



“Faith’s Response to Suffering” Pt 2

REVIEW

James issued some instructions to his readers regarding suffering and persecution. How would someone with strong trust in God respond to trials and suffering no matter the source? As we have observed throughout the letter, James holds up a mirror to our life that accurately reflects the sincerity of our faith. He portrays how someone with faith in God responds to various life circumstances. Today I want to broaden our observation from our current passage to a comprehensive view of tribulation and suffering as provided in the whole New Testament. I hope to provide you a template to refer to when life feels difficult. This is not comprehensive but an attempt to provide the raw material for your further study and reflection. Review the principles provided here and make application where it may fit your particular circumstance.

I. Source of Suffering

A. God’s Initial Design

God planned a perfect environment. Evil did not originate with God. He did not plan it. Although He planned for it. Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights who cannot be tempted by evil nor can He tempt anyone to evil.

B. Man’s Intentional Default

We understand that sin originally came into our world through the heart and mind of Lucifer. Scripture states clearly how sin came into the human experience.

Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned - Rom 5:12

It is passed down.

knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 1 Peter 1:18

Every person disobeys.

We have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” Romans 3:9-12

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, Romans 3:23

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. Romans 1:18

C. God’s redemptive Desire

As by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 1 Corinthians 15:21-22

And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. 1 John 5:11-12

God has an order to His redemptive plan.

- Regeneration/transformation/glorification of the of the spirit/soul
- Resurrection and transformation of the physical body.

II. The Nature of Suffering

A. Biblical Terms

Misfortune, calamity, affliction, Mistreatment, oppression, Bear hardship, receive or suffer hard blows from without, Distressed by outward circumstances, Distressed by inner emotional upheaval

Tribulation

Those actions of people or those events of life that produce physical, psychological, or spiritual pain and or pressure in my life

SIMPLY-- Any person or circumstance that produces pain or pressure.

These pressures and pains range from slight to severe. It may be anything from an unexpected expense to complete financial disaster. From an exasperating marital disagreement to an excruciating divorce. From a temporarily rambunctious, strong-willed child to a totally rebellious one. From fighting a troubling head cold to facing a terminal illness.

B. Suffering is no respecter of Persons – everyone suffers

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 2 Timothy 3:12

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Joh 16:33

Suffering and evil permeates every sphere of this broken cursed world.

C. Suffering never arrives announced

III. Possible Divine purposes of suffering

A. Suffering promotes purity and maturity

In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Heb 2:10

We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces endurance; endurance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. Rom 5:3-5

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops endurance. Endurance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. Jam 1:2-4

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. 1 Peter 5:10

B. Suffering cultivates compassion for others.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction, with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Paul taught that God mutually connects the body of Christ much as our physical body is interconnected.

God has so composed the body...that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. 1 Corinthians 12:24-26

C. Suffering teaches us to trust in God alone

We do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. 2 Corinthians 1:8-9

We have this treasure (Jesus) in jars of clay (subject to suffering), to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. 2 Corinthians 4:7-10

Trials and suffering readily reveal the true object of our trust.

D. Suffering brings glory to God.

And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. John 9:2-3

We must maintain a God-centered focus where God's glory is the primary goal even if it means personal suffering. Suffering becomes a tool in the Master's hand to demonstrate His power and love to an unbelieving world. He can demonstrate that power and love through healing or not healing.

E. Suffering is a means to achieve personal glory and blessing

Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:17

If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 1 Peter 4:14

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. Rom 8:18

Blessed is the man who endures under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. James 1:12

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:12

Blessing and reward may come here and/or hereafter.

F. Suffering facilitates the spread of the gospel

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. Act 11:19

For it (suffering) is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. 2 Corinthians 4:15

All through church history, suffering has laid the foundation of the spreading of the kingdom.

G. Suffering serves to train and discipline God's children

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Heb 12:9-11

Suffering can be the result of my unwise choices or of God's infinite wisdom that we may share in His holiness. Don't immediately cry, "Why me Lord?" Ask, "What Lord?" What is God looking to do in my life or the lives of others? If I believe that God is a good and loving God, who is infinitely concerned with my ultimate (important distinction) good, then I will be better equipped to respond in a healthy way to any given circumstance. If on the other hand, I believe that God is obligated to keep me comfortable, I will be disappointed and will become bitter. At times God allows Satan to send things our way to test our resistance.

A proper prayer might be... "Lord I refuse any and all purposes of the enemy in this difficulty but embrace whatever purpose You may have and ask for Your power to respond in a way that pleases You.

