

# A Song in the Night

In conversation with God about pain and suffering

*40 Day Prayer Focus on Farming  
1 September – 10 October 2020*

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Quotations are from the New International Version Bible unless otherwise indicated.

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# Dedicated to

Janetta and all our children  
Dirk and Leana and their three children: Josua, Leila and Amelie  
Jaco and Elsa and their three children: Nihan, Jano and Elzandé  
Eugene and Roné and their two children: Ruben and Mia  
Melinda

*Thank you for going on this journey with me. Your support makes it easier to keep moving forward. Thank you for everything that you've endured and sacrificed, not just for me, but also in living out your own callings. You make a huge difference in people's lives by teaching, providing for, serving, and helping them. Your compassion lightens their burdens and gives them hope. Don't stop!*

Also dedicated to Arno and Jana, my late brother's two children who suffered the loss of their mother, Elmien, and their brother, Johan.

## From tears to a song!

I grew up in a very happy home. My parents were Godfearing, responsible people. We weren't really poor, but we definitely weren't rich. My father sometimes had to take back our few cents of pocket money to pay all the bills. I still remember the little pieces of paper stuck in the front of our savings books to record the loans. I had a speech problem and had to see a speech therapist. I only managed to pronounce an "R" in grade 7. My speech problem led to a reading problem and I still struggle to get through large amounts of reading. In grade 11, I suffered a serious back injury because of a birth defect. I was operated on and had to stop playing rugby. It was not easy to overcome this setback.

My conversation with God about pain and suffering first began in September 1984. My father phoned me and said he had some bad news. I immediately thought that my grandfather had died. Instead I was told that my brother, Albert, had been shot dead by armed robbers on his in-laws' farm. He left behind a pregnant wife and one child. Darkness descended! Albert's untimely death could have driven me away from God, but thankfully it did not. I began to talk to God about suffering. I

went to Him for answers. I read the Bible from start to finish. I read everything I could about the subject. It took me quite a few years. In 1987, I wrote down everything I had learnt. I asked someone to type it on waxpaper and print a few copies. The title: **A Song in the Night**. But it stayed on the shelf.

Suffering is such an overwhelming, theologically difficult, and emotionally sensitive subject that I never thought I'd dare write about it. I had too little experience and my knowledge was too limited. Meanwhile, my family and I experienced "persecution" in and by the church. I don't feel the need to say more about it though. Because I spoke out for people who weren't allowed to speak for themselves (Proverbs 31:8-9), I was seen as a traitor to my people in 1993/4. On one occasion four armed farmers tried to chase me out of town. In one way or another, every bullet that was fired at me hit my wife and children too. This made life even more difficult for me. But the Lord taught me not to be angry with anyone because He was teaching me things that I would later need in ministry. Little by little, He formed my character and developed my leadership. He did it through every drought, flood, failed harvest, theft, and personal or financial crisis in my life.

In 1993 the Lord called Janetta and me to start AMOS – a farming ministry. The name Amos comes from the farmer-prophet Amos in the Old Testament. Amos means "burden bearer". Ouch! I discovered that living out your calling and accomplishing your God-given task always comes with pain and suffering. (Think about Jesus; Paul – Acts 9:16; Mary - Luke 2:34-35; John the Baptist - Matthew 11:2-19 and 14:1-12.) As the years passed the mission became more difficult and the challenges bigger. Obeying God sometimes became life-threatening.

*A Song in the Night* is not a collection of 40 messages of comfort. It is a collection of Biblical perspectives to help you converse honestly with God about your pain and suffering. May these conversations help you to know God more, to understand suffering better, and to react responsibly to suffering. May you learn how to sing **a song in the night!**

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# 10 October – Barefoot Day

At AMOS, 10 October is Barefoot Day. God regularly commands His prophets to do something unusual to make a specific message clear to His people. (E.g. Ezekiel 3:24; 4:1-4; 4:10-11; 5:1; 12:2-3; 12:18; 21:6; 24:15-16; 37:15-19; Jeremiah 13:1-14; 16:1-4; 27:1-2; 32:1-44; Hosea 3.)

**The aim of *Barefoot Day* is to remind you that we are on holy ground, God's land, and that we live and farm in His presence.** God's presence in the burning bush made the ground on which Moses was standing holy (Exodus 3). Later Christ came to Earth and was called Emmanuel, which means: *God is with us* (Matthew 1:23). He also reconciled the world and made it holy through His sacrifice and presence (Colossians 1:19-20). He is with us every day until the end of the world (Matthew 28:20). **We now live and farm daily on holy ground in God's presence.** Being aware of that all day is life-changing. With my soft, sensitive bare feet, I think carefully about where I walk, and I tread carefully. I don't just rush thoughtlessly through the day. The same applies to my life in God's presence. It helps me to avoid sin (thorns and sharp stones), and is a great comfort and encouragement to me. He is here with me to carry, help, and protect me (Acc. Joshua 1:9; 2 Chronicles 16:9 and Matthew 28:20).

**This is also a special opportunity to testify.** People are bound to ask you: *Why are you walking around barefoot?* This will give you an opportunity to testify according to the Scripture verses above. **Barefoot Day** is an opportunity to encourage people and to show them that they are in God's presence not only in church, but everywhere.

Let's start a  
movement!

Let's farm barefoot yearly on  
**10 October!**



# How to make the most of this prayer focus.

Keep the following in mind to make the most of this prayer focus:

## 1. Plan and organise

Use every possible opportunity for prayer. Create new opportunities to pray with other people during this time. There are many opportunities, but it won't just happen by itself. Make an effort and plan thoroughly. Think about the following:

- Your personal **quiet time**;
- Mealtimes prayers (*this is an opportunity where people can and should pray for agriculture*);
- At the start or end of the workday or during lunch hour, time for prayer can be set aside;
- Use your existing small group gatherings;
- During **church services**, a farmer, his wife or child, a farmworker, or someone else can be asked to pray and intercede especially for the farming community;
- **Special prayer opportunities** (prayer hours), as well as **half-night or all-night prayer wakes**, can be arranged;
- Mobilise the **elderly, children, women, prayer groups, etc.** to pray;
- **Promote** the *40 Day Prayer Focus on Agriculture* as widely as possible. Use newspapers and radio stations. Remember, these guidelines appear in English and Afrikaans on the AMOS homepage: [www.amosafrica.net](http://www.amosafrica.net) and may be copied freely.

## 2. Read the Scripture passages

Every day, read at least the Scripture passages at the top of the chapter. You will experience little blessing and growth if you only read the message. Remember, it is very important to give the Holy Spirit an opportunity to speak through the Word.

### 3. **Confess your sins**

Although it is not mentioned specifically in every chapter, it is extremely important to pay attention throughout to the four important issues mentioned in **2 Chronicles 7:14**:

- Let the Holy Spirit lead you to repentance;
- Pray and confess any sins the Holy Spirit convicts you of;
- Ask what the will of the Lord is and obey it;
- Turn away from your evil ways. Turn your back on everything that the Word of God doesn't approve of.

### 4. **Prayer guidelines**

The prayer guidelines are not rigid requirements. Read and think about the chapter for each day. Pray about everything that the Holy Spirit puts on your heart.

### 5. **Cultivate the discipline of fasting and obedience**

There are many books about fasting and prayer. Read them at your leisure. The 40 Day Prayer Focus is an ideal opportunity to sharpen your self-control and discipline. For instance, eat and drink nothing for three days like Esther did (Esther 4:16), or just eat vegetables and drink water like Daniel and his friends (Daniel 1:12).

Consider fasting from something you really enjoy for 40 days: coffee, Coke, sweets or chocolates, meat, dairy products or bread. You may also decide not to have seconds at mealtimes or not to drink tonics or use other stimulants.

It's not just food, TV, etc. that we must learn to give up from time to time. We must learn to **always give up our sins and disobedience**. We must fast from evil deeds and break bad habits. Therefore, use this book to practise the discipline of obedience.

# PART 1

## The Bigger Picture



When you only look at one piece of a puzzle, it's hard to know where it fits in. If the piece is grey, you might think that the whole picture is grey too. But when you look at the picture, you will see many different colours and images. You will even see that the grey piece doesn't make the picture ugly. The whole picture puts that one piece into perspective. You were holding only a small piece of a big puzzle in your hand.

It's important not to lose perspective when you experience suffering. Don't focus on your experience right here and now. Reality, including pain and suffering, is much larger than your current experience.

Always look at the bigger picture! It's important.

***"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us"*** (Romans 8:18).

## Day 1

### A Song in the Night!

(In conversation with God about pain and suffering.)

**Read:** Job 35:9-10 and Habakkuk 3:17-19

Let me tell you about a friend of mine who went through some challenging times. He put all his time, money, and energy into the farm and built it up into a successful business. But when his father died, he didn't inherit the farm and the business. Initially it was impossible for him, in midst of what had happened, to keep praising the Lord. According to him, it was easy for Habakkuk to say that he would "**nevertheless**" rejoice in the Lord because he was never actually in such a situation. Habakkuk says "**Even though ...**" My friend's theory was: it's much easier to sing when pain and suffering is only a possibility than when it's a reality.

Suffering is a reality. It is terrible! Nevertheless, **a song in the night** is possible. Job says that **a song in the night** comes from God (Job 35:10). He gives it to us!

Let's have a look at a few examples in the Bible. David is a good example. The Holy Spirit inspired him to write songs in very challenging times (2 Timoteus 3:16). Read the Psalms. In the middle of a battle against overwhelming numbers of Moabites and Ammonites, Jehoshaphat had the singers sing songs of praise (2 Chronicles 20:21-22). Jesus sang a song of praise with His disciples the night He was arrested, tortured, and crucified (Mark 14:26). Paul and Silas sang songs of praise in the middle of the night while in dangerous circumstances in jail (Acts 16:22-25).

