

REASONS WHY WE SUFFER

John 9:1-5

(John 9:1-5), "And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. {2} And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? {3} Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. {4} I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. {5} As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

(Psa 50:15), "And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."



S EVERY PERSON HAS TO DEAL WITH **SUFFERING** at various times in life. That is just the nature of life. FOR EXAMPLE, I have a kid in college and I am presently suffering from **MALTUITION**.

S Suffering can come at **DIFFERENT STAGES** in life. Suffering can originate from many **DIFFERENT SOURCES**:

- C an **accident**,
- C a **persistent pain**,
- C a **birth defect**,
- C a **genetic disorder**,
- C a **miscarriage**,
- C a **rebellious child**,
- C an **abusive parent**,
- C a severe **illness**,
- C a **random disease**,
- C a **death of a loved one**,
- C a **broken relationship**
- C a **natural disaster**.
- C The list could go on almost unendingly.

THE POINT IS that everyone suffers. And **IF BY CHANCE** you are not suffering at the present time, just hang around for a while and suffering will eventually come knocking at your door.

S **SUFFERING ALWAYS POSES A CHALLENGE**. When it comes, it will be used either to **make us more like Christ** or to **make us bitter**.

S **BILL GOTHARD**:

"Suffering can be our greatest motivation for spiritual growth, or our deadliest means of discouragement. The difference depends on our understanding of God's purposes through adversity."

OUR TEXT PRESENTS A PERSON who had suffered from birth. He had been **BORN BLIND**. He had **never seen** the grass turn green in spring, nor seen the glory of the twinkling stars on a cold winter night.

S AS **THE DISCIPLES** passed by that blind man, they **BEGAN A THEOLOGICAL DISCUSSION** on the **CAUSES OF THAT MAN'S BLINDNESS**. **THEIR THEOLOGY** was such that they believed **all suffering** was caused by sin.

(V. 2), "... 'MASTER, WHO DID SIN, ...?'"

Believing that all illness was **CAUSED BY SIN**, the disciples simply wanted to know whose sin caused the blindness. They wanted to know if his blindness was **his own fault**, or the fault of his **parents**.

(V. 2), "... 'Master, who did sin, **THIS MAN**, or **HIS PARENTS**, that he was born blind?'"

SOME **JEWISH RABBIS** in Jesus' day believed that a child could sin in the mother's womb. Perhaps the disciples thought the blind man had sinned while in his mother's womb.

S **JESUS' ANSWER** to their question must have shocked the socks off the disciples:

(V. 3), "... **NEITHER** hath this man sinned, **NOR** his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him."

THE REASON that the blind man suffered was not even on the disciples' chart of explanations as to why some people suffer.

S The purpose of this message is to present **SEVEN BIBLICAL REASONS PEOPLE SUFFER**.

I. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER BECAUSE OF SATAN

S **SATAN IS A LITERAL EVIL SPIRITUAL BEING** that **hates God**. He also hates people because God loves people. One way that Satan can get at God is to afflict people because God loves them.

S The Bible has **MANY EXAMPLES** of Satan **INFLICTING SUFFERING** upon human beings. Consider four examples:

- (1) **JOB** lost ten children, his health and his wealth. He was afflicted with boils from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet. When you read Job 1-2, you discover that Job's suffering was the result of Satan's work.
- (2) **A WOMAN** had been **UNABLE TO STAND UPRIGHT** for **EIGHTEEN YEARS** because of the work of Satan. **(Luke 13:16)**, "And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, **WHOM SATAN HATH BOUND**, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?"
- (3) **PAUL'S THORN IN HIS FLESH** as a messenger of Satan. **(2 Cor 12:7)**, "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, **THE MESSENGER OF SATAN** to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure."

(4) **A BOY WAS AFFLICTED WITH SEIZURES** because of the work of Satan.

(Mat 17:14-18), "And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him **A CERTAIN MAN**, kneeling down to him, and saying, {15} **Lord, have mercy on my son:** for he is a **lunatic**, and **sore vexed:** for oftentimes he **falleth into the fire**, and oft into **the water**. {16} And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him. {17} Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me. {18} And **JESUS REBUKED THE DEVIL**; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour."

