



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

BIBLE FOUNDATIONS

Suffering and God's Faithfulness

How Can God Still Be Trusted When He Allows Suffering, Does Not Remove It, or Does Not Answer as We Hoped?

The Short Answer

God's faithfulness does not mean He promises to prevent every painful circumstance, answer every prayer in the way requested, or explain everything He permits. It means God remains completely true to His character, His Word, His purposes, and His people - even when circumstances are painful and His purposes cannot yet be seen.

Lamentations 3:19-26 · Psalm 73 · Romans 8:18-39 · 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Opening Memory Anchor

God's faithfulness is not measured by whether life unfolds as hoped. It is measured by whether God remains true to who He is and what He has promised.

WELCOME

This guide is meant to send you back to Scripture

This Companion is designed for guided self-study or small-group use. Part One introduces the central biblical foundations for trusting God's faithfulness when suffering continues, prayer is not answered as hoped, or circumstances do not make sense. Part Two moves into the harder theological questions surrounding sovereignty, providence, biblical promises, unanswered prayer, intercession, doubt, community suffering, and hope beyond the grave.

Foundational truth

God's faithfulness is not measured by whether life unfolds as hoped. It is measured by whether God remains true to who He is and what He has promised.

How to use this study

- Open and read the cited passages rather than relying only on the summaries.
- Distinguish what Scripture explicitly teaches from theological inference.
- Use the Memory Anchors to retain the central ideas.
- When a promise is discussed, ask who received it, what God actually promised, and how Scripture relates that truth to Christ and His people.
- Where Christians disagree, note the disagreement without pretending Scripture says more than it does.

PART ONE

BEGINNER GUIDE

Trusting God's faithfulness when suffering does not make sense

Memory Anchor

God's faithfulness is not measured by whether life unfolds as hoped. It is measured by whether God remains true to who He is and what He has promised.

Part One builds the biblical foundation in accessible language. It does not ask readers to deny pain, force an explanation, or pretend every prayer receives the hoped-for answer. It asks a more careful question: What has God actually promised, and what has He revealed about Himself?

1. WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT GOD IS FAITHFUL?

To say God is faithful means He is completely trustworthy and true to Himself.

Read Deuteronomy 7:9; Psalm 36:5; Psalm 119:89-90; 1 Corinthians 1:9; and 2 Timothy 2:11-13.

God does not become dishonest, unjust, unloving, or forgetful. He does not abandon His character or make promises carelessly.

God's faithfulness does not mean, "God will always do what someone hopes He will do." It means, "God will always be true to who He is and to what He has actually promised."

Much disappointment with God can arise when something Christians deeply hope for gradually begins to feel like something God explicitly promised. That does not make the hope wrong. It means Scripture must define the promise.

Memory Anchor

God's faithfulness means God can be trusted to remain true to His character and His promises.

2. DOES GOD'S FAITHFULNESS MEAN HE WILL PROTECT CHRISTIANS FROM SUFFERING?

No. Jesus explicitly told His followers that they would experience trouble (John 16:33). Paul told Timothy that faithful believers could experience persecution (2 Timothy 3:10-12), and Peter wrote to Christians who were suffering (1 Peter 4:12-19).

Scripture sometimes prepares believers for suffering precisely so that suffering will not be mistaken for God's unfaithfulness. Jesus did not promise that His people would never suffer. He promised His presence, His peace, His ultimate victory, and eternal life with Him.

If a promise God never made becomes the standard by which His faithfulness is measured, God may appear unfaithful when He has actually broken no promise at all.

3. WHY CAN GOD FEEL UNFAITHFUL EVEN WHEN SCRIPTURE SAYS HE IS FAITHFUL?

Because suffering is experienced from inside the story. A person in pain usually cannot see the ending.

Joseph in the pit did not yet see Egypt. Israel at the Red Sea did not yet see the water divide. Naomi returning to Bethlehem did not yet see Ruth's place in the family line that would lead to David. The disciples watching Jesus die did not yet see Sunday morning.

Read Psalm 77. The psalmist begins in distress and wonders whether God's promises have failed. Then he remembers God's past works. The circumstances have not necessarily changed, but his perspective begins to change because he remembers what God has already done.

Faith often lives between what can be seen right now and what is known about God.

4. IS IT WRONG TO FEEL DISAPPOINTED WITH GOD?

No. Disappointment should be distinguished from a final judgment about God's character.

Read Psalm 13; Psalm 22; Psalm 42-43; and Habakkuk 1:1-4. These are not emotionally sanitized prayers. They contain grief, confusion, waiting, fear, and strong questions.

Biblical lament shows that God does not require suffering people to pretend. A person can tell God, "I prayed for something different," "I do not understand why You allowed this," or "This hurts."

Faith does not require dishonest emotions. Biblical lament brings disappointment to God rather than pretending it does not exist.

Memory Anchor

God is not honored by pretending pain does not hurt. Biblical faith brings the pain honestly to Him.

5. WHAT IF GOD COULD HAVE STOPPED SOMETHING TERRIBLE BUT DIDN'T?

This is one of the hardest questions in Christian faith.

Scripture teaches that God is powerful, yet it also records circumstances God could have prevented but did not. In John 11, Jesus knew Lazarus was sick and loved him, yet did not immediately go to him. Martha and Mary both told Jesus that if He had been there, their brother would not have died. Jesus did not rebuke them for acknowledging that He could have prevented the death. Then Jesus wept.

God's sovereignty does not mean human grief is inappropriate. Christians can believe, "God could have stopped this," while also confessing, "I do not know why He did not."

Where God has not explained His hidden purposes, Christians should not pretend to know them.

6. IF GOD LOVES SOMEONE, WHY WOULD HE ALLOW THEM TO HURT?

The Bible never defines divine love as the prevention of all earthly pain.

Jesus is the clearest evidence. The Father openly identifies Jesus as His beloved Son, yet the beloved Son suffered. The Father's love did not mean Jesus would avoid Gethsemane or the cross.

Romans 8:31-39 describes Christians as deeply loved by God while openly acknowledging trouble, calamity, persecution, hunger, danger, and death. Paul does not say God's love means none of these things will happen. He says none of them can separate believers from God's love in Christ.

Suffering may make God's love difficult to feel. It does not prove His love has ceased.

7. WHAT IF GOD DOES NOT ANSWER A PRAYER THE WAY SOMEONE HOPED?

Scripture contains prayers whose requested outcome did not occur.

Paul repeatedly prayed for his thorn to be removed (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). It remained. Jesus prayed in Gethsemane and honestly asked whether the cup could pass, yet submitted Himself to the Father's will (Matthew 26:36-46). The cup did not pass.

These passages prevent Christians from saying that an undesired answer automatically means the prayer lacked faith, the person prayed incorrectly, God did not hear, or God did not care.

Prayer is not a mechanism for controlling outcomes. Christians are invited to ask boldly, but biblical prayer ultimately entrusts the answer to God's wisdom.

8. DOES 'NO' MEAN GOD HAS FAILED TO ANSWER?

No. An answer someone does not want is different from abandonment.

Paul wanted removal. God gave sustaining grace. God's response was not that Paul's pain did not matter. He told Paul that His grace was sufficient and His power was displayed in weakness.

This does not mean every unanswered prayer should be explained as, "God has something better." Sometimes the faithful response is simply: "The requested answer did not come, and the reason has not been revealed."

But Scripture shows that God's faithfulness is not limited to giving the requested outcome. Sometimes His faithfulness is revealed through sustaining grace within the outcome no one wanted.