It's only when God is a greater reality to you than your circumstances – than your suffering – that you will be able to sing **a song in the night** during your grief. By singing **a song in the night**, I want to affirm how well I've come to know God and His character; that I'm prepared to fully trust in Him *in* my suffering and *with* my suffering. A Song in the Night shows the authenticity of my faith. It shows that I'm not a victim of my fear and circumstances. In all circumstances, I am more than a conqueror in Christ Jesus who gives me strength!

The ability to sing **a song in the night** is not something that we can find in ourselves. It's an ability only God can give. Ask Him for **a song in the night** – *your* night. Even if drought, sickness, conflict, divorce, murder, fire, theft, accidents, corruption, economic chaos, unemployment, poverty, death of a loved one, cancer, or Covid-19 don't make sense to you, God still wants to give you **a song in the night**.

When people are genuinely wrestling with God about their suffering by reading His word and listening to His Spirit, He usually first gives them a

song. A song of victory is born out of those intimate conversations – **a song in the night**. May God give you a song of victory in your intimate conversations with Him over the next 40 days. Start singing it, even if you can only hum, even if your voice is breaking, your eyes are tearing up, and your melody is totally off key. Start singing **a song in the night** because God and His promises are a greater reality than your suffering and circumstances.

**Prayer:** Lord, I also want to sing a song during my dark night of pain and suffering. I don't know how to yet, but I know You want to teach me and that You will. Please teach me through Your Word and Your Spirit during the next 40 days. **Amen.**

**Intercession:**

- † *Pray for all of your family, friends, and colleagues who are hurting, suffering, and struggling to sing.*
- † *Pray that everyone who starts reading this Prayer Focus will persevere until the very end. Pray that the Holy Spirit and the Word will show them the bigger picture and give them new insight.*
- † *Ask the Lord in His great love and grace to give you and your people a song – a song to sing in your darkest night.*

**Pray for Africa:** Focus on farmers, doctors, and politicians.

## Day 2

### Start an honest conversation with God.

**Read:** Job 33:14-19; Job 42:1-6; Hebrews 1:1-3

The subtitle of **Song in the Night** is: *In conversation with God about pain and suffering.* The only way to find **a song in the night** is to enter into a conversation with God about your pain and suffering. No conversation, no song!

**Job 33:14. For God does speak—now one way, now another—  
though no one perceives it ...**

**Job 33:19. Or someone may be chastened on a bed of pain  
with constant distress in their bones ...**

God speaks to us through suffering. I want to help you hear what He is saying. He wants to teach us to sing **a song in the** night. He wants to strengthen and encourage His children. He wants us to understand that He didn't change when our situation changed. He is still holy, God Almighty. He is our loving Father in Jesus Christ. He just wants us to know Him better. That's why He speaks to Job (from Job 38 onwards). We read about Job's reaction to God's words in Job 42:5. **"My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you."** May this happen to us when we talk to God about our suffering.

We must wrestle honestly with God. In Job 16:9, Job calls God his Opponent. It's as if he's holding on to God with one hand (because he has no one else to hold on to), but hitting God with the other hand because he's so angry and broken. Please read Job 23! It shows how Job honestly wrestles with God.

Jeremiah complains about the calamities that have afflicted him since his birth (Jeremiah 15:10). He reminds the Lord about the promises He gave him and about everything he has done for the Lord. In Jeremiah 15:18 he asks: **"Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable? You are to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails."** Please read God's reaction in verses 19-21. God wants to talk to us in our suffering, even if we are speaking nonsense (Jeremiah 15:19)!

Read David's Psalms. In many of them (eg. Psalm 13 and 54), David speaks to God about his suffering in the period between his anointment and his ascension to the throne about 10 years later (1 Samuel 16-31). He wrestles with the Lord. He wants to know why the Lord is taking so long to help him.

In Gethsemane, Jesus' struggle with the Father was so bad that His sweat fell like drops of blood (Lukas 22:44). This condition is called **hematidrosis**. It is caused by abnormal physical and emotional stress and anxiety. On the cross shortly before Jesus' death, He calls out loudly to God: **"Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?")** (Matthew 27:46)

When you suffer, you must speak. Beware of an "internal conversation" – a conversation with yourself in your head. You can easily convince yourself that you're suffering unjustly and should feel sorry for yourself. Self-pity, anger, and bitterness are often the result of a continuous, one-sided conversation with yourself (Acc. Jonah 3:10 – 4:11).

**Prayer:** Help me, Lord, not to speak and listen only to myself. Help me to honestly share my heart with You in my suffering. Help me to listen to You and know You better. Please give me greater perspective and deeper insight. **Amen.**

**Intercession:**

- † *Pray that the Lord will protect you from bitterness and self-pity.*
- † *Pray for family, friends, farmers, and doctors that need to have a good conversation with God. Pray for those who don't want to read the Bible or pray about their suffering.*
- † *Confess the nonsense and all the terrible things that you've said in your suffering* (following Jeremiah 15:19).

**Pray for Africa:** Focus on farmers, doctors, and politicians in **South Africa.**

## **Day 3**

### **It's a listening conversation. God is revealing Himself!**

**Read:** John 1:18 and 14:8-11; Hebrews 1:1-3

After the death of my brother, Albert, on a farm near Upington in 1984, many people tried to comfort us with these words: *It was the will of the Lord. Accept it; He is in control.* I wondered how it could be His will. In Exodus 20:13 God forbids murder. He says: ***You shall not murder.***

I realised that I would have to think more deeply and read the whole Bible to find sensible answers to all my questions. I would have to walk in a personal relationship with God and get to know Him better.

The Bible is clear: **People can disobey God's will. Therefore we can't say that everything that happens is God's will.** God can't be held responsible for the miseries that follow disobedience to Him. Pain and suffering can only be God's will if Satan and humankind are always obedient to Him. But we know that this isn't so!

Therefore it's totally wrong to blame God for all suffering. It's also very dangerous. Someone who blames God for all the evil and misery in the



world will turn his back on God at some point. No one wants a god that threatens your life and happiness and afflicts you with disasters at random. It would be better to ignore such a god and convince yourself that he doesn't exist.

You can't get to know God by looking at suffering. Get to know Him by reading His Word and accepting His Son, Jesus Christ, as Lord and Saviour. Then He will teach and show you how to understand suffering. If you base your image of God on your experience of suffering, you will get the wrong idea about Who He is. You can only get the right image of God by looking at Jesus:

***"No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known."*** (John 1:18).

***"Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"*** (John 14:8-9).

***"In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. <sup>3</sup> The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word."*** (Hebrews 1:1-3a).

In the Bible we are introduced to God as the Light (John 9:5; 1 John 1:5); the merciful Father; the loving, righteous, and holy God. The One Who hates every kind of sin, injustice, and darkness so much that He let His Son be nailed to a cross: The Righteous One crucified for us sinners (1 Peter 3:18).

In Jesus Christ we get to know Him as the One Who triumphs over all powers of destruction, even death! When we look at suffering, we don't ask: *What kind of a god is responsible for this chaos?* No. We look to the Bible and know that God is Light. There is no darkness in Him. Then we ask: *How should we, in the light of His Word, understand the suffering in this world?*

Don't try to understand God by reasoning from your personal experience. Walk in conversation with God. Believe and accept His Word, no matter what your circumstances are. Get to know Him as He reveals Himself to us in Christ. Get to know Him personally. Then the Spirit of Christ will make all hidden things known to you. Only the Holy Spirit can teach you Who God is. Only He knows the hidden things of God. Only He knows what God gives us in His grace (Acc. 1 Corinthians 2:11-12).

**Prayer:** Lord, keep me from getting the wrong idea about You by looking at suffering. Please reveal Yourself to me through Your Word, Your Son, and Your Spirit. Help me to then see suffering through Your eyes. **Amen**

**Intercession:**

- † *Ask for forgiveness for the false image we formed of God by looking at suffering instead of getting to know Him through His Word and His Son.*
- † *Pray for family and friends who have turned their backs on God because they were blinded by suffering.*
- † *Pray that everyone who starts the Prayer Focus will finish it. Pray that the Spirit and the Word will give them new insight.*
- † *Pray that God will reveal Himself through His Word and His Spirit to farmers, farm labourers, doctors, medical personnel, as well as their families.*

**Pray for Africa:** Focus on farmers, doctors and politicians in **Lesotho**.

**Day 4**  
**Suffering: Everthing – Everyone – Everywhere –**  
**Always**  
**But ...**

**Read:** Genesis 3:14-20; Romans 5:12; 1 Peter 5:9; Matthew 6:34

When you're with people who are talking about things in which you aren't involved, their conversation doesn't interest you because it doesn't affect you. But this conversation is different. It affects you directly because it's about pain and suffering. **Everything** in creation is suffering because of

the sin and disobedience of Adam (Romans 8:18-23). **Everything** is affected by the curse. **Everyone** is affected by the curse. **Everywhere** we go, we see the scars of the curse. Pain and suffering are **always** with us because **"Each day has enough trouble of its own."** (Matthew 6:34b)

There are many kinds of suffering and pain:

- Physical pain: a broken arm; heart problems; headaches; kidney stones; open wounds; hunger and thirst; ageing; etc.
- Emotional pain: fear; crumbling relationships and marriages; misunderstandings; insults; bitterness and hate; jealousy; etc.
- Social pain: social isolation; loneliness; disparagement; scorn and rejection; discrimination; etc.
- The pain of disappointment: childlessness; an unsuccessful year of school or an unreachable goal; a failed harvest; crushed dreams; etc.
- Economic suffering: losses; failed plans; corruption and exploitation; bankruptcy and the effects thereof; disasters; unemployment; etc.
- Suffering in the workplace: being overworked or burnt out; exploitation; abuse; struggle and hardships; unrealistic demands; failed harvests and/or transactions; missed deadlines or timelines that don't come together; etc.
- Natural disasters, pandemics, disfunctional governments, and so on!

