

Burden Bearing

• Lesson Five •

God, Why Won't You Take Away Our Burdens?

1. God has a purpose for us in our burdens
2. God uses our burdens to benefit others

Worship

While we are living under a burden, time drags on. It seems the weight will never be lifted. We have God's promises, but still we ask: How long, Lord? Won't you take my burden away?

Read responsively King David's cries found in Psalm 13:1-6.

A: How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?

B: How long will you hide your face from me?

A: How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?

B: How long will my enemy triumph over me?

A: Look on me and answer, O LORD my God.

B: Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death;

A: My enemy will say, "I have overcome him,"

B: And my foes will rejoice when I fall.

A: But I trust in your unfailing love;

B: My heart rejoices in your salvation.

A: I will sing to the LORD,

B: For he has been good to me.

Prayer:

When we seek relief
From a long-felt grief,
When temptations come alluring,
Make us patient and enduring;
Show us that bright shore
Where we weep no more. Amen. (CW 422:3)

Introduction

A woman once went to her minister. "Pastor, I need you to pray for me," she pleaded. "Pray for me to have patience. I'm just losing it so easily and so often. I get impatient with my kids and scream at them. I get frustrated while waiting and waiting in what's supposed to be the express checkout at the grocery store. I badger my husband because he doesn't get things fixed around the house as quickly as I want. I need patience! Will you pray for me?"

“Certainly,” said the minister. He took her hand and prayed: “Heavenly Father, make this woman suffer. Give her great trouble and pain. Inflict enormous burdens . . .”

“Stop!” the woman shrieked, jerking her hand away from his. “Pastor, what are you doing? I asked you to pray for patience, not pain and tribulation!”

The pastor opened the Bible on his desk and read Romans 5:3: “We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance.”

In this lesson we will see that God always works for our good through what we suffer.

Studying God’s Word

God has a purpose for us in our burdens

Alice suffered severely from rheumatoid arthritis. It twisted her fingers and joints. The disease was damaging her spine. Her doctor attempted surgery to repair her back, but she came out of the surgery worse than she went in. Now she was confined to a wheelchair.

When we are in the middle of suffering, it seems so ugly. Yet we have God’s promise: “I know the plans I have for you, . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11).

Let us look at Scripture to determine God’s ultimate purpose in all our sufferings.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10.

1. What incredible things had happened to Paul?
2. Some may have been tempted to boast in these great blessings, but how did Paul treat them?
3. God kept Paul humble by giving him a “thorn in the flesh.” Scripture doesn’t specify the exact nature of Paul’s thorn. Suffice it to say it was a chronic, physical ailment. Why did Paul want it taken away?
4. Paul called his affliction “a messenger of Satan.” Are problems and burdens sent by God or the devil?
5. Why did God say no to Paul’s pleas?

His Word in My Life

Long ago in her childhood, Yvonne had nearly drowned. The feeling of choking and gasping for breath was forever etched into her subconscious memory. She was afraid of confined spaces and reacted abruptly when anything seemed to block her air passages. In later life she developed thyroid cancer, which meant being subjected to the tight confinement of MRI chambers and the gagging sensation of having tubes put down her throat.

Dan had always loved sweets . . . donuts, candy, all the good stuff. In his early 40s, Dan became diabetic and had to cut all sweets from his diet.

Why would God afflict Christians, whom he loves, in areas where they are the most vulnerable—attacking their strongest fears or most tempting desires?

Refocus on the key point

In his book When Bad Things Happen to Good People, Rabbi Harold Kushner writes: “God would like people to get what they deserve in life, but he cannot always arrange it” (p. 43). That’s nowhere near the truth. For one thing, what everybody deserves is destruction. God has the power to bring tragedy into life if he wishes. But God’s overriding purpose toward us is love. In love he arranges the circumstances of our lives so that we are drawn closer to him.

God uses our burdens to benefit others

A grandfather was wasting away in a nursing home. He had almost no physical ability left. Month after month, year after year, he kept asking his pastor, “Why won’t God let me die?”

That man’s grandsons had fallen away from the church. But they did come to visit their grandfather. His faith, amid pain, had an influence on them. When he did pass away, they went to his funeral. Knowing what Grandpa would have wanted, they returned to the church the next Sunday also. They and their wives and children are members now.

God always has purpose in our pain. Sometimes it is not the good of the sufferer that God has in mind but the good of others whose lives the suffering person will touch.

Read Ruth 1:1-9,16-18.

1. List the burdens Naomi had to bear.
2. Orpah went back to her people and her gods. Ruth clung to Naomi. Why did Ruth feel such an attachment to her mother-in-law?
3. How do you suppose Ruth came to have such committed faith in the Lord God?
4. Have you known anyone like Naomi—a person whose faith in the face of burdens has been an example to you?

His Word in My Life

In Old Testament times, the levirate law (the “husband’s brother” law) said a husband’s brother or next of kin *must* take the widow as his wife (see Deuteronomy 25:5-10). Ruth’s story is an illustration of this law being put into practice. Her kinsman-redeemer, Boaz, married her.

It may seem strange to us, but what burden-bearing purposes did this law serve?

Refocus on the key point

Our sufferings call others into action. They provide an opportunity for others to show us their love and put compassion into practice. The quiet testimony of a Christian, bearing a burden by grace, can have a powerful effect on others.

Summary

When we suffer, God intends good toward us and those around us. Joseph had the right idea when he told his brothers, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Genesis 50:20). Joseph himself grew in spiritual stature because of the ordeal he went through. Thousands of others benefited from the path on which God led Joseph.

Give examples of people—from the Bible or from personal experience—whose sufferings brought out the best in those around them.

Life with God

- Day 1: Study the hymn “What God Ordains Is Always Good” (CW 429). Read and ponder each stanza. Memorize favorite stanzas.
- Day 2: This week we’ll read some of David’s psalms, written when he was in danger and was being pursued by murderous King Saul. Read Psalm 56.
- Day 3: Read Psalm 57.
- Day 4: Read Psalm 59.
- Day 5: Resume reading the book of Job. Read Job 29—Job remembers better days.
- Day 6: Read Job chapter 30. Job feels as if God has grabbed him, thrown him to the ground (verses 18-20), and then kicked him when he was down (verses 24-26). Is God cruel?
- Day 7: Read Job chapter 31. Why does Job feel God is being unfair with him?