

God's Will and Suffering

Welcome to Harvest Community Church

Series: Knowing God's Voice

Text: 1 Peter 4:19

All of us have faced times where we have heard the voice of God, obeyed the voice of God and moved in the direction He has given us only to run into problems that are the result of the decision to follow what seemed to be God's will and leading. All of us will deal with this reality if we are truly being obedient to God.

This leads to many questions?

- Did I really hear the voice of God or did I make a mistake?
- Is the fact that I am dealing with these difficult experiences a sign from God that I am not living in His will?
- Does God permit suffering to come to someone who is living a righteous life within the will of God?

When Jesus was with His followers, He spoke of the suffering that He was going to face on the cross. He also indicated that those who would truly become His disciples would also face suffering. This did not jive with their expectations. The Bible tells us that this offended many because they were expecting the Messiah to reign in power. Instead, He spoke of suffering. Because of this many who were initially excited actually turned away. **John 6:55-66**

If we do not understand suffering and how it relates to the will of God, then we also might be tempted to turn away from God when we face difficult circumstances. It is important to understand that God did not create suffering. Suffering entered the world through man's sin. God does take that which is intended for evil and use it to accomplish His purposes. Nothing in our life is wasted, including our suffering.

Reasons for Suffering

The Bible has a great deal to say concerning the reasons for suffering, problems and afflictions.

1 Peter 4:12

- 1) The choices that others make that will affect us. Through no fault of His own, Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. People lied about him, forgot about him but it was God who promoted him. **Genesis 45:5-7**
- 2) Suffering is often the result of the circumstances of life. In the book of Ruth, Naomi lost her husband and her sons. Life happens to all of us. No one is exempt. **John 16:33** Natural disasters, death, unforeseen financial trouble and many other things can bring hardship and struggle. God is with us through it all.

3) Suffering can come as a result of our **ministry**. Serving Jesus means that we will deal with hurting people, and sometimes hurting people hurt people. Certainly, there will be those who disagree and even hate the fact that we represent Jesus.

- The Word of God speaks of suffering for His **Name's** sake **Acts 9:16**
- Suffering will happen on behalf of Christ **Philippians 1:29**
- Some will suffer for the Kingdom of God **2 Thessalonians 1:5**
- For the sake of the Gospel **2 Timothy 1:11-12**
- For doing **well** **1 Peter 2:19-20**
- For righteousness' sake. **1 Peter 3:14**
- We can suffer just for being a **Christian** **1 Peter 4:15-16**
- We will face suffering according to the **will** of God. **1 Peter 4:19**

Some people view suffering as a sign of failure or of a lack of faith. If this is true, then many of the apostles that we look up to would fall into that category. It was **prophesied** over the Apostle Paul that he would suffer great things for the Lord's sake. **Acts 9:16** There were many times that Paul even despaired for his own life. When we read of those listed in the 'Hall of Faith' in Hebrews, many of them suffered various things from prison to affliction and even being martyred. The Bible calls these people 'of whom the world is not worthy'. **Hebrews 11:36-40**

4) Suffering can be a result of direct **satanic** activity. The book of Job wrestles with the question – Why do the righteous suffer? Job did not suffer because of his sin. It is clear that Satan was the instigator of his suffering. **Job 1:1-11**

We must be careful when we view the suffering of others that we do not jump to the assumption and accuse them of sin, unbelief or faithlessness. While the Bible does teach that we reap what we sow, sowing and reaping cannot be used to explain the suffering of the **innocent**. There is a spiritual war going on. Many times, it is manifested in the difficult circumstances or our lives. An important truth is that nothing comes into our life that God is unaware of. God does not cause suffering and the limits are set by God on Satan who does the inflicting.

5) Another significant way that suffering enters our life is through our own sin and **disobedience**. Jonah is an example of this. Jonah wound up in the belly of a fish because He chose to run from God's purpose for his life. Trouble should always be treated as an occasion to examine our ways and our heart before God. What is God trying to show me, why is He getting my attention, and what do I need to **learn** from this. **Hebrews 12:11, Psalm 119:67,71,75**

The Proper Attitude Towards Suffering

It is important to know that trouble is not necessarily a sign of being out of God's will. The Bible says that in this world you **will** have trouble but that God has overcome the world. As a matter of fact, if you are righteous, you will have many difficulties. **Psalm 34:19** When we experience suffering the real test of our spirituality is our attitude and how we **respond**.

Proverbs 24:10, 1 Peter 4:16

- When we suffer, we are to **commit** ourselves to the Lord.
1 Peter 4:19, 1 Corinthians 4:12, 2 Corinthians 6:4,
- We are to **rejoice**, practice patience and be quick to prayer. Essentially, we are to exhibit the Fruit of the Spirit. **Romans 12:12**
- We are to endure and refuse to be **moved**. **1 Thessalonians 3:3, 2 Timothy 4:5**
- We are not to act like something **strange** is happening to us. Trials are a part of life and a part of serving God. **1 Peter 4:12-13**
- We are to endure hardship like a **soldier**. **2 Timothy 2:3**
- We need to have the attitude of someone who is **expectant** of good to come out of the difficulties. **2 Corinthians 4:16-18**

There are Positive Benefits to Suffering

- 1) It is in times of suffering and trials that we can be sure that God is speaking to us.
- 2) It allows our **faith** to be tested. **1 Peter 1:7**
- 3) Suffering affords us the ability to **comfort** others in the same way that Christ comforted us.
2 Corinthians 1:3-4
- 4) It is through suffering that we learn not to trust or **depend** on ourselves.
2 Corinthians 1:8-9
- 5) Suffering is a pathway for Godly qualities and maturity to be **developed** in our lives.
Romans 5:3-4, 1 Peter 5:10, Romans 8:28-29, Hebrews 2:10 & 18
- 6) Many times, it is our suffering that becomes an **opportunity** for the works of God to be manifested. **John 9:3**
- 7) Difficult times are where we see the power of God perfected in our lives.
2 Corinthians 12:9
- 8) In times of suffering God **removes** those things that are unstable in our lives. The truth is there are some things that need to be shaken up in our lives. We will cease to depend on unstable people, programs or material things that have no foundation to stand or last.
Hebrews 12:2-27 It is in the storms of life that everything that is not build upon God and His Word will crumble. **Psalm 119:89, Matthew 7:24-29, Luke 22:31-34**

- 9) Through suffering, our **focus** is changed. At the start of suffering our focus is on the cause and effect. God desires to change our focus from the temporal to the eternal.
2 Corinthians 4:17-18 Suffering helps to purge us of our old nature. Suffering rids us of the impurities and extracts that which is precious. Just like the crushing of grapes produces wine or the pressing of olives separates the flesh from the oil.
- 10) It is through suffering that God prepares us for **ministry**. **Isaiah 48:10** It is through affliction that we move beyond our calling as a child of God so that we are refined as a vessel for His use.
- 11) It is through trials and afflictions that we are **prepared** to reign with Christ.
2 Timothy 2:12
- 12) Suffering brings us spiritual **blessings**. **Matthew 5:10-12**
- 13) It is through the trials that we truly learn **obedience**. **Hebrews 5:8**
- 14) Suffering **tests** the Word of God within us. **Psalms 12:6**
- 15) Difficult and trying times will **humble** us to the place that we willingly submit ourselves.
Deuteronomy 8:15-16, 1 Peter 5:6
- 16) It is through suffering that we come to know God **intimately**. **Job 42:5-6** Some of us know God through second-hand experience. When we experience the blessings of life, God is often a luxury instead of a necessity. It is one thing to have a teaching it is another thing to know and experience for ourselves. Paul knew that to know Jesus we must experience both suffering and **resurrection**. **Philippians 3:10**
- 17) Suffering changes, the desire of our **will** from ME to THEE. Job had a lot of questions for God. On the cross Jesus cried out His **WHY**; “My God, My God WHY have you forsaken **Me**. Jesus next words were “into Your hands I commit My spirit.”
Job 13:15, Job 19:25-26 It is in the trials and in the suffering that we learn to **trust**. These are the times that we really get to know God, His character and His voice.
Proverbs 3:5 It is where we learn to trust Him regardless of if He tells us all we desire to know. **Proverbs 25:2, Deuteronomy 29:29, Proverbs 20:24 (AMP & NLT)**

The Bible often compares suffering to a natural **storm**. It can affect us spiritually, physically, mentally, materially and emotionally.

There are two types of Storms.

There are storms that are an attack of Satan that are meant to **prevent** us from something that God wants us to do. These storms are simply Satan trying to hinder God’s work in our lives or something that God wants to do through our lives. **Mark 4:35-41** Satan was trying to prevent the work the disciples would do, and the deliverance of the man possessed by demons.

Some storms are those of our own making. They are a result of our disobedience. Jonah is a perfect example. For instance, if you marry an unsaved person, you will experience trouble because you violated a scriptural principle. When we realize that we are suffering because of our disobedience the remedy is to repent and ask for **forgiveness**.

It is in suffering and through trials that we become stronger. It is where we get to know the voice of God through the noise. It is where we have the approval of God even when we are not having the results that we normally associate with success. It is through suffering that we understand that God desires obedience over sacrifice and that success is really spelled faithfulness.

When we suffer according to the will of God, we realize that we are not alone.

1 Peter 5:9, 2 Timothy 3:12, Philippians 1:29, John 15:20, Matthew 10:38, Matthew 16:24, Luke 14:27

One key truth is that if there were not times when things dried up then we would not move on.

1 Kings 17:2-9

Storms and dry times lead us into the new seasons God has for us. Each new season for Elijah came with hearing from God after a time of storm or drought. It is in those times that God has our attention, and we know that we must press in and listen.