

FROM THE MINISTRY OF



THRUthe**BIBLE**

WHY DO GOD'S CHILDREN SUFFER?



DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

WHY DO GOD'S CHILDREN SUFFER?

There is joy in the Christian life—and peace—and healing. I know, I've experienced all three. But it is also true that God's children will suffer. We can't escape it. Even the Lord Jesus Himself told His own they would have tribulation (see John 16:33).

But even in our suffering, God wants us to be fruitful Christians. He wants us to grow up. He wants to get us off baby formula and out of the spiritual nursery and get us going. He wants to make us men and women of conviction and courage, stamina and strength. And sometimes that lesson is best learned by suffering.

“A Christian's life consists in doing good and suffering evil,” said the Renaissance friar, Girolamo Savonarola. It's true: The Bible tells us God's children do not escape suffering.

The book of Job, one of the first books of the Bible to be written, says: “Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7)—proven true by the laws of aerodynamics.

David wrote: “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all” (Psalm 34:19).

James said, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials” (James 1:2).

Paul doesn’t shy away from it, either, saying, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12).

Let’s agree on this: The Bible says God’s children will suffer.

God did not promise we would miss the storms of life. He only promised we would make the harbor at last.

What God Hath Promised

*God hath not promised skies always blue,
Flower-strewn pathways
all our lives through;
God hath not promised sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.
God hath not promised we shall not know
Toil and temptation, trouble and woe;
He hath not told us we shall not bear
Many a burden, many a care.
God hath not promised
smooth roads and wide,
Swift, easy travel, needing no guide;
Never a mountain, rocky and steep,
Never a river, turbid and deep.
But God hath promised
strength for the day,
Rest for the laborer, light for the way,
Grace for the trials, help from above,
Unfailing sympathy, undying love.*

-Annie Johnson Flint

WHY DO WE SUFFER?

My friend, trials would be meaningless, suffering would be senseless, and testing would be irrational unless God had some good purpose and sound reason for them.

But we don't have one single answer to the question of why God's children suffer. It can't be answered with one verse of Scripture. But the Bible does give us reasons why God's children suffer and we'll explore them in a moment. But first, let's agree on another axiom of Scripture: God can prevent His child from suffering. The question is, of course, why doesn't He?

REASON #1: OUR OWN STUPIDITY

There's no nicer way to say it. Sometimes we suffer because of our own willfulness, selfishness, and willful ignorance. We can try to blame God for this kind of suffering, but it is our fault.

For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. –1 Peter 2:20

The word “faults” here means to miss the mark. Picture a man with a bow and arrow shooting at a target. He comes short of that target, which simply means he misses the mark. Because of our own willfulness, we sometimes miss the mark in how we live and the decisions we make.

I know a young man who inherited quite a sum of money. He and his wife could have lived comfortably the rest of their lives on what he inherited. But he invested in oil wells instead, and they all turned out to be dry holes. He lost a fortune. I heard his wife say several times, “Why did God let this happen to us?” Well, I don’t think God let it happen to them. I think they made very foolish, “get rich quick,” decisions. They missed the mark in their judgments.

Some decisions are just flat out of God’s will. A man once came to see me with a real problem. He had a wife who proved unfaithful to him, and he was going to get a divorce. As I was expressing my sympathy to him in this tragic place in life, he said, “It’s my own fault. I was stupid. I was a Christian, but I drifted out of the will of God. I got into sin, and I met this unsaved girl. I married her, and I’ve lived in a hell ever since.” He understood. He didn’t blame God for it. Many of us suffer because of our own stupidity.

REASON #2: TO TAKE A STAND FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed. “And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.” But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear. –1 Peter 3:14, 15

Sometimes trouble comes to you because you have taken a stand for righteousness. If you wonder if this is the reason for your suffering, first be sure this is an issue of righteousness and that you have a right relationship with Jesus Christ. When you are sure of that, you can be confident God will see you through.

