

WHAT YOU  
SHOULD KNOW  
ABOUT SUFFERING

by Jonathan

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# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT SUFFERING

by Jonathan

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## I. MISGUIDED REASONINGS

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### PRESSING QUESTIONS AND EXCLAMATIONS OF OUR TIME

“If there is a God, why does He allow so much suffering and pain?”

“Christians can talk about how great and sovereign God is, but if He is really that sovereign, why doesn’t He eliminate all the ills affecting humanity?”

“God took my baby away! What have I done to deserve this?”

“I just can’t conceive how a good and loving God can allow innocent little children to die of disease!”

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Indeed, these are some of the most pressing questions and exclamations of our time. Whether these sentiments are actually mouthed vocally or merely pondered within the heart makes little difference because these sentiments are genuine and valid. Have you ever wondered why God *fail to* intervene in situations that so “desperately” needed attention?

I think you have. Alright, I hope to answer some of these life’s haunting questions within this message.

## II. WHEN GOD CREATED MAN...

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### HE CREATED HIM PERFECT

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We are told that when God created man, He created him perfect. Man was not created evil. And God entrusted man to rule the earth (though I must state that God retains the ownership of the earth). In other words, man was given “the key” to control and to have dominion over the earth- “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” (Genesis 1:26).

In this perfect environment under God’s canopy, man was totally and absolutely free from the domination of Satan. It was a world without suffering, pain, evil, sickness, disease, heartache or sorrow. What a paradise it was! In fact, the scripture speaks of “the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Genesis 3:8).

### GOD ALLOWED MAN TO HAVE A UNIQUE ATTRIBUTE

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In God’s creation of man, man was allowed a will of his own. And with this incorporated faculty, man has the power of free choice. In Genesis 2:16-17, we read, “And the LORD God commanded the man saying, of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die”. Now, the point of it all is this: Adam and Eve can choose to obey God by not partaking of the fruit of that tree- or they can choose to rebel against Him and reap the consequences of death (the immediate result being separation from God and in time to come, physical and eternal death as well). I realize that

whenever we talk of death, we would normally think of it in the physical sense (which in the limited sense is correct!) BUT really, in the light of the BIBLE, physical death is merely a symptom of spiritual death and eternal separation from God. Dear friend, I have to explain this with clarity in the event that you do not quite understand what God was meaning when He talk of “death”, as in Genesis 2:17.

## **ADAM COMMITTED HIGH TREASON**

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When Adam disregarded the command of God (through yielding to the suggestion of Satan), he was in essence CHOOSING to openly rebel and disobey God. Through this act of disobedience, Adam also gave his dominion and “the key” to rule the earth to Satan. Now, instead of Adam having dominion over the earth (which God had actually given to him- according to Genesis 1:26), Satan gains an “upper hand” and has become the god of this world. The reason why Satan has become the god of this world is because Adam allowed him to- through the power of free choice. Had Adam chosen to obey God, it would be a paradise forever- BUT he lost it! Alright, allow me to say that while Adam had NO moral right whatsoever to disobey God, he did have the legal right to do so BUT in doing so, he would forfeit his dominion over the earth.

### III. THE THIEF COMETH...

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#### TO STEAL, AND TO KILL, AND TO DESTROY

“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy... ”  
(John 10:10).

“Every good gift and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17).

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Before we attempt to consider the nature and course of suffering, it would do us well to note that the author of suffering is Satan; and not God. It is indeed sad whenever the news media carrying reports of the occurrences of catastrophe or disaster around the world would sometimes seem to suggest, “An act of God!” (or somewhere along this line)”. But friend, I would have you know that this is grossly misleading; for we are told in John 10:10 that it is actually Satan who is in this business of wrecking this planet and its inhabitants.

#### THE INFLUENCE OF SIN

“For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

“Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same” (Job 4:8).

“I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live... ” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

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While it is true that the author of suffering is Satan, we must at the same time not overlook the area or the part whereby man himself is responsible for facilitating suffering in the world. There is a price to pay

for every wrong choice or decision that the human race makes and this has an ever compounding effect. I think you see this point. We do not shudder to say that the freedom of choice is the Creator's great gift to the human race. Having said this, I suppose that some would take issue and say, "If God knew that there would be so much suffering and evil in this world as a result of man's wrong decision, why did He allow man a will of his own in the first place?" Alright, did God made a mistake? Is God guilty? By no means! You see, man's carnal and finite reasonings may often appear convincing, but always remember, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12). Nevertheless, I am concerned that there may be others who have an honest attempt to faith, even though answers hasn't come easy for them. It is with this regard for this category of people that I propose that we consider the arguments that follow...

