

How should we respond to suffering?

With Bishop Ronald K. Powell

Dear Friends,

“Present yourself to God.” “walk according to the Spirit”, with the breaking of the outer man we should respond properly to God’s initiatives.

Our response to God’s discipline/breaking process is crucial. We do not have the ability to escape from suffering, but we do have the ability to nullify God’s good purpose for it.

Listed below are the proper and improper responses to suffering most emphasized by the Bible.

Identify your most common wrong responses, and give special attention to replacing them with the proper response.

1. Don’t be surprised.

1 Pet. 4:12 – Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you.

2 Tim. 2:3-4 – Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.

1 Pet. 4:1-2 Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.

2 As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.

New Christians should be informed of this ASAP.

Acts 14:22 – strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.’)

“Forewarned is forearmed!”

Older Christians also need to be reminded when things get harder than they thought.

Heb. 12:5 – “ . . . and you have forgotten the exhortation

which is addressed to you as sons, `MY SON, DO
NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF
THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE
REPROVED BY HIM'

Arm yourself to suffer

1 Pet. 4:1-2

2 Tim. 2:3

Phil. 1:29

We must prepare our minds, accepting the fact
that hardship is certain.

2. Don't compare your sufferings to others

John 21:18-22 – "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you
were younger, you used to gird yourself, and walk
wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will
stretch out your hands, and someone else will gird you,
and bring you where you do not wish to go." (19) Now
this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would
glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to
him, "Follow Me!" (20) Peter, turning around, saw the
disciple whom Jesus loved following them; the one who
also had leaned back on His breast at the supper, and
said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" (21) Peter
therefore seeing him said to Jesus, "Lord, and what
about this man?" (22) Jesus said to him, "If I want him
to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow
Me!"

"Why aren't they suffering as much as I am?

"They must be more spiritual."

"I must be more spiritual than them since I'm not suffering."

These meditations are foolish, and give birth to self-pity, envy and pride—the very
things from which God is seeking to deliver us!

God has his own plan for each of us.

Our concern for others should be on how we can
encourage them to follow Christ.

Our main focus should be on following him and learning what he wants us to
learn.

3. Do focus on God's promises.

2 Cor. 4:17-18 – For momentary, light affliction is
producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all

comparison, (18) while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Heb. 12:11 – All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

1 Pet. 5:9-10 – But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.
(10) And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

In This Life:

1- More fruit

Jn. 15:2;

Phil 1:12,13 – including increased impact on others;

2- The peaceful fruit of righteousness

Heb. 12:11

3- Perseverance, proven character & hope

Rom. 5:3-4

4- Strengthen, confirm, perfect & established

1 Pet. 5:10

5- Purifying your faith

1 Pet. 1:6-7

In The Next Life:

1- Reward

Rom. 8:18

2 Cor. 4:17

2- Full understanding

1 Cor. 13:12

Like a TAPESTRY, we only see the underside of it during this life.

It is full of knotted threads of different colors, and we see no real beauty or pattern. But in the next life, God will show us the top of the TAPESTRY.

We will see how it all fits together, and how his hand was always working with perfect love and wisdom to fashion our lives into something that gave glory to him.

4. Do give thanks while you are suffering.

James 1:2-4 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, (3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. (4) And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

This is a key way we can express our trust that God is sovereignly working through this suffering.

Rom. 8:28

Antithesis:

Complaining; self-pity; becoming embittered toward God; etc.

It is also a privilege to suffer for the cause of Christ

Phil. 1:29

Acts 5:41

There is cause greater than our own personal comfort: The cause of Christ.

Antithesis:

We don't see the willingness to suffer for anything amongst most western people.

American hedonism/narcissism—no cause is greater than my own comfort.

This is a choice (imperative), not a feeling!

We can and should choose to thank God on the basis of his truth, in spite of our contradictory thoughts and feelings.

The result of turning to God in the midst of suffering is a growing trust and realization of his infinite provision and commitment.

5. Do tell God how you feel, but determine to follow his will.

Matt. 26:39-42 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." (40)

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. (41) "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the

body is weak.” (42) He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

Some Christians think it is nonspiritual to admit to God that they are in pain, or to ask God to deliver them from suffering- but Jesus (and many other Old Testament authors) shows us this is not the case. To draw near to God in this way is a precious feature of our personal relationships with him.

But alongside this freedom, there must be the determination to do what God wants us to do rather than to go outside God’s will to spare ourselves from suffering. Under girding this determination, of course, is the choice to believe that God’s will is both wise and loving and good.

We need to prize perseverance, endurance the way God does (70+ times in the New Testament)—to “play with pain,” to stay at our posts instead of deserting

2 Tim. 4:10

Heb. 12:3-5

1 Cor. 10:13

Rom. 5:4

Conclusion:

(John Newton) I asked the Lord that I
might grow in faith and love and every
grace, might more of His salvation know and seek
more earnestly His face.

‘Twas He who taught me thus to pray, and
he, I trust, has answered prayer;
But it has been in such a way as almost
drove me to despair.

I thought that in some favored hour at once
He’d answer my request
and by His love’s constraining power,
subdue my sins and give me rest.

Instead of that, He made me feel the
hidden evils of my heart,
and bade the angry powers of hell assault
my soul in every part.

Nay more, with His own hand he seemed

intent to aggravate my woe,
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,
blasted my gourds, and laid me low.
“Lord, why is this?” I trembling cried. “Wilt
Thou pursue this worm to death?”
“This is the way,” the Lord replied, “I
answer prayer for grace and faith.
“These inward trials I employ from self and
sin to set thee free,
And cross thy schemes of earthly joy that
thou might’st find thy all in Me.”