



EXTRA CHAPTER
BY KRISTEN

What to Do When You Are Not Suffering



In the strangest of strange moments, I find myself wishing for suffering.

Over the years, I've seen and known suffering's ability to bring me near to God. A tool in his hands, chronic pain has taught me dependence on Christ's strength, and dashed dreams have led me to confidence in resurrection hope. It's been the soil in which I've grown most, and it's brought me closer to the only One who can give hope.

I'm not saying it's right to wish for suffering. The opposite is true—we should never wish for something brought about by sin's entrance into the world. We shouldn't desire pain, loss, or grief. These are the sorrowful, unfortunate fruits of the fall.

But still, there's something unique about what suffering does to us, as we walk with Jesus and seek to know and love him more: it accelerates us toward this goal. Author Rankin Wilbourne calls it “the necessary path of abiding,” saying, “Suffering is the extraordinary means God has provided for us to move toward communion with him.”



Abundance and Dependence

If this is true, then what do we make of seasons when we're not suffering? Are the easier times, the more comfortable times, ineffective? Useless? Less valuable than the difficult ones? What if we forget what we discovered of God in the hurting times?

This has been my fear, and it's why, when the chronic pain lessens and I seem to be getting stronger and healthier, I have those strange moments of wishing to suffer again.

But this isn't the answer.

Paul says:

I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.
(Philippians 4 v 11-13)

Whatever situation. Abundance. Plenty. Any and every circumstance. All things. Paul writes about the reality of a growth-producing, good season—yes, one that lacks suffering. He's saying that seasons of abundance are also a means to knowing Christ's strength and practicing contentment in him.

Dependence on Jesus can (and needs to) be learned in both suffering and abundance (though suffering may be the accelerated, extraordinary path). And a key word in this passage is this one: "learned." Growing in faith, hope and contentment does not happen naturally or by accident, whether you are living with plenty or with nothing, in health or in hurt. Godly contentment is something that we learn in the classroom of abundance and the classroom of need.



Depending on God When It's Fine

A friend recently wrote of an experience that resonated with me. After suffering a season of chronic pain, his wife enjoyed a time of relief, in the Lord's kindness. But then her pains returned, and my friend realized how quickly he had forgotten all the lessons of joy in hardship, dependence rather than self-reliance, and leaning eagerly toward the new creation that he'd learned when she was in pain.

Paul says we must learn the secret of facing easier, even prosperous, seasons because we're forgetful creatures. In whatever situation, whether suffering or abundance, we must learn to be content in the Lord Jesus. We must learn to depend on his strength. We must learn to remain grateful for all we are given.

But how? As we've seen, the answer isn't to wish for suffering. But it is proactively to seek to learn from our suffering, and from our lack of it, and to ask God to send us the circumstances that he knows will best teach us: So we seek every opportunity to learn dependence on Jesus, trusting that only he can ultimately supply this growth.

Here are four ways we can do this when things are going well:



Remember

How many times does God's word speak of the forgetfulness of his people? Deuteronomy exhorts us to "take care" four times in four chapters:

Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. (4 v 9).

From the Israelites to you and me, it is a struggle to remember the character and works of God.

So, in times of abundance, we can learn dependence on Jesus by remembering who he is and what he's done. Remember:

- ~ Jesus' sacrifice for your sin and fellowship with you in your suffering
- ~ God's plan to carry you through difficult, but growing, seasons
- ~ the Spirit's work to transform your heart through pain and increase your hope
- ~ every spiritual blessing and every good, earthly gift you've been given



Praise

We can also allow relative ease and comfort to fuel our praise and thanksgiving. We praise Jesus for taking on our eternal suffering—he rescued us from our gravest danger, a sin-laden soul—and we also praise him for relief from hard times now.

Praise keeps us dependent because it doesn't come naturally to us. Deliverance from suffering may be sweet at first—until forgetfulness sets in, which is why remembering God's character and works is so important. Remembrance produces thanksgiving, and both keep us mindful of our desperate need for Christ.



Weep

If we're enjoying a season of relief or abundance, it can be easy to forget the sorrow of grief, the stress of confusion, the loneliness of betrayal, and the pain of physical weakness. But many others are in the trenches, and we can learn dependence on Jesus as we walk closely with the suffering and weep with them (Romans 12 v 15).

