

Responding to Suffering

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A tornado leaves devastation and death in its wake. Yet another shoot-out kills young people in school. Or a serial killer gets away with kidnapping and murdering another child. Perhaps you've wondered, **"God, why don't you prevent these tragedies?"**

The truth is that God could intervene. The Bible teaches that He is sovereign, no matter what happens. But many times, He chooses to allow evil people the freedom to destroy life, or He lets nature destroy an entire region. As believers, what should our response be when adversity, unexpected tragedy, or suffering comes?



Reaffirm your position in Christ. Remind yourself of who you are and what you have in Christ. It helps to do this out loud. You can say something like this:

I know that I am a child of God. I am saved. I have been placed into Christ. I am sealed with the Holy Spirit. My eternal destiny is determined, and nothing can change that. The Lord will never leave me nor forsake me. Nothing can touch me apart from what my heavenly Father allows. All things will work together for my good since I love God and have been called according to His purpose in Christ.

These truths are essential to maintaining the right perspective on adversity. Self-esteem and confidence in God are usually the two things most affected by tragedy: **"How could God allow this to happen?"** In moments of despair, you need a strong dose of truth to relieve your troubled heart.

Ask God to remove the adversity from your life.

This is usually where we begin, but it is best to ask after we have regained some perspective. In **2 Corinthians 12:8-9**, Paul asked that his adversity be removed. Although God did not answer that request, He did not chastise him for it. Neither will He be displeased by your request. Even your prayer for mercy is an expression of dependence and faith.

Reaffirm the promise of God's sustaining grace.

God may not choose to remove adversity from your life immediately. When that happens, it's important for you to rely on His grace rather than your own strength. People who try to endure suffering in their own strength collapse under the weight of it all. Right up front, admit you do not have the power to withstand the pressure. Cry out to God for mercy. He will hear you. His grace will be sufficient moment by moment to get you through.

Thank God for this unique opportunity to grow spiritually.

You must look for God's part in your adversity, or you'll miss it. You are not simply to endure suffering; you are to grow and mature through it. The best way to develop this attitude is to thank Him every day for the spiritual growth He is bringing about in your life.

Receive adversity as if it were from God.

Believe it or not, it doesn't matter if the adversity you are facing originated with Satan or God. Most of the time, you don't know for sure who's behind your suffering. If God is behind it, He's going to use it for your good. If Satan is behind it, you know he works under God's supervision. God has a purpose for each difficulty He allows.

When you respond to adversity as if it were from Satan, the tendency is to fight it. When it lingers you may begin to doubt God. So, as long as God is accomplishing His purpose through the adversity in your life, receive it as if it were from Him. Regardless of who initiated it, God is in it! His grace will be sufficient for you.

Read and meditate on Scriptures describing the adversity God's servants faced.

Read the story of Joseph. Look at the way God provided for Abraham when he was left with the least desirable land. Imagine how foolish Noah felt while building the ark. The Bible contains illustration after illustration of God's faithfulness in adverse circumstances.

Fill your mind with these truths. Ask God to open your eyes to the human side of these characters so you can identify with their pain and sorrow. Then, dwell on Christ's promise to care for those who love Him. (See [Matt. 6:25-34](#).) Just as He was faithful to those whose stories are in the Old and New Testaments, He will also demonstrate His faithfulness to you.

Suffering is unavoidable. It comes without warning. It takes us by surprise. It can shatter or strengthen us. The outcome does not hinge on the nature of our adversity, but on the nature of our response. If your heart's desire is to see God glorified through you, adversity will not take you down for the count.

When tragedy hits, devote time to praying for those who are suffering. Respond wisely and compassionately to others who question why God would allow such evil. Keep a heavenly perspective on this life and the life to come, and you will emerge victorious in the end.