9. WHAT IF SOMEONE PRAYED FOR HEALING AND THE PERSON DIED?

This may be one of the most painful experiences of unanswered prayer. Christians should be extremely careful here.

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A grieving person should not be told, "You didn't have enough faith," "You prayed incorrectly," or "Everything happens for a reason." Even a statement containing some theological truth can become cruel when used to rush someone through grief.

Jesus wept at Lazarus's tomb. Death is called an enemy in 1 Corinthians 15. Christians do not have to pretend death is good.

For those who belong to Christ, resurrection is the ultimate answer to death. Sometimes healing happens in this life. The final healing promised to every believer is resurrection.

10. WHAT IF GOD SEEMS SILENT?

Many faithful people in Scripture experienced this. Read Psalm 22:1-2; Psalm 88; and Habakkuk 1:2.

Psalm 88 is especially striking because it largely does not move toward obvious resolution. Scripture preserves that prayer too.

The existence of Psalm 88 tells suffering believers there is room in Scripture for a prayer that ends while the darkness still feels dark.

God's apparent silence is not proof of His absence. Feelings describe genuine human experience. They do not always describe the complete spiritual reality.

11. HOW CAN SOMEONE TRUST GOD WHEN THEY CANNOT FEEL HIS PRESENCE?

By allowing revealed truth to carry more weight than changing feelings. That does not mean feelings should be ignored. It means they should not be asked to perform a job they cannot reliably perform.

Hebrews 13:5-6 speaks of God's commitment not to abandon His people. Romans 8:26-27 says the Spirit helps believers in weakness even when they do not know how to pray. Psalm 23 locates confidence not in avoiding the darkest valley but in God's presence inside it.

A suffering Christian may not be able to say, "I feel God's presence," but may still be able to say, "God has promised not to abandon His people. Today I will hold onto that promise."

12. WHAT IF SUFFERING LASTS FOR YEARS?

The Bible contains many stories of prolonged waiting: Joseph in slavery and prison, Israel under Egyptian oppression, Hannah's infertility, David fleeing Saul, Jeremiah's long ministry, the exiles waiting for restoration, and Paul's continuing thorn.

Scripture does not teach that prolonged suffering means God has forgotten someone.

Sometimes biblical faithfulness looks less like dramatic victory and more like continuing to trust through a long season that has not changed. Hebrews 10:35-39 emphasizes perseverance precisely because some answers do not arrive quickly.

13. WHAT IF LIFE NEVER RETURNS TO WHAT IT WAS BEFORE?

Some suffering changes earthly life permanently. Bereavement changes families. Disability may change what someone can physically do. Trauma can alter a person's sense of safety. A marriage may end. A career may disappear. A dream may never happen.

Christian hope does not require pretending everything will return to its previous form.

The Bible's final promise is not, "Everything will eventually return to your old normal." It is that God will make all things new (Revelation 21:1-5).

Christian hope is ultimately resurrection and new creation - not restoration of every earthly circumstance to its previous state.

14. WHAT IF SOMEONE HAS DONE EVERYTHING 'RIGHT' AND STILL SUFFERS?

Scripture rejects the idea that every suffering person can be diagnosed by looking for what they did wrong.

Job is an important example. The reader is told from the beginning that Job's suffering cannot be explained by the simplistic accusation his friends later make. Jesus similarly rejected automatic connections between a person's suffering and personal sin in John 9:1-3 and

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Luke 13:1-5.

Scripture does teach that sinful choices can have consequences, but it rejects the formula: obedience equals a comfortable life; disobedience equals suffering.

For a broader treatment of why suffering occurs and why Christians should not diagnose the cause of another person's suffering, see 3Nails Study #128, Trials and Hard Times.

15. WHAT IF OTHER PEOPLE SEEM TO RECEIVE THE ANSWERS SOMEONE PRAYED FOR?

This can hurt deeply. One couple celebrates a pregnancy while another grieves infertility. One person receives a clear scan while another receives devastating news. One marriage is restored while another ends. One family welcomes a wandering child home while another keeps waiting.

Psalms 73 shows a believer struggling with comparison. Jesus also redirected Peter away from comparison in John 21:18-22.

God's faithfulness to one person cannot be measured by giving that person the same story He gives someone else.

Comparison asks, "Why did they receive what I wanted?" Faith eventually learns to ask, "Lord, what does faithfulness look like in the life You have placed before me?"

16. DOES GOD'S FAITHFULNESS MEAN EVERYTHING WILL EVENTUALLY MAKE SENSE IN THIS LIFE?

No such promise is given.

Some things may make more sense later. Joseph eventually saw how God used his circumstances to preserve many lives. But Scripture also contains mysteries that remain mysteries.

Deuteronomy 29:29 distinguishes between things God has revealed and things that remain secret. Christians are responsible for trusting and obeying what God has revealed. They are not responsible for explaining everything He has not.

Faith does not require possessing every answer. Sometimes faith is trusting the character of God when the explanation remains hidden.

Memory Anchor

God has never promised to explain everything. He has given sufficient reason to trust Him when explanations do not come.

17. HOW DOES REMEMBERING GOD'S PAST FAITHFULNESS HELP?

Scripture repeatedly commands God's people to remember. Read Psalm 77:11-15; Psalm 105; and Deuteronomy 8:1-18.

Fear narrows attention toward the immediate threat. Grief can make today's pain feel as though it describes the entire story. Remembering interrupts that narrowing.

A Christian can remember God's faithfulness in Scripture and Christ, past provision, prayers that were answered, people God sent, and grace that arrived when strength was gone.

Remembrance is not a prediction technique. It is a way of anchoring present uncertainty in God's demonstrated character.

18. WHERE IS GOD'S FAITHFULNESS SEEN MOST CLEARLY?

In Jesus Christ. Read Romans 5:6-11; 2 Corinthians 1:18-22; and Hebrews 10:19-23.

The biblical story moves toward God's promises being fulfilled in Christ. Jesus is the promised Messiah. He bears sin, establishes the new covenant, defeats death, rises, and will return.

On Friday, the disciples could see a crucified Messiah. That looked like failure. On Sunday, the empty tomb changed the meaning of Friday forever.

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Christians do not know how every individual painful circumstance will be resolved. But they know what God has already done in Jesus. The resurrection becomes the anchor when the ending of the present chapter cannot yet be seen.

19. WHAT CAN SOMEONE DO WHEN TRUST FEELS VERY SMALL?

Trust does not need to feel impressive. In Mark 9:14-29, a desperate father told Jesus that he believed while also asking for help with his unbelief. Jesus did not reject him.

When faith feels small: tell God the truth; read one passage rather than forcing ten; ask another believer to pray; remember what God has already done; avoid making permanent conclusions about God's character during the most emotionally overwhelming moment; take appropriate practical steps; receive medical or mental-health care when needed; rest when exhausted; grieve what has actually been lost; and keep turning toward Jesus.

Sometimes strong faith looks like confidence. Sometimes strong faith looks like refusing to walk away.

20. WHAT IS THE CENTRAL TRUTH TO REMEMBER DURING SUFFERING?

God's faithfulness is larger than today's circumstances.

The circumstance may change or it may not. The prayer may be answered as hoped or it may not. An explanation may eventually emerge or it may not. But God's character does not fluctuate with circumstances.

Read Lamentations 3:19-26. The declaration that God's mercies continue and His faithfulness is great comes from catastrophe and grief, not from an easy season.

That is not shallow optimism. It is faith spoken from ruins.

