

“The Blessings of 2020”

(selected Scriptures)

Introduction

➤ The axiom “Hindsight is 20/20” is based upon the notion that to have 20/20 vision is to have perfect eyesight. The expression, “Hindsight is 20/20” describes the benefit of being able to look in the past and see past events more clearly. In that sense, hindsight is (presumably/usually) better than foresight. It conveys the idea that if we had to do something over again, we would do a better job knowing what we learned from the first time.

I think it is more than a bit ironic that last year – repeatedly described as “the worse year in American history” or “the worse year in recent memory” – was the year 2020. For there is much we can learn from looking back on such an extraordinary and tumultuous year (Covid-19, quarantines/closures, wildfires, protests/riots, racial/social volatility, economic/political uncertainty, presidential/local elections, toilet paper shortage, Tom Brady leaving the New England Patriots, etc.).

➤ Looking back on this past year ought to give us perspective. Perspective is powerful. In fact, our perspective in life has a lot to do with how we live life – both our actions and our attitudes are largely influenced by our personal point of view.

✓ Illust: A guy received a parrot for his birthday. The parrot was already fully grown with a bad attitude, and an even worse vocabulary. The guy tried hard to change the bird's attitude by saying polite words to him, playing soft music, anything he could think of. Nothing worked. He yelled at the bird and the bird got worse. He shook the bird, and the bird got more angry and more rude. Finally, in a moment of desperation, the guy put the parrot in the freezer. For a few minutes he heard the bird squawking, swearing, and kicking, then suddenly there was complete quiet. The guy was frightened that he might have actually hurt the bird, and quickly opened the freezer door.

The parrot calmly stepped out onto the guy's extended arm, and said, “I'm deeply sorry that I offended you with my language and actions, and I humbly ask your forgiveness. I will endeavor at whatever cost to correct my behavior.” The guy was astonished at the bird's change in attitude, and was about to ask what would have affected such a drastic change, when the parrot continued, “May I inquire as to what the chicken did?”

➤ A new perspective can elicit a new attitude and a change in behaviors. Fortunately, thankfully, God has given us divine knowledge in His Word and through His Holy Spirit. From studying God's Word, our perspective can be shaped by God's divine wisdom and will. We desperately need a biblical worldview – a perspective that is in harmony with God's Word and in conformity to God's will.

The Bible teaches us that God is omniscient – i.e. He knows everything (past, present, future) perfectly, eternally, and equally. God is never surprised, never mistaken, and never learns anything. God has no need of hindsight, and has full and flawless foresight. Therefore, His instruction is without error and His promises are without failing.

➤ **Scripture teaches that there are many Christian blessings associated with the sufferings of trials and sorrows.** These blessings are not always readily evident or easily understood, but they are nonetheless taught in God's Word and ought to be embraced by every Christian. These biblical truths can guide us through, and protect us in the midst of, various trials and sufferings we face in this life. While we do not have perfect foresight, we do have God's Word as “a lamp to [our] feet and a light to [our] path[s]” (see Ps.119:105). Like a lighthouse, these truths can guide us through the storms of life and keep us from being dashed against the rocks of suffering.

✓ Illust: Charles Spurgeon said: “They who dive in the sea of affliction bring up rare pearls.”

➤ Specifically, this morning, I want us to examine God's Word in order to give us the proper perspective of suffering. From Scripture we can find at least twelve distinct blessings – ‘rare pearls’ – that can come from the suffering of trials and sorrows.

1. Suffering can humble us

➤ Although these are in no particular order of importance, the blessing of humility may be the most important. For without humility, it could be argued, none of the other blessings would actually be realized.

2 Cor 12:7-10 ~ “So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.⁹ But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

➤ God can, and will, use trials in our lives in order to keep us from becoming conceited and to humble us if we are being haughty. Humility is a blessing from God because it enables to see truth – who we really are and who God really is. Pride, on the other hand, is a skewed view of reality. The prideful person thinks of themselves too highly and others too lowly.

Worse still, the prideful person has a false (small) view of God, and tends to think (to whatever degree) that they do not need God or can act independent from God. Suffering can bring us back to reality and make us more like Jesus Christ.

Phil 2:3-8 ~ “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

James 4:8-10 ~ “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”

➤ True humility recognizes the absolute need for God – for life, for salvation, for wisdom, for purity, for perseverance, for literally everything. True humility recognizes that we owe everything to God, and that God owes us nothing; that He is the Creator, and we are His creation; that He is the potter, and we are the clay.

➤ Practically speaking, humility enables to see that ultimately we have no control over the future or over future events. Twenty-twenty should serve as a sobering reminder to us all that the future is uncertain. We should humbly submit all our plans to the One who not only knows but also controls the future.

