

Chapter 17
Suffering & Tribulation.
The door into the invisible world.



Now that's the craziest thing I have
EVER heard!

Before I met the Lord, I always pursued ease and comfort for my life. After I met Him, I felt that He would help me pursue that ease and comfort. That has not been true. He has led me into the abundant life, but it has been through much pressure and many trials and tribulations, all of which I am thankful for in retrospect.

We need to realize that we live on a planet that has fallen into sin, or to put it another way, man has rebelled against all the laws of God. That, coupled with the evil activity of Satan to kill, steal, and destroy, is enough to cause suffering for everybody.

Life is rough, it is not fair, and it deals out suffering to everybody in some form. People attempt to hide the pain of life through the pursuit of money, which can purchase temporal comforts. They also cover up life's pain with drugs, entertainment, success and many other things. We need to know and realize that we are living in a war, and there is tension between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the World. The war has already been won in eternity, but it is our job to bring the victory into our sphere of influence. This tension will cause sufferings; however, let us be accurate in defining this suffering. We need to seek God so that we know how to resist those things that Satan is trying to put on us.

God is not the author of suffering or of the unfair things in life. However, God intends for the tough things in life to bring us to the end of our own resources. He desires that we will turn to Him. When we do, He performs miracles and turns our troubles into eternal triumphs.

So many believers have difficulty learning God's prospective on suffering, trials and tribulation. There are two major opposing doctrines. One says that we are not supposed to suffer as believers. The other side says that we are just old sinners, so God teaches us by making us suffer. The latter view grossly distorts God's character! God does not put sickness and disease on us. He does not even have any to put on us. The story of Job confirms this. Both views are very far from the truth.

Both views have some element of truth, but their doctrines will not work when they are in “the fire.”

I am going to share with you what God has taught me about this subject. I learned this through experience and through revelation in Scripture. It is fine if you disagree with me. I know that I do not know all there is about suffering. I have never (yet) been called to undergo physical torture or spent time in jail for the sake of the Gospel.

There is no way I can take space in this book to do a complete teaching on suffering. I am not even qualified to do so, but I have been under severe trials and tests. This is the way I have made it through many difficult circumstances, some of which were life threatening.

Are we supposed to suffer? What kind of suffering?

First, I want to differentiate between “stupid suffering” and redemptive suffering. “Stupid suffering” is when we are reaping the results of bad choices, morally, spiritually, and physically. We need to come before God and receive forgiveness and get back on track with Him. You will find Him with open arms of mercy, ready to turn your mistakes into triumphs.

There is also a difference between the Christian who has totally yielded himself to Jesus and the average person (Christian or not) who is living his life for himself. “If anyone does not love the Lord--a curse be on him. Come, O Lord!” (1 Corinthians 16:22).

“When a Christian decides to give up his life utterly and totally to Jesus Christ without reservation, abandoning the world, giving up security, turning to simplicity and heading for the deep things of God, that is, the things nearest and dearest to the Lord; you can be sure that soon thereafter he is going to touch some portion of pain. When he does, he has commenced his inevitable journey down the road of suffering. That pilgrimage will carry him from glory to glory to glory, until one day, by the sovereign hand of the Lord, he is made into something not altogether unlike Him. Conformed to His image, mostly by suffering.”¹⁰

Most of our suffering is mental.

We are tempted by Satan and distracted by our flesh to believe lies. God wants us to believe His Word no matter how bad things look. God wants us to confess His Word over our situations working as the change

¹⁰ The Inward Journey, Gene Edwards, Christian Books, Goleta, CA., 1982, page 141

agent in the realm of the Kingdom of God. During this time we are subjected to *great pressure*. See Mark Chapter 4.

What about martyrs?

God has called some to become physical martyrs unto torture and death. Revelation 12:11 says that we are not to love our lives even to death. The early church calculated that for every martyr three hundred people would get saved. I do not know for sure, but from reading the account of Stephen in Acts chapter 7 and the accounts of other historic situations, it seems as though God gives a special grace when a person is being tortured for the Gospel. The Scripture says that Jesus *tasted* death for every person.

Martyrdom is not something that passed away centuries ago; it is still going on all over the world in large numbers. For those of you who may be called to this ministry, I want to honor you. I am certainly not qualified for this subject. I want to believe that if God ever called me to be a martyr it would be something I would be honored to go through. The grace for such a thing does not come in advance.

The Bible talks about sharing in the fellowship of his sufferings as indicated in Philippians 3:10, Colossians 1:24 and 2 Corinthians 4:12. “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Philippians 3:10). “Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church” (Colossians 1:24). “So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you” (2 Corinthians 4:1). Paul was talking of a kind of redemptive suffering. As he met suffering in his life, he knew that he was breaking spiritual strongholds as an intercessor for others.

