

PAPER 6: “On Suffering and Suffering Well”

We would open Paper 6, “*On Suffering and Suffering Well*”, with four quotes from from C. S. Lewis’s wonderful book on suffering, *The Problem of Pain* ...

First, I would state that I undertake teaching a class on “*Suffering and Suffering Well*” with the same sense of trepidation that C. S. Lewis had in writing his book *The Problem of Pain*

“All arguments in justification of suffering provoke bitter resentment against the author. You would like to know how I behave when I am experiencing pain, not writing books about it. You need not guess, for I will tell you; I am a great coward. But what is that to the purpose? “

Lewis goes on to mention his own thoughts about suffering and pain ...

“When I think of pain – of anxiety that gnaws like fire and loneliness that spreads out like a desert, and the heartbreaking routine of monotonous misery, or again of dull aches that blacken out our whole landscape or sudden nauseating pains that knock a man’s heart out at one blow, or pains that seem already intolerable and then are suddenly increased, of infuriating scorpion-stinging pains that startle into maniacal movement a man who seemed half dead with his previous tortures – it ‘quite o’erexcites my spirit.’ ”

I would say with Lewis concerning my own personal pain ...

“If I knew any way of escape I would crawl through sewers to find it. But what is the good of telling you about my feelings? You know them already: they are the same as yours.”

We would conclude our Introduction with Lewis’s statement that ...

“I am not arguing that pain is not painful. Pain hurts. That is what the word means. I am only trying to show that the old Christian doctrine of being made ‘perfect through suffering’ is not incredible. To prove it palatable is beyond my design.”

Before diving into our course “*On Suffering and Suffering Well*” we would again stress that

Our course cannot alleviate your physical suffering – that is God’s department, through His use of direct healing and His use of your doctors and medicines.

BUT, very importantly, the “broken spirit” part of our suffering, the intellectual suffering and pain that so often accompanies physical suffering, can be mended and repaired.

Solomon writes of “intellectual suffering” in Proverbs ...

*“The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness,
But who can bear a broken spirit?” (Proverbs 18:14)*

“But a broken spirit dries the bones.” (Proverbs 17:22)

We see Job cry out in the midst of his great physical suffering ...

“My spirit is broken” (Job 17:1)

It is true that the mending and repair of a “broken spirit” cannot in and of itself reduce your physical pain and suffering, but it will be a great help to you by better enabling you to endure any physical pain and suffering that you are going through.

With this in mind, let’s take a look at “*Suffering and Suffering Well*”

We have previously looked at the “WHYs?” of Suffering, dividing them into 3 Parts ...

1. General Reasons for Suffering
2. Suffering for God’s Glory
3. God’s Answer to Job’s “Why?” and Job’s Reaction to It

But we have not yet looked specifically at the subject of “*Suffering*” itself and the answer to its most perplexing and seemingly self-contradictory Question ...

“How can a good, loving, caring, merciful and sovereign God decree and allow pain and suffering for His children?”

**Well, there are two sides to consider in answering that Question ...
“Our” side and “God’s” side**

On “Our” side ...

... we know a great deal about *suffering and pain* as it relates to ourselves personally.

Again, I can only say along with Lewis ...

“I am not arguing that pain is not painful. Pain hurts. That is what the word means. I am only trying to show that the old Christian doctrine of being made ‘perfect through suffering’ is not incredible. To prove it palatable is beyond my design.”

On “God’s” side of the Question ...

“How can a good, loving, caring, merciful and sovereign God decree and allow pain and suffering for His children?”

... we have to ask ourselves how much do we really know about “*God Himself*” and about the “*nature of His Love for His Children*” as they relate to our own personal suffering and pain.

This is a very important consideration, because, as submitted earlier, many of the most intellectually tormenting and challenging questions that arise during times of extended physical pain and suffering, questions like ...

Is God mad at me?

Does God no longer love me?

Is God punishing me?

... are related to a misunderstanding and misapprehension on our part about the true nature of God and His love for us.

We would submit that understanding the true nature and character of God and the true nature of His love for His children, will, even if your physical pain and suffering should continue unabated, help to dispel the gloom and fear of your suffering, and help you learn to “*suffer well*”, for your own personal benefit and for His glory.

Most importantly, it will help you to maintain ...

the “joy of your salvation” ...

the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding ... and ...

to know the rich and wonderful blessings of trusting, serving, and witnessing for God even in the midst of your most difficult times.

And so, to help us gain a better understanding of “*God Himself*” and of “*the nature of His love for us*” as it relates to our own pain and suffering and to help us to answer our most challenging Question of all ...

“How can a good, loving, caring, merciful and sovereign God decree and allow pain and suffering for His children?”

We will divide the rest of our Paper into three Parts that will hopefully give satisfactory answers not only to the “*Whys?*” of God’s use of pain and suffering for our benefit but also how His use of pain and suffering actually shows His great love and care for us.

Part 1 will undertake “A Look at God’s Inner Core Being and Character”

Part 2 will undertake “A Look at the Nature of God’s Love for His Children”

Part 3 will undertake “A Look at ‘Why?’ it is Necessary for a loving God to Use Pain and Suffering in the Lives of His Children”

So, let’s start with ...

Part 1 – “A Look at God’s Inner Core Being and Character”

As to God Himself, we would describe Him thusly ...

“God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.” (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 4).

For our purposes, we want to zero in on the term “unchangeable”, which is also referred to as being “immutable”.

That God is “*unchangeable*” or “*immutable*” is described as ...

“God’s freedom from all change, understood to emphasize God’s changeless perfection and divine constancy.” (Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms, Donald K. McKim)

When Moses asked God at the burning bush ...

“Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?’

And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, I AM has sent me to you.’” (Exodus 3:13-14)

In stating His name as “*I AM WHO I AM*,” God is describing Himself as eternally Self-existent, of Himself alone, and eternally immutable. Because He is eternally immutable, God is now what He was in the past and will always continue to be what He is now in the future.

Thus does God say of Himself ...

“For I am the LORD, I do not change” (Malachi 3:6)

Thus is it said of our Lord ...

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8)

God also has what are called “*attributes*”. The “*attributes*” of God are the “*Characteristics or qualities of God that constitute God’s very being.*” (*The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, Donald K. McKim).

Two things that we can say about God’s “*attributes*” are that ...

It is axiomatic that the “*characteristics or qualities of God that constitute God’s very being*” would, like God Himself, be immutable and in perfect harmony with each other.

All of His attributes (i.e., His sovereignty, holiness, love, mercy, goodness, justice, wrath, omniscience, omnipotence, etc.) are at the absolute pinnacle of perfection and can neither be improved upon or diminished in any way. Thus, whereas God Himself is complete, whole, and immutable, His attributes are also complete, whole, immutable, and in perfect harmony with each other. Again, God can only be compared with Himself and being immutable, He does not, will not, and cannot, change in any way.