- C** This passage in no way implies that every ailment is the direct result of Satan's work. It does reveal that what was going on in that one boy's life was the result of Satan's work.
- C** Some people suggest that Jesus was just accommodating the ignorance of His day when He referred to Satan. That suggestion is in great error. Jesus did not accommodate error. To pretend that error is true by accommodating it, is to propagate error. That is not something the One who called Himself "the truth" would do (John 14:6; John 1:14).

REASONS FOR SUFFERING:

I. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER **BECAUSE OF SATAN**

II. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER BECAUSE OF SIN

S **THE BIBLE** offers at least three very clear definitions of sin.

- 1) **(1 John 3:4)**, ". . . **SIN IS** the transgression of the law."
- 2) **(Rom 14:23)**, ". . . Whatsoever is not of faith **IS SIN**."
- 3) **(James 4:17)**, "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it **IS SIN**."

SOMETIMES PEOPLE SUFFER BECAUSE OF:

(1). **ADAM'S SIN**

S Several years ago **KARL MENNINGER** wrote a book titled *WHATEVER BECAME OF SIN*. The title is descriptive of the book's content. **Society** has tried to write sin out of existence. The problem is that when the definition of sin is removed from the human vocabulary, it diminishes society's ability to understand why Jesus died on the cross. **JESUS DIED** on the cross because of our sin.

C **(1 Cor 15:3)**, ". . . Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;"

C **(Eph 1:7)**, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, **the forgiveness of sins**, . . . "

SIN CAN BE SPOKEN OF FROM THREE PERSPECTIVES:

#1. ADAM'S SIN (Adam's sin is sometimes referred to as *original sin*)

S When Adam sinned, he experienced spiritual death (Gen 2:17). When Adam bore children, he passed that spiritual death on to his offspring. All subsequent generations have been affected by Adam's sin. That is why the Bible says:

C **(Psa 51:5)**, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and **IN SIN** did my mother conceive me."

C **(Job 5:7)**, "Yet **MAN IS BORN UNTO TROUBLE**, as the sparks fly upward.

C **(Rom 5:12)**, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:"

S **CREATION ITSELF** was affected by Adam's sin.

C **(Rom 8:22)**, "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."

C Sin explains **natural disaster**, **disease** and **defective genes**. Something has **gone horribly wrong** with this planet because of sin.

SOMETIMES PEOPLE SUFFER BECAUSE OF:

#2. THE SINS OF OTHERS

1) **ABEL** suffered because of **HIS BROTHER'S SIN**. Cain hated Abel and murdered him.

2) **URIAH** suffered because of **DAVID'S SIN**. David had Joab take Uriah to the front lines in battle and withdraw from him. The action resulted in his death.

3) **THE EARLY CHURCH** suffered because of **SAUL'S SIN**. Saul dragged Christians out of their homes and threw them in jail. Saul consented to the death of many early Christians.

4) **A YOUNG WIFE** had her heart broken because a drunk driver ran over her husband while he was riding a bicycle down a sidewalk.

5) **HOW MANY CHILDREN** have learned a destructive **DRUG HABIT** from their parents who had a drug habit?

S **SOME PEOPLE SUFFER BECAUSE OF THE SINS OF OTHERS**. The ultimate example is Jesus. **JESUS SUFFERED BECAUSE OF OUR SINS**. Jesus did not suffer because of His own sin because He had no sin (Heb 4:15). Jesus suffered because of the sins of others.

(Isa 53:5), "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace **was upon him**; and with his stripes we are healed."

SOMETIMES PEOPLE SUFFER BECAUSE OF

(1). **ADAM'S SIN**

(2). **THE SINS OF OTHERS**

#3. THEIR OWN SIN

(Ezek 18:20), “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.”

- 1) **JONAH** suffered in the belly of the fish because of his own sin.
- 2) **KING DAVID** suffered because of his own sin.