IV. Prescribed Biblical responses to suffering

A. Prohibited unproductive fleshly responses

- 1. Fight**
- 2. Flight - Flee**
- 3. Freeze**
- 4. Fret**

B. Prescribed faith responses

Each trial that comes our way creates a crossroads for response. I can choose to respond as prompted by the Spirit according to the pattern of Christ. I can choose to respond as pressured by Satan according to the pattern of the flesh. God promises to enable me to righteously respond to any given pain or pressure that people or events may bring. And not only respond initially, but continue to respond, however severe or however long that trial may be. Proper response produces growth. Improper response stunts growth. Physical exercise must be done properly, or it has the opposite result. The Bible encourages several responses to trials and the reasoning behind it.

1. Rejoice

"I Rejoice in my suffering for your sake." Colossians 1:24

"We can exalt in our tribulation" Romans 5:3

"Consider it all joy when you encounter various trials." James 1

"Overflowing with joy in all our affliction." 2 Corinthians 7:4

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 1 Peter 4:12-13

The catalyst for choosing to rejoice in most of these passages is a focus on the possible benefit derived because of the suffering. This keeps our focus on God's purpose rather than our predicament. The opposite of rejoicing is grumbling and disputing against God and people.

2. Praise/give thanks without complaining

*giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Eph 5:20
And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:17*

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 2 Thessalonians 5:16-19

The call to offer thanksgiving abounds in the whole of Scripture.

Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. James 5:9

The Israelites grumbled against Moses and God at every bump in the road

Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding forth to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. Philippians 2:14-16

Praise keeps our focus on the person of God.

3. Endure / suffering long / don't lose heart of give up

We mentioned this last week. Remain under the trial. Persevere, hold on. Close to this would be James' admonition to "suffering-long", forbear.

Rejoice in hope, endure in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Romans 12:12

Consider him (Jesus) who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. Hebrews 12:3

Blessed is the man who endured under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. James 1:12

You have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. Hebrews 10:36

May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and long-suffering with joy... Colossians 1:11

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 2 Corinthians 4:16

Suffer long, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being long suffering about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, suffer long. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. James 5:7-8

4. Strengthen\encourage your heart and others

God strengthens us. The Scriptures strengthen us. God instructs us to strengthen and encourage one another. God provides a remedy for weakness later in James.

5. Pray

Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. James 5:13

Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philip 4:5-7

He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many. 2 Corinthians 1:10-11

V. Deliverance from Suffering

A. Internal deliverance

This relates to God's deliverance from the penalty and power of sin through the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, 1 Peter 1:22

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. 1 Peter 2:24-25

God promises an inner renewal in the face of outer deterioration.

B. External deliverance

Later in James we will explore the cure for weakness.

Is anyone among you without strength? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is weak, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. James 5:14-15

We believe in the healing of the physical body. Jesus offered it to multitudes while visiting the earth. People throughout generations have experienced physical healing.

C. Ultimate deliverance from suffering

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 1 Corinthians 15:51-53

Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Phil 3:20-21

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." Revelation 21:3-4

VI. Suggested elements to help response to suffering

A. Regularly interact with the Scriptures

Seek God in His Word so you won't miss Him in your wilderness.

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 15:4-6

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

God's divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence... 2 Peter 1:3

The only sure place to increase our knowledge of Him is through the Scriptures.

B. Acknowledge God has not promised a pain free life but promises a way to endure

*No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to **endure** it. 1 Corinthians 10:13*

Notice the promise is not removal of suffering but power to **endure it**. Don't demand a pain free life but a fruitful life.

C. Consider God's possible purposes for suffering

D. Submit to God's purposes and Entrust Your soul to Him

Accept, don't resist God's work in your life.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you... Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. James 4:7-10

Read Hebrews 12:1-11 (God's discipline for our holiness)

Let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. 1 Pet 4:19

E. Look to Jesus

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. Hebrews 12:1-3

Follow His example.

You have been called to suffer, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. 1 Peter 2:21-24

F. Pray for yourself and others

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints... Ephesians 6:18

Job found personal deliverance and blessing when he prayed for his foolish friends.

G. Examine your heart and attitudes

Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. James 4:7

Is this suffering caused by any of my unwise choices?

H. Resist Satan and refuse any of his purposes

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. James 4:7

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. 1 Peter 5:8-9

I. Choose God's responses to suffering (see above)

J. Reflect on the ultimate benefit and blessing of suffering.

By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. Hebrews 11:24-26

Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 2 Cor 4:17

Do not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. Gal 6:9

K. Enlist the help of others.

God places us into the body of Christ to minister to each other.

The multitude of commands regarding our interaction and ministry to one another demonstrates that we cannot do it alone. Ask for help!!

L. Study and imitate those who have endured suffering

As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. James 5:10-11

Consider those who endured suffering throughout church history.