



Am I Being Punished or Favored?

1 Peter 1:6-7: (NASB) *⁶In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*



Nobody likes to suffer. Nobody wants pain, turmoil, uncertainty, tragedy or sickness to take up continual residence in their lives. When a Christian suffers by facing hard things in their daily experience, it is easy to look at it as punishment. We see these harsh experiences as a signal that something is wrong, and we expect them to sap the joy right out of our lives. Suffering is easily seen as having little to no redeeming value. We think it signals that God has ceased protecting us and that means trouble. It turns out, the Bible has a lot to say about suffering, trial and punishment. It explains in great detail the role suffering plays in our lives, and the how and why of punishments that come from God.

Jesus is the model for sacred sufferings. But does God have a loving intent or an evil intent for His children's sufferings? Can we know?

Yes, we can! To understand punishment, let's begin by understanding how God views suffering. First, let's note how God permitted His own son to suffer. The book of Isaiah is filled with prophecies about Jesus, written hundreds of years before Jesus was born. We will refer to [Isaiah 53](#) several times in this podcast.

Isaiah explains how God permitted His son to suffer:

Isaiah 53:1-3: (NIV2011) *¹Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? ²He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. ³He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.*

Jesus is described as tender and innocent as a youth. As an adult, Jesus is shown carrying his cross after being beaten and bloody. He was despised when looked upon, *a man of suffering*.

It is clear from these verses that God did permit His son to suffer who was not guilty of sin, so there must be more to suffering than punishment.

Jesus knew suffering would be his destiny:

Mark 8:31: (NASB) *And he began to teach them that the son of man must **suffer** <3958> many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.*

Suffer: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #3958 *pascho*;
to experience a sensation or impression (usually painful)
The King James Version translates this word as: feel, passion, suffer, vex



Jesus had to go through difficult, painful experiences. We will explore why as we move forward.

All of Christianity honors and reverences Jesus' suffering:

Romans 8:32: (NASB) *He who did not spare His own son, but delivered him over for us all, how will He not also with him freely give us all things?*

We see and appreciate that Jesus' suffering had redeeming value.

God didn't spare Jesus from pain, crucifixion, rejection, suffering, ignominy and shame. Why could Jesus not just come down to earth, be a good man, be perfect and die? God was dealing with the justice of reclaiming a sinful world. The only path to redeeming (buying them back) and to reconciling a sinful world was walking the path through the valley of hard suffering. Jesus knew this and graciously accepted it. This was his mission - what he came to accomplish on earth. We see suffering in the life of Jesus, as there was a price that needed to be paid.

God, therefore, sees suffering as a necessary experience for Christians:

Acts 14:21-22: (NASB) *²¹After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²²strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, Through many **tribulations** <2347> we must enter the kingdom of God.*

Tribulations: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #2347 *thlipsis*; pressure (literally or figuratively) afflicted(-tion), anguish, burdened, persecution, tribulation, trouble

We need to acknowledge and embrace the value of Christian hardship because it is part of God's plan.

For a disciple of Christ, the entrance into the kingdom of God is not a four-lane superhighway that is smooth and easy. It is a narrow way, according to Matthew 7:13-20. Imagine walking up a rocky mountain pathway. It is steep, uneven; there are ruts and muddy, slippery spots. It is snake-ridden and buggy. It can be painful and lonely. This is the path Jesus walked.



As a footstep follower of Jesus, if he walked through the mud, guess where you are walking?



We can all understand the example of an athlete in training. They push their muscles to a point of pain and exhaustion in order to become stronger. There is great hardship and suffering required in order to be a champion. We get a picture of what a successful athlete has to do. Likewise, Christians are to be the most successful example of Christ they can possibly be.



God DOES discipline us when necessary. He implemented hardship when sin entered the human experience:

Genesis 3:17: (NASB) ¹⁷Then to Adam He said, Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, You shall not eat from it; cursed is the ground because of you; in **toil** <6093> you will eat of it all the days of your life.

Toil: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #6093 'iṣṣābôn; worrisomeness, i.e. labor or pain
The King James Version translates this word as: sorrow, toil



To sin in Scripture means to "miss the mark." Anything less than perfect harmony with God is missing the mark. Therefore, suffering, hardship, pain and toil are natural consequences of sin.

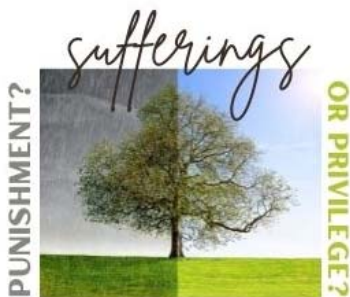
The first sin brought the first suffering. There was a big consequence for an action. Was this a consequence or a punishment? It was both.