PART ONE MEMORY ANCHOR

Faith does not say: 'Nothing terrible can happen.' Faith says: 'Whatever happens, God will remain God, Christ will remain risen, and His promises will not fail.'

PART TWO

WANT TO GO DEEPER?

INTERMEDIATE

The harder theological questions behind suffering and God's faithfulness

Interpretive posture

Where Scripture speaks clearly, believe it. Where theological conclusions are inferred, identify them as inference. Where God has left mystery, humility is more faithful than invented certainty.

Part One established the central biblical truth: God's faithfulness is not measured by whether circumstances unfold according to human expectations. Part Two asks harder questions about sovereignty, promises, providence, unanswered prayer, intercession, doubt, community suffering, and hope beyond the grave.

21. CAN GOD BE FAITHFUL WHILE ALLOWING SOMETHING HE HATES?

Scripture indicates that He can. God's moral approval of something and His decision to permit it are not identical.

The crucifixion is the clearest example. Read Acts 2:22-24 and Acts 4:23-28. Jesus' crucifixion involved real human wickedness, and those responsible were morally accountable. Yet the cross also occurred within God's redemptive purpose.

God's ability to sovereignly use an evil act does not transform the evil act into something morally good. The cross reveals God's sovereignty over evil - not God's moral participation in evil.

22. DOES GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY MAKE HIM RESPONSIBLE FOR EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS?

Christians agree that God is sovereign. They disagree about the precise relationship between divine sovereignty, divine permission, secondary causes, creaturely freedom, and moral responsibility.

Scripture teaches that God rules over creation and accomplishes His purposes, that human beings make morally meaningful decisions and are responsible for evil actions, and that God Himself is holy and does not commit moral evil.

Reformed/Augustinian traditions generally emphasize God's comprehensive sovereign decree and providence while distinguishing God's holy purposes from sinful human intentions. Arminian/Wesleyan traditions generally emphasize God's sovereign governance while allowing a stronger category of creaturely freedom and divine permission.

These are theological frameworks attempting to synthesize biblical evidence. Scripture clearly teaches God's sovereignty and human accountability. The precise philosophical mechanics remain debated among faithful Christians.

23. IF GOD KNOWS THE FUTURE, WHY CREATE A WORLD IN WHICH HE KNOWS TERRIBLE SUFFERING WILL OCCUR?

This question goes deeper than asking why God did not prevent one tragedy.

Scripture does not provide a single philosophical explanation answering every aspect of this question. It does reveal the destination of creation. Read Ephesians 1:3-14; Colossians 1:15-20; and Revelation 21-22.

The biblical story moves toward a redeemed people united to Christ, evil judged, death destroyed, creation renewed, and God dwelling with His people.

The Bible gives the beginning, the rebellion, the redemptive center in Christ, and the promised ending. It does not answer every philosophical question between them.

24. CAN GOD'S FAITHFULNESS BE JUDGED BY OUTCOMES?

Only if the outcome being measured is one God actually promised.

God has promised forgiveness and eternal life to those who belong to Christ, His presence, that nothing can separate believers from His love, completion of His saving work, Christ's return, resurrection, final judgment, and new creation.

Scripture does not promise every believer a long life, lifelong health, marriage, children, financial prosperity, protection from bereavement, freedom from persecution, immediate healing, reconciliation in every broken relationship, or a satisfying explanation for every tragedy.

God should be evaluated according to His promises - not promises people accidentally made on His behalf.

25. HOW CAN I KNOW WHETHER A BIBLICAL PROMISE APPLIES DIRECTLY TO ME?

Every verse in Scripture is God's Word and is valuable for teaching, correction, wisdom, and understanding (2 Timothy 3:16-17). But that does not mean every promise recorded in Scripture was made directly to every individual Christian.

When reading a biblical promise, ask seven questions:

1. Who was originally being addressed?

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2. What was the original situation?
3. Was this a unique promise or a general promise?
4. Is the promise repeated or applied to believers in Christ?
5. Does the promise have conditions?
6. What does the surrounding passage say the promise means?
7. Am I claiming what the text actually promises, or extending it to an outcome the passage never guarantees?

Faithful Bible reading asks first, 'What did this text mean in its biblical setting?' before asking, 'How does this truth apply faithfully today?'

Context does not mean Old Testament promises have nothing to say to Christians. The New Testament repeatedly shows that God's earlier promises, covenants, patterns, and hopes find their fulfillment and fullest meaning in Christ. Some promises are fulfilled specifically in Jesus; some extend to those who belong to Him; and others reveal enduring truths about God's character and ways even when their original covenant form does not apply directly to the Church.

The goal is neither to claim every promise directly nor to dismiss every promise as belonging only to someone else. The goal is to understand each promise in its biblical context and then follow Scripture itself in seeing how it relates to Christ and His people.

Memory Anchor

Every biblical promise is true. Not every biblical promise was made directly to every individual believer. Context helps us understand who received the promise, what God promised, and how that truth ultimately relates to Christ and His people.

26. WHAT ABOUT BIBLE VERSES THAT SOUND LIKE UNLIMITED PROMISES?

Psalms 37:4 should not be treated as a guarantee that every personal desire will be fulfilled exactly as imagined. Read the whole Psalm: it contrasts the temporary prosperity of the wicked with the enduring security of those who trust God.

Philippians 4:13 is about Christ-given strength for faithfulness in changing circumstances. Read Philippians 4:10-13. Paul is speaking about contentment in both abundance and need, not unlimited achievement.

Jeremiah 29:11 was originally addressed to Jewish exiles in Babylon. Their restoration would come, but not immediately. They were told to build homes, plant gardens, raise families, and seek the welfare of the city during a seventy-year exile.

Faithfulness requires reading promises in context.

27. WHAT IF SOMEONE DIES BEFORE SEEING GOD'S PROMISE FULFILLED?

Hebrews 11 directly addresses this. Abraham and others died still believing what God had promised without receiving everything during their earthly lifetimes.

That does not mean the promises failed. It means God's timetable extended beyond their earthly lives.

If earthly life is the only horizon, some biblical promises appear unresolved. But Christianity does not end at death. Resurrection means God's faithfulness can extend beyond the grave.

The final question is not whether every faithful person received everything before dying, but whether God will complete everything He has promised. Christianity answers yes.

28. HOW DOES ABRAHAM'S STORY TEACH TRUST DURING DELAY?

God promised Abraham descendants, yet years passed. Abraham openly raised the problem, God reaffirmed His promise, and more years passed. Abraham and Sarah then attempted to produce an outcome through Hagar, bringing painful consequences.

Abraham's story shows that waiting can test trust and that delay can create temptation to manufacture what God has promised.

But Abraham's story should not be turned into a universal formula that if someone waits long enough, God will eventually give the earthly

thing desired. Abraham possessed a specific promise from God. Modern believers should distinguish between a promise God has actually made and a deeply desired outcome.

29. WHAT DOES NAOMI TEACH ABOUT GOD'S FAITHFULNESS WHEN LIFE FEELS EMPTY?

Naomi experienced famine, displacement, widowhood, and the deaths of both sons. When she returned to Bethlehem, she described herself as bitter and empty.

The narrator does not mock her grief, and Ruth does not immediately lecture her about God's plan. Instead, the story quietly begins showing God's providence through Ruth, Boaz, redemption, and the family line that eventually leads to David.

Naomi could not see Ruth 4 while living in Ruth 1.

This does not mean every bereaved person will receive an earthly replacement for what was lost. It means a suffering person's present interpretation of the story may be understandable without being complete.

