

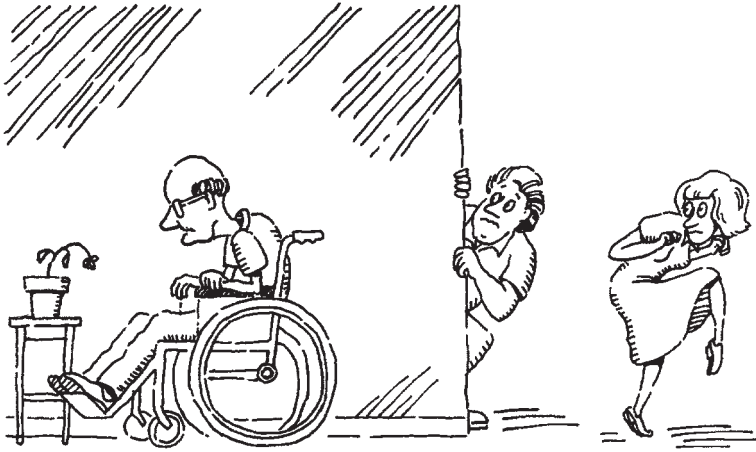
LESSON 9 Suffering and Death

A little boy wrote this letter to God: “Dear God, if there really is life after death, then why do we have to die?”

We dislike thinking about death. If a loved one were to say to you, “Today I would like to talk about what you should do when I die,” would you willingly enter into the discussion? Or would you try to avoid talking about such an unpleasant subject? We find it difficult to accept the fact that we, or someone we love, will someday die. We tend to think that if we refuse to talk about it, it won’t happen to us.

For the Christian, death itself should not be considered a problem. As the apostle Paul said, “to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). Death is not the end, but the beginning! But the process of dying is a fearful thing for young and old alike, because we are afraid of pain and suffering.

In Lesson 1 we explored the questions, “Why do Christians suffer?” “Why do we have to experience pain?” “Why is life so filled with misery?” Now our purpose is to discuss ways suffering and death bring problems into human lives, and how the Christian should approach these problems. How we respond to painful experiences is of utmost importance, as we consider them in the light of eternal values.



lesson outline

Benefits of Pain and Suffering
Problems Related to Suffering and Dying
Helping the Suffering and Dying
Problems Related to Death
A Christian Perspective

lesson objectives

When you finish this lesson you should be able to:

- Give three examples of the benefits of pain and suffering.
- Explain what enabled Job to keep a positive attitude even while enduring great pain.
- Compare problems common to sick persons with those you may have personally experienced when ill.
- Recognize stages of dealing with terminal illness and how the gospel can make a difference for the terminally ill.
- Select true statements concerning ways a Christian can help those who are suffering or dying.
- Based on 1 Corinthians 15:55-57, explain the strength and peace experienced by the bereaved when a Christian dies.
- State a principle based on Christ's example which should guide the Christian when he faces suffering or death.

- Identify basic principles which reflect a Christian attitude toward suffering and dying.

learning activities

1. Read Isaiah 52:13-15 and Isaiah 53. As an optional reading assignment, read the book of Job.
2. Work through the lesson development in the usual manner. Be sure to look for definitions of key words you do not know, and answer each study question before looking at the answer we have given.
3. Take the self-test, and check your answers.

keywords

| | | |
|-------------|-----------|----------|
| afflicted | diagnosis | symptoms |
| antidote | intensity | ultimate |
| bereaved | isolation | |
| bereavement | stricken | |

lesson development

BENEFITS OF PAIN AND SUFFERING

Objective 1. *Give three examples of the benefits of pain or suffering.*

You are probably thinking, “How could pain and suffering possibly be beneficial?” If pain is a result of sin entering into the world, is it not entirely evil? Can there be any benefit in something that is evil? Yes, there are some benefits to be gained from pain, both of a physical and a spiritual nature.

