

Theology of Trials in the New Testament

As we live for Christ, we will experience troubles because we are trying to be God's people in a perverse world. Some people say that troubles are the result of sin or lack of faith, but the Bible teaches that they may be a part of God's plan for believers. Our problems can help us look upward and forward, instead of inward. They can build strong character, and they can provide us with opportunities to comfort others who are also struggling. Your troubles may be an indication that you are taking a stand for Christ.

Suffering is not always the result of sin.

"His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.'" (John 9:2-3 NIV).

God provides hope and love in suffering.

"We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Romans 5:3-5 NIV).

Problems help us trust in God's sovereignty for our lives.

"We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family" (Romans 8:28-29 NRSV).

Suffering enables us to comfort others.

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows" (2 Corinthians 1:3-5 NIV).

Our eternal reward outweighs our suffering.

"For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:17-18 NRSV).

Problems open up opportunities for service.

"I want you to know, beloved that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel" (Philippians 1:12 NRSV).

Problems may be a confirmation that we are living for Christ.

"This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, and is intended to make you worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering" (2 Thessalonians 1:5 NRSV).

God uses suffering in his plan for our lives.

"Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us, so that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified everywhere, just as it is among you, and that we may be rescued from wicked and evil people; for not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one" (2 Thessalonians 3:1-3 NRSV).

Through his suffering, Jesus fully identified with us.

"For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham" (Hebrews 2:16 NRSV).

Jesus was willing to obey God even when it meant suffering.

"Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8 NRSV).

Trials help train us to be more fruitful.

"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11 NIV).

Problems help us mature.

“My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:2-4 NRSV).

Trials help refine our character.

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:6-9 NIV).

When we suffer, we share in the suffering of Christ.

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you” (1 Peter 4:12-14 NIV).

(Reference: *Life Application Bible Commentary: Hebrews*)