30. WHAT DOES JOSEPH TEACH ABOUT GOD'S FAITHFULNESS?

Joseph's story spans years of betrayal, slavery, false accusation, imprisonment, and being forgotten.

Only years later could Joseph look backward and recognize ways God had been working through circumstances he could not have understood while living through them. Genesis 50:20 comes near the end of a long story.

Christians should therefore be careful about quoting that verse as though someone presently suffering should already be able to explain how God will redeem what happened.

Faith sometimes means trusting before the Genesis 50 perspective arrives.

31. WHAT DOES DAVID TEACH ABOUT TRUSTING GOD WHILE WAITING?

David was anointed king long before he became king, then spent years living under Saul's hostility and fleeing for his life.

The promise did not eliminate the wilderness between anointing and fulfillment. David's Psalms reveal what trust looked like during that wilderness: he feared, cried out, asked for deliverance, and remembered God's character.

Trust was not emotional invulnerability. David's story teaches that waiting for God's purposes can include danger, confusion, and long stretches when circumstances appear inconsistent with what God has said.

32. WHAT DOES JEREMIAH TEACH ABOUT FAITHFULNESS WITHOUT VISIBLE SUCCESS?

Jeremiah faithfully proclaimed God's message, yet the nation largely refused to listen. He was mocked, threatened, imprisoned, rejected, and Jerusalem eventually fell.

By many modern measurements, Jeremiah's ministry could appear unsuccessful. Yet biblical faithfulness is not identical to visible success.

Jeremiah was responsible for faithfully delivering what God gave him. He was not responsible for forcing people to respond.

This matters for parents praying for adult children, spouses praying for marriages, believers praying for someone trapped in addiction, pastors serving difficult congregations, and Christians sharing the Gospel.

33. WHAT DOES HABAKKUK TEACH ABOUT TRUST WHEN GOD'S METHODS ARE CONFUSING?

Habakkuk begins by asking why God appears to tolerate violence and injustice. God's answer creates another problem: Babylon will be used as an instrument of judgment.

Habakkuk's questions become deeper after God responds. Sometimes receiving part of an answer does not remove every difficulty.

By Habakkuk 3:17-19, he can say that even if crops fail, fields produce no food, and livestock disappear, he will rejoice in God.

His trust emerges after wrestling. Habakkuk demonstrates faith that can say, 'I still do not understand everything You are doing, but I know enough about You to continue trusting You.'

34. WHAT DOES PAUL'S THORN TEACH ABOUT GOD'S FAITHFULNESS?

Paul asked three times for the thorn to be removed. God did not remove it. Instead, God gave Paul sufficient grace.

This corrects a common assumption: God's faithfulness does not always look like removal. Sometimes it looks like sustaining grace.

Deliverance changes the circumstance. Sustaining grace changes what becomes possible within the circumstance. Both can be expressions of God's faithfulness.

35. WHAT DOES GETHSEMANE TEACH ABOUT TRUST WHEN THE DESIRED ANSWER IS NO?

Jesus' prayer contains both request and surrender. He asks whether the cup of suffering can be taken from Him, then entrusts Himself to the Father's will.

Biblical surrender does not mean having no preference. It means entrusting the preference to God.

This protects prayer from two extremes: never asking boldly, and assuming enough faith allows someone to demand the outcome. Jesus does neither. He asks, submits, and obeys.

36. WHAT DOES FAITHFULNESS LOOK LIKE WHEN THE SUFFERING IS SOMEONE ELSE'S AND I AM THE ONE WAITING AND PRAYING?

Some of the hardest waiting happens when the person suffering is someone we love: a child who has walked away from God, a spouse trapped in addiction, a family member who is ill, or someone making destructive choices.

Scripture encourages intercession. Jesus prayed for Peter. A desperate father brought his suffering son to Jesus. Paul prayed for the spiritual growth of other believers. The Spirit helps believers when they do not know how to pray.

Intercession is an act of love and dependence on God. It is not a means of controlling another person's choices or guaranteeing a particular outcome.

You cannot repent for someone else, believe for someone else, force recovery, compel reconciliation, guarantee healing, or make another adult choose wisely.

Faithfulness may mean continuing to pray while surrendering what cannot be controlled, loving while establishing necessary boundaries, offering help without enabling destructive behavior, or seeking outside intervention when safety is at stake.

The failure to control another person's outcome is not the failure of prayer. Faithful intercession places the person we love into hands more capable than our own.

Memory Anchor

You can faithfully pray for another person without being able to control their choices or guarantee their outcome.

37. DOES JESUS' SUFFERING MEAN GOD UNDERSTANDS WHAT HUMAN PAIN FEELS LIKE?

Christianity makes an extraordinary claim: God the Son truly entered human life.

Read John 1:1-18; Philippians 2:5-11; Hebrews 2:14-18; and Hebrews 4:14-16.

Jesus experienced hunger, exhaustion, grief, rejection, betrayal, physical pain, humiliation, and death. Christians therefore do not pray to a God who knows suffering only as an abstract concept.

This does not answer every question about why suffering is permitted, but it changes the character of the question. The Christian God does not remain at a safe distance from the suffering world. He enters it.

38. WAS THE FATHER FAITHFUL TO JESUS AT THE CROSS?

Yes, but the answer requires careful thought.

Jesus genuinely suffered and died. He cried the opening words of Psalm 22. The crucifixion appeared to His followers to be catastrophic defeat. Then came resurrection.

The Father's faithfulness was not demonstrated by preventing Jesus' death. It was demonstrated through accomplishing redemption and raising Him from the dead.

This becomes foundational for Christian trust: God's faithfulness cannot always be evaluated before resurrection.

39. WHY IS THE RESURRECTION SO IMPORTANT TO TRUSTING GOD IN SUFFERING?

Because resurrection demonstrates that death itself cannot invalidate God's promises.

If Jesus remained dead, Christian faith would collapse. Paul says so plainly in 1 Corinthians 15. But Christ has been raised.

Christian hope therefore differs from optimism. Optimism says things may improve. Christian hope says that even if they do not improve as hoped in this life, Christ is risen, and death cannot prevent God from completing His promises.

Memory Anchor

The resurrection means God's faithfulness extends beyond the grave.

40. CAN SUFFERING EVER PROVE THAT GOD HAS ABANDONED A CHRISTIAN?

Romans 8 answers this directly. Paul imagines trouble, calamity, persecution, hunger, destitution, danger, and threat of death, then asks whether these things mean Christ no longer loves His people.

His answer is no. Nothing in all creation can separate believers from God's love in Christ.

Circumstances may remove health, money, security, reputation, relationships, freedom, or even earthly life. They cannot remove Christ.

41. WHAT IF SUFFERING MAKES SOMEONE QUESTION EVERYTHING THEY BELIEVE?

That experience should be taken seriously rather than shamed or rushed.

Suffering can expose assumptions someone did not realize they held: 'If I obey God, He will protect my family,' 'If I pray faithfully, God will heal,' or 'If God loves me, He will prevent the thing I fear most.'

Sometimes what collapses is not Christianity but an assumption attached to Christianity. Recognizing that distinction does not automatically resolve the emotional or spiritual crisis.

Psalm 73 and Thomas in John 20 show different textures of doubt. It can help to distinguish questioning God from rejecting God; questioning an interpretation from rejecting Scripture; discovering a wrong assumption from abandoning Christianity; and emotional uncertainty from a settled conclusion that God is untrustworthy.

