

# GOD'S PURPOSE IN SUFFERING

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.” James 1:2-3

As a mom, I hate to see my kids suffer. When they were little and they would fall, I'd pick them up and wash them off. When friends were mean, I would hold them and comfort them with my affection and kind words. When they didn't make a team, I would ache for them, feeling all the disappointment, hurt and sadness with them.

However, sometimes, I've been able to recognize that suffering can be good for my children. Like when they fail a test and are required to learn better study habits. Or they get in a fight with a friend and need to learn peace-making skills. Or when they eat too much candy and get a terrible stomach-ache. Suffering can change us in a way that nothing else can.

We see this truth all throughout scripture. Suffering is one of God's best tools in His tool-bag to change us, make us more like Jesus and reveal the idols in our hearts. We see in our scripture today that various trials put our “faith to the test.” What does that mean? What does it look like for our faith to be tested and why would God do that?

When we get “squeezed” and the trials of life come crashing in, we can see with clarity where our hope TRULY lies. Do we trust God with every area of life, or have we been trusting in something or someone else...our health, the government, our jobs? Do we pray occasionally, know a few verses but have not given God FULL control and authority over all our lives? Suffering and trials show us the true condition of our hearts. When things are good and comfortable, we may think we have true faith in God...but the truth is...we may just have faith in our good circumstances. Our Heavenly Father is a good parent. He doesn't want to leave us blind and lost. He desires for us to come to full surrender and repentance. He doesn't want us to put our hope in sinking sand. He wants us to put our hope in the ROCK that is sure and steady and will never fail...and that rock is Jesus...crucified, died, buried and risen to save us from our sins.

The crisis we are experiencing right now is causing suffering for many of us. Fear of the future, fear for our loved ones, fear of the virus...all these things are natural responses to a global pandemic. But I encourage you to look at your heart and emotions during this trial and ask yourself, "Do I put my full faith in God? Have I truly surrendered all to Jesus"? If these questions reveal that you have not fully given your life over to the Lord, don't wait! You can pray even now as you are reading these words. Confess your sin. Confess your independence and self-sufficiency and your lack of faith. Come humbly to Jesus and ask Him to wash you clean and make you new. He will do it. He will ALWAYS answer that prayer with "YES!"

To be clear, this doesn't mean that we won't ever feel fearful emotions, but let our thoughts and emotions remind us anew to put our faith in the sovereign, wise, powerful, merciful Lord who left the glories of heaven to save us from our sin. He can be trusted with all our pain and fear.

Our Bible verse tells us that the "testing of our faith produces endurance." Endurance is needed! We need to get up every morning and remember that God is good and in control. This is a marathon...not a sprint. And we need endurance to finish the race. Faith is not a decision made once for Christ and then we go on with life and do whatever we want. Faith is the DAILY decision to trust God and rely on Him in all circumstances. This kind of faith produces endurance...and ultimately, joy. Because we know we have a Father that loves us and will use all things for our good and His glory.

Good mothers don't enjoy seeing their children suffer. It's painful to watch, but we know it is necessary in order to cause growth and change in our children. How much more so with our perfect Heavenly Father! Trust Him with your suffering and pain and allow Him to reveal the condition of your faith. Put your hope in Jesus. He will never leave you or forsake you.

*Devotion by Toria Peterson, Kidz2Leaders Family Support Manager*