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I know a man who was an official in a very large corporation. They wanted to promote him to vice-president. It was understood that he would have to entertain customers in compromising situations, so he refused the promotion. He said, "I am a Christian. I won't do that." It cost him the promotion—in fact, he was demoted. It cost him something to take a stand for righteousness, but he was willing to make that sacrifice.

Any Christian who takes a stand for God today will have to pay a price for it.

REASON #3: SIN

We suffer for sin in our lives. If a child of God sins, does he get by with it? The answer, of course, is no. But God says He will give us an opportunity to confess that sin and make it right.

For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

-1 Corinthians 11:31

If we do confess our sins, God will not judge us. He says, "My child, if you commit that sin and won't deal with it yourself, I'll take you to the woodshed." And, friend, if He does take you to the woodshed, you can be glad you're His child. He never whips the devil's children, only His own.

If we don't judge ourselves, God will. When John said there is a "sin leading to death" (1 John 5:16), meaning physical death for a child of God, I believe this is what he meant. A child of God can go just so far; we can't get away with our sin. If we commit certain sins, God may just say, "Come on home," and remove us from this life.

The Bible gives us two good illustrations of God dealing with His children's sins.

Remember David in the Old Testament? David committed two awful sins. He broke two of the Ten Commandments. David was God's man, but he thought he had gotten away with his sin

with Bathsheba. Just imagine him sitting on his throne, looking around him at his court, and thinking, *I wonder if anyone knows?* He thought no one knew, so he went on with state business. One day Nathan the prophet, a very fine friend of David's, entered the court. David probably greeted him warmly, not thinking he knew anything about his hidden sin. But then Nathan said, "I have a little story I'd like to tell you." Read it for yourself in 2 Samuel 12.

Nathan told him about two men in his kingdom. One a rich man with flocks and herds, and the other a poor man with just one ewe lamb. He loved that lamb and had raised it as a pet with his children. When a visitor came to see the rich man, instead of reaching into his own flock and taking a lamb for the visitor's dinner, the rich man went over and took the pet lamb belonging to the poor man and killed and ate it for dinner.

You know how easy it is to see the fault in the other fellow but we can't see sin in the mirror? Well, hot-tempered David stood up in anger and said, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this shall surely die!" His righteous indignation got the better of him.

But brave Nathan pointed his finger at David and said, "You are the man."

David could've easily denied his guilt. He could've just lifted his scepter and Nathan would have been dragged out and executed. Nobody would have been the wiser. But that's not what David did. He bowed his head and confessed, "I have sinned."

David had tried to hide his sin. Instead of confessing it to God after he had done it, he went on to commit a greater sin—murder—and tried to rationalize it. So God took him to the woodshed, and He never took the lash off his back.

Frankly, when I read the story of David, I feel like saying to the Lord, "You've whipped him enough!" But *David* never said that. He went through it without complaining because he wanted

the joy of his salvation restored to him. He wanted to be back in fellowship with God. David learned that God *mercifully* judges sin in the lives of His children.

Then in the New Testament, God deals with His children's sin quite definitively. In Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira illustrate the sin leading to death. This couple were believers, but they lied, and in the early church, they could not get away with it. Death isn't the immediate result today, by the way, but because the early church was a holy church, God judged them. They committed a sin leading to death, and God took them home because He will always deal with His own children.

REASON #4: PAST SINS

Another reason God's children suffer is for our past life of sin—committed even before we were saved. Now I want to be very careful here because you might hear people say, "But since I came to Christ, doesn't that mean all my sins are forgiven?" Yes. If you've accepted Christ, you will never come before Him for judgment that will affect your salvation. Never! "Well, if I committed a sin before I was saved, do you mean to tell me I suffer for that?" Yes, sin leads to consequences.

That principle is at work everywhere in the physical world. You sow corn and you reap corn. You plant an orange tree, someday you're going to pick oranges.

Galatians 6:7 says it like this: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." We reap what we sow—it's true for people in any walk of life, whether they are believers or nonbelievers.

