

# Good Grief

## Seeing Through Affliction

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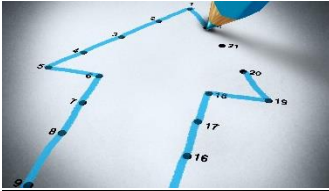
Today we're tackling the tough *questions* behind the rough stuff in *life* by looking *deeper* to learn the *difference* between *hurtful* and *helpful*. So, to get started, I want you to think through *all* the answers to *this* question: **What hasn't killed you?** Well, based on you making it to church today, I can answer this one for you – *everything!* *Nothing* has killed you yet; so way to go! Cuz that means you've **SURVIVED** *everything* this world has thrown at you your *whole* life! *And* who you are *now* – including all of your strength, wisdom, and trust is the living proof of what happens when you put a human through everything *you've* ever had to experience. So now, the question is: **if it didn't kill you, did it make you stronger?** That is how the *saying* goes, so was it *all* good?



[Well, as Christians, we know] All things God works **for the good** of those who love Him – Romans 8:28 NIV



So we believe life's all *good* when life's all *God*; cuz that's the *promise*. But, just because something *is* good, doesn't mean it *feels* good, that's the *bummer!* And apparently God created vegetables to teach us that lesson from childhood! So how do we *know* when our afflictions *are* good and godly? Cuz I felt for that **BLIND** beggar we talked about last week who had to live his whole life being told his *pain* was his *fault* before Jesus started setting people straight; remember:



As [Jesus] went along, He saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened **so that the works of God might be displayed in him.** – John 9:1-3 NIV



So not only was it *not* his fault, but it *was* for God's glory! *That's* the reason – and *this* guy had to hang out and wait until *this* stage in his life before being given the nod that all his grief was good and *from* God !

And **THAT'S** the sight we all want as believers more than anything – clarity on human disparity! And finding the purpose in the way God's working, sure helps us handle the hard stuff! Cuz **in a God-glorifying heart affliction is our means to God's end.** While **in a God-denying heart our affliction is our end to God's means.** So you lost your job, broke your leg, and had a fight... do you feel God working *with* or *against* you? It's **TOUGH** – because like Bruce pointed out, even the blind beggar wasn't ever *abandoned* by God, he was *sent*; but to be honest, it can *feel* the same.

So how do we see through our affliction as not *just* hurtful, but *helpful*? Like any change of habit, it takes deliberate effort. **We gotta practice a perspective of purpose.** And to make that easier, we need to know *how* to look for God's handiwork. So to train your heart to see God's part, let's talk about three common things God might be growing in your affliction: **strength, wisdom, and trust.**

First good godly **affliction gives strength through struggle.**



You ever think about hiring a personal **TRAINER**? *Why?* Well, it's their job to get the most out of making you sweat! They educate and encourage you to get you to take on more than you ever would on your *own*. And we *pay* them to push us farther than we thought possible to develop qualities we don't possess. Which is why they never say, *"Alright, hit the couch, grab the remote, and lets see how far we can get through this bag of chips!"* You're already an expert at that cuz you've trained for it your whole life!

But if we ever want something better than what we were born with, **we must push past our comfortable capacity** to increase our ability! And that takes someone *else* adding weight when *you* would rather quit. So we need to see our **STRUGGLE** against the weight of *this world* as the purposeful personal training of a God who sees a super-natural capacity in you. The way James says:

Consider it **pure joy**, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. – James 1:2-4 NIV

Whenever the weight of this world is too much, it tears us apart... a little. But whether physical *or* spiritual, there's a type of **TEAR** we can *repair*! When it's just a bit beyond our ability we're wired to adapt and increase automatically. And nobody leads you to that line like the Lord!

**[Cuz]** No temptation has overtaken *you* except what is *common* to mankind. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted *beyond* what you can bear. But when you *are* tempted, He will *also* provide a way out so that you can endure it. – 1 Corinthians 10:12-13 NIV

Y'know, I routinely worked 20-hour days **LONGLINING** in Alaska but one day we were finally catching fish and at around hour 25, the **SKIPPER** said to reset the gear and go again. And after I stopped and politely explained I would physically die, he smiled and said, *"Yeah, but that sun is gonna come up and the part of you that thinks it's tomorrow will just believe it's supposed to keep going!"* And I said, *"Fine, you'll see!"* And he did... as we all finished a 46-hour workday.

And although those muscles withered away, the strength I still have from *knowing* I've handled something so heavy has carried me through lots of other hardships. So if you're having a hard time putting purpose to your present pain, remember, **God knows what you're capable of better than you do** and as your loving Dad, he wants to help train you to show *you* how *strong* you are.

