

DAILY DEVOTIONS

WHY?

GOD, SUFFERING & HOPE

**WEEK 1:**

Why do the innocent suffer?



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With grateful thanks to the Church of the Resurrection, Kansas City, for permission to use their material.

## MONDAY – God is not the source of suffering



### **Isaiah 56: 10 - 57:2**

**V10:** *Israel's watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge;*

**V11:** *They are shepherds who lack understanding; they all turn to their own way, they seek their own gain.*

**Matthew 7: 11** *If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!*

One common explanation for suffering doesn't hold up well: "If 'everything happens for a reason,' and by that we mean it is part of God's plan, then we have said He willed it, and by effect – *caused it*. How then does this fit in with the Matthew reading above? Would you do this to your children? The Isaiah passage did not blame God for suffering. Israel's failing, self-serving leaders, greedy for profit, let their "flock" come to harm. People, not God, caused this suffering.

The prophet promised God's continued presence, even at times of suffering, promising

that the righteous "will find peace." In the ancient Hebrew drama of Job, God never gave the explanations Job first asked for. But Job found that God's presence meant more than any "why" answers (Job 42: 4-6). You will find that God seldom answers "Why" questions. But He does say continuously "I am with you always."

### **Reflection:**

How can God's caring presence matter more to you than any abstract explanation?

Just sit in His loving presence and pour out your heart to Him.



**Prayer:** Lord, You are not a God who deliberately sends illness or accidents. Even when we hurt because things like this happen, You are with us every step of the way. Thank you for Your steadfast love. AMEN.

## TUESDAY – Lament life’s pain



### **Psalm 13**

**V 1:** *How long, Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?*

**Matthew 27: 46** *About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “God, my God, why have You forsaken me?”*

Laments or complaints, or crying out to God about suffering can be found throughout the Bible.

The most striking is Jesus’s words on the cross – “My God, My God, why have You forsaken me.” Intellectually Jesus knew He was not abandoned by God, but that is how He felt.

That is how we feel in the depths of suffering. And it is okay to cry out like this. God understands and He allows us that space until we turn back to His loving arms. Until the fury is spent. Our faith may be severely rocked but not shattered and THEREIN lies our strength. When we realise that God IS holding us through this storm.

God doesn’t cause the suffering but He can use it to bring us hope

and redeem our pain. Always, from our pain, God can grow us and even bring about something new. He never uses suffering to teach us a lesson. In all of Jesus’s ministry, He urged the disciples to seek how God’s power was at work in people’s lives. And today, He is at work through your pain.

**Reflection:** How can you open “the eyes of your heart” to recognize and respond to God’s power at work in and through your suffering?

It may be dark but the Lord is there.

**Psalm 13: 5 & 6** *But I trust in Your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in Your salvation. I will sing the LORD’s praise, for He has been good to me.*



**Prayer:** Lord God, whether I’ve been brave enough to say it aloud or not, You know when my heart asks, “How long?” Thank you that Your faithful love is always with me—that I never have to wait for that. AMEN.

## WEDNESDAY – Jesus trusted God through suffering



**John 16: 33 - 17: 2** I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” When Jesus had spoken these words, He lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You, since You have given Him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom You have given Him.

On the night before He went to the cross, Jesus told His followers, “*In the world you have distress. But be encouraged! I have conquered the world*” (not “Now that you’re my follower, you’ll never have any trouble”). He began His prayer “*Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son.*” It would be easy to miss the fact that “the time has come” pointed to the **cross** as the setting in which God would “glorify” Jesus.

Twelve hours later, dying on the cross, Jesus quoted a psalm of trust: “*Father, into Your hands I entrust My life*” (Luke 23: 46). That psalm ended with, “*All you who wait for the Lord, be strong and let your heart take courage.*” Jesus trusted God even as He

suffered a horrible execution.

**Reflection:** Can that shape your outlook on whatever suffering comes into your life?

Many people think (maybe subconsciously) that “being good” should be a “non-suffering insurance.” But “the sweeping message of the Bible is not a promise that those who believe and do good will not suffer. Instead, the Bible is largely a book about people who refused to let go of their faith in the face of suffering.” \*

**Reflection:** Jesus knew you would have suffering. Can you, trusting His claim to have “*overcome the world*”, gain strength and encouragement?



**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, help me, even when I can’t fully know the “why” of any suffering I face, to know the “who”—You!—who is with me, and who sustains me and gives me hope. AMEN

\* Hamilton, Adam. *Why?: Making Sense of God's Will*. Abingdon Press. Location 79, Kindle Edition.

## THURSDAY – God helps us grow



**Matthew 28: 19 & 20** Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age

Sooner or later, every person faces suffering. Some of it may be fairly minor, but other events can strain the very fibre of our being. The greater the suffering, the more we face the urge to write God off — “If God is so good, why didn’t God prevent or fix this?”

It can be too easy to overlook this reality: *“Rejecting God doesn’t change the situation that has caused our suffering; it only removes the greatest source of hope, help, comfort, and strength we have.”* \*

The apostle Paul charted the spiritual growth process through which every Christ-follower can develop a character that meets challenges, with hopeful

awareness that, if we face it with God, even suffering can produce inner growth. God, has the power to bend even bad things to good purposes in our lives. God can give us the wisdom to bring endurance and hope out of our hardest experiences.

Human nature is not at all inclined to view hard times as “occasions for joy” (James 1: 2-5). That’s why those apostles focused on God’s **wisdom** and **love** as the divine gifts that can turn our hard times into occasions for growth.

In the dark times keep praying and relying on Jesus’s promises. Cry out to Him. Ask Him. Let Him see your tears. He cares.



**Prayer:** Lord keep teaching me to view life Your way. Help me learn more and more how to value even the tough, painful times You can use to help me grow in endurance, character, and trust. AMEN.

\* Hamilton, Adam. *Why?: Making Sense of God's Will*. Abingdon Press. Location 350, Kindle Edition.

## FRIDAY – Hope renewed



**Romans 15: 12 & 13** *And again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse will come, even He who arises to rule the Gentiles; in Him will the Gentiles hope.” May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.*

*Suffering is not God's desire for us, but it occurs in the process of life. Suffering is not given to teach us something, but through it we may learn. Suffering is not given to punish us, but sometimes it is the consequence of our sin or poor judgment. Suffering does not occur because our faith is weak, but through it our faith may be strengthened. God does not depend on human suffering to achieve his purposes, but sometimes through suffering his purposes are achieved. Suffering can either destroy us, or it can add meaning to our life. (Rev Ray Firestone)*

We don't know the answers to the 'Why's', but we do know that God loves us and can see what we cannot. It is in desperation that we

seek God, where faith takes flight and hope is born. No matter what the future holds, God holds you. Hope is refusing to let go of your faith when suffering comes.

Richard Rohr says “*Sooner or later, life is going to lead us (as it did Jesus) into the belly of the beast, into a place we can't fix, control, explain, or understand. That's where transformation most easily happens—because only there are we in the hands of God—and not self-managing.*”

### **Reflection:**

Can you see your suffering as a way of preparing you for life further down the road? Or Conversely, will your struggles be better or worse for having rejected your faith?



**Prayer:** Lord God, keep teaching me to view life Your way. Help me learn that You can use even the tough, painful times to help me grow in endurance, character and trust, knowing that You always hold on to me. AMEN