

Suffering and the Christian

The difference between a Christian and an unbeliever is not that Christians don't have any problems. The difference is how a Christian deals with the difficulties when they arise. Many Christians spend their lives protecting themselves or avoiding discomforts and are unknowingly rejecting the means by which God deepens their focus on Him. They are either unaware of the God-given means to deal with the struggle, or they choose to handle the situation in their own strength apart from God. Either way, mishandled suffering produces bitterness, pride, and fear rather than the joy, forgiveness, and freedom that God provides His children in times of trial. Below are some practical suggestions to deal with the pains of life.

1. Remember that God is in control.

Job suffered terrible loss, but God had a hedge about Job limiting the destruction. God's purpose was to enable Job to see Him in a deeper way and to deliver Job from "self," the thing that keeps all of us from seeing God clearly (Job 1:10,20-22, 42:5). God has promised that every event in our lives will work for our good to transform us into the likeness of His Son (Rom. 8:28,29). The way we understand and are able to comfort others is by receiving God's comfort and grace during our own sufferings (2 Cor. 1:3-5). Our lives are made fruitful by the pruning shears of a Loving Father (John 15:2).

2. Focus on the person and presence of the Lord Jesus Christ rather than the circumstance.

Faith is focusing on the person of Christ. As Peter lost his focus on the Lord and sank helplessly as he walked from the boat, so we, if we lose our focus off the person of Christ will sink helplessly in our circumstance. Satan does not care what we get our focus on as long as we take it off the Lord (Heb. 12:2).

3. Commit the situation to God.

If a person has offended you, commit him to the Righteous Judge to bring justice (1 Pet. 1:23). We were never created to judge or to meet out vengeance; that is God's responsibility. We become proud if we start assuming God's responsibilities.

If you are going through a difficult situation, commit yourself and the situation to God (1 Pet. 4:19). God is working through the situation and will work it for your good if you will only trust Him.

4. If offenses have occurred, forgive the offenders from the heart.

Forgiveness is an act of the will not a feeling. Very few of us feel like forgiving when we are hurt. To maintain our focus on the Lord, to receive God's ongoing power and forgiveness, and to avoid spiritual torment, we must forgive (1 Pet. 2:19, Heb. 12:15, Matt. 6:14, 18:34,35). Forgiveness is not letting a person off the hook. Instead, it is transferring him to God's hook. It is trusting God to deal with that person wisely and justly.

5. If the circumstance is due to a personal failure, ask God to forgive you.

Often we find ourselves in situations of our own making. If there are personal failures that lead up to the present circumstances, ask for and accept God's forgiveness (1 John 1:9). The cycle of "what if's" and "if only's" often leads to unnecessary torment. God is faithful, and He does forgive sin. Humbly accept it.

If we have failed others, we need to possess a willingness to acknowledge our mistakes and ask forgiveness of those we have offended (1 Tim 1:19). Guilt in a time of suffering only produces unnecessary agony.

6. Transfer all your emotional energy and focus from the circumstance to the Lord.

If we focus on an offender, that person will emotionally dictate and control our lives. Our feelings will be affected adversely, our decisions will be influenced negatively, and we will take our focus off the Lord. Transferring our emotions from the individual or circumstance is freeing because it will enable us to hear from the Lord (Col. 3:2). He can then show us other prior circumstances that are presently influencing our present emotional state and enable us to deal with our past and present circumstances properly. He can remove any negative emotion as He brings comfort and peace to our awareness. Finally, it frees us from "having to prove other people wrong" and from using our emotional energy to push people away or draw them to us. As we focus on Christ, He provides a continual flow of emotional healthy responses--love, joy, and peace--even in less than desirable circumstances.

7. Ask God to come and comfort you.

God allows trials in our lives so that we will know Him in a way we have previously not known Him. He is the God of all comfort. When we have reached the end of ourselves, He will show Himself to us--bringing comfort, healing, and new insight into His nature. At times, all He is waiting for is a call for help.

8. Wait, look and listen carefully for God's clear direction and be willing to obey.

God can clearly communicate His direction to us if we are willing to listen and obey. We must deny ourselves by letting God have control, look diligently for His will in scripture and in prayer, and be willing to obey even if it means enduring more suffering (Luke 9:23). God will give grace for our trials and will give peace in the midst of our suffering. (2 Cor. 12:9)