How does this happen? As we enter into the pain of suffering people, we feel afresh the weight of suffering, carry some of their burden, serve their needs, and speak God's truth to them—and all of these require the help and strength of Jesus.

- ~ We see more clearly how suffering pervades everything, not just our immediate sphere.
- ~ We rely on the Holy Spirit to use our presence, words, and actions to encourage the hurting.
- ~ We learn to depend on God as we realize we can't fix things.
- ~ We pray for our friend and entrust them ultimately into his hands.



Fight

Finally, if you want to learn dependence on Jesus in times of abundance, fight your sin. And fight hard. No, you may not be fighting chronic pain anymore, or you may not be struggling financially or

relationally as you used to. But God's word calls sin our most malignant disease and our gravest problem, and sin does not cease when an earthly struggle does. Do not forget that your greatest problem and biggest weakness was never the hurt—it was always your sin. The hurt may have passed, but the sin still needs fighting. “The desires of the flesh” are still “against the Spirit” within you, and you still need to fight to “walk by the Spirit” (Galatians 5 v 16-17). Comfort is often the seedbed of complacent sin. Fight it.

Ask God to make you more aware of sin through his Holy Spirit, and give you the strength and desire to fight it with his strength. I've never felt more dependent on God than when I've seen my sin clearly, and recognized my need for a great Savior to rescue me from it.



Tell Him

Friend, if you're not suffering right now, and are yearning for closeness to God, tell him that. Ask him to use these means of dependence to draw you near and keep you clinging to him. And praise him for the relief! His goal for you is more of himself, so that's one prayer he delights to answer—whether it be through suffering or abundance, only God knows.

Reflect

- ~ If you're presently in a season of abundance, what are some truths you can remember about God's character and works? You might want to write them down. Then praise God for them, often.
- ~ Who might you weep with? Is there a hurting person whose pain you can enter into?
- ~ If you haven't recently asked the Holy Spirit to show you your sin, will you ask him right now? Is there a particular sin he's revealed to you that you need help to fight?
- ~ How has suffering grown your faith and deepened your hope in Jesus Christ?

Pray

Heavenly Father, you are good and I can trust you, both in seasons of abundance and suffering. It's been wonderful having some relief, and I praise you for this! But please don't let me become complacent or forget all you've taught me. Please teach me to depend on you right now. Remind me often of what Jesus has done for my soul. Help me see my sin and fight it. And please, make me a servant to a suffering friend who is hurting. I want to know you more through the abundance. In Jesus' name. Amen.

For further meditation: 1 Thessalonians 5 v 16-18; Psalm 103



EXTRA CHAPTER
BY KRISTEN

Don't Let Me Give
Way to Despair 

My new bike is still sitting here. Tags and all.

My husband bought me the shiny cruiser for my birthday, which was a celebration of progress for us. Until recently, I hadn't ridden a bike in a year because of physical pain resulting from Lyme disease. But lately I had improved enough that some easy exercise on the bike seemed within my grasp—until I proceeded to roll my ankle on a stupid crack in the road a few weeks ago.

These days, the ongoing pain in my body has felt... ridiculous. If it's not one thing, it's another. If it's not my "normal," chronic pain, it's the disorder in my jaw. If it's not my jaw acting up, it's my ankle, because of my stupid misstep. And if it's not my ankle, it's the screaming pain of costochondritis attacks, an inflammation of chest cartilage that comes on without notice, which feels like a boulder is sitting over my heart.

And so the bike is still sitting here, unused.

Some days God gives me the grace to laugh about it. Some days. But most days, I'm overcome by the weariness of what feels like unceasing physical pain. I'm beaten down by it. It's exhausting. It's defeating. The pain overflows into tears, and I cry, "Lord, this is enough. No more, please!"

Maybe for you, it sounds like:

No more hospital appointments, please!

No more conflict, please!

No more bad news, please!

No more loneliness, please!

No more financial setbacks, please!

No more, no more... please...

Our groanings go from words to... well... groaning. The temptation is to give way to discouragement and, in our lowest moments, to despair. Oh, how the enemy of our souls would love to see this happen. He would love to defeat us in our pain—to use our pain to drag us down into despair, and beyond that point to disbelief.