Saul of Tarsus, a brilliant young Pharisee who hated Jesus and hated Christians, stood outside Jerusalem one day. Men took off their coats and put them at his feet so they could be unhindered in stoning Stephen (the first one to die for Jesus Christ). "But," you say, "Paul was converted on the Damascus

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A young man with short hair, wearing a dark t-shirt and shorts, is kneeling on a paved surface. He has his hands clasped in prayer and his head bowed. The scene is backlit by a bright, low sun, creating a strong silhouette and a warm, golden glow. In the background, there is a grassy field and a building. The overall mood is contemplative and spiritual.

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

Road. God has forgiven him.” He certainly has. Paul is on the way to heaven, you can be sure of that. But he committed an awful sin. So on his first missionary journey, while he is in Lystra one day, they drag him outside of the city and stone him and leave him for dead. (I believe he *was* dead, and God raised him from the dead.) You never hear Paul complain about the stoning. Paul knew that whatever you sow, you reap—he’s the one who wrote these words to the Galatians.

Mel Trotter, one of the great evangelists in my generation, held meetings when I was a pastor in Nashville, Tennessee. Mel had been a drunkard before he believed in Jesus Christ—he had probably sunk as low as any man could go. He even stole the shoes off the feet of his dead daughter when she was in her coffin—took them out and hawked them to buy liquor in order to get enough courage to go to the funeral. You just don’t go any lower than that! Yet God saved him, and he had become an outstanding evangelist.

After a service one night, a group of us went out for dessert. Everyone else ordered a big malt or milkshake, but he ordered only a little glass of water. As we were enjoying our malts we began to kid him because he had only a little glass of water. I never forgot his answer. He said, “When the Lord gave me a new heart, He did not give me a new stomach. I still have the same old stomach that liquor ruined.” May I say to you, “Whatever a man sows, that will he also reap.”

I receive hundreds of letters from people whom God has transformed. But, as I told one who had turned to Christ after many years of being addicted to drugs, “It’s wonderful that you have come to Christ now, but as you age, you’re going to find that your body will have to pay for what you went through.” You don’t escape. You cannot escape.

REASON #5: A HIGH PURPOSE OF GOD

Job is an example of another reason God's children suffer. Why did Job suffer—it's for a lofty purpose of God, which He does not always reveal to the believer. Perhaps Job suffered, not because he had done anything wrong, but because God used him to counter Satan's accusation. Satan's charge was, "Job serves You only for what he can get out of it. If You let me get to him, I'll show You. He'll turn against You. He'll curse You to Your face!" So God took down the hedge He had around Job and let Satan move in. And, as this man suffered, he demonstrated that he was no paid lover. Job didn't love God for what he could get out of it; his love for God was genuine.

On this same note, God said a strange thing about Paul the apostle when he was converted. He said He was going to make him a missionary to the Gentiles, then He said, "I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:16). While it is true Paul suffered for sins in his life before his conversion and he reaped what he had sown, he also suffered immeasurably in his life as a missionary. He details this in his second letter to the Corinthians:

... In labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. -2 Corinthians 11:23-28

Paul experienced the limit, friend. You and I have never suffered as much as he did. Paul can stand as a witness to that for every child of God.

REASON #6: FAITH

Some believers suffer heroically for their faith. I noticed this recently as I studied Hebrews, chapter 11, for the *Thru the Bible* study. Notice this:

Who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again..... –Hebrews 11:33–35

Here is a group of people who, by faith, gained great victories for God. Friend, it is wonderful to be able to say, “I’ve been healed.” No one knows how happy I’ve been to be able to say that. But some haven’t been able to say that. In the middle of verse 35, we are introduced to another company. Notice how this group suffered:

... Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. –Hebrews 11:35–38

What a strange thing! The first group of people by faith *escaped* the edge of the sword. This group were *slain* by the sword. But both acted by faith. Frankly, we can’t reconcile the two. God permits some folks to suffer—you have known saints like this. I rather think they are His choice saints. James and Peter, you recall, were arrested by old Herod. Herod took James and put

him to death. Peter he put in prison, but God got him out. Is the Lord playing favorites? No, He is not. James could endure martyrdom; Peter could not. Later on Peter was a martyr also, but not then. He was growing in grace.

