

1. INTRODUCTION

Even though the Bible says that suffering should not take us by surprise, in moments of suffering, it's tempting to allow ourselves to doubt the goodness of God. We reason with ourselves that somehow, someday, this moment of suffering is evidence that God is less than who he has said he is. Maybe he's a fraud, and maybe we've been suckered.

Suffering tempts you to doubt God's goodness and kindness. Suffering tempts you to doubt his faithfulness and love. Even though you may never say it out loud, God is brought into a courtroom in which you are the judge, and God stands as the accused, on trial for being unloving and unfaithful to his promises.

Here's why doubt is such a deadly trap: as soon as you begin to question the character of God, you'll quit running to him for help. After all, you don't go for help to someone whom you no longer trust. Instead, you'll seek out earthly saviors who will provide the supposed rest and comfort you think you need (this could be drugs, people, television, food, or a host of other numbing agents).

There are a host of Scripture verses that remind us that suffering is evidence of God's grace. Though in this lifetime you may never know why God allows some particularly difficult circumstance into your life, you must always remember one thing. You can trust the character of God because he sent Jesus to die for you, even when you were his opponent.

In moments of suffering, don't run away from God in doubt. If you do, you risk missing out on the wonderful blessings of grace that he has made available. Even if those blessings are uncomfortable or even excruciatingly painful, you can run to the Father.

2. SCRIPTURE: 1 PETER 1:3-8

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith - more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire - may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

3. REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What first strikes you about this passage?
2. How do verses 4-5 describe the "living hope" that God has provided to us? Who is guarding us? How?
3. What are some of the "various trials" you have experienced this week? Who do you know who is suffering?
4. According to verses 6-7, what is the redemptive purpose of suffering?
5. Why is it tempting to doubt the goodness of God in your specific suffering, despite what Scripture says?
6. How (apart from the cross) has God proven to be faithful and loving to you in the past?
7. What can you gain by running to God in moments of suffering? In the same way, what can you lose by running away from Him?

4. IN NEED OF PRAYER

What stories have you heard of God's provision and protection that you can share and thank God for?

- The Rogers, whose home was damaged so severely that it is uninhabitable, and who are in need of a long term place to stay
- The Dales, who lost their home and are in need of long term housing
- Three generations in Roy and Jan Worsham's extended family, who lost their homes in Upper Ojai
- The Hassiens
- The firefighters and local officials who are laboring tirelessly to protect us
- Those for whom the smoke will be a particular health threat
- Hope and resources for the displaced and the homeless
- Comfort and relief to the grieving
- For the winds to calm, the fires to be extinguished, and the smoke to clear