

Response to Suffering

This lesson is partly a review of suffering. This is not some all-encompassing list. It is an attempt to focus your attention on answers, solutions to suffering you may encounter. Here the emphasis is on what we can do when immersed in suffering. What is our response to suffering? Some people fall apart. Have you seen someone go into panic when faced with suffering? Or perhaps breakdown and cry? We are children of God the Father. He is our FATHER. His essence causes Him to act in love and righteousness and omnipotence. But He provides what we need. Not always what we want. Sometimes that is to get our attention to return to walking by faith. Sometimes we endure undeserved suffering for a variety of reasons.

The easy answer to how are we to respond to suffering is to just trust our Father.

Let us read in Romans chapter 8 until we get to verse 17 where we will explore some approaches to suffering. Remember that Paul repeatedly tells us to not sin. Avoid sin. It is incompatible with our position in Christ.

Romans 8:12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—

Romans 8:13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die (believer dies “operationally” – cannot produce divine righteous deeds); but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live (believer lives “operationally” in the spiritual life).

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Romans 8:14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons (adult sons) of God.

Adult sons. Mature believers have the spiritual knowledge and apply faith to the promises which allows the Holy Spirit to lead us, to guide us through life.

Romans 8:15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!”

Adoption. There was a lesson on adoption which described the Greek and Roman procedures for adopting sons. We were formerly enemies of God. Now, as believers, we are in the family of God, in Christ.

Romans 8:16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,

Romans 8:17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*.

Let us concentrate on Romans 8:17

Romans 8:16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children (τέκνα) of God,

Children of God. We are in the family of God, in Christ.

Paul uses two different words for child. One is a vanilla word for children (τέκνα). The other, is for adult sons (υἱοί). All through this

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passage in Romans chapter 8 there is a contrast between the believer who is walking according to the flesh or sin nature and the believer walking consistently according to the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:4). That is important to orient our understanding of the contrast in verse 17.

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Romans 8:17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*.

Let us review via a comment from Robby Dean:

“We can look at Romans 8:17, and put a comma after “also” and after “Christ.” That punctuation combines the terms, "heirs of God" and "fellow-heirs with Christ" as the same thing. However, if we move a comma so that we place it after God ..." If children, heirs also of God ..." Then "joint-heirs with Christ if we indeed suffer with Him." So that being an heir of God is related to being a child of God and that is part of the grace package received at the instant of salvation. But to be considered a joint-heir with Christ in which there is additional reward on the basis of suffering. That would be a second category.¹”

Robby Dean makes the point that most of the translations punctuate these verses such that “heirs of God” and “heirs of Christ” are synonymous terms. They are not. Robby Dean emphasizes that children of God is the result of faith in Jesus Christ. Suffering after salvation is not part of the

¹ <https://deanbible.org/new-testament-menuitem/romans-menuitem/message/2010-romans-087b/read>

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salvation package. Let me suggest four reasons to support Robby Dean's argument. This is a repetition of a previous lesson. The point is to emphasize something you will not see in most Bible or Bible commentators. For me, the logic of the explanation is convincing.

1. **Logic of salvation (Logic).** If you were to assume that the two inheritances were the same, then you are left with a logic error. Salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone. But if you now add suffering as a requirement of salvation then you encounter a contradiction. Salvation would then be both by faith alone plus suffering. Consider this. Salvation is accomplished in a point in time, the point of faith in Jesus Christ. But suffering is something done post-salvation in the Christian's life. So, on the basis of the definition of salvation these two inheritances are different. Paul uses logic.
2. **Flow of argument for believers (Context).** What many Bible commentators seem to do is conflate (i.e. mix) salvation and the Christian life. But we see Romans chapter 8 as comparing the believer living according to the sin nature and the believer living according to the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:4). Heirs of God is for all believers. Not all believers will suffer and depend upon God the Holy Spirit. Paul uses the context.
3. **Two different inheritances (Vocabulary).** Continuing from the first point, why would Paul identify two different inheritances and yet say they are the same? Not impossible but improbable. Note that there are two different words for inheritance here. The first word is heirs. The second word, in the Greek, is "joint-heirs." Paul uses vocabulary.
4. **Grammar of *de* (adversative) (Grammar).** We have encountered Paul's use of conjunctions to guide us through his arguments. Here