So how do we fight back? When there doesn't seem to be a way out of our situation, how do we process it? How do we apply God's truth to it? How do we pray about it?

I'm walking this earthly journey with you. I'm struggling with these questions and learning how to cling to Christ, our hope, in the process. This is what I prayed for myself today, and what I am praying for you, brother, sister, as you also walk through the valley of the shadow of death in your own context.



Lord, Don't Let Me Give Way to Fear

I confess, Jesus, that I'm terrified of what tomorrow may bring—and I'm even more afraid that I won't be able to press on. You tell me, "Do not be anxious about tomorrow" (Matthew 6 v 34), but I am, Lord! I'm anxious. I'm worried. I'm fearful of the future. Jesus, don't let me give way to fear. You have given me "a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (2 Timothy 1 v 7). Your perfect love "casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment" (1 John 4 v 18)—and I know you have taken my punishment upon yourself, so there is none left for me. Would you fill me with your peace? Would you pour your love into my heart through your Holy Spirit, who has been given to me? Would you transform me through the renewing of my mind by your precious word, and set my mind on things above?

Help me, Lord Jesus. I am afraid. I need you. I can't see beyond this moment, except to feel anxious. Help me to walk in your peace and to trust you for tomorrow.



Lord, Don't Let Me Give Way to Self-Pity

Father God, you see my innermost thoughts and the intentions of my heart (Psalm 139 v 2); so you know already that I am battling against the awful, joy-sapping sin of self-pity. I feel waves of pain-induced pride welling up within me, and I often don't think that I deserve any of this pain. I'm sorry that I have not yielded to your will in an attitude of meekness, but have stubbornly resisted you in pride, thinking I know what is best and know what you should give me. I'm sorry for taking out my anger and bitterness on the people I love the most, and for silently stewing at you in the depths of my being, when I could enjoy "draw[ing] near to the throne of grace [to] receive mercy and find grace to help in [this] time of need" (Hebrews 4 v 16).

I know you will not turn me away, Lord, but all too often I keep myself away from you. Don't let me give way to self-pity! By your grace at work in my soul, squash my pride and humble me before your holiness and wisdom. Make me a willing vessel to be used for your purposes, not my own agenda—even through pain. I praise you, Father, that I am your child, and that this is true of you: "He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he also hears their cry and saves them" (Psalm 145 v 19). I don't need to pity myself because you see me and hear me, and you know.



Lord, Don't Let Me Give Way to Doubt

Jesus, in my darkest moments, I confess that I doubt you're even real. The enemy loves to try and veil my eyes again, blinding me to the promise that you will never leave me or forsake me (Deuteronomy 31 v 6)—but you have promised that you "will not let [me] be tempted beyond

[my] ability, but with the temptation [you] will also provide the way of escape, that [I] may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10 v 13). May these truths be my way out: that you have defeated death itself (Acts 2 v 24); that you are more real than this life, and more lovely than anything in this life, even though I can't see you (1 Peter 1 v 8); that there is blessing in believing in you even while I cannot set my eyes on you (John 20 v 29). Help me to love you while I "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5 v 7). Help me to love you and trust you, even when everything around me is crumbling and cannot suffice for me. Don't let me give way to doubt! Give me eyes to see that your truth gleams more brightly in the darkness. I depend on you, the light of the world, to lead me, counsel me, and make the gospel real to me—to lead me in, and through, and beyond, these doubts.

Would you combat despair through prayer, and add yours to mine? Lord, don't let us give way to despair. You are our hope.

Reflect

- ~ In your darkest moments of fear, self-pity, and doubt, what have you been tempted to believe about God? About yourself? About your suffering?
- ~ What specific biblical truths can you combat these lies with? You may want to write a few on cards to carry with you and memorize, for when the lies come.
- ~ If you have a friend who's hurting, call them or visit them, and pray God's word over them.

Pray

Father God, the sum of your word is truth! And I want to believe all of it. You speak to me so I would know who you are, and believe what is true. Father, protect my mind from lies that come during trials, and

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guard my heart from acting on these lies. Your truth and character are steadfast, sufficient, and strengthening! Help me believe your truth! Don't let me give way to despair, but lead me to my Hope, my Lord and Savior, Jesus. Amen.