The list of pain, suffering, and hardship is neverending. Our enemy, the devil who walks around like a roaring lion, is always looking for someone else to devour; someone else whose life he can make hell. Believers throughout the world experience it (1 Peter 5:8-9).

Remember that suffering isn't limited to physical illnesses. Heartache can cripple someone's spirit just as much as sickness can keep the body in a sickbed. In our search for answers about suffering, we must find answers that are comprehensive enough to help in all instances of suffering.

Everyone thinks their own pain is the worst. It's personal: my pain and my suffering. It's really bad! It's heartbreaking! Don't deny your pain and suffering. If you do, you're lying to yourself. *A Song in the Night* is for people who are struggling through suffering. It's for people who want to talk to God about it and seek answers from Him. *A Song in the Night* wants to give you perspective on your suffering.

Don't deny your suffering. It's a reality! **But ...** the conversation is not just about suffering. There is more to talk about, more to consider. The days of suffering are numbered! Christ's resurrection and victory over death proves it. One day God will make everything new. Nothing will be cursed any more (Revelation 21:5 and 22:3). The day will come of which the Word says: **"He (God) will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."** (Revelation 21:4). And Paul says: **"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us"** (Romans 8:18).

But the conversation isn't just about the future. God's Kingdom is not just a future reality. The Kingdom is already being established. Here and now – more and more every day! God performs signs, wonders, and powerful deeds in answer to the prayers of His children. He heals and restores! He gives victory over the powers of evil. He provides and cares for us in wonderful ways! He gives wisdom to solve problems and knowledge to make new discoveries. Just as suffering penetrated all of creation, God's Kingdom is busy working it's way through all creation (Matthew 10:31-33). What a joy it is! What an encouragement it is to pray and talk to God in our suffering! What a motivation it is to start singing even now!

**Prayer:** Lord, I can't run away from my suffering or deny it. Life isn't always pleasant. Please help me to believe that the days of suffering are numbered; to believe that a day is coming when You will bring an end to all suffering! **Amen**

**Intercession:**

- † *Pray that something of God's Kingdom today will become visible in your suffering and your community's suffering.*
- † *Pray for family, friends, and acquaintances who are suffering in one way or another, even if they are physically healthy.*
- † *Pray most of all for people who live in fear. Pray for people who don't know God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Pray that they will get to know the Father through Jesus and that His love will drive out all the fear (1 John 4:14-19).*

**Pray for Africa:** Focus on farmers, doctors and politicians in **Swaziland.**

## **Part 2**

### **The Bible gives more than one answer and more than one perspective on pain and suffering.**

God, Satan, and humankind – all three – are always involved in our pain and suffering; each one in agreement with his own nature and character.



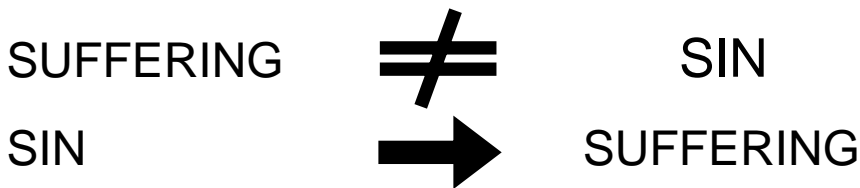
## **Day 5**

### **What is the connection between sin and suffering?**

**Read:** Isaiah 53 and 1 Peter 1:18

Before we discuss the different Biblical perspectives on suffering, we need to discuss the difference between sin and suffering.

**Suffering is not the same as sin**, even though the two are linked. **Suffering is the result of sin** (Genesis 3). It wasn't part of God's creation from the beginning. It was only after Adam and Eve's disobedience that it became a horrible reality (Romans 5:12).



(This diagram shows that suffering is not sin, but that suffering is always the result of sin. However, it doesn't mean that all your suffering is the direct result of your own sin.)

Sin and suffering are different things. The Bible says that we must turn from our sins, not our suffering. If suffering and sin were the same thing, it would mean that Christ sinned because He certainly suffered! But that is false! The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus suffered (John 10:17-18; Acts 3:18), but never sinned (John 8:46; 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Hebrews 4:15 and 7:26-27; 1 Peter 3:18)!

This distinction between sin and suffering is important. When we speak about God's involvement in suffering, we may not say that He was also involved in sin. God is light. There is no darkness in Him, even though He is involved in suffering. We don't have to try to protect His goodness by denying His involvement in suffering. On Day 7-9 we will discuss God's involvement in suffering in more detail.

Suffering is caused by sin and sin is our own fault. And yet, sin doesn't originate in the human world, but in the angelic world (Acc. Jude 6; 2 Peter 2:4).

God gave humans the freedom to choose. We don't know why because the Bible doesn't tell us. The best answer that we can give is that God made us in His image and so we can choose and make decisions.

Sin is the cause of suffering! When we blame God for causing suffering, we are putting the guilt of sin on Him. This means we're doing the exact same thing Adam did (Genesis 3:12): we are blaming God for our own irresponsibility (Acc. Proverbs 19:3). This is something we must never do!

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I worship You. Thank You that You suffered for us, but never sinned. Therefore You are our Saviour and You can help us in our struggle against sin (Hebrews 2:17-18 and 4:14-16). **Amen**

**Intercession:**

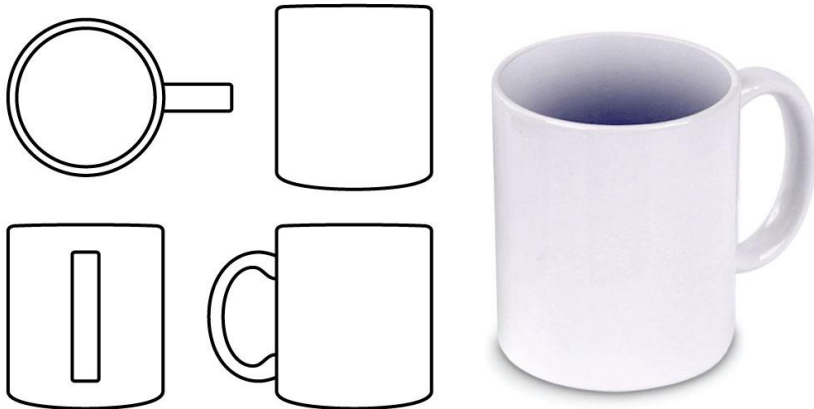
- † *Pray for deep insight into the Word of God. Pray that we will all understand what the Bible says about sin and suffering.*
- † *Pray that you and your loved ones will never abuse your free will by disobeying God. It will land you and others in misery.*
- † *Pray that people who are suffering and being tempted will get to know Jesus as Helper and Saviour (Hebrews 2:17-18 and 4:14-16).*

**Pray for Africa:** Focus on farmers, doctors, and politicians in **Namibia**.

## Day 6

### More than one perspective on suffering

**Read:** 1 John 4:8; Hebrews 12:29; 2 Corinthians 5:21



*Five different perspectives of a coffee mug*

Each diagram of the coffee mug is true. But each diagram is not the only truth. In each diagram there are parts which you can't see – but they're still there. When we merge the different diagrams (perspectives), we see the whole picture. You must look at the coffee mug from all angles to see the full picture.



In the same way, the Bible looks at suffering from different angles. Different writers and parts provide different perspectives. Each perspective is true, but does not give the full picture on its own. For example, if we look at the cross based on certain passages of Scripture, we see God's love. Other passages of Scripture emphasise His holiness (He hates sin) and His righteousness (He must punish sin). All these perspectives put together help us to better understand the message of the cross.

The many perspectives the Bible offers on suffering makes it difficult to find short and simple answers. For example, a farmer may ask: *Was my crop destroyed by hail because I was dishonest about the actual condition of the bakkie when I sold it?* He wants a simple **yes or no** answer. People who are suffering often want straightforward, simple answers. They don't ask themselves if it's the right answer or the full answer. But the Bible doesn't always give straightforward, simple answers.

Everyone's suffering is different. Therefore, the Bible's answers to everyone's questions will be different. As far as possible, you must first find all the answers. Then you must **wrestle with God in intimate prayer to seek the answers that apply to your current situation**. Yesterday's answers are for yesterday's suffering. They might be applicable some time in the future again. But what about today? The answers that I receive in my suffering don't necessarily apply in my neighbour's suffering.

Because the Bible gives different perspectives on suffering, you must keep them all in mind while you interpret your suffering and try to understand it. We can't explain someone else's suffering. But we can help to make sense of someone's suffering by using a few Biblical perspectives.

Let's make peace with this and enjoy the freedom of searching for the right perspective. Look for what is applicable to your current situation and suffering. Don't accept simple answers (only one or two texts) that are given randomly to everyone who is suffering. The Lord doesn't work with people in that way. He knows who you are; how mature you are in your relationship with Him; what you are doing and what your circumstances are. He will speak to you personally through His Word and His Spirit. This doesn't mean that people can't help each other and offer advice. Help each other to remain in conversation with God.

**Prayer:** Lord, help me to accept that the Bible provides more than one perspective on suffering. Help me not to look for short, simple answers. Help me to spend quality time with You when I am suffering. **Amen**

**Intercession:**

† *Pray for everyone who needs perspective, rather than a “one-size-fits-all” text.*

† *Pray for everyone in your community who is working with sick and disabled people: doctors, dentists, nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, audiologists, hospital personnel, paramedics, etc.*

† *Pray for spiritual leaders who have the responsibility to help believers understand and manage their suffering.*

**Pray for Africa:** Focus on farmers, doctors, and politicians in **Botswana**.

## Day 7

### Who is involved in your pain and suffering?

**Read:** Genesis 50:20 and Job 1:8-12; 2:3-6

Everyone suffers at some or other point. When they do, they ask many questions in search of answers: *Why is this happening? Why now? Why like this? Why me? What should I do now?* Pain and suffering is a difficult question which doesn't have only one easy answer. You can't deal with everyone's suffering with the same single text or passage of Scripture. The Bible provides more than one perspective on pain and suffering. Remember the coffee mug!