S I HAVE A SERMON TITLED “**THE BLAME GAME.**” It addresses the reality of human nature that is so inclined to blame others for what we do wrong. It nails down the fact that when we choose to sin, we are the ones to blame. When we sin, it is not acceptable for us to blame our parents, our government, or society for our decision to do wrong. When we sin, it is our fault.

NOW, SOME EXPLANATIONS for human suffering stop at this point in this message and go no further.

- 1) **JOB’S THREE FRIENDS** were convinced the reason Job suffered was because of his sin. They could not envision any other explanation for Job’s suffering.
- 2) **THE DISCIPLES** were convinced that the blind man suffered because of sin, whether his or his parents. They had a difficult time conceiving of any other explanation for such a condition other than sin.

THERE **ARE OTHER EXPLANATIONS** FOR SUFFERING OTHER THAN SIN.

- I. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER **BECAUSE OF SATAN**
- II. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER **BECAUSE OF SIN**

III. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER IN ORDER TO GLORIFY GOD

JESUS spoke of His suffering as a means of bringing glory to the Father.

- C** **(John 12:23)**, “. . . The hour is come, that the Son of man should be **GLORIFIED.**”
- C** **(John 21:19)**, “This spake he, signifying by what death he should **GLORIFY** God. . . .”

S **WE SELDOM THINK OF DEATH** as a means by which God may be glorified. God can take something as devastating as our death and bring glory to Himself. I have officiated at many funerals where the death of a Saint brought much glory to God.

S **AN INTERESTING STUDY** is found in Scripture by researching those things that have brought glory to God. Consider a couple of things that can bring glory to God.

#1. SICKNESS CAN BRING GLORY TO GOD

S **WHEN JESUS HEARD THAT LAZARUS WAS SICK**, He could have gone to him and prevented his death. Rather than going to Lazarus, Jesus waited until Lazarus died. Jesus told His disciples why he allowed Lazarus to die.

(John 11:4), “When Jesus heard that, he said, **THIS SICKNESS** is not unto death, but **FOR THE GLORY OF GOD**, that the Son of God might be **GLORIFIED** thereby.

S **RON DUNN**

“I have an idea that for most of us the problem is not that we lack sufficient faith to be healed--- we lack sufficient faith to remain sick if that be God's will. It requires greater faith to endure than to escape.” (*THE FAITH CRISIS*, pg. 97)

#2. BEARING SPIRITUAL "FRUIT" CAN BRING GLORY TO GOD

(John 15:8), "Herein is my Father **GLORIFIED**, that ye bear **MUCH FRUIT**; so shall ye be my disciples."

IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE that God sometimes uses **SUFFERING** to help us bear spiritual fruit.

(John 15:2), "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, **HE PURGETH IT**, that it may bring forth more fruit."

- S** While in the Northwest in 1972 one of the things that caught my attention was **APPLE TREES** that looked like they had been given a flattop. I remember someone explaining to me that pruning those trees helped them produce more fruit.
- S** Around the church are a bunch of **ROSE BUSHES** that have recently been trimmed back. They were cut back so they will produce more and better roses.
- S** In like manner, God sometimes **USES SUFFERING** to help us bear spiritual fruit. The illustrations go on unendingly.
- S** As a young woman, **JONI EARECKSON TADA** dove into shallow water and broke her neck. When she discovered that she was paralyzed from her neck down, she wanted to die. With the passing of time she came to trust the Lord. She tells how her accident and subsequent suffering were one of the best things that ever happened to her. She refers to her suffering as **A "GLORIOUS INTRUDER."**

- I. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER **BECAUSE OF SATAN**
- II. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER **BECAUSE OF SIN**
- III. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER IN ORDER **TO GLORIFY GOD**