Physical Benefit

How does a small child learn that fire is dangerous? By getting his hand too close to the fire! When he does this, there is a physical sensation that we call *pain*. Pain *hurts*. When we feel pain, we want to do something to stop the pain. Pain occurs to tell us there is a problem that needs to be dealt with. When the child feels pain from the fire, he deals with the problem by quickly removing his hand from contact with the fire. When there is pain in any part of our body, we do what we can to find out why we are feeling pain and how to get rid of it.

When God created man, He did not intend that man should experience pain. But because of man’s sin, God provided the sensation of pain so that we would have a warning against things that would harm or destroy our bodies. If we felt no pain, we would be unable to protect ourselves against germs, disease, or other attacks on the body.

Spiritual Benefits

C. S. Lewis said, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains” (C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, New York: HarperCollins, 1996 p. 91). Pain causes suffering, and it is impossible to ignore.

Application

1 The spiritual benefit of pain is similar to the physical benefit. In your own words, explain what it is.

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Some people only turn to God in emergencies. When things are going well, they feel self-sufficient. But suffering causes them to realize that there are some things beyond their own power to control, and in desperation they look to God for help. Certainly God is pleased when we place our trust in Him and worship Him *because* He is God and worthy of our adoration. But how marvelous it is that even when we go our own way and fail to recognize His right to be our Lord and Master, He yet loves us so much that He will draw us to Himself through any possible means. If through pain and suffering God can reach me and rescue me from sin and eternal death, is this not a wonderful benefit of suffering? That is why the apostle Paul could say, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

God knows that the most important decision we can make in life is to love and serve Him. If we fail to make that decision, our end will be hopeless agony for eternity. If He can capture our attention and our obedience to His will only by allowing us to suffer, then we should be grateful that He loves us so much!

Application

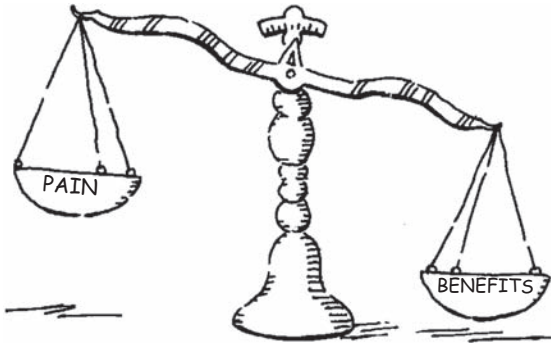
2 Choose the best completion. We could illustrate this concept by saying that it can be compared to a loving father who will

- a) show his love by never scolding or punishing his son.
- b) give to his son the best of everything in order to win his obedience.
- c) discipline his son as often as necessary to teach him how he ought to behave.

Another spiritual benefit of suffering which we discussed in Lesson 1 is that those who have suffered make the best

comforters (see 2 Corinthians 1:3-6). We identify with those who share experiences such as we have had. As members of the body of Christ, we are instructed to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2); to weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15); and to pray for those who are hurting (James 5:16). The apostle Paul speaks of this in 1 Corinthians 12: "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts If one part suffers, every part suffers with it Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" (vs. 12, 26, 27).

In Lesson 1 we also saw that suffering comes to us to purify us and prove our faith (1 Peter 1:6-7) and to develop in us the character of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:7-10). When viewed in the light of our eternal good, the spiritual benefits of suffering far outweigh any pain and misery that we are called upon to bear.



PRESENT SUFFERING - FUTURE GLORY

Application

3 Give an example of a benefit of pain which has both physical and spiritual value.

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4 Give two other examples of spiritual benefits of pain.

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PROBLEMS RELATED TO SUFFERING AND DYING

As we have seen in other lessons, suffering can take many forms. It can be physical or emotional in nature. We suffer because of illness, because of injustice, because of natural disasters which affect us, because of our own sins, and for many other reasons. Throughout this course we have discussed specific problem areas that cause us to suffer. Now we want to center our thoughts on problems related to pain, sickness, dying, and death.