As a parent, we know the consequence is often a punishment. Adam was told that he was to do things a certain way and life would be wonderful. However, if he did not follow along, there would be consequences - a discipline - for not following after God and instead being loyal to Satan. Often, consequences ARE the punishment from God. We will look at this further as we go on.

Because God is calling us up out of our sinful lives, His disciplining us is to be expected:

Hebrews 12:7-10: (NASB) ⁷It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? ¹⁰For 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.

These scriptures in Hebrews deal with many aspects of discipline. We will study them in more detail soon. When we understand these verses, the idea of Christian suffering and Christian discipline makes so much more sense. We are looking at this subject from the highest perspective first - by looking at Jesus. We next bring our focus down to our level. There is a vital connection between what Jesus did and what is expected of us. It is different for us in that we are not perfect, but we are still walking along the same pathway that Jesus laid out for us.



Is our Christian suffering a punishment because we did wrong? Or is our Christian suffering a privilege that we get to be a part of? Suffering happens to everyone in every corner of every nation in the world. It is part of the natural state of things. All suffering is not a direct punishment from God, but it is a direct and necessary result of a world that is out of harmony with God. Direct punishment from God only occurs when His chosen people are involved.



Christian suffering is a paradigm shift in thinking where we attribute meaning and purpose to our trials. The perspective of why we go through what we do is different from the average person. We suffer like all human beings - God allows Christians to get cancer, go bankrupt, feel regret and shame - but the way we view the experience is different.

To further explain the statement we made, "Direct punishment from God only occurs when His chosen are involved," - God turned the world over to Satan (which is being allowed for a temporary period of time). When God gives a punishment, it involves only those individuals attempting to follow Jesus. We are focusing on those who say they are disciples of Christ (not just "Sunday-go-to-church" Christians) who are in the trenches, walking the walk, talking the talk. As a result of trying to follow Christ, suffering, punishment and discipline come our way because God loves us. The world is out of harmony with God and God allowed that to be. Even WE are out of harmony with Him, but through Jesus as our advocate, we can come into greater harmony with Him in each and every one of our experiences.

Suffering is universal, so much so that Jesus, as the Redeemer of the world, had to suffer to bear our sins.

**God sees suffering as necessary in our lives.
What is the purpose and result of our sufferings?**

We now see that our suffering and punishments as Christians are not necessarily related to one another. They can be different. This means we need to define both Christian suffering and Christian punishment separately. We will begin by looking at the broader picture of Christian suffering - how it works and what it brings.

Again, this episode focuses only on Christian suffering. The broader topic of suffering is a huge stumbling block for atheists; the thinking being, if there really was an omnipotent God, He would intervene and end all suffering. For more on the permission of evil in general:



Why God permits evil and how He will end it

Let's go back to the Isaiah prophecy that details Jesus' suffering:

*Isaiah 53:4-6: (NIV₂₀₁₁) ⁴Surely he took up our **pain** and bore our **suffering**, yet we considered him punished by God, **stricken** by Him, and **afflicted**. ⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was **crushed** for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his **wounds** we are healed. ⁶We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

Pain...suffering... pierced...crushed...wounds - all of these unjustly happened to Jesus. God wrote the prophecy through Isaiah and Jesus fulfilled it. Suffering was clearly part of the plan.



We need to see suffering as a road to growth, rather than always as a situation where we did something wrong. Many of our Christian sufferings happen because we try to do something right! This is the path Jesus himself walked.

It would help if we could see the purpose behind suffering. But we have to further differentiate between worldly suffering and Christian suffering. Christians suffer just like non-Christians, but how we look at it as a way to learn, build character and glorify God is certainly different. But there is also the privilege of "suffering for Christ," meaning suffering the consequences of standing up for godly righteousness.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF OUR CHRISTIAN sufferings?

To teach us to completely rely on God and not ourselves

2 Corinthians 1:8-9: (NASB) (The Apostle Paul speaking) ⁸For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; ⁹indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead;

The Apostle Paul is describing his own experiences. He is mature, leading the way at every turn, and yet he says he was burdened so much beyond his strength that he *despaired even of life*. Why? *So that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God*. If the Apostle Paul had to learn that, we need to learn it as well.

To teach us to rely on Jesus and give us fellowship with his sufferings

Philippians 3:7,10: (NASB) ⁷But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ¹⁰that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death;

We are connected with his sufferings. In Mark 1:17, Jesus said, *Follow me*. His life path was not that of worldly power, riches and glory. His life path was of *sacrifice and suffering*.

To teach us how to reveal the life of Jesus in our own lives

2 Corinthians 4:8-10: (NASB) ⁸we are *afflicted* in every way, *but not crushed*; *perplexed*, *but not despairing*; ⁹*persecuted*, *but not forsaken*; *struck down*, *but not destroyed*; ¹⁰*always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body*.