IV. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER IN ORDER TO BE TESTED

- S** There is a difference between *tested* and *tempted*. **God never tempts** a person to sin, but **God does TEST** (James 1:13-14; Gen 22). It is as if **GOD HAS A UNIVERSITY** into which every believer must be enrolled. It is called **THE UNIVERSITY OF SUFFERING**. The classes in the university of suffering are all required. None of the classes are electives. These classes **TEACH LESSONS OF LIFE** that can be learned by no other means other than suffering.
- S** God enrolled **THE NATION OF ISRAEL** in the university of suffering for forty years. He let them suffer for all those years and He explained to them that it was for the purpose of testing.
 - C** (**Deu 8:2**), "And thou shalt remember all the way which the **LORD thy God** led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and **TO PROVE THEE**, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no."
 - C** (**Deu 8:16**), "Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might **PROVE THEE**, to do thee good at thy latter end;"
- S** **DOES GOD TEST US SO THAT HE** can find out what is in our heart? Or does God test us so that we can find out what is in our heart? Or is it some of both? Doesn't it seem likely that God already knows what is in our heart before He tests us? Isn't it true that sometimes we think we know what is in our heart, but in reality we do not know?
 - Jesus told **PETER** that Peter would betray him three times. **PETER WAS CONVINCED** that he would lay down his life for Jesus rather than deny him. Not until Peter was tested and failed did he realize that denial was in his heart (Luke 22:33). Jesus knew all along what Peter would do, but Peter didn't.

S SUFFERING HELPS reveal what is in a person's heart. For example, **A MAN** said to his counselor, "My wife makes me so angry." The counselor said, "Your wife does not make you angry, she just brings out the anger that is already in you." The man did not know that he had a problem until he was tested.

S BE CAREFUL TO REMEMBER that God does not test us in order to destroy us, or to hurt us. God tests us in order to help us. When we are tested and fail, it affords opportunity to grow by doing something about a weakness.

SEVEN REASONS FOR SUFFERING:

- I. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER **BECAUSE OF SATAN**
- II. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER **BECAUSE OF SIN**
- III. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER IN ORDER **TO GLORIFY GOD**
- IV. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER IN ORDER **TO BE TESTED**

**V. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER IN ORDER TO
MANIFEST THE WORKS OF GOD**

JESUS SAID TO THE DISCIPLES REGARDING **THE BLIND MAN: (V. 3)**, ". . . Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but **THAT THE WORKS OF GOD SHOULD BE MADE MANIFEST IN HIM.**"

S The blind man was privileged to bring great glory to God that day because Jesus healed his blindness. **CHANCES ARE GOOD** we would have never heard of the blind man had it not been for Jesus healing him.

S HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE BOUGHT GREAT GLORY TO GOD because of what they **suffered**?

(1) **JOSEPH** suffered at the hands of his brothers who sold him into slavery. He suffered several years in prison because of a lie by Potiphar's wife. But it was through those horrible experiences that God preserved a nation and brought great glory to Himself. Years later Joseph said to his brothers:

(Gen 50:20), "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."

(2) **DAVID** spent ten years in the wilderness running from King Saul because Saul wanted to kill him. It was during those ten years that some of the most encouraging Psalms were written. Rather than that wilderness experience destroying David, that suffering was what prepared him to bring great glory to God.

(3) **DANIEL** was taken captive to Babylon as a young boy. It was in Babylon that God revealed Himself mightily through Daniel and directed the course of a nation.

(4) **SHADRACH, MESHACH AND ABEDNEGO** were thrown into a fiery furnace. It was in that furnace that they were privileged to glorify God. King Nebuchadnezzar looked down into that furnace and saw the King of Kings (Dan 3:25).

(5) **PAUL** asked God three times to remove the "**thorn**" from his flesh. Three times God told him *no*. God explained to Paul why He would not remove the thorn.

(2 Cor 12:7-9), "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. {8} For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. {9} And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for **MY STRENGTH IS MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS.** . . . "

(6) **MUCH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT** was written while Paul was imprisoned for preaching the Gospel. I wonder if he would have had the time to write those letters had he not been confined. It was in that prison that God glorified Himself through Paul.

(7) **JOHN BUNYAN** spent twelve years in Bedford prison because he preached the Gospel. It was during those years of suffering and confinement that he wrote *Pilgrim's Progress*.