Pain

Objective 2. *Explain what enabled Job to keep a positive attitude even while enduring great pain.*

It is natural to fear pain and try to avoid it. It is a sobering experience to walk through the corridors of a hospital and view the misery and suffering of the stricken. A pastor told of visiting a hospital for the mentally disturbed. As he saw those tortured souls who had lost all touch with reality, some tied to their beds so they could not harm themselves or others, his heart was torn by their pain and grief. Later he went to a military hospital where he saw rows of beds filled with young men who were the victims of war. Some were blinded, others had lost an arm or a leg, and others were paralyzed. Once again he agonized over their pain.

Pain can make it impossible for us to function in a normal way. It can affect our behavior, our attitudes to others, and our self-image. Pain that endures can cause discouragement and despair.

The book of Job gives us a classic example of a man who suffered extreme pain. Job was a man of God who lost all his possessions. His children all died in a series of terrible disasters. Then he suffered physically, covered with terrible sores. His sufferings took him to the depths of despair. There were times when he felt God was far away from him. Yet in all this, he maintained his faith in God. He worshipped God in spite of his troubles (Job 1:21-22).

Not everyone responds to pain as Job did. There can be anger, resentment, doubts, and fear. Probably you can give several

examples of Christians you know who have responded to pain in different ways—some positive, and some negative.

Application

5 Name five possible negative reactions to pain.

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6 What made it possible for Job to maintain a right attitude even while enduring great pain?

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Sickness

Objective 3. *Compare problems common to sick persons with those you may have personally experienced when ill.*

Sickness is another problem that affects all of us in varying degrees. There have been many wonderful advances in medical technology which have extended life expectancy. Man has successfully combated and overcome many diseases. But sickness still strikes young and old, rich and poor, good and bad. Here are some typical problems that may result for the sick person:

1. Financial problems (medical expenses, inability to work and earn money)
2. Worry about being a burden to others.
3. Fear of dying, uncertainty about the future.
4. Withdrawal from normal activities.
5. Anger and frustration at being afflicted.
6. Resentment of those who are healthy.
7. Disruption of plans.

Those who are responsible for a sick person may also share some of these same problems. In addition, they may suffer in a different way, because they feel helpless to relieve the distress of the one who is sick.

Application

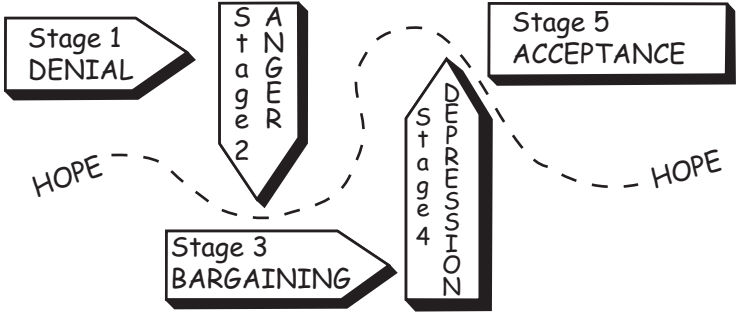
- 7 Put a check mark (✓) in front of any of the problems listed above which you have personally experienced.
- a List any other problems related to sickness which you have had.
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- b If you found solutions for any of these problems, state what they were. You may need to use a notebook if your answer is lengthy.
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Dying

Objective 4. Recognize stages of dealing with terminal illness and how the gospel can make a difference for the terminally ill.

A medical doctor, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, has done a great deal of research concerning problem attitudes of those who are dying of a terminal disease. In her book, *On Death and Dying*, chapters 3-8, she has determined that there are certain attitudes which are common to those who know they are dying, and that their attitudes go through several stages of change. These are as follows:



Stage 1—Denial. The first reaction is, “This can’t be true. This can’t happen to me.” Denial is one way of dealing with the shock which accompanies the knowledge that death is coming. Often people who are ill refuse to go to a doctor because they fear what he might tell them. This is a form of denial.

This may be a particularly difficult problem for a Christian, because the idea that we may be dying contradicts our knowledge that Christ has provided for our healing through His own suffering and death. In my own experience I have been close to people who knew they were dying, but who trusted God for healing until the moment of their death. I also know several people with terminal illnesses who were miraculously healed. We should always encourage those who are terminally ill to pray for healing and trust God whatever happens, and we should pray and trust with them.