God's immutability brings us to the somewhat surprising truth that God, even though He is God, actually has limitations on what He can do. And some of those limitations have a great impact on the resolution of our Question about the co-existence of pain and suffering and a loving, caring, merciful, and sovereign God at the same time.

For our purposes, the one big way in which God is limited in what He can do is that even though He is omnipotent, He can never act contrary to or go against the dictates of His own inner core nature, character, and being. He is what He is and He must be, act, and do in accord with what He is at all times.

As we will shortly see, this has amazing and wonderful implications for His children and for answering our most important Question ...

“How can a good, loving, caring, merciful and sovereign God decree and allow pain and suffering for His children?”

So, with this in mind, what are some things that God cannot do?

Here are six ...

- 1. God cannot die.**
- 2. God cannot lie.**
- 3. God cannot let sin go unpunished.**

Because God is a just, righteous and holy God, He can never just overlook or ‘*wink*’ at sin and ‘*let us all into heaven in the end*’. Do not be deceived on this point. Because God is just, righteous, and a “*consuming fire*” of holiness, He will always detest sin and by His very nature *must* move to punish it. He cannot do otherwise. It is not only because He is “just, righteous, and holy” by nature that He cannot let sin go unpunished, but it is also because it would not be “good” that sin should go unpunished ... and our God is by His inner core nature a “good” God.

If you would have proof of God's detestation of sin and need to punish it, then look to Jesus Christ on the cross.

- 4. In a similar vein God also cannot be lenient in punishing sin.**

Because God is “Just”, He must act in a “Just” manner, meaning that a *full* penalty must be exacted and paid for every sin ever committed, and that penalty will be “*severe*”. We note

that the Apostle Paul himself clearly states that God is “severe” when it comes to His punishment of sin ...

“Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness” (Romans 11:22)

Likewise, our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself the “chief cornerstone”, at the end of the parable of the wicked vinedressers says of Himself ...

“Then He looked at them and said, ‘What then is this that is written:

*The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone’?*

Whoever falls on that stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.” (Luke 20:17-18)

Being “ground to powder” is not a light punishment.

The Apostle Paul confirms this and points out that it is vital that we “not deceive” ourselves or others about God’s seriousness concerning sin and its consequences ...

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.” (I Corinthians 6:9-10)

Indeed, in Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus Himself warns us that people can be so self-deceived about their salvation as to call Him, “Lord, Lord,” and do much work for the church, but still “practice lawlessness”, i.e., repetitively and unrepentantly “practice” any sin. He makes it very clear that He will tell them at the final judgment “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness”

So, “Do not be deceived” in this matter.

God is very serious about sin and its consequences.

But even though God cannot overlook or be lenient toward sin, He can still be merciful to individual sinners. Yet, even in His mercy and grace to redeem individual sinners, their sins

are not in any way overlooked. No, redeemed sinners have had the full penalty for each of their sins paid for by Christ on the cross.

A fifth thing that God cannot do is ...

5. God cannot perform “intrinsic impossibilities”.

As C. S. Lewis says ...

“It remains true that all things are possible with God: the intrinsic impossibilities are not things but nonentities. It is no more possible for God than for the weakest of His creatures to carry out both of two mutually exclusive alternatives; not because His power meets an obstacle, but because nonsense remains nonsense even when we talk it about God.” (The Problem of Pain, page 28).

And so, God can perform all “possible” things, including miracles, but He cannot perform self-contradictory nonsense. For example, *God cannot make a rock that is too big for Him to pick up.*

6. Perhaps strangest of all is that God cannot do all that He desires.

God tells us twice in Ezekiel that He “*does not take pleasure in*” (i.e., He “does not desire”) the death and condemnation of the wicked, but would rather that they repent and live ...

“Therefore you, O son of man, say to the house of Israel: ‘Thus you say, “If our transgressions and our sins lie upon us, and we pine away in them, how can we then live?” Say to them: ‘As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but would that the wicked would turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’” (Ezekiel 33:11)

“‘Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, everyone according to his ways,’ says the Lord GOD. ‘Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,’ says the Lord GOD. ‘Therefore turn and live.’” (Ezekiel 18:30-32)

And thus we see that God can “desire” or “not desire” something, but by His own immutable decree cannot have it.

This, of course, prompts the question ...

“How can God, if He is all-powerful and sovereign over all things not have something He desires or wants to see done?”

This is a very complex and intricate question that would require a full study paper in itself to answer – if it could ever be satisfactorily answered. We will have to suffice it to say here that there can be within one person, even God, a single will with both *revealed* and *hidden* parts. God has a *revealed* will that is written in the Bible. He also has a *hidden* or *undisclosed*, i.e., unwritten, will, known only between the members of the Godhead. They are both part of one and the same will and, as in our present case, might on the surface seem to be contradictory to each other, but are not.

The examples given in the Ezekiel quotes are perhaps the only passages in the Bible wherein God reveals to us parts of His written and His undisclosed will together. Here we see that in God's "*undisclosed will*" He desires that all men be saved and that none should perish. God loves His creation – all of it – and "*takes no pleasure*" in the destruction of any part of it. But in His "*revealed will*", as expressed in the Bible, we see that though He inwardly desires that no men be lost, He has purposely decreed and ensured that some men will be lost and spend eternity in hell - even though He might inwardly "*desire*" the opposite. In short, God can "*desire*" one thing, but not have it.

We do want to be very clear here that in condemning some people to hell God does not forcefully restrain or hold back anyone that would come to Him ...

"... the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (Jesus Christ, John 6:37)

Likewise, God does not forcefully compel anyone to in any way to do anything against their own will that would send them to hell. He, rather, issues call after call for repentance.

If we define "freedom" in its classical humanist sense as the absence of external coercion and the ability to do what you want to do, then natural unregenerate man's will is "free" in that no outside force compels him to act in ways that send him into hell or prohibit him from coming to Christ if he would come. No, natural unregenerate man acts and does as he wants to act and do.

But though he is not in any way compelled or restrained by God, natural unregenerate man is still bound and held captive to his own fallen nature to suppress and reject the laws and commands of God and thereby do only evil in His sight. Confirm ...

“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, not indeed can be.” (Romans 8:7)

Yet, again, though bound by his own nature, natural unregenerate man is still, nonetheless, “free” in the sense that he does what he wants to do without any external compulsion, which, as we have said, is the essence of freedom in the classic humanist sense – which is why he must bear moral responsibility for his actions.

It is very important to note again that in all six of the limitations presented above, we have seen that God not only will not, but cannot, go against His own inner core nature, character or being, but must at all times act in full accord with it.

