgeting their money or being wasteful. Some people may suffer the loss of friendship through their hurtful words or gossip. However, suffering may also arise due to other people's sin and failure, or other forces outside of our control. For example, a drunk driver who causes an accident creates suffering for others. A tornado or hurricane can create great suffering for many people.

But suffering doesn't happen just to people. The Bible teaches that creation itself is suffering until a day when it will be redeemed. God Himself suffers, and looks forward to the day when He will bring His people to be with Him.

THE GROANING OF THE EARTH

The earth itself is suffering: "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:20, 21). The whole earth, inanimate and animate, suffers because of the inevitability of death and decay. Animals grow old and sick; crops and trees suffer disease, die, and decay. Suffering is not merely human; it is also earthly. Creation waits in eager anticipation of its day of redemption.

THE GROANING OF HUMANITY

We already know that people suffer—we see it or experience it every day. "We also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23). Suffering is common to all people and is not removed by the presence of the Spirit. Being a Christian is not a "get out of suffering free" card. Christians experience suffering like everyone else. No better illustration of this principle can be found in the Bible than the Book of Job.

Satan complained to God that Job, a righteous man, served God only because his life was relatively free of suffering. A wager was made and the course of Job's suffering increased. With the increased suffering came Job's increased questions and struggles with God. His demand for a hearing concerning his questions grew to such a tempo that God deepened Job's suffering by bringing his soul low with humility. In that suffering, Job found that his deepest desire was not for relief, restitution of his losses, or a return of his reputation. He found what he wanted more than anything in the midst of his suffering was the presence of God. Suffering awakened him to a deeper desire for God.

THE GROANING OF GOD

Suffering is not merely earthly and human; it is also divine. God groans. Paul described

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it this way: "The Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. 8:26). Other religions cannot fathom the concept of an all-powerful God suffering on behalf of His people—suffering when they suffer, feeling their pain. God came to earth in the person of Christ in order to understand humanity and, ultimately, to die an agonizing death for us.

God's suffering reveals the path to glory. Jesus bore the full and complete penalty of sin and suffered judgment so God's children would never be separated from His love. Jesus' suffering became the blood offering for sin that cleanses and heals. It is the redemptive power of suffering that allows us to glimpse an incredibly small taste of what Jesus suffered on the Cross while bearing our sin. It also strips us of the illusion of autonomy and the deceit of self-righteousness. "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Rom. 8:16, 17).

SUFFERING AND GLORY

Despite its painfulness, suffering can be very valuable. Suffering clarifies what the heart truly worships, especially when the pain is unexplained and unabated. Do we worship the idea of deliverance, or the Deliverer? Suffering also purifies the heart by deepening the desire for the day when all tears will be wiped away. Our growing discontent with the sin and evil in this world increases our hopefulness for heaven. Suffering not only clarifies and purifies, but it also motivates the heart to action. If we see a child cry, we offer tenderness. If we see the wounds of a victim,

we offer solace. Human suffering arouses anger, invigorates action and, as a result, enables us to push back some of the darkness of the Fall. Suffering humanizes the heart and increases our hunger for God.

FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of suffering include:

- > Psalm 119:67, 71, 75
- > Lamentations 3:20-25
- > Acts 5:41
- > Romans 8:18, 28, 29
- > 1 Corinthians 12:26
- > 2 Corinthians 1:3-5; 4:7-10; 12:7-10
- > Philippians 1:29; 4:19
- > 2 Timothy 2:8-13; 3:10-12
- > Hebrews 4:15, 16
- > James 1:2-4; 5:13
- > 1 Peter 1:6-9; 2:19-25; 3:14, 17, 18; 4:16; 5:10

To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on suffering at 1 Peter 4:12-16 on page 1664. See also the personality profile of Job on page 638.

9 What do you know that we do not know?
What do you understand that is not in us?
 10 Both the gray-haired and the aged *are* among us,
 Much older than your father.
 11 *Are* the consolations of God too small for you,
 And the word *spoken* gently^a with you?
 12 Why does your heart carry you away,
 And what do your eyes wink at,
 13 That you turn your spirit against God,
 And let *such* words go out of your mouth?