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Paul uses the conjunction *de* twice: once in front of inheritance of God and once in front of inheritance of Christ. It can indicate continuation of an argument or a contrast. But the second use of *de* includes “μεν” which shows a contrast between the two inheritances. Paul uses grammar.

Below I format this passage to highlight the conjunctions μεν & *de*.

We are children of God (from verse 16)

IF:

Indeed (*de*) children, also heirs, heirs of God on the one hand (μεν),
But (*de*) joint-heirs of Christ if on the other hand we together suffer
(*present active indicative*) (with Him) that (purpose) we might
be glorified together (with Him)

This is an important point. In chapter 8 Paul is explaining the Christian life. The purpose of our life is to glorify Christ.

Suffering is a multifaceted multidimensional topic. Different Bible teachers will teach this topic using a variety of categories. Indeed, Robby Dean came up with two different sets of categories when dealing with these verses in the same series of lessons.

Here is one set of categories² taken from Robby Dean's lessons on suffering in the Romans series:

1. Preventative suffering

A. To warn and instruct

**Job 33:14 “Indeed God speaks once, Or twice,
yet no one notices it.**

² <https://deanbible.org/dbmfiles/slides/2010-Romans-089b.pdf>

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**Job 33:15 “In a dream, a vision of the night,
When sound sleep falls on men, While they
slumber in their beds,**

**Job 33:16 Then He opens the ears of men, And
seals their instruction,**

Concerning the Hebrew word translated “instruction” from Biblehub.com.

“יָסַר” describes the active process by which God or His appointed agents correct, train, admonish, chasten, or educate so that the recipient is restored to covenant faithfulness and brought to maturity. The term is always relational; the one who disciplines does so because he already possesses rightful authority over the one disciplined.”

**Job 33:17 That He may turn man aside *from*
his conduct, And keep man from pride;**

**Job 33:18 He keeps back his soul from the pit,
And his life from passing over into Sheol.**

This may remind you of Paul’s admonition to Timothy.

**2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God
(literally God-breathed) and profitable for
teaching, for reproof, for correction, for
training in righteousness;**

**2 Timothy 3:17 so that the man of God may be
adequate, equipped for every good work.**

B. To prevent pride and sin associated with arrogance and pride. As you will see, these points and quoted passages overlap.

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Job 33:17 That He may turn man aside *from his* conduct, And keep man from pride;

Job 33 is a powerful statement concerning “instruction” or “chastening.”

C. To protect from death

Again from Job 33:

Job 33:23 “If there is an angel as mediator for him, One out of a thousand, To remind a man what is right for him,

Job 33:24 Then let him be gracious to him, and say, ‘Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom’;

Job 33:25 Let his flesh become fresher than in youth, Let him return to the days of his youthful vigor;

Job 33:26 Then he will pray to God, and He will accept him, That he may see His face with joy, And He may restore His righteousness to man.

Job 33:27 “He will sing to men and say, ‘I have sinned and perverted what is right, And it is not proper for me.

Job 33:28 ‘He has redeemed my soul from going to the pit, And my life shall see the light.’

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Job 33:29 “Behold, God does all these oftentimes with men,

**Job 33:30 To bring back his soul from the pit,
That he may be enlightened with the light of life.**

2. Corrective or disciplinary suffering:

“In chastening, punitive, or disciplinary suffering the Lord punishes the believer who does not respond to preventative suffering.”

Proverbs 3:11 My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD Or loathe His reproof,

Proverbs 3:12 For whom the LORD loves He reproves, Even as a father *corrects* the son in whom he delights.