This is a very significant consideration in answering our Question concerning the existence of pain, suffering, and death in a world set up and ruled by a loving, caring, and all-powerful God. For it tells us that since God’s actions are Self-limited by His inner core attributes and that He can only do that which is in accord with His inner core nature, then all of God’s actions towards His children must be sent in love and for their own good.

This must be the case. For if two of God’s inner core character traits are “*love*” and “*goodness*”, traits to which He must always and ever remain true, traits from which He cannot and never will depart one iota, then we can know for certain that all of God’s actions and decrees towards His redeemed children, including those concerning pain, suffering, and death, must proceed from and be filtered through His inner core attributes of “*love*” and “*goodness*”. He cannot, by His very inner core nature, do otherwise. Thus, God’s children can have the comforting assurance that any suffering and pain sent by God to them can only be sent by Him for their benefit and good.

Thus do we also see that God’s ordaining and use of pain and suffering for His children’s spiritual benefit and higher good is entirely consistent with His being a sovereign, omnipotent, good, loving, merciful, and caring God.

This admittedly does not tell us “Why?” God might send pain and suffering to His children, but it does tell us that God’s “Motive” behind sending pain and suffering to them is always for their benefit and good.

And so, Part 1 only gives us a “Part” of the answer to our central Question ...

“How can a good, loving, caring, merciful and sovereign God decree and allow pain and suffering for His children?”

We will take up the other two “Parts” of the answer, the “Nature of God’s love for His Children” and “Why is it necessary?” for God to send pain and suffering to His children for their own benefit and good, in Parts 2 and 3.

Part 2 – “A look at the Nature of God’s Love for His Children”

So, “What is God’s Love Like?”

Most people’s definition of what they want “God’s Love” to be like is described by C. S. Lewis in his book *The Problem of Pain* ...

“We want, in fact, not so much a Father in Heaven as a grandfather in heaven – a senile benevolence who, as they say, ‘liked to see the young people enjoying themselves,’ and whose plan for the universe was simply that it might be truly said at the end of each day. ‘a good time was had by all.’”

In order to understand the different nature of God’s love for His children from the one given above, we first need to lay out the very important difference between “love” and “kindness”.

Noting the difference, Lewis comments ...

“There is kindness in Love: but Love and kindness are not coterminous, and when kindness (in the sense given above) is separated from the other elements of Love, it involves a certain fundamental indifference to its object, and even something like contempt of it.”

This leads us to what Lewis calls ...

The “Intolerable Compliment” of God’s “Love” for His Children

In his look at the nature of God’s love for His children, C. S. Lewis first differentiates between love and kindness and then goes on to make the very important point that “God’s Love” for us involves much more than expressing “mere kindness” to us ...

“If God is Love, He is, by definition, something more than mere kindness. And it appears, from all the records, that though He has often rebuked us and condemned

us, He has never regarded us with contempt. He has paid us the intolerable complement of loving us, in the deepest, most tragic, most inexorable sense.”

In his use of the word “*contempt*”, Lewis is saying that God does not just consider His children to be some lower order of being whom He can simply appease, give what they want, tolerate their imperfections, and then just leave alone and take no further account of.

No. God has a much higher love for His redeemed children, considering them to be the apex of His “very good” creation. His children were bought at the price of His Son’s life. They are a people on whom He has chosen to set a very deep and eternal love, a people whom He loves enough to give what they “*need*” to be conformed to His image, rather than what they might “*want*”, a people to be made and molded to be like Himself in order to fit them to spend eternity with Him. In short, He gives them the highest possible of all imaginable loves.

Thus we have Lewis’s wonderful statement ...

“He has paid us the intolerable complement of loving us, in the deepest, most tragic, most inexorable sense.”

Commenting further on the “*intolerable compliment*” of God’s love, Lewis continues ...

“We are, not metaphorically but in very truth, a Divine work of art, something that God is making, and therefore something with which He will not be satisfied until it has a certain character. Here again, we come up against what I have called the ‘intolerable compliment.’”

This is the crux of Lewis’s statement that God loves us “*in the deepest, most tragic, most inexorable sense*”. To God we actually are a “*divine work of art*” that He not only loves but adores and greatly cares for, a “*work*” that He will not be “*satisfied*” with or “*rest*” from until we exhibit the “*certain character*” that he wants us to have.

God has told us in His Bible exactly what that “*certain character*” that He wants us to have is ...

“... but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’” (1 Peter 1:15-16)

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.” (Romans 13:14)

“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” (2 Corinthians 7:1)

Thus are we told the reason for which *“Christ ... gave Himself”* for the church ...

“... just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle of any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” (Ephesians 5:25-27)

Indeed, the child of God actually has God the Holy Spirit Himself dwelling within ...

“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

... and are therefore to *“present”* themselves a *“living sacrifice”* to God ...

“... present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:2)

We are to approach our “renewal” and the “transformation” of our “minds” very seriously, even to the point of approaching it with *“fear and trembling”* ...

“... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do according to His good pleasure.” (Philippians 2:12)

[Note: Paul is saying here to work out *the implications of your salvation*, not work to earn your salvation itself.]

**Next, after stating that no *adequate* comparison for
God’s love for man or the nature of it ...**

can be found in analogies with the various types of love found on earth, Lewis proceeds to give us four “*Inadequate Analogies*” of God’s love for His children to help us to begin to “*reach an inadequate, but useful, conception of God’s love for man*”.

First, Lewis pursues an “inadequate” analogy of God’s Love for man with an artist’s love for his *magnus opus* work of art ...

“Over a sketch made idly to amuse a child, an artist might not take much trouble: he may be content to let it go even though it is not exactly as he meant it to be. But over the great picture of his life – the work which he loves, though in a different fashion, as intensely as a man loves a woman or a mother a child – he will take endless trouble – and would doubtless, thereby give endless trouble to the picture if it were sentient.”

From this “inadequate” analogy, Lewis shows that that God does not treat us like thumbnail sketches but treats us like a much higher “work” of art, indeed, a “work” made in His own image, and tells us that we should never wish for less ...

“In the same way, it is natural for us to wish that God had designed for us a less glorious and less arduous destiny; but then we are wishing not for more love but for less.”

Note well the line “*but then we are wishing not for more love but for less.*”

Second, Lewis uses the “inadequate” analogy of a man’s love for his animals

... a comparison often used by our Lord Himself ...

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep ... I am the good shepherd and I know My sheep and am known by My own” (John 10:11,14)

Confirm the Psalmist ...

“We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.” (Psalm 100:3)

Lewis’s specific analogy is that of a puppy being trained by a loving master ...