- (8) **FANNY CROSBY** was **six weeks old** when she was blinded by an illness. That little blind girl went on to live **95 years** and wrote more than **9,000 hymns** during her life of blindness. On a simple little **HEADSTONE** in **Bridgeport, Connecticut**, are these words: "**Aunt Fanny,**" and "**Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine.**"

Though all her years we are told that **she never became bitter**. In fact, when she was just **eight years of age**, she wrote these words:

"O, what a happy soul am I, although I can not see
I am resolved that in this world, contented I will be.
How many blessing I enjoy that other people don't,
To weep inside because I am blind,
I cannot and I won't"

- S** The list could go on and on. In each instance, **THEIR SUFFERING WAS NOT THEIR UNDOING**, but rather it was what made them vessels for God's glory. Their suffering actually put God's work **on display** through their lives. Their suffering is what **accented** their testimony so that God would be honored.

S A PASTOR SHARED RECENTLY

"I have **TWO MEN** in my congregation who have suffered a great deal through their life. I don't believe it is a coincidence they are spiritual giants."

SEVEN REASONS FOR SUFFERING:

- I. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER **BECAUSE OF SATAN**
- II. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER **BECAUSE OF SIN**
- III. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER IN ORDER **TO GLORIFY GOD**
- IV. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER IN ORDER **TO BE TESTED**
- V. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER IN ORDER TO MANIFEST **THE WORKS OF GOD**

VI. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER IN ORDER TO DEVELOP GODLY CHARACTER

(Rom 8:28-29), "And we know that **ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD** to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. {29} For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren."

- S** CONSIDER **FIVE** GODLY CHARACTER TRAITS that suffering can produce.

#1. COMPASSION

(2 Cor 1:4), "Who comforteth us in all **OUR TRIBULATION**, that we may be able to comfort them which are **IN ANY TROUBLE**, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

- S** Here is how it works. Like the disciples, we happen upon some *blind* person. We pull out theological dictionaries and start presenting all the reasons the *blind* person is suffering. What **we fail to understand** is that "Blindness" comes in many different forms. Not all *blindness* is physical. Some *blindness* is spiritual. One big area of *blindness* is our lack of godly perspective as to why some people suffer. Our lack of perspective is manifest in our judgmental spirit while analyzing and dissecting why we think other blind people are blind.
- S** **ONE WAY** that God has of working that judgmental spirit out of us is to allow us to suffer. God allows us to **LOSE OUR JOB** so that we will have compassion for others who have lost their job. Rather than judging them as inept, we say, "There go I except for the grace of God." God allows us to **LOSE OUR HEALTH** so that we will have compassion for others who have lost their health. As God comforts us in our loss of health, we learn to comfort other rather than judge them. As the Scripture states, we comfort others with the comfort we have been comforted with. Rather than being critical and judgmental, we become compassionate. Rather than using the

blind man for a theological discussion regarding sin, we take his hand and ask him how we can be of help.

S SUFFERING OFTEN **AWAKENS COMPASSION**. **DR. M. R. DeHAAN** has written a book titled ***BROKEN THINGS***: Listen to what he writes in it:

“The greatest sermons I have ever heard were not preached from pulpits but from sickbeds. The greatest, deepest truths of God's Word have often been revealed not by those who preached as a result of their seminary preparation and education, but by those humble souls who have gone through the seminary of affliction and have learned experientially the deep things of the ways of God.”

“The most cheerful people I have met, with few exceptions, have been those who had the least sunshine and the most pain and suffering in their lives. The most grateful people I have met were not those who traveled a pathway of roses all their lives through, but those who were confined, because of circumstances, to their homes, often to their beds, and had learned to depend upon God as only such Christians know how to do. The grippers are usually, I have observed, those who enjoy excellent health. The complainers are those who have the least to complain about, and those dear saints of God who have refreshed my heart again and again as they preached from sickbed-pulpits have been the men and women who have been the most cheerful and the most grateful for the blessings of almighty God (pp.43, 44).