“What is man, that he could be pure?
 And *he who is* born of a woman, that he could be righteous?”

15 If God puts no trust in His saints,
 And the heavens are not pure in His sight,
 16 How much less man, *who is* abominable and filthy,
 Who drinks iniquity like water!
 17 “I will tell you, hear me;
 What I have seen I will declare,
 18 What wise men have told,
 Not hiding *anything* received from their fathers,
 19 To whom alone the land was given,
 And no alien passed among them:
 20 The wicked man writhes with pain all his days,
 And the number of years is hidden from the oppressor.
 21 Dreadful sounds *are* in his ears;
 In prosperity the destroyer comes upon him.
 22 He *does not* believe that he will return from darkness,

For a sword is waiting for him.
 23 He wanders about for bread, *saying*,
 “Where *is it?*”
 He knows that a day of darkness is ready at his hand.
 24 Trouble and anguish make him afraid;
 They overpower him, like a king ready for battle.
 25 For he stretches out his hand against God,
 And acts defiantly against the Almighty,
 26 Running stubbornly against Him
 With his strong, embossed shield.

“Though he has covered his face with his fatness,

And made *his* waist heavy with fat,
 He dwells in desolate cities,
 In houses which no one inhabits,
 Which are destined to become ruins.
 29 He will not be rich,
 Nor will his wealth continue,
 Nor will his possessions overspread the earth.
 30 He will not depart from darkness;
 The flame will dry out his branches,
 And by the breath of His mouth he will go away.
 31 Let him not trust in futile things,
 Deceiving himself,
 For futility will be his reward.
 32 It will be accomplished before his time,
 And his branch will not be green.
 33 He will shake off his unripe grape like a vine,
 And cast off his blossom like an olive tree.
 34 For the company of hypocrites *will be* barren,

15:11 ^aSeptuagint reads a secret thing.



SOUL NOTE

Sincerely Wrong (15:17–26) Job’s friends attempted to help him with their advice. Had they listened more and talked less, however, they would have been more helpful. Eliphaz was convinced that Job was being disciplined by God for his sins. He thought Job was wicked because “the wicked man writhes with pain all his days” (15:20). Eliphaz was sincere, but he was wrong. People must be very careful about making assumptions regarding others’ circumstances. Things are not always what they seem. It is often more helpful to empathize with a suffering friend than to try and rush in to explain his or her suffering. **Topic: Suffering**

And fire will
 bribery.
 35 They conceal
 futility;
 Their women

JOB REPROACHES

16 Then Job

2 “I have heard
 Miserable
 3 Shall words
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 7 But now He
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 8 You have sh
 And it is a v
 My leanness
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 He tears me
 He gnashes
 My adversar
 10 They gape a
 They strike
 cheek,
 They gather
 11 God has del
 And turned
 wicked.

12 I was at ea
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 He has set r
 13 His archers
 He pierces r
 He pours ou
 He breaks r
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 He runs at

15 “I have sew
 And laid my

JOB AND HIS FAMILY IN UZ

1 There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil. **2**And seven sons and three daughters were born to him. **3**Also, his possessions were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys, and a very large household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East.

4And his sons would go and feast in their houses, each on his appointed day, and would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. **5**So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed^a God in their hearts." Thus Job did regularly.

SATAN ATTACKS JOB'S CHARACTER

6Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan^a also came among them. **7**And the LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?"

So Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it."

8Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that *there is* none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?"

9So Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing? **10**Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his

1:5 ^aLiterally *blessed*, but used here in the evil sense, and so in verse 11 and 2:5, 9 1:6 ^aLiterally *the Adversary*, and so throughout this book



Suffering

PERSONALITY PROFILE

JOB'S SUFFERING

(JOB 1)

Suffering is unavoidable and inescapable. Everyone suffers—it's part of being human. The story of Job reveals a source of suffering, people's powerlessness in it, and, ultimately, God's power through it.

Job was a godly man. The beginning of the book reveals a conversation between Satan and God. Satan was convinced that Job loved God because God had blessed him. Take away his wealth, Satan argued, and Job would curse God. When that didn't work, however, Satan asked for permission to inflict more suffering—taking Job's family and then his health. Job was shattered, broken, and diseased. But through it all, Job "did not sin with his lips" (Job 2:10).