God doesn't permit some Christians to suffer for the simple reason they can't take it. God lets one group escape the edge of the sword, and they do it by faith. They may not have had quite as much faith as the other group had.

REASON #7: DISCIPLINE

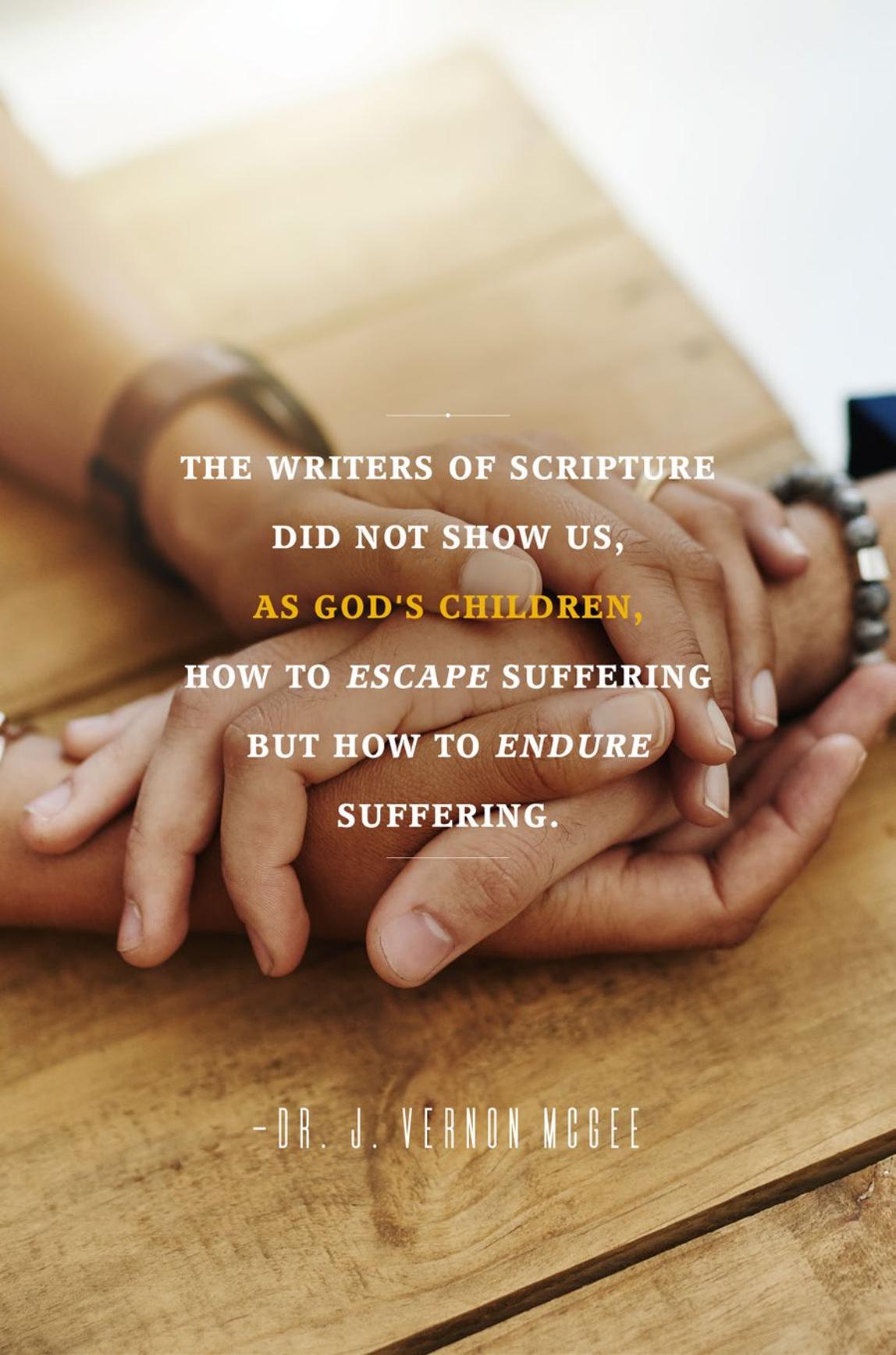
For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. –Hebrews 12:6

Some misunderstand this verse because they think the word “chasten” means punishment. Actually, it means child training, discipline. In other words, God does not have undisciplined children. He disciplines His own, and He uses certain lessons to get through to us.