S **DR. G. W. TRUETT** was the pastor First Baptist Church (FBC) of Dallas, Texas for years. He was a prince of preachers. Dr. Truett experienced a great tragedy in his life which forever changed his life. He was out hunting one day with a faithful member of FBC, **CAPTAIN ARNOLD**. Captain Arnold was Chief of Police for the city of Dallas. Dr. Truett and Captain Arnold were on a hunting trip when Dr. Truett accidentally shot Captain Arnold and he died. Dr. Truett said, "I don't think I can ever preach again." He **secluded** himself as he tried to cope with his **agony** and **torment** before God.

It was during that time that the Lord appeared to him and **called him again** into the ministry. It was said that after that incident that Dr. Truett's life that he preached with an **incomparable sympathy**.

S **(Rom 5:3-5)**, “And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; {4} And patience, experience; and experience, hope: {5} And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”

S **A FIERY YOUNG MAN** filled in as the guest preacher on Sunday. After completing his sermon a wife leaned over to her husband and said, “Wasn't that wonderful!” The husband said, “Yes, indeed it was. But it will be even more wonderful after he has suffered for a while.”

#1. **COMPASSION**

#2. HOLINESS

IN THE FOLLOWING VERSE, LOOK FOR THE WORD “HOLINESS” AND NOTICE WHAT GOD USES TO PRODUCE IT.

(Heb 12:10-11)

(Heb 12:10-11), “For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his **HOLINESS**. {11} Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”

S SUFFERING PRODUCES HOLINESS!

(1) DAVID'S SUFFERING PRODUCED “HOLINESS”

(Psa 119:67, 71), “Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word. . . {71} It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.”

(2) JOB'S SUFFERING PRODUCED "HOLINESS"

(Job 23:10), "But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

Gold is purified by raising it to such an extreme temperature that it is turned into liquid. In liquid form, the dross (garbage, filth) floats to the top and is raked away. What is left is pure gold.

Sometimes God allows the temperature in our spiritual life to reach such extreme levels of suffering that we let go of the impurities of life and "come forth as gold."

- (1) **AN ARTIST WAS ASKED** how he made a horse out of marble. He said, "You knock everything off the marble that is not horse and all that you have left is horse." How does God form holiness in our lives? He knocks off what is not "holy," so that what is left is holy. He knocks off what is not "Christ-like," so that what is left is "Christ-like."

#2. HOLINESS

#3. HUMILITY

GOD REVEALED WHY HE LET ISRAEL SUFFER FOR FORTY YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS

(Deu 8:2-3), "And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, **TO HUMBLE THEE**, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. {3} And **HE HUMBLER THEE**, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live."

(Deu 8:16), "Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that **HE MIGHT HUMBLE THEE**, and that he might prove thee, **TO DO THEE GOOD AT THY LATTER END;**"

S GOD HATES PRIDE (Prov 6:16-17). **GOD RESISTS THE PROUD** (James 4:6). If God hates pride and resists it, then what is God's solution to pride? It is "**HUMILITY.**" God gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). God lifts up the humble (Mat 23:12; 1 Pet 5:6).

S NEBUCHADNEZZAR was the arrogant King of Babylon during the days of Daniel. He walked through the garden of Babylon and proclaimed:

(Dan 4:30-32), ". . . Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty? {31} While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. {32} And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will."

S God did to Nebuchadnezzar exactly what He said He was going to do. Nebuchadnezzar suffered insanity. But after Nebuchadnezzar had suffered for a period of "seven times," God restored him. Listen to the word of the one-time proud man turned humble.

(Dan 4:37), "Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase."

S Suffering has a way of knocking the pride out of us.

#3. HUMILITY

#4. FAITH

It is strange how suffering works, but it simply has a way of helping us to stop trusting in ourselves, and to start trusting in God. **PAUL** gave testimony of how suffering taught him not to trust in himself.

(2 Cor 1:8-9), “For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: {9} But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, **that we should not trust in ourselves**, but in God which raiseth the dead:”

S ANSWER A SIMPLE QUESTION, “How can we trust (have “faith” in) God when He allows us to suffer? **THE ANSWER IS**, “We know God.” To know God is to trust God. We know that God is not going to allow anything to come our way except it be for our good and our growth in Christ-likeness.