For further meditation: Ephesians 1; Psalm 105; Romans 8 v 6

Journal





EXTRA CHAPTER
BY SARAH

The Burden Makes Me Weary

My heart has been incredibly weary lately. I have struggled to find words that adequately express the tumultuous emotions within my spirit. Daily, I need to fight the impulse to turn inward and disconnect from those around me, as I teeter between pressing on or succumbing to the crushing weight of heartache, pain, and fear.



But I Am God's Daughter

Months have stretched into years of enduring, waiting, hoping, praying, clinging, and surviving suffering that seems to have no conceivable end. A battle has been waged over my family and me. The enemy seems intent upon turning my heart against the Lord for the pain he has allowed.

I am not the first to experience this:

The enemy has pursued my soul; he has crushed my life to the ground; he has made me sit in darkness like those long dead. Therefore my spirit faints within me; my heart within me is appalled. (Psalm 143 v 3-4)

But I am God's daughter, and I'm trusting with all I have (as weak as my faith may be) that he will not let me go. In my brokenness, all I can do is believe that he will carry me through and prove himself faithful.

It is not a lack of faith to grieve and to wrestle with the deep realities of heartache and loss. We live in a culture that's so uncomfortable with

suffering that we mask our hurt, cover our blemishes, medicate our pain, and explain our confusion away. Of course, pain is not to be glorified either, as though we are holier because we are suffering.

The ongoing reality is that suffering hurts. It's uncomfortable, it's lonely, it sends some friends running, and it causes others to judge things they cannot understand and didn't pause to ask about. It's unsettling, disorienting, and confusing, and it stirs deep questions of faith that we don't have to face until suffering forces us to.

But by God's grace, I'm choosing to face it head on, rather than running from it. We must each choose how we will respond when the heaviness of life leaves us feeling joyless, hopeless, and even in despair.



Two Encouragements to Persevere

I have found such great encouragement in the words of Paul, a man whose greatest desire was to love and glorify God, yet who also suffered much as he fought the good fight of faith. I am thankful for the way God used Paul's devastating circumstances to encourage the Corinthians, and then through the Scriptures to encourage countless others who have suffered through the ages.

For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. (2 Corinthians 1 v 8-10)



1. At the End of Our Strength, We Trust in His

After nine years of fighting an unseen enemy that has wrought unimaginable havoc through destructive neurological behaviors in our oldest son (and thus in our other children), recent evidence seems to point to Lyme disease. This means a long, uncertain future of costly

treatments without any guarantees of healing. There is no area of our lives that has not been touched by a little tick that bit me and infected me years ago with a disease, which I then unknowingly passed on to all four of my children. Until recently, mysterious health problems had sent us from doctor to doctor, adding financial loss and burden to the many other stresses we were facing, while doctors simply shook their heads in confusion.

Even now that we have identified the problem, treatments are complex. It's hard not to give in to fear and despair. As a woman and mother who desires to bring order and peace to our home, I fight perpetual feelings of failure over the turmoil that seems constant there. Misguided judgments from people who don't understand also leave me feeling vulnerable.

But by God's grace, and despite my flailing, the Lord continues to carry me, change me, and help me press on for another moment. As Paul experienced the complete emptying of his own resources in order to learn to rely fully on Christ, I am learning to do the same. Though I often feel as if I die a thousand deaths every day, I am experiencing greater life in Christ—for the more that I am emptied, the more I am filled.

Are you in this place right now? You may be experiencing far greater trials than I am, circumstances I can't even imagine. If you are despairing of life itself, uncertain whether you can endure one more moment of your pain, remember that the apostle Paul, a strong and greatly-used servant of God, experienced the same. Even more so did Jesus, the Son of God. He sweat blood the night before he died, such was the pressure and the anguish. He bore the entire weight of the world's sin and the wrath of his Father in order that you and I would always enjoy the presence of, and have access to the resources of, the Almighty God.

2. At the End of Our Resources, We Treasure Christ

Circumstances that feel hopeless magnify the hope of the gospel. Circumstances that reveal our weaknesses magnify the strength of Christ. Circumstances that cause our love for this world to fade cause our love for Christ to grow. Circumstances that bring about the loss of earthly things magnify the glorious riches of eternity. Circumstances that

seem to be “a sentence of death”—and may indeed be a sentence of death—“make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead” (2 Corinthians 1 v 9).