“To the puppy the whole proceeding would seem, if it were a theologian, to cast grave doubts on the ‘goodness of man’: but the full-grown and full-trained dog, larger, healthier, and longer-lived than the wild dog, and admitted, as it were by Grace, to a whole world of affections, loyalties, interests, and comforts entirely beyond its animal destiny, would have no such doubts.”

He concludes ...

“We may wish, indeed, that we were of so little account to God that He left us alone to follow our natural impulses – that he would give over trying to train us into something so unlike our natural selves: but once again, we are asking not for more Love, but for less.”

Third, Lewis uses the “inadequate” analogy of a father’s love for his son ...

“Love between father and son, in this symbol, means essentially authoritative love on the one side, and obedient love on the other. The father uses his authority to make the son into the sort of human being he, rightly, and in his superior wisdom, wants him to be.”

Fourth and last, Lewis uses the “inadequate” analogy of a man’s love for his bride (an analogy that is often found in Scripture) ...

“The Church is the Lord’s bride whom He so loves that in her no spot or wrinkle is enduring. For the truth which this analogy serves to emphasize is that Love, in its own nature, demands the perfecting of the beloved; that the mere ‘kindness’ which tolerates anything except suffering in its object is, in that respect, at the opposite pole from love. When we fall in love with a woman, do we cease to care whether she is clean or dirty, fair or foul? Do we not rather then first begin to care? Does any woman regard it as a sign of love in a man that he neither knows nor cares how she is looking?”

Lewis says in a grand summation ...

“God loves man ... in awful and surprising truth, we are the objects of His love. You asked for a loving God: you have one. The great spirit you so lightly invoked, the ‘lord of terrible aspect,’ is present: not a senile benevolence that drowsily wishes you to be happy in your own way, not the cold philanthropy of a conscientious magistrate, nor the care of a host who feels responsible for the comfort of his guests, but the consuming fire Himself, the Love that made the worlds, persistent as the artist’s love for his work and despotic as a man’s love for a dog, provident and venerable as a father’s love for a child, jealous, inexorable, exacting as love between the sexes. How this should be, I do not know.”

To our main Question of reconciling human suffering with a loving God, Lewis writes

“The problem of reconciling human suffering with the existence of a God who loves, is only insoluble as long as we attach a trivial meaning to the word “love,” and look on things as if man were the center of them. Man is not the center. God does not exist for the sake of man. Man does not exist for his own sake. ‘Thou hast created all things and for thy pleasure they are and were created (Revelation 4:11)’. We were made not primarily that we may love God (though we were made for that too) but that God may love us, that we may become objects in which the Divine love may rest ‘well pleased.’ To ask that God’s love should be content with us where we are is to ask that God should cease to be God: because He is what He is, His love must, in the nature of things, be impeded and repelled by certain stains in our present character, and because He already loves us He must labor to make us lovable ... What we would here and now call our ‘happiness’ is not the end God chiefly has in view: but when we are such as he can love without impediment, we shall in fact be happy.”

And such is the “*intolerable compliment*” of the nature of God’s “love” for us.

And so ...

God’s love for us is not the trivial and somewhat contemptuous love of mere kindness that treats us as lower beings, tolerates our imperfections, and indulges us with what we want rather than what we really need. No. We were created in His image. And we were created for Him to love. And he will make us “lovely”, whatever it takes. As Lewis said, “You wanted a God of love, you got one!”

We should always remember that we are God’s “*divine work of art*” – a work that He loves and cherishes very much. He is of course very “*kind*” to us. But His love goes way beyond mere kindness. He pays us the “*intolerable compliment*” of loving us too much to just give us what we think we *want* and what we *think* will make us happy. No, He loves us so much that He wants for us that which he, in his vastly superior wisdom, knows is *best* for us as He calls us to the highest perfection of being, love, and joy imaginable – *He wants us to be like Him*. That is the “*intolerable compliment*” of God’s love – He has chosen to set His love on us in the highest sense possible, and thereby He gives us what we *need*, including, sometimes, pain and suffering, rather than what we might *want*.

God created us perfect and holy. And when we disobeyed, rebelled and fell, He redeemed a number of us at the greatest of personal cost, adopted us as His sons, united us spiritually to the Lord Jesus Christ, and has put His Holy Spirit in us – *all because* He wants us to be and bear the family image. And if there are strains in our character that need to change to conform us to that image, He will most certainly work to change them – again, using pain and suffering if necessary to get our full attention – for our own good as well as for His love and glory.

What Lewis said earlier bears repeating ...

“To ask that God’s love should be content with us where we are is to ask that God should cease to be God: because He is what He is, His love must, in the nature of things, be impeded and repelled by certain stains in our present character, and because He already loves us He must labor to make us lovable ... What we would here and now call our ‘happiness’ is not the end God chiefly has in view: but when we are such as he can love without impediment, we shall in fact be happy.”

In sum, it is true that God decrees all things that come to pass, and that nothing, including pain and suffering, come to us by chance or accident, but by His sovereign decree. But it is also true, as we have seen, that He seeks only the best for us and that all of His decrees for us “*proceed from His inner goodness*” and are filtered through His great inner core “*love*” for us, and, as such, will always work that which is “*best*” for us.

And so, suffering and pain entered our world through the fall of man and God now uses suffering as one of His tools to make us more Christ-like. As stated above, using suffering and pain is often the only way that He can get our attention.

As Lewis reflects at the beginning of the next Chapter of his book ...

“THE EXAMPLES given in the last chapter went to show that love may show pain to its object, but only on the supposition that the subject needs alteration to become fully lovable.”

Thus do we see that individual pain and suffering and a loving, caring, merciful and good God can co-exist.

And so, Parts 1 and 2 have given us a great part of the answer to our most basic Question ...

“How can a good, loving, caring, merciful and sovereign God decree and allow pain and suffering for His children?”

... by showing us that God’s “Motive” behind sending pain and suffering to His children is and must always be, in every instance, for their own benefit and good.

Part 3 will tell us “Why it is necessary” for God to send pain and suffering to His children for their own benefit and good.

Part 3 – A Look at “Why it is Necessary” for God to Use Pain and Suffering in the Lives of His Children

We learned in Parts 1 and 2 that ...

1. Suffering and pain were created by God’s eternal decree and because they exist by God’s decretal will, suffering and pain are not, and cannot be, in and of themselves, morally or intrinsically evil.
2. Though eternally decreed into existence by God, pain and suffering came into God’s “very good” creation as a result of man’s sin and disobedience.
3. Like all created things, pain and suffering fall under God’s sovereign rule, control and disposition. Being under God’s sovereign rule, control, and disposition, pain and suffering do not come to us “*simply because we live in a fallen world*” or “*because it rains on the just and unjust alike*”. No. God is never arbitrary in what He does. Every case of pain and suffering is sent by God for His own specific “good” purposes and ends which are never random, arbitrary or meaningless in occurrence.
4. Romans 8:28 tells us that God works “*all things*”, including pain and suffering, “*for good*” for those “*who are the called*” (i.e., His redeemed elect) ...