We are:

afflicted...perplexed...persecuted...struck down.

But not crushed! But not despairing! But not forsaken! But not destroyed!

This is encouraging!



There are different ways of suffering, including mental, physical, emotional and even spiritual suffering.

...so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body - we want to be a reflection of the Master. This is why we are disciples, followers. The idea is to "grow up" so that when people see us, they see Christ in us.

To have *the life of Jesus...manifested in our body* is to have:

- the experiences of Christian suffering
- the experience of growth, development and maturity
- fellowship
- our lives reflect the preaching of the gospel

Others should be able to look at us and say: *That person reminds me of someone who follows Jesus...!* People should see the characteristics of Jesus when they look at us.

In 2014, we had our friend Vicki on Christian Questions while she was going through aggressive chemotherapy treatment. She commented on James 1:2-4 (NRSV) which says in part, *My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance... Vicki shared, "I thought this Scripture said ...consider it joy... but I have since noticed it actually says ...consider it nothing BUT joy... There are times when my focus is correct and I realize I'm not fighting cancer. That is not my battle. I am fighting my *character* to be a Christian and to be fruitful. God has chosen cancer as my battleground."* Vicki is doing great today!

Listen to the full episode for more:



Examining what the "fruit of the Spirit" really is

To teach us how to comfort others who are suffering

2 Corinthians 1:3-4: (NASB) ³*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,* ⁴*who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*

Being able to understand what others are going through in order to comfort them is a big part of our suffering. What is the difference between "empathy" and "sympathy"?

We might look at empathy and put it aside because we really would want to sympathize with someone. To sympathize means to have a similar experience and to walk through another's experience with them, knowing firsthand what it feels like.



To empathize is to walk with a person through the experience, even though you have never personally had the experience.

Sympathy involves understanding from your own perspective.

Empathy involves putting yourself in the other person's shoes and understanding WHY they may have these particular feelings.

- psychmc.com



In speaking with those who have gone through many hard things I have not, I have the privilege to empathize - to enter into their experiences, to walk with and encourage them, to ask them questions, point out scriptures, to be a shoulder to cry on - so they could stand more firmly.

Whether you are sympathizing because you have been there, or empathizing because you want to bear the burdens of your brethren, does not matter. What does matter is that we work together through our suffering.

Jesus is described as our "sympathetic high priest" in Hebrews 4:14-15. Here is how it reads in the Phillips translation: *For we have no superhuman High Priest to whom our weaknesses are unintelligible - he himself has shared fully in all our experience to temptation, except that he never sinned.*

We, in turn, can comfort others when we understand what they are going through.



Would you look at your hard experiences differently if you knew they would help someone else going through that experience?

Whether we sympathize or empathize, it gives us power to positively effect those around us.

WHAT ARE THE RESULTS OF OUR CHRISTIAN sufferings?

They offer us blessing in the face of persecution

1 Peter 4:12-14: (NASB) ¹²Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; ¹³but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. ¹⁴If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed - there may be consequences for standing up for godly righteousness. Swimming upstream with our Christian beliefs puts us in the spotlight to be made fun of or worse.



We are having an experience with some dear Christian brethren we just met recently. They had to leave their church because of some specific doctrinal disagreements. It was a hard decision because they were so attached to those there. We have been fellowshiping and studying with them, and they so badly wanted to share some of what they are learning but were shut down.

Not only that, and this is heartbreaking, but there are rumors starting to be passed around, and they are being misrepresented.

To be *reviled for the name of Christ* is a hard suffering. Jesus was reviled for the name of God the Father. Why would we not expect and want to be reviled for the name of Christ? It is such an important description of the blessing our Christian suffering can bring us.

It can be unnerving when the meanness comes from fellow Christians. We are all supposed to know better and be kind even in our doctrinal disagreements.

They build comprehensive Christian maturity

Romans 5:3-5: (NASB) ³And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; ⁴and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; ⁵and 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.

Yes, we are even supposed to *exult in our tribulations!*

This is growing up in Christ. What a beautiful and profound personal lesson the Apostle Paul learned and shared with us. What maturity!

Think about what a privileged but difficult goal it is to have a proven character before God through Christ, where God and Jesus see you and say, "Well done. Be with Us for eternity."

We cannot skip over steps to get through that door. It all starts with exulting in tribulation + perseverance in order to have *proven character*.

They prove that our tested faith will bring praise, glory and honor to God and Jesus

1 Peter 1:6-7: (NASB) ⁶In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

This ties into 2 Corinthians 5:18 that talks about the *ministry of reconciliation* - the future work of those in heaven who proved their faith through even the worst of times. They will have a work of helping to reconcile resurrected mankind back to God. This is one of the rewards and privileges of the overcomers.

