

A Reason for Pain?

As your students grapple with understanding why Christians suffer pain, it might be interesting to quote the noted author C. S. Lewis, who wrote, “God whispers in our pleasures, but shouts in our pain.” Understanding that God has a purpose in what He allows us to go through can help your students to keep an optimistic outlook of faith when the waves of trouble roll in.

God wants us to be prepared for the pain-filled issues that will come into our lives, and that is the point you will want to develop with your group. The assurance that God is deeply involved and offers personal assistance and infinite understanding when we face pain is an indescribable help. Draw your students’ attention to the many times the word “comfort” appears in the 2 Corinthians text. That word comes from the Greek terms para, meaning “beside, alongside,” and kaleo, “to call.” Together they mean, “called alongside.” No matter what our need, God will be alongside to share our pain.

Response 1 — The examples given should help your group conclude that pain is anything that brings grief or suffering. It might be physical trauma, but a broad range of other pain-causing situations could also come our way: a wayward child, a broken friendship, a disagreement, a loss by death, a backslidden brother, or a personal failure. It might be interesting to note your students’ responses on a dry erase board, dividing the examples given into three categories: physical pain, emotional pain, and spiritual pain. Then help your group to analyze the three categories. How are they alike? How are they different? How do we react to each of them? How might they change our lives? The point is to help your group understand that while we might feel alone in our suffering, there are others around us who are hurting too, although perhaps for very different reasons.

Objective

The students will be able to explain how God would have the Christian react to suffering, and to relate some of the ways that good can come of the suffering in our lives.

Key Texts

Job 23:14; Psalms 34:19; 119:71; Proverbs 3:11,12; Isaiah 43:2; 48:10; 53:4; Mark 14:36; John 15:2; 16:33; Romans 5:3,4; 8:17,28; 2 Corinthians 1:3,4,9,11; 12:10; Hebrews 4:14-16; 10:25; James 4:7; 1 Peter 4:12

Other Scriptures Used in This Study

Job 1:8,22; Luke 22:42; Romans 14:8; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Philippians 4:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:18; James 5:10,11; 1 Peter 2:14; 4:13,14; 2 Peter 2:9; Revelation 12:10

Suggested Verse for Memorization

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.
— 2 Corinthians 4:17

Response 2 — Class discussion should bring out that pruning is not done to inflict pain, but to remove certain parts of a plant that hinder its productivity. When God “prunes” us, He has an end result in view, and He determines what will best accomplish this in our lives. God’s “punishment,” on the other hand, is reserved for “the day of judgment” (2 Peter 2:9). That judgment will be punishment for evildoers (1 Peter 2:14) and not for the Christians. God does not punish His children—He corrects them.

Response 3 — Paul lets us know, in the first chapter of 2 Corinthians, that we might go through afflictions “that we may be able to comfort” (verse 4), “that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God” (verse 9), “that . . . thanks may be given” (verse 11). Allow your class to summarize the other verses listed. Those verses let us

know that possible reasons for affliction and positive things learned through affliction are:

Psalm 34:19—to learn God’s power to deliver His children out of affliction

Psalm 119:71—to learn God’s statutes (His Word)

Proverbs 3:11,12—to learn that correction and discipline show the depth of God’s love for His children

Isaiah 43:2—an awareness of God’s presence in every situation

Isaiah 48:10—to learn the value of refinement

John 15:2—to learn that “pruning” will help us to bear spiritual fruit

Romans 8:17—to give us the opportunity to be glorified with Him

2 Corinthians 12:10—to discover what Christ can do for us in our times of weakness, because though we are weak, we can be strong in Christ

Response 4 — We know that Job’s character was impeccable. God himself said of Job, “There is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil” (Job 1:8). Job certainly would not be chastened for this manner of living—sin was not the reason for his bankrupt and broken condition. However, God has a purpose for everything He allows to come into the lives of His children. As Christians, we don’t live for ourselves, but for God (Romans 14:8), and our reaction to situations that come our way might impact the lives of others. If we can grasp this truth, then we can begin to understand why God allowed Job to be tempted and tried in such an extreme way. Job is an example to us of how God’s love and mercy is so great that anyone who is completely surrendered to God can accept whatever God allows to come his way—even though he can see no good reason for it. Consider also the beautiful verses of encouragement found in the Book of Job that have influenced believers for thousands of years.

Help your group to understand that, whatever God’s intention is in our pain, we can trust Him.

Response 5 — Class discussion should bring out that faith is not a means of coercing God into doing something He never intended. Whether or not He will perform a miracle is in His hands. Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane helps us to understand that with God all things are possible, and if we include “God’s will” in our prayer of faith, we can trust that the things which happen in our lives are allowed by Him. However, we certainly

may pray for a miracle. Any heart’s cry that reaches out to the Almighty for a touch from His hand can be expressed by a child of God, but the basis for our prayer should be, “Thy will be done.” We should not come to God demanding or thinking to earn a self-shaped answer to our request by our great faith. There are times when disease, trials, or heartaches come and are not taken away, but they don’t have to defeat us. If our trust is in God, then we will offer our praise in whatever answer He sends, because we have confidence that He knows what is best for us.

Response 6 — Your group should see that our initial step of cooperation in the refining process must be a total submission to God’s will—to pray as Jesus did, “Not my will, but thine be done” (Luke 22:42). James 5:10,11 brings out that we are to have patience and endurance, considering the example of others who have gone through hard places. In 1 Peter 4:13,14, we find that we are to accept suffering with joy. Reading of Job’s trial (Job 1:22) helps us see the wisdom of not charging God foolishly when we are afflicted. We are admonished in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 to give thanks in everything, and this would include during times of suffering. We are to look to God for strength and grace to overcome (Philippians 4:13; 2 Corinthians 12:9).

Response 7 — James 4:7 tells us that if we resist the devil, he will flee from us. Bring out the fact that Satan is the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10) and that he is a liar. Reminding ourselves of past victories over his insinuations can be a powerful weapon. We can praise God and plead the Blood of Jesus against the enemy’s attack. Your students might also suggest discussing the problem with a minister or Christian friend. Attending church whenever possible is another effective way of withstanding Satan’s attempts, for we find strength and encouragement in fellowship with other believers (Hebrews 10:25).

Response 8 — The passage in Hebrews tells us Jesus is our High Priest. He was made like us in every way, yet without sin, so He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses and is touched by the feeling of our infirmities. At the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus felt the combined weight of His grief and that of those around Him, and He wept. We can confidently approach the Throne of Grace with our deepest feelings of grief, frustration, doubt, suffering, and heartache. There we will “find grace to help in time of need.”