Hebrews quotes and comments on this:

Hebrews 12:4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;

Hebrews 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;

Hebrews 12:6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.”

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Hebrews 12:7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline?

3. Pedagogical or educational suffering (Psalm 25 is a Psalm of David).

Psalm 25:8 Good and upright is the LORD; Therefore He instructs sinners in the way.

Psalm 25:9 He leads the humble in justice, And He teaches the humble His way.

...

Psalm 25:16 Turn to me and be gracious to me, For I am lonely and afflicted.

Psalm 25:17 The troubles of my heart are enlarged; Bring me out of my distresses.

Psalm 25:18 Look upon my affliction and my trouble, And forgive all my sins.

Psalm 25:19 Look upon my enemies, for they are many, And they hate me with violent hatred.

Psalm 25:20 Guard my soul and deliver me; Do not let me be ashamed, for I take refuge in You.

Deuteronomy 8:2 You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in

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the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.

Deuteronomy 8:3 He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.

Deuteronomy 8:4 Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years.

Deuteronomy 8:5 Thus you are to know in your heart that the LORD your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son.

4. Suffering to glorify God

John 9:1 As He (Jesus) passed by, He saw a man blind from birth.

John 9:2 And His disciples asked Him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?”

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John 9:3 Jesus answered, “*It was neither that* this man sinned, nor his parents; but *it was so* that the works of God might be displayed in him.

John 11:1 Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

John 11:2 It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.

John 11:3 So the sisters sent *word* to Him, saying, “Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.”

John 11:4 But when Jesus heard *this*, He said, “This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it.”

Paul:

2 Corinthians 12:7 Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!

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2 Corinthians 12:8 Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me.

2 Corinthians 12:9 And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

2 Corinthians 12:10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

5. Suffering to remove distractions and focus on the important issues in life

2 Corinthians 1:8 For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came *to us* in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life;

2 Corinthians 1:9 indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead;

2 Corinthians 1:10 who delivered us from so great a *peril of death*, and will deliver *us*, He

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on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us,

Much of this lesson follows Robby Dean:

<https://deanbible.org/dbmfiles/slides/2010-Romans-089b.pdf>

Some things to consider when in suffering:

1. Are you walking according to the Spirit or according to the flesh (Romans 8:4)? Acknowledge sin and go to faith dependence on the Holy Spirit. Spirituality depends upon God the Holy Spirit.

2. Give thanks: in all things give thanks

1 Thessalonians 5:16 Rejoice always;

1 Thessalonians 5:17 pray without ceasing;

1 Thessalonians 5:18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

3. Pray of clarification/removal. Paul & Jesus both asked for removal of suffering. In both cases the answer was no. But they asked because at least for Paul, removal of suffering was a possibility. So with us. We can ask.

Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane:

Matthew 26:38 Then He *said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me."

Matthew 26:39 And He went a little beyond *them*, and fell on His face and prayed, saying,

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“My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.”

Paul asking for relief from suffering.

2 Corinthians 12:7 Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!

2 Corinthians 12:8 Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me.

2 Corinthians 12:9 And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

2 Corinthians 12:10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

4. Are there visible changes between pre-suffering and during suffering? Are there visible benefits to your suffering. You may not immediately see any. But hours or days or even years later, you may see the benefit of the suffering you encountered. Sometimes it is to

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be able to comfort those who suffer in a similar manner. Sometimes God puts you in a position with a new perspective. Something you could not appreciate previously.

5. Suffering of pastors Paul's explanation in 2 Cor 1

2 Corinthians 1:3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,

2 Corinthians 1:4 who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

2 Corinthians 1:5 For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.

2 Corinthians 1:6 But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer;

2 Corinthians 1:7 and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are *sharers* of our comfort.

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6. Is there a lesson to be learned?
7. Bottom line: suffering should cause us to focus on our relationship to God, especially God the Father in prayer.