Who is involved in our pain and suffering? **God, Satan, or people** are usually singled out as the cause of pain and suffering. Some people think that only one of the three is always responsible for our problems. This is because they only read one passage of text. They don't read all the passages of Scripture on pain and suffering.

Read the Bible carefully. You will discover many texts about pain, suffering, and problems. In some texts there is a connection between God and suffering. In other texts there is a connection between Satan

and problems. And some texts even say that people cause their own suffering and misery. Here are a few examples:

- In the following texts there is a connection between **God and suffering**:  
 1 Peter 4:17-19  
 Lamentations 3:31-38  
 Jeremiah 30:15
- In the following texts there is a connection between **Satan and suffering**:  
 Mark 5:2-5  
 John 8:44  
 1 Peter 5:8  
 Revelation 2:10
- In the following texts there is a connection between **people and suffering**:  
 Psalm 107:17  
 Proverbs 19:3  
 2 Timothy 3:1-4

It would be a mistake to choose only one text and use it to find out *who* plays a role in your problems and suffering. You'll think it's either **God, Satan, or people** (even yourself). But pay attention to the different perspectives that the Bible gives on suffering. You will notice that **God and Satan and people** always play a role in suffering. Sometimes only two of the three are mentioned, without showing the role of the third party. God and Joseph's brothers (people) are mentioned in Genesis 50:20. God and Satan are mentioned in Job 1:8-12 and 2:3-6. The involvement of Job's wife is only mentioned in 2:9 for the first time.

You are **WRONG** if you say:

**God or Satan or people** are involved in my pain and suffering.

You are **RIGHT** if you say:

**God and Satan and people** are involved in my pain and suffering.



Know that **God and Satan and people** play a role in every case of suffering and in every problem. **But remember: each is involved in suffering according to his nature and character.** Think about the following: When a doctor cuts open my ribcage to operate on me, the pain is exactly the same as when a criminal attacks me with a knife and slashes my chest open. And yet, there is a big difference because each one is acting according to his character. The doctor will help me to heal and get well. He wants me to live. The criminal wants to harm me. He wants to kill me. God and Satan's involvement in my suffering differ in the same way. According to their natures and characters, One will help me, and the other will kill me.

We will discuss this further over the next few days.

**Prayer:** Lord, please show me how You, Satan, and people are involved in my suffering. **Amen**

**Intercession:**

- † *Pray for everyone who is suffering because of a natural disaster or pandemic and the social and economic effect thereof.*
- † *Pray that Christians will better understand their pain and suffering through the Word and the Spirit. Pray that people will study **A Song in the Night** and speak to God about their pain and suffering.*
- † *Pray that people throughout Africa, especially in rural areas, will grow in their knowledge of the Word of God. Pray that the Spirit will give them new life. Pray that Africa will rise up out of poverty.*

**Pray for Africa:** Focus on farmers, doctors, and politicians in *Zimbabwe*.

## **Day 8**

### **God's involvement (1)**

**Read:** 1 Peter 1:16; 1 John 4:8; Psalm 119:75b

We have referred to 1 John 1:5 a few times already. ***"God is light; in him there is no darkness at all."*** This means that God doesn't have a dark side. There is nothing in His nature and character that is ugly or evil. There is nothing nasty in Him that could manifest unexpectedly. God is light! God is lovely! God is Who He is (acc. Exodus 3:14). We can sing about Him in the darkest of nights!

In Exodus 34:6-7, the Lord says Who He is: ***"And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."***

Jonah warned the people of Ninevah that the Lord was going to punish them. When they repented, God changed His mind about destroying them. Jonah was angry with the Lord about it. In Jonah 4:2b, Jonah says: ***"I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity."*** Read Nehemiah 9:17 as well.

God ***is*** holy and God ***is*** love! He ***is*** just, good, almighty, full of mercy and compassion. We also have certain characteristics. Sometimes we act according to those characteristics and sometimes we don't. But God ***is*** His characteristics. His being, character, and characteristics cannot be separated from one another. God is involved in our suffering in accordance with His unchanging character.

How is God, according to His nature and character, involved in our suffering?

- ✓ According to Lamentations 3:32, we can say that **suffering is God's reluctant will**. God doesn't enjoy it when someone endures pain and suffering. When He allows pain and suffering, it's always with a tear in His eye and lamentation in His heart (Jeremiah 9:10; 13:17 and 31:20; Hosea 11:8-9). God doesn't take revenge on His children by letting them suffer. Instead, it sometimes is the way He calls them back to Him.
- ✓ God's involvement in suffering is always **a call to repentance or turning back to Him**. For example, in Amos 4:6-12 we read about famine, drought, failed harvests, pestilence, wars, and earthquakes. People think that it was probably just the natural course of events in a region like Israel. Amos says clearly that it wasn't just another drought. He says that *the Lord* did not send the rain. God was speaking through natural disasters. In this way, Israel was called to repentance. Five times we read: "**... yet you have not returned to me,' declares the Lord.**" Suffering is never God's final will. It's His "pre-final" (semi-final) will. God's final will is always our redemption and salvation. He only wants the very best for us. (Read 33:11, Hebrews 12:10 and Revelation 9:20-21.)
- ✓ **God, in His almighty power, is involved in our suffering. In His almightiness He rules over and limits** our suffering. God saved David from deadly danger in many ways (1 Samuel 16 – 31). Daniel's friends didn't burn in the fire (Daniel 3:22-26) and the lions didn't devour Daniel (Daniel 6:22-23). God limits the extent and the duration of our suffering. Suffering can't get out of hand (Job 1:12 and 2:6; Revelation 2:10; 13:5)! In His almightiness He **works everything for the good** of all His children (Romans 8:28). He even conquered death. Nothing is impossible for God (Jeremiah 32:17 and 27).
- ✓ **God, in His holiness, is involved in our suffering**. By punishing sin, He maintains His holiness and righteousness. If He doesn't punish sin, we might think that He has become like the wicked (Psalm 50:21-22). God's holiness is most obvious on the cross at Golgotha. His holiness means that sin cannot be overlooked (1 Corinthians 11:17-34).
- ✓ **God, in His love, is involved in our suffering**. Christ bore the punishment for our sins. To the Christian, the sting of punishment is

removed from suffering. In His love and almightiness, God makes all things work together for the good of His children (Romans 8:28). He raises them up to a holy life, obedience in the faith, and spiritual maturity. To the Christian, suffering is like discipline to mature one's faith. It's not a punishment (Hebrews 12:4-12. Compare with Ezekiel 33:11). Discipline, focuses on the future. Punishment follows something that happened in the past.

God's involvement in your suffering doesn't make Him cruel, evil, and hostile. David sang: **"I know, Lord, that your laws are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me."** (Psalm 119:75 – read verses 67 and 71 as well.) God remains the same! He loves you very much. Your suffering is His suffering too. He is always with you in your suffering. **"Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens."** (Psalm 68:19).

People who ignore God in their suffering are foolish. Speak to Him about your suffering.

**Prayer:** Lord God, I worship You as the One in Whom there is no darkness, sin, or evil. I worship You as the unchanging God; You are holy, loving, and good, even when I am suffering. For this, I thank You. **Amen**

**Intercession:**

- † *Pray for governments. How they govern can either cause or prevent a lot of pain and suffering.*
- † *Pray for the elderly. Many are illiterate, especially in the countryside. Pray that they will get to know God as He reveals Himself to us through the Word and Christ. Pray that it will happen before they pass away.*
- † *Pray for all farmers. Pray that they will truly get to know God.*

**Pray for Africa:** Focus on farmers, doctors and politicians in **Mozambique**.

## **Day 9**

### **God's involvement (2)**



**Read:** Hebrews 1:1-2

God speaks to us through His Son, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2). In Him we hear and see how God feels about our suffering and how intensely involved He is in it.

Our misery began with the sin and disobedience of Adam. That's why God sent His Son as the second Adam to address our problem at the root. The second Adam never sinned. He was 100% obedient to the Father. Death entered the world through the first Adam. The second Adam brought us life (Romans 5:12-21). How can anyone claim that God doesn't care? Just look at Jesus!

The cross is a picture of God's characteristics. It's the full picture of His involvement in our suffering.

God is **holy** (1 Peter 1:16). He hates and forbids sin. Nothing unholy or impure can enter His presence. That's why we must be cleansed before our relationship with God can be restored. The blood of Christ has already done this for us (Hebrews 7:26-27; 9:22; 10:10-20). Be thankful for God's involvement in suffering – it's to our advantage.

God is **righteous** (Isaiah 53:11; Zephaniah 3:5; Acts 22:14; 1 John 2:1). He must punish sin. He sent Jesus to bear the punishment for our sins (Isaiah 53:4-5; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Be thankful for God's involvement in suffering. It's to our advantage.

God is **love** (1 John 4:8-10). Because He loves us, He was prepared to become a curse for us so that we can be redeemed (Galatians 3:13).

***"He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. ... Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."*** (Isaiah 53:3-5).

Jesus' crucifixion clearly demonstrates God's love for us! He gave Christ up in our place when we were still sinners (Romans 5:6-8). Be thankful for God's involvement in suffering – it's to our advantage.

God is **almighty** (Jeremiah 2:19 and 32:15-17). In His almightiness, He raised Christ from the dead. Christ conquered the grave (Luke 24:34; Revelation 1:17-18)! He is the Victor! The ultimate Winner! The One Who laid the foundation for God to make everything new again (Colossians 1:19-20; Revelation 21)! Be thankful for God's involvement in our suffering – it's to our advantage.

The cross and resurrection shows us how intensely God is with us and is involved in our suffering; how much He loves us; what He was prepared to do to take away the cause and consequences of our suffering.