The Judge punishes; the Father chastens. Punishment is for breaking the rules of the Father, as we have seen. When appropriate, God deals that way with His children. But when He chastises, or trains, His child, He does so in love. It may be severe and it may hurt, but it's not delivered as angry punishment.

It's rather like the old story about the father who took his son out to the woodshed for a little discipline. But before the father whipped the boy, he sat down and wept. As he looked up at the boy, he said, “Son, this hurts me more than it does you.” And the son said, “Yes, Dad, but not in the same place.”

Our heavenly Father, I'm confident, is not severe because He takes delight in disciplining us, but He does it for our benefit. Therefore, the writers of Scripture did not show us, as God's children, how to *escape* suffering but how to *endure* suffering. That is the most important thing. When the Lord disciplines us, it's for a worthy purpose and a productive goal.



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BENEFITS OF OUR SUFFERING

Now here's the part I want to entrust to those who are suffering through the discipline of the Lord. Take these four benefits to heart.

BENEFIT #1: PATIENCE

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

–Hebrews 12:7

Patience means to be able to endure suffering. God disciplines us so that He may teach us how to endure trials, sickness, and suffering. Patience is one of the fruits of the Spirit. It doesn't come in a gift-wrapped package at Christmas. Patience comes through suffering. In Romans, Paul says tribulation or trouble works patience in the life of a believer:

... But we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance. –Romans 5:3

To suffer and not realize why you are suffering is, to my judgment, one of the most foolish things a believer can do. When God disciplines us, He is trying to teach us endurance. He is teaching us patience.

BENEFIT #2: ASSURANCE

As I mentioned before, God only disciplines His own. If you are suffering, then this is proof you are His child.

But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. –Hebrews 12:8

If God does not discipline you, then you are not actually His child. God disciplines His children—every one who He calls His own. Suffering doesn't always mean you are out of favor with God, or out of His will or you've done something wrong. Sometimes suffering means you are proof-positive His child.

William I, who probably did more for England than any other ruler, is called William the Conqueror, but he didn't sign his name that way. He signed his name William the Bastard because he was the illegitimate son of Robert, Duke of Normandy, and was recognized by Robert to succeed in his place. William the Conqueror never let the world forget his real background. I believe a great many church members today could sign their names the same way. They are church members, but they actually are not children of God. They really haven't been born again into the family of God. They have no proof they are God's children.

God disciplines His own so we will *know* we belong to Him.

BENEFIT #3: PROFIT

Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. –Hebrews 12:9, 10

The “profit” here is not material profit—it is spiritual profit, and that is “partakers of His holiness.”

You and I live in a day of action. I've said many times, "Get busy for God. Do something for God." But too often our busyness eclipses a desire to live a holy life for God. But He wants a holy life above your service. Really, what has happened to old-fashioned holiness? I started off in the Methodist church, and I just can't get away from it. I remember hearing Bishop Moore, of the old Southern Methodist Church, say years ago, "If the Methodists were as afraid of sin as they are of holiness, it would be a great day." That applies to believers everywhere today. We need holy living, and God disciplines His children so they might have a holy life.

BENEFIT #4: PRODUCTIVITY

God wants us to be productive Christians.

Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. –Hebrews 12:12, 13

In other words, He wants us to grow up. He wants to get us off baby formula and out of the spiritual nursery and get us going. He wants to make us men and women of conviction and courage, stamina and strength.

Someone asks, "How may I teach my children to live the Christian life and to attend church?" The answer is: By living the Christian life yourself and going to church yourself. This is something that is desperately needed—courage and conviction in the lives of believers.