This comes about because of Christian suffering. Jesus suffered, and he was the ransom for all of mankind. We suffer by walking in his footsteps, and we get to be part of the reconciliation process. It all works together.



If the ultimate result of our suffering is to honor the Father, am I willing to go through it? Compare our brief human lifetime of suffering in relation to eternity!

They produce eternal and glorious results that are beyond comparison

2 Corinthians 4:16-17: (NASB) ¹⁶Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,

Suffering preparing us for glory? This initially seems counterintuitive. Again, ask any athlete who trains hard, competes and wins. They overcome every obstacle to be the best they can be.



While the sufferings of the world are a consequence of sin and are not yet appreciated, Christian suffering is entirely different. We are called to suffer for the specific purposes of learning and maturing in Christ. Our sufferings fertilize the garden of our Christian discipleship to ensure that the fruitage of our lives is abundant.

Suffering is a key to getting the fruitage! Suffering has a value that extends far beyond what we would naturally see. We need to pay attention.

**We can now see that Christian suffering is a privilege.
Is Christian punishment also a privilege?**

While we would not quite call being punished as a Christian a "privilege" in the full sense of the word, we will say that it is an important part of the privilege of being called to Christ. This whole aspect of our Christian lives has to do with being tasked with growing into Christ. Proper growth requires proper direction, and proper direction requires the need to be refocused.

Let us head back to Isaiah 53. Remember, this chapter prophetically describes Jesus. Isaiah has so many prophecies about Jesus that it is sometimes referred to as the fifth Gospel.

We may need to be refocused through discipline. Jesus did not need this. His discipline was not corrective; it was instructive:

Isaiah 53:7-9: (NIV₂₀₁₁) ⁷He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. ⁸By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. ⁹He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Jesus did not need to be disciplined, but he had to have the discipline of the experiences to grow and learn. We are looking at his example at the beginning of every segment so that we can pause and learn. Jesus is our example of how to suffer in the godliest way possible.

What is the purpose of our being disciplined as Christians?

Discipline from God our Father is for the sole purpose of bringing us back into line with Him.



But sometimes discipline does not work. Some people leave the faith when disciplined and stop believing in God. Was the discipline too harsh? No, the child was too rebellious.

Necessary discipline comes in degrees, as sometimes we grasp the lesson faster than other times:

Hebrews 12:5-8: (NRSV) ⁵And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children - My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished (rebuked) by Him; ⁶for the Lord disciplines those whom He loves, and chastises every child whom He accepts. ⁷Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline? ⁸If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not His children.

The Apostle Paul is teaching that the discipline (education and training) that comes from God will be difficult but effective. How?

Discipline represents the Christian's overall learning experience, exemplified in three phases or levels of education and training. Sometimes we need less of a rebuke, and sometimes we need to be figuratively "smacked in the back of the head."

1. *do not...lose heart when you are punished (rebuked) by Him* - this is the first level of training and the least painful. A scolding with words or a look disheartens. We acknowledge we have disappointed God and make a correction. We are disheartened in order to be refocused.

EXAMPLE

I learn some juicy information about someone and really, really want to tell my friends. But, I read a scripture that gets my attention and realize this would be wrong, so I ask for forgiveness and get back on track. I catch my own sin before it becomes an action.

The reason you catch your own sin is because you are in tune with the word of God. This is very helpful - we ALL want to respond on this level, as the rest of the levels are a lot harder!

2. *for the LORD disciplines those whom He loves* -the second level of training. It is more painful and involves discipline through action backed by firm words. Discipline means something needs correction and refocusing. This might not seem like "love" at the time, but it is important for our growth.

EXAMPLE

Maybe the temptation to gossip was just too strong, and I told those friends what should have been kept private. Someone overhears and tells the person what I'm saying and they confront me. I feel shame and need to apologize to not only that person but the others who I now put into an awkward position of having information *they* shouldn't be sharing.



Feathers in the Wind, a Jewish Folktale

Once upon a time there was a woman who loved to gossip. Every day she would sit with her friends gossiping about the bad things others may have done. "Can you believe he did that?" "Can you believe she said that?" "And did you see what he was wearing? A man of his age..." On and on and on she would gossip.



One day the Rabbi asked to see her. "There's something I want you to do for me," he told her. He gave her a cushion and told her to go outside, cut it open and release all the feathers to the wind. "But why?" she pleaded. "Just do as I ask," he told her. The woman went outside, slit the cushion open and released all the feathers to the wind where they were quickly blown far and wide and out of sight. "Now," said the Rabbi, "I would like you to go out and bring back all the feathers." "But I can't," she pleaded. "They've been blown from pillar to post, down the street, over the hill. I'll never be able to bring them all back." The Rabbi looked at her sternly. "And so it is with words and idle gossip," he told her. "Words once spoken can never be taken back. There is no telling how far they will travel and what harm they could do. From now on, I want you to think before you speak." And she did.

