

SUFFERING AND INTERPERSONALISM

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Scripture treats the problem of pain like being disciplined by a parent (Hebrews **12:5-11** < Proverbs **3:5**). Since a personal, all-powerful, all-knowing God controls the universe, everything that happens here he either initiates or allows. Everything that occurs passes through his omniscience, his will, and his power. We can be confident that the experience will not be more than we can handle (1 Corinthians **10:13**).

God's motive for allowing suffering as far up as we can handle serves for our development much as a parent's discipline serves for a child's maturity. Negative experiences impress us with our dependence; they help us develop virtues like humility, patience, respect, and gratitude (Romans **5:2-4**; 1 Corinthians **12:7-10**). They toughen us up and cause us to seek refuge in inner security (or more precisely "inter-security") because we cannot depend on external, natural circumstances. Suffering helps us get priorities straight and rise above our present circumstance. Hard times draw us closer together with those of like faith and like difficulty, and enable us to empathize with others who suffer (2 Corinthians **1:3-4**; Hebrews **2:18**). They give us opportunity to glorify God by allowing us to show that we are not fair-weather friends (1 Peter **1:6-7**).

When we interpersonalize the suffering experience, we conclude that God cares enough for us to provide experiences that drive us back to him and his will. We can take the attitude also that our suffering is light in comparison to other people's pain. Through the incarnation, God in Christ has identified himself with human existence even in suffering and there even to the point of violent death—on a cross, no less; so we can consider it a suffering with Christ (2 Timothy **2:11-13**; Philippians **3:10**). Finally, we are praising God by remaining faithful to him amidst adversity (Job **1:8**; **2:3**).