James 4:13-17 ~ “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit’ —¹⁴ yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.’¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.¹⁷ So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”

➤ Humility is a blessing from God, and sometimes we need suffering to humble us. Jesus stated:

Matt 23:12 ~ “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

✓ Illust: Spurgeon said, “You have two choices: you can either be humble or humbled.”

2. Suffering can mature us

- The expression “no pain, no gain” is true physically and spiritually. In the same way physical pain is associated with exercising to make one strong and fit, so too the exercise of sufferings and trials can make one spiritual strong and mature.

Most of us have a natural aversion to (and even fear of) sorrow and pain, and a natural attraction to ease and comfort. We tend to view suffering as something that is bad – something that has no redeemable or beneficial quality – something that is to be avoided at all cost. This perspective seems to originate from our sinful nature. Many Christians avoid spiritual growth and spiritual discipline like the plague. It would seem that in the world of Christianity the all too common, yet unspoken, belief is: “No gain, no pain.”

✓ **Illust:** Robert Murrey McCheyne, a Scottish minister of the 19th century, said, “There is a great want about all Christians who have not suffered. Some flowers must be broken or bruised before they emit any fragrance.”

- God permits and provides trials in our lives in order to that our perseverance may be perfected so we can endure more trials until we have become a complete and mature person in Christ.

Rom 5:3-4 ~ “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope”

James 1:2-4 ~ “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

- Notice that we are to “*rejoice in our sufferings*” and “*count it all joy*” we experience trials. The reason for this joy is not a masochistic lust for or love of pain, but a joyful realization of the spiritual maturity that suffering and trials can produce in the Christian’s life. Like the pain of being sore after a workout, the Christian can rightly and joyfully view the pain of suffering as the means of growing spiritual stronger and more mature in Christ.

1 Peter 1:6-7 ~ “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

3. Suffering can sanctify us

- Suffering and trials serve as a crucible, refining the impurities and imperfections – worldliness and sin – from our lives. God can use the suffering we experience

Ps 119:67 ~ “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word.”

Ps 119:71 ~ “It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.”

- The word sanctify/sanctified (*hagiazō*) is literally translated “to set apart” and carries the meaning of being dedicated as sacred or consecrated as holy. Simply put, to be sanctified is to be (made) holy – to remove sin from our lives. The goal of this refining process is our sanctification, our personal holies. Suffering is not the goal, but the means.
- Would a loving God cause or allow suffering in the life of one of His children in order to get his/her attention and bring them back to Himself? Absolutely. Would we not rather go through momentary (in light of eternity) suffering and pain in this life and spend eternity in heaven with God, or go through this life problem-free and spend eternity in hell with no personal or loving relationship with God? In this, suffering can be seen as a blessing as it creates a dependent and desperate relationship with God.

Heb 12:3-11 ~ “Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. ⁴In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? ‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.’ ⁷It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

1 Cor 11:32 ~ “But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.”

➤ The truth is, we ought not to waste any part of our sufferings. God can, and desires to, use every ounce of the sufferings and trials we endure in this life, as a means of making us holy. For the Christian, suffering is never without reason or purpose. Thankfully, we have God’s promise that He will work in and through our lives to make us holy in Christ.

1 Thess 5:23-24 ~ “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”

4. Suffering can drive us to pray/prayer

➤ Nothing quite drives us to our knees in prayer quite like suffering. I can attest that I have never prayed as frequently or as passionately when things are going well as I have done when things are not going well. Suffering and pain, perhaps like nothing else, arrests our attention and awakens our minds to the realization that we are dependent on and desperate for God. Conversely, prosperity and comfort can sometimes deaden the awareness that we are dependent and desperate for God and lull us into the false notion that we can live independent and aloof without Him.

➤ In times of comfort and prosperity we can neglect the discipline of prayer, and the command to pray. When things are going well, we can tend to think that we need God less. This is never true.

Luke 21:34-36 ~ “But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. ³⁵For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Rom 12:12 ~ “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.”

1 Peter 4:7 ~ “The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.”

➤ Like a splash of ice-cold water, suffering will jolt us into the recognition that we desperately need God. It has been said, “In times of crisis God hears many strange voices.” These voices are not “strange” because God does not know who they are, but because these voices only cry out in times of suffering.

✓ Illust: C. S. Lewis said, “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” (*The Problem of Pain*; 1962, p.93).

5. Suffering can compel us to be (more) thankful/grateful

- It is relatively easy to take God for granted, especially in times of comfort and prosperity. It is easy for us to think that we deserve blessings from God – that we are entitled to healthy, security and wellbeing. With this false notion, many people (including many Christians) doubt God’s goodness when they experience trials and sorrows. Scripture reveals that every blessing we experience is graciously given to us by God.