This level gives us hurt in our hearts. We must put things back in order by repenting. We have to be dedicated and disciplined to correct what we have done wrong. This is a harder level of discipline, but we should not let it go beyond this point because it gets even harder.

3. *chastises* (literal or figurative) *every child whom He accepts* - this would seem to be the *opposite* of acceptance. This is the third level of training and the most painful. This word *chastises* is also translated as "punished" and "scourged" - the Greek word means "to literally or figuratively flog or scourge." There is pain inflicted for what we have done. Continuing in sin is different from making a mistake and repenting.

EXAMPLE

Maybe the person gossiping was someone who holds a position in the church congregation and ends up having to be removed from service. This would be a difficult but necessary punishment.

It is important to realize that the LORD loves us. *The LORD disciplines those whom He loves.* All of this is for the sole purpose of keeping us in line - or bringing us back into line - with His will. That is the reason for discipline and rebuke. It is not that God is angry; He wants us to grow appropriately as representatives of Christ.



As a dad raising three children, when it came to discipline, it was hard to be harsh. But it was important - I loved them more than I wanted to back off from being too hard. I wanted to make sure they would learn. God loves us that deeply.

But God sometimes does get angry with us. How do we know if we are being deliberately punished by God, or if it is just the natural consequence of what we have done?



To help answer that, we look to see if we can see a natural consequence, if we were taken unaware, wondering what brought it on. Consequences CAN be God's discipline.

We saw in the Garden of Eden how God already laid out the consequences - *dying thou shalt die*. We do not necessarily need to know whether the result is a consequence or a deliberate punishment. The important thing to realize is that it is corrective. Our actions have resulted in this correction that will put us back on the path. We need to do whatever is necessary with this suffering to ensure that we grow by the experience rather than be resentful or crushed by it.

God's discipline will yield fruits of righteousness

IF we are properly exercised by it!

Hebrews 12:9-11: (NRSV) ⁹Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not be even more willing to be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share His holiness. ¹¹Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

If we have not been trained by it, it was a wasted opportunity. We have the opportunity to be trained just like an athlete, to put the work in and feel the soreness and the pain so that we can grow. If we fight against it, we are essentially fighting against the loving, caring, directing hand of God.

God's discipline will bring happiness into our lives

IF we follow it!

Job 5:17-19: (NASB) ¹⁷Behold, how happy is the man whom God reprove, so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. ¹⁸For He inflicts pain, and gives relief; He wounds, and His hands also heal. ¹⁹From six troubles He will deliver you, even in seven, evil will not touch you.

We can be happy if we follow the corrections He gives us. God disciplines us because we are special to Him; we are beloved to Him. He wants us to have that resulting happiness, so we are to go through the hardness and suffering for the things we have done wrong.

God's discipline will grant us blessing and relief from adversity

IF we apply it!

Psalms 94:12-13: (NASB) ¹²Blessed is the man whom You chasten, O LORD, and whom You teach out of Your law; ¹³That You may grant him relief from the days of adversity...

That You may grant him relief from the days of adversity - if the Christian's life is all about adversity, why are we getting relief from it?

Relief from adversity comes through perspective, understanding and acceptance. In talking with someone who has really suffered for Christ, if they are truly following in Jesus' footsteps, they are joyous. How is this possible? Their perspective is that they have been relieved of adversity by having the privilege of sharing with Christ.



Relief from adversity can come if it goes away, of course, but it can also come if it stays - that is part of the growth of Christian suffering.

God's discipline will comfort us because He is faithful and loving in it

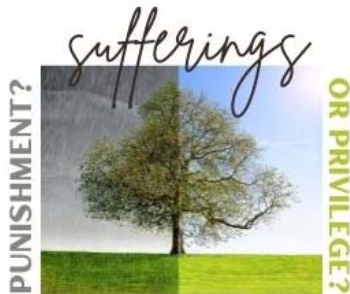


Psalms 119:75-76: (NASB) ⁷⁵I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me. ⁷⁶O may Your lovingkindness comfort me, according to Your word to Your servant.



"...in faithfulness You have afflicted me..."
Can we make this same statement of faith?

You love me so much, You have made it hard for me! Thank you!



While it is never a happy prospect to be facing discipline from God, it is a source of strong encouragement and hope. God's discipline towards us is never an angry reaction; rather, it is always a measured and loving response to help us correct, refocus and grow in Christ.

If we look at God's discipline as though He is just mad at us, we do not understand our Father. Sometimes He IS angry, but only because He loves us and wants us to grow through the experience.

It is comforting to know that being in God's hands when we have done wrong always has the potential for growth!

