

Do Christians Have to Suffer?

In our family, one of our favorite people is a little girl who has bows in her hair, braces on her legs and a walker that holds her up. Her little body struggles to be healthy. But her soul is perhaps the healthiest I have ever seen.

She has a huge smile, lovely personality and kind word for everyone she meets. Every time I read Jesus' words that those with pure hearts will be blessed, this little girl comes to mind.

This lovely little lady has spent much of her dozen years of life in the hospital undergoing various surgeries. On one occasion, I was at her bedside as she woke after surgery. Her lovely blonde hair was shaved, and in its place were numerous large stitches.

With parched lips and droopy eyes due to the medication, she looked at me and smiled. Holding back tears, I asked her how she was doing. She said, "I'm fine, but Mr. Mark, how are you? I'm more worried about you."

This little girl had been through more suffering than any child I know. Yet she is perhaps the most godly, mature and Christlike child I have ever met. She has explained to me how her suffering has helped her more fully appreciate Jesus' suffering and increased her love and compassion for others who are suffering. At times, the insights she shares are so deep for a child that it is obvious that the Spirit of God is present and powerful in her suffering. She has a wisdom that defies the number of candles on her birthday cake.

Before we examine the suffering of Jesus, there is one Scripture that I want you to reflect on. Speaking of Jesus' suffering and your suffering, 1 Peter 4:12–14 (ESV) says, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may

also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed ... you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”

Jesus suffered and was blessed because the Holy Spirit rested upon Him in glory during His suffering. You can suffer and be blessed because the Holy Spirit will come to rest on you in a unique and glorious way when you are suffering.

The Beginning of Jesus' Suffering

By the time Jesus reached his final week, he had already been run out of his hometown as a prophet without honor. Jesus ominously begins talking openly about his impending death. He sat down with his Jewish disciples to eat the traditional Passover meal that God's people had been eating ever since their deliverance from bondage and slavery in Egypt as recorded in Exodus.

Today, we call this meal “The Last Supper,” and it has been memorialized in the painting by Leonardo da Vinci. Passover is about forgiveness and deliverance. Passover memorialized the night in Egypt when in faith God's people painted the doorposts to their home in the blood of a lamb.

The lamb was to be unblemished, showing its purity, and it was slaughtered as a substitute in the place of the sinner. The painting of the doorposts with the blood was an act of faith showing that the household believed they were sinners deserving death but that through the death of a substitute without spot or blemish, they would be forgiven, and God's wrath would literally pass over them. Conversely, those who were not covered by the blood of the lamb saw death come to their home.

This all foreshadowed the coming of Jesus in John 1:29 when John the Baptizer said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” Reflecting back, Paul would later write in 1 Corinthians 5:7b (NLT), “Christ, our Passover Lamb, has

been sacrificed for us.”

Sitting at the Passover, Jesus broke with 15 centuries of tradition. The Scriptures to be read and words to be spoken were virtually unchanged from generation to generation. However, everything was about to change at the cross of Jesus. While eating the Passover, Luke 22:19-20 says Jesus, “... took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me.’ After supper he took another cup of wine and said, ‘This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you.’”

As Jesus was eating, His suffering was beginning. He has endured every category of suffering and has compassion for your suffering. What kinds of suffering have you endured?

The Holy Spirit Helps You

All of the suffering Jesus experienced culminated on the cross. There, our loving Lord and dying deliverer suffered complete and total suffering in every category simultaneously.

Whatever you have endured, it pales in comparison to what Jesus endured. We don’t worship a God who stood back at a safe distance viewing the horror story of human history but rather a faithful high priest who sympathizes with us. He’s been through what we have, felt what we feel and conquered what we face.

The very things we spend our life energy seeking to run from, Jesus Christ willingly ran to. God came and basically jumped headfirst into a wood chipper called the cross.

Crucifixion was and is brutal. In recent times the Nazis crucified Jews, the Khmer Rouge crucified opponents in Cambodia and in our day, some terrorists have taken to also crucifying openly, publicly and shamefully.

The goal is always the same—terror. To crucify one person publicly is to send a chilling fear into the hearts of anyone who might align with them or follow them. The message is clear—do not believe what they believe, or you will endure what they endure.

All of human history had been marching to the cross of Jesus. As Jesus hung there bleeding, weeping and dying, the visible mob of humanity as well as the invisible legions of angels and demons were anxiously awaiting His response. Jesus suffered nobly, simply, humbly and lovingly. Then He died and needed to wait for time to vindicate Him.

The same is true for you. If history will not vindicate you, eternity will. I want to sincerely say that I am sorry for your suffering. What I'm sharing in these devotionals are things I've learned as I walked through my own valley of the shadow of death. It's an honor if anything I learned can be of help to you, so thank you for giving me the opportunity to walk with you through your valley.

When suffering comes, it does feel like we are in a wilderness. You feel overwhelmed, discouraged, fearful and even hopeless. In your worst moments, the Holy Spirit cries out, begging you to not harden your heart toward God. The greatest need we have when suffering is the Spirit. He reminds us of Jesus' suffering for us and comes to help us suffer well.

The School of Suffering

We've all been to different schools where we learned different things. But for every Christian, there is one school we all attend and one lesson we all learn. That school is suffering. And that lesson is how to become more perfectly like Jesus.

In Hebrews 2:10 (ESV), we read this astonishing statement regarding Jesus' suffering, "... it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to

glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering."

What does it mean that Jesus was "made perfect through suffering"? Jesus was perfect before He came to earth and suffered. But He became perfectly perfect through the experience of suffering.

One Bible commentary explains it this way, "Christ always has been perfect in a moral sense. He is sinless. The word translated perfect here frequently recurs throughout this letter. It signifies the completion of a use here means that Jesus became fully qualified as pioneer of man's salvation by undergoing experience of human sufferings, inasmuch as through suffering is the way to salvation. Although Christ was morally perfect and sinless, his life and work were brought by suffering to a form of perfection or completion which cannot have been possible without them" (Brown, *The Message of Hebrews*).

There are some things you can learn by watching others experience that you cannot fully understand until you share that experience. So it is with Jesus. From heaven, He watched our suffering and knew about suffering. But He added the experience of His suffering, and His learning was perfected so that He now fully and completely understands your suffering.

Jesus came to earth to pioneer a path for His people to march into His eternal kingdom. This required that He get off his throne in glory and come to earth in humility to serve us. He suffered because of our sin and died to deliver us from death. Today, our humble King has returned to His throne.

Jesus can fully empathize with you as you suffer. He has faced what you face, He has endured what you must endure, and He has defeated what is opposing you. He loves you, he helps you, and He has sent the Spirit so you have the power to endure suffering as He did. {eoa}

Mark Driscoll is an author, speaker and pastor who has been in ministry for over 25 years. He and his wife, Grace, planted the Trinity Church with their five kids in Scottsdale, Arizona. For free sermons, answers to questions, Bible teaching, and more, visit or download the Mark Driscoll Ministries app.