When life is going well, it’s easy to be generally thankful for the gospel, but to not allow the veins of its truth to give life to us. But when disappointment and suffering strike, the gospel becomes our lifeline and empowers us to live victoriously. This has been true for me as I’ve desperately needed the physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual strength to press on moment by moment, every day.

When I see pain in one of my children, but feel helpless to do anything about it, I need the reminder that Christ is grieved by their pain and remains Lord over it. When my child is causing deep hurt in another one of my children, I need the love, grace, and patience of Christ to flow through me before I react. When I feel insecurity rise up in me as I see the worry in my husband’s face over finances, I need to remind myself that my true security is in Christ, no matter what happens. When my body aches and I want to crawl into bed and sink into despair, I need to rely on the Holy Spirit’s strength to endure and focus on truth.

When the tenth doctor expresses how perplexed they are and suggests we see someone else, I must go to the word to remember that God knows all things, and that he is sovereignly working all things out for my good, even when the wise of this world are left baffled.

The hope of the gospel is not just our guaranteed future glory in heaven. It is the promised power, purpose, presence, and fullness of Christ in every moment of our lives on earth. It is “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1 v 27). Because of the gospel, suffering is no longer meaningless, but is wielded by the Lord to be used for our good, to change us into the people that our redeemed selves long to be: reflections of Christ.



Joy Will Come in the Morning

*Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning ...
You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed*

my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever! (Psalm 30 v 5b, 11-12)

As I write this, I am speaking to myself as much as to anyone else. My temptation is to quit, become a hermit, and bottle up the bitter ache within my soul. But that would allow the enemy to have his way and, by the grace of God, he will not have his way in my life. I am the Lord's and I know that he will not let me go. Whether I see God redeem this story in my lifetime or not, I know that it will be redeemed.

Whatever your own circumstances, I pray that you will be confident in this: if you are in Christ Jesus, you are covered by his promises. Though you may feel burdened beyond your strength and in despair, Christ will be your strength. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy will come in the morning. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, maybe not next year. But it will come. Cling to him, cry to him, and one day, he will turn your mourning into dancing, and you will be clothed in gladness, singing praises to his name and giving thanks for all that he has done.

Reflect

- ~ What circumstances have tempted you to despair? What do you do when those feelings arise? (E.g. Pull away from those you love; mask it and pretend everything is okay; or bring yourself to Christ in honest brokenness.)
- ~ How have you seen the Lord use your circumstances to draw you into a greater dependence on his strength and a greater hope in promises?
- ~ Which of these truths do you need to find comfort in today?

Pray

Heavenly Father, sometimes my circumstances feel like they are too much to bear. I struggle to understand why you have allowed these trials and how I can persevere through them. But I see now that you allow circumstances beyond what I can handle so that I will learn to rely on you rather than on my own strength and wisdom. Help me not to turn away from you in my despair, but turn towards you in trust and confidence that you will be all that I need. Thank you that one day you will deliver me from this pain and struggle, and bring me into your everlasting presence. Amen.

For further meditation: Isaiah 40 v 31; Isaiah 40 v 10; Romans 1 v 1-21



EXTRA CHAPTER
BY SARAH

Hope When It Hurts For Your Kids

Trials and suffering in our lives can be anything from stretching to down right devastating. However, I think most people would probably agree that as painful as it is to endure suffering in our own lives, it can be even more painful to watch our children suffer.

But in this world, suffer they will. Whether it's a bully at school, a friend who hurts their feelings, the loss of a loved one, a broken heart, or life-altering illness, all of our children will be faced with the realities of a broken world.

All four of my children have endured suffering since they took their first breath. They each suffer immensely from the physical, emotional, and neurological pain of Lyme disease. They have all watched our family go from being financially comfortable to facing unemployment. They frequently feel left out of parties and school activities because of special diets and chronic pain. Our oldest is tormented by thoughts and behaviors that turn him into someone else; and our younger three have had to grapple with the devastating effects of growing up with an older sibling whose neurological Lyme disease causes them so much pain.

