

# Accepting Adversity and Tragedy

## Lesson 9 Personal Trials and Suffering Biblical Background

### Introduction

In lessons 4 – 6 we examined large-scale tragedies that, generally speaking, have no direct effect on the quality of our lives. In the last two lessons (7 and 8), we brought our consideration closer to home as we looked at the adversities suffered by our families or friends. In this and the next lesson, our focus will be on ourselves: what do I struggle with, what are my personal trials, and how do I deal with them.

This is a broader topic than the previous lessons. Many things that affect us personally, we would not even notice if they occurred to strangers. We might not even be aware when our own family endures the same trials. Remember the Biblical examples from lesson 7 and the types of tragedies suffered by their loved ones that prompted their actions or grief: death of a child, death of a relative, life threatening diseases and life altering handicaps. Contrast this to the list below of Biblical people who endured a much wider array of problems on a personal basis.

### Bible Examples of Personal Suffering

As we saw in lesson 7, the Bible is a book about real people who suffered real sorrow and pain. Examine the following accounts and answer the questions:

1. Jacob is Cheated      Genesis 29:15-30
  - a. How did Jacob respond?
  - b. Did God have a deeper purpose in Jacob's adversity
  
2. Hannah's Barrenness and Oppression      I Samuel 1:1-11
  - a. From what did she suffer? What were the sources?
  - b. How did she respond?
  - c. What eventually happened (I Samuel 1:18-20)?
  
3. Woman with an Issue of Blood Mark 5:24-34
  - a. How long and to what extent did she suffer?
  
4. Paul's Thorn in the Flesh      II Corinthians 12:7-10
  - a. What was the purpose of his suffering?

- b. What did Paul do?
  - c. Read II Corinthians 11:26-29
5. Joseph's Travails
    - a. If you know the story, list the trials of Joseph and how God used them to good effect:
  6. David is Pursued      I Samuel 23:15-29
    - a. Read Psalms 69 to understand David's attitude when oppressed.
  7. Job Loses Everything
  8. Manasseh Loses His Position and Freedom      II Chronicles 33:10-13
    - a. What did Manasseh learn?
  9. Bartimaeus's Blindness      Mark 10:46-52
    - a. How persistent was Bartimaeus?
  10. Zedekiah Loses His Family and Sight      II Chronicles 36:13, II Kings 25:6-7
    - a. Why did this happen to Zedekiah? Could it have been avoided?

### **Lessons Learned**

While our attention has narrowed from the tragedies of the world to the difficulties we face as individuals, the lessons we have learned along the way still have application. In our next lesson, we will look at additional Biblical principles to help us understand and accept our personal trials, but first look again at some points we have previously covered:

#### 1. Paradox of Pain

James tells us to count it all joy when we meet various trials. He even describes the good result that will occur from facing the trials (James 1:2-4). We will spend time in lesson 10, seeing how this can be true, but it is reassuring to note that, despite the benefits of trials, God approves of our desire to avoid pain and to seek relief. Look over the Biblical examples above and list the individuals who sought deliverance from their hardship:

Based on these examples, we can use physical resources (doctors, medicines, etc.) for relief, but we should also note the solace provided from our spiritual family, and, of course, we are to pray for God's help. James speaks of calling for the elders in a

time of sickness (James 5:14) and in the previous verse he tells us to pray when we are suffering.

2. Limitation of Answers

Once more we should remind ourselves of the message of Isaiah 55:8,9. We will not understand all of God's ways, and in fact, we often will not even know whether God has acted in a situation or simply allowed it to occur. Nevertheless, there are situations when we will understand why we are suffering. Consider those situations when our suffering results directly from our own sinful or reckless behavior. List the Bible characters above who caused their own suffering:

The suffering often results from the actions of others exercising their free will. List examples from the Bible passages above:

It should also be noted that our difficulties might arise specifically because we are Christians (Matthew 5:10-11). While there is consolation in that fact (Matthew 5:12), and we certainly should not be surprised by it, it is still difficult to endure.

3. Opportunity to Set an Example

Remember the world is watching. Our patient endurance in times of hardship will draw attention, and will give us opportunities to explain our faith in Christ. This may be one aspect of walking wisely among those outside the body of Christ - being able to answer everyone (Colossians 4:5-6).