People who think they can ignore God in their suffering are foolish. Speak to Him about your suffering. In Christ, God came to show us that He takes our pain and suffering seriously. He came to tell us how He feels about our pain and suffering and what He has already done about it. Speak to Him about your pain and suffering. Listen to Him.

**Prayer:** Lord, help me to always remember the cross and the empty grave when I think about my pain and suffering. Help me to speak with You when my life goes through the darkest nights.  
**Amen.**

**Intercession:**

- † *Praise and worship God for everything that He came to tell us and do for us in Christ Jesus.*
- † *Pray for the salvation of everyone who doesn't believe in Jesus yet – including those who live and work with you.*
- † *Pray for everyone who still refuses to speak to God about their pain and suffering.*

**Pray for Africa:** Focus on farmers, doctors and politicians in **Zambia**.

## **Day 10**

### **Satan's involvement (1)**

**Read:** John 8:44 and 10:10a



In 2 Peter 2:4 we read about angels that sinned. Their sin was probably self-exultation, arrogance and pride (Acc. Jude 6 and 1 Timothy 3:6). They no longer wanted to be God's subjects. That's why they were thrown out of heaven.

Just as God is involved in our suffering in accordance with His nature and character, Satan is involved in our suffering in accordance with his nature and character.

- ✓ The Bible describes Satan as the **father of lies** (John 8:44). He lies and deceives – that's his nature and character. He confuses those who are suffering. He distorts everything, speaking half-truths and lies. He tells lies about God: he tells people that they can't trust God; that they shouldn't dare speak with Him; that God doesn't care. He never stops lying – about the reason for your suffering and the solution to it! He is a liar by nature. He disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14); pretends to be a friend (Matthew 16:22-23) and makes his words seem like they are your own thoughts (John 13:2). You need knowledge of the Word and discernment through the Spirit to know when and how Satan is lying to you.

The Word also says that Satan has been a murderer from the very beginning – one who **steals, kills, and destroys**. He is like a **roaring lion** who **devours** his prey. (John 8:44 and 10:10; as well as 1 Peter 5:8) Satan is involved in our suffering in accordance with his evil character. He takes delight in causing pain and suffering and raising havoc everywhere. Satan is the primary cause of all our misery.

- ✓ Satan is a **cunning deceiver**. He is not satisfied with the fact that you are suffering. He wants your suffering to make you sin against God. Therefore, he turns every situation of suffering into a temptation (Job 2:7-9; Proverbs 30:7-9; Matthew 4:2-3). He gives the wrong solutions for your problems: *“Relieve your stress with alcohol.” “Take the law into your own hands and get revenge.” “Lie and deceive to escape your financial difficulties.”* This is so important that we’ll speak about it again on Day 11.
  
- ✓ Satan, the **accuser**, accuses humankind before God (Job 1:6-9 and Revelation 12:10-12). But now Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God interceding for us. Therefore, Satan can no longer accuse us before God (Romans 8:33-34; 1 John 2:1, as well as Hebrews 7:25 and 9:24). However, he now accuses us in our consciences. He wants you to keep sinning. That’s why he’s not specific in his accusations. He usually weighs you down with general, vague feelings of guilt: *“You’re actually really terrible!”* Pray that you will have the ability to discern between the clear voice of the Holy Spirit and the vague, false accusations of Satan.
  
- ✓ God’s nature and character is **love** (1 John 4:8). Satan’s is **fear**. He knows what his fast approaching fate is (Matthew 25:41; Luke 8:28; Jude 6; Revelation 12:12). He is anticipating his punishment and he’s terrified of it. That’s why he tries to make us scared of God’s punishment (1 John 4:14-19). He easily succeeds when we are suffering. We so easily believe the worst. Our problems become gigantic monsters that threaten our entire lives. How does Satan do it? He knows that fearful people easily make mistakes and sin. Think about how Saul sinned against God because he was afraid of his men (1 Samuel 15:24; Proverbs 29:25; Isaiah 57:11; Revelation 21:8). Or how Peter denied Jesus before a servant girl because he was afraid when he saw what was happening to Jesus (John 18:17).
  
- ✓ Satan **possesses and controls** people even now (Luke 8:26 onwards; Mark 1:32). This is sometimes linked to mental illness, disability, sickness, or other forms of suffering (Matthew 12:22; 17:14-18).
  
- ✓ It doesn’t matter how aggressive Satan is. He has been **defeated**. His power and authority is very limited (John 16:33; Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14-15). Satan is like an angry dog or a lion on a chain. The

only way he can get a hold on believers is to tell lies and sow panic and fear.

**Prayer:** Lord, help me to see how Satan is involved in my suffering. Thank you, Jesus, that You have already defeated him. Please protect and keep me from his evil. **Amen.**

**Intercession:**

- † *Praise and thank God that Satan has already been defeated and can't do what he wants.*
- † *Pray for people who live in constant fear because ...*
  - *they serve and honour idols;*
  - *they are involved in abominable occultic practises as mentioned in Deuteronomy 18:9-14.*
- † *Pray that Christians who have turned away from ancestral worship will boldly testify of the love and joy that they have found in Christ.*

**Pray for Africa:** Focus on farmers, doctors and politicians in **Malawi**.

## Day 11

### Satan's involvement (2): Temptations

**Read:** 1 Corinthians 10:13 and 1 Peter 1:6

We already know that the devil is the **father of** lies. He is involved in our suffering in accordance with his evil nature and character. That's why we can expect him to lie to us in our suffering. He does this by giving us wrong advice and false solutions.

In Greek the same word is used for temptation and affliction. The Greeks understood that there is a temptation hiding in every affliction (all suffering). This temptation is not from God (James 1:13).

Satan uses our suffering as an opportunity to test us. He gives us the wrong advice and false solutions. He just wants to worsen our suffering by giving us bad advice. He isn't satisfied by our suffering. He wants our suffering to cause us to sin against God. Read Job 2:7-9. Satan used Job's wife to tempt Job to curse God: **"His wife said to him,**

**"Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!"**

According to Proverbs 30:7-9, suffering caused by poverty becomes a temptation to steal and thereby dishonour the Name of the Lord. When Jesus was hungry after his 40-day fast, Satan tempted Him to abuse His power by turning stones into bread (Matthew 4:1-11).

Temptation comes in different forms. Many people turn their backs on God because there's so much pain and suffering in the world. Don't fall for this trap. Your pain and misery will only increase. Read Jeremiah 2:19b: **"Consider then and realize how evil and bitter it is for you when you forsake the Lord your God and have no awe of me," declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty.**

It's a common temptation to **take the law into your own hands** when you suffer injustice. You want to take revenge, but in so doing you also break the law and bring guilt upon yourself.

If Satan can't get you to take the law and justice into your own hands, he will try to tempt you into **bitterness and hate**. Thus I was tempted to give up on my calling after the murder of my brother.

Just like bitterness, **unforgiveness** is also a common temptation. Satan can destroy our lives completely if we give in to it. Bitterness and unforgiveness blocks God's love and forgiveness (Matthew 6:12; 18:21-35): It eats away at you like a cancer. It destroys your life. Remember: *Bitterness is like drinking poison and hoping it will kill someone else.*

Many people **curse** when they get angry (Acc. Ephesians 4:25-32 especially verse 26). They often even take the Lord's name in vain. They curse God and do what Job refused to do (Job 2:9-10).

Many people are very tempted to **be unfaithful in marriage**. It often happens that people in unhappy marriages find themselves confiding in one another. They *relate* to each other. In this way, the devil tempts them to get involved in adulterous relationships.

**Suicide** can also become a temptation when circumstances become overwhelming and hope is lost.

The following story illustrates successive temptations from Satan in the life of a farmer experiencing intense hardship:

This farmer started suffering financial difficulties because of his bad decisions and a overly luxurious lifestyle. Satan's "solution" was to file a false VAT-claim for R10 000. The claim was accepted, but Satan continued to harass him. Stress and fear that he would be caught out began to consume the farmer. I offered to get him a Christian lawyer to help him declare the fraudulent activity and correct it but he wasn't interested. His financial troubles got worse and worse. Bankruptcy was becoming a greater and greater possibility. Once again, Satan offered a dishonest solution. The farmer consulted a sangoma. Slowly but surely, Satan was destroying his life. His Christian friends begged him on behalf of God to repent but he showed no remorse. He chose to hide his sins. Eventually the truth found in Proverbs 28:13 became a reality in his life. Everything went wrong. His wife also lost her job and his children suffered tremendously. The farmer started blaming God for all his suffering as though God was the "sinner" (acc. Proverbs 19:3). A buyer was found for the farmer's land and a deal looked likely. But then the buyer let the farmer know that he was no longer interested and all his wonderful promises came to nothing. "*God dropped me again!*" said the farmer. Now God was the guilty One! Untrustworthy, reprehensible! The farmer was staring bankruptcy in the face. Once again, Satan was there with another evil plan. But the farmer phoned me first (because God, in His great love, was also involved in the farmer's suffering). He ended our conversation with these words: "*There's only one way out. I've got to take my own life. Then I'll be free from all this trouble.*" Slowly but surely, Satan was busy destroying a valuable life by continuously giving the farmer the wrong solutions. (I lost contact with the farmer after that, but a few years later I heard that he hadn't given in to the final temptation of suicide. Thank the Lord!)

All these examples serve as a warning. Beware of temptations during suffering. **Every time you suffer, you must stop and ask: *How is Satan busy tempting me? What false and dangerous solutions is he suggesting?*** True to his nature, Satan wants us to sin against God in our suffering! He wants to increase our suffering and destroy our lives.