What do we do when suffering strikes our kids? How do we prepare our children for a world that involves disappointment, pain, and loss?



Lead by Example


Do you view suffering as purely harmful and something to be avoided at all costs? Or do you have a biblical view of it?

While suffering is not a good thing in and of itself, if we view it as Christians who know the God who is Lord of all, then we are able to trust that he will use whatever he sends to draw us closer to him and mold us to be more like him.

So when pain enters your life, how do you respond? Does it drive you (with all of your confused emotions, and sometimes shaken faith) to Jesus, and to greater dependence on him?

Of course, you won't do this perfectly because you are still in the process of being made perfect. But your children are watching, and they are learning from your responses to the irritations you face, the detours that leave you frazzled and frustrated, and the devastating circumstances that sometimes leave you fighting for any sense of hope.


Parents, you are the ones who will begin to shape your children's view of suffering and the power of the gospel in light of it. Your suffering is an opportunity to show them how faith brings joy and perseverance when life hurts.



Pray for Wisdom

When is it a parent's job to protect and seek to rescue them from the pain of the world? When is it a parent's job to support them through it and allow God to use their trials to draw them to him?

Of course, there may not always be—in fact, often will not be—black-and-white answers; and we will always have the tendency to want to rescue and protect our children. But ask yourself the questions. And seek wisdom through prayer and godly Christian counsel when faced with these circumstances.



Remember Who is in Control - and Who is Not

If we think that we have the ability to control our children's lives, we will have a tendency to become hover parents, living in fear of what we can't control and never allowing our kids to learn from anything, good or bad.

There is great freedom in realizing that God has entrusted us with

children whom he created for his purposes under his sovereign plan. We can teach our children about the Lord, but only he has the power to save them. We can help protect our children, but only the Lord is truly sovereign over what happens in their lives. We can love our children, but only the Lord can love them with a love that is perfectly knowledgeable and perfectly untainted by mixed motives and ongoing sin.

The best thing that you can give your children is parents who seek to know and love Christ above all else. After that, pray for wisdom and guidance in raising them, and then entrust their lives into his hand.

How then do we help our children to endure suffering in light of the gospel?

I'd like to share five ways that I have seen God guide us in helping our children understand and learn to view suffering with a gospel lens.



1. Teach Kids that Suffering is Not Only a Bad Thing to be Avoided

Do you mainly pray for your trials to be taken away and for things that you want? Do you, in fact, pray with and in front of your children at all? Aim to pray with confidence, recognizing that God is Lord over you, that you are a sinner in desperate need of him, and that Christ has died and defeated death, so that your pain need not be wasted but can be used for your good.

And when your children suffer, help them to pray for faith and growth and endurance more than they pray for the circumstance to be changed.

I've learned this the hard way. Years upon years of praying for my oldest to be free from all that torments him and causes so much pain in our home began to make him question why God wouldn't answer our prayers to heal him. For a long time I struggled to answer him because I couldn't understand why the Lord was continuing to allow so much pain in such a little child's life.

But over the years, my prayers began to change. I found myself praying that Jesus would help me trust him more and give me the strength

to keep going. I began to experience sweet blessings within the deep heartache that I never would have found if I had only viewed our trials as my enemy and something to get out of as quickly as possible.

Now when one of my children comes to me with the question, “Why do I have to be sick and all my friends aren’t?” Or, “Mommy, why did you give me this sickness?”, or “Why does my brother hurt me so much?” I have to quickly reflect on all that God has done through the pain he has allowed, and then respond with, “I don’t know why God has allowed all of this, but I do know that it’s not being wasted, and that he is allowing it to make us love him more, love the world less, and become more like him in the process.”



2. Teach Kids that Suffering is Not a Surprise

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned...

(Romans 5 v 12)

It’s important that we help our children understand that when sin entered the world, death entered the world. Therefore, we shouldn’t be surprised when we experience the inevitable sadness, brokenness, and pain of living in a world under the curse of sin. We do need to be clear, however, that our suffering is not always (and often not) a direct result of a specific sin in our lives, but rather, a result of the overarching curse of sin on the world. But if our children do not understand that we are all sinners and deserve to die for our sins, then they will expect to be happy and comfortable in this life, and will be angry at God when they aren’t.

