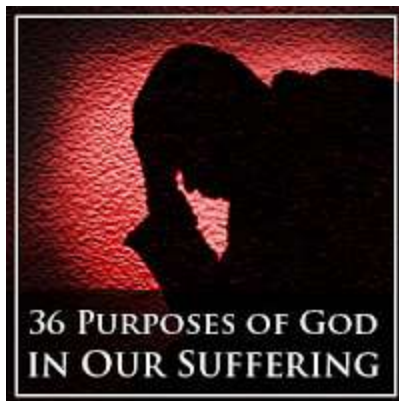


36 Purposes of God in Our Suffering

Pastor Bill Farrow

- When difficulties, trials, and suffering come in our lives, often the first question we ask is, "why?" How could God allow this? Why does God allow suffering at all? Could there be any purpose in suffering?
- Joni Eareckson Tada knows hardship firsthand and shares her experiences and reflections on suffering in many of her books. The following is an appendix from her book *When God Weeps: Why Our Sufferings Matter to the Almighty*.



1. Suffering is used to increase our awareness of the sustaining power of God to whom we owe our sustenance (Ps 68:19).

*¹⁹ Blessed be the Lord,
Who daily loads us with benefits,
God of our salvation! Selah*

2. God uses suffering to refine, perfect, strengthen, and keep us from falling (Ps 66:8-9; Heb. 2:10).

- Psalm 66:8-9
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*⁸ Oh, bless our God, you peoples!
And make the voice of His praise to be heard,*

*⁹ Who keeps our soul among the living,
And does not allow our feet to be moved.*

- Heb. 2:10
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¹⁰ For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

3. Suffering allows the life of Christ to be manifested in our mortal flesh (2 Cor. 4:7-11).

- 2 Corinthians 4:7-11 - Cast Down But Unconquered

⁷ But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. ⁸ We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—¹⁰ always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. ¹¹ For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

4. Suffering bankrupts us, making us dependent upon God (2 Cor 12:9).

⁹ And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

5. Suffering teaches us humility (2 Cor 12:7).

- 2 Corinthians 12:7 - The Thorn in the Flesh

⁷ And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

6. Suffering imparts the mind of Christ (Phil 2:1-11).

Philippians 2:1–11 - Unity Through Humility

¹ Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ² fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. ³ Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴ Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

- The Humbled and Exalted Christ

⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. ⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

7. Suffering teaches us that God is more concerned about character than comfort (Rom 5:3-4; Heb 12:10-11).

- Romans 5:3–4

³ And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

- Hebrews 12:10–11

¹⁰ For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. ¹¹ Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

8. *Suffering teaches us that the greatest good of the Christian life is not absence of pain, but Christlikeness (2 Cor 4:8-10; Rom 8:28-29).*

- 2 Corinthians 4:8–10

⁸ We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—
¹⁰ always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

- Romans 8:28–29

²⁸ And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. ²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

9. *Suffering can be a chastisement from God for sin and rebellion.*

- Psalm 107:9–15

⁹ For He satisfies the longing soul,
And fills the hungry soul with goodness.
¹⁰ Those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death,
Bound in affliction and irons—
¹¹ Because they rebelled against the words of God,
And despised the counsel of the Most High,
¹² Therefore He brought down their heart with labor;
They fell down, and there was none to help.
¹³ Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble,
And He saved them out of their distresses.
¹⁴ He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death,
And broke their chains in pieces.
¹⁵ Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness,
And for His wonderful works to the children of men!

10. *Obedience and self-control are from suffering*

- Hebrews 5:8

⁸ though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. ;

- Psalm 119:67

*⁶⁷ Before I was afflicted I went astray,
now I keep Your word.*

- Romans 5:1–5 - Faith Triumphs in Trouble

5 *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

- James 1:2–8 - Profiting from Trials

² My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

- Philippians 3:10

¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

11. Voluntary suffering is one way for us to demonstrate the love of God (2 Cor 8:1-2, 9).

- 2 Corinthians 8:1–2 - Excel in Giving

8 *Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: ² that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.*

⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

12. Suffering is part of the struggle against sin (Heb 12:4-13).

- Hebrews 12:4–13 - The Discipline of God

⁴ You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. ⁵ And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:

*“My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;
⁶ For whom the LORD loves He chastens,
And scourges every son whom He receives.”*

⁷ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸ But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. ⁹ Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. ¹¹ Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

*¹² Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees,
¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.*

13. Suffering is part of the struggle against evil men (Ps 27:12; 37:14-15).

- Ps 27:12;

*¹⁴ Wait on the LORD;
Be of good courage,
And He shall strengthen your heart;
Wait, I say, on the LORD!*

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- Ps. 37:14-15

*¹⁴ The wicked have drawn the sword
And have bent their bow,
To cast down the poor and needy,
To slay those who are of upright conduct.*

*¹⁵ Their sword shall enter their own heart,
And their bows shall be broken.*

14. Suffering is part of the struggle for the kingdom of God (2 Thess 1:5).

- 2 Thessalonians 1:5

⁵ which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer;

15. Suffering is part of the struggle for the gospel (2 Tim 2:8-9).

- 2 Timothy 2:8-9

⁸ Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, ⁹ for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained.

16. Suffering is part of the struggle against injustice (1 Pet 2:19).

- 1 Peter 2:19

¹⁹ For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.