How should we frame our internal thinking and prayerful responses to God when we face suffering?

Realizing that suffering and discipline are powerful signs of God's favor can be life changing. Now we need to internalize what we have observed. The internal conversations we have with ourselves regarding suffering can help us focus, giving our burdens to our Father when we pray. It comes down to focusing and prayers so the burden ends up in the right hands.

Let's go back to [Isaiah 53](#) for more insight. We know that Jesus gave the overwhelming burden of his suffering over to his Father.

He knew God's will would ultimately bring peace, justification, life and glory:

Isaiah 53:10-12: (NIV₂₀₁₁) ¹⁰Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. ¹¹After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. ¹²Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.



In these final verses of this chapter, we see that Jesus gave it all.

The LORD makes his life an offering for sin - Jesus buys back humanity with the sacrifice of his blood. But he also offers his life as an offering for sin. He is developed as a perfect human being through his suffering, and because of that he can bear the transgressions of humanity. !!!

Hebrews 5:8 tells us, *Although he was a son, he learned obedience from the things which he suffered*, meaning, he gained the privilege and opportunity to carry our sufferings and now makes intercession for our transgressions. He was offering for sin, a ransom for all - that is what Jesus did with his suffering.

We are going to move on to "self-talk," those unspoken thoughts running through our heads all the time. If we are a more negative person, our self-talk is more negative.



One of my challenges is that my self-talk often is not very good. I am very mean to me. I have to work on it because I have to realize that I am in God's hands. I need to be more respectful to see God in me rather than "me" in me.



Ask ourselves key questions

Psalm 42:5: (NASB) *Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence.*

Why are you in despair, O my soul - this is David talking to himself. We can hear him counterbalancing the negative with hope and help from God. This is a recipe for speaking to ourselves in a godly fashion. This will help us endure our sufferings and experiences.

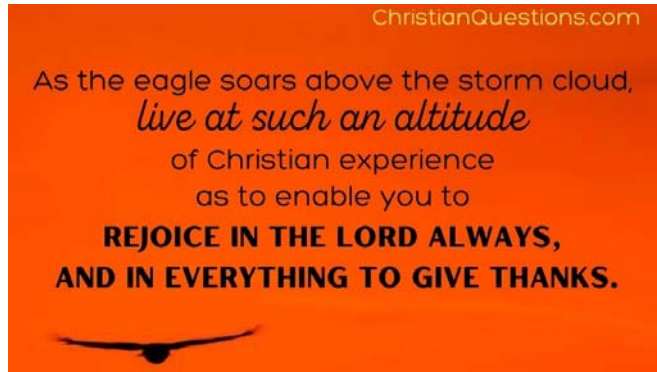
Suffering can take us off course. It hurts. We can either stay in that condition or we have a choice to recenter - are we going to make that choice to look up again from despair? Prayer is the way to recenter. Explain and discuss the hurt with Him. We can grow to a point of praise, bringing us back to where we need to be. We can either take the experience for good or wallow in it and never recover from it. Choose praise and prayer!

Intentionally recall and focus on God's character

HOMework



Lamentations 3:21-24: (NASB) ²¹*This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope.* ²²*The LORD'S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail.* ²³*They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.* ²⁴*The LORD is my portion, says my soul, Therefore I have hope in Him.*



The LORD is my portion, says my soul - the Scriptures instruct us how to address ourselves in order to manage the sufferings and difficulties of our lives.

Reaffirm God as our sovereign
Reaffirm His protectiveness and our trust in it
Rejoice from within

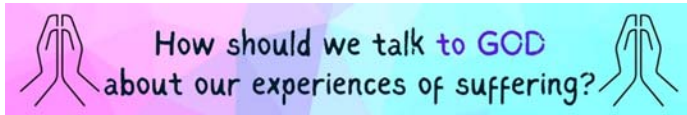
Psalms 28:6-7: (NASB) ⁶Blessed be the LORD, because He has heard the voice of my supplication. ⁷The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart exults, and with my song I shall thank Him.

It starts from deep within - He has heard the voice of my supplication. This voice is often not out loud. The LORD is my strength...my heart (deep within me) trusts in Him, and I am helped; and then my heart exults, and...my song comes from that. The self-talk on the inside can produce the actions on the outside. We need to focus it in talking to ourselves in a God-honoring fashion.

Rest in His care

Psalms 62:1-2: (NIV2011) ¹Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from Him. ²Truly He is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I will never be shaken.

If only we could say like David, My soul finds rest in God. I do not have to be anxious or worried. I can rest in the suffering because He is my fortress. Our inner dialog should be positive, full of hope and trust, even if we have to repeat it over and over again.



Confess our sins and our transgressions to Him

Psalms 32:5: (NASB) I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, I will confess my transgressions to the LORD; and You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah.