“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.” (Romans 8:28)

5. The pain and suffering of God’s children is never penal in nature. God is a just God and would never punish any of His children a second time for sins that have already been fully paid and atoned for by Christ on the cross.

OK, we learned that. But, again ...

“Why it is Necessary?” for God to Use Pain and Suffering in the Lives of His Children?

Since Romans 8:28 tells us that God works “*all things*”, including pain and suffering, “*for good*” for His children, our Question now becomes ...

“What and where is the ‘good’ to be had by God’s sending pain and suffering into the lives of His children?”

To answer that, we have to first remember God’s “will”, or goal, for our lives

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification” (I Thessalonians 4:3)

God’s “will” for our lives is for us to grow and mature as Christians, for us to become more like our elder Brother, Jesus Christ. God adopted us as His children, Jesus Christ suffered and died for us, is in spiritual union with us, and we are part of His bride, the church, and the Holy Spirit actually indwells us. God, in His eternal love, wants to shape us into His *magnum opus* work of art. He wants us to be holy like Him. He wants us to bear the family image.

And He will, in Fatherly love and for our benefit, do whatever it takes to get us there, even using pain and suffering.

That is the “*intolerable complement*” of His love for us. That is what Lewis meant when he wrote ...

“He has paid us the intolerable complement of loving us, in the deepest, most tragic, most inexorable sense.”

We often need pain and suffering in our lives to keep us on track to achieving God’s “will” or goal for our lives – “*our sanctification*” – which is also our highest happiness, joy, blessedness, and “good”.

With this in mind, we will present five of the possible Reasons that God might use pain and suffering in our lives.

The first three Reasons have to do with the fact that even as redeemed Christians, we retain a natural and deadening tendency to spiritual laziness and complacency.

Christians too often forget or downplay the fact that they remain locked in a very intense spiritual warfare against three very powerful archenemies – the “*world*”, the “*flesh*”, and the “*devil*”. We quite often hamper ourselves in this war ...

1. By relying on our own way and using the things and ways of man (our supposed self-sufficiency and own strength) to fight this war
2. By neglecting or ignoring the things God has given us to fight this war

3. By, in our complacency, forgetting the utter sinfulness and deceitfulness of sin and the great gap that exists between the best mankind has to offer and the holiness of God

... all three of which can lock us into an increasingly deadening complacency in our spiritual lives, which often takes the jolts of pain and suffering to shock us out of it.

The other two reasons that God might use pain and suffering in our lives are ...

4. The many “*spiritual benefits*” to be gained from it
5. To allow us the inestimable privilege of sharing in the sufferings of Christ

**Let’s look a little more deeply into each of our five Reasons
that God might use pain and suffering in our lives ...**

Reason 1 that God might use pain and suffering in the lives of His children is that ...

In spite of our Lord telling us ...

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)

... we still retain our natural “*fleshy*” tendencies of being self-willed, thinking we are self-sufficient, and trying to manage spiritual things on our own. Because of this tendency, God must often use pain and suffering to intrude upon our self-will and very deceptive sense of self-sufficiency to break us out of a very deadening and dangerous complacency.

C. S. Lewis writes ...

“While what we call ‘our own life’ remains agreeable we will not surrender it to Him. What then can God do in our interests but make ‘our own life’ less agreeable to us, and take away the plausible sources of false happiness? It is just here where God’s providence seems at first to be most cruel, that the Divine humility, the stooping down of the highest, most deserves praise.” (Problem of Pain, Chapter 6, page 96).

Lewis continues ...

“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world” (Problem of Pain, Chapter 6, page 93).

Reason 2 that God might use pain and suffering in the lives of His children is that ...

We need it because we all too often fail to pursue spiritual growth and maturity by using “the things of God”, i.e., by a regular and diligent use of the means of grace, to “fight the good fight” and to advance in spiritual maturity.

In our deadening complacency, we tend to forget that ...

Spiritual growth does not just happen on its own ...

But spiritual declension does.

Both the author of Hebrews and the Apostle Paul (perhaps one and the same) strongly admonish Christian “*babes*” for remaining just that ...

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” (Hebrews 5:12-14)

Paul in a similar vein writes to the Corinthians ...

“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal”. (I Corinthians 3:1-3)

Rather than regularly and diligently using “the things of God”, i.e., the means of grace, to advance in Christian maturity from “*milk*” to “*solid food*”, we tend to neglect the means of grace resulting in little if any spiritual growth and maturity and remain Christian “*babes*” and, worst of all, are content to remain so.

Whereas the Christians addressed by the author of Hebrews and the Apostle Paul should by now be “*teachers*” of others, they instead “*need someone to teach you again the first*

principles of the oracles of God". By their own neglect of spiritual duties and lack of use of the means of grace, they remain "babes" in understanding and are "unskilled in the word of righteousness". "Milk" Christians are still Christians, but they have not "by reason of use [had] their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

Of "milk" Christians Matthew Henry has said ...

"Those that are babes, unskillful in the word of righteousness, must be fed with milk; they must be entertained with the plainest truths, and these delivered in the plainest manner ... Christ despises not his babes; he has provided suitable food for them. It is good to be babes in Christ, but not always to continue in that childish state; we should endeavor to pass the infant state; we should always remain in malice children; but in understanding we should grow up to a manly maturity."

Paul likewise admonishes his Corinthian church members. He still calls them "brothers", i.e., he still recognizes them as his fellow Christians, but he says that they are "carnal" instead of "spiritual" and puts the blame for their spiritual immaturity squarely on their own shoulders ...

"And I, brethren, could not speak to you as spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal".

He tells his "skim milk" Corinthian Christians that their small advancement in sanctification has left them too much under the control of their old *flesh*, too much under the remnants of their old "carnal" corruptions. They are Christians and still have the Spirit of God, but they have so much remained in the *flesh* and have so neglected their spiritual duties that the *flesh* has prevailed over the promptings of the Spirit of God and they have remained "carnal". This is especially lamentable because they had set under Paul's ministry for a long time, but seem to have not really tried to grow in grace and understanding.

"Solid food" Christians, on the other hand, are Christians who have matured to "full age". They are no longer "babes". They have moved well beyond "*the first principles of the oracles of God*" and "*by reason of use have [had] their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*" The "solid food" Christian has grown and matured in the things of God.