#### IV. LAWSUIT AGAINST GOD?

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##### **"GOD COULD HAVE CREATED MAN INCAPABLE OF SINNING."**

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Certainly, God could have created man incapable of sinning, but wouldn't this make us more like puppets, or robots or slaves?

To illustrate this point, let us consider this for moment: Man now has the capability to program a computer to where that computer follow exactly what that program dictates, but that computer is after all, lifeless. It has no feeling, no emotion. Would we like to be created as such?

Also, I am convinced that God's design for the human race was the ultimate expression of His love. You see, being able to fellowship with man was God's intended purpose and desire. But again, He simply does

not force or program any man to worship Him. Man worships and love God through free volition. Thank God though, I am thrilled that for those of us who love and trust Him, we most certainly *want* to praise and worship Him!

## **“WOULDN’T IT BE IDEAL FOR MAN TO BE FREE FROM TEMPTATION?”**

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First of all, you should know that God is not responsible for all the tempting, this is Satan’s role. Still, I firmly believe that God can *use* the temptations instigated by Satan in aiding our moral development. Why do I say this?

You see, there is simply no other avenue to assess how an individual will act or react unless he is tested. Would it surprise you to find out that Jesus was “led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil?” (Matthew 4:1). In fact, not even Jesus was exempted from temptation even though I would quickly say that He was victorious through His sufferings- “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are, yet* without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Therefore, I think there is no excuse for any individual to complain, “God, you are unfair, you do not understand the temptations that I am facing!”

Indeed, Jesus suffered and He was an example to us, “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:” (1 Peter 2:21). Many times, when we are beset with difficulties and problems, it is easy for us to think we are all alone in our situations. We are so overwhelmed by our circumstances so much so that we forget that Christ is our benefactor, who suffered and thus understands the trials that we face. Remember, Christ was made perfect through suffering and if we will allow God, we too, can grow and mature spiritually through suffering. Being all too



human, it is understandable that we do not appreciate testing. But Ephesians 6:16 gives us the key to victory, that we are to take “the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked” (Ephesians 6:16).

I would also like to leave you with this spiritual food for thought, “If it weren’t for our trials, how would we become overcomers?” (perhaps, you should read Revelation Chapters 2 and 3 whereby Christ places the emphasis on the need to overcome in the living of the Christian Faith).

### **“WHY DOES THE TREACHEROUS SEEM TO FLOURISH WHILE THE INNOCENT ARE OFTEN VICTIMIZED?”**

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To better answer this question, let us recall our earlier discussion where we dealt with how Adam gave his dominion to rule the earth to Satan. In essence, he “traded lords”. When he disobeyed God, he lost his God-given dominion over the earth. Consequently, we are reaping the results of the fall. Satan has become “the god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4). We look around us. We see the Herods, the Hitlers, ... (the list goes on) and it is easy for us to resign to the belief that it is the evil men that seem to prevail. In the natural, it would appear that any attempt to do good in the face of rampant and widespread evil is an all-too-futile and defeated effort. Yet, find just one Apostle Paul, one Charles Finney, one David Wilkerson... and that one will frustrate (if not eliminate) the all-too-pervading evil schemes of hell. Allow me to illustrate this point. Now, all of us who believe in Christ Jesus are in essence, the products of Paul’s ministry in preaching the Gospel. Today, about two thousand years later, the efforts began by Paul (and other disciples) in taking the Gospel of Jesus Christ is still being carried out. In fact, it is the most important work on the face of the earth and it will continue to be so. It is certainly the ONLY work that has eternal impact.

To cite another case, do you realize that there was a day when Satan thought he had an “upper hand” in influencing the rest of humanity, when men had become so depraved that the Lord determined to destroy the human race? (Genesis 6:1-7). Do you see what it would have been for the eternal destiny of the human race, I suspect, if not for a man called Noah? Do you understand this significance? Thank God! In the midst of that desperately corrupt age, there was Noah. Surrounded by ungodly people, Noah’s life shone with righteousness (Genesis 6:8-9).

You see, while evil thrives in all its hellishness, it must be said that it will last but for a moment. *On the surface*, it does seem that the treacherous are flourishing, but do not ever forget that this is only temporary. What finally matters is the eventual and eternal consequence. Are you living life with an eternal perspective? Are you trusting in Jesus, who said, “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly?” (John 10:10).

