

5 Books on the Christian Perspective of Suffering

by Virginia Orton

<http://lifemessenger.org/5-books-on-the-christian-perspective-of-suffering/>

The plight of man in a world marred by sin and death demands that one make sense of the suffering that grips every person in various forms and degrees.

A person's world-and-life-view – their underlying convictions concerning the origin, nature, meaning and destiny of man and the world – will inform one's response to suffering.

For the unregenerate, believing a lie that man is the product of mindless chance in an impersonal universe, suffering is ultimately meaningless and a madness to endure. As a victim of a tragic universe, this brief life is all there is, directing man's highest good to "eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die" (1 Cor 15:32). Hence, our present culture of death, terminating "inconvenient" life through abortion and euthanasia.

The gospel profoundly shatters this lie. Man lives in a world created and governed by the sovereign triune God who directs all things according to His own good purpose. As his image bearers, men and women are not victims of impersonal forces but are subject, in the totality of their life and being, to the living God. Tribulation and tragedy in the world, rather than *karma* or chance, is the consequence of sin, man's violation of God's law. He, therefore, stands in need of redemption and restoration.

The marvel of the gospel, while foolishness to the unregenerate, is that the all-powerful God became man to restore all things; taking the form not of a stoic overlord but that of a "suffering servant"—a man of sorrows acquainted with grief (Isa 53:3; Phil 2:7-8). Drinking the cup of God's wrath in full, Jesus suffered and died not as a victim, but willingly in man's stead for the joy that was set before him—his resurrection glory, that would secure the redemption and restoration of man, bringing many sons to glory (Jn 10:18; Heb 3:10; 12:2).

Rather than a madness to escape, through the incarnation God reveals that suffering has meaning, serving His redemptive purpose as the path to glory. Thus, while human reason is confounded by the apparent contradiction of an *all-loving* and *all-powerful* God allowing suffering, the incarnation provides some salve to the dilemma as the supreme demonstration that God's love and power turns suffering to His own glory.

Therefore, if it was fitting for the pioneer of man's salvation and perfecter of the new humanity to enter into human suffering and learn obedience as the path to glory (Heb 3:10; 12:2), we can be assured that it is, likewise, fitting that the heirs of salvation learn obedience through suffering. Thus, being conformed to the image of the Son (Heb 12:9-11). As Paul says, "Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, *if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory*" (Rom 8:17).

The Puritan writer John Flavel reminds us:

We forget so easily that in the spiritual life there must be the darkness of the night before there can be the radiance of the dawn. Before the life of resurrection can be known, there must be the death that ends the dominion of self. It is a serious but a blessed decision, this willingness to say, "I will follow Him no matter what the cost. I will take the cross no matter how it comes!"

Yet, grievously this willingness to endure suffering is largely lost in the modern church. Preferring "personal peace and affluence" over God's path to glory – suffering – the modern church has become pitiful, poor and blind (Rev 3:17-22). Nonetheless, the Father will discipline his children. Desiring mature sons of His kingdom, He would rather have our "hearts be heavy under adversity, than vain and careless in prosperity" (Flavel).

This, of course, does not mean God's children won't enjoy His temporal blessings of prosperity and peace in life! Suffering

has no virtue in itself and is not to be sought after or self-imposed. Even so, the believer's road to glory is, to be sure, a painful one requiring perseverance. Yet, in the midst of the perplexity of pain, the promise remains that those who trust in the Lord turn even "the Valley of Baca" – the valley of weeping – into a place of springs (Ps 84:6). The believer's strength and joy is not dependent on their circumstances but has its life-spring in the Lord of glory and his victory, whereby when wearied by agony and opposition one may stand firm, fully assured that any "light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Cor 4:16-18).

These books serve to revive and enrich the biblical perspective and purpose of suffering in the life of the believer, so that as God's children we might learn not to despise nor despair under the Lord's discipline (Heb 12:5-7). They entreat us with the Scriptures, to "not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings ..." (1 Pet 4:12) and "count it all joy, then you meet trials of various kinds" (Jam 1:2). For the triumph of true faith and glory – the unshakable trust and obedience to God and his word – is hammered out not in the absence of adversity but in the midst of it (1 Pet 1:6-7; Jam 1:3).

When God's Children Suffer, Horatius Bonar

Foreword by Erwin W. Lutzer: "It is no easy matter to write a book for the family of God. Yet it is for them that these thoughts on chastisement are written." So begins Horatius Bonar's classic work on how Christians should deal with grief in face of a faith that knows God to be good. Bonar mines Scripture and the wisdom of the church to reveal that God's ways, while not our ways, are intended to manifest righteousness. Indeed, the author argues that earthly bonds may be broken not to bring believers sorrow, but in order to draw them closer to an eternal relationship with God. Profound and timeless, *When God's Children Suffer* reminds Christians that God will not abandon them but will instead extend grace to His children, giving them "beauty for ashes."

The Problem of Pain, C.S. Lewis

In *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis, one of the most renowned Christian authors and thinkers, examines a universally applicable question within the human condition: "If God is good and all-powerful, why does he allow his creatures to suffer pain?"

With his signature wealth of compassion and insight, C.S. Lewis offers answers to these crucial questions and shares his hope and wisdom to help heal a world hungering for a true understanding of human nature.

Preparation for Suffering, John Flavel

Humiliation for our own sins and the due preparation to take up our own cross and follow Christ in a suffering path is the only mark and aim of this tract. The expectation of and preparation for suffering abates much of the dread and terror by accustoming our thoughts beforehand to it, that we may find it not so grievous, shocking, and intolerable when it comes. Reader, the cup of suffering is a very bitter cup, and it is but needful that we provide something to sweeten it so that we may be able to receive it with thanksgiving. What those sweetening ingredients are, and how to prepare them, you will have some direction and help in the following discourse. It is a blessed and excellent thing for the people of God to be prepared and ready for the hardest services and worst of suffering to which the Lord may call them. Beloved, suffering is one of the choicest discoveries of your love to your master Christ—yea, it is such a testimony of love to Him as angels are not capable of. They show their love by their readiness to do His will in the execution of which they fly as with wings (Ezekiel 1:24) but you only have the happiness of testifying your love for Him by your readiness to suffer for Him. Is not this excellent? The shoe of preparation to follow Him through thorns and briars, and over rocks and mountains of difficulties and troubles, loves Him indeed.

A Christian's Pocket Guide to Suffering: How God Shapes Us through Pain and Tragedy, Brian H Cosby

When tragedy strikes—the death of a child, hurricanes, a school shooting—we begin looking for an escape from the pain, a way out, or we clamor for answers from a panel of religious "experts" to explain the ever-present question, "Why?" We want answers and we want to believe that our suffering isn't meaningless.

A Christian's Pocket Guide to Suffering seeks to simply, but clearly, present a biblical view of suffering so that your feet might land on the solid foundation of God's Word and the God of that Word and, there, find understanding and hope. All other ground is sinking sand.

The Problem of a Suffering Christian, A. W. Pink

[Read "The Problem of a Suffering Christian" as Free PDF](#)

In this short tract, A. W. Pink describes several heart-wrenching examples of a suffering Christian, a situation that puzzles many. According to Pink, Paul casts light on this perplexing problem in Romans Chapter 8 when he shows that the sufferings of this present time (v. 18) “are not inconsistent with the special favor and infinite love which God bears to His people.” He then gives four ways this is true, demonstrating that God does not abandon us in our sufferings, but uses them for our good and His glory.

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