**Prayer:** Lord, thank You that You taught us to pray: *Protect us from the evil one* (Matthew 6:13 and John 17:11-15). Help me to keep praying that You will keep me from Satan's temptations and traps. Please protect me every day. **Amen.**

**Intercession:**

- † *Pray for someone whom you suspect no one else is praying. Pray that this person will be saved from the evil one (Colossians 1:13-14).*
- † *Confess and let go of all bitterness.*
- † *Confess and let go of all cursing.*

**Pray for Africa:** Focus on farmers, doctors, and politicians in **Tanzania**.

## Day 12

### Satan's involvement (3): Fear

**Read:** 2 Timothy 1:7

Satan is always involved in our suffering in accordance with his nature and character. He enjoys making us fearful. It's easy for him to do so when we suffer and are confronted by big challenges. John Maxwell's **"Reflective thinking turns experience into insight"** made me reflect and pray about fear. I gained the following insight:

Fear is our greatest enemy. Fear has never solved a problem. Fear has never lent someone a helping hand. Fear has never created jobs or healed disease. Fear has never made someone laugh or brought encouragement. Fear has never formed or restored a relationship, and has never saved a marriage. Fear has never cultivated a piece of land, provided food for someone, started a business, or created a future for someone else. Fear has never empowered anyone for a task. Instead, fear has crippled many people. **However, every day faith and love achieve what fear does not!**

I also reflected on fear and understood why the Lord, when He gives someone an assignment, always adds: *Do not be afraid! I am with You!* (acc. Joshua 1:5-9; Jeremiah 1:8 and 1:17-19). Fear has always led to sin and disobedience (Revelation 21:8). Fear has never done what God has said, but always responds with *"What if ... ?"*. Fear has never defeated darkness. Only faith can do that! Fear has never made this world a better place. Only love and faith can do that! **Fear has never helped a Christian to use the power and authority that Christ has given us to build His Kingdom** (Luke 9:1-2 and Matthew 10: 1 and 7). Fear has never given anyone the power to endure and push through. Fear doesn't allow anyone to persist until God's promises become a reality. The only thing that fear has ever done is make believers shrink back. It makes them ineffective.

Fear preys on the unknown, the future, the *"what if?"* of life. Faith remembers what God has already done (Psalm 107). He provided in the wilderness **and** at Golgotha! Fear operates in lies and half-truths. Faith operates in the whole truth. Fear speaks about what happened at three o'clock in the afternoon on the Friday, but is silent about what happened on the Sunday morning. But the grave shouted it out: **Empty! He is risen!** *It may still be dark and feel like Friday, but surely, Sunday is coming!* Keep the faith!



**Reflective thinking turns experience into insight!** Just because I believe doesn't mean that I never have made or will make bad judgement calls. I'm only human and I don't always hear correctly. I don't always listen well enough. But my conclusion is: **Even though my faith has sometimes seemed to let me down, fear has *always* let me down! Faith that leads to action through love is better than fear that cripples and makes us passive.**

Fear has never helped me. Faith has! God has! Fear doesn't work for me! I don't want it anywhere near me. I choose love and faith and a relationship with God! Faith has brought me farther in life than fear will ever take me. Fear has never "filled my tank". But it has definitely left me stranded "without petrol" on the side of the road. Faith has always filled my empty tank. It has always enabled me to go further in faith than I ever thought I could.

Fear doesn't proclaim what must happen based on the cross and the empty grave. It just emphasises all the negative things visible to the eye. Fear discusses Goliath and all the giants that threaten us every day. It tries to convince us that the battle is ours to fight and that we are going to lose. Fear makes us forget that God is with us (Matthew 1:23 and 28:20). It makes us forget that God has already won the victory.

Faith speaks to the giant. It destroys his arrogance, intimidation, and defiance of God (40 Day Prayer Focus on Farming 2019 – *God sees a king in you!* Day 15).

Don't allow fear to overwhelm you. Fear can't help you in your struggle with pain and suffering. Fear and worry doesn't come from God (2 Timothy 2:7; Philippians 4:6). You can defeat them by speaking to God. Have a conversation with Him based on His Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Don't be afraid. God is with each and every one of His children. It doesn't matter how dark the night or how big the challenge seems.

If you're scared, you've already lost (Proverbs 24:10).

**Prayer:** Lord, thank You that You fill me with Your power, love, and self-control. Thank You that You help me not fear anyone or anything. I bow before You in worship and awe. **Amen.**

**Intercession:**

- † *Pray for everyone who is living in fear. Pray especially for people in traditional religions who are held captive by fear.*
- † *Pray for people who are suffering from depression.*
- † *Speak to the Lord about your fear. He will help you to conquer your fear and do what He says. He will give you a new song to sing!*

**Pray for Africa:** Focus on farmers, doctors, and politicians in *Angola*.

## Day 13

### People's involvement (1)

**Read:** Romans 3:9-18



People are not just spectators to or victims of suffering. Read about **Judas** in John 13. The devil planted the thought in his head to betray Jesus (13:2). Jesus knew who would betray Him so that the Scripture would be fulfilled (13:11 and 17:12). Therefore, He gave Judas the piece of bread (13:26). Then the devil entered Judas (13:27) and he took the bread (13:30). Judas wasn't a victim. He was an active roleplayer. He didn't take the bread by accident. He was with Jesus all the time. He heard what Jesus taught and saw what He did. But ... his heart never changed. His political conviction (of an earthly nationalistic kingdom) and greed also didn't change. He didn't care about the poor. He even stole the ministry's money (John 12:5-6). His loyalty was bought with money (Matthew 26:14-16). Judas betrayed Jesus. It was in accordance with his nature and character. That is who he was.

Read Romans 1:18 onwards. People try to explain or reason the truth of God away. Their arguments are foolish. Yet they believe they are smart and learned. They have no excuse for their actions. They reject God. But they worship anything under the sun: images that look like people or animals, money, and their own appetites (Romans 1:18-23; Matthew 6:24;

Philippians 3:19). They love pleasure more than God (2 Timothy 3:4). Because of their own decisions, God gives them over to their evil desires, sexual impurity, and a debased mind (Romans 1:24-28). In this way they become completely degenerate: ***"They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them."*** (Romans 1:29-32).

Paul describes society in the time of Christ's return in similar words (2 Timothy 3:1-5). For some or other reason, people choose a life of pain, suffering, misery, and hardship. It's inexplicable and foolish. People can only blame themselves.

People's selfish desires cause conflict between them (James 4:1-3). This leads to all kinds of evil and even war. People are tempted by their own desires and enticed to give in. People are simply too willing to be tempted (James 1:13-15).

Sin blinds people. We don't recognize our own sins (Matthew 7:1-6; Revelation 3:17). We don't even realise how much heartache and misery we cause.

People are often their own greatest enemy. But every person is quick to shift the blame for their sins and suffering onto someone else. They even blame God and/or Satan.

**Remember:** The Bible offers more than one perspective on pain and suffering. Behind our suffering there is ...

NOT God OR Satan OR people,

BUT, God AND Satan AND people.

**Each one is involved in accordance with his own nature and character.** A born-again Christian is a new creation. Therefore his involvement in suffering should be different to that of unbelievers. A Christian is born of God. God is his Father (John 1:12-13; Hebrews 2:11). Therefore, his involvement should be in accordance with his Father's

nature and character. The involvement of unbelievers will usually be in accordance with the nature and character of their father – the father of lies, the murderer of humankind, Satan. That is why people act differently during a pandemic like Covid-19. Some people do everything they can to meet people’s needs. But others see the pandemic as an opportunity to exploit people and benefit financially.

**Prayer:** Lord, open my eyes to my own involvement in pain and suffering. Help me to accept responsibility for what I think, say, and do. **Amen.**

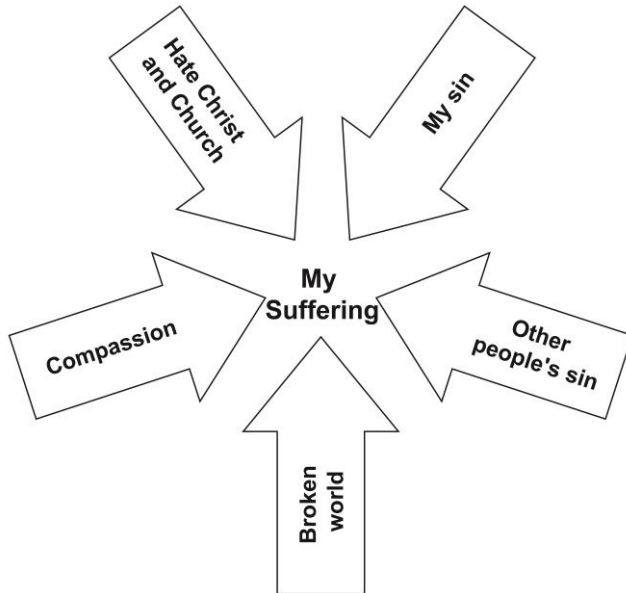
**Intercession:**

- † *Pray for all leaders. What they think, say, and do has a big influence on many people’s lives. Pray that they will follow Jesus as Lord.*
- † *Pray for lazy farmers, lazy doctors, and lazy politicians. Their laziness has caused a lot of suffering for many people.*
- † *Pray for farmers and their families to repent and be born again.*

**Pray for Africa:** Focus on farmers, doctors, and politicians in die **DRC.**

## PART 3

Suffering enters our lives in at least one of five different ways.

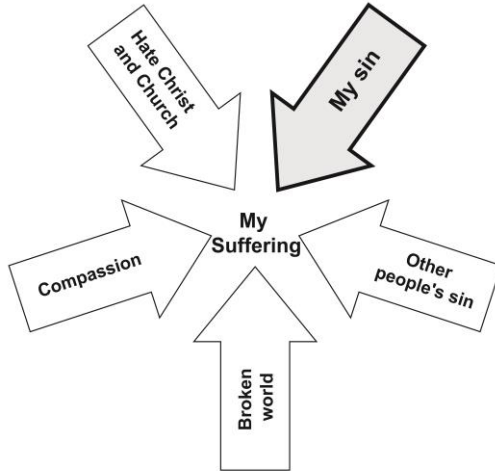


When someone is suffering, they always ask **why?** People often don't get direct, clear answers to questions of why. And yet it's important to look at a few perspectives found in the Word. The Bible doesn't have **only one** crystal clear **answer**. There is **more than one answer and more than one perspective**. Very often **more than one** answer and perspective are applicable at the same time.

