



## A New View of suffering

By [ligonier.org](http://ligonier.org)

We have seen that Paul is writing in Romans 5:1-11 to show the Roman Christians how assured is their salvation. Amazingly, one of the clearest evidences of the believer's security has to do with tribulations, or, more specifically, the believer's attitude toward them. Filled with peace and hope, he can "glory in tribulations." He can do so, Paul writes, because he has learned a lesson no unbeliever can grasp—that tribulations are merely a tool in God's hands for his good. "Christians rejoice in suffering because of what they know about it," Dr. James M. Boice explains. "God uses our troubles, trials, and tribulations to form Christian character."

As we see so often in Scripture, and not infrequently in Romans, God uses processes in His workings with people. While the first step may seem to have nothing to do with the last, and may even seem unworthy of God, the end result of the process is beautiful and good. Suffering is one such process. Suffering, or tribulation, first produces perseverance within us, Paul says. The Greek word translated "perseverance" is a combination of a prefix meaning "under" or "below" and a root word meaning "abode" or "living place." Thus, the experience of suffering teaches us how to live under trying circumstances. As we develop such perseverance, we grow in character. The Greek word used here is closely related to one that means "tested" or "approved." In 1 Corinthians 9:27, Paul speaks of his fear of being "disqualified"; he wants to pass the test, to be found approved. Finally, as we see such character being formed in ourselves, we are filled with hope, "an assurance of what will one day be ours, though we do not possess it yet," as Boice describes it. We go through repeated tests and pass them with increasing frequency, and so we realize that God is doing within us the work He promised to do until it is completed. Thus, the effects of suffering are another source of assurance.

This hope we gain in suffering is not vain, for "the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." God has clearly demonstrated His love for us at the Cross, and the Spirit (Himself a marvelous gift and manifestation of God's love)

helps us understand how much we are cherished by God. We are loved by Him who brings tribulation upon us for our good.

## Suffering that strengthens faith

By John piper

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. (James 1:2-3)

Strange as it may seem, one of the primary purposes of being shaken by suffering is to make our faith more unshakable.

Faith is like muscle tissue: if you stress it to the limit, it gets stronger, not weaker. That's what James means here. When your faith is threatened and tested and stretched to the breaking point, the result is greater capacity to endure. He calls it steadfastness.

God loves faith so much that he will test it to the breaking point so as to keep it pure and strong. For example, he did this to Paul according to 2 Corinthians 1:8-9,

We do not want you to be unaware, 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.

The words "but that was to" show that there was a purpose in this extreme suffering: it was in order that — for the purpose that — Paul would not rely on himself and his resources, but on God — specifically the promised grace of God in raising the dead.

God so values our wholehearted faith that he will, graciously, if necessary, take away everything else in the world that we might be tempted to rely on — even life itself. His aim is that we grow deeper and stronger in our confidence that he himself will be all we need.

He wants us to be able to say with the psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73:25-26).