Our share is something less than his share. Only Jesus is qualified for the redemptive suffering that saves man. He bore our curse totally and completely at the Cross. We cannot add to that, nor should we compromise that truth. That does not mean those curses will not come on us. It does mean that when they do, we are to stand on the truth of the Cross and turn that curse into a blessing. Exactly how that takes shape in our lives is up to God. He has the plan for our lives. If you stay close to Him and if you do not compromise the truth of the Cross, He will walk you through the hard times with purpose.

Paul knew that God would rescue him in his sufferings. “You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith,

patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings--what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them” (2 Timothy 3:10,11).

What is the purpose of suffering?

I am going to offer a three-part answer to this question. The three parts are (1) vicarious intercession, (2) entering the Kingdom of God and (3) being proved by God.

1. Our suffering quite often acts as intercession and warfare for the church and the lost, and for the defeat of our spiritual enemies. This is called vicarious intercession. Vicarious means to take the place of another.

Jesus defeated Satan at the Cross, but now it is up to us to administer that defeat and finalize it. “His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 3:10).

Our suffering has to do with finalizing that defeat on Satan. “Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church” (Colossians 1:24).

Our share of His suffering is not the same as His share, but ours is nevertheless redemptive. There is still something lacking in His suffering regarding men and women who are still in bondage. Jesus has done His part; He was the only one qualified to suffer for our salvation. However, there is still something lacking in His suffering regarding men and women who are still in bondage. There is a human part to be done, and it consists of more than just saying prayers.

Our suffering is not the real thing; it is only the shadow of the real thing. Psalm 23 calls it the valley of the shadow of death. Shadows can't hurt, but they can cause fear. Psalm 23 goes on to say that we need not fear for He is with us, and that this path is the path of righteousness chosen by God and not by Satan. It says further that our table is spread in the presence of our enemy, we are anointed of God and our cup runs over for the blessing of others.

Why is our suffering not the real thing? Look at Revelation Chapters 4 and 5. At the throne, John saw the Lamb who was the only one worthy to take the Scroll, which Zechariah describes as the curse (Zechariah 5:3). Then the Scroll unrolls and explosions take place (the catastrophes in the Book of Revelation). We feel the shadow of our curses, the explosions, and they feel like the real thing. But the Lamb is

holding the Scroll and the explosions hit Him. When we shine the light into the **shadow**, we see the Lamb bleeding for our curse and saying to us, “Will you accept the shadow of this as the key to unlock the prisons for those who are bound? I promise it will not hurt you. Will you do this for Me?”

Jesus became poor so we could be rich. Yet look at the poor people in your realm of influence. Someone has to accept the shadow of being poor as the final key to unlock his or her prison.

Suffering gives us authority for ministry. “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12). “Crowns” stand for authority. “Life” is what we are dispensing to the lost world. We gain the authority to bring the lost to God.

Perhaps we could name this teaching “Saved by a Shadow.”

When I experience this type of suffering, I am truly content and at peace (most of the time) because His presence is heavier during this time than ever before. There is something about going through this and then hearing His heart of love toward people that comforts me and makes me know not to be afraid no matter what happens. After all, we only have a few more years to be poor, but those people who do not get saved, well...

2. Our tough situations are doorways into the Kingdom of God.

When we were born again we were legally transferred out of the kingdom of the “world” and transferred into the Kingdom of God. That was all by the grace of God and had nothing to do with our suffering.

“For He has delivered us from the power of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son” (Colossians 1:13).

However, like most spiritual truths, we realize the benefits of that truth through a process. That is why the Scriptures tell us we realize more of the Kingdom of God when we go through trials and tribulations. We have it all legally when we are born again, but we experience the benefits over a period of time.

“... ‘We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,’ they said” (Acts 14:22).

We are in an age where two kingdoms, or two worlds, exist (See the diagram on the next page). One is the visible Kingdom called the “world.” The other is invisible to our eyes and it is the Kingdom of God. The kingdom of the “world” began back sometime in the Genesis account after man fell slave to Satan. The Kingdom of God began with Jesus.