# Day 14

## My sin and disobedience (1)

Read: Psalm 38:4



Why am I suffering? There is **more than one answer** to this question. The first, most obvious answer is usually: **Because of my sin!**

There are at least five possible reasons for your pain and suffering. Suffering **could** be the result of your **personal sin, foolishness, disobedience, and irresponsibility** but this **isn't always the case**. It's dangerous to only have one standpoint when speaking about suffering and personal sin.

It's dangerous to say to someone who is suffering: *Your suffering is **always** the result your own personal sin.* It's false and you're laying a heavy burden on that person's shoulders. It's also wrong to tell someone who is suffering: *Suffering is **never** the result of your own personal sin.* Don't make such statements. Christians are not without sin(1 John 1:8). Sin carries the germ of suffering (Acc. Jeremiah 7:16-20).

It's obvious: All suffering is related to sin. Only some suffering is the direct result of your own personal sin.

In the Bible there are examples where people's suffering is clearly the result of their own sin:

- **Greed / lies** and Gehasi's leprosy (2 Kings 5:19-27);
- **Adultery / murder** and the death of David and Bathsheba's child (2 Samuel 12:13-14);
- **Disobedience** and Lot's wife (Genesis 19:16-26);
- **Theft** and the death of Achan and his family (Joshua 7);
- **Disobedience / fear** and Saul's rejection as king (1 Samuel 15);
- **Unbelief** and Zechariah becoming mute (Luke 1);
- **Lies** and the death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5);
- **Inappropriate use of communion** and the sickness and death of some partaking incorrectly in communion (1 Corinthians 11:17-34).

In 1 Corinthians 5 we read about church discipline. Here sin and suffering are directly related. The discipline deals with a specific sin of a certain person. God, Satan, and people's involvement are made clear in 1 Corinthians 5. The purpose of discipline (suffering) is the salvation of the sinner and the glory of God (verse 5).

Practical examples from everyday life:

- **HIV/AIDS** can be transferred in many ways. But there is a direct relation between sexual debauchery and perversity, and this sickness.
- Many car accidents are the direct result of **alcohol abuse**. Alcohol abuse also leads to physical decay. Many marital and family problems are the result of drunkenness.
- **Smoking and poor eating / drinking habits**, are the direct cause of many blood, lung, heart, and other problems.

We know that suffering is linked to sin. We also know that it can be the result of personal sin. Therefore we must examine and humble ourselves when we are suffering. Speak to God about your suffering and its cause. If the Spirit of God convicts you of a specific sin, confess it. Remember how He revealed Himself to us in Exodus 34:6-7: ***"The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and***

**fourth generation.”** He punished His Son in your place to forgive your sins and set you free (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 John 1:7-10). Accept His salvation. Turn from your sin. You will receive grace (Proverbs 28:13)! You don't have to worsen your suffering by blaming and punishing yourself or bringing all kinds of offerings. Christ's sacrifice dealt with everything (Hebrews 10:11-18). When darkness descended in the middle of the day for Jesus (around noon it became dark as night), He was terribly alone and abandoned by God. But when He died, the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:45-51). Because of this we have access to the sanctuary, the throne of grace (Hebrews 10:19-22 and 4:16). Make use of this opportunity! It's a privilege!

God gives people over to themselves and/or Satan if they show no remorse about their sin, even though they are suffering because of it. Then they destroy their own lives (Romans 1:18-32). Woe to those who slander God in suffering (Acc. Revelation 9:20-21; 16:9, 11, 21).

There isn't always a **direct link** between sin and suffering.

- The blind man in John 9:2-3;
- The Galileans who Pilot had killed and the 18 who were crushed when the tower of Siloam fell on them (Luke 13:1-5);
- Job's bitter suffering (Job 1 to 42);
- Asaph who struggles in Psalm 73 with the prosperity of proud and Godless people;
- Droughts in the Northern Cape don't mean that the people of the Northern Cape are worse sinners than the people who live in areas with high rainfall.

Therefore we must look further and delve deeper for more answers.

**Prayer:** Father, thank you for Jesus' sacrifice, the forgiveness of sins, and the unhindered path to Your throne of grace. I want to speak to You about my sin and its results. Please show me everything that I must confess and leave behind. **Amen**

**Intercession:**

- † *Pray for people who keep sinning even though they are suffering. Ask the Holy Spirit to open their eyes and ears. Ask that they will hear His invitation and accept it.*
- † *Pray for a farmer, his family, and all his workers.*
- † *Bless all doctors and medical personnel you know.*



**Pray for Africa:** Focus on farmers, doctors and politicians in the Congo.

## **Day 15**

### **My sin and disobedience (2): Please take away my sin!**

**Read:** Psalm 51

Psalm 51 is a song! David wrote it after his affair with Bathsheba. His life was filled with darkness. His sin had overtaken him. The song was inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16). I can't think of more sincere words with which to come to God in our brokenness. Make the words from this Psalm the sincere prayer of your heart.

*1 Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your unfailing love;  
according to your great compassion  
blot out my transgressions.*

*2 Wash away all my iniquity  
and cleanse me from my sin.*

*3 For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is always before me.*

*4 Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight;  
so you are right in your verdict  
and justified when you judge.*

*5 Surely I was sinful at birth,  
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*

*6 Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;  
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.*

*7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;  
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.*

*8 Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.*

*9 Hide your face from my sins  
and blot out all my iniquity.*

*10 Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

*11 Do not cast me from your presence  
or take your Holy Spirit from me.*

*12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation  
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*

*13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,  
so that sinners will turn back to you.*

*14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,  
you who are God my Saviour,  
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.*

*15 Open my lips, Lord,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.*

*16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;  
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.*

*17 My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart  
you, God, will not despise.*

*18 May it please you to prosper Zion,  
to build up the walls of Jerusalem.*

*19 Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous,  
in burnt offerings offered whole;  
then bulls will be offered on your altar.*

**Prayer:** Thank You, Lord, that You listen to my Psalm 51 prayer. You know my heart. You hear my prayer! You restore our relationship! Your judgements are righteous when you forgive me because I believe in Jesus. (The last part of Romans 3:26!) **Amen**

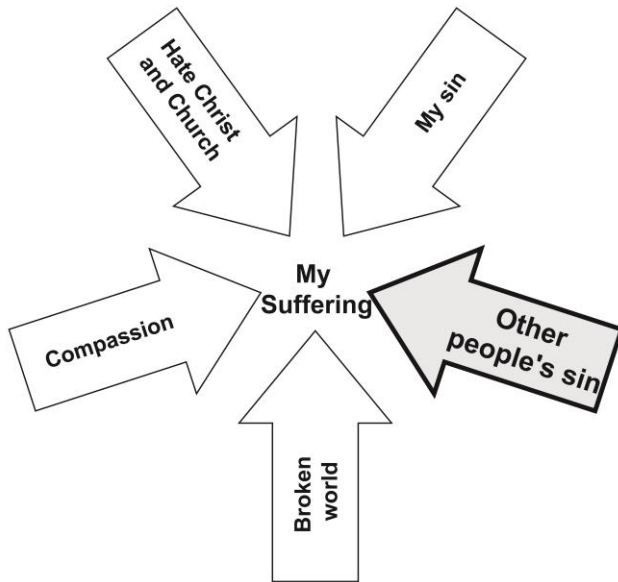
**Intercession:**

- † Pray Psalm 51 over someone you love, but who isn't yet ready to pray it himself.
- † Pray for the salvation of your parents if they are not yet saved.
- † Bless all teachers and leaders in education who you know.

**Pray for Africa:** Focus on farmers, doctors, and politicians in *Rwanda*.

## Day 16 Other people's sin

**Read:** 2 Timothy 3:1-5



**Other people's sin** (of a specific person, group of people, even ancestors, and/or all of creation and humankind), disobedience, and irresponsibility can also cause you pain and suffering.

We live in a Godless world. Everyone, Christians and non-Christians alike, are bound by social, economic, historical, and cultural ties. Thus we influence each other in every regard – positively and negatively. In 2 Timothy 3:1-5 Paul calls the negative influences “terrible times”. This

term implies suffering (acc. Romans 1:29-31 as well). These “terrible times” are not the result of natural disasters or the incredible events that will precede Christ’s return. They are the result of the character and actions of people. Paul describes the lives of the people of these “terrible times” negatively: They are **inhuman**: disobedient to their parents; without natural love; unholy; irreconcilable; and irreligious. Their actions are **inhuman**. They are boastful, lawless, and cruel. The word “cruel” means “untamed”, like wild animals. They are barbaric! These people only love themselves, money, and pleasure. They believe the world revolves around them. They just want to eat and drink and enjoy life. They aren’t interested in the resurrection of the dead or eternal judgement.

The word “**tittitainment**” was coined by a former advisor to former president of the USA, Jimmy Carter. *“This word is a combination between “entertainment” and “tits” – the American slang word for female breasts. It describes the need for plenty of entertainment and enough food to keep the world’s frustrated 80 percent in a good mood! What a world to live in!”*<sup>1</sup>

In a society like this everyone suffers – Christians and non-Christians alike. Just think about it: How do the inhuman actions of parents hurt their children? How many tears do the inhuman actions of children cause their parents? How much suffering do the inhuman actions of politicians and governments cause their citizens? How do the inhuman actions of farmers affect the people who they are supposed to provide with sufficient quality, healthy food? How do church congregants suffer under the inhuman actions of religious leaders? What happens to patients when doctors act inhumanly? How difficult do patients make things for doctors and other health care workers when they treat them inhumanly? How are you and I affected by the inhuman actions of large companies who produce seed for farmers or vaccines for pandemics? Inhuman researchers and scientists make biological and chemical warfare more than just a terrible possibility. It could become a shocking reality overnight. What can you expect from an inhuman policeman and an inhuman teacher? What happens to the poor under the inhuman actions of the wealthy? How safe are the wealthy when the poor act inhumanly? In an inhuman society, pain and suffering are shocking realities for all of us!