Eph 1:3 ~ “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places”

James 1:17 ~ “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”

- To be sure, we are to be thankful to God for His manifold blessings. Unfortunately, we often view suffering and blessing as opposites (saying, “I will trust God in times of suffering as well as times of blessing”). The truth is, the suffering can be the blessing. We need to understand that some of God’s blessings come in the form trials and sorrows.

Phil 4:11-13 ~ “Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹²I 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. ¹³I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

- In the Bible, we are exhorted to give God “*thanks always and for everything*” (Eph.5:20), and instructed to “*give thanks in all circumstances*” (1Thess.5:18). The “always ... everything ... all” is certainly all-inclusive. Additionally, it must be noted that we are not only called to give thanks “in” all circumstances, but also “for” all things.

Eph 5:20 ~ “giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”

1 Thess 5:18 ~ “give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

- We are not so much called to be thankful for the various trials or sufferings that we endure in this life, but thankful for what God will do in and through such trials and sufferings!

6. Suffering can elicit in us compassion for others

- We are more apt to sympathize and empathize with others who are suffering, when we ourselves are suffering or have suffered. Sometimes, especially when we are healthy and happy, we can become apathetic or calloused to the needs of those around us. Sometimes, we are simply unable to truly understand what is like to live with pain or sorrow until we ourselves experience suffering.

2 Cor 1:3-6 ~ “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. ⁶If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.”

- One of God’s purposes in the suffering of Christians is that they would experience direct, personal comfort from God, and then from that experience be able to minister God’s comfort to others.

Rom 12:15 ~ “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.”

7. Suffering can awaken us to our own mortality

➤ Death is a sobering wakeup call for all those who are alive. It can awaken us to fragility, brevity and unpredictability of human life. Some people scarcely contemplate their mortality. To them, thoughts of death and dying are morbid and depressing. The truth is, we ought to come to grips with the reality of death before we (or those we love) die. For death is a part of life.

Heb 9:27 ~ “And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment”

➤ Viruses, plagues, disease, and death are all consequences of sin and living in a fallen world (Gen.3; Rom.6:23; 8:18-23). This should not surprise, or shock, us. Rather, this reality should cause us to be ever-aware of the blessing of life, and the brevity of life. Suffering can remind us that none of us know how long we will live (or when we will die). Therefore, we must always be ready to face our mortality, and ready to one-day face the judgment of God.

Luke 13:1-5 ~ “There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ²And he answered them, ‘Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? ³No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. ⁴Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? ⁵No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

➤ All too often we assume that we, and others we love, will live forever – or at least live to a reasonably old age. But Scripture assures us that we have no guarantee of living a long life. In fact, God’s Word reveals that even a “long life” is incredibly brief moment in time.

James 4:14 ~ “yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.”

✓ **Illust:** “Life is as transitory as a puff of smoke from a fire; the steam that rises from a cup of coffee; or one’s breath, briefly visible on a cold day. How foolish, in light of the brevity and frailty of earthly life, to plan and live it without consideration for God’s will” (John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament*

Commentary: James).

8. Suffering can unmask the depravity and severity of sin/unbelief

➤ Living in a moralized world – a so-called “Christian nation” – can mask the true depravity and severity of sin. A civilized culture and society can give the false impression that sin/unbelief is not humanity’s greatest problem, and that all problems can be resolved by human means or merit. Suffering unmasked such delusion and vividly reveals the true depravity of our sinful nature.

Jer 17:9 ~ “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”

Phil 3:18-19 ~ “For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.”

Titus 3:3-6 ~ “For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. ⁴But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior”

James 1:14-15 ~ “But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”

- It is important that we remember that there is no inherent goodness in us apart from the saving work of Christ that comes through faith in Christ (Rom.3:10-12). Morality cannot fix our sinful condition. Legislation cannot cure the sinful heart or soften the hard heart. Suffering reminds us of the Gospel – that a person is saved by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

9. Suffering can motivate us to evangelize unbelievers/the lost

- Consequently, the unmasking of humanity’s depravity ought to motivate us to proclaim the Gospel. Prosperity and ease – living in a civilized and moralized society – can lull Christians into a complacency regarding those who are unsaved; those who are going to hell. As Christians, we can all too easily find a comfortable place and safe routine – scampering from our Christian homes, to our Christian schools, to our Christian clubs/social gatherings, to our Christian church, and back to our Christian homes – without every being having to really engage unbelievers.

Acts 10:42 ~ [Peter] “And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.”

