



10/10/2012
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What is the Purpose of Suffering?

No matter if we want to admit it or not, suffering is an indiscriminate part of the human existence. From our earliest ages, we can identify with the agonizing pains of broken relationships, failing health, unmet expectations, or untimely deaths. Suffering is a worldwide epidemic:

- According to estimates, 485 natural disasters killed 297,000 people in the year 2010.
- In 2011, it is estimated that 1,596,670 new cancer cases were found in the United States.
- 571,951 people in America died of cancer last year alone.

People – even the strongest Christians – struggle to make sense of suffering, yet you must realize today that even when things don't make sense, Jesus can meet your deepest need.

This is a huge topic to try to cover together in one sitting! In order to cover such a large topic, we will begin by recognizing three key acknowledgments related to suffering. These will form the background for our understanding of suffering. Against the backdrop of these acknowledgments, we will look into Scripture and discover two primary purposes of suffering.

Please note: These listings are not meant to be exhaustive! They do, however, provide us with a solid starting-point.

SUFFERING: THE ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A Christian worldview must accept these acknowledgments as truth in order to make sense of the suffering that exists in the world.

Acknowledgment #1: God Controls All Things: He is Sovereign (Lam. 3:37-38).

- God's sovereignty means that he rules over all things, good and bad. We cannot give that up!

Acknowledgment #2: God Orchestrates All Events: He is Providential (I Sam. 2:7-8)

- Not only is God in control, but he is also actively engaged in everything that takes place. Both good and bad.

Acknowledgment #3: God is Good and He does Good (Ps. 119:68).

- Your view of "good," and God's view of "good" may be very different!
- God possesses an omniscient viewpoint.

SUFFERING: THE PURPOSES

With an understanding of these acknowledgments, we can discover at least two purposes for suffering in God's Word.

Purpose #1: Sometimes, Suffering is for Discipline (Heb. 12:14).

- The purpose of this discipline is always reconciliation.

Purpose #2: Always, Suffering is to Convince You that Jesus is Enough (Ps. 73:26)

- Against the backdrop of God's sovereignty, providence, and goodness, suffering occurs so that you will understand that Jesus is enough!