The next faithful step may not be resolving every question. It may simply be continuing to bring the questions toward God rather than hiding them from Him.

42. IS TRUSTING GOD WITHOUT AN EXPLANATION INTELLECTUALLY DISHONEST?

Not necessarily.

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Christian faith is not supposed to be belief without evidence or belief against everything known. It rests on what God has revealed: creation, Scripture, God's historical acts, His covenant faithfulness, and centrally Jesus Christ.

The Christian does not say, 'I have no reason whatsoever to trust God, so I will trust Him anyway.' Rather: 'I do not know why God allowed this particular circumstance, but this circumstance is not everything known about God.'

Faith admits the unanswered question without allowing the unanswered question to erase everything that has been revealed.

43. WHAT IF SOMEONE CAN NO LONGER SAY 'GOD IS GOOD' WITHOUT STRUGGLING?

Then begin with honesty. God does not need forced religious language.

A person may pray, 'Lord, Scripture says You are good, but right now I am struggling to understand that.'

Psalm 73 shows a believer whose confidence was destabilized by what he saw. He did not resolve the problem by denying it. He brought it into God's presence.

Pastoral care should allow grieving people space to wrestle. Faith does not always move from anguish to confidence in one conversation.

44. HOW SHOULD CHRISTIANS RESPOND TO SOMEONE WHO FEELS BETRAYED BY GOD?

Listen before explaining.

Job's friends were initially most helpful when they sat beside him in silence. Their greatest damage came when they became certain they understood why he was suffering.

Someone who feels betrayed by God may need a safe place to speak honestly, prayer without correction disguised as prayer, practical help, time, permission to grieve, Scripture offered gently rather than weaponized, qualified counseling when appropriate, and companionship through questions that cannot yet be resolved.

God does not need His people to invent explanations He has not given.

45. DOES TRUSTING GOD MEAN STOPPING GRIEF?

No. Jesus trusted the Father perfectly and Jesus wept. He experienced anguish in Gethsemane.

Paul does not tell Christians not to grieve in 1 Thessalonians 4. He says they grieve differently because they have hope.

Christian hope does not erase grief. It changes grief's horizon.

46. DOES TRUSTING GOD MEAN SOMEONE SHOULD NOT SEEK TO CHANGE THE SITUATION?

No. Trusting God's sovereignty does not mean passivity.

Nehemiah prayed and acted. Paul prayed and used available legal protections. People sought Jesus for healing. The early Church provided practical aid.

Christians may pray and seek medical care, receive counseling, leave danger, report abuse, pursue legal protection, apply for employment, seek financial guidance, ask for church assistance, set boundaries, change unhealthy patterns, and take appropriately prescribed medication.

Faithfulness asks both: 'What should be entrusted to God?' and 'What responsibility has God placed before me?'

47. DOES GOD'S FAITHFULNESS REQUIRE REMAINING IN AN ABUSIVE OR DANGEROUS SITUATION?

No. Biblical teaching about endurance, forgiveness, submission, or carrying one's cross should never be used to trap someone in danger.

Seeking safety does not demonstrate distrust of God. Forgiveness does not require immediate reconciliation. Reconciliation does not

automatically restore trust.

Serious abuse may require involvement from law enforcement, medical professionals, counselors, child-protection authorities, domestic-violence services, or church leaders who understand safeguarding.

God's faithfulness should never become a slogan used to protect an abuser from accountability. Truth, justice, compassion, safety, forgiveness, and grace can remain together.

48. WHAT ABOUT DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, TRAUMA, OR OTHER MENTAL-HEALTH STRUGGLES DURING SUFFERING?

These should not automatically be interpreted as spiritual failure.

Suffering affects whole persons - body, mind, emotions, relationships, and spiritual life. Prayer, Scripture, Christian community, counseling, medical evaluation, and appropriately prescribed treatment can work together.

A Bible study cannot diagnose a mental-health condition. Nor should severe emotional distress automatically be labeled sinful, demonic, or evidence of deficient faith.

Study #128, Trials and Hard Times, provides a fuller discussion of mental and emotional health during suffering.

If someone is thinking about suicide, self-harm, harming another person, or cannot remain safe, immediate help is appropriate. In the United States, call or text 988 to reach the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. If immediate physical danger or a medical emergency exists, seek emergency assistance.

49. WHAT IF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IS EASIER TO SEE IN SOME STORIES THAN OTHERS?

It is. Joseph's story ends with dramatic earthly resolution. Not every biblical story does.

Stephen is killed in Acts 7. James is executed in Acts 12. Hebrews 11 includes people who experience dramatic deliverance and others who suffer and die.

Scripture places them in the same chapter of faith.

This prevents Christians from defining God's faithfulness only by visible deliverance. The final resolution lies beyond the present age.

50. WHAT DOES TRUSTING GOD'S FAITHFULNESS REQUIRE WHEN AN ENTIRE COMMUNITY IS SUFFERING?

Some suffering affects families, communities, nations, or entire populations: war, genocide, famine, displacement, trafficking, corrupt systems, mass violence, natural disasters, and oppression.

It would be deeply inappropriate to tell victims of atrocity or injustice, 'God is just teaching you something.'

Scripture condemns oppression and commands God's people to care about those who are harmed. Read Isaiah 1:16-17; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:8; and Psalm 82.

Faithfulness may require lamenting with those who suffer, protecting vulnerable people, feeding the hungry, sheltering the displaced, speaking truth about injustice, opposing exploitation, supporting appropriate efforts toward justice and accountability, refusing indifference, giving generously, serving practically, and praying persistently.

Study #128, Trials and Hard Times, provides a fuller treatment of collective and systemic suffering.

51. IF GOD WILL EVENTUALLY MAKE EVERYTHING RIGHT, DOES THAT MINIMIZE PRESENT SUFFERING?

No. Biblical hope should deepen compassion, not weaken it.

Jesus knew Lazarus would rise and still wept. The Bible promises resurrection and still calls death an enemy. Revelation promises a world without tears; it does not say today's tears are meaningless.

Future restoration tells suffering people, 'This will not last forever.' It should never be twisted into, 'This does not matter now.'

Eternal hope and present compassion belong together.

52. WILL CHRISTIANS EVENTUALLY UNDERSTAND WHY EVERYTHING HAPPENED?

Scripture does not explicitly promise that believers will receive a detailed explanation of every event in their lives.

Christians sometimes say, 'Someday God will explain everything.' That may be possible, but it should not be presented as an explicit biblical promise.

Scripture promises something greater: God Himself will dwell with His people, they will see His face, evil will be judged, death will be gone, and creation will be restored.

The final Christian hope is not an exhaustive written explanation. It is God with His people in a restored creation.

53. WHAT IF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS CAN ONLY BE SEEN IN RETROSPECT?

Sometimes that happens. Israel could understand the Exodus differently after crossing the sea. Joseph could understand his story differently after reconciliation. The disciples understood the cross differently after resurrection.

But sometimes earthly hindsight never provides a satisfying explanation.

The Christian may eventually say, 'Now I understand why,' or 'I can see ways God redeemed parts of this,' or 'I still do not understand why this happened.'

All three experiences are possible. God's faithfulness does not depend upon the believer reaching the first one.

54. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO TRUST GOD'S CHARACTER?

It means allowing what God has clearly revealed about Himself to anchor what remains unclear.

Scripture reveals God as holy, just, merciful, compassionate, patient, truthful, faithful, loving, sovereign, near to the brokenhearted, opposed to evil, and committed to redemption. Christians see these attributes most clearly together in Jesus.

