STARTING OUT AS A CHRISTIAN · STUDY NOTES

Study 11: Suffering and glory

For personal study or groups

Your name

biblehelp.net

How to use these notes. Watch each part's video on biblehelp.net, or read the text below. Look up each passage in your own Bible and write the answer on the lines. The verses are printed at the back if you need them. At the end there are questions to think about on your own or to discuss in a group.

PART 1

Why is there suffering?

A hard question

We often hear people ask, "If God is good and all-powerful, why do people suffer?" Perhaps we ask it ourselves. Because it stirs such deep feelings, we need humility and sensitivity even in attempting an answer.

Christians do not claim to know the answer to every question suffering raises, but the Bible sheds a great deal of light on it. Our thinking about suffering needs to fit within the framework below. It will help to keep us steady in times of crisis.

There will always be details we do not understand, but that does not mean there is no explanation. God knows many things we do not, and He is not obliged to explain everything. Nor would we understand if He told us: can a three-year-old understand the complexities of science?

Here, then, are some helpful signposts.

1. Our sin brought suffering into the world

God is good and perfect, and He made a good and perfect world in which suffering had no part.

1 **Look up Genesis 1:31**

How good was the world that God made?

Mankind used their original freedom to rebel against God, and as a result suffering and death entered the world.

2 **Look up Romans 5:12**

How did sin enter the world, and what came through sin?

Suffering is often a direct result of human sinfulness and conflict. Sin always leads to suffering. And behind the scenes, invisible to us, the devil is also at work. He is thoroughly malicious, and aims to bring suffering on this world (Luke 13:11, 16). The blame for suffering lies squarely with mankind and with the devil.

2. God has entered into our pain and suffering

God became a man in the person of His Son. He is not indifferent to our pain, but shared in it – supremely at the cross, where Jesus suffered. Jesus is our example of patient suffering.

3 **Read 1 Peter 2:21–23**

How did Jesus respond to suffering?

Jesus' willingness to suffer silences any urge to question God. He was willing to suffer, so let us accept suffering too, when it cannot be avoided. We know enough about God to trust Him with what is unexplained.

3. God commands us to help those who suffer

Jesus had compassion on the sick and healed them. He has set us an example of care. God wants us to lessen sin's harmful effects.

4 **Look up James 1:27**

For whom does pure religion care?

4. God will create a world without suffering

Christians have something to look forward to. One day God will create a new heaven and a new earth, where there is no suffering.

5 **Read Revelation 21:3–4**

What will there be no more of?

PART 2

Suffering and the Christian

5. God uses suffering to make us rely on Him

God may use suffering to bring people to Himself. Suffering is like a surgeon's knife: it can be a "severe mercy" that makes us think about our relationship with God. Suffering teaches Christians to rely on God and not on themselves. Paul's "thorn" (2 Corinthians 12:7) showed him God's strength.

6 **Look up 2 Corinthians 12:9**

What did the Lord say to Paul about His grace and His power?

6. What can Christians expect in a world of suffering?

a) They can expect to suffer like others. Our Lord suffered, and God's people have always had to endure trials. It is important to grasp this, so that when we suffer we don't think God has failed us. We are not promised exemption from the troubles that come to everyone.

7 **Look up 2 Corinthians 1:8**

How heavy was the burden that Paul and his companions bore?

b) They can expect God's help when they suffer. We may not understand why God allows trials, but we know He is in control. Nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:35–39). We may wonder how we can possibly cope, but God never fails.

8 **Look up Psalm 46:1**

What is God to us in times of trouble?

c) They can expect to grow through suffering. We must be open to this. The devil always hopes we will be angry with God and turn our backs on Him. If we resist that temptation, we will see God working wonders, bringing good out of the most distressing circumstances of our lives.

9 **Look up Romans 8:28**

For whose good does God work all things together?

The Lord is our Shepherd, leading us into green pastures (Psalm 23), some of them in the most unexpected places. He knows what we need, and can teach us many lessons through suffering.

7. Finally: heaven

The most important thing of all is to fix our eyes on heaven before suffering comes. If all our hopes are in this world, we will not be able to cope when health, loved ones and possessions are taken from us. Christ has come to prepare us for a better world. Realising this gives us a perspective on suffering. It won't make it more pleasant, but it will help us keep our balance.