Often isolation accompanies denial—the sick person may need time to himself, and we should be sensitive to special needs of the sick in dealing with the idea of possible death.

Stage 2—Anger. The second reaction is, “Why me?” When a person comes to the realization that, unless a miracle happens, he really is going to die, it seems natural for him to rebel against the idea. The will to live is strong within us—it is part of our human nature. There are many reasons for the anger: illness has interrupted his activities, his plans for the future, his dreams; other people are going on with a full life, and his life has been cut short; there still are many things he wants to *do* with his life; he doesn’t want to be separated from his loved ones.

Application

8 Do you think it’s wrong for a Christian to rebel against the knowledge that he is going to die? Explain your answer.

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Stage 3—Bargaining. Many dying people go through this stage, particularly trying to bargain with God. This is an opportunity for a caring Christian to help them find release from guilt, and accept God’s will for their life whether healing is “part of the bargain” or not. Sometimes people feel that God is punishing them. Certainly He does allow us to experience

problems to discipline us and draw us closer to Himself, as we have seen in previous lessons. But His grace does not depend upon our making bargains with Him.

Stage 4—Depression. When a dying person can no longer deny his illness, when his symptoms become more severe and the disease more advanced, he eventually senses a great loss. The illness may have brought many changes in his life—loss of a job, financial strain, pain, and others. Finally he is unable to cope, and he sinks into depression. This depression is related to what he has already gone through. But, according to Dr. Kubler-Ross, there is another stage of depression in which the sick person must have an opportunity to grieve over the fact that he is going to be separated from everything and everyone he loves. This is not a time to try to cheer the person, but a time to comfort him and, if necessary, weep with him. This stage prepares the person for what is coming, and helps him to accept the fact that he may die.

Stage 5—Acceptance. Finally, the dying person reaches the stage of acceptance, where he seems to resign himself to the idea of dying and becomes less interested in what is going on around him. He may become withdrawn and detached from other people. He has lost his anger, and while he may not be happy he seems at peace with the idea of death. This is a time when those close to him may need to be comforted even more than he does.

It has been noted that some people go through various of these stages more than once, or they move back and forth from one stage to the other. There is another common response which human beings seem to share, and that is *hope*. There is an old saying. “Hope springs eternal in the human breast.” The dying person may have hope that the doctors are wrong in their diagnosis; or that the symptoms may disappear; or that there will soon be a cure for his disease. This may be a response of both the non-Christian and the Christian. Hope is a thread that runs through each stage and keeps the emotions from being too intense. The Christian, of course, also has a blessed hope built on faith in God. We will be talking about the Christian’s hope in our next lesson. It is our greatest antidote for all of life’s problems.

**“The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”
“Death is swallowed up in victory—
through Jesus Christ our Lord.”**

1 Corinthians 15:26, 54, 57

Other Problems. There are also many problems of a practical nature that accompany the process of dying. Here are some of the more prominent ones:

1. The need to hide the fact that one is dying. One person said to me, “I wouldn’t tell anyone that I was dying, because when people know, they treat you differently. I want to keep my life as normal as possible as long as I can.”

2. Worry about who will take care of unfinished business, what will happen to the family, and other such worries. “Someone needs to know where the keys are, where the money is, how much insurance there is, where the important family papers are . . .” a nurse suggested. “Just imagine you’re not here. What would your family need to know?”

3. Financial problems related to medical bills or loss of income of a wage-earner.

4. Reluctance of family members to discuss the possibility of death and how it will affect the family. The person who is dying has a right to know the seriousness of his condition, and be able to talk about it with his family.

Possibly you can think of other similar problems that must be dealt with in this type of situation. In addition, there are emotional and spiritual problems of the dying person and the family, related to loss, grief, or questions about unanswered prayers concerning healing.

Application

9 Make a list of things you would want your family to know in case of your death. Write this in your notebook.



The best time to discuss important family matters is when you are still healthy and you can do it in an objective, unemotional way. If you have possessions, you can best protect your spouse and children by making out a will. Husband and wife should plan together as best they can for the future care of their children in case one or both of them should die. These are important matters that should not be neglected.

