

CHAPTER FIVE

# CHARACTER IN ACTION

A Christian is not immune to the experience of suffering. Sickness, sorrow, death, disappointment, and pain are experienced by all people. But for a Christian, suffering carries with it the promise of God's sovereign purpose in shaping the inner qualities of life.

## GOD'S ULTIMATE CONTROL

1. What do the following verses teach about God's perspective and purpose?

*Isaiah 45:5-7* \_\_\_\_\_  
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*Isaiah 46:9-10* \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. What did Joseph say about the difficult circumstances and troublesome people he faced? *Genesis 50:20*

3. Read Romans 8:28.  
a. What was Paul's conclusion?  
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b. To whom was this promise made?

4. Can you describe an experience in your life which at the time did not seem to be producing anything good, yet later proved to be beneficial?  
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## THE PURPOSE OF SUFFERING

5. Read Isaiah 52:13–53:12, which describes the Messiah as God's suffering servant.

a. In what ways did Christ suffer unjustly? *Verses 3-5*

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\_\_\_\_\_  
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b. How did he respond to this suffering? *Verse 7*

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c. For whose sake did he endure this suffering? *Verses 8, 10-12*

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d. How does Christ's suffering relate to you? *1 Peter 2:21*

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6. What are some of the reasons God tested the children of Israel?

*Deuteronomy 8:2* \_\_\_\_\_

*Deuteronomy 8:3* \_\_\_\_\_

*Deuteronomy 8:16* \_\_\_\_\_

7. What are some further purposes of suffering?

*John 15:2* \_\_\_\_\_

*Hebrews 12:6-7* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 Peter 1:6-7* \_\_\_\_\_

8. Why should we not be surprised to suffer for Christ?

*1 Peter 4:12-13* \_\_\_\_\_

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9. Reflect on Jesus' words in John 15:18-21.

a. What does this reveal about the world's attitude toward God?

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b. Why can we expect this response?

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**YOUR RESPONSE  
TO SUFFERING**

10. Read Luke 6:22-23.

a. What type of suffering can we expect?

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b. How should we respond?

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11. Examine James 1:2-4.

a. What should be our attitude as we experience various trials?

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b. Why can we have this attitude?

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12. Read Ephesians 5:20 and 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

a. How does God want us to respond to every situation?

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b. Why is this response important?

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**13.** Is there any circumstance in your life for which you have not been able to thank God from the heart?

a. Check one answer:

- Yes
- No

b. If you answered “yes,” what is it? \_\_\_\_\_

c. What keeps you from thanking God for it? \_\_\_\_\_

d. What action could you take to resolve this conflict? \_\_\_\_\_

**14.** Read *Philippians 1:12-21*.

a. How did Paul suffer? \_\_\_\_\_

b. What was his attitude? \_\_\_\_\_

c. What were the results of his suffering? \_\_\_\_\_

**15.** What attitudes toward suffering were shown by the following men?

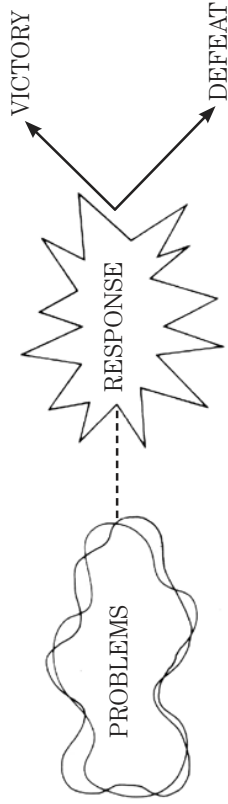
*Job—Job 1:20-22* \_\_\_\_\_

The Apostles—*Acts 5:40-41* \_\_\_\_\_

Stephen—*Acts 7:59-60* \_\_\_\_\_

Paul—*Romans 8:18* \_\_\_\_\_

A man's response to problems determines his maturity level. Each crisis is an opportunity for victory or defeat.



**16.** What wrong responses could be demonstrated in the midst of suffering? Why are they wrong?

*Psalms 106:13-15* \_\_\_\_\_

*Romans 12:17-19* \_\_\_\_\_

*Hebrews 12:15* \_\_\_\_\_

**THE RESULTS OF SUFFERING**

**17.** Read *Romans 5:3-5*. What are some possible results of suffering?

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**18.** What can God's loving discipline produce in you?  
*Hebrews 12:10-11*

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19. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.

a. What does this passage tell you about the benefits of suffering?

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b. Name a person you know who is presently going through a difficult time.

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c. What can you do to encourage this person?

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20. Read Psalm 119:67,71.

a. What can afflictions produce in you?

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b. How do you think this happens?

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21. Psalm 78 recounts God's dealings with the nation of Israel. Often God did things for the benefit of his people which they failed to see from his perspective. Rather, they saw them from their own short-range point of view. From verses 11-18, list several ways God acted for the good of his children.

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*“When God wants to drill a man  
And thrill a man  
And skill a man;  
When God wants to mold a man  
To play the noblest part;  
When He yearns with all His heart  
To create so great and bold a man  
That all the world shall be amazed—  
Watch His methods, watch His ways!  
How He ruthlessly perfects  
Whom He royally elects!  
How He hammers him and hurts him,  
And with mighty blows converts him  
Into trial shapes of clay which  
Only God understands,  
While his tortured heart is crying  
And he lifts beseeching hands!  
How He bends but never breaks  
When his good He undertakes;  
How He uses whom He chooses  
And with every purpose fuses him,  
By every act induces him  
To try His splendor out—  
God knows what He’s about!”*

J. OSWALD SANDERS<sup>4</sup>

**Remember These Points**

Add a sentence or two to the following statements to summarize the most important points you learned from each section in this chapter.

**God’s Ultimate Control**

God is in control of the circumstances surrounding us.

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<sup>4</sup> From *Spiritual Leadership*, 141.

***The Purpose of Suffering***

We should expect to suffer, and should learn something from trials.

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***Your Response to Suffering***

God wants us to display joy and thanksgiving in all situations.

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***The Results of Suffering***

Suffering produces good qualities in our lives.

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