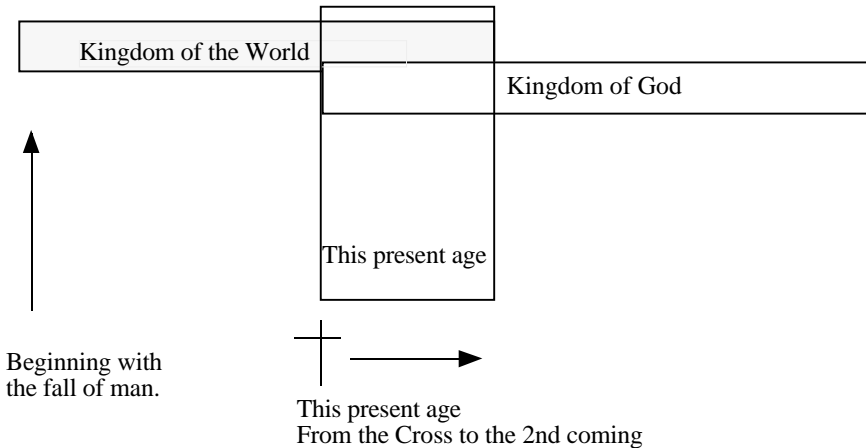
Satan is the prince of this world system. Jesus is King of the Kingdom of God. Jesus defeated Satan at the Cross. If you read the end of the Book (Bible), the Kingdom of God prevails. However, God has made it our privilege to bring the final victory of the Kingdom to our realm of influence.

“...Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel”(Mark 1:14,15). “But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:27).

We have the opportunity and the privilege to operate in the Kingdom of God right now on earth before we die. “And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come” (Hebrews 6:5).

We do not have room here in this chapter, or even in this entire book, to do an entire teaching on the Kingdom of God. Suffice it to say, the Kingdom of God is not a geographical place or location. It is not a place where we go when our body dies. The Kingdom of God co-exists right here and now with the world that we can see with our eyes. It is the invisible realm where God rules, and where believers have an opportunity to be subjects to the King and to be co-rulers.

Both kingdoms are co-existing during this age.



We need to know that whatever pressures or difficulty we are going through will be a new door for us to go deeper into the Kingdom of God. It will also bring Kingdom victory into our realm of influence.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). The word for “poor” is *ptocheuo*. Strongs Concordance defines it as “beggar, no way out, perplexed, without resources, realizes his inferior position, indigent.” When the world's kingdom fails you, then you capable of finding the Kingdom of God. This includes the afterlife and the present life. When I knew for sure that I had no control over where I went after I died, I was poor, and God’s Kingdom came upon me for that need. When I knew for sure that I was poor for my child’s healing, God’s Kingdom came upon us.

God’s Kingdom is still coming on me as I am confronted with new ways of being “poor” all the time. Do I enjoy it? No! Am I glad for it? Yes! It brings me deeper into the Kingdom, it brings me more into the presence of God through the fellowship of His sufferings, and it does some serious business for the church.

Each time we overcome bad situations, we gain more spiritual authority. **How do we reach that goal?** Only by traveling the pathway from pressure to enlargement, from poverty to enrichment. In the Book of Daniel, the three Hebrew children were in the pressure of the fiery furnace. Rather than finding a door out of the furnace, the Fourth Man found His way in. But the result was that the influence of God was expanded. God allowed trial upon trial to press upon Job, but his trials only pressed him to God’s goal. To John, the Isle of Patmos seemed like pressure that no one would want; yet it was the vehicle for the Revelation of who Jesus really is.

Revelation 21:21 tells us that the “gates” of heavenly Jerusalem, the Kingdom of God, are made from pearl. A process in the oyster that starts with pain develops pearl. First, a wound occurs in the shell and a piece of sand enters which causes irritation. Second, the oyster’s body responds by secreting a substance that coats the sand making its surface smooth. Then the result is a beautiful jewel. Revelation 21 tells us that most of the Kingdom is made up of other precious jewels which in the natural earth are developed by being under much pressure in the earth.

“The Christian life is a process of deliverance out of one world into another, and ‘death,’ as has been truly said, ‘is the only way out of any world in which we are.’”¹¹

The Christian life is not like the world. The world works on improvement and upward mobility. The Kingdom of God works on the principle of resurrection. Without death, resurrection is not possible. The Christian life, therefore, works on death first and resurrection second. Poverty and pressure are not the end, they are simply the doorways to abundant life! We need to remember that we are building a kingdom for God that is eternal, and whose elements are out of the reach of the world and Satan. Only what has passed through death qualifies. This is indicated in Romans 6:9-10 and many other Scriptures.

“For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God” (Romans 6:9,10).

So far I have given you a lot of theory and Scripture. Now I want to make this practical and something that you can use for your everyday life.

Our lives with God seem to go through cycles or a process that looks like the following.

a. Need. We encounter a desperate situation and realize that it is beyond our ability to resolve it.

b. Promise. We go to God through the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit and we receive His promise as the Word-seed planted in our heart. Mark 4:11 says that this process is *the mystery* of the Kingdom of God.

c. Tribulation. As in Mark chapter 4, Satan comes to steal the Word of promise that has been planted in our heart. We feel temptations from our flesh, from the cares of the world and from all kinds of lies that are thrown at us through circumstances and “thought bombs.” During this time, standing on the Word causes great pressure. During this tribulation our old “self,” the generational nature that we inherited from Adam, passes away and the new nature of Christ takes over in us.