Application

10 How can you best prepare for handling the practical problems associated with death?

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11 In the right column are listed stages a person may go through in dealing with the fact that he is dying. In the left column are listed symptoms of each stage. Match the stages to the symptoms by writing the correct number in each blank space.

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|---------|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| a | Outspoken rebellion against the fact. | 1) Denial |
| b | Belief that something will happen to change the situation. | 2) Anger |
| c | Resignation, detachment, a sense of peace. | 3) Bargaining |
| d | Refusal to accept the fact. | 4) Depression |
| e | Promises of changed behavior if God will intervene. | 5) Acceptance |
| f | Grief and a sense of great loss. | 6) Hope |



It is perhaps during physical suffering that the Christian discovers the true impact of the gospel of Jesus Christ in his life. Billy Graham said, "I have seen great beauty of spirit in some who were great sufferers." Many beautiful hymns and eloquent sermons have been written by saints undergoing extreme pain. What an inspiration are those believers who radiate joy and peace, who reflect Jesus Christ in the midst of their hardest trials!

Application

12 In what way does the gospel make a difference in the way you deal with the possibility of dying?

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HELPING THE SUFFERING AND DYING

Objective 5. *Select true statements concerning ways a Christian can help those who are suffering or dying.*

In this course we have already seen many ways of ministering to those who are suffering. At this point we will deal more specifically with ways to help those who are suffering physical or emotional pain, or who are dying.

Be There

Probably the most important thing you can do is simply to *be there*. Your closeness, a gentle voice, the touch of a hand can speak more loudly of your love and concern than many words. Make yourself available to the suffering or dying person, and to his family. Brief, frequent visits to a sick person's bedside are an encouragement. If you stay too long, your visit will become a burden for him. You can show your love in many ways—perhaps by running errands for the family, caring for their children, reading to the sick person, or possibly even ministering to his physical needs.

Be Honest

In talking with sick and dying people, be honest. Allow your own feelings to show, but also let them know that you have found Christ to be a wonderful resource in times of fear and discouragement. Allow the Holy Spirit to speak words of comfort through you. Share Scripture passages that are uplifting and encouraging. Pray with them and for them. Be sensitive to any

of the stages of reactions we discussed earlier, and don't try to convince the sick person that he is wrong in having such reactions.

Be Sensitive

Even though Christians are freed from the fear of death itself, it is still an enemy, and the strangeness of it can produce some uneasiness. You need to be especially sensitive to the special loneliness felt by the dying and also by the bereaved. They need the presence of brothers and sisters in Christ to help ease the feeling of being cut off from the life they have known.

Dying people frequently mention that other people tend to treat them as less than human, as though they were already dead. Just at the time when they most need comfort and encouragement, other people often withdraw and leave them to face death alone. Or family and friends discuss their condition, their symptoms, or their behavior in their presence, just as if they were not present. The sensitive Christian will never allow this to happen. A person's healing may remain even if he is unable to respond to you. It is important at this time for you to communicate hope and comfort.

Application

13 Circle the letter preceding TRUE statements which reflect ways a Christian can help those who are suffering or dying. A Christian should

- a** spend long hours at the sick person's bedside talking to him, to show that he cares.
- b** be honest in sharing his feelings and concern with the sick person.
- c** be available often to minister in whatever way is needed.
- d** avoid discussing a person's condition with others in his presence.
- e** share personal problems with him to get his mind off his own.
- f** speak words of comfort and hope as guided by the Holy Spirit.
- g** be sensitive to the dying person's need to be treated as the whole person that he still is.



PROBLEMS RELATED TO DEATH

Objective 6. *Based on 1 Corinthians 15:55-57, explain the strength and peace experienced by the bereaved when a Christian dies.*

Spiritual Condition

The most critical problem for those facing death is this: “Am I ready to meet God?” If a person has solved his sin problem, if he has become a new creature in Christ Jesus, death is not a problem to him, because Christ solved that problem by His own death on the cross, and His resurrection from the grave. This is revealed in 1 Corinthians 15:55-57:

“Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?”