So never forget that heaven, not this world, is our home (Revelation 22:3–5), and that to be with Christ is far better.

10 **Look up Philippians 1:23**

What did Paul desire, and why?

God is preparing us for glory. We are not there yet, but we can rejoice in what God has in store for us.

11 **Look up Luke 10:20**

What does Jesus tell His disciples to rejoice in?

Glory ahead

Heaven will more than make up for all the sufferings of this present life (2 Corinthians 4:16–18).

THINK IT THROUGH

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Which of the signposts in this study helps you most when you think about suffering?

2. How did Jesus respond to suffering, and what can we learn from Him?

3. How can keeping your eyes on heaven help you when hard times come?

HIDE IT IN YOUR HEART

Memory verse for study 11

Learn this verse by heart this week. Cut out the card and keep it where you will see it.

STARTING OUT AS A CHRISTIAN · STUDY 11 · MEMORY VERSE

“And we know that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose.”

Romans 8:28

Berean Standard Bible · biblehelp.net

“I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You.” (Psalm 119:11, BSB)

AT THE BACK

The Bible passages (BSB)

1 **Genesis 1:31** *And God looked upon all that He had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.*

2 **Romans 5:12** *Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, so also death was passed on to all men, because all sinned.*

3 **1 Peter 2:21–23** *21For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His footsteps: 22"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth." 23When they heaped abuse on Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats, but entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly.*

4 **James 1:27** *Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

5 **Revelation 21:3–4** *3And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. 4'He will wipe away every tear from their eyes,' and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the former things have passed away."*

6 **2 Corinthians 12:9** *But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest on me.*

7 **2 Corinthians 1:8** *We do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the hardships we encountered in the province of Asia. We were under a burden far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life.*

8 **Psalm 46:1** *God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble.*

9 **Romans 8:28** *And we know that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose.*

10 **Philippians 1:23** *I am torn between the two. I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better indeed.*

11 **Luke 10:20** *Nevertheless, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."*

Scripture: Berean Standard Bible (BSB), public domain. Quotations keep its American spelling. Like many English Bibles, it often says 'man', 'he' or 'brothers' where it means people in general, men and women alike.

FOR GROUP LEADERS

Study 11: Suffering and glory

> **Memory verse:** “And we know that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28). Say it together at the end, and ask who can say it without looking.

Aims

- Give a biblical framework for thinking about suffering: sin's entry, God sharing our pain, our call to help, and the world to come.
- Show what Christians can expect: to suffer like others, to receive God's help, and to grow.
- Fix our eyes on heaven, and close the course with encouragement to keep growing.

Suggested timing (about 60 minutes)

- **5 min** Welcome and short prayer.
- **20 min** Part 1 video (5 min); Genesis 1:31, Romans 5:12, 1 Peter 2:21–23, James 1:27 and Revelation 21:3–4.
- **25 min** Part 2 video (5 min); 2 Corinthians 12:9, 1:8, Psalm 46:1, Romans 8:28, Philippians 1:23 and Luke 10:20.
- **10 min** Closing reflections and prayer; celebrate finishing the course.

Tips

- Someone in the group may be suffering now. Listen more than you speak; don't offer quick answers.
- Avoid suggesting that a particular trial is a punishment for a particular sin.
- Point to Christ, who suffered for us and with us, and to the hope of heaven.
- Plan the next step for the group: Bible reading together, a prayer meeting, or the next course.

Answers to watch for

- **Genesis 1:31:** God's world was very good.
- **Romans 5:12:** sin entered through one man, and death through sin.
- **1 Peter 2:21–23:** Christ left us an example; He entrusted Himself to God.
- **James 1:27:** care for orphans and widows in their distress.
- **Revelation 21:3–4:** God will wipe away every tear; no more death, mourning, crying or pain.
- **2 Corinthians 12:9:** "My grace is sufficient for you."
- **2 Corinthians 1:8:** Paul was under a burden far beyond his ability to endure.
- **Psalm 46:1:** God is our refuge and strength.
- **Romans 8:28:** God works all things together for the good of those who love Him.
- **Philippians 1:23:** to be with Christ is far better indeed.
- **Luke 10:20:** rejoice that your names are written in heaven.