WHY? God already knows all about our sins. Why is it so important to confess them?



Because WE do not know our sins well enough. He does know, but for us to bring our sins before the Father is to become 100 percent vulnerable with those sins. To be specific and clear in prayer and not withhold the details is such an important basis to learn how to deal with them. That is what David did and why he is such an amazing example as not only one who talked to himself in a godly fashion, but talked to his Father and did find forgiveness for horrible sins. We are more accountable when we tell the Father our sins. The more detailed we are, the more accountable we will be. This is a way to truly be blessed.

Declare to Him our personal trust in Him

Psalms 31:14-16: (NASB) *¹⁴But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD, I say, You are my God. ¹⁵My times are in Your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and from those who persecute me. ¹⁶Make Your face to shine upon Your servant; Save me in Your lovingkindness.*

This means we should express the trust we give Him. Declare our trust and faith in Him that He will fulfill His promises to us. Say out loud in our prayers, *I trust in You, O LORD, I say, You are my God.* Saying this over and over during a hard experience - and believing it - will change how we view what we are going through.



I have had the experience where there has been such a hard thing in front of me that I said to the Father, *I have to trust You. I have no idea what to do and this is coming on me in the next five minutes. Father, what do I do? What do I say? It is Yours.* My prayer usually is, *Help me to see what You want me to do; I trust in You.*

Proclaim to Him our need for His protectiveness. His righteousness and standing in His name

Psalms 31:1-3: (NASB) *¹In You, O LORD, I have taken refuge; Let me never be ashamed; In Your righteousness deliver me. ²Incline Your ear to me, rescue me quickly; be to me a rock of strength, a stronghold to save me. ³For You are my rock and my fortress; for Your name's sake You will lead me and guide me.*

These scriptures help us see the depth of prayer that will help us manage through suffering. *You are my rock and my fortress; for Your name's sake, You will lead me and guide me. Your righteousness deliver me, I know You hear me,* there is so much here! Telling our Father that we understand these things, and then to let Him gently guide us in whatever His providence might be is how to speak to Him.

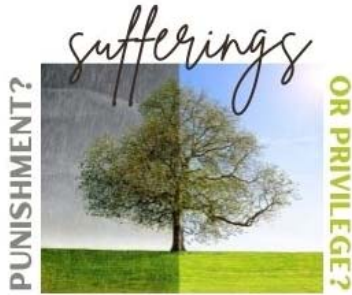
Ask Him for His presence. His principles and His providence to be revealed

Psalms 143:8-10: (NASB) *⁸Let me hear Your lovingkindness in the morning; for I trust in You; teach me the way in which I should walk; for to You I lift up my soul. ⁹Deliver me, O LORD, from my enemies; I take refuge in You. ¹⁰Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; let Your good spirit lead me on level ground.*

Learn the ways in which we need to walk. God is a delivering God and not a tormenting God. This is crucial to remember, no matter what our sufferings are.



This is why we need to learn **how to talk to ourselves** and **how to talk to our Father** in the midst of our suffering. These are two sides of the coin that show us His direction and help us find the growth and maturity suffering brings us. This is such an important aspect of our lives.



Christian suffering and discipline have a profound and eternal purpose. Without them it is impossible for us to be faithful to our call. Let us, therefore, retrain our minds. Let us see our suffering for Christ and our discipline when we commit sin as God's strong and loving hand, guiding and directing our lives so we may honor Him with every breath!

There is JOY in our trials and sufferings:

James 1:2-4: (NASB) ²*Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,* ³*knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.* ⁴*And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

Our sufferings and the disciplines our Father brings us are a privilege because as footstep followers of Jesus, we are blessed with the opportunity to walk where he walked. Not in the same way because we are not perfect, but to walk with the same kinds of experiences, creating the same potential for growth in Christ towards God so that we can honor Him with everything.

Consider it all joy - that is a big ALL and a lot of JOY! It is *all joy* when we encounter trials because this is God saying He loves us. He wants us to grow and develop so that we can be faithful, and so that we can be with HIM and His son for ALL of eternity. This is why we suffer!

Praise God!



*So, am I being punished or favored?
For Jonathan, Rick, Julie and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*

All quoted scriptures are from the 1995 version of NASB unless otherwise indicated.



Join us next week for our podcast on May 2, 2022
Ep. 1227: Where do the Human Soul and Spirit Go
When We Die? (Part I)



Bonus Material and Study Questions

A deeper look at the discipline spoken of in Hebrews 12:

“Discipline” - this is the overall experience of learning as a Christian:

Discipline/Chastening: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #3809 *paideia*; tutorage, i.e. education or training; by implication, disciplinary correction: chastening, chastisement, instruction, nurture

Some examples:

Ephesians 6:4: (KJV) *And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture <3809> and admonition of the Lord.*

2 Timothy 3:16: (KJV) *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction <3809> in righteousness:*

This is the first level of training and the least painful. It might be a correction with words or by a look.

Punished/Rebuked: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #1651 *elegcho*; of uncertain affinity Greek-English Lexicon: 1) to convict, refute, confute 1a) generally with a suggestion of shame of the person convicted 1b) by conviction to bring to the light, to expose 2) to find fault with, correct

The King James Version translates this word as “reprove” six times, “rebuke” five times, “convince” four times, “tell (one’s) fault” once, “convict” once

Some examples:

Ephesians 5:11: (KJV) *And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove <1651> them.*

1 Timothy 5:20: (KJV) *Them that sin rebuke <1651> before all, that others also may fear.*

This is the second level of training - more painful - training through action.

Discipline/Chastening: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #3811 *paideuo*; Greek-English Lexicon: 1) to train children 1a) to be instructed or taught or learn 1b) to cause one to learn 2) to chastise 2a) to chastise or castigate with words, to correct 2a1) of those who are molding the character of others by reproof and admonition 2b) of God 2b1) to chasten by the affliction of evils and calamities 2c) to chastise with blows, to scourge 2c1) of a father punishing his son 2c2) of a judge ordering one to be scourged

The King James Version translates this word as “chasten” six times, “chastise” twice, “learn” twice, “teach” twice and “instruct” once

Some examples:

1 Corinthians 11:32: (KJV) *But when we are judged, we are chastened <3811> of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.*

1 Timothy 1:20: (KJV) *Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn <3811> not to blaspheme.*

This is the third level of training - the most painful - punishment

Punished / Scourged: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #3146 *mastigoo*; to flog (literally or figuratively): scourge



Some examples:

Matthew 10:17: (KJV) *But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge <3146> you in their synagogues;*

John 19:1: (KJV) *Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged <3146> him.*

Christian Questions Weekly Newsletter

CQ Rewind Show Notes and Study Questions

Text
CQREWIND
to **22828** to get started.



christianquestions.com

Subscribe to our YouTube channel and check out CQ's "Moments that Matter!"
These two-minute videos give you something to ponder throughout your day or before you go to sleep.
ChristianQuestions.com/YouTube or search



eqbiblepodcast
Christian Questions
Think about the Bible like you never have before

Like us on Facebook

Study QUESTIONS

Ep. 1226: Am I Being Punished or Favored?

<https://christianquestions.com/character/1226-punishment/>

See:  CQRewind
SHOW NOTES

1. What does Isaiah 53:2-3 tell us about the life of Jesus? What value did his suffering have? Why do we have to have hardships? (See Mark 8:31, Romans 8:32, Acts 14:21-22, Matthew 7:13-20)
2. What was the first disciplinary action God took against humans? What does "sin" mean scripturally? What is the difference between "consequence" and "punishment"? Why does God discipline us? Are our sufferings different from others in the world? Explain. Why is there suffering at all? (See Acts 14:21-22, Matthew 7:13-20, Genesis 3:17, Hebrews 12:7-10)
3. Describe the four main purposes of our Christian suffering? How can we be a reflection of Christ? What is the difference between sympathy and empathy? Why should we develop both of them? (See 2 Corinthians 1:3-4,8-9, 4:8-10, Philippians 3:7,10, Hebrews 4:14-15)
4. What are the 4 main *results* of our Christian suffering? How do these help us in our Christian walk? (See 1 Peter 1:6-7, 4:12-14, Romans 5:3-5, 2 Corinthians 4:16-17, 5:18)
5. Is Christian punishment a privilege like Christian suffering? What is its purpose? Why did Jesus need to be disciplined? Why do we? Describe the three degrees of discipline. (See Isaiah 53:7-9, Hebrews 12:5-8)
6. What blessings does God's discipline cause in our lives? What do we have to do to ensure we receive the benefits from God's discipline? Is God mad at us when He disciplines us? Explain. What is God's motivation to exact discipline upon us? (See Hebrews 12:9-11, Job 5:17-19, Psalms 94:12-13, 119:75-76)
7. How should we talk to ourselves about our experiences of suffering? What four things can we do to reduce anxiety and despair through self-talk? (Psalms 28:6-7, 42:5, 62:1-2, Lamentations 3:21-24)
8. How should we talk to God about our experiences of suffering? Why is it important to confess our sins to God if He knows all about them already? (See Psalms 31:1-3,14-16, 32:5, 143:8-10)
9. Is Christian suffering a punishment or a privilege? How will you find joy in your trials and sufferings by practicing the suggestions from this episode? Why is it a joy when we encounter trials? What do your trials indicate about our relationship with our Father? (See James 1:2-4)