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as His children ... No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but *painful*. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been *trained* by it. – Hebrews 12:7,11 NIV

We all want strength; the problem is just wanting the *discipline* it takes to attain it. But luckily:

Good godly **affliction teaches wisdom through want.**



Nothing puts your priorities into perspective like losing control of your life. And nothing robs you of control like an unexpected affliction. And like lots of us, that's what **JAMIE ATEN** learned when he got diagnosed with cancer. So after a long recovery, he began to *research* how people respond to trauma. And he eventually concluded that the best way to tackle affliction was to "make meaning of your experience". But in studying **DISASTER** survivors, he found *two* ways *believers* did this: one group believed God was *punishing* them and another believed God *saved* them. And *among* them, he learned affliction was much worse for the 'I'm punished people' and easier for the 'I'm saved'. Cuz in the end, those looking for the positive purpose found it faster than the ones seeking a reason for God's wrath. Like the one **MAN** they met who had his roof blown off by a storm but offered this this optimism: "**Sometimes you have to lose the roof to see the stars.**"

Whenever things don't go the way we want, we *all* get to choose which perspective to use when we try to make sense of our affliction and it leads us to this deceptively deep question: **Is God denying our desire to punish or redirecting it to flourish?** Well, we're told:

Though [God] brings grief, He will show compassion, so great is His unfailing love. For He does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone. – Lamentations 3:31-33 NIV

So if *our* affliction and grief is not by *His* choice, it seems **it's up to us when it begins and ends.** And when we shift our perspective to find purpose in *why* we aren't getting what we want, we get the wisdom that changes pain into purpose. Remember when you were a **KID** who hated hot baths, home-cooked meals, and a good night's sleep?! Your parents didn't force them on you as *punishments*, but you were just too focused on what you already wanted to see what was better.

And to this day, a *lot* of our *so-called* afflictions are just like bedtimes, and broccoli, and bathing – nothing bad is happening, but our **growth just feels like it's afflicting when it's conflicting with what we want!** And just as we've *grown* to *crave* what a good meal, hot tub, and warm bed can do for us, we have to learn to accept that our affliction might just be a symptom of wanting the wrong things. God wants us to get what we want, but only gives it if it's helpful and not hurtful. So aligning what *we want* with what *God gives* is how we live in His wisdom; and where we learn:

[God's] Wisdom is more precious than rubies, and **nothing you desire** can compare with *her.* – Proverbs 8:11 NIV

Just think back to all the things you thought you wanted and remember how they didn't solve your problems! And now think back to all the things you knew you didn't want and remember how many surprising blessings they brought. And take a minute to realize: **God's always been building the case for His plan** by proving – sometimes you have to lose *your* roof to see *His* stars!

Because good godly **affliction builds trust through trial.**

Remember, just by *living*, you've never stopped **GROWING** and all the affliction you've ever endured has, one way or another, been part of that process. So when you're lacking the wisdom to see the strengthening in your present pain – **take it on trust!** Cuz by experience you *already* know:

*Blessed is the one who **perseveres under trial** because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord *has promised* to those who love Him. – James 1:12 NIV*



Without taking time to develop a deliberate perspective of purpose, it's easy to miss the meaning in the mundane, but look at your life! Look how far you've come and acknowledge that you already know: **perseverance is progress!** And simply surviving all of your trials *has* led you to suspect there must be a method to the madness and all you really need is the reason you already trust the way God works.



Which logically brings us to **HERMIT** crabs. Because for some reason, scientists could not figure out how to reliably breed them in captivity until **MARY AKERS** built a crabitat as a hobby and solved the problem. Because after taking some home to raise, she got excited when they started laying little eggs and stayed glued to the glass as a hermit crab helicopter parent! So she monitored and adjusted the water, food, light, temperature, and terrain to accommodate their every need. And they all died. So she tried again. And they all died. And as she grew more frustrated, she thought, *"What am I doing wrong?! I mean, these things survive in the ocean – and that's a way harsher environment!"* And something clicked. Maybe they survive *because* of the harsh environment – not in *spite* of it. So she decided to merely *"be the ocean"* and let them endure more difficulty in a new 'hands off' approach. And they all lived.



But think about it, what she discovered is a universal truth that life has been hinting at everywhere all the time: a little **affliction gives strength, builds wisdom, and teaches trust.** So yes, what doesn't kill you does make you stronger, but the bigger takeaway is this: **what doesn't make you stronger, does kill you.** And God loves us too much to coddle us to death. And giving us kids what we want isn't wise because we need to build the strength to survive the harsh reality of an uncompromising truth. The same fine line that exists between mothering and smothering, **EXISTS** between helping and hurting. And **love is always on the side of helping** – even if it takes a more 'hands-off' approach that might *FEEL* like hurt until we develop the strength, wisdom, and trust to know there's a perfect purpose in the way God raises children. So:

*Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something *strange* were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed. – 1 Peter 4:12-13 NIV*

Because when you become part of His family, your story becomes part of His glory. So until then, remember all kids have a hard time handling hurt, but trust that a having a loving Dad means none of this is ever bad; and instead learn to love *Him* until you see it *is* all good cuz it *is* all God!

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Father God, thank You for loving me in spite of my sin; forgive me and cleanse me by the sacrifice of Your Son, my Savior; and free me and lead me by Your Spirit and Word, as I seek to trust and follow Jesus Christ, as the Lord of my life. Amen.