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

CHRIST - THE PROBLEM SOLVER



“DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY”

The Christian can declare with the apostle Paul, therefore, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain . . . I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far” (Philippians 1:21, 23). Psalm 116:15 tells us that “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.”

Bereavement

Death, then, is a greater problem for the ones left behind than it is for the Christian who has gone to be with the Lord. The

bereaved persons will experience a time of grief. They may also feel guilt because of their helplessness to prevent the death, or because of regrets they may have. They will suffer a great sense of loss and will need to accept the reality that death has occurred. They will need someone to stand and mourn with them.

Most of us have feelings of helplessness in trying to comfort the bereaved. Often things are said that do more harm than good. Once again, your presence, the touch of your hand, your willingness to help will accomplish more than many words. Later, after the shock has worn off and life has settled once again into a routine, your interest and friendship will be needed to help the bereaved as they adjust to life without their loved one.

Those of us who have experienced the death of a close family member know that this is a time when God provides supernatural strength and peace as we look to Him for help. He sustains us in every decision and in every heartache. And He gives us the blessed hope that one day we shall be reunited with our loved one forever in heaven!

Application

14 Based on 1 Corinthians 15:55-57, explain the strength and peace experienced by the bereaved when a Christian dies.

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A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

The Suffering and Death of Christ

Objective 7. *State a principle based on Christ's example which should guide the Christian when he faces suffering or death.*

Isaiah foretold this about Jesus Christ:

Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will

of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light (of life) and be satisfied (Isaiah 53:10-11).

Jesus committed no sin. He suffered as the innocent for the guilty. But He knew, long before He came to earth, that coming would mean crushing sorrow and suffering. After Jesus had died and was risen from the dead, He explained, “This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day” (Luke 24:46).

Application

15 Read Acts 3:18 and Acts 26:22-23. What do these Scriptures both say that Christ did?

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The Jews were expecting a Messiah to come as a mighty king with political power who would release them from Roman oppression. They had overlooked the fact that Old Testament prophets had said He would come as a suffering servant. They, as many do today, rejected the *suffering* image of Christ as too unpleasant to consider.

Even though it was to be of temporary duration, the intensity of His suffering caused Jesus to pray in Gethsemane, “Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will but what you will” (Mark 14:36). Jesus knew that His suffering had a purpose. Even though He would have preferred to be spared if that were possible, His ultimate desire was to fulfill the Father’s will. He was more concerned with the eternal values to be gained through His suffering and death than with His momentary distress and sorrow. He is our perfect example.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (Hebrews 12:2-3).

Application

16 State a principle based on Christ's example which should guide the Christian when he faces suffering or death.

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The Christian's Response to Suffering and Dying

Objective 8. *Identify basic principles which reflect a Christian attitude toward suffering and dying.*

Confidence in God

In the scriptural account of Job's suffering, Job was never told why the suffering had come to him. But he had confidence that God's purposes were good, and that God did not want to destroy him, but to purify him. Job said of God, "But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). Job confirmed that his love and trust in God sprang from a confidence in who God is, and not in how much material wealth and satisfaction God would give him, nor in the condition of his health.

God often delivers us from suffering by His mighty power and grace. Yet some suffering remains in spite of all our prayer and travail before God. Suffering is important in the plan of God to discipline us (Hebrews 12:7-11); to test us (Job 23:10); to prepare us for service (2 Corinthians 1:4-5); and to form in us the image of Christ. The apostle Paul said, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (Philippians 3:10).

Joy

In the New Testament we see a strong connection between suffering and joy:

- James 1:2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.
- Acts 5:41 The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name [of Christ].
- Colossians 1:24 Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you
...
- 1 Thessalonians 1:6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.
- 1 Peter 4:13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.
- John 16:22 Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

Read also Hebrews 10:34, James 5:11, Revelation 12:2, Romans 8:18, John 16:20-22, and Luke 6:21-23.