"Solid food" Christians would never boast of being "solid food" Christians. Because they have "*by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*", they are mature enough to know that even as "strong" Christians, they owe it all to God's grace and still need daily spiritual nourishment through the means of grace. They take seriously Paul's warning, also written to the Corinthians, to ...

“... let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” (I Corinthians 10:12)

John Owen says concerning “solid food” Christians ...

“Those of ‘full age’ have their understandings enlarged and their minds settled in the knowledge of Christ and the mysteries of the gospel... ‘Strong meat’ [i.e., “solid food”] belongs to these; that is, it is to be provided for them and proposed unto them, and that because they have ‘their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.’ This is to have our understanding and mind, through constant, sedulous study, meditation and prayer, hearing of the word, and the like means of the increase of grace and knowledge, to become ready, fit, and able to receive spiritual truths and to turn them into nourishment for our souls ... It is an evidence of a thriving and healthy state of soul to have an appetite for the deepest mysteries of the gospel or most solid doctrines of truth, and to be able to profitably digest them.”

In both the Hebrews and Corinthians passages above, we clearly see the authors fairly sternly admonishing the “milk” Christians for remaining where they are and not progressing from “milk” to “solid food”.

In sum, by our complacent and deadening neglect of the means of grace we are not fulfilling God’s will for our lives ...

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification” (I Thessalonians 4:3)

God wants us to grow and mature as Christians, to become more like our elder Brother, Jesus Christ. If we are locked in a deadening complacency, He will often have to use pain and suffering to shock us out of it.

[For those who might be interested, we refer you to our “Paper # 9: From ‘Milk’ to ‘Solid Food’ – The Joyous and Glorious Road to ‘Full Age’ Christian Maturity (Hebrews 5:12-14)”]

Reason 3 that God might use pain and suffering in the lives of His children is that ...

... due to spiritual sluggishness and neglect of the things of God, we, even as Christians, often forget the utter sinfulness of sin in the eyes of a holy God and the great gap that exists between even the best and holiest of men on earth and the “consuming fire” of the holiness of God.

As a result, we tend to become complacent and satisfied with our spiritual status quo. Instead of hating sin and “*fearing*” God in the proper sense of standing in awe of His transcendent majesty, sin comes to be held as not so bad after all. And, invariably in this state our sense of the transcendent holiness of God decreases and the sense of the inherent holiness and goodness of man increases.

For an example of the vast gap between the holiness of God and the best of men ...

I once saw Dr. R. C. Sproul place two men on a stage at the opposite ends of a long continuum – marked “Good” at one end and “Evil” at the other. The man at the “Good” end represented Jesus Christ, the epitome of God’s holiness and goodness. At the other end was Adolph Hitler, our epitome of an “Evil” person.

Dr. Sproul then asked us to imagine the best Christian we know, the one that most closely embodies all the characteristics of Christian goodness and decency, and asked “*Where should we place him on the continuum?*”

Dr. Sproul took him and walked him up and down the continuum a little and then placed him just ahead of but touching the sleeve of Adolph Hitler.

Such is the vast difference between the holiness of God contrasted with even the best and most decent of men. We remember again the reactions of Job and Isaiah, probably the best and holiest men of their times, when in the presence of our majestic and holy God.

And so, we often need pain and suffering to shock us out of our deadly complacency and restore us to a true sense of the sinfulness of sin, the holiness of God, and the vast difference between man and God.

[We do want to note that the Christian actually does bear the holiness of God in that the righteousness of Christ was imputed to his account at this Justification – BUT, it is critical to remember that ours is an “imputed” righteousness and not an “inherent” righteousness in and of ourselves.]

We would note that this need for pain and suffering is just as great for the “*really, really, good, decent, and worthy*” people of “*modest*” means just as much as it is for others.

Again, Lewis writes ...

“We are perplexed to see misfortune falling upon decent, inoffensive, worthy people – on capable, hard-working mothers of families or diligent, thrifty little trades-people, on those who have worked so hard, and so honestly, for their modest stock of happiness and now seem to be entering on the enjoyment of it with the fullest right. How can I say with sufficient tenderness what here needs to be said? ... Let me implore the reader to try to believe, if only for the moment, that God, who made these deserving people, may really be right when He thinks that their modest prosperity and the happiness of their children are not enough to make them blessed: that this must fall from them in the end, and that if they have not learned to know Him will be wretched. And therefore He troubles them, warning them in advance of an insufficiency that one day they will have to discover.” (Problem of Pain, Chapter 6, page 96-97).

So, even people that we consider to be very good and decent people are still very far from being what they need to be and must also be trained, disciplined and corrected to get them there. We should never question or disannul God’s judgments by thinking or stating that some deserving people suffer too much or that some wicked people get off too easily.

[Note: A reading of Psalm 73 should settle the “wicked getting off too easily” issue for us.]

Reasons 4 and 5 that God might use pain and suffering in His children’s lives are ...

The many “*spiritual benefits*” to be gained from it

To allow us the inestimable privilege of sharing in the sufferings of Christ

4. There are many very positive and valuable “Spiritual Benefits” to be gained from God’s use of pain and suffering in His children’s lives

Some of the “good” spiritual benefits to be gained by God’s use of pain and suffering for His redeemed children would include – Training them up in righteousness ... Beneficial instruction ... An increase in their sanctification ... The administration of loving Fatherly discipline ... and the inestimable privilege of sharing in the suffering of Christ (Reason 5).

Brian H. Cosby in his book *Suffering and Sovereignty – John Flavel and the Puritans on Afflictive Providence* gives us Flavel’s eight sets of “*spiritual benefits*” (or “good ends”) as to why God ordains suffering for His children. They are ...

Reason 1: *To Reveal, Deter, and Mortify Sin*

Reason 2: *To Produce Godliness and Spiritual Fruit*

Reason 3: *To Reveal the Character of God*

Reason 4: *To Relinquish the Temporal for the Eternal*

(1) *By loosening the believer's grip on temporal and earthly things*

(2) *By showing the believer the vanity of this world*

(3) *By revealing the true nature of comfort*

(4) *By making the believer long for heaven*

Reason 5: *To Produce a Sincere Faith, Devoid of Hypocrisy*

Reason 6: *To Encourage Fellowship with God through Word, Prayer, and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper*

Reason 7: *To Bear Witness to the World*

Reason 8: *To Cultivate Communion with Christ, the Greatest Sufferer*

—

God also has “good ends” in sending pain and suffering upon the reprobate (the unsaved) though they are not “good” ends for the reprobate themselves. Whether sent while they are on earth or in eternal hell, the “good ends” of God’s sending pain and suffering upon the reprobate would include the just punishment of their unrepentant sin and the glorification of God’s justice and wrath against wickedness and sin. As we said earlier, God must punish sin, because it would not be “good” to leave wickedness and sin unpunished, and our God is, by nature, a “good” God.

