



"How to Find God's Purposes in Your Physical Pain"

*10 outcomes of God's sanctifying effect in our lives
through the instrument of physical pain:*

1. Deepens our knowledge of God and his character—Job 42:1-6

(Ps 73:28; James 4:8)

2. Weans us from a temporal mindset—2 Cor 4:16-18; Rom 8:16-18

3. Directly assaults our self-sufficiency—2 Cor 1:8-10, 4:7-12

4. Refines our faith to become more robust—1 Pet 1:6-7

(Prov 17:3; Is 48:10; Ps 18:30; Prov 30:5)

5. Helps us discover a level of joy previously undiscovered—Jam 1:2-4

6. Fosters greater obedience to the Lord—Ps 119:67, 71

7. Enables us to bring encouraging comfort to fellow sufferers— 2 Cor 1:3-7

8. Causes us to thoroughly examine our lives for sin—Ps 26:2, 139:23-24

9. Links us more closely with the sufferings of Christ—Php 3:7-11

(Heb 13:11-13)

10. Points us to the ultimate sufferer—Is 53:4-6; Heb 2:17-18, 4:14-16

Sometimes we come to the place where we do not demand of God that he explain himself, but we try to determine or comprehend for ourselves what God is doing. We are often unwilling to live without rational reasons for what is happening to us...We are almost insatiable in our quest for the 'why' of the adversity that has come upon us. But this is a futile as well as an untrusting task. God's ways, being the ways of infinite wisdom, simply cannot be comprehended by our finite minds...So just as we should learn to stop asking why, or searching for rational explanations, or seeking to discover what 'good' there is in our own adversities, so we must also learn to quiet our hearts in regard to God's government of the universe. (1)

Up to a point, fear and dismay are natural reactions [to suffering]. But problems arise when distress and apprehension become Godless. The honest anguish of faith slips into godless despair... [sometimes] people escape pain into the false, feel-good refuges of entertainment, recreation, food, drink, and drugs...[However,] the problem is not that we feel troubled by trouble and pained by pain. Something hurtful should hurt. The problem is that God slides away into irrelevance when we obsess over suffering or compulsively avoid it...Pain naturally triggers a cascade of apprehension, unhappiness, and distress and, because of the deviance of our hearts, often triggers bad reactions of unbelief and idolatry. (2)

[In times of pain,] I learned who God is...in a way that I could never have known otherwise. And I can say to you that suffering is an irreplaceable medium through which I learned an indispensable truth—I am the Lord [and there is no other]. (3)

Confidence in God's sovereignty in all that influences us is crucial to our trusting him. If there is a single event in all of the universe that can occur outside of God's sovereign control, then we cannot trust him. His love may be infinite, but if his power is limited and his purposes can be thwarted, we cannot trust him. (4)

All the hardship and loss we face are designed by God to prepare us for our eternal home. God is working through hardship to pry open our hands and loosen our hearts from our tight grip on the here and now. He's working to release us from the hope that this present world will ever be the paradise that our hearts long for He's employing suffering to produce in our hearts a deep and motivating longing for a much, much better home, the eternal home that's the promise of his grace to us all. And he's given us his Spirit right now as the all-access pass to that home. Like a ticket that guarantees entrance, we carry the Spirit around with us to remind us that there's a home waiting for us where we'll be welcomed and taken in forever. What we suffer isn't a failure of God's plan but a tool to bring us in line with God's plan so that we'll love what he's prepared for us more than we love our present comfort. (5)

¹ Jerry Bridges, *Is God Really in Control? Trusting God in a World of Hurt* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 88, 92.

² David Powlison, *God's Grace in Your Suffering* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2018), 48, 49.

³ Elisabeth Elliot, *Suffering Is Never for Nothing* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2019), 15.

⁴ Jerry Bridges, *Is God Really in Control? Trusting God in a World of Hurt*, 29.

⁵ Paul David Tripp, *Suffering: Gospel Hope When Life Doesn't Make Sense* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 185.

Physical suffering exposes the delusion of personal autonomy and self-sufficiency...Physical suffering does force you to face the reality that your life is in the hands of another. It reminds you that you are small and dependent, that whatever little bits of power and control you have can be taken away in an instant. Independence is a delusion that is quickly exposed by suffering... During months [of physical suffering] I was confronted with the reality that much of what I thought was faith in Christ was actually confidence in my physical condition and pride in my ability to [be very productive]...[I concluded that] If you lose hope when your physical body fails, maybe your hope wasn't really in your Savior after all. It was humbling to confess that what I thought was faith was actually self-reliance. (1)

Refining is the process of removing impurities from metal ore. Two verbs in Hebrew are employed metaphorically for the cleansing or purifying of persons or things either by filtering or washing, or by burning or smelting. When referring to metalworking, the process is that of melting a solid to a liquid in order to remove the dross (Isa. 1:25; Mal. 3:3), or to a process of burning in which the fire helps in the extraction of metal from an ore by enhancing chemical reactions (Isa. 48:10; Jer. 6:29; 9:6; Ps. 12:6). (2)

Suffering reveals the genuineness of faith in Christ. And suffering produces genuine faith...Suffering is both the acid test and the catalyst. It reveals and forms faith. It also exposes and destroys counterfeit faith. Afflictions expose [false] hopes invested in imaginary gods...The destruction of what is false invites repentance and faith in God as he truly is...Affliction presses on unbelief [and works with it to expose] bitterness, or despair...or even more desperate illusions or even more deadly self-satisfaction [to bring one] to a reconsideration of what lasts. To lose what you are living for, when those treasures are vanities, invites comprehensive repentance. (3)

The joy we experience from our trials can be some of the greatest joy we ever know. Since one of the major reasons God sends trials into the believers' lives is to test the very genuineness of our faith (Gen. 22), what more fitting occasion to have joy than in the aftermath of an experience of suffering that has proved the reality of our salvation? A strengthened assurance of our salvation and confidence that God cares for us, as manifest in the reality that our suffering could neither break our faith nor sever us from His love, is cause for the highest [joy]. (4)

Those who suffer are candidates to be vessels through whom Jesus Christ might be exalted. (5)

¹ Paul David Tripp, *Suffering: Gospel Hope When Life Doesn't Make Sense* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 20-21.

² Paul J. Achtemeier, Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 858.

³ David Powlison, *God's Grace in Your Suffering* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2018), 14-15.

⁴ John MacArthur Jr, *The Power of Suffering: Strengthening Your Faith in the Refiner's Fire* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2011), 139.

⁵ Richard Mayhue, *The Healing Promise* (Fearn, Great Britain: Mentor, 1997), 211.