Joyfulness is a way of life for the Christian. Not only can he experience joy in the midst of trials, but rejoicing in the Lord is an *antidote* for sorrow and grief (see Nehemiah 8:10, Psalm 30:5, and Colossians 1:10-12).

The Christian knows that even though death is a necessity because of sin, it has been conquered by Christ (Revelation 1:17-18, 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, John 11:26). Our faith in Christ has not brought us to some place of dread and gloom. That is not the picture of death at all for the Christian! Those who stand by the body of their departed loved one feel the sadness of separation. But for the one who has departed, a glorious, joyful arrival has taken place.

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Hebrews 12:22-24).

Surrender

Like Jesus, when suffering comes, we pray for relief. Often God graciously brings us deliverance. But there are times when our prayers are not answered in the way that we would choose. These times may have nothing to do with a lack of faith. Perhaps it takes more faith to endure a severe trial and maintain the right spirit towards God than if a miracle had taken place. Whatever the answer when we pray, we need also to affirm with Jesus, “Not what I will, but what you will.”

Someone has said, “The full acting out of the self’s surrender to God demands pain.” Accepting God’s will may be contrary to our human nature. It may even require a willingness to suffer:

Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it (Matthew 10:38-39).

For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live (Romans 8:13).

Romans 14:7 teaches us that none of us lives to ourselves alone, nor do we die to ourselves alone. We live, and die, to the Lord. And in so doing, we strongly influence those around us. If you are called upon to suffer, perhaps your experience, or your response to it, will have a life-changing effect on someone else (2 Corinthians 1:4-5.)

Divine Vision

How should the scriptural principles which you have studied in this section change your life?

Time. Psalm 90 is a prayer of Moses, the man of God. In it he prays, “Teach us to number our days aright” (Psalm 90:12). The knowledge that death will come to all of us should make us careful how we use the time that God gives us. Love for God and service to others is of great eternal value, and it pleases God.

Values. When you understand that the things of earth are perishable and temporary, you see them in their true light. They are here for us to use, but they must be held lightly. Place less

value on earthly, material things and more on heavenly things. True happiness, true joy, is available even in the midst of suffering for those who seek first the kingdom of God.

Comfort. Just by his presence, the caring Christian can minister to someone feeling the sharp pain and loneliness of illness, dying, or bereavement.

Commitment. Since you know Christ who has promised you eternal life, you are relieved of fear and worry about death. Jesus shared in our humanity “so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (Hebrews 2:14-15). You can fully commit yourself to God, your faithful Creator who sustains you, and continue to do good (1 Peter 5:2).

Application

17 Write **G** in the blank space if the statement represents a sound and *good* principle concerning a Christian attitude toward suffering and dying. Write **P** in the blank space if the statement is *poor* or incorrect.

- **a** Confidence in God is based on deliverance from suffering and pain.
- **b** God always has a purpose in allowing us to suffer.
- **c** Following Christ includes a willingness to share in His suffering.
- **d** There can be rejoicing in suffering not only because of present benefits but also because of future glory.
- **e** The more tightly we hold on to material possessions, the more we will be required to suffer.
- **f** If we have a true awareness of the possibility of our own death, we will put greater value on how we use our time.
- **g** If we respond to personal suffering in a Christlike way, we will be enabled to influence or comfort others who are suffering.
- **h** A Christian must endure great suffering in order to prove his faith and in order to comfort others.



self-test

- 1 One way that pain can be considered a blessing is that it
 - a) hurts.
 - b) is a universal experience.
 - c) warns us of a problem that needs attention.
 - d) is God's way of reminding us that we have inherited a sinful nature.
- 2 Sometimes God allows us to experience pain because we
 - a) ignore Him when He speaks to us in other ways.
 - b) deserve to suffer.
 - c) can't help others unless we have suffered.
 - d) worship Him for the wrong reasons.
- 3 When God chooses to discipline us by allowing us to suffer, it is because He
 - a) wants to hurt us.
 - b) is angry with us.
 - c) wants to make us self-sufficient.
 - d) loves us so much.
- 4 The spiritual benefits of suffering far outweigh any pain that we must bear because our present suffering leads to
 - a) death.
 - b) understanding.
 - c) future glory.
 - d) temporary relief.
- 5 Even though Job experienced some of the negative reactions which may accompany pain, his strongest reaction was to
 - a) blame God.
 - b) keep his faith in God and continue to worship Him.
 - c) resent his friends because they were not suffering.
 - d) blame himself for the things that happened to him.
- 6 Which of these explains the main reaction of a Christian to the possibility of dying, based on his faith in God?
 - a) Hope
 - b) Denial
 - c) Anger
 - d) Acceptance
- 7 Which stage is illustrated by a person who promises God that he will pay his tithe faithfully if he is healed?
 - a) Anger
 - b) Hope
 - c) Depression
 - d) Bargaining