We note again that the only difference between the redeemed children of God and the reprobate who are damned forever is the redeemed children’s unconditional eternal election and predestination to salvation and glory by the grace and mercy of God (though the redeemed were not one whit more deserving of salvation than the reprobate, and in many cases were less deserving of it). But that is God’s decision ...

“For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion’. So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.” (Romans 9:15-16)

Reason 5 that God might use pain and suffering in the lives of His children is that ...

Sometimes God will permit the suffering of His children “*for His own glory*” and/or to allow them to share in the “*sufferings of Christ*”.

[We go into both of these reasons in much greater depth in Paper # 3 on “The ‘Why’s’ of Suffering – Suffering for God’s Glory” and Paper # 2 on “The ‘Whys?’ of Suffering – General Reasons]

For now, we would distinguish between two kinds of “*suffering for God’s glory*”.

There is a general “*suffering for His glory*”, a suffering of which all Christians will partake ... and ...

There is a special “*suffering for His sake*” that is “*granted*” to some only.

“General” suffering for God’s glory would encompass both physical and intellectual forms of suffering, including the ridicule and mockery of today’s America.

We read in Romans ...

“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.” (Romans 8:16-17)

When we suffer “general” afflictions, we glorify God by exhibiting patient endurance and trust in Him and in His plan for our lives, knowing that we will in return receive many spiritual benefits and will be “*glorified together*” with Him at the consummation of all things.

Concerning the “special” class of suffering, we read in Philippians ...

“For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Philippians 1:29)

We note again that suffering “*for His sake*” is a high privilege that is “*granted*” to people.

Most of the time, this “*special*” kind of suffering (i.e., “*suffering for His sake*”) has its origins in active and overt persecution leading up to death, a persecution which is practiced throughout the world today on a scale never seen before.

In this “*special*” kind of suffering, people “*glorify*” God by bearing witness to His name even to the point of death. God takes very special note of this, and even now the martyred saints are under the very throne of God itself.

Wrapping it all up

In closing out our look at some of the Reasons for God’s use of pain and suffering in His children’s lives, we would again quote C. S. Lewis ...

“I am not arguing that pain is not painful. Pain hurts. That is what the word means. I am only trying to show that the old Christian doctrine of being made ‘perfect through suffering’ is not incredible. To prove it palatable is beyond my design.”

Whether you find it “*palatable*” or not, your acceptance of God’s use of pain and suffering in your life and your attitude towards it come down to your answers to three simple questions

Is God “good”?

Does God really “love” His children?

Is God worthy of your faith and trust?

If your answer to all three of the Questions is “Yes!” – Then do it! Trust that He is “good”, that He “loves” you dearly in the highest sense imaginable, and have faith that He is “trustworthy” in every way, even in pain and suffering.

One additional note ...

When looking overall at God’s use of pain and suffering, we must also guard against our tendency to believe that there is a direct relationship between an individual’s sin and the

degree of their suffering and pain on earth. Both Job's three friends and Jesus's disciples fell into this line of thought ...

"Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'"

Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor His parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.'" (John 9:1-3)

This man suffered blindness from birth not for his or his parents' sin, but for another reason previously known only to God, *"that the works of God should be revealed in him."* Ditto for Job and his great suffering.

So, what should be the Proper Reaction of a Christian to Pain and Suffering?

The two most important things for a Christian to remember when facing long-term suffering and pain are ...

1. That all things, including pain and suffering, fall under the sovereign control of God – who loves you and knows exactly what He is doing ...
2. That all of your pain and suffering are being used by Him to work for your good, the benefit of others, and the glory of God ...

Unless you believe these two truths by faith, you will never find the inestimable consolation and solace that God gives to His children who endure long-term pain and suffering with quiet submission to His will.

So, in answer to our question, *"What is the Proper Reaction of a Christian to Pain and Suffering?"*, we say that the Christian should react to the advent and/or continuance of pain and suffering with *"trust"* in God and with a *"quiet submission to His will"*.

[Note that by 'quiet submission to His will' we do not mean that you should stop praying for relief and deliverance, but that you should pray as our Lord did at Gethsemane

"Father, if it is your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." (Luke 22:42)]

Let's also note that 'Quiet Submission to God's will' IS NOT 'Fatalism'

"Quiet submission to God's will" is not a fatalistic, ungodly resignation to an impersonal fate, but is instead the exercising of a joyous acceptance of a loving and caring heavenly Father's will that we know is working for our good.

In *"Fatalism"* pain and suffering come by random chance and impersonal fate and have no real meaning, cause, or purpose. The sufferer is nothing more than an incidental victim of random chance. In fatalism, the sufferer must simply resign himself to his fate and has no real hope at all.

"Quiet submission to God's will", on the other hand, holds that pain and suffering purposefully come from a good, loving, and caring Father who works all things for the personal good of each of His children and for His own glory. The sufferer continues to pray for and has true hope of relief, but is assured that if it does not come while on earth – that God knows what He is doing, is working for his good, and has exceedingly great eternal rewards for his exercise of simple faith and trust in God's goodness, love, and providence.

And, very importantly, the Christian can, through a diligent use of the means of grace, always have and maintain ...

the "joy of their salvation" ...

the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding ... and ...

the rich and wonderful blessings of trusting, serving, and witnessing for God even in the midst of their most difficult times.

So, in reality, we see that *"Quiet submission to God's will"* is the exact opposite of *"Fatalism"*.

**In developing a proper reaction for a Christian to pain and suffering,
we should also look back to what we learned
from Job's audience with God**

Two remarkable things that happened in Job's audience with God were ...

First, that God never gave Job an explanation for his great ordeal of suffering ...

Second, and even more remarkable, Job no longer wanted to ask Him for one.

What an incredible change we saw in Job's attitude towards his suffering during His audience with God!

In the very presence of God, Job, who probably suffered more intensely than any other child of God, save our Lord Jesus Christ, immediately forgets all his complaints, questions and charges. The farthest thing from his mind just then would be any "contention" with, or "correction" or "rebuking" of God.

Rather, Job was so totally overwhelmed by the transcendent majesty and presence of God that even though he was probably the godliest man of his time from a Biblical point of view, in God's very presence he came to view, and say of himself and his situation ...

*"Behold, I am vile;
What shall I answer You?
I lay my hand over my mouth.
Once I have spoken, but I will not answer;
Yes, twice, but I will proceed no further." (Job 40:3-5)*

... and, again, two chapters later ...

