

Doctrine of Suffering

1. Suffering is physical or mental pain. Suffering might manifest itself in a loss of health, wealth, friends, family or guilt reaction, psychosis, etc. Suffering is temporary or permanent loss of happiness or mental tranquility.

1.1 There are two general reasons for suffering:

1.1.1 to get an unbeliever to believe on the Lord Jesus and be saved, and

1.1.2 to get a believer to move to the next level of spiritual maturity.

1.1.3 Both the unbeliever and the believer suffer in time but only the unbeliever suffers in eternity.

Rev 20:15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Rev 21:4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

Heb 12:6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

Heb 12:7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

Heb 12:8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

Heb 12:9 Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?

Heb 12:10 For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

Heb 12:11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

1.1.4 Judgment for discipline in the case of the believer can be changed to judgment for blessing by simply following the protocol plan of God.

1.2 The believer needs only to name his or her sin back to God and discipline for suffering is turned into discipline for blessing.

1Co 11:31 But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.

1Co 11:32 When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

1Jo 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

1Jo 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

2. Believers can receive suffering for either discipline or suffering for blessing; we often refer to the former as deserved suffering and the latter as undeserved suffering; although certainly from God's divine viewpoint, both are deserved.

3. Discipline-type suffering is designed to get believers, to either rebound or get hot for the Word, i.e., to name a sin or give up a false concept.

Hos 8:7 "They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind. The stalk has no head; it will produce no flour. Were it to yield grain, foreigners would swallow it up.

Hos 8:8 Israel is swallowed up; now she is among the nations like a worthless thing.

Gal 6:7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

Mat 5:45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

4. Let's look at ten reasons a believer suffers:

4.1 to glorify God in the Angelic Conflict - Book of Job,

4.2 to learn self-discipline,

Heb 5:8 Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

4.3 to demonstrate the sufficiency of God and to control certain types of personalities,

2Co 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

4.4 to help us empathize with others who are suffering,

2Co 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,

2Co 1:4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

4.5 to learn the value of doctrine,

Psa 119:67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.

Psa 119:68 You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees.

Psa 119:69 Though the arrogant have smeared me with lies, I keep your precepts with all my heart.

Psa 119:70 Their hearts are callous and unfeeling, but I delight in your law.

Psa 119:71 It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.

Psa 119:72 The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.

4.6 to illustrate God's message to God's people,

Hos 1:2 When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD."

Hos 1:3 So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son....

Hos 3:1 The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes."

Hos 3:2 So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley.

Hos 3:3 Then I told her, "You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will live with you."

Hos 3:4 For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol.

Hos 3:5 Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.

4.7 to develop patience and reward in eternity,

1Pe 1:7 These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

1Pe 1:8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,

Rom 5:3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;

4.8 to eliminate pride and to relate all things instead to God's grace,

2Co 11:24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.

2Co 11:25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,

2Co 11:26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers.

2Co 11:27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

2Co 11:28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

2Co 11:29 Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

2Co 11:30 If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

4.9 to eliminate a believer's arrogance and bad decisions, and

Mat 7:1 Judge not lest you be judged.

Mat 7:2 For with what judgment ye judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again.

4.10. to witness for the Lord.

2Co 4:8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;

2Co 4:9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

2Co 4:10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

2Co 4:11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.

5. Before we conclude our study of suffering, I want to provide an anecdote from Scripture describing an arrogant king. I think it speaks a thousand words.

- Nebuchadnezzar in chapters two and three of the book of Daniel is described as having seen God in action in the lives of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.
- Although Nebuchadnezzar had seen miracles, he had apparently not passed the point of no return.
- How faithful is God.

Rom 1:20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

- God will continue to work with the great king and his salvation will come after loss of his kingdom and after a bout with insanity.
- Daniel chapter four is actually a salvation tract describing how Nebuchadnezzar "got saved."

6. Let's take a look chapter four in the NIV.

The King Acknowledges God

Dan 4:1 King Nebuchadnezzar, To the peoples, nations and men of every language, who live in all the world: May you prosper greatly!

Dan 4:2 It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me.

Dan 4:3 How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.

The Vision of a Great Tree

Dan 4:4 I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous.

Dan 4:5 I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in my bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me.

Dan 4:6 So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me.

Dan 4:7 When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me.

Dan 4:8 Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.)

Dan 4:9 I said, "Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me.

Dan 4:10 These are the visions I saw while lying in my bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous.

Dan 4:11 The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth.

Dan 4:12 Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the beasts of the field found shelter, and the birds of the air lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed.

Dan 4:13 "In the visions I saw while lying in my bed, I looked, and there before me was a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven.

Dan 4:14 He called in a loud voice: 'Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches.

Dan 4:15 But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field. "Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth.

Dan 4:16 Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him.

Dan 4:17 "The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men.'

Dan 4:18 "This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Belteshazzar, tell me what it means, for none of the wise men in my kingdom can interpret it for me. But you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you."

Daniel Interprets the Vision

Dan 4:19 Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said, "Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you." Belteshazzar answered, "My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries!

Dan 4:20 The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth,

Dan 4:21 with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the beasts of the field, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds of the air --

Dan 4:22 you, O king, are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth.

Dan 4:23 "You, O king, saw a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven; let him live like the wild animals, until seven times pass by for him.'

Dan 4:24 "This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king:

Dan 4:25 You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes.

Dan 4:26 The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules.

Dan 4:27 Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue."

The Vision Fulfilled

Dan 4:28 All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar.

Dan 4:29 Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon,

Dan 4:30 he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"

Dan 4:31 The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you.

Dan 4:32 You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes."

Dan 4:33 Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.

The King Is Saved

Dan 4:34 At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

Dan 4:35 All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

Dan 4:36 At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before.

Dan 4:37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

7. Summary

7.1 Unbelievers suffer to get them to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

7.2 Believers suffer in order to motivate movement toward maturity.

7.3 The more doctrine in our soul the better we can appreciate suffering.

7.4 Suffering for believers should be considered as part of our brief sojourn on the road to ultimate sanctification.

Heb 12:11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

1Pe 1:6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

1Pe 1:7 These have come so that your faith -- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire -- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Rev 2:10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