8 In which stage does a person deal with his grief over the possibility of dying and leaving his family and all of his plans for the future?

- a) Anger
- b) Depression
- c) Denial
- d) Hope

9 When is the best time to discuss family matters concerning things you would want your family to know or do in case of your death?

- a) When you are near death.
- b) As soon as you discover that you have a terminal illness.
- c) While you are still healthy.
- d) When you near the age of 70.

10 Which of these is NOT a good way to help those who are suffering or dying?

- a) Be available to help.
- b) Be honest in showing your feelings.
- c) Be sensitive to their special needs.
- d) Pretend that they are going to recover from their pain and not die.
- e) Pray for them to be delivered and healed.

11 How does Christ's reaction to suffering serve as an example for us?

- a) He expected God to deliver Him from suffering.
- b) He prayed for deliverance providing that was God's will for Him.
- c) He bore His suffering without any outward show of emotion.
- d) He was afraid of the pain that He would be called upon to bear.

12 Which of these does NOT represent a Christian response to suffering?

- a) Withdrawal
- b) Confidence
- c) Joy
- d) Surrender
- e) Divine vision

answers to study questions

- 9 Your answer.
- 1 Pain lets us know we have a problem that needs to be resolved. In this case, it is a spiritual problem that we are made aware of.
- 10 By discussing them with family members now, and providing in every possible way for the family's welfare (such as obtaining insurance, making a will, arranging for guardianship of children).
- 2 c) discipline his son as often as necessary to teach him how he ought to behave.
- 11 a) 2) Anger.
b) 6) Hope.
c) 5) Acceptance.
d) 1) Denial.
e) 3) Bargaining.
f) 4) Depression.
- 3 Pain lets us know something is wrong, that there is a problem which needs to be taken care of.
- 12 Your answer. Because of my faith in Christ, I know that death is not the end, but the beginning. I can face the thought of death because of my trust in God, knowing that He is in control of my life and my death.
- 4 Any of these: Those who have known pain are better able to comfort others who are in pain; suffering purifies us and proves our faith; suffering develops in us the character of Christ.
- 13 a) False.
b) True.
c) True.
d) True.
e) False.
f) True.
g) True.
- 5 Wrong behavior, bad attitudes, poor self-image, discouragement, despair, anger, resentment, doubts, fear.
- 14 Your answer should be similar to this: Because we know that Christ has overcome death for all who accept His atoning work, we know that our Christian loved ones are in His presence after death, and that some day we shall be with them in His presence. That knowledge takes the sting out of death and gives us peace.

- 6** He kept his faith in God through it all. He never stopped worshipping God.
- 15** He suffered.
- 7** Your answers. If you are still seeking solutions in this area, apply the problem-solving methods we have given, and expect God to help you!
- 16** Your answer should be similar to this: God is able to deliver me from suffering and death if that is His will for me. I will pray for deliverance, yet accept what He chooses as for my eternal good, whether it be deliverance, suffering, or death.
- 8** Your answer. Anger is certainly a natural first reaction to the threat of death, because death is an enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26). But Christ has conquered death, and so we can accept whatever happens if we commit our lives into His care. But we are to pray for healing and have faith in God; we are to seek deliverance from death.
- 17**
- a** Poor.
 - b** Good.
 - c** Good.
 - d** Good.
 - e** Poor.
 - f** Good.
 - g** Good.
 - h** Poor.