

Biblical Truth #6—God Designs All Suffering in a Christian’s Life to Work for our Good **By Jill Nelson**

Introduction for Parents:

For a Christian, suffering is not simply enduring life in a fallen world. It is not simply toughing it out until Christ returns. Rather, it serves as a precious gift. Consider the words from this beautiful poem by Martha Snell Nicholson:

*I stood a mendicant of God before His royal throne
And begged him for one priceless gift, which I could call my own.
I took the gift from out His hand, but as I would depart
I cried, “But Lord this is a thorn and it has pierced my heart.
This is a strange, a hurtful gift, which Thou hast given me.”
He said, “My child, I give good gifts and gave My best to thee.”
I took it home and though at first the cruel thorn hurt sore,
As long years passed I learned at last to love it more and more.
I learned He never gives a thorn without this added grace,
He takes the thorn to pin aside the veil which hides His face.*

Supplies:

- Jigsaw puzzle (or cut an old calendar picture into 10 or more pieces)
- [Joseph’s Life Visual \(PDF\)](#)—fold the visual so that only the picture of Joseph in prison is visible
- Optional: Flour or vanilla extract, and spoons
- Piece of paper, pencil, colored marker or crayon, scissors

Pique their Interest (3 – 5 minutes):

(Without showing the children the puzzle box/picture, give them one or more nondescript puzzle pieces to look at. Ask the following kinds of questions.)

*Are these just random pieces, or are they part of something else?
Can you tell what the whole picture will look like by just these pieces? Why not?
Would you say that these pieces are beautiful and wonderful? Why not?*

(Show the children the puzzle box/picture so that they can see what the puzzle will look like when all the pieces are properly fitted together. See if the children can guess where the pieces they were given fit into the completed picture. Point out that not every piece of a puzzle looks beautiful, exciting, or wonderful. Some pieces might even look ugly. Some might seem like they couldn’t possibly be part of the final picture. But puzzle makers know what they are doing to make every piece fit together perfectly. And that is a good thing.)

(Display the folded visual depicting Joseph in prison. At this point, do not tell them that it is Joseph. Ask the following questions.)

Suppose you were given a “piece” of someone’s life, and this is the way it looked. What do you see? Does it look beautiful and wonderful? Does it look good? Why not?

(Point out that this “piece” shows something that happened in the life of Joseph, from the Old Testament.)

Study the Scriptures:

(Read and talk about the following Scriptures. Depending on the age of your children and the time available, you may choose to have children look up one or more of the texts in their Bibles. Make sure to define any unfamiliar words or terms after reading each text.)

Genesis 39:20—And Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison.

But this one piece of Joseph’s life doesn’t show us the whole story. We need other pieces to see what happened and why it matters.

(Unfold the Joseph’s life visual and flatten it out. Beginning with the picture in the upper left-hand corner, see if the children can briefly recall any of the events represented by pictures of Joseph’s life. Below is a summary you may want to use.)

- 1) Joseph was one of Jacob’s 12 sons. God had made a special promise to Jacob: He would make Jacob’s 12 sons into a great nation called Israel.
- 2) Joseph was Jacob’s favorite son, and Jacob made Joseph a beautiful coat of many colors.
- 3) Joseph’s brothers were very jealous of him and hated him. They sold Joseph as a slave, and he was taken far away to Egypt.
- 4) While in Egypt, God was with Joseph. Joseph was given many responsibilities and did a good job. But one day he was thrown in prison, even though he had done nothing wrong.
- 5) But God was with him even in prison. God gave Joseph the ability to interpret dreams. When Pharaoh had a dream, Joseph was able to tell him what it meant—a great famine was coming, and they needed to store food ahead of time to prepare for it. Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of this task.
- 6) The famine also struck the land in which Jacob and Joseph’s brothers lived. They became very hungry and traveled to Egypt to find food to eat.
- 7) Because God had made Joseph an important man in Egypt, he was able to provide his family with all they needed. Joseph was happily reunited with his family.
- 8) God’s people were saved from the famine, and God went on to make Israel into a great nation, just as He had promised.