Acts 17:30-31 ~ [Paul] “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

2 Thess 1:5-10 ~ “This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering – ⁶since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, ¹⁰when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.”

1 Peter 3:13-17 ~ “Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.”

- We must remember that Christ commands that we go into the world proclaiming the Gospel to those who are lost/unsaved (Matt.28:18-20; Mk.16:15; Acts 1:8).

10. Suffering can expose our worldly securities and latent idolatries

- Anything that exposes worldliness or ungodliness in our lives is a good thing. Like a spotlight from heaven, suffering can reveal to us those things in our lives that are displeasing or disobedient to God.

Heb 12:1-2 ~ “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

- We need to “lay aside” (*apotithēmi*) whatever hinders our faithful pursuit of Christ. This certainly includes “sin” (*hamartia*), which is anything and everything that is contrary to the Word and will of God. But this also includes those things that would be a “weight” (*onkos*), which is something that is

not necessarily sinful but is nonetheless an obstacle or distraction to (e.g. watching tv, social media, video games, etc.). The analogy in Hebrews twelve is one of a runner in a race. A good (smart) runner is going to remove anything and everything they can that might be a hindrance to them running well and finishing the race.

Matt 13:20-22 ~ “As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.”

Rom 12:1-2 ~ “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed [*syschēmatizō*] to this world, but be transformed [*metamorphoōmai*] by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

2 Cor 4:16-18 ~ “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

Col 3:1-2 ~ “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”

Heb 11:25 ~ “[Moses] choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.”

- As the saying goes, “We are in the world, but not of the world.” Suffering can wash away the filth of worldliness. It can forcibly break us free from finding satisfaction, security or pleasure in this world, and compel us to find our ultimate satisfaction, security and pleasure in God.

ii. Suffering can create in us a hunger for God’s Word/truth

- Today we are inundated with information, but starving for truth. Through the many various media outlets available to us today, there is no shortage of opinions and beliefs being declared. And, often, these subjective (impassioned) opinions are presented as objective (indisputable) facts. Our society has even embraced the slogan “That’s my truth!” (supposedly allowing for everyone to have their own truth. But opinions are not truth, and feelings are not facts. In the midst of it all, we are awash in presumed truths that actually contradict each other (even our “experts” adamantly disagree with one another!).

In times of tranquility and prosperity this can seem to be entertaining and harmless. However, in times of suffering, when we are in desperate need of certainty and security, we long for the truth of God’s Word.

Ps 119:71 ~ “It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.”

Ps 119:92 ~ “If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction.”

- As Christians, we are commanded to be immersed in the Word (truths) of God. We are to have an insatiable hunger and thirst for God’s Word.

1 Peter 2:2 ~ “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation”

1 Peter 2:2 ~ “like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation” (NASB)

Col 3:16 ~ “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

➤ As the one who is stumbling in the darkness longs for light, so too those who are suffering long for the light of the truth of God. In a world that is searching for answers, and wallowing in lies, God’s Word remains the eternal, perfect and unfailing source of truth.

Heb 4:12 ~ “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

2 Tim 3:16-17 ~ “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

John 17:17 ~ “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”

12. Suffering can stir within us a longing for Christ’s [return](#)

➤ Personally, I do not think I have ever heard as many Christians express their desire for the Lord Second Coming as I have throughout this past year; and that is no coincidence. It is good for us to be reminded that this world is not our home, that we are “strangers and aliens” in this world.

Phil 3:20-21 ~ “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”

Heb 10:32-36 ~ “But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, ³³sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. ³⁵Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.”

Heb 11:16 ~ “But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.”

2 Peter 3:11-12 ~ “Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹²waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!”

Rev 22:20 ~ “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”

Conclusion

➤ According to Scripture, God does not view suffering like most people do. While humans tend to see suffering as only bad, God – in His perfect and supreme wisdom – may be using it for our good and His glory. My prayer is that we will prayerfully consider these benefits, and that the Lord will use anything and everything to increase our gratefulness to and godliness in Him. There are great blessings in suffering ... don’t waste your trials!

➤ The Bible assures us that every painful experience we endure – every suffering, persecution, or affliction – is used by God in order to make us what He wants us to be. Every stroke of pain we endure is a brushstroke that God uses to paint, on the canvas of His divine purpose, our portrait as we are

created (and being created) to be in His likeness. The blood that is shed in and for Christ He paints in the dark red color of persecution and martyrdom. The bruises that are endured through affliction and suffering, in and for the sake of Christ's name and honor, He paints in deep blue. The painful trials and tribulation that He uses to refine and purify our lives He paints in the fiery colors of yellow and orange.

When He is done, the portrait that God has painted on our lives will look just like the life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!