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Why Christians Pass Through Suffering, Tests, And Trials Nowadays: Is There Any Connection With The Will Of God Or With The Accomplishment Of God's Purpose In Our Life?



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† Christians still suffer. We still face sickness, loss, disappointment, persecution, grief, financial hardship, broken relationships, and circumstances we never would've chosen.

† Fulfilled prophecy doesn't mean the end of human suffering. The fulfillment of judgment, resurrection, the coming of Christ,

and the establishment of the New Covenant didn't turn the present world into a place where pain, disease, aging, accidents, and death no longer exist.

† The important question isn't whether Christians suffer, because experience makes that obvious. The question is what Scripture teaches about suffering now that God's redemptive purposes in Christ have been accomplished.

† We need to distinguish between the unique first-century tribulation connected with the end of the Old Covenant age and the ordinary trials believers can experience in every generation (Matthew 24:21, 34).

† We also need to avoid two opposite errors. We shouldn't assume every hardship is direct punishment from God, and we shouldn't assume suffering is meaningless simply because we don't understand why it's happening.

† God can work through circumstances He permits without being the author of evil. He can use suffering to produce endurance, maturity, humility, compassion, dependence, and a deeper confidence in Him (James 1:2-4).

† God's purpose isn't always to remove the trial immediately. Sometimes His work is seen in what He produces in us while we're passing through it.

James 1:2-4

Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

† James doesn't say the painful circumstance itself feels joyful. The joy comes from understanding that testing can produce endurance.

† A tested faith becomes stronger because it learns to continue trusting when circumstances aren't easy (Romans 5:3-5).

† God can use trials as a means of spiritual growth. The trial isn't necessarily evidence that God has abandoned us, it can become the very circumstance through which patience and

maturity develop (Hebrews 12:10-11).

Romans 5:3-5

And not only this, but we also celebrate in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

† Paul describes a process. Tribulation produces perseverance, perseverance produces proven character, and proven character strengthens hope.

† This doesn't mean every painful event was individually sent by God. It means suffering doesn't have to be spiritually wasted.

† God can accomplish something good in us through circumstances that aren't good in themselves (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

† Christianity doesn't promise that believers will avoid hardship. It gives us a foundation that allows hardship to shape us without destroying our hope.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer person is decaying, yet our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

† Paul openly acknowledges physical decline and suffering. Faith didn't cause him to deny reality.

† The outward person can weaken while the inward person becomes stronger. Physical suffering and spiritual growth can happen at the same time.

† Paul's immediate suffering included circumstances unique to his apostolic ministry and the first-century transition, so we shouldn't automatically apply every detail of his experience

directly to ourselves (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).

† The principle remains powerful for believers today. What happens to our bodies and circumstances doesn't determine the condition of our relationship with God.

1 Peter 4:12-13

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though something strange were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that at the revelation of His glory you may also rejoice and be overjoyed.

† Peter was writing to first-century believers facing suffering during the period approaching the fulfillment of those things he said were near (1 Peter 4:7).

† We shouldn't remove this passage from its historical setting and pretend Peter was predicting a fiery end-time persecution thousands of years later.

† However, Peter reveals an important principle. Suffering shouldn't automatically cause believers to conclude that something has gone wrong with their faith.

† Following Christ has never been a guarantee of a trouble-free earthly life.

Hebrews 12:10-11

For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. For the moment, all discipline seems not to be pleasant, but painful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

† Scripture doesn't pretend discipline and painful growth feel pleasant. It specifically says they're grievous while they're happening.

† God's concern is deeper than our immediate comfort. Character, holiness, wisdom, and spiritual maturity can be developed through experiences we'd never voluntarily choose.

† This doesn't mean every sickness, accident, tragedy, or loss is God's discipline. We shouldn't tell suffering people that God

personally caused their tragedy when Scripture hasn't given us the authority to make that claim.

† It does mean God can bring spiritual fruit out of painful circumstances and use hardship to teach us what comfort alone often can't teach us (Psalm 119:71).

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Because of the extraordinary greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

Therefore I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in distresses, in persecutions, in difficulties, in behalf of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

† Paul prayed repeatedly for his suffering to be removed, and the answer wasn't the removal he wanted.

† This destroys the idea that sufficient faith always guarantees immediate deliverance from suffering.

† Paul's thorn was connected specifically with the extraordinary revelations he'd received, so we shouldn't claim that every Christian has the same kind of thorn (2 Corinthians 12:1-7).

† The principle still speaks clearly. Sometimes God's strength is demonstrated not by removing weakness, but by sustaining His people through weakness.

† We can pray for relief while still trusting God when relief doesn't come according to our timetable.

Romans 8:28

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

† Paul doesn't say all things are good. Disease isn't good. Grief isn't good. Cruelty isn't good. Death isn't good.

† He says God works through all things for good. That's a completely different statement.

† God's ability to bring good from suffering doesn't require us to call evil good or pretend painful circumstances don't hurt.

† Joseph expressed the same principle when he explained that what others intended for evil, God used for good (Genesis 50:20).

† God's purpose can be accomplished even when human circumstances appear completely opposed to it.

Philippians 4:11-13

Not that I speak from need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with little, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

† Paul's famous statement about doing all things through Christ isn't a promise that Christians can accomplish anything they imagine.

