

Suffering in Christianity – a believer’s perspective.

Suffering plays a key role in our formation as Christians. We have to acknowledge that it’s a part of everybody’s lives and there is no avoiding it. Therefore, we have to develop a theology of suffering in which we can see its significance in our lives, understand that it’s a tool in God’s hand that he uses to mature us and that it does not in any way suggest that God does not love us or has abandoned us.

[Rom. 8:17](#) tells us that our identification with Christ includes difficulties, challenges, trials, pain and suffering. As, heirs of God, we are glorified with Christ. But just as we are glorified with him, so, too, must we suffer with him. Unlike non-Christians we suffer with the support and strength of God to help us persevere and we have this great hope of a future without sorrow and suffering and trials.

[John 16](#) compares suffering to a woman giving birth. The pain is NOT meaningless. It leads to something worthwhile. For one thing, it often results in our radical dependence upon God. It also gives us the ability to minister to others in this broken world. Suffering forms our character, taking us to maturity in Christ ([Rom. 5:3, 4](#)). But everything depends on our response to suffering. It can make us or break us. It can strengthen or destroy our relationship with the Lord. It depends on what we choose.

To respond positively to suffering involves forgiveness and resolution of the past.. You may have different hurts to forgive and leave behind. Is it that person who gossiped about you and made your life miserable at work? Is the husband who left you for another woman? Is it the fact that God has given you a disabled child? Is it your own loss of health? Is it the fact that your father left when you were just a child?

We also need to accept our limitations and losses. Then there is our work lives. The reality is that we are going to be in workplaces where people, both Christian and non-Christian, are going to hurt, disappoint, abuse, enrage, frustrate and annoy us. We have to accept that graciously as a reality of life, too, and look upon it as one more area where we learn to depend on the Lord to help us endure and, even more importantly, thrive spiritually.

And then there are failures and setbacks. Do we give up? Or do we carry on, learning from the mistakes and disappointments?

For me, my suffering has been in the physical realm and the impact poor health has had on my life. It might be different for you. It might be family troubles or work troubles or loss of a loved one – the ways in which we struggle and face challenges and feel sorrow and frustration and anger may all be different, but all can be used by God for good.

Personally, I got closer and closer to the Lord in my suffering. I learned what Job did in his suffering – where once I knew OF God, after going through the trials in life, I can say I know him intimately because of them ([Job 42:5](#)). The very things that pushed me away from initially ended up being the very things that drew me into his arms