¹¹ _____, The Refiner’s Fire, Volume II, World Challenge, Lindale, TX., page 106.

d. We come to the end of our own strength. We try to remain patient, but we feel like we just can't make it. We feel like giving up. This is suffering. Our solution is to rest in the Word of God. A more complete teaching on this is in our series, "Grow or Die."¹²

Quite often, there is even a sense of disappointment with God because He does not resolve the situation in the way we thought He would. We feel abandoned. If we are going through our own crucifixion, then we need to know two things. First, we do not have enough hands to nail ourselves to the cross, and second, feeling forsaken by God is a part of the process.

e. God takes you up. It seems like we go through a sort of "rapture" when God takes us up to sit with Him in heavenly places. We experience a new and fresh measure of His presence. We receive revelation that we are on track with God, and that everything will be all right. This really helps our emotions. We receive His peace which passes understanding.

f. Separation from world. There is an involuntary separation from the things and resources of the world system. We are no longer looking to man or institutions to deliver us. We know that we cannot deliver ourselves. We know it is God and God alone in His timing and in His way that will deliver us. We become helpless like children waiting on their daddy to provide.

g. Awareness of the Kingdom. Each time we go through this cycle, we become more aware of the spiritual world, the Kingdom of God, and the satanic powers of the world system.

h. Deliverance. God comes through in His timing and in His way. We see His Hand working. It is not the way we expected. It accomplishes much more than we anticipated. We see that we have taken up our cross and that we are different.

3. Proving. First we talked about spiritual warfare and then we talked about entering the Kingdom of God; now we are going to the third item, which is proving. "These [fiery trials] have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be **proved** genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Peter 1:7).

¹² International School of the Bible publishes Grow or Die. ISBN # 0-9676731-0-0. Email info@isob-bible.org for information.

The word “prove” is a word used in the refining of gold and silver. To prove means to put gold in the fire so that the dross and impurities are burned off. The result is that the gold is more valuable and becomes pure. When we are proven, our old fleshly and worldly ways are burned off and God has proven that we are useful in His service. As we mentioned before, there is always a war, some suffering, and some spiritual tension when you decide that God will be your provider. It is like a “tearing” away from one god to the Living God (Acts 14:22). Jesus said in John 17:18 that He is sending us into the world in the same way He was sent, through spiritual warfare and difficulties.

This refining can also be described as the “breaking of our flesh,” which is our old nature and soul power. Sometimes our self-sufficiency can only be diminished through this proving process. “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain” (John 12:24). The outer shell of the grain must be broken in order for the seed to bear fruit. Our outer shell is the self-sufficient soul, our soul power.

Finally.

When the Israelites came out of Egypt through the Red Sea, one of their first stops in the desert was at a pool of water called Marah, which means “bitter.” The water was not fit to drink, as it was full of heavy minerals. The people were very thirsty and began to murmur. Moses asked God what to do. The Lord showed Moses a particular tree that he was to cast into the bitter water. When he did, the waters were made sweet. Exodus 15:25 says, “And he cried unto the LORD; and the LORD showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he **proved** them” (Exodus 15:25). Notice the word “proved.”

The tree is symbolic of the Cross of Jesus Christ, which when cast into our bitter situations, makes them sweet. The story also encourages us to seek the Lord to find out exactly which “tree” to throw into our bitter situations. Moses could have chosen any tree in the woods, and it would not have had the effect of the one God told him to choose. In other words, when we find bitterness in our lives, we need to get close to God so that we can hear Him tell us exactly which step to take next; which doctor to pursue, which medicine to take, which job to take, etc.

Exodus 15:26 contains the first part of your promise with a big “IF”. It says, “He said, ‘If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his

commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you” (Exodus 15:26).

Exodus 15:27 contains your deliverance, and it says, “Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water” (Exodus 15:27).

The Kingdom of God, in type, was shown in Elim. Elim had twelve fresh springs of water, twelve being symbolic of the Kingdom of God, and seventy palm trees, surely a place of shade, comfort and blessing. The word Elim means strength by virtue of something being twisted.

There was a door, an open door that led to Elim. It was called Marah, the pool of bitter waters. When the tree, the Cross, was applied to the bitter circumstances, the result was strength in Kingdom work.

The story infers that there will be suffering before the goal is reached. We are encouraged to hang on and to be an overcomer. It infers that the open door of bitterness will lead to things of the Kingdom of God, probably ministry, as a pillar in the Temple of God.

Paul said, “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead” (2 Corinthians 1:8,9).