17. Suffering is part of the struggle for the name of Christ (Acts 5:41; 1 Pet 4:14).

- Acts 5:41

⁴¹ So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.

- 1 Peter 4:14

¹⁴ If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.

18. Suffering indicates how the righteous become sharers in Christ's suffering (2 Cor 1:5; 1 Pet 4:12-13).

- 2 Corinthians 1:5

⁵ For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.

- 1 Peter 4:12–13 - Suffering for God's Glory

¹² Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; ¹³ but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

19. Endurance of suffering is given as a cause for reward (2 Cor 4:17; 2 Tim 2:12).

- 2 Corinthians 4:17

¹⁷ For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,

- 2 Timothy 2:12

¹² If we endure,
We shall also reign with Him.
If we deny Him,
He also will deny us.

20. Suffering forces community and the administration of the gifts for the common good (Phil 4:12-15).

- Philippians 4:12–1

¹² I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. ¹³ I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

¹⁴ Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress. ¹⁵ Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only.

21. Suffering binds Christians together into a common or joint purpose (Rev 1:9).

- Revelation 1:9 – John’s Service and Vision of the Son of Man

⁹ I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

22. Suffering produces discernment, knowledge, and teaches us God’s statutes (Ps 119:66-67, 71).

- Psalm 119:66–67

⁶⁶ Teach me good judgment and knowledge,
For I believe Your commandments.

⁶⁷ Before I was afflicted I went astray,
But now I keep Your word.

⁷¹ It is good for me that I have been afflicted,
That I may learn Your statutes.

23. Through suffering God is able to obtain our broken and contrite spirit which He desires (Ps 51:16-17).

- Psalm 51:16–17

¹⁶ For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it;
You do not delight in burnt offering.

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,
A broken and a contrite heart—
These, O God, You will not despise.

24. Suffering causes us to discipline our minds by making us focus our hope on the grace to be revealed at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1:6, 13).

- 1 Peter 1:6. 13 - Living Before God Our Father

⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,

¹³ Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

25. God uses suffering to humble us so He can exalt us at the proper time (1 Pet 5:6-7).

- 1 Peter 5:6-7

⁶ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, ⁷ casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

26. Suffering teaches us to number our days so we can present to God a heart of wisdom (Ps 90:7-12).

- Psalm 90:7-12

*⁷ For we have been consumed by Your anger,
And by Your wrath we are terrified.*

*⁸ You have set our iniquities before You,
Our secret sins in the light of Your countenance.*

*⁹ For all our days have passed away in Your wrath;
We finish our years like a sigh.*

*¹⁰ The days of our lives are seventy years;
And if by reason of strength they are eighty years,
Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow;
For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.*

*¹¹ Who knows the power of Your anger?
For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath.*

*¹² So teach us to number our days,
That we may gain a heart of wisdom.*

27. Suffering is sometimes necessary to win the lost (2 Tim 2:8-10; 4:5-6).

- 2 Timothy 2:8-10

⁸ Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, ⁹ for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained. ¹⁰ Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

- 2 Timothy 4:5-6 - Paul's Valedictory

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⁵ But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.

28. Suffering strengthens and allows us to comfort others who are weak (2 Cor 1:3-11).

- 2 Corinthians 1:3–7 - Comfort in Suffering

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵ For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. ⁶ Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. ⁷ And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.

- 2 Corinthians 1:8–11 - Delivered from Suffering

⁸ For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. ⁹ Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, ¹⁰ who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, ¹¹ you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.

29. Suffering is small compared to the surpassing value of knowing Christ (Phil 3:8).

- Philippians 3:8

⁸ Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ

30. God desires truth in our innermost being and one way He does it is through suffering (Ps 51:6; 119:17).

- Psalm 51:6

⁶ Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts,
And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.

- Psalm 119:17

¹⁷ Deal bountifully with Your servant,
That I may live and keep Your word.

31. The equity for suffering will be found in the next life (Ps 58:10-11).

- Psalm 58:10–11

¹⁰ *The righteous shall rejoice when he sees the vengeance;
He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked,*

¹¹ *So that men will say,
“Surely there is a reward for the righteous;
Surely He is God who judges in the earth.”*

32. *Suffering is always coupled with a greater source of grace (2 Tim 1:7-8; 4:16-18).*

- 2 Timothy 1:7-8 Not Ashamed of the Gospel

⁷ *For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*

⁸ *Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God,*

- 2 Timothy 4:16–18 - The Lord is Faithful

¹⁶ *At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them.*

¹⁷ *But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. ¹⁸ And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!*

33. *Suffering teaches us to give thanks in times of sorrow (1 Thess 5:17; 2 Cor 1:11).*

- 1 Thessalonians 5:17

¹⁷ *...pray without ceasing,*

- 2 Corinthians 1:11

¹¹ *you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.*

34. *Suffering increases faith (Jer 29:11).*

- Jeremiah 29:11

¹¹ *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.*

35. *Suffering allows God to manifest His care (Ps 56:8).*

- Psalm 56:8

⁸ *You number my wanderings;
Put my tears into Your bottle;
Are they not in Your book?*

36. *Suffering stretches our hope (Job 13:14-15).*

- Job 13:14–15

¹⁴ *Why do I take my flesh in my teeth,
And put my life in my hands?*

¹⁵ *Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.
Even so, I will defend my own ways before Him.*
