

trials & suffering



The _____ and _____ of trials & suffering

1. Trials & suffering are unnatural
 - God's original creation was very good (Gen. 1:31)
 - In the garden, Adam & Eve experienced perfect harmony with each other and with God (Gen. 2)
2. When Adam & Eve sinned, suffering entered God's good creation (Gen. 3)
 - Physical suffering – death (2:17; 3:19), painful childbearing (3:16), difficult work (3:17-19)
 - Relational suffering – alienation from God (3:8-10, 23-24), alienation between people (3:12), marital discord (3:17)
 - Emotional/psychological suffering – guilt & shame (3:7-10), fear (3:8-10)
 - As a result, suffering is universally experienced (Rom. 8:20-23)
3. God suffers with His creatures
 - Sin and its consequences grieve God (Gen. 6:5-6; Eph. 4:30)
 - God immediately promised a coming rescuer who would defeat the Serpent and suffer in the process (Gen. 3:15)
 - This promised rescuer who suffers – Jesus – turns out to be God Himself (John 1:1-3, 14; Phil. 2:5-11; Acts 20:28)
 - Jesus, the God-man, took on flesh so that by dying He might destroy the one who brought death into God's good creation, the devil (Heb. 2:14)
4. God will one day end all suffering (Rev. 21:1-22:5)
 - The death and resurrection of Jesus secured victory over death (1 Cor. 15:54-57)
 - Just like in the garden, God will once again live among His people (Rev. 21:3)
 - The curse pronounced in Genesis 3 will finally be removed (Rev. 22:3), and there will be no more suffering (Rev. 21:4)

The _____ of trials & suffering¹

1. Suffering as a result of (Ps. 107:17)

¹ Adapted from Tim Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* (New York: Dutton, 2013), 205-13.

- David – after his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah, the child conceived dies and his family unravels. All of this is predicted beforehand by the prophet Nathan as a direct result of David’s sin (1 Sam. 12:9-12).
- Ananias & Sapphira – The Lord strikes them dead after they lied to make themselves look more generous than they really were (Acts 5:1-11).
- The proper response when our own sin causes our suffering is confession & repentance (2 Sam. 12:13; Psalm 32; Psalm 51), though this doesn’t necessarily remove sin’s consequences (2 Sam. 12-18)

2. Innocent suffering

- The suffering of mystery
 - Job – Though his friends argue incessantly that Job must have sinned to deserve his suffering, in reality he was described by God Himself this way: “there is none like him on earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil.” (Job 1:8)
- Suffering for righteousness’ sake
 - Paul – the apostle was stoned, whipped, beaten, imprisoned, threatened, slandered, deserted by friends, suffered poverty, all because of his efforts to spread the gospel and plant churches (see 2 Cor. 11:23-29)
- The suffering of loss
 - Mary & Martha – The sisters of Lazarus grieve over the death of their brother, and even Jesus himself, who is about to raise Lazarus from the dead, weeps (John 11).

3. Because of the variety of suffering in this world, we must not have a one-size-fits-all response to it. We must be sensitive, thoughtful, and wise in the way we approach each person who is suffering.

God's _____ in trials & suffering

1. God is sovereign over all trials & suffering
 - God was sovereign over Jesus' sufferings (Acts 2:23; 4:27)
 - God was sovereign over Job's sufferings (Job 1:12; 2:6)
 - God is sovereign over the suffering of Christians (John 21:18-19; Acts 9:16; Rom. 8:28-29; Rev. 6:10-11)
 - God promises never to allow any trial to be more than we can bear and will always provide a way of escape from sin (1 Cor. 10:13)
2. God has many good purposes for trials & suffering
 - God uses suffering to glorify himself (John 9)
 - God uses suffering to discipline his children & bear the fruit of righteousness (Heb. 12:1-11)
 - God uses suffering to test & purify our faith (Job 23:10; Ps. 66:10; 1 Pet. 1:6-7)
 - God uses suffering to produce perseverance & godly character (James 1:2-4; Rom. 5:3-5; Ps. 119:67, 71)
 - God uses suffering to conform believers to the image of Jesus (Rom. 8:28-29)
 - God uses suffering to make us useful in ministry to others (2 Cor. 1:3-7)
 - God uses suffering to teach us to rely on Him (2 Cor. 1:8-9)
 - God uses suffering to keep us humble & display His power in us (2 Cor. 12:7-10)
 - God uses suffering to wean us off of this world and create in us a longing for the new creation (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:16-18)
 - God uses suffering to reveal our heart (Matt. 13:20-21)

God's _____ in trials & suffering

1. Expect to face trials (Matt. 10:24-25; 1 Pet. 4:12; Phil. 3:10; Rom. 8:22-23; 2 Tim. 3:1, 12)
2. Remain firmly committed to the word of God, trusting and obeying it (2 Tim. 3:10-17)
3. Go to Jesus, our High Priest who suffered for us and who understands what we're going through, for help (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:14-16)
4. Remember the preciousness of the presence of God in trials & suffering (Ps. 23:4; Ps. 34:18; Is. 43:1-5; 1 Pet. 4:14)
5. Don't interpret your suffering as the withdrawing of God's love from you (Rom. 8:35-39)

6. Look to the reward we will receive at the consummation (Matt. 5:10-12; Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:16-18; Heb. 10:32-36; 11:24-26; 13:12-14)
7. Follow Jesus' example in suffering righteously (1 Pet. 2:20-25)
8. Imitate others who have suffered well (1 Thess. 1:6)
9. Entrust yourself to our faithful and just God, resist the temptation to take revenge, and overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:19-21; 1 Pet. 2:23, 4:19)
10. Rejoice in the midst of trials & suffering (Matt. 5:12; Rom. 5:3-5; James 1:2-4)

Walking _____ sufferers

1. Ask for wisdom, and think carefully about what kind of suffering this person is experiencing (James 1:5)
2. Weep with those who are weeping (Rom. 12:15; Job 2:11-13)
3. Don't be too quick to speak (Job 2:11-13)
4. Don't be afraid to speak (Eph. 4:15)
5. Pray with them and for them (Rom. 12:12; 2 Cor. 1:11)
6. Comfort those who are suffering with the same comfort you have received in suffering (2 Cor. 1:3-7)
7. Encourage those who are suffering, and be patient with them (1 Thess. 5:14)
8. Be willing to help in practical ways (Rom. 12:13)

“Frequently in the midst of suffering the most comforting ‘answers’ are simple presence, help, silence, tears. Helping with the gardening or preparing a casserole may be far more spiritual an exercise than the exposition of Romans 8:28.” (D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord?*, p. 249)

9. Help them use their trials & suffering to know God better (John 17:3)
10. Help them look outward to love God and other people (Mark 12:30-31)