I was privileged to know the poet, Martha Snell Nicholson, and to be her pastor. She suffered terrible pain whenever her body was touched, so much so she couldn't leave her home. Well, she wanted to be baptized by immersion. So, we went to her home and as I baptized her, lowering her into a bathtub filled with water, she screamed out in pain. It was horrible. But if you read any of her poetry, you'd never dream that she suffered so. It was God's beautiful discipline working in her in order to bless others.

The greatest pulpits are not in churches; they are on beds of pain. Many wonderful saints of God cannot attend church services. I learned that over the years of radio ministry. Many, many people are bedfast, but by faith they are living for God. I know one woman who writes a volume of letters every month to encourage missionaries on the field, and she is lying on a bed in constant pain. What a message she sends!

GOD DISCIPLINES

HIS OWN SO

WE WILL KNOW

WE BELONG TO HIM.

A tall, slender evergreen tree stands prominently on a dark, rocky outcrop in the ocean. The tree's branches are sparse and reach outwards. The surrounding water is calm and greyish-blue, with several smaller rocks visible in the distance. The background shows a hazy, forested coastline under an overcast sky.

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HOW DO YOU ACT WHEN YOU SUFFER?

You can respond to the Lord's chastening in a number of ways. You can despise it. You can ignore it by not accepting that God is trying to get a message to you. You can accept it like a brute beast accepts pain. "Well, it's just my luck." My friend, if you are a child of God, you haven't had hard luck. God is trying to tell you something. Hebrews 12:5 says, "Do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him."

You can also be a crybaby. "Why did God let this happen to me?" You can become a super-pious saint and become a martyr. "Well, this is my cross and I'll bear it," when all the time you wrestle with an inner rebellion going on. Oh, my friend, that is not what God wants you to do. Listen to Him:

Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

-Hebrews 12:11

In the moment, no suffering is pleasant. If you want to know the truth, when I'm suffering, I scream at the top of my voice. Of course, it is not joyous—but it's just for a brief moment.

A preacher in the south once asked for favorite Scripture verses. One deacon got up and said, "My favorite verse is, 'And it came to pass.'" Everyone looked puzzled. The preacher asked, "What do you mean your favorite verse is, 'And it came to pass'?" "Well," he said, "when trouble comes to me, I just turn to where it says, 'It came to pass,' and I thank the Lord it came to pass and it didn't come to stay."

This may not be a correct interpretation of that verse, but I tell you, God's Word teaches us a marvelous truth. "No chastening seems to be joyful for the present"—it's terrible. Don't say you are a martyr and you are going to bear it. Say, "I'm going to get out of this as quickly as I can."

When I had surgery for cancer, I asked everybody to pray for me. A woman wrote, "Now, Dr. McGee, you are ready to go so I am going to pray the Lord takes you home." I wrote a reply in a hurry, "Don't you pray that prayer. This is between the Lord and me, and you let Him handle it." I wanted to be cured of cancer. I was prepared to learn the lesson God had for me, but I wanted to *live*.

Don't be passive about what God is doing. Ask Him to show you what He wants to accomplish in your life through this season of suffering. And grab hold of it by faith.

We are to *endure* chastening. Let me be personal at this point.

When I got cancer in 1965, I announced it on my radio program, and asked people to pray for me. I had periodic x-rays, that showed my lungs were clear of the seven cancer spots. I thanked God for healing. But I want to say this to you: I accepted cancer as punishment from God. I believe He was punishing me. I'll tell you why. I had been at the Church of the Open Door for

15 years. I had come to the place that I thought I didn't need the Lord to bring the crowds. I thought I was doing it myself. As a result, the Lord put me flat on my back to let me know I was absolutely nothing. He said, "I can remove you from this scene, and I do not need you." He punished.

