

Discipleship Questions

How can your sufferings serve as helpful warnings and reminders?

How can your sufferings expose what is truly in your heart and the nature of your faith?

How can your sufferings build trust in God?

How can your sufferings have a positive impact on others?

How can your sufferings result in a greater reliance on God?

How can your sufferings be viewed as a great joy?

How can your sufferings lead you to greater spiritual maturity?

How can your sufferings result in opportunities to glorify God?



There are undoubtedly many struggles and challenges in this life. These ultimately come from living in a fallen world due to the consequences of sin (Genesis 3). However, the Scriptures demonstrate that these challenges and struggles should not be viewed as being all bad. Instead, God can use them to bring about good things. Therefore, people who desire to please God should learn how to find the blessings in life's challenges.

Psalm 90:10-12

Even if life lasts 70 or 80 years, trouble is experienced throughout life before death. Yet, this should teach people to number their days and use wisdom in how they live! Though it can be easy to lose sight of our mortality and eternity (Matthew 25:31-46), the sufferings of life should serve as warning signs not to become too comfortable in this life and fail to make the proper preparations for eternity (Ecclesiastes 12:1-8, 13-14)! So, when you experience suffering, be reminded to number your days and refocus on the spiritual things that truly matter!

Deuteronomy 8:1-5

As Moses addressed the Israelites prior to their entering the promised land, he reminded them how God led them on the 40-year wilderness journey and allowed them to be hungry to humble them and see what was in their hearts. This exposed whether they trusted in and would depend on God (who provided manna for them) or not. Similarly, the times you experience challenges and sufferings should humble you and expose what is truly in your heart! These can expose whether you truly trust in and depend on God or whether you only trust Him whenever

things go well in life (Job 2:8-10). For, some will allow the struggles of life to destroy or weaken their faith, exposing that their faith was not strong and/or genuine!

2 Corinthians 1:3-11

The suffering Paul experienced in Asia was so great that he felt completely overwhelmed and hopeless for this life, feeling as though he had received a death sentence. Yet, Paul came to view this tremendous trial as an event that taught him not to trust in himself and that deepened his trust in God. Certainly, the trials you experience in life ought to drive you to your knees in humble dependence on God, finding the end of yourself and your ability to control things. Furthermore, Paul saw the great comfort he received from God as an opportunity to share God's comfort with others (vv. 3-4)! Similarly, the sufferings and trials you experience should result in finding God's strength to endure them in successful ways rather than through your strength. Then, you can use the trials God has brought you through to be a source of help, comfort, and strength to others who are experiencing trials in their lives!

2 Corinthians 12:6-10

Although we do not know what Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was, we do know it was a source of suffering for him. He pleaded for God to remove it, but God did not remove it. However, Paul came to view it as something that helped him rely on God's grace and power rather than his own, which strengthened Paul's faith. When things go well, there is a tendency for people to forget God and rely on themselves (e.g. their wealth, abilities, knowledge, etc.). However, the sufferings and trials we go through expose our weaknesses and shortcomings. These, then, should drive us to rely on God and His strength and ability!

James 1:2-4

James says that Christians should view trials as a source of great joy! This, however, is not because the trials are pleasurable. Instead, they ought to be seen as a refining process that makes faith stronger and more genuine (like gold refined in the fire, 1 Peter 1:6-7). Particularly, the trials that put your faith to the test ought to result in endurance (perseverance). If you do not allow trials to defeat your faith, God will give you the strength to endure (1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Corinthians 1:8-11). Then, the strength of your faith will have grown to sustain even greater trials. Therefore, trials should be viewed as being critical in bringing you to spiritual maturity. For, while there are several things

involved in becoming spiritually mature, trials and suffering can grow you in ways that comfort cannot!

Romans 5:3-5

Similar to James, Paul demonstrates that Christians can boast (rejoice, celebrate) in their afflictions. Again, trials should grow your ability to faithfully stand in the face of opposition, trials, and hardships. As you endure trials, it demonstrates a character that proves faithfulness to Christ in the midst of hardships. All this works to produce a stronger hope. Without the sufferings and afflictions of life, it would be even easier to lose perspective and become comfortable in life on earth. However, afflictions should strengthen the hope for what God has prepared for His people and cause you to greatly anticipate that glory (Romans 8:14-18; 2 Peter 3:10-13)!

Philippians 1:12-14

The apostle Paul wrote this letter during his 4+ year wrongful imprisonment (Acts 21-28). Despite suffering unjustly, Paul saw the blessings that had come from it all. First, he was given unique opportunities to spread the gospel that he would not have had otherwise (e.g. with the imperial guard and with rulers, Acts 24-26). Second, other Christians spoke the word of Christ with more courage because they were inspired by his imprisonment. Similarly, you may have opportunities to glorify God and spread the gospel that come about because of your sufferings and trials you would not have had otherwise. Then, other people may see something in how you endure the struggles of life that will help and encourage them to glorify God in their lives (Matthew 5:13-16)!

Conclusion

The sufferings and trials of life are often viewed with great reservation and fear. However, despite the pain that is involved in these experiences, the Scriptures demonstrate that they can bring some great blessings! Your challenge is to focus on God through whatever you experience so that you see these potential blessings rather than getting lost in the pain, frustration, and discouragement of them. If you do, you can rejoice in the trials, and God will use them to His glory in ways that only He can!

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