Trusting God's character does not mean saying, 'I understand what God is doing.' It means saying, 'What I do not understand will not cause me to deny what God has clearly revealed about Himself.'

55. WHAT DOES FAITHFULNESS LOOK LIKE WHEN NOTHING CHANGES?

Sometimes it looks remarkably ordinary.

Getting out of bed. Praying one sentence. Taking medication. Going to counseling. Attending a medical appointment. Going to work. Caring for a child. Eating. Sleeping. Asking someone for help. Opening one Psalm. Going to church while still hurting. Refusing bitterness today. Choosing not to retaliate. Setting a necessary boundary. Continuing to love someone without pretending their choices are acceptable. Telling the truth. Waiting. Grieving. Remembering.

Faithfulness is not always dramatic. Sometimes perseverance is simply the next obedient step.

56. HOW CAN CHRISTIANS KNOW GOD WILL REMAIN FAITHFUL TO THE END?

Read Philippians 1:3-6; 1 Corinthians 1:4-9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; Hebrews 10:19-23; and Jude 24-25.

The New Testament repeatedly grounds Christian endurance in God's faithfulness.

This does not eliminate biblical warnings about perseverance, obedience, or apostasy, and Christians interpret some warning passages differently. But the New Testament consistently presents God as trustworthy and Christ as sufficient.

Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

Christian hope does not finally rest in the believer's ability to predict every circumstance. It rests in the God who has acted in Christ and will complete His redemptive purposes.

57. WHAT IS THE FINAL ANSWER TO THE QUESTION, 'CAN GOD STILL BE TRUSTED?'

Christianity ultimately answers by pointing to Jesus.

Look at the cross: God did not remain distant from suffering.

Look at the empty tomb: suffering and death did not defeat Him.

Look at God's promises: Christ will return, the dead will be raised, evil will be judged, creation will be renewed, and God will dwell with His people.

Scripture does not answer every individual 'why' question. But it gives an answer to the larger question, 'Is God faithful?'

Yes. Not because every circumstance feels faithful, every prayer receives the desired answer, every tragedy becomes understandable, or every wound heals before death.

God is faithful because faithfulness belongs to His character, and He has demonstrated that faithfulness decisively in Jesus Christ.

FINAL MEMORY ANCHOR

When circumstances cannot explain God, let God's revealed character interpret the circumstances. The cross shows His love. The resurrection shows His victory. His promises reveal the ending. God is faithful.

KEY TERMS

FAITHFULNESS

God's complete trustworthiness and consistency in being true to His character, His Word, His covenant purposes, and His promises.

PROVIDENCE

A theological term describing God's continuing care for and governance of creation. Christians agree that God providentially rules creation while differing about precisely how His sovereignty relates to human freedom and individual events.

SOVEREIGNTY

God's supreme authority and rule over creation.

LAMENT

Honest prayer that brings grief, confusion, complaint, fear, or protest to God while remaining in relationship with Him.

PERSEVERANCE

Continuing in faith and obedience under pressure.

PRESUMPTION

Treating something God has not actually promised as though He has guaranteed it.

CONTEXT

The surrounding literary, historical, covenantal, and biblical setting that helps determine what a passage means and how it should be applied.

INTERCESSION

Prayer offered to God on behalf of another person or group of people.

PROVIDENTIAL HINDSIGHT

Not a biblical term, but a useful description of recognizing afterward how God may have been working through circumstances that were unclear while they were happening.

RESURRECTION

God's raising of the dead. Jesus' bodily resurrection is central to the Gospel and grounds Christian confidence that death will not have the final word.

NEW CREATION

The biblical hope that God will ultimately renew creation, defeat death and evil, and dwell forever with His redeemed people.

WHAT THIS STUDY DOES NOT TEACH

This study does NOT teach that:

God promises Christians an easy life.

Every painful circumstance has an explanation available to us.

Every unanswered prayer means God secretly has a better earthly outcome coming.

Every tragedy is primarily intended to teach the victim a lesson.

Faith guarantees healing.

Suffering proves someone has sinned.

A lack of healing proves deficient faith.

God's sovereignty makes evil morally good.

Human beings are not responsible for the harm they cause.

Grief demonstrates distrust of God.

Questions or doubts are inherently sinful.

Questioning an interpretation of Scripture is the same as rejecting Scripture.

Trusting God requires remaining in danger.

Forgiveness requires immediate reconciliation.

Professional mental-health or medical care demonstrates weak faith.

Christians will necessarily understand every tragedy before they die.

Every biblical promise applies directly to every Christian in exactly the same way it applied to its original audience.

Intercessory prayer gives one person control over another person's decisions.

God's faithfulness means He will do whatever someone sincerely hopes He will do.

Instead, this study teaches that God's faithfulness must be understood according to God's revealed character and the promises He has actually made.

REVIEW: CAN YOU REMEMBER?

1. God's faithfulness is not measured by whether life unfolds as _____.

 2. Biblical _____ brings disappointment and grief honestly to God.

 3. God's apparent silence is not proof of His _____.

 4. Sometimes God's faithfulness appears as deliverance; sometimes it appears as sustaining _____.

 5. God should be evaluated according to promises He has actually _____.

 6. Before applying a biblical promise directly to ourselves, we should examine its _____.

 7. Abraham's story warns against confusing a specific divine promise with a deeply desired _____.

 8. Joseph could see God's providence more clearly in _____ than he could while suffering.

 9. Intercessory prayer does not give us _____ over another person's choices.

 10. Hebrews 11 includes both people who experienced dramatic deliverance and people who _____.

 11. The resurrection means God's faithfulness extends beyond the _____.

 12. Trust and _____ are not opposites.

 13. Asking difficult questions is not automatically the same as _____ God.

 14. God does not promise an exhaustive explanation for every tragedy, but He does promise final _____.

 15. The clearest revelation of God's faithfulness is found in _____.

- ANSWERS: 1. hoped 2. lament 3. absence 4. grace 5. made 6. context 7. outcome 8. retrospect 9. control 10. suffered 11. grave 12. grief 13. rejecting 14. restoration 15. Jesus Christ

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How would you define God's faithfulness after completing this study?
2. What is the difference between a biblical promise and a deeply desired outcome?
3. Why can suffering make God feel unfaithful even when He has broken no promise?
4. What does Psalm 77 teach about remembering?
5. What does John 11 teach about God's love, delay, grief, and intervention?
6. Why is Paul's thorn important for understanding unanswered prayer?
7. What does Gethsemane teach about asking God for a different outcome?
8. Why should Christians be careful about telling someone, 'God has something better'?
9. What questions should we ask before assuming a biblical promise applies directly to us?
10. How does the original context of Jeremiah 29:11 change the way the passage should be understood?
11. How does Hebrews 11 challenge outcome-based definitions of faith?
12. What does Naomi's story teach about interpreting life before the story is complete?
13. Why should Genesis 50:20 be used carefully with someone still in the middle of suffering?
14. What does Jeremiah teach about the difference between faithfulness and visible success?
15. What does Habakkuk teach about trusting God without fully understanding His methods?
16. What does faithful intercession look like when someone we love continues suffering or making destructive choices?
17. What responsibilities belong to us when praying for someone else - and what things remain outside our control?
18. What assumptions about God's promises can suffering expose?
19. Why does the resurrection matter to the question of God's faithfulness?
20. How can grief and trust coexist?
21. Why is seeking practical help compatible with trusting God's sovereignty?
22. How should Christians respond when suffering destabilizes someone's faith?
23. Why is questioning God not necessarily the same thing as rejecting God?
24. How can Christians walk compassionately with someone who feels betrayed by God?
25. What does trusting God's faithfulness require when an entire community is suffering?
26. What would faithfulness look like today if the circumstance itself did not change?