Eight years later I was stricken with another illness, but this time, I did not feel it was punishment. I felt He was disciplining me. I was confident I was in God's will, so I went to Him and said, "Look, I think I've learned all the lessons I need to learn, and I'd appreciate it if You would make it possible for me to fulfill my obligations." I was committed to speak at a conference, and I didn't know what they would do without me. So I begged the Lord, "Let me go." Actually I rebelled against the chastening and against my doctor's orders. I got up and tried to move, and God slapped me down, oh, so hard! I never have suffered like I suffered at that time. I had to cancel all my speaking engagements that summer and fall. God assured me, "It's all right. They will get along without you. I want you to lie down and just get acquainted with Me. I want you to know I love you and that you have a lot of lessons to learn yet." I found out the Lord had a lot of things to teach me. I have never been brought as close to the Lord as I was during that time. Never. How wonderful He was.

It's amazing what you can learn when you are flat on your back. You simply have to look up to the Lord and let Him speak to you.

How do you respond, friend, when suffering comes?

There are no accidents in a Christian's life. Even when a Christian has an "accident," it didn't happen by chance. Do you take an inventory of your life when trouble comes? Do you ever evaluate your suffering? Do you turn your stumbling blocks into steppingstones?

"Why did God let this happen to me?" is a good question. Here's a better answer to it: You've got a race to be run. A goal to attain. A battle to fight. You've got something good to do.



THE GREATEST
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Job discovered this truth:

But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold. –Job 23:10

God not only refined him, but He doubled everything he lost. Someone counters, “But God didn’t double his children. He gave him the same number of children he lost.” No, He doubled them also. You see, when he lost the cattle, he lost them permanently—they were gone forever. But when he lost his children, he did not actually lose them—they just went on before him. So God *doubled* his children also.

Next, let’s look at Paul the apostle. Paul never received a reward down here. In fact, he became a martyr, but he could say at the end of his life:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. –2 Timothy 4:7, 8

Paul will get his reward afterward.

Whether now or later, His faithful children always get a reward. Someday God will wipe away all tears, and He will heal all the broken hearts. Then He will reveal the reasons for those puzzling experiences you and I had down here.

Do you remember when the children of Israel went through the wilderness? They crossed the Red Sea in great victory, and they sang the song of Moses to the Lord (Exodus 15). God delivered them. What a victory it was! Immediately their first experience in the wilderness was a lack of fresh water. When they got to Marah where there was water, they eagerly drank it, but it was bitter. They began to complain—their first experience was a bitter one. So God said to Moses, “There is a certain tree here. Get a branch from it, put it in the water, and it will be sweet.”

Friend, you and I need to bring Jesus Christ and His death on the tree into the bitter experiences of our life to make them sweet. That is the only thing in the world that can make the experiences of suffering down here sweet.

We are to run with patience the race set before us. How?

Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher [architect] of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has set down at the right hand of the throne of God. –Hebrews 12:2

The most important thing is to draw near to God. When we do, He promises to draw near to us. We need to keep very close to Him in these days.

When I was a boy, I went to grade school in southern Oklahoma. On April Fool's Day, it was the custom among the bad boys to play hooky. Well, although I was a good boy, I went with a bad crowd. One time we came to school on April the first, put our books in our desks, and then about a dozen of us went down to the old Phillip's Creek to go fishing. We had a good time running up and down the creek to the different holes we knew. None of us caught any fish, but we had a great day. When we started back home, the problems began to arise. We decided the best thing to do was to go by the school, get our books, and take them home so our parents would not suspect what we had done. When we reached the schoolhouse, everybody had gone, so we walked into our room. The principal, apparently knowing what we would do, walked in after us.

"Boys, did you have a good day?"

"Yes, sir." It *had* been a good day up to that moment!

He paraded us down the hallway to his office, sat us down, and gave us a little talk. We knew what was coming. He said, "Now I keep my switches down the hallway locked up in a closet. I'll go down and get them, and I'll come back and punish each one of you."

So while he was gone, one of the boys who had been in there more than any of the rest of us and knew his way around, gave the best advice I ever received. He said, “Now when he hits you with that switch, the first lick will just burn you up because he starts off with you way out on the end of the switch. But as he whips you, take a step toward him. Keep moving toward him. The closer you get to him, the less it’ll hurt.”

That was the best advice I ever had. I remember the first lick really burned. But I began to edge toward him, and when he finished, I was somewhere pretty close to his hand and it wasn’t hurting me at all.