S GOD TOLD ISRAEL that He allowed them to suffer in order to help them.

(Deu 8:16), “Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, **TO DO THEE GOOD AT THY LATTER END;**”

S It can sometimes be quite difficult to trust God while walking through the fog of suffering. But fog, or no fog, God expects us to trust Him.

C (Heb 11:6), “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must **BELIEVE THAT HE IS**, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

C THE WORDS, “**BELIEVE THAT HE IS**” seems to imply that such faith is required when everything in human flesh seems to cry out saying that “He is not.”

S REMEMBER WHAT **BILL GOTHARD** WROTE?

“Suffering can be our greatest motivation for spiritual growth, or our deadliest means of discouragement. The difference depends on our understanding of God’s purposes through adversity.”

S ROBERT DEFFINBAUGH

“I do not think that it is possible to praise God in the midst of our suffering and pain until we have come to grips with the goodness and with the sovereignty of God.”

S HAROLD WELLS was born with no arms. He tells of the day as a preschooler, when he was struggling to get a shirt over his head. He said I was grunting and sweating and my mother just stood there watching me. A friend said to my mother, “Why don’t you help your child.” He said, “My mother answered through gritted teeth, “I am helping him.”

S DR. LEHMAN STRAUSS wrote a little booklet titled *In God’s Waiting Room*. It addressed his experiences while waiting on his wife who was ill and confined to the hospital. About that harrowing experience he wrote:

“I will not dishonor God by questioning His right to do what He wants to do.” (From *In God’s Waiting Room*, pg 23-24)

#4. FAITH

#5. OBEDIENCE

A MOST UNUSUAL VERSE REGARDING JESUS

(Heb 5:8), “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he **SUFFERED;**”

S That verse is **PUZZLING** because it says that Jesus *learned obedience* through the things that He suffered. We are told in Scripture that Jesus never sinned (Heb 4:15). What then does it mean that Jesus learned obedience by the things He suffered?

S I AM NOT SURE I understand all that verse means. Perhaps a life illustration would be helpful. Do you remember those times that you tried to put something together without reading the instructions? After almost having the project all put together, you realized that you did it wrong and had to take it all apart again and start over. I would refer to that as “suffering.” So that the experience would not be repeated a second time, you learned to read the instructions and do it right the first

time. Through that suffering of having to “do it again,” we learned obedience.

That may not be a valid illustration as it relates to Jesus. There is a certain mystery to Hebrews 5:8. But mystery or not, the Scripture still states that Jesus “learned obedience by the things which he suffered.”

S PAUL

(Heb 12:9-10), “Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? {10} For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for **OUR PROFIT**, that we might be partakers of his holiness.”

- #1. **COMPASSION**
- #2. **HOLINESS**
- #3. **HUMILITY**
- #4. **FAITH**
- #5. **OBEDIENCE**

SEVEN REASONS FOR SUFFERING:

- I. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER **BECAUSE OF SATAN**
- II. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER **BECAUSE OF SIN**
- III. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER IN ORDER **TO GLORIFY GOD**
- IV. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER IN ORDER **TO BE TESTED**
- V. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER IN ORDER TO MANIFEST **THE WORKS OF GOD**
- VI. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER IN ORDER **TO DEVELOP GODLY CHARACTER**

VII. SOME PEOPLE SUFFER AS A COMPLETE MYSTERY

CONSIDER ANOTHER PUZZLING VERSE:

(Rom 8:20), “For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope,”

QUESTIONS THAT NEED ANSWERS:

- 1) **What** was the creature made subject to? The answer is **“vanity.”**
- 2) **Who** is the **“him?”** The answer is **“God.”** God is the one who subjected the creature to “vanity.”

3) The third question is **“why?”** Why would God subject the creature to vanity? It has something to do with **“hope.”**

S I do not pretend to know all the reasons why God allows suffering. Some of the answers to suffering might never be known this side of eternity. The best we can do in some instances is to simply venture a guess and be sure to walk by faith while in the process. I would call these guesses the **“JUST MAYBE’S.”** Let’s venture a few guesses.

#1. “JUST MAYBE” some people suffer in order to help God bring others to **SALVATION.**

C **(2 Cor 1:6)**, “And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and **SALVATION.**”

C **CHUCK COLSON** was sentenced to prison from one to three years for his part in the Watergate break in during the days of the Nixon administration. God used that harrowing experience to bring him to Christ. He wrote these words regarding his prison experience:

“I went to prison to be free . . . Bless you, prison, for coming into my life” (Chuck Colson, Loving God, p 171-172).

#2. “JUST MAYBE” we suffer so God can teach us His **CHARACTER.**

God’s goal is that the *image of Christ* be formed in us (Rom 8:28-29). If God is trying to teach us **COMPASSION, HOLINESS, HUMILITY, FAITH** and **OBEDIENCE** by what we suffer, perhaps it would be good if we decided to participate in a positive manner in God’s training. Perhaps it might speed up the process.

#3. “JUST MAYBE” God is keeping us from **SOME GREAT TRAGEDY** by allowing us to suffer.

Dr. Dobson tells how his hamster was trying to get out of his cage. All the hamster could see was the cage that prevented him from doing what he wanted to do. What the hamster could not see was Dr. Dobson’s dog waiting and hoping that the hamster

would escape. Does that sometimes picture our attempt to get away from our suffering?

#4. **"JUST MAYBE"** God is **answering some past prayer** in our life. God might be in the process of answering a prayer for our good and yet we are unable to see it.

#5. **"JUST MAYBE"** we are suffering so that we can show people **how to die**. A **PASTOR** went to the doctor and discovered that he had a disease that would soon take his life. He said to his congregation the next Sunday, "I have lived among you and taught you how to live for Christ. Now I want to teach you how to die for Christ."

#6. **"JUST MAYBE"** we might never know why we suffer, or why a loved one suffers, until they get to heaven. But until then, we can trust God. Like **JOB**, may we say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him . . ." (Job 13:15).

S IN THE MEAN TIME, **DON'T MURMUR. DON'T DISHONOR** God by doubting Him. **TRUST** God. DO LIKE **PAUL**:

C (**Rom 5:3**), ". . . We **GLORY** in tribulations . . ."

C (**2 Cor 12:10**), "Therefore **I TAKE PLEASURE IN INFIRMITIES**, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

S **JESUS SAID THE FATHER KNOWS WHAT WE NEED** (**Mat 6:8**), ". . . Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him."

C **DON'T GROW BITTER!** GROW MORE COMPASSIONATE.

C **DON'T QUIT!** ENDURE. TRUST GOD ALL THE MORE.

S **JAMES DOBSON**

THE LORD CAN BE
TRUSTED -- EVEN WHEN
HE CAN'T BE TRACKED

S **ANDREW MURRAY** tells how we should say four things when we are suffering

C I am here by Appointment.

C I am in his Keeping.

C I am under his Training.

C I am here for his Time period.

DR. VANCE HAVNER

Of all of Dr. Havner's almost forty books written over his life time of 80 years, the most popular was a little book entitled, ***Though I Walk Through the Valley***. In it he shares the tender account of the sickness, suffering, and eventual death of his dear wife, Sara" Consider some of Dr. Havner's words.

"I had hoped for the miraculous healing of Sara and that we might bear a dramatic testimony to the direct intervention of God. I had a sermon ready. But it was not to be. My dearest died in spite of the day-and-night efforts of a medical center equipped with the very latest and best in machines, medicine, and methods. It did not please God to heal her. Instead she succumbed to a terrible malady that distorted and disfigured her fair face and features so that we did not open the casket at the funeral.

"My disappointment was intense, but sober thinking has changed my view. If a dramatic experience of healing had been ours, it would have been sensational, but such experiences are rare and my listeners and readers would have said, "That is very wonderful but it happens only once in awhile and is the exception that proves the rule. Most of us do not have such miracles. Our loved ones die, our hopes fade, and we need a word for those who walk the valley with no happy ending to the story. 'I can see now that God denied me what I sought that I might bring a message to the multitude like myself whose prayers are not answered as hoped."