But what about all the bad things that had happened to Joseph—all the “ugly pieces” of his life and all of the suffering he experienced? Here is what Joseph said to his brothers when they were reunited in Egypt...

Genesis 50:20—“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”

Was any of the suffering Joseph experienced outside of God’s sovereign control? No. Even though his brothers and others intended to bring about harm to Joseph, what was God’s design and intention? [to bring about good]

How can the “pieces” of Joseph’s life serve to help us in times of suffering? What can we learn? [Encourage some responses.]

Romans 8:28—And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

So we could say...“We know that for those who love God all things—sickness, broken legs, lost jobs, pandemics, stay-at-home orders, missing time with friends, cancelled vacations—work together for good for those who are called according to His purpose.

- God designs to bring about good in the lives of His people.
- God is sovereign over everything—even suffering.
- For everyone who is trusting in Jesus, suffering is designed for our good. It serves God’s purposes for us.

How can suffering be for a Christian’s good? How can God make something that feels painful and sad to us into something good for us? Can you give an example?

Optional illustration:

(Have the children close their eyes for a moment. Tell them that you are going to place something edible on the tip of their tongue. Next, use the spoon to place either a small amount of flour or a drop of vanilla extract on their tongue. Ask them if it is pleasant and yummy. Have them open their eyes and show them the flour or vanilla extract. Point out that the flour or vanilla extract, when tasted alone, is icky or bitter. However, when mixed with other ingredients, it becomes part of a complete and delicious treat like cookies. In a similar way, God designs that suffering would be part of making us more “complete,” which is for our good.)

Romans 5:3-5—...but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to

shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Suffering for a Christian is designed to produce good things in our lives—things like endurance, character, and hope.

(Discuss some real-life examples. Draw from your own personal experience and/or the lives of other Christians (e.g., the Apostle Paul, Joni Eareckson Tada, Corrie ten Boom, Fanny Crosby, etc.). Suffering brought about stronger dependence on Jesus, more time in God's Word and in prayer, spiritual growth and maturity, greater eagerness to comfort and witness to others, etc. Emphasize the main idea in the previous lesson: God promises to be with His people in the midst of suffering.)

Suffering for Christians is designed by God to produce good things in their lives—even the best thing of all.

Activity:

(Use the piece of paper and pencil and have a one-minute call-out activity. Have the children call out types of suffering they or others have experienced recently. Encourage them to recall the suffering mentioned in the real-life examples you've discussed. Write these down as quickly as possible on the piece of paper. Next, fold the paper in half and use the scissors to cut out a male stick figure. Unfold the paper again.)

What have I turned our list of suffering into? [a man] Why do you think I cut out a man from our suffering list?

Romans 8:29a—For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...

(Use the colored marker and crayon to write "Jesus" on the stick figure.)

- Suffering is meant to make us become more like Jesus.
- That is the greatest good in our lives. It is the best good.

(Recite together.)

Romans 8:28—And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Pray Together:

Praise God for being sovereign over suffering and designing it to make us more and more like Jesus. Thank Him for His goodness in times of suffering. Ask for hearts that wholeheartedly trust His loving purposes. Pray for others who are in the midst of suffering.

Apply the Truth This Week:

- Learn and sing together the hymn, “Children of the Heavenly Father” by Carolina Sandell.
- Find out more about the great hymn writer Fanny Crosby, who suffered from blindness.
- Use experiences of suffering this week to point to biblical truth: How does God want you to think about this? What does His Word say? How should our hearts respond—what feelings and desires does God command? What does God call us to do?

Optional Activity Pages:

- [“Joseph’s Life Page”](#) (lower-elementary age), Lesson 7 from [The ABCs of God](#)
- [“All Things Work for Good for God’s Children”](#) (upper-elementary), Lesson 34 from [My Purpose Will Stand](#)

Next week’s devotional will be **Biblical Truth #7—When Jesus Returns, the Curse Will Be Removed, and He Will Restore All Creation.**

This lesson is part of an eight-part devotional series, which was kicked off with this [post](#).