



Ten Reasons to Believe in a God Who Allows Suffering¹

Natural disasters. Terrorist acts. Injustice. Incurable disease. All these experiences point to suffering, and can cause people to question the love and goodness of a God who would let such things occur. We seek to consider who God is, and why we can trust Him even when life hurts—and we don't know why.

Suffering Comes With The Freedom To Choose



Loving parents long to protect their children from unnecessary pain. But wise parents know the danger of over-protection. They know that the freedom to choose is at the heart of what it means to be human, and that a world without choice would be worse than a world without pain. Worse yet would be a world populated by people who could make wrong choices without feeling any pain. No one is more dangerous than the liar, thief, or killer who doesn't feel the harm he is doing to himself and to others ([Genesis 2:15-17](#)).

Pain Can Warn Us Of Danger



We hate pain, especially in those we love. Yet without discomfort, the sick wouldn't go to a doctor. Worn-out bodies would get no rest. Criminals wouldn't fear the law. Children would laugh at correction. Without pangs of conscience, the daily dissatisfaction of boredom, or the empty longing for significance, people who are made to find satisfaction in an eternal Father would settle for far less. The example of Solomon, lured by pleasure and taught by his pain, shows us that even the wisest among us tend to drift from good and from God until arrested by the resulting pain of their own shortsighted choices ([Ecclesiastes 1-12](#); [Psalms 78:34-35](#); [Romans 3:10-18](#)).

Suffering Reveals What Is In Our Hearts



Suffering often occurs at the hand of others. But it has a way of revealing what is in our own hearts. Capacities for love, mercy, anger, envy, and pride can lie dormant until awakened by circumstances. Strength and weakness of heart is found not when everything is going our way but when flames of suffering and temptation test the mettle of our character. As gold and silver are refined by fire, and as coal needs time and pressure to become a diamond, the human heart is revealed and developed by enduring the pressure and heat of time and circumstance. Strength of character is shown not when all is well with our world but in the presence of human pain and suffering ([Job 42:1-17](#); [Romans 5:3-5](#); [James 1:2-5](#); [1 Peter 1:6-8](#)).

Suffering Takes Us To The Edge Of Eternity

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If death is the end of everything, then a life filled with suffering isn't fair. But if the end of this life brings us to the threshold of eternity, then the most fortunate people in the universe are those who discover, through suffering, that this life is not all we have to live for. Those who find themselves and their eternal God through suffering have not wasted their pain. They have let their poverty, grief, and hunger drive them to the Lord of eternity. They are the ones who will discover to their own unending joy why Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" ([Matthew 5:1-12](#); [Romans 8:18-19](#)).

Pain Loosens Our Grip On This Life

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In time, our work and our opinions are sought less and less. Our bodies become increasingly worse for the wear. Gradually they succumb to inevitable obsolescence. Joints stiffen and ache. Eyes grow dim. Digestion slows. Sleep becomes difficult. Problems loom larger and larger while options narrow. Yet, if death is not the end but the threshold of a new day, then the curse of old age is also a blessing. Each new pain makes this world less inviting and the next life more appealing. In its own way, pain paves the way for a graceful departure ([Ecclesiastes 12:1-14](#)).

Suffering Gives Opportunity To Trust God

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The most famous sufferer of all time was a man named Job. According to the Bible, Job lost his family to "a mighty wind," his wealth to war and fire, and his health to painful boils. Through it all, God never told Job why it was happening. As Job endured the accusations of his friends, heaven remained silent. When God finally did speak, He did not reveal that His archenemy Satan had challenged Job's motives for serving God. Neither did the Lord apologize for allowing Satan to test Job's devotion to God. Instead, God talked about mountain goats giving birth, young lions on the hunt, and ravens in the nest. He cited the behavior of the ostrich, the strength of the ox, and the stride of the horse. He cited the wonders of the heavens, the marvels of the sea, and the cycle of the seasons. Job was left to conclude that if God had the power and wisdom to create this physical universe, there was reason to trust that same God in times of suffering ([Job 1-42](#)).

God Suffers With Us In Our Suffering

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No one has suffered more than our Father in heaven. No one has paid more dearly for the allowance of sin into the world. No one has so continuously grieved over the pain of a race gone bad. No one has suffered like the One who paid for our sin in the crucified body of His own Son. No one has suffered more than the One who, when He stretched out His arms and died, showed us how much He loved us. It is this God who, in drawing us to Himself, asks us to trust Him when we are suffering and when our own loved ones cry out in our presence ([1 Peter 2:21](#); [3:18](#); [4:1](#)).

God's Comfort Is Greater Than Our Suffering

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The apostle Paul pleaded with the Lord to take away an unidentified source of suffering. But the Lord declined saying, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." "Therefore," said Paul, "most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" ([2 Corinthians 12:9-10](#)). Paul learned that he would rather be with Christ in suffering than without Christ in good health and pleasant circumstances.

In Times Of Crisis, We Find One Another

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No one would choose pain and suffering. But when there is no choice, there remains some consolation. Natural disasters and times of crisis have a way of bringing us together. Hurricanes, fires, earthquakes, riots, illnesses, and accidents all have a way of bringing us to our senses. Suddenly we remember our own mortality and that people are more important than things. We remember that we do need one another and that, above all, we need God. Each time we discover God's comfort in our own suffering, our capacity to help others is increased. This is what the apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" ([2 Corinthians 1:3-4](#)).

God Can Turn Suffering Around For Our Good

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This truth is best seen in the many examples of the Bible. Through Job's suffering we see a man who not only came to a deeper understanding of God but who also became a source of encouragement for people in every generation to follow. Through the rejection, betrayal, enslavement, and wrongful imprisonment of a man named Joseph, we see someone who eventually was able to say to those who had hurt him, "You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good" ([Genesis 50:20](#)). When everything in us screams at the heavens for allowing suffering, we have reason to look at the eternal outcome and joy of Jesus who in His own suffering on an executioner's cross cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" ([Matthew 27:46](#))

You're Not Alone

You're not alone if the unfairness and suffering of life leaves you unconvinced that a God in heaven cares for you. But consider again the suffering of the One called by the prophet Isaiah, "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" ([Isaiah 53:3](#)). Think about His slashed back, His bloodied forehead, His nail-ripped hands and feet, His pierced side, His agony in the Garden, and His pathetic cry of abandonment. Consider Christ's claim that He was suffering not for His sins but for ours. To give us the freedom to choose, He lets us suffer. But He Himself bore the ultimate penalty and pain for all of our sins ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#); [1 Peter 2:24](#)).

¹ Booklet provided online at RBC Ministries,
http://www.rbc.org/bible_study/ten_reasons_to_believe/reasons/7378.aspx