Eventually, God entered the discussion. He did not explain Job's suffering or help him make sense of his loss. Instead, God underlined the reality of His sovereignty, and the fact that He acts on His own without human advice or explanation. He expects people to trust Him and His goodness regardless of what happens.

Although Job's health and wealth were eventually restored, that is not the central message of the story. The Book of Job shows us that our love for God must not be conditioned upon how we think He is treating us. Great suffering well borne is an indication of unshakable trust in God. Faith in God must be maintained through times of trial as well as times of blessing. Such faith reflects God's nature in us, His redeeming power in Christ, and His unconditional love toward us. No matter what we face in life, we can trust that God is in control. We must rely on Him and His goodness.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about suffering on pages 646, 647. See also the key passage note at 1 Peter 4:12–16 on page 1664.

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¹²And th that he has hand on hi So Satan LORD.

JOB LOSES

¹³Now daughters their oldest ger came plowing as ¹⁵when the them away vants with have escap

¹⁶While came and heaven and vants, and escaped to

¹⁷While came and s bands, raide yes, and ki sword; and

¹⁸While came and s eating and brother's h came from the four cen young peop have escape

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PSALM 65

PRAISE TO GOD FOR HIS SALVATION AND PROVIDENCE

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David. A Song.

1 Praise is awaiting You, O God, in Zion;
And to You the vow shall be performed.
2 O You who hear prayer,
To You all flesh will come.
Iniquities prevail against me;
As for our transgressions,
You will provide atonement for them.

Blessed is the man You choose,
And cause to approach YOU,
That he may dwell in Your courts.
We shall be satisfied with the goodness
of Your house,
Of Your holy temple.

By awesome deeds in righteousness You
will answer us,
O God of our salvation,
You who are the confidence of all the
ends of the earth,
And of the far-off seas;
Who established the mountains by His
strength,

Being clothed with power;
7 You who still the noise of the seas,
The noise of their waves,
And the tumult of the peoples.
They also who dwell in the farthest parts
are afraid of Your signs;
You make the outgoings of the morning
and evening rejoice.

You visit the earth and water it,
You greatly enrich it;
The river of God is full of water;

You provide their grain,
For so You have prepared it.
10 You water its ridges abundantly,
You settle its furrows;
You make it soft with showers,
You bless its growth.

11 You crown the year with Your goodness,
And Your paths drip with abundance.
12 They drop on the pastures of the
wilderness,
And the little hills rejoice on every side.
13 The pastures are clothed with flocks;
The valleys also are covered with grain;
They shout for joy, they also sing.

PSALM 66

PRAISE TO GOD FOR HIS AWESOME WORKS

To the Chief Musician. A Song. A Psalm.

1 Make a joyful shout to God, all the
earth!
2 Sing out the honor of His name;
Make His praise glorious.
Say to God,
"How awesome are Your works!
Through the greatness of Your power
Your enemies shall submit themselves to
You.
All the earth shall worship You
And sing praises to You;
They shall sing praises to Your name."

Selah

Come and see the works of God;
He is awesome in His doing toward the
sons of men.

6 He turned the sea into dry land;
They went through the river on foot.

7 He rules by His eyes over the earth;
Do not let the proud boast of themselves.
8 Oh, bless our God, O Lord,
And make us hear His voice,
9 Who keeps the nations from living,
And does not allow the proud to be made.
10 For You, O Lord, have tested us as silver,
You have refined us as silver.
11 You brought us up from the sea,
You laid our feet on a rock.
12 You have covered our heads with silver,
We went through the water;
But You brought us through the fire,
And You fulfilled our promise.
13 I will go into the temple of Your offerings;
I will pay You my vows,
14 Which my mouth has spoken in trouble,
And my mouth has not lied.
15 I will offer You animals,
With the sacrifice of the righteous.
I will offer You praise.
16 Come and see the works of God,
And I will declare my soul.
17 I cried to Him in my distress,
And He was answered by His tongue.
18 If I regard iniquity,
The Lord will not hear my prayer.
19 But certainly He has answered my prayer.
20 Blessed be the God of Israel,
Who has not forsaken His people,
Nor His mercy.