A 7-DAY SCRIPTURE PATH

TRUSTING GOD WHEN LIFE DOES NOT MAKE SENSE

DAY 1 - WHEN GOD FEELS SILENT

Read Psalm 77. Notice the psalmist's questions, then what he chooses to remember. Ask: What has God already revealed about Himself that today's circumstances cannot erase?

REMEMBER

God's apparent silence is not proof of His absence.

DAY 2 - WHEN GOD COULD HAVE INTERVENED

Read John 11:1-44. Notice that Jesus loved Lazarus before, during, and after the delay. Notice Martha and Mary's honesty and Jesus' tears. Ask: What does this passage reveal about the difference between divine love and immediate intervention?

REMEMBER

Delay does not necessarily mean indifference.

DAY 3 - WHEN THE ANSWER IS NOT WHAT WAS REQUESTED

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. Notice what Paul asked for and what God gave. Ask: Where might sustaining grace be needed if the circumstance does not change?

REMEMBER

Sometimes God's faithfulness appears as deliverance. Sometimes it appears as grace sufficient to remain faithful.

DAY 4 - WHEN THE STORY FEELS EMPTY

Read Ruth 1 and Ruth 4. Do not rush from chapter 1 to chapter 4 emotionally. Ask: Where might a present interpretation of life be understandable but incomplete?

REMEMBER

A chapter is not the whole story.

DAY 5 - WHEN GOD'S METHODS ARE CONFUSING

Read Habakkuk 1 and Habakkuk 3. Notice that Habakkuk's questions are not trivial. Ask: Can God be trusted before every question is resolved?

REMEMBER

Trust does not require pretending to understand.

DAY 6 - WHEN PRAYING FOR SOMEONE YOU LOVE

Read Luke 22:31-32; Mark 9:14-29; and Romans 8:26-27. Ask: What can faithfully be brought to God in prayer? What belongs to your responsibility? What must ultimately be entrusted to Him?

REMEMBER

Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

Intercession is an act of love and trust. It is not control.

DAY 7 - WHEN THE ENDING CANNOT YET BE SEEN

Read Romans 8:18-39 and Revelation 21:1-5. Notice what suffering cannot do and what suffering will eventually lose. Ask: How do resurrection and new creation change the meaning of present suffering?

REMEMBER

God's faithfulness extends beyond the present chapter - and beyond the grave.

WHEN GOD DOES NOT DO WHAT YOU HOPED

When suffering is fresh, a long theological explanation may not help. Begin here.

TELL GOD THE TRUTH.

'I wanted something different.' 'I don't understand.' 'I'm angry.' 'I'm afraid.' 'I'm disappointed.' 'I need You.'

DO NOT FORCE AN EXPLANATION.

If Scripture has not revealed why something happened, you do not need to invent a reason.

ASK THE PROMISE QUESTION.

What did God actually promise? Then ask: What did I deeply and legitimately hope He would do? The two may not be the same.

READ THE PROMISE IN CONTEXT.

Who was being addressed? What was happening? Was the promise unique or general? Is it applied to believers in Christ? Are there conditions? What does the surrounding passage actually say?

DISTINGUISH THE CIRCUMSTANCE FROM GOD'S CHARACTER.

Ask: What does this circumstance make me feel about God? Then: What has God actually revealed about Himself?

READ ONE PASSAGE.

Psalm 13. Psalm 23. Psalm 42. Psalm 73. Psalm 77. Psalm 88. Romans 8. 2 Corinthians 12. One passage is enough for today.

LET SOMEONE HELP CARRY THE BURDEN.

Read Galatians 6:2. Suffering was never intended to become a test of how independently someone can survive.

TAKE THE NEXT WISE STEP.

Make the appointment. Accept the meal. Call the counselor. Rest. Take prescribed medication. Ask for help. Set the boundary. Tell the truth. Seek safety. Do the next faithful thing.

WHEN SOMEONE ELSE IS THE ONE SUFFERING, REMEMBER WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT DO.

You can pray, love, speak truth, offer help, establish wise boundaries, and remain available in appropriate ways. You cannot control another person's heart, choices, recovery, repentance, or future. Entrust what you cannot carry to God.

DO NOT MAKE PERMANENT THEOLOGICAL CONCLUSIONS FROM THE WORST MOMENT.

Today's pain is real. It is not the entire biblical story.

LOOK AT JESUS.

When everything else feels uncertain: the cross happened, the tomb is empty, Christ is risen, and He has promised to return.

WHEN FEELINGS SAY...

"God has forgotten me."

READ: Isaiah 49:13-16; Hebrews 13:5-6

"God must not love me."

READ: Romans 5:6-11; Romans 8:31-39

"God didn't answer, so prayer must not matter."

READ: Matthew 26:36-46; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

"I can't handle this."

READ: 2 Corinthians 1:8-11

"I should be stronger."

READ: Psalm 103:13-14; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

"I shouldn't still be grieving."

READ: John 11:32-36; Romans 12:15

"Everyone else is receiving what I wanted."

READ: Psalm 73; John 21:18-22

"I thought God promised me this."

READ: Jeremiah 29:1-14; 2 Timothy 3:14-17

"I can't fix the person I love."

READ: Luke 22:31-32; Romans 8:26-27

"My questions mean I'm losing my faith."

READ: Psalm 73; John 20:24-29

"Nothing about this makes sense."

READ: Habakkuk 1-3

"God is silent."

READ: Psalm 22; Psalm 88

"This will never be redeemed."

READ: Romans 8:18-39

"Death has won."

READ: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

"The story is over."

READ: Revelation 21:1-5

THE GOSPEL AND GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

The deepest evidence of God's faithfulness is not found in comfortable circumstances. It is found in Jesus Christ.

Humanity rebelled against God. Sin entered human experience. Death followed. Yet God did not abandon His redemptive purpose. He made promises, established covenants, worked through Israel, spoke through the prophets, and in the fullness of time Jesus came.

Jesus lived without sin, proclaimed God's Kingdom, revealed the Father's character, went willingly to the cross, bore sin, died, was buried, and rose.

The resurrection declares that God's promises are stronger than death. Those who trust in Christ are forgiven and reconciled to God by grace.

They are not promised a painless life. They are promised Christ.

Because they belong to Christ, sin will not have the final word. Suffering will not have the final word. Injustice will not have the final word. The grave will not have the final word. Jesus will.

The Gospel therefore changes the deepest question from, 'Will God make every circumstance turn out the way I hope?' to, 'Has God done enough in Jesus Christ to demonstrate that He can be trusted with the parts of the story I cannot yet understand?'

Christianity answers: Yes.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

SCRIPTURE FIRST

Before turning to other resources, spend time with Job, Ruth, selected Psalms of lament, Habakkuk, John 11, Romans 8, 2 Corinthians, Hebrews 10-12, 1 Peter, and Revelation 21-22.

3NAILS STUDY #128 - TRIALS AND HARD TIMES

Study #128 provides the broader biblical framework for understanding and walking through suffering, including fuller treatments of different causes and categories of suffering, Job and victim-blaming, mental and emotional health, collective and systemic suffering, abuse and safety safeguards, and difficult cases that resist easy explanation. Study #129 intentionally focuses more narrowly on how God can still be trusted when suffering continues, prayer is not answered as hoped, or circumstances seem inconsistent with what we believed God would do.

