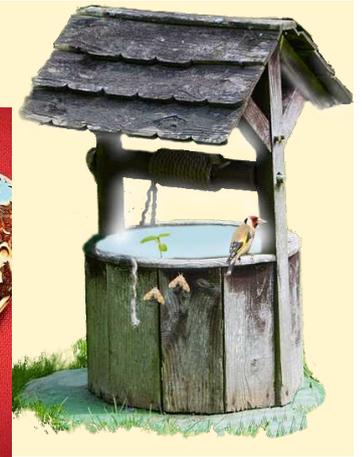


Q. Why might we want to respond well to trials, suffering, etc?

A. To grow as believers, honour God, and help others.

Paul Mallard's book, *Invest Your Suffering*, teaches that suffering, though painful and mysterious, can become a means of deepening intimacy with God and growing in Christ-like character when entrusted to him.



What follows is a biblical methodology for responding well to trials and suffering in their many forms.

1. REMEMBER, SUFFERING, TRIALS, TEMPTATIONS, TESTS ARE ALL NORMAL

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man[kind]. ESV

Daily suffering and trials etc. are normal for everyone, including for Christians:

Luke 9:23 Jesus: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. NIV

But God makes it all work out for our good and his glory (Romans 8:28), especially the events involving human sin, because this demonstrates his grace and sovereignty:

Genesis 50:20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. ESV

Although any trial seems painful rather than pleasant (Hebrews 12:11), James challenges us:

James 1:2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds NIV

Q. Why is it important to 'manage our expectations' of the Christian life well?

Jesus suffered better than we do! Even on the cross:

John 19:26-27 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"

²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. ESV

Our failure to suffer well is made up for by Jesus' loving suffering.

2. DO NOT RESPOND BADLY

God can easily send us more trials if we do not co-operate! Examples of responding badly:

a) Only praying for God to take the trial away. Praying only for healing is bad.

Exercise over./

2 Corinthians 7:7-10 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. *ESV*

Q. How did Paul respond;

how should he have responded;

what was the purpose of the trial?

b) Job's 'comforters' – Bildad and Zophar in Job 8:4; 11:14: 'It's all your fault; you sinned.'

c) Automatically assuming that we are being chastised or even 'punished'.

d) Not considering that we may be being chastised.

e) Feeling that God no longer loves us!

Romans 8:38-39 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

EXAMPLE FROM THE LIFE OF JOSEPH IN EGYPT.

Genesis 39:2 The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master.

Genesis 39:3 His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD caused all that he did to succeed in his hands.

Q. What brief story is in the middle of Genesis 39? Where does Joseph end up?

Genesis 39:21 But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

Genesis 39:23 The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the LORD was with him. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed.

f) Avoiding church and Christians

'Bonz' quote: "When there is trouble, Non-Christians start going to church; Christians stop."

g) When it is other people who are suffering, talk at them a lot? No:

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

h) Refusing to be at peace until we understand what is going on and why (Job?)

- i) Don't just say that you will pray for someone; do it there and then.
- j) Don't offer cheap advice "Cheer up", "Pull yourself together," etc

3. REMEMBER THE BENEFITS OF TRIALS

a) We honour God and benefit his people by keeping on trusting him during trials.

Psalm 73:15 If I had said, "I will speak thus", [envying the wicked]

I would have betrayed the generation of your children. [never mind God himself!]

b) The end product is training (Hebrews 12:7) in righteousness:

Hebrews 12:11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

c) Sometimes, responding well to a trial may even result in it being shortened or removed:

Revelation 3:10 Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.

d) Loss teaches us to trust God instead of idolising the thing lost:

Psalm 63:1 O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you;

my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you,

as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. ESV

Q. What was the back story to Psalm 63, i.e. Where was David? What had he perhaps lost?

e) Remember that perseverance comes only with practice:

Romans 5:3-5 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not let us down; we know this because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. DWL

f) Remember that it is possible to rejoice whilst suffering, bringing glory to God:

Acts 16:24-25 [The jailer] put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

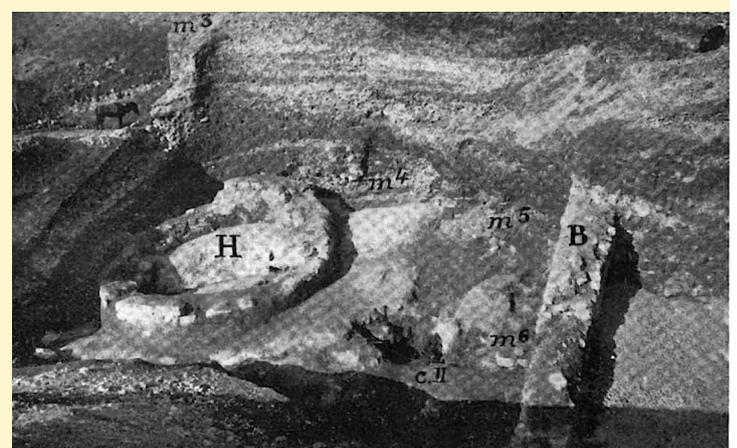
²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ... ESV

This is something that Paul Mallard experienced when he gave the trial to his God.

4. HUMBLE AND EXAMINE YOURSELF UNDER GOD

1 Peter 5:6-7 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

Q. Is he training me or chastising me? It will be one or other, or both.



5. REPENT IF NECESSARY

Luke 13:4-5 Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.’ NIV ¹

a) Any judgement from God should remind us of our own need to repent, whether it is chastisement connected to a particular sin or not. Our consciences will tell us which (Job 27:6; Acts 23:1; Romans 2:15).

b) But anyway, all suffering is some sort of opportunity for growth:

Hebrews 12:7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?² NIV

6. PERSEVERE & WAIT PATIENTLY

a) We must persevere whilst *enduring* whatever our loving Father sends us, as Jesus did:

Hebrews 12:2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. ESV

b) Persevere with making good use of all the means of grace and living holy lives.

c) Keep on *meeting together* - Hebrews 10:25.

d) Pray ‘*Lead us not into temptation*’ every day:

Matthew 26:41 ‘Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.’ NIV

7. HELP OTHERS

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ESV

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 Blessed [i.e. Praised] be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.



If we remember this little methodology, trials will hurt less and benefit us more readily.

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¹ The NIV seems better than 'likewise'. A tower will not necessarily fall on everyone.

² SBL : εἰς παιδείαν ὑπομένετε, ὡς υἱοὶς ...: *Endure for the purpose of discipline, as children ...*