Share with your children ways that you have struggled with sin and suffering in your own life (in an age-appropriate way), and how you have needed forgiveness and the power of the Holy Spirit to help you. Tell them about the great men and women of the Bible who made some pretty huge mistakes and endured perplexing circumstances, but desired to follow Jesus, and who found help to carry on, and to do great things even amid their difficulties.

3. *Teach Kids to talk to Jesus about Their Feelings, Questions, and Fears*

Many children will bottle up their feelings, especially if they think that they shouldn't feel the way they do or they don't know what to do with the feelings. Others will go to their parents (which is great)—but we need to lead them to go to Jesus. He can help more than we can, and can be there for them when we can't be!

We have seen our own children struggle with anger, discouragement, weariness, and confusion because each day is such a struggle, and they can't understand why God hasn't answered prayers for healing. So it's important that we help them learn to talk about feelings that they may not understand, and then teach them to talk to Christ honestly about them.

Reading the psalms out loud with your children can be very helpful to show them that they aren't alone in feeling this way. The psalms will teach them that it's ok to bring their honest feelings to the Lord, as long as we don't get stuck there, and are willing to learn from him and be reminded of what is true about him.

4. *Teach Kids to Look for Ways God has been Faithful*

While it's important to help our kids learn to talk to Jesus about their feelings and struggles, it's even more important to teach them to praise God and look for ways that he has been faithful, even when it isn't easy. We are not only to “continue steadfastly in prayer”—we are to be “watchful in it with thanksgiving” (Colossians 4 v 2).

Recently, in a really, really hard time for us as a family, I created a faithfulness tree. It's made of nothing more than construction paper, and it's not even close to Pinterest-worthy—but it's served its purpose. It's simply a tree trunk and branches of paper taped on our wall with little green leaves that display ways we see God's faithfulness to us and care of us. What has been so neat to see is how this has encouraged us all, including the kids, to look for God's faithfulness within the trials.



5. *Teach Kids to Wait for Eternity*

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. (James 1 v 12)

One of the hardest parts of watching our children suffer has been watching their little hearts grieve the loss of so much innocence at such a young age. But one of the blessings is seeing the Lord awaken them to the reality that this is a world that cannot satisfy them. It has caused them to want to hear more about heaven and what there is beyond this world.

While it's hard to hear each one of them express a desire to go to heaven now instead of living on this earth, I am thankful that the pain that they are enduring is forcing them to search for a deeper meaning in their suffering and a purpose for their lives.

So when our children come to us, not understanding why something is happening and just wanting it to go away, let's use this as an opportunity to lead them to Jesus and help them learn to wait on him and trust his promises.

Suffering will come to our children, sooner or later, when they are young or when they are grown. If we do not use the trials that they face when they're young to guide them in these truths, then it will be much harder for them to face a life of following Christ as they grow up and are faced with the pain of living in a broken and hostile world.

And wonderfully, we can rest assured that our children's souls are not relying on us. Yes, we bear responsibility in what we do with the time that we are given as their parents, but the Lord remains bigger than both our greatest failures and greatest successes. And he can use our trials and struggles—and our response to them—to teach our kids the life lesson they most need to grasp:

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. (Psalm 73 v 26)

Reflect

- ~ When you think about suffering in your child's life, does it stir up fear, panic, and a desire to control their circumstances? If so, what truths about God might you be struggling to trust?
- ~ What areas of struggle in your child's life can you use as an opportunity to teach them about Christ and the hope they can have in him even as they walk through that struggle?
- ~ In what ways will you ask the Lord to help you trust him in your trials, as well as the trials that enter the lives of those you love?

Pray

Heavenly Father, thank you that you are in control and have a perfect plan and purpose for my child's life. Forgive me for trying to take control and not always trusting you when you allow pain into their life. Help me love, guide, and teach my child with the truth of your word, rather than reacting out my fears, doubts, and insecurities. I know that I will fail my child at times, but I pray that by your grace, you will help me walk with them through the trials that they face with honesty, truth, and hope. In Jesus' name, amen.

For further meditation: Deuteronomy 6 v 7; Psalm 127 v 1; 2 Timothy 3 v 14-17