† The context is endurance and contentment. Paul had experienced abundance and need, fullness and hunger, and he'd learned that Christ strengthened him through all of them.

† Christian victory isn't always escaping the difficult circumstance. Sometimes victory is remaining faithful, hopeful, loving, and spiritually grounded while living through it.

† Contentment isn't pretending everything is fine. It's knowing that our relationship with Christ isn't controlled by changing circumstances.

Historical References

† Josephus described enormous suffering surrounding the Jewish war and Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70. His account helps us understand the historical intensity behind Jesus' warnings concerning Jerusalem and that generation (Matthew 24:21, 34; Luke 21:20-24).

† Tacitus recorded the persecution and suffering experienced

by Christians under Nero. This historical setting helps explain why New Testament writers repeatedly encouraged first-century Christians to endure persecution faithfully.

† Eusebius preserved early Christian traditions concerning the persecution of believers and the flight of Christians from Jerusalem before its destruction. These accounts help distinguish the extraordinary first-century judgment period from ordinary Christian suffering throughout later generations.

† These historical witnesses matter because we shouldn't take first-century tribulation passages and turn them into predictions of another future Great Tribulation.

† The Great Tribulation connected with Jerusalem's covenant judgment belongs to that historical generation. Human suffering, however, didn't end with AD 70.

How It Applies To Us Today

† Christians today can experience suffering because we're still physical human beings living in a world where bodies become sick, accidents happen, people make sinful choices, relationships break, natural disasters occur, and physical death remains.

† Fulfilled eschatology doesn't teach that AD 70 ended physical suffering. It teaches that the prophetic events associated with the end of the Old Covenant age reached their fulfillment.

† We shouldn't interpret every hardship as God's punishment or assume that God personally caused every tragedy.

† We can still believe that God is able to work through every circumstance and produce something spiritually valuable even when the circumstance itself is painful (Romans 8:28).

† Sometimes suffering teaches patience. Sometimes it exposes pride. Sometimes it deepens compassion. Sometimes it teaches us to receive help. Sometimes it changes our priorities. Sometimes it shows us how temporary material things really are.

† Sometimes we may never understand in this life why a particular event happened, and Scripture doesn't require us to invent an explanation.

† We can ask God for healing, relief, wisdom, strength, and deliverance while trusting Him regardless of the outcome (Philippians 4:6-7).

† God's purpose for us isn't measured by whether our lives are painless. His purpose includes transforming our character and teaching us to live faithfully in Christ.

† Trials can become part of that growth, but suffering isn't proof that God is angry with us, and prosperity isn't proof that God approves of everything we're doing.

† Our confidence rests in Christ, not in circumstances.

Q & A Appendix

Q: Why do Christians still suffer if Jesus fulfilled prophecy?

A: Because fulfilled prophecy never promised the end of ordinary physical suffering in this world. The Old Covenant age ended, but human beings still experience sickness, aging, grief, hardship, and physical death (2 Corinthians 4:16; Philippians 4:11-13).

Q: Does God cause every trial we experience?

A: Scripture doesn't give us permission to say that every sickness, accident, loss, or tragedy was personally caused by God. It does teach that God can work through our circumstances for good (Romans 8:28; James 1:2-4).

Q: Can suffering be connected with God's will?

A: Yes, but we need to be careful about what we mean. God can permit suffering and use it to develop endurance, character, wisdom, humility, and maturity without requiring us to say that every painful event was directly sent by Him (Romans 5:3-5; Hebrews 12:10-11).

Q: Does suffering mean that my faith is weak?

A: No. Paul suffered tremendously and prayed for his thorn to be removed, yet the Lord's answer was that His grace was sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

Q: Should Christians pray for suffering to end?

A: Yes. Paul asked the Lord repeatedly to remove his thorn. There's nothing wrong with praying for healing, relief, wisdom, or deliverance while continuing to trust God (2 Corinthians 12:8-9; Philippians 4:6-7).

Q: If God doesn't remove the trial, does that mean He didn't answer?

A: No. Sometimes the answer isn't immediate deliverance. God's grace can sustain us through circumstances that remain difficult, and His strength can become especially evident in human weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

Q: Is every Christian suffering part of the Great Tribulation?

A: No. Jesus placed that tribulation within the generation He was addressing, and the historical events surrounding Jerusalem's destruction belong to that first-century setting (Matthew 24:21, 34; Luke 21:20-24). Christians today can suffer, but we're not waiting for another fulfillment of that prophecy.

Q: Can God accomplish His purpose in our lives through suffering?

A: Yes. Scripture shows that endurance, proven character, hope, maturity, and spiritual strength can develop through trials (James 1:2-4; Romans 5:3-5). The suffering itself doesn't have to be good for God to bring good from it.

Q: What should our attitude be when we don't understand why we're suffering?

A: We don't have to pretend we understand everything. We can pray, seek help, pursue appropriate solutions, and continue trusting God. Our confidence is that circumstances can't separate us from His love in Christ (Romans 8:35-39).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† James 1:2-4; Romans 5:3-5; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 1 Peter 4:12-13; Hebrews 12:10-11; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Romans 8:28; Philippians 4:11-13

† Historical writers: Josephus, The Wars of the Jews; Tacitus, Annals; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History

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