## THE TWO SIDES OF A COIN IN SUFFERING

“Therefore also will I make *thee* sick in smiting thee, in making *thee* desolate because of thy sins” (Micah 6:13).

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it*” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

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We want to make this clear: God is not the author of suffering or sickness; Satan is. However, the question is sometimes raised, “Hasn’t there been people who turn to God as a result of suffering?” Yes, this is a possibility that I do not deny. But on “the other side of the coin”, there are also others who gets bitter with God even to the extent of cursing

Him (even though they fail to realize that it is Satan, and not God, who caused their sufferings).

## V. MUST CHRISTIANS SUFFER?

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### WHAT SUFFERING FOR THE LORD IS NOT

“But he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

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When the Word of God speaks of suffering for the believer, it doesn’t imply “sickness”. Legally-speaking, we believe that deliverance from sickness is provided for us in the atonement and is a privilege of all believers (Isaiah 53:4-5, Matthew 8:16-17 and James 5:14-16). As such, it is erroneous for believers, when they are sick, to say that they are suffering for the Lord. Still, the problem that besets many Christians is with the battle of sickness in this life. Though this is difficult to understand, it is essential that we keep our faith in Christ strong and firm. Rather than groaning and complaining, we should continue to pray and believe in faith for the healing to take place. When we stand upon the Word of God and trust His provision of healing through the death of Jesus Christ, we can steadfastly expect answers to this our need. Another confusion amongst Christians is to equate the chastening of the Lord (read Hebrews 12) with sickness. They believe that they are chastened when sick and yet they know nothing in particular that they have done. In all truth, the chastening of the Lord in the life of the believer, I believe, is primarily through God’s Word and through the witness of the Holy Spirit. It is the Word of God that convicts, rebukes and hence “chasten” the believer of sin- “All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for

correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

I will leave you with these questions,

“Would an earthly parent allow the child to suffer bodily, in so much as it is possible?”

“How then, would a loving Heavenly Father, bear to see His children sick?” (Matthew 7:7-11, Luke 11:9-13).

### **WHAT SUFFERING FOR THE LORD IS**

“And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life” (Mark 10:29-30).

“And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are* not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:17-18).

“Blessed *be* God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope of you *is* stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so *shall ye be* also of

the consolation. For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that we will yet deliver *us*; Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift *bestowed* upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf” (2 Corinthians 1:3-11).

“*We are* troubled on every side, yet not distressed: *we are* perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body” (2 Corinthians 4:8-10).

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

“Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory” (Ephesians 3:13).

“Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church:” (Colossians 1:24).

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (James 1:2-4).

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory

shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy *are ye*, for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or *as* a thief, or *as* an evil-doer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if *any man suffer* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (1 Peter 4:12-16).

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle *you*. To him *be* glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." (1 Peter 5:8-11).

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Having dealt with the needless sufferings Christians bear, we want now to focus on the sufferings that we *can* expect to face as we live this Christian life. Yes, there are sufferings that we will still encounter even though we may walk in the ways of God and be conformed to His will. Sometimes, certain ministers of the Gospel would have us believe that if we are in the will of God, all our problems will be eliminated. This, while it sounds appealing, just isn't true. The reason why I am certain of this is because of numerous examples of mighty men of God who suffered difficulties even though they followed God so very closely. For instance, I think of Peter and John who had to suffer imprisonment. Then I think of Jeremiah, who was thrown into a dungeon. Their "crimes"? For delivering God's message.

So, as you can see, being committed to following God is no assurance of a life that is storm-free. More often than not, Biblical examples indicates that the reverse situation is far more probable.

## LESSONS FROM THE PRAYER OF PAUL

“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).

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Does it occur to you, that while Paul was in prison, he did *not* consciously seek release from prison. Instead, his prayer was, “That I may know him” (Philippians 3:10). Now, this may sound strange. Paul, I am sure, must have witnessed numerous miracles as he minister the Gospel. He must have seen the mighty power of God like few other men. Yet, miracles aside, his prayer was to know the Master in an even more intimate way. In other words, he desired a deeper walk with God, a deeper communion with Him. This was the utmost cry of his heart.

Then Paul speaks of the power of His resurrection. I believe that this is closely related to his battle or “thorn in the flesh”. In effect, he was saying, “I want to put to death the flesh so that I may be victorious in the spirit!” We are, in fact, told in the verses following, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing I *do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12-14). This should not surprise you and me when we consider the fact that the flesh is often the prime hindrance to our spiritual development.

Yet, perhaps, there is nothing more overwhelming to indicate Paul’s Christlikeness than to hear him say, “...the fellowship of his sufferings” (Philippians 3:10). This, unquestionably, is a man of God who has endured persecution and opposition to where he is able to make such a statement. When I think of this, I realized the great debt that I owe to Paul. Now, please don’t misunderstand. I am not speaking of Paul

“suffering for my sins”. This is the *completed* work of CHRIST AND CHRIST ALONE. But what I speak of is this: Paul had to labour in order to accomplish the work of God- and he succeeded as no man could. Subsequently, there has got to be others who were willing to carry on this task as Paul “passed his baton” to them. *Somewhere and somehow* (down through the centuries until this day), there has got to be individuals who have the burden to reach lost souls with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You can’t get people saved by just “sitting”. You see, I ask myself, “Had Paul (as well as many others through the centuries, for that matter) not laboured for the Gospel the way that he did, there is a possibility that I may not be saved today”. Now, I know that is quite a statement and I will leave it just there. Similarly, I believe God will hold us accountable for the lost souls of our lifetime if we are indifferent to the fulfilling of the Great Commission of Jesus Christ in our lives. Are you understanding this?

To reiterate, there is a fellowship of His sufferings for the earnest child of God. There are sacrifices to be made. And there is a price to pay- but it is one that will make a difference both for now and for all eternity. Paul, as well as many labourers of the Gospel, entered this fellowship of Christ’s sufferings. We too, *will* experience intense opposition as we make an active stand for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Perhaps, some of you, my Christian friends, have endured abuse, reproach and sarcasm because of your Christian stand and witness. You feel that you are out of place in the midst of your unbelieving acquaintances. You are rejected. You hurt deeply. Now, in essence, you are entering into the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings. As difficult and as bad as your situation may be right now, do take comfort and strength from the Word of God. God wants you to know that He is with you- “What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us?” (Romans 8:31). He knows and understands your trials.



Jesus is saying, “ ...I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5).

## VI. A DAY IS COMING...

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### WHEN GOD HIMSELF WILL PUT A FINAL END TO ALL SUFFERING AND PAIN

“For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only *they*, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, *to wit*, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:22-23).

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God has put up with “the god of this world” for centuries. However, God Himself will put a final end to all suffering and pain that is caused by Satan. Yes, my friend, that day is coming and we can be certain that whatever the Word of God says, it will surely come to pass.

I want to close with Revelation 21:1-7 and it reads,

“AND I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and

Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son”.

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B-0004

# ATTENTION, FRIEND: THIS IS GOOD NEWS!

Dear Friend,

We want to take this opportunity to show you God's plan of salvation, according to the Bible. We believe the Bible is the inspired and only infallible and authoritative written Word of God.

If you are not a Christian and you read this, here's an appeal for you to accept Jesus as your Lord and Saviour. To be included in this invitation, you must have a relationship with Jesus Christ, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. The choice is yours. If you say "yes" to Jesus, here's what you must do,

Admit the fact that you are a sinner, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23);

Be willing to repent from disobedience and rebellion against God, "...except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3);

Believe that Jesus is your only Saviour, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16);

Confess, trust and receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9-10).

Please pray this prayer and do mean it with all of your heart:

**"Dear Lord Jesus, I now recognize that I am a sinner and I am in need of salvation. I accept the sacrifice You paid for me on the cross of Calvary and I allow Your precious shed blood to cleanse me. I now surrender myself to You and invite You to be my Lord and Saviour. Please come into my heart. Take full control of my life and help me to live and serve You from this moment forward. I ask in the name of Jesus. Amen."**

If you prayed this prayer in all sincerity, you are now a child of God. We encourage you to find fellowship in a Bible-believing, Spirit-filled church and obtain a copy of the Bible and that you read it diligently so that you will be the kind of Christian God wants you to be.

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT SUFFERING

“If there is a God, why does He allow so much suffering and pain?”

“Christians can talk about how great and sovereign God is, but if He is really that sovereign, why doesn’t He eliminate all the ills affecting humanity?”

“God took my baby away! What have I done to deserve this?”

“I just can’t conceive how a good and loving God can allow innocent little children to die of disease!”

Indeed, these are some of the most pressing questions and exclamations of our time. Whether these sentiments are actually mouthed vocally or merely pondered within the heart makes little difference because these sentiments are genuine and valid. Have you ever wondered why God *fail to* intervene in situations that so “desperately” needed attention?

I think you have. Alright, I hope to answer some of these life’s haunting questions within this message.

- Jonathan

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