

Rick Warren – Devotionals on suffering

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (Psalms 23:4 NIV).

Did Jesus suffer? Was Jesus sometimes lonely? Was he tempted to be discouraged? Was he misunderstood, maligned and criticized unjustly? The answer to all these questions is “Yes.”

And none of us are exempted from suffering, or loneliness, or discouragement, or unjust criticism—because God is developing within us the character of Christ, and in order to do this, he must take us through all of the circumstances in life that he took Christ through.

This means God is more interested in your character than your comfort, and he's more concerned about your holiness than your happiness. So, the question is not *if* you'll go through dark times in life, but *when* you'll go through them.

Now, does this mean God causes tragedies? No. God is good, and he will not cause evil or do evil. *But* God can *use* dark and stressful times for good; he'll use them to build a Christ-like character within us.

So, what should you do when you go through difficult times?

Refuse to be discouraged. David said, “I will fear no evil” (Psalms 23:4 NIV). His use of the word *will* implies a choice, an act of decision. In the final 12 hours of Christ's life, we can clearly see he made a *choice* to follow God's will; He made a *choice* to face down fear; he made a *choice* to ignore despair.

Remember God is with you. David said, “For you are with me” (Psalms 23:4 NIV). God not only promises his power; he promises his presence. We will never go through a dark day alone. Jesus knew he wasn't alone as he walked out his Passion.

Rely on God's protection and guidance. David said in Psalm 23:4 that God's rod and staff comforted him. The rod and staff were basic tools a shepherd used to protect and guide the sheep. God will be with you, and he'll protect and guide you. Jesus could have called down 10,000 angels; he could have called his disciples to arms; instead he relied on God to protect and guide Him.

We all go through difficult times. The difference for those who believe in Jesus is not the absence of the shadow but the presence of the Light.

[God] comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others . . . When we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer” (2 Corinthians 1:4a, 6 NLT, second edition).

Your pain often reveals God's purpose for you. God never wastes a hurt! If you've gone through a hurt, he wants you to help other people going through a similar hurt. He wants you to share it. God can use the problems in your life to give you a ministry to others. In fact, the very thing you're most ashamed of in your life and resent the most, could become your greatest ministry in helping other people.

Who can better help somebody going through a bankruptcy than somebody who went through a bankruptcy? Who can better help somebody struggling with an addiction than somebody who's struggled with an addiction? Who can better help parents of a special needs child than parents who raised a special needs child? Who can better help somebody who's lost a child than somebody who lost a child?

The very thing you hate the most in your life is what God wants to use for good in your life.

The Bible says, *“[God] comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others . . . When we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer” (2 Corinthians 1:4a, 6 NLT, second edition).*

This is called redemptive suffering. Redemptive suffering is when you go through a problem or a pain for the benefit of others.

This is what Jesus did. When Jesus died on the cross, he didn't deserve to die. He went through that pain for your benefit so that you can be saved and go to Heaven.

There are many different causes for the problems, pains, and suffering in your life. Sometimes the stuff that happens you bring on yourself. When you make stupid decisions, then it causes pain in your life. If you go out and overspend and buy things you can't afford and presume on the future, and then you go deeply in debt and lose your house, you can't say, "God, why did you let me lose my house?" You can't blame God for your bad choices.

But in some of your problems, you're innocent. You've been hurt by the pain, stupidity, and sins of other people. And some of the pain in your life is for redemptive suffering. God often allows us to go through a problem so that we can then help others.

Talk It Over

- What are some of the problems in your life that you have questioned God about or wondered why they had to happen to you?
- How can you use your painful experience to minister to others?
- Why do you think God does not always reveal his purpose to us? How should we respond when this is the case?

How to Remain Faithful When Suffering

By Rick Warren

"Those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good." (1 Peter 4:19 NIV)

There are people out there who say God wants everybody to be a millionaire. God never wants anybody to have cancer. God never wants any problems in your life.

But the Bible says sometimes suffering is God's will for your life. Why? Because it makes you more like Jesus. It deepens your faith. It brings you rewards in [Heaven](#). It builds your character. It teaches you to worship instead of worry.

- There are three kinds of suffering in the world. Common suffering is suffering that's common to everybody. It doesn't matter if you're Baptist or Buddhist or Muslim or atheist or whatever. Everybody suffers certain things. When a hurricane comes into town, it doesn't just pick on [Christians](#). There is suffering in the world that we all share in common.
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- The second kind of suffering is carnal suffering. That's suffering you bring on yourself from your own sin. If I go out and live a very loose immoral life and get a sexually transmitted disease, that's my fault. It's not God's fault. It's not anybody else's fault. It's my fault. If I spend more money than I make and now I'm in debt and going bankrupt, that's not anyone's fault but mine. That's suffering because of my sin and bad decisions.
- Not all suffering is from sin. The Bible says sometimes suffering is according to the will of God, because God is more interested in your character than your comfort.
- The Bible says in 1 Peter 4:19, "Those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good" (NIV).
- No matter what arrows are thrown at you, no matter what you suffer in this life because of your faith, God wants you to remain faithful to him and keep on doing good to others. Is that easy to do? Not always. Does it take faith? Definitely. Is it worth it? Absolutely.