THE BOOK OF JOB

A trusted evangelical study Bible or careful commentary on Job can help readers follow the entire argument rather than extracting isolated statements from Job or his friends.

TIMOTHY KELLER - WALKING WITH GOD THROUGH PAIN AND SUFFERING

A broad Christian treatment examining philosophical, cultural, biblical, and pastoral dimensions of suffering.

C. S. LEWIS - THE PROBLEM OF PAIN

A classic Christian attempt to think carefully about God's goodness and the existence of suffering. Lewis is offering theological and philosophical reasoning rather than inspired Scripture.

C. S. LEWIS - A GRIEF OBSERVED

Written after the death of Lewis's wife, this book allows readers to see the difference between discussing suffering intellectually and experiencing grief personally.

THE PSALMS OF LAMENT

For someone actively suffering, Scripture itself may be more helpful than a theological book. Begin with Psalms 13, 22, 42-43, 55, 73, 77, 88, 121, and 130.

Important resource safeguard

Listing a resource does not mean 3Nails endorses every theological position, interpretation, methodology, statistic, strategy, publication, or conclusion it contains. Outside resources can help. Scripture remains authoritative. Compare what is read with God's Word and continually return to Scripture.

CLOSING SUMMARY

Can God still be trusted when He allows suffering, does not remove it, or does not answer prayer as hoped? Scripture answers yes - but it does not answer by pretending those experiences are easy.

The Bible contains people who waited, wept, asked why, felt forgotten, prayed for different outcomes, suffered for years, watched someone they loved suffer, and died without seeing every promise fulfilled during their earthly lives.

Scripture therefore does not define God's faithfulness as: 'God will always give His people the earthly outcome they desire.' God's faithfulness means He remains true to His character, His Word, His covenant purposes, and His promises.

That makes one distinction especially important: there is a difference between what God promised and what someone deeply and legitimately hoped God would do.

Recognizing that distinction does not make the hope foolish, the prayer wrong, or the disappointment less painful. It simply means God's faithfulness must be measured against what God actually promised.

That requires learning to read Scripture carefully: Who was God speaking to? What did He promise? What was the context? Is the promise repeated or applied to believers in Christ? Were conditions attached? What does the surrounding passage actually say?

Reading a promise in context does not mean explaining it away or assuming that an Old Testament promise has nothing to say to Christians. Scripture itself shows how God's promises, covenants, patterns, and hopes reach their fulfillment in Christ.

Sometimes God's faithfulness appears as rescue. Sometimes as provision. Sometimes as an answer after long waiting. Sometimes as sufficient grace when the circumstance remains. Sometimes as strength to endure another day. Sometimes as people who help carry a burden. Sometimes His faithfulness is recognized only in retrospect. And sometimes the reason for a particular suffering remains unknown.

Christian faith does not require inventing the missing explanation. Nor does it require pretending questions do not exist.

Above all, Scripture points toward what God has already revealed. Look at Jesus. At the cross, evil appeared victorious. The Messiah was dead. The disciples scattered. Hope seemed buried. If God's faithfulness had been judged only by what could be seen on Friday, the conclusion would have been wrong.

Sunday changed everything.

Jesus rose. The resurrection is God's declaration that death cannot defeat His purposes.

Until Christ returns, faith does not have to pretend. It can cry, lament, ask why, ask again for deliverance, seek medical care, receive counseling, establish boundaries, flee danger, pursue justice, grieve, admit disappointment, and wrestle with questions.

It can say, 'Lord, I do not understand.'

And then, sometimes through tears, it can add: 'But I know what You have shown me in Jesus. Help me trust You with what I cannot see.'

God's faithfulness is not measured by whether life unfolds as hoped. It is measured by whether God remains true to who He is and what He has promised.

And Scripture's testimony from Genesis to Revelation is: He does.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father,

You know how difficult it can be to trust when life does not make sense.

You know every prayer that seemed unanswered, every healing that did not come, every relationship that was not restored, every door that remained closed, every loved one who continues to struggle, every loss that cannot be replaced, every question that still begins with 'Why?' and every heart that has quietly wondered whether You can still be trusted.

Thank You that Your Word does not shame those questions. Thank You for preserving the prayers of people who cried out from confusion, grief, fear, disappointment, and darkness.

Help hurting people bring their real hearts to You rather than the words they think they are supposed to say.

Where someone feels forgotten, remind them of Your presence. Where someone feels abandoned, anchor them in Your promises. Where someone is exhausted from waiting, provide today's strength.

Where someone is carrying the suffering of a person they love, remind them that they do not have to carry what belongs ultimately in Your hands. Teach them to pray faithfully without believing they must control the outcome.

Where someone needs practical help, bring trustworthy people alongside them. Where medical or mental-health care is needed, provide wise and compassionate care. Where someone is unsafe, provide courage, protection, and a path toward safety. Where injustice has occurred, bring truth and accountability.

Where grief is fresh, do not let anyone rush what needs to be mourned. Where a prayer has not been answered as hoped, guard hurting hearts from believing that an undesired answer means You do not care.

Where someone's faith has been shaken, give them room to bring their questions to You. Help them distinguish between questioning an assumption and abandoning You. Meet them in uncertainty. Lead them back to Your Word. Lead them back to Jesus.

And where no explanation has been given, protect Your people from explanations You never gave.

Teach them the difference between what You have promised and what they deeply hoped would happen. Give wisdom to read Your promises faithfully and in context.

Help them also remember that context does not make Your Word distant or irrelevant. Show them how Your promises and purposes find their center and fulfillment in Christ, and teach them to receive faithfully what Your Word truly gives Your people.

Above all, turn their eyes toward Jesus.

When circumstances seem to say You cannot be trusted, remind them of the cross. When death seems victorious, remind them of the empty tomb. When the story seems finished, remind them that Jesus is risen. When the future feels uncertain, remind them that Christ will return. When suffering feels permanent, remind them that You will make all things new.

Until that day, give grace for what remains. Give courage for the next faithful step. Give permission to grieve. Give strength to persevere. Give humility where answers are unavailable. Give wisdom to recognize Your promises accurately.

You are faithful.

Help Your people trust You when they can see it.

And help them trust You when they cannot.

Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

FINAL MEMORY ANCHORS

REMEMBER

God's faithfulness is not measured by whether life unfolds as hoped. It is measured by whether God remains true to who He is and what He has promised.

God is not honored by pretending pain does not hurt. Biblical faith brings the pain honestly to Him.

God's apparent silence is not proof of His absence.

Sometimes God's faithfulness appears as deliverance. Sometimes it appears as sustaining grace.

God has never promised to explain everything. He has given sufficient reason to trust Him when explanations do not come.

A chapter is not the whole story.

God should be evaluated according to the promises He has actually made - not promises people accidentally made on His behalf.

Every biblical promise is true. Not every biblical promise was made directly to every individual believer. Context helps us understand who received the promise, what God promised, and how that truth ultimately relates to Christ and His people.

A deeply legitimate hope is not necessarily a divine promise.

You can faithfully pray for another person without being able to control their choices or guarantee their outcome.

Questions are not automatically rejection. Sometimes faith means continuing to bring the questions toward God.

Trust and grief are not opposites.

The resurrection means God's faithfulness extends beyond the grave.

When circumstances cannot explain God, let God's revealed character interpret the circumstances.

The cross shows His love. The resurrection shows His victory. His promises reveal the ending.

God is faithful.

Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus.