



John Perkins helps you see endurance in suffering as a virtue that makes you more like Christ and produces joy in those who trust Him. You will be encouraged to embrace suffering when it comes, stand alongside others who suffer, and believe that God will repurpose your suffering for good.

Interested in the whole book?  
Select your preferred book seller:

[MOODY PUBLISHERS](#) [AMAZON](#) [WALMART](#) [LIFEWAY](#) [APPLE BOOKS](#) [GOOGLE PLAY](#) [CHRISTIANBOOK.COM](#) [BARNES & NOBLE](#) 

## CONTENTS

Foreword	9
Introduction	13
Prelude: Two Gardens and Suffering	25

### **PART ONE: WHEN SUFFERING CHOOSES YOU**

1. Chosen to Suffer	35
2. The Unanswerable “Why”	45
3. Tested by Suffering	53
4. I See Him	67

### **PART TWO: WHEN YOU CHOOSE SUFFERING**

5. The Case for Suffering	79
6. In His Steps	95
7. Deal with Fear	107

### **PART THREE: JOY COMES IN THE MORNING**

8. He Can Redeem It All!	117
9. My Eyes Are Fixed	125
Conclusion	133
Afterword	139
To Think About and Talk Over	145
Acknowledgments	149
Notes	153
About the Authors	159

# Chosen to Suffer

---

*"Then the LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job?  
There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright,  
a man who fears God and shuns evil.'"*

JOB 1:8

I believe that God chose me to be a Bible teacher. There's nothing that I love more than sitting down with the Word and speaking of His goodness. I believe that He chose me to be a husband and father. Joy overflows when I think about His kindness in allowing me to be married to Vera Mae for more than seventy years and to be the father of our children. To be the head of our family. I love being chosen by God for these wonderful experiences. But the story of Job helps me get my head around another truth: the same God who chose me for blessings can also choose me for suffering.

## RIGHTEOUS JOB

Job was a good man. He was so good that God bragged on him. God told Satan that there was no one as righteous as Job in the whole earth. Have you ever wondered what God says to Satan

about you? Can He say that you are upright, that you fear Him, and you turn away from evil? He said that about Job. We get to see a little of what that looked like, as Job made sacrifices for his children. He made sacrifices to God just in case his children had sinned and had “cursed God in their hearts” (Job 1:5). And Job did this continually, because his children seemed to have a party

going on every day.

Job wasn't perfect, but he was good. And it was expected that he would be blessed. And Job *was* really blessed. He had thousands of sheep and camels, hundreds of oxen and female donkeys. He had seven sons and three daughters who all were doing well. Job was a wealthy man. I think maybe that's what made Job so special. He wasn't just godly. He was rich *and* godly. He had not

allowed his wealth to make him forget God. He was so zealous to please God that he even anticipated that his children might have done something to offend God. He was doing everything he knew to do to serve and worship God.

**HAVE YOU EVER  
WONDERED WHAT  
GOD SAYS TO SATAN  
ABOUT YOU?  
CAN HE SAY SAY  
THAT YOU ARE  
UPRIGHT. THAT  
YOU FEAR HIM.  
AND YOU TURN  
AWAY FROM EVIL?**

## **BLESSING FOR OBEDIENCE. PUNISHMENT FOR SIN**

It is believed that Job lived during the time of Abraham's early ancestors and long before the nation of Israel was formed. *The Moody Bible Commentary* suggests that there was a body of oral truth that was passed on from generation to generation from the

time of Adam and Eve.<sup>1</sup> Job's theology about God would have come from this. And based on how his friends kept pushing him to admit to whatever sin had caused his misfortune, there was among the people an expectation of blessings for being good, and judgment for mistreating others and taking advantage of the poor. It is reassuring to know that some of the earliest writings in God's Word wrestle with the "why do we suffer" question.

This idea was brought forward in God's covenant with Israel much later. When they obeyed Him, He blessed them. If they disobeyed, they were subject to His judgment. As Moses prepared them to go into the promised land he reminded them, "If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God: You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed. You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out" (Deut. 28:1–6).

But if the people chose to disobey, there were warnings. "However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you: You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country. Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed. The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out" (Deut. 28:15–19).

This idea of blessings for obedience and judgment for disobedience is seen again in the New Testament when Jesus healed a man who had been blind since birth. The disciples asked Jesus who had sinned to cause the man to be born blind. They wondered if he had sinned in the womb or if he was blind because of his parents' sin. Jesus blew their minds when He told them that the man's blindness had nothing to do with anybody's sin—it was to allow God's power to be made known.

**WE DARE NOT LOOK  
AT SOMEONE ELSE'S  
SUFFERING AND  
DECIDE THAT THEY  
ARE BEING PUNISHED  
FOR THEIR SIN.**

And still today, when we suffer we often feel like God is punishing us or is angry with us about something. When we suffer, this is where the enemy steps in. He brings condemnation and doubt. He makes us question whether we really do belong to the Lord. We need to be careful

about allowing him to distract us from what is really going on. The story of Job tells us that we cannot always draw a straight line from suffering to sin. We dare not look at someone else's suffering and decide that they are being punished for their sin.

## **IT'S HIS STORY**

I've read the story of Job again and again for many years. And I'm convinced that his story is not really about him at all. The story of Job is not about Job. It's not about his friends. It's not about his wife. (A lot has been said about her telling him to curse God and die. But it's not about her.) The story of Job is about God. We need to keep our eyes on Him throughout the story of Job to see what

He is doing. Job is responding, but God is initiating. Job's friends are judging, but God is adjusting the limits of Job's suffering—enlarging the boundaries that Satan can operate within. God actually suggests Job to Satan. However, it's important to note that Satan is not a major player in Job's story. In his commentary on Job, Francis Andersen argues the point strongly that Satan's role in the story line is minor. "His place in its theology is even less."<sup>2</sup> And he reminds us that Satan doesn't show up at all after Job 2:7.

I love how Paul Tripp speaks of this in his book *Suffering*: "We don't live under the sovereign control of the forces of evil. We live in a world that's been terribly broken by sin but still sits under the power and authority of the One who created it. You may not see his hand, and it may be very hard to accept that what you've had to endure has come under God's watch, but Scripture is clear about the nature and extent of his rule. The fact that God is in control tells us that there's divine reason and purpose to all we face."<sup>3</sup>

God tells Satan just how he can attack Job. God tells Satan he can go even further, as long as he doesn't take Job's life. It's all about Him. Job knew that. He said, "the LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised" (Job 1:21) and "shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" (Job 2:10).

One of the first things that I learned from the missionary who helped me learn how to study the Bible was something that has helped me so much. She said, "The Bible is about one person—and He is God. And it's about the people who interacted with God." As I am going through this last cancer journey I'm straining to keep my eyes on Him. When the pain is at its worst I try to keep my eyes on Him. God is at work. He is speaking. And just like he did for Job, He has already set the boundaries for my suffering. I cannot see where they end, but He knows.

In 1659, a Puritan writer declared, “God, who is infinite and matchless in goodness, hath ordered our troubles, yea, many troubles to come trooping in upon us on every side. As our mercies, so our crosses seldom come single; they usually come treading one upon the heels of another; they are like April showers, no sooner is one over, but another comes. It’s mercy that every affliction is not an execution, every correction not a damnation. The more the afflictions, the more the heart is raised heavenward.”<sup>4</sup>

It can seem like that. Just as soon as you get out of one storm, another one comes up. Paul David Tripp says, “Moments of suffering are always transformational in some way. No one ever comes out of the unexpected, the unwanted, the difficult, and the discouraging unchanged. You will not rise out of tragedy the way you were before it overtook you.”<sup>5</sup> The hard waves of suffering are how our God changes us for His purposes. It’s how He chisels away at what does not look like Him and shapes us by His transforming grace.

How are you suffering right now? Are you able to move your heart heavenward? Are you able to keep your eyes fixed on Him? When pain is overwhelming it can be hard to pull your attention away from the pain and look to Him. It’s hard. When my son Spencer died, it was like that for me.

## UNTHINKABLE PAIN

Spencer died suddenly of a massive heart attack at the age of forty-four in January 1998. I followed the ambulance in my car and rushed into the emergency room. They wouldn’t let me go in with him. They worked on him for about thirty minutes and the doctor came out and said, “We can’t bring him back; but we’re



going to try again.” Another five or six minutes later he came back and brought me into the room. I walked around the hospital bed and touched his face. He was gone. It was the most traumatic experience of my life. I felt like a part of me had died. There was a white chaplain in the room with us. He came over and put his arms around my shoulder. I felt like I would have died if he hadn’t put his arm around me. Every time I see him we talk about this. Parents are not supposed to bury their children. Children are supposed to bury their parents.

I spoke out of my grief at his funeral service. “God, I’m really mad at You. You took my son.” My pain and my grief were too burdensome to take anywhere but to the throne room of heaven. Like Job, I understood that the Lord had given, and the Lord had taken away. Because God is sovereign, He can do that.

We read the story of Job and we have the benefit of knowing how God was involved from the very beginning. But Job didn’t know any of that. He had no idea that God was about to commend him to Satan—for suffering and testing. He was minding his own business, and suddenly everything about his life changed.

And what Job did and said right after that is so very powerful: he worshiped the Lord, and he blessed His name. He worshiped and he blessed the Lord. He couldn’t have done that if his eyes weren’t fixed on the Lord. I’m not talking about ignoring pain or pretending that it’s not there. I’ve heard so many people talk about not claiming that when it comes to pain and suffering. I’m talking about looking right through your pain into His strength. That’s where joy lives in the midst of suffering. It’s in Him. It’s in that place where suffering wrestles you to the ground and you flail around in anger and desperation. You finally wear yourself out and surrender the fight. It’s then that you realize His

presence . . . that He is with you. In your deepest, darkest pain He is with you. You find yourself leaning into Him for strength, and the power to put one foot in front of the other for one more day. He gives you strength through His Word to stand tall. The old preacher used to say, “He will prop you up on every leaning side.”

When I struggled with the loss of Spencer I wasn’t nearly as noble as Job. My first thought wasn’t to worship God. I wanted to bargain with Him. I told Him I was angry because He took Spencer from me. I said that I would have given him to God, but He didn’t give me a chance. I don’t think I would have ever willingly given my son up, but I asked the Lord to give him back to me and allow me to return him. I later repented of my anger and prayed, “Lord, would You make him a fruit bearer for reconciliation?” That had been his life’s work and I wanted his death to mean something. I had been involved in the movement just on the fringes and didn’t know then that my commitment to the cause of reconciliation would be the fruit from his death. Over the weeks and months after he passed, doors began to be opened for me to speak on reconciliation. I would have much rather had Spencer, but I was motivated to work for the cause that he was so passionate about, as a way to keep his memory alive. God allowed me to pick up the mantle and run to people and places that I never dreamed of. He taught me how to press into Him for purpose and for joy. And I rejoice to think that I am still running . . . though slower . . . still running until my day is done.

There were many times after his death that someone who had not lost a child would try to comfort me by saying, “You’ll be okay, John. You’ll get over it.” I don’t think that’s true. I don’t think you ever get over losing a child. This is a hurt that is still fresh in my heart today. It has not healed. It still brings tears to

my eyes whenever I talk about him. It has given me a zeal for other parents who lose a child. I want them to know that I understand what they're going through. I want to weep with them and bring them comfort in their loss.

Job knew the truth of God's sovereignty. God is in charge. Satan is not in charge. Sickness is not in charge. Calamity is not in charge. God is in charge. God chooses to wound us. God chooses to bruise us. God chooses.

The hammer is a useful tool, but the nail, if it had feelings and intelligence, could present another side of the story. For the nail knows the hammer only as an opponent, a brutal, merciless enemy who lives to pound it into submission, to beat it down out of sight and clinch it into place. That is the nail's view of the hammer, and it is accurate, except for one thing: The nail forgets that both it and the hammer are servants of the same workman. Let the nail but remember that the hammer is held by the workman and all resentment toward it will disappear. The carpenter decides whose head will be beaten next and what hammer shall be used in the beating. That is his sovereign right. When the nail has surrendered to the will of the workman and has gotten a little glimpse of his benign plans for its future it will yield to the hammer without complaint.<sup>6</sup>

God is sovereign. He does choose. But I also have to remember again and again the lessons from the garden. The God who allows me to suffer is the God who loves me. He loves me. He loves me. That was settled on the cross at Calvary. He proved His love for me. Oh, how He loves you and me!

But, if I'm honest, every once in a while I still struggle with the lingering question of the "why" of it all . . .

# The Unanswerable “Why”

---

*“Why was I not hidden away in the ground like a stillborn child,  
like an infant who never saw the light of day?”*

JOB 3:16

**B**y this time, not only has Job lost all his earthly possessions and all his children, his body has suffered the enemy’s attack and is falling apart. In his anguish he curses the day he was born and asks the question so many of us wrestle with when we suffer: *Why?*

**“Why** have you made me your target? Have I become a burden to you? **Why** do you not pardon my offenses and forgive my sins?”  
(Job 7:20b–21a)

**“Why** then did you bring me out of the womb? I wish I had died before any eye saw me.” (Job 10:18)

It’s not hard to understand why Job was so troubled in his spirit. He didn’t know what we know about his suffering. And his

suffering had taken in everything that was his. The image had to be hard to look at: Job with open sores all over his body, sitting out on a dust heap, scratching and in agony. It was like that for his friends who came to comfort him. It was hard for them to look at what he had become: “When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads” (Job 2:12).

## THE STING OF POVERTY

Some suffering is so ugly and so heinous that it’s hard to even talk about. You don’t want to think that life can be that hard and that difficult for anybody. The pictures of starving children whose bellies are bloated because they have no food or water are hard to look at. When cancer or some other terminal disease begins to destroy the body, it can be hard to look at. When violence takes a life before its time, that’s hard to think about.

When I think about what it was like for my mother to literally die of starvation in a land of plenty, I want to know how that could have happened. My family were sharecroppers in rural Mississippi during the Great Depression. Malnutrition was commonplace because cotton replaced food crops, and over time the soil became degraded. There just wasn’t enough food for poor folks to survive. When you’ve been poor, you know that poverty isn’t just about not having things. It’s also about what it does to your soul to know that you are seen as less than others. It can be a deep, deep hurt.

She held on to life as long as she could, but she died when I was only seven months old. And I would have likely died too if it hadn’t been for a lady who had a milk cow and knew that my

mother had died. She made sure I had milk every day and was able to survive. That milk was a lifeline for me.

I think about that now when I see so many people standing in lines for food. We are in the middle of what the experts call a hunger emergency that is more severe than we've ever seen before. They expected the number of people facing acute hunger to reach 265 million by the end of 2020.<sup>1</sup> Back in 1968 I was blessed to speak before Senator George McGovern's Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs. I was able to talk about my mother dying from starvation and how important it is for poor folks to have healthy diets. That "committee developed a bipartisan response to hunger and laid the foundation of our current food assistance programs."<sup>2</sup> And a few years later Rev. Art Simon worked with a group of religious leaders to form Bread for the World. I was privileged to serve on that board. And I rejoice to see that this organization is still working to end hunger under the leadership of Eugene Cho. But it grieves my heart that there is still such a dire need today in such a rich country. Why so much suffering? Why does God allow so much suffering? Why did God take everything from Job, even all of his children? Why? Why?

**WHEN YOU'VE BEEN  
POOR, YOU KNOW  
THAT POVERTY ISN'T  
JUST ABOUT NOT  
HAVING THINGS.  
IT'S ALSO ABOUT  
WHAT IT DOES TO  
YOUR SOUL TO KNOW  
THAT YOU ARE  
SEEN AS LESS THAN  
OTHERS.**

## THE POWER OF LAMENT

Maybe that's your question too. "Why, God? Why did this terrible thing happen to me?" That *why* comes from the depths of the soul and is a lament. I'm grateful that God allows us to ask why. We don't have to pray pretty prayers when we are suffering. We don't have to cross all the "t's" and dot all the "i's" when we are in agony. We don't have to pray theologically correct prayers when we are hurting. We can just cry out! Pain and agony ask the question, "Why? Why am I suffering like this?"

When I'm in deep pain I cry out, "God, have mercy on me!" And He hears my feeble cry. That's really what lament is. It's crying out to God, and there's something about a child of God crying out to his heavenly Father that gets His attention.

In *Weep with Me*, Mark Vroegop defines lament as "a prayer in pain that leads to trust. . . . Lament is the historic biblical prayer language of Christians in pain. It's the voice of God's people while living in a broken world."<sup>3</sup>

**I REMEMBER  
SPENCER SAYING,  
"YOU PLAY 'AMAZING  
GRACE' ON THE  
BLACK KEYS,  
AND YOU PLAY IT  
TO THE TUNE OF  
THE SOUND OF  
THE GROAN OF THE  
DYING SLAVES."**

More than one-third of the psalms are devoted to lament. And the book of Lamentations is full of Jeremiah pouring out his heart to God in lament. I remember Spencer saying, "You play 'Amazing Grace' on the black keys, and you play it to the tune of the sound of the groan of the dying slaves." I think that's what they call the minor keys. They tug at your soul. Lament

tugs at your soul. It goes deep into the reservoir of pain.

When the psalm writers would pour out their lament they began with their complaint. They did what Job did. They cried out to God, they made their requests of Him . . . but they always ended with praise or a word of trust. Job did that in his lament:

“I know that my redeemer lives,  
and that in the end he will stand on the earth.  
And after my skin has been destroyed,  
yet in my flesh I will see God;  
I myself will see him  
with my own eyes—I, and not another.”  
(Job 19:25–27)

I think maybe the church has got it wrong. We need to make room for lament. We need to let people know that God allows us to lament. We don’t have to act like we’re strong when we’re falling apart. In Gary Smalley and John Trent’s *The Blessing*, they have an entire chapter devoted to the idea that the church needs to be a place where we can take our hurts. They begin the chapter with a poem titled, “If This Is Not the Place.” It asks the question, if the church is not the place where we can go to cry when we hurt, then where can we go? And it challenges the notion that you have to always be smiling and have your happy face on. Life is hard. And it becomes harder when we don’t have safe places to share our grief and our struggles without being made to feel like we’re not strong enough. We need a place where we can hurt together, cry together, heal together. I think that place should be the church.

In *This Too Shall Last: Finding Grace When Suffering Lingers*, K. J. Ramsey says, “The tacit message in our churches, culture,



and relationships is this: success is public; suffering is private. We see so little of each other's insides that we come to believe we might be the only ones suffering. We hide our wounds behind bandages of our own making while wondering if the hard things lingering in our lives somehow delineate between who belongs to God's family and who doesn't. Hiding and hurting, we become divorced from hope and detached from joy."<sup>3</sup> We've got to find a way to give space to our cries and our hurts when we come together as the body of Christ.

## HE ANSWERS WITH HIMSELF

It reveals a lot about God that He allowed Job thirty-four of the forty-two chapters to lament and wrestle with God and his friends before He finally spoke into the conversation. God makes room for our lament, for our questions, for our heartache. I love that He came to Job. He let him hang out there for a while, but He finally came. And He actually engaged in a dialogue with Job! The Creator of the universe gave Job the privilege of having a one-on-one conversation with Him. He came to Job. And to his question of why . . . God filled that space with Himself. He didn't explain anything to Job about His conversation with Satan and His offering Job as a worthy target. Nothing. Silence. And for much of life it's like that. There is no answer that will suffice for why a child is born with a deformity. There is no answer that will do for why a family is murdered by an intruder. No answer that will suffice for why cancer comes back again, destroying what was left from before. There is only the answer that He provided to Job: "Here I AM." And what we, like Job, are left with is the question that Helen Roseveare wrestled with:

Helen Roseveare, a British medical missionary in the Congo uprising when the Mau-Mau revolutionaries invaded, was attacked. This godly, gracious, woman of God was raped, assaulted, humiliated, hanging on with her life to a faith that would not be shaken. While recovering from that horrible event, Helen and the Lord grew closer together than they had ever been before. In her pain, she felt his presence and sensed him asking her: “Can you thank Me for trusting you with this experience, even if I never tell you why?”<sup>4</sup>

At first, she wasn’t sure that she could ever thank Him for her experience, but one word was riveted in her heart: *privilege*. She had been given the privilege of suffering. God had entrusted her with a special, and very difficult—almost unthinkable—type of suffering. Like Job, she was given the privilege of suffering. I have been given the privilege of suffering. If you’re reading this book you probably have been given that privilege too.

That’s a paradox, isn’t it? That anyone would consider suffering a *privilege*. We’ll talk about that more in the coming chapters. But for now, let’s rivet our hearts to the truth that God doesn’t always answer the why in our hearts. And that’s probably for the best. I’m not sure any answer would ease the pain of the death of a loved spouse or betrayal by a close, intimate friend. No answer would make the suffering of infertility or moral failure any less.

In that huge space of unanswered questions for Helen Roseveare, for Job, for me, and for you, God offers Himself. He is there. He is present. The God who knows about suffering is there. The God who loves me—He is there. He is there with awesome power to keep me. He is there. The old preacher used to say, “He’s my everything. He’s water in dry places. He’s bread in a

starving land. He's a doctor in a sickroom, a lawyer in a courtroom. He's my everything." He's there filling the void when I don't understand why. He is enough. He's more than enough . . . and that's joy!

Interested in the whole book?  
Select your preferred book seller:

[MOODY PUBLISHERS](#) [AMAZON](#) [APPLE BOOKS](#) [GOOGLE PLAY](#) [WALMART](#) [LIFEWAY](#) [BARNES & NOBLE](#) [CHRISTIANBOOK.COM](#) 