*"I know You can do everything,
And that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You.
You asked, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?'
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
Listen, please, and let me speak;
You said, 'I will question you, and you shall answer Me.'*

*I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
But now my eye sees You.
Therefore, I abhor myself,
And repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:1-6)*

And so, Job learned first-hand of God's greatness and experienced a personal glimpse of His transcendent majesty. He had also been struck speechless by God's questioning of him, and had consequently admitted that he had "uttered that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me" ... and ... "repented in dust and ashes."

In the face of all his suffering, in God's presence, Job could only consider himself "*vile*" and "*abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*" No more questions. No more demands to know "*Why?*" Only humility and repentance for the harsh and reckless words he had uttered earlier about God.

We should all feel the full force of this.

[Note: Job's encounter with God as well as Isaiah's similar encounter with God in Isaiah 6:1-6 both show us that our view of our God is much, much less that it deserves to or should be.]

**Some of the many lessons we have learned about suffering from Job
(and the rest of the Bible) to help us in the face of
extended suffering and pain, would be ...**

1. Maintain your faith and trust in God – He is worthy of it.
2. Do not succumb to rash and erroneous thoughts about God. Be guided instead by Biblical truth.
3. Rest in God's superior wisdom.
4. You cannot fight this fight alone and should immerse yourself in the means of grace and putting on the armor of God on a daily basis.
5. Remember that God may at times exercise loving discipline in your life, but He is never punishing you. Jesus Christ has already paid the full penalty for all your sins on the cross, and God, being Just, would never punish anyone a second time for any sin. As His redeemed and adopted child, all of God's actions toward you are and always will be loving, beneficial, protective, instructive and corrective – never punitive.
6. Ask God for wisdom in understanding and learning any lessons that He might be trying to teach you during your period of suffering.
7. Always consider that your situation might just be a God-sent opportunity for you to witness to your many friends, relatives, neighbors, and co-workers who come to see you. Their seeing your faithful endurance and steadfast love and trust of God even through prolonged pain and suffering is a great witness to them (and can well provide an opportunity for you to share the gospel with them). In many ways, your witness

today through your pain and suffering is very much like the witness of the martyrs of old. You really can serve God up to the very end.

8. Bear in mind that God has promised you great rewards for submitting to and patiently enduring such suffering – both now and later.
9. Use this time to “*draw near to God*” (*James 4:8*) by developing a much greater and deeper prayer life and a much more fruitful time of meditation on God’s word.
10. Always remember that you are glorifying God by humbly and patiently submitting to his providences (which providences themselves also result in your own highest personal good).
11. Also always remember that when standing in God’s presence and viewing the wonderful tapestry of your life that God has woven using even pain and suffering to His good and just ends, we, like Job, will stand there in awe and amazement at what He has done for us and for others through our pain and suffering and would not consider changing even one minute of them.
12. Diligently “test” and “examine” yourself as often as is necessary to have and maintain a full assurance of your salvation. It is your birthright as a Christian to have a full assurance of your salvation and it will be your greatest comfort during times of pain and suffering.

As a guide to help you out in your “test” and “examination”, we have provided

Paper # 8: “How Can I Know for Sure That I am a Christian?”

And so, it really comes down to a simple choice on your part

You can either believe, accept as true, and trust God’s explicit promise that even your pain and suffering are under His control and are working your good and that you can maintain ...

the “joy of your salvation” ...

the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding ... and ...

the rich and wonderful blessings of trusting, serving, and witnessing for God even in the midst of your most difficult times.

... throughout your ordeal ...

OR

You can listen to the whisperings of Satan and your own feelings and doubt God's word (thereby denying the veracity of the Bible, scorning the very character and omniscience of God Himself, and denying yourself many comforts that are to be had.)

Meeting pain and suffering in "*quiet submission to God's will*" is an exercise in faith and trust that our heavenly Father loves you dearly, knows exactly what He is doing, and is working that which is best for you. The sufferer here has hope for relief and has the sure knowledge that even if relief does not come on earth, great solace, comfort, and rewards will come to him in heaven for the trust and faith that he is exhibiting on earth.

In sum – Simply trust Him! He is “worthy” of it!

**In conclusion, when facing extended pain and suffering,
in addition to our two rules given earlier ...**

1. That all things, including pain and suffering, fall under the sovereign control of God – who loves you and knows exactly what He is doing ...
2. That all of your pain and suffering are being used by Him to work for your good, the benefit of others, and the glory of God ...

You should also always keep in mind that ...

3. God's love for you is founded in your position "*in Christ*". Both the foundation of God's love as well as the foundation of your salvation rests on the imputation of Christ's righteousness to your account, such that whenever God looks at you, He beholds the face of His dear Son, and not anything that you have done or failed to do. So, no matter what happens in your life, whenever you have to endure suffering and pain short-term or long-term, you can always be fully assured of God's love for you and that all of God's actions toward you always are and always will be loving, beneficial, protective, instructive and corrective and never punitive.
4. In times of pain and suffering, always remember that God loves you with the highest love imaginable. We saw that His love for you is not the trivial and somewhat contemptuous love of mere kindness that treats you as a lower being, tolerates your imperfections, and indulges you with what you want rather than what you really need.

No, He created you in His image for Him to love. And He will make you “lovely”, whatever it takes, even through the use of pain and suffering. As Lewis wrote, *“You wanted a God of love, you got one!”*

5. Always remember that to God you are a *“divine work of art”* – a work that He loves and cherishes very much. He is of course very *“kind”* to you. But His love for you goes way beyond mere kindness. He pays you the *“intolerable compliment”* of loving you too much to just give you what you *think* you want and what you *think* will make you happy. No, God loves you so much that He wants for you that which He, in his vastly superior wisdom, knows is *best* for you as He calls you to the highest perfection of being, love, and joy imaginable – *He wants you to be like Him!* That is the *“intolerable compliment”* of God’s love for you – He has chosen to set His love on you in the highest sense possible, and thereby He gives you what you *need* which is quite often not what you might *want*.
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Wrapping it all up

[A repeat from above]

In closing out our look at some of the Reasons for God’s use of pain and suffering in His children’s lives, we would again quote C. S. Lewis ...

“I am not arguing that pain is not painful. Pain hurts. That is what the word means. I am only trying to show that the old Christian doctrine of being made ‘perfect through suffering’ is not incredible. To prove it palatable is beyond my design.”

Whether you find it *“palatable”* or not, your acceptance of God’s use of pain and suffering in your life and your attitude towards it come down to your answers to three simple questions

Is God “good”?

Does God really “love” His children?

Is God worthy of your faith and trust?

If your answer to all three of the Questions is “Yes!” – Then do it! Trust that He is “good”, that He “loves” you dearly in the highest sense imaginable, and have faith that He is “trustworthy” in every way, even in pain and suffering.

Again, simply trust Him, for He is worthy of it!

Soli Deo Gloria

“Glory to God Alone”