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<sup>1</sup> (Business Unlimited by J. Gunnar Olson, page 207)

When these things hit close to home, we must retain perspective. No matter how madly the world rebels against God and no matter how much they believe they have all the power and the final say: God laughs at them. He mocks them (Psalm 2:4 and 37:13)!

But remember: Christians are called to be the salt of the earth and a light in the darkness of the world (Matthew 5:13-16). Darkness has never and will never overcome the light (John 1:4-5)! Make a difference. Be the salt and the light!

Don't become bitter. Bitterness cannot lessen your suffering or lighten your burdens. It destroys your life. *Bitterness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.* **"Do not say, 'I'll pay you back for this wrong!' Wait for the Lord, and he will avenge you."** (Proverbs 20:22). Let God choose who and when to punish (Romans 12:17-21). Remember: We can also cause pain and suffering in the lives of others. My terrible attitude and irresponsible actions can cause suffering. That's why I, while suffering because of someone else's actions, also choose to examine my own heart and actions. I must confess my sins before God and others (James 5:16).

**Prayer:** Lord, we live in a dark world full of inhuman people. Help me not to become bitter. Help me to be salt and light to the world. Your light can never be extinguished. May Your light shine through me. **Amen.**

**Intercession:**

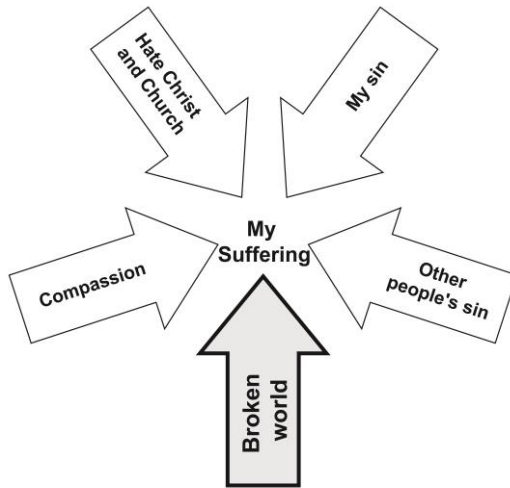
- † *Confess all bitterness and vengefulness.*
- † *Pray for everyone who has made your life hell through their inhuman mindsets and actions. Obey Jesus' command in Luke 6:27-31 and bless them.*
- † *Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what you are doing to cause others pain and suffering. Confess and stop doing it.*

**Pray for Africa:** Focus on farmers, doctors, and politicians in **Burundi.**

# Day 17

## The general brokenness of life and creation

**Read:** Genesis 3:17-19; Romans 8:20-22



The world has been broken and imperfect since the Fall. People have been suffering since then. We don't always know why we see problems everywhere. Pain and suffering are often impossible to understand and explain.

God cursed the earth after Adam and Eve's disobedience (Genesis 3:17-19). But then in Christ He reconciled everything to Himself (Colossians 1:19-20). However, until Christ returns all of creation will remain in a state of brokenness and decay. There is always something that will go wrong; something that won't work properly; something that will break; something that will decay. All of creation is full of pain and frustration. All of creation is still under the curse of the Fall and its consequences. God will only make the earth completely new when Christ returns (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1-5). The New Earth will correspond with the glory of God's children.

Eventually your bicycle will get old and break, no matter how well you look after it. It won't necessarily be because of something you did wrong. Nothing in this world lasts forever. Nothing is perfect. Everything must constantly be maintained otherwise it will naturally waste away. The same applies to houses and buildings; roads and vehicles; furniture and clothes. It even applies to relationships between people.

Weeds will grow on your land even though you serve the Lord. It will cause you problems if you don't plough (Genesis 3:18). Fires, floods, storms, droughts, earthquakes, and the effects of global warming affect everyone, including Christians. Suffering and problems are a reality because the world is broken. We do not understand and cannot explain everything. It's part of living a broken life in an imperfect world! Only on the New Earth will creation be free from the scars of the curse of the Fall (Revelation 22:3a).

The brokenness of creation doesn't only affect us physically. Everything in creation is broken. Consequently, we don't always have a choice between good and bad. Sometimes we have to choose between bad and bad. Think about the difficult decisions that governments, businesses, and individuals need to make during the worldwide outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. If they prioritise the physical health and safety of people there are many negative economic consequences. It leads to another completely different series of miseries. If they prioritise economic health which creates jobs then it has massive implications for people's physical health and safety. There simply isn't a correct choice. This is why people (e.g. economists, doctors, and politicians) differ so fiercely in their points of view. When this happens, we need a lot of wisdom. We need the guidance of the Holy Spirit to know which choice is the better of two bad options.

Conflicting interests is a common occurrence in life. One group wants to mine minerals in the same place another group wants to farm. Think about all the difficult decisions farmers must make during and after a grueling drought, large flood, or devastating hailstorm. To go into more debt to survive in the short-term carries greater long-term risks. To avoid going into debt can also mean your downfall. It's a difficult choice between two unfavourable options.

To retrench workers in tough economic times causes many struggles for the workers and their families. However, avoiding retrenchments could

lead to the downfall of the entire business. The owner is forced to choose between two unfavourable options.

God hates divorce (Malachi 2:15-16 and Matthew 19:6). It's always wrong. But it's also wrong to stay in a marriage where domestic violence and abuse is taking place. There is no "good choice". You must choose between two bad options. You must consider your responsibility towards God and then choose the lesser of two evils. Confess your sin, receive God's forgiveness and carry on with your life.

A lot of suffering is the result of the general brokenness of creation because of sin. All of humankind over all the thousands of generations since Adam (Romans 5:12-21) are just as responsible and guilty for this suffering. Therefore everyone who is suffering must search their own heart and humble themselves before God.

**Prayer:** Lord, please give me Your wisdom to make the best decision when I have two bad options to choose from. Help me especially in such situations to spend a lot of time in conversation with You. Keep me from making impulsive, unloving, selfish, and dangerous decisions. **Amen.**

**Intercession:**

- † *Pray for doctors. They often have to make extremely difficult "life and death" decisions.*
- † *Pray for governments to govern justly over everyone: rich and poor; educated and uneducated; young and old; urban and rural communities.*
- † *Pray for farmers who must produce food on a daily basis in a broken world.*

**Pray for Africa:** Focus on farmers, doctors, and politicians in **Uganda.**

## **Day 18**

### **Compassion for people who are suffering (1)**

**Read:** 1 Corinthians 12:26 and 2 Corinthians 8:1-5





You could also experience suffering because you choose to have compassion for people who are in need – especially other believers. *If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.* (1 Corinthians 12:26). Parents suffer with their children and children with their parents. It's heartbreaking to see the suffering of hungry people; to see the fate of those affected by HIV/AIDS; to hear the story of a woman who has been raped; to stand on the ashes of a fire that has burnt down your neighbour's land; to attend the funeral of a murdered friend; to hear the cry of a neglected child; or to cross the path of someone who is desperate for work.

There is a cost to helping someone in need. You have to give something of yourself! Your time! Your attention! Your physical effort! You might have to give of your finances (Lukas 10:33-35), empty your savings account, or open up your home and offer up your resources. My parents-in-law told me about a man whose entire farm burnt to ashes. He lost a lot of livestock. Many people visited him and *said* how sorry they were. But one old farmer took him outside, pointed to his bakkie and said: *On the back of my bakkie you'll see my compassion. Where can I drop off these ewes to help you get back on your feet?* Somewhere in the scriptures of the early church I read that believers in the first century after Christ often fasted so that they would have food to share with those suffering from hunger. We must demonstrate the image and character of our Father: He is compassionate (Luke 6:36). What He does for us, we must do for others (2 Corinthians 1:3-4; Ephesians 4:32; 1 John 4:19). Compassion and mercy is part of being a Christian (Hebrews 10:32-34). Job 6:14 says:

***"Anyone who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty."***

We must have compassion for people who are suffering. We must help carry the weight of their burden. That's what Christ did for us (Isaiah 53:4-5 and John 10:10 and 18).

Compassion asks a lot of a person. Therefore, Paul commands Christians not to grow weary of doing good (Galatians 6:9-10 and 2 Thessalonians 3:13). The challenge to keep on doing good also contains a promise: At the proper time we will reap a harvest! Keep on doing good! Remember to always show compassion with a grateful heart. If you have feelings of guilt or obligation when doing good then you will quickly grow tired and give up.

To truly have compassion for others we must look to how God in Christ had and still has compassion for us.

**Prayer:** Lord, help me through the Holy Spirit to not grow tired of doing good. Help me to do good wisely so that my good deeds won't lead to others becoming lazy, bad, and irresponsible. **Amen.**

**Intercession:**

- † *Ask the Holy Spirit to fill your heart with compassion so that doing good won't become a burden for you. It must be an enjoyable desire.*
- † *Pray for everyone for whom you have compassion.*
- † *Pray for everyone for whom you don't have or don't want to have compassion. Speak to God about the reasons for your lack of compassion. Do what He says.*

**Pray for Africa:** Focus on farmers, doctors, and politicians in **Kenya**.

## **Day 19**

### **Compassion for people who are suffering (2)**

**Read:** Hebrews 4:14-16 and Isaiah 53:4-5

Sometimes compassion arises spontaneously, like becoming teary-eyed when you see someone suffering. This emotional reactions is an invitation to practical acts of compassion. Practical compassion is a choice. It's a continuous choice. Especially when it's not an easy choice.

When we found ourselves in the greatest misery of all because of our sins and disobedience, God pitied us. But He didn't just feel sorry about our situation (Jeremiah 13:17). He had practical compassion for us: Jesus came down from His heavