

Biblical Solutions for Life Issues

Topic 16 – Trials and Suffering (Hard Times)

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Review

God is faithful. He will always do what He has said and fulfill what He has promised. He is steadfast, unchanging, perfectly reliable, and utterly dependable. He is 100% reliable, 100% of the time. God is completely trustworthy. Because He is faithful, we can fully submit ourselves to His sovereignty. His faithfulness preserves us from worry, will stop our complaining, and drive us to trust His sovereign plan. God's faithfulness provides believers comfort, drives rebellious believers to repent or be disciplined, and drive unbelievers to repentance and salvation.

God is sovereign. He is the supreme ruler – in control of all events. He has decreed for His own glory all things that come to pass. He continually upholds, directs, and governs all creatures and events. All things are under His rule and control; nothing happens without His direction or permission. He works all things after the counsel of His own will. God's purpose is all-inclusive and is never thwarted. Nothing takes Him by surprise. In His sovereignty, He is neither the author nor approver of sin. His sovereignty does not absolve people of their responsibility; people are still accountable. God's decree includes the means to accomplish that decree. He is sovereign in all things, yet uses various means to bring about that sovereign purpose. God's sovereignty deepens our reverence for His character, puts God in His rightful place and us in ours, magnifies God's grace, is profoundly humbling, gives us a sense of complete security, and provides comfort in sorrow.

❖ **Have you grown to accept the ramifications of God's faithfulness and sovereignty at the heart level? What does that look like?**

Hard Times

The Scriptures tell us that all people will experience trouble in their lives (Job 5:7; 14:1). Suffering entered the world at the Fall (Gen 3). Generally, suffering can be a byproduct of a fallen world, the result of the sin of others, or the result of our own sin. Even so, God is sovereign over all suffering and in His sovereignty, He works ALL things for His glory and our good (Rom 8:28). This includes our own sin and the sin of others.

General Suffering

General suffering is difficulty or hardship that comes on a person through no fault of their own (i.e. not because of personal sin) or persecution because for their faith as believers (2 Tim 3:12; 1 Pet 4:12-19). As we will see later, God calls believers who are experiencing this type of suffering to rejoice (James 1:2-4; 1 Pet 1:6-8) and persevere (Rom 5:3-4).

Suffering due to Personal Sin

There is also suffering due to the consequences of personal sin: either the natural consequences of personal sin or God's discipline for sin. For example: revoked driving privileges because you broke the speed limit (by a lot or many times); marriage difficulty because you have chosen to sin; being fired from job or demoted because you chose to sin, being church disciplined because of sin, God's conviction of sin, or health issues because of sin.

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. ¹⁵**Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler;** ¹⁶**but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.** 1 Pet 4:12-16

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? ⁸**But 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. ¹¹All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Heb 12:7-11

In some places in Scripture, sickness and even death are described as God's judgment of sin.

²⁹For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. ³⁰**For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.** ³¹But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. 1 Cor 11:29-31

In other places in Scripture, sickness is not related to personal sin, but to God's glory.

¹As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. ²And His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" ³Jesus answered, "*It was neither that* this man sinned, nor his parents; but *it was* so that the works of God might be displayed in him. John 9:1-3

We cannot know if sickness is God's discipline. However, we can know if we are sinning or not. Look at what David says of how his body felt because of ignoring the conviction of sin.

¹How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! ²How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit! ³**When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long.** ⁴**For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.** Selah. ⁵I 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. Psa 32:1-5

¹O LORD, rebuke me not in Your wrath, And chasten me not in Your burning anger. ²**For Your arrows have sunk deep into me, And Your hand has pressed down on me.** ³**There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your indignation; There is no health in my bones because of my sin.** ⁴**For my iniquities are gone over my head; As a heavy burden they weigh too much for me.** ⁵**My wounds grow foul and fester Because of my folly.** ... ¹⁸For I confess my iniquity; I am full of anxiety because of my sin. Psa 38:1-5, 18

Sin requires repentance! True repentance will be demonstrated by an earnestness, indignation, fear, longing, zeal, avenging of wrong, and doing everything we can to heal relationships and live at peace with all people.

⁹I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to *the point of* repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to *the will of* God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. ¹⁰For the sorrow that is according to *the will of* God produces a repentance without regret, *leading* to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. ¹¹For behold **what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong!** In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter. 2 Cor 7:9-11

²³Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your offering there before the altar and go; **first be reconciled to your brother**, and then come and present your offering. Matt 5:23-24

¹⁸**If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.** Rom 12:18

¹⁴**Pursue peace with all men,** and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. Heb 12:14

❖ **Are you quick to repent of sin?**

Once repentance is present, the believer is to understand that the continued experience of the natural consequences of sin are what God has ordained at this time and they are for His glory and our good (Rom 8:28). In these situations, God calls the believer again to rejoice (James 1:2-4; 1 Pet 1:6-8) and persevere (Rom 5:3-4).

A believer who is suffering may never experience relief from that suffering this side of heaven. However, they have an incredible opportunity to present the truth of the Gospel to the world (to prove their faith): Jesus Christ is true and He has done a supernatural work in their heart. That is the issue – the heart motives and resulting actions through the trial and suffering.

❖ **Are you committed to glorifying God in repenting all suffering?**

What about equitability?

One may ask, “Why is it that some believers seem to have more difficulty (or difficulty to a more intense degree) in life than others?” Experience shows us that some Christians seem to sail through life while others have a hard time, moving from one crisis to another. The answer to this question is probably unsatisfying from a human perspective. To our human mind, it may seem unfair.

“The fact of suffering undoubtedly constitutes the single greatest challenge to the Christian faith, and has been in every generation. Its distribution and degree appear to be entirely random and therefore unfair.” John Stott – Anglican Theologian/Pastor

The bottom line is... God is God and will do as He wills in allowing or causing His children to experience difficulty. The truth of Scripture is that difficult times are for His glory and our good!

⁵“I am the LORD, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; ⁶That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun That there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, ⁷The One forming light and creating darkness, **Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.** ...

⁹“**Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker—An earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth! Will the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you doing?’** Or the thing you are making say, ‘He has no hands’? Isa 45:5-7, 9 (see also Rom 9:19-24)

❖ **Do you find fault with God?**

Some Key Passages

Romans 8:28

We saw when looking at God’s sovereignty, that the purpose of God’s plan is His glory (Psa 19:1; Eph 1:4-6, 11-12; Rom 9:23; Rev 4:11). In addition, we see that in working all things for His own glory, God causes all things to work together for the good of His children.

²⁸And 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. Rom 8:28

“Good” [agathos] means beneficial, profitable or useful (from God’s perspective).

What an incredible promise! In the midst of the most wonderful or most dark circumstances, we can know that God is working this for His glory and my good.

❖ **Is this a promise that is constantly on your mind?**

James 1:2-4

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

“Consider” [hegeomai] is a command calling for action. It denotes deliberate and careful judgment stemming from external proof, not subjective judgment based on feelings.

“Joy” [chara] is the deep-down sense of well-being that abides in the heart of the person who knows all is well between himself and the Lord. It is not an experience that comes from favorable circumstances, but even occurs when those circumstances are the most painful.

“When” [hotan] carries the idea not just of possibility, but inevitability.

“Encounter” [periptō] means falling into, usually unexpectedly.

“Various” [poikilos] means various kinds. It stresses the diversity not the quantity of trials.

“Trials” [peirasmos] means trial, try, tempt, and prove in either a good or a bad sense. Depending on the context, it may either mean enticing to sin or difficult times.

“Testing” [dokimon] describes both the process of determining the genuineness of one’s faith or specifically the genuineness of one’s faith as the result of testing.

“Endurance” [hupomone] means steadfastly and unflinchingly bearing up under a heavy load and describes character which does not allow one to surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial. The picture is that of steadfastness, constancy, and endurance.

“Let ... have” is a command, putting the readers on guard against allowing the chain of results to be interrupted.

“Perfect” [teleios] means mature, fully developed, full grown, complete soundness.

“Complete” [holokleros] means having the entire allotment, complete in all its parts, and in no part unsound.

“Lacking in nothing” means literally "in nothing being left behind"; not falling short, not being destitute or in need.

There are inevitable varieties of hardships that will fall upon each of us unexpectedly (from our viewpoint). When this occurs, we must make a deliberate decision of the will to evaluate the truths from God’s Word concerning trials and joyfully accept hardship. We know that God has a perfect plan to use the hardship to display the genuineness of our faith and mature us in our relationship with Christ.

❖ **Do you view hardship as a blessing or curse?**

1 Peter 1:6-8

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; ⁸and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 1 Pet 1:6-8

“Greatly rejoice” [agalliaō] is an intense, expressive term that means to be supremely and abundantly joyful. It is not based on circumstances or superficial feelings. It always refers to spiritual rather than temporal joy and usually has reference to a relationship with God.

“Necessary” is a matter of perspective, in the case of trials the necessity is God’s.

“Distressed” [lypeō] refers not only to physical pain, but also to mental anguish, including sadness, sorrow, disappointment, and anxiety.

“Various trials” have the same word meanings as James 1:2

Trials are a necessity from God’s perspective. We are to greatly rejoice knowing that trials are for a short time (in relation to eternity). For the believer who desires to glorify God in the trial it results in the proof of their faith and glory to God.

❖ **Do you view hardship as God’s means of maturing you and proving your faith?**

Romans 5:3-4

¹Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. 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; Rom 5:3-4

“Exult” [kauchaomai] combines the ideas of jubilation and confidence into one word to describe “joyful confidence”; which believers are to be continually (present tense) practicing.

Believers are to first “exult” in the hope of the glory of God (v2) – in the certainty of our salvation. Then we are to “exult” in tribulation (v3). Then we are to “exult” in God through our Lord Jesus Christ (v11).

“Tribulations” [thlipsis] originally expressed sheer, physical pressure on a person. It is a strong term which does not refer to minor inconveniences, but to real hardships.

... has the underlying meaning of being under pressure and was used of squeezing olives in a press in order to extract the oil and of squeezing grapes to extract the juice...In Scripture the word thlipsis is perhaps most often used of outward difficulties, but it is also used of emotional stress. MacArthur NT Commentary: Romans 1-8.

“Perseverance” [hupomone] is translated “endurance” in James 1:3-4

“Proven character” [dokime] is similar to “testing” used in James 1:3 having the idea of being shown proven, authentic or genuine.

Hope [elpis] is confident expectancy.

Believers with a God centered perspective exult in their tribulations. The result of tribulation is perseverance, proven character, and hope; a demonstration that we are a true child of God.

❖ **Do you exult in tribulation?**

Purposes of Difficult Times:

1. To test the strength of our faith.

⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, **that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction.** Ex 16:4

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;** ⁸and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 1 Pet 1:6-8

... even the world can often notice the marked differences between genuine Christians and those who merely profess faith in Christ. As with jewels, there is a noticeable difference in radiance, especially when people are undergoing difficult times. Many people have great confidence in their faith until it is severely tested by hardships and disappointments. How a person handles trouble will reveal whether his faith is living or dead, genuine or imitation, saving or non-saving. Macarthur Study Guide on Trials

❖ **Do you purpose to pass the test of genuineness when undergoing hardship?**

2. To humble us

⁷Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, **to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh**, a messenger of Satan to torment me--to keep me from exalting myself! 2 Cor 12:7

❖ **Are you proud?**

3. To teach us to trust God and not in ourselves

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;** 2 Cor 1:8-9

❖ **When you go through a hardship, in whom do you trust: yourself or God?**

4. To remind us of our future glory

¹⁸For I consider that **the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.** Rom 8:18

❖ **Do you focus on the end in the midst of hardship or on the present circumstances?**

5. To develop godly character and strength

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. Rom 5:3-5

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

¹⁰Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; **for when I am weak, then I am strong.** 2 Cor 12:10

The road to maturity, to being complete in Christ during our alien pilgrimage here, is filled with the bumps of difficult circumstances. The life of ease is not the way God has typically chosen as the forum for growth. This perspective, also reflected in Acts 14:22, and 1 Peter 1:6-9, shows us a purpose in hard days. We have the great opportunity to both please and honor our God by our faith and to simultaneously grow in the likeness of Christ. Wayne Johnston

❖ **When in the midst of hardship, do you focus on glorifying God and growth?**

6. To enable us to better help others in their trials

³Blessed 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.** 2 Cor 1:3-4

❖ **Are you self-focused?**

7. To allow us to receive help in time of need

¹⁶Therefore **let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.** Heb 4:16

❖ **Do you draw near to God in hardship?**

8. To cause us to learn more of God's Word

⁷¹**It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes.** Psa 119:71

❖ **Do you saturate yourself with God's Word when in hardship?**

9. To give us opportunities for service.

¹²Now I want you to know, brethren, that **my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel,** ¹³so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, ¹⁴and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. Phil 1:12-19

❖ **Do you use hardship as an opportunity to minister to others?**

Hope in Difficult Times

1. The trial may never end this side of heaven, but glory awaits the true believer.

¹⁸For I consider that **the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.** Rom 8:18

2. The hope of glory is an anchor for our soul.

¹⁷In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, ¹⁸so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. ¹⁹**This hope we have as an anchor of the soul,** a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, Heb 6:17-19

❖ **What is your hope in hardship?**

3. God is sovereign and is working all things for His glory and my benefit.

²⁸And 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. Rom 8:28

❖ **Do you rest in this promise?**

4. God has given us everything we need to glorify Him through the trial.

²Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; ³seeing that **His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness,** through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. ⁴For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. 2 Pet 1:2-4

5. God will not allow more trials (temptations) in our life than we can bear through His strength.

¹³No **temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man;** and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. 1 Cor 10:13

6. The Word can equip us to glorify God in the trial.

¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷**so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.** 2 Tim 3:16-17

7. Saturation with the Word provides peace.

¹⁶⁵Those who love Your law have great peace, And nothing causes them to stumble. Psa 119:165

❖ **Are you consistently in God's Word to prepare you to glorify Him in hardship?**

8. Prayer brings peace.

⁶Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And **the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** Phil 4:6-7

❖ **Do you have great peace in hardship?**

9. Cast the burden on God and He will care for you.

²²**Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you;** He will never allow the righteous to be shaken. Psa 55:22

⁶Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, ⁷**casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.** 1 Pet 5:6-7

❖ **Where do you cast your burdens?**

10. Perseverance results in blessing, maturity and eventually the crown of life (more glory for God).

¹²Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. James 1:12

Real Life Scenarios

Yourself: You are in your 40s now. You have been healthy all your life except for normal sickness and injuries, but you have never had a "disease". At your normal physical, the doctor finds something (could be cancer, could be something else) that he thinks is wise to have checked out by a specialist who orders several tests (some invasive). In your mind, this is just to "rule out" the cancer. At the consultation after the tests, the specialist tells you that you indeed have cancer.

A. What first response would best glorify God?

B. What will be your purposes as you work through treatment?

C. What opportunities will you have to glorify God and display Him in the world through this?

Someone Else: A coworker seems distant and [his/her] performance is slowly degrading. After a meeting where [he] has an angry outburst, you ask [him] out to lunch and question [him] about what is going on. [He] is reluctant to share, but finally tells you about [his] spouse's declining health and also the family's financial instability due to medical bills. You know [he] attends a church in town.

A. What is the most important thing for you to know about your coworker at this time?

B. After that, where would you begin as you seek to bring Biblical care to this coworker?

C. What other care might you offer?

Conclusion

We will all experience trouble in life—this side of glory. God is sovereign over this trouble. Everything we experience is for God's glory and our good – so that God's purpose of sanctification will be accomplished in us.

Biblical Solutions for Life Issues
Topic 16 – Trials and Suffering – Additional Study

Re-read the verses on hard times in this study.

List out the things that are true about God:

List out the things that are true about you:

What blessings come from hard times?

Do you find your mind set on the truths of the Word during hard times or do you find yourself becoming bitter? Which honors God? What should you do with bitterness?

Read Psalm 20:6-8

⁶Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with the saving might of his right hand. ⁷Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. ⁸They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright. Psa 20:6-8 (ESV)

Make a list of things that believers may be tempted to trust in when going through hard times:

What do you trust in during hard times?