SOUL NOTE



Refining Fire (66:10) Silver ore must be refined by fire in order to remove its impurities. Every time the silver is heated and the dross is removed, the metal becomes more and more purified. In like manner, the fire of trials purges sin, burning away the lusts and impurities that pollute people's lives. Although unpleasant, suffering often removes the impurities from our lives and helps us grow toward perfection. God refines us "as silver is refined" so that we can reflect His glory.

Topic: Suffering

flesh has ceased from sin,² that he no longer should live the rest of *his* time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.³ For we *have spent* enough of our past lifetime⁴ in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.⁴ In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with *them* in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of *you*.⁵ They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.⁶ For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

SERVING FOR GOD'S GLORY

⁷But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.

⁸And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "*love will cover a multitude of sins.*"^{8a} ⁹Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.¹⁰ As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.¹¹ If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

SUFFERING FOR GOD'S GLORY

¹²Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;¹³ but rejoice to the extent that you partake of

4:3 ^aNU-Text reads *time* 4:8 ^aProverbs 10:12

KEY PASSAGE



Suffering

FAITH UNDER FIRE

(4:12-16)

Believers should "not think it strange concerning the fiery trial" that they face.

"Trial" here refers to persecution for the faith. Not all suffering is the result of godly Christian conduct (4:15). Many times, however, loyalty to Christ will bring suffering. At those times, believers can rejoice and "be glad with exceeding joy" because they are considered worthy of suffering for Christ.

Sometimes God allows suffering to come into believers' lives in order to strengthen their faith. Suffering provides the opportunity to trust God. Believers can rejoice because of what God will do in their lives and what He promises for their future. When we suffer, we are in good company, for Christ also suffered, He understands, and He will be with us all the way. We can commit our lives to Him (1 Pet. 4:19).

To Learn More: Turn to the article about suffering on pages 646, 647. See also the personality profile of Job on page 638.

SOUL NOTE



Leap of Loyalty (4:19) Nothing happens to believers that surprises God. He may allow suffering for a time, knowing that it will strengthen His people's faith. A believer's suffering should be "according to the will of God," however, not due to their own sinful or irresponsible actions. When we face suffering because of our loyalty to Christ, we must remember that, like everything else, our suffering is under God's control. We can commit our lives to Him, knowing that He is completely faithful and trustworthy. He will remain with us through our suffering, and in the end bring us to glory. **Topic: Suffering**

Father." ¹⁶The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

FROM SUFFERING TO GLORY

¹⁸For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared with the glory* which shall be revealed in us.

¹⁹For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope; ²¹because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. ²²For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. ²³Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. ²⁴For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? ²⁵But if we

hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for *it* with perseverance.

²⁶Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us^a with groanings which cannot be uttered. ²⁷Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is*, because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*.

²⁸And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

²⁹For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be conformed to the image of His Son*, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

GOD'S EVERLASTING LOVE

³¹What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He

^a8:26 ^aNU-Text omits *for us*.

SOUL NOTE



Count On It (8:18) Suffering was very real for the early believers. Persecution was part of the package when someone became a Christian. Jews who became believers faced persecution from fellow Jews who did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah. Gentiles who became believers faced charges of treason for refusing to worship the emperor. Persecution has continued throughout the centuries, and today's believers are not immune. Our suffering may seem to have a stranglehold on us, but in eternity's perspective, it loses its grip. God promises glory—we can count on it!

Topic: Suffering

SOUL NOTE



Groaning Bodies (8:20–23) In heaven, God will make everything perfect. He promises believers new and perfect bodies that will never get sick and never die (1 Cor. 15:35–49; Rev. 21:4). Our earthly bodies face genetic problems that sometimes cannot be reversed or cured. Many people live in darkness, in silence, or bound to a wheelchair. Yet many love Christ and serve Him faithfully even through difficult life challenges. How wonderful will be that day, especially for those who now face physical burdens, when Christ returns and all believers will be given brand new bodies—seeing, hearing, running, jumping—in “the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

Topic: Genetic Issues