That was a great lesson. And since then, I have learned that God also disciplines His children. If you don’t want it to hurt, the thing to do is get close to Him. The closer you are, the less it will hurt.

The Lord Jesus said in John 15 that He is the vine, we are the branches, and the Father prunes the branches. It hurts to be trimmed like that! But, as the old Scotch divine said, the Father is never so close to the branches as when He is trimming them. That is wonderful. We need to get close and stay close to Him.

I Needed the Quiet

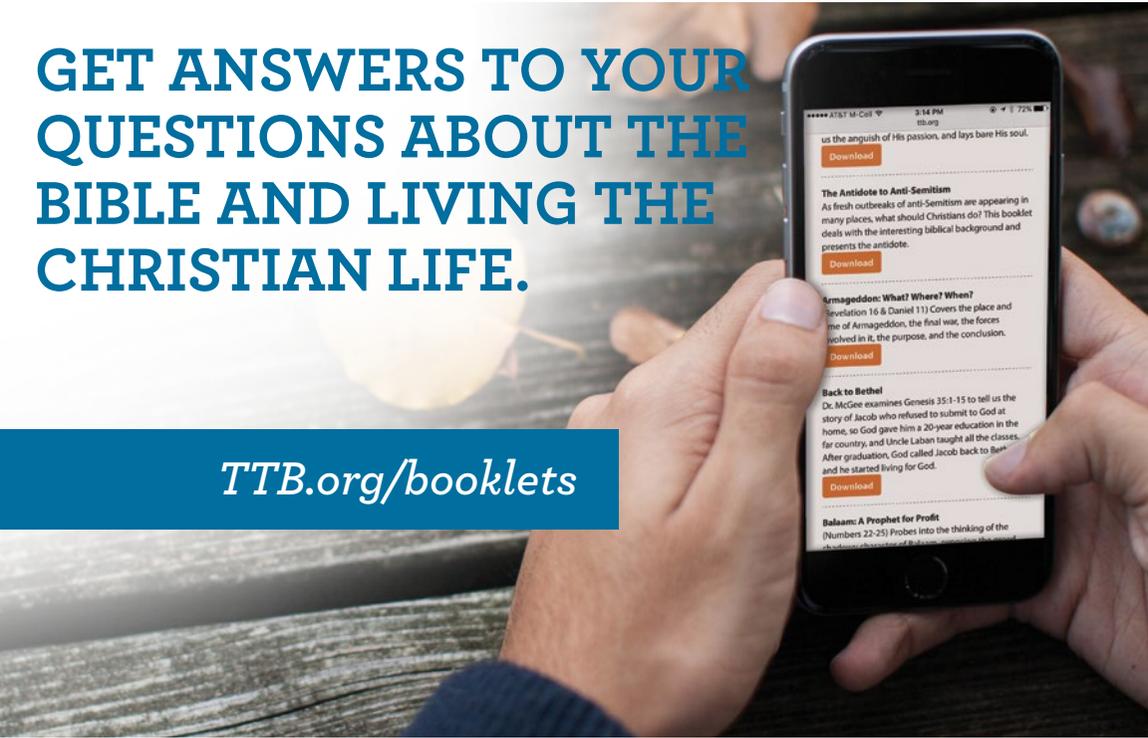
*I needed the quiet so He drew me aside,
Into the shadows where we could confide.
Away from the bustle where all the day long
I hurried and worried when active and strong.
I needed the quiet though at first I rebelled,
But gently, so gently, my cross He upheld,
And whispered so sweetly of spiritual things.
Though weakened in body,
my spirit took wings
To heights never dreamed of
when active and gay.
He loved me so greatly He drew me away.
I needed the quiet. No prison my bed,
But a beautiful valley of blessings instead—
A place to grow richer in Jesus to hide.
I needed the quiet so He drew me aside.*

—Alice Hansche Mortenson

A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and talking to each other outdoors. They are both gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and greenery.

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A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a smartphone. The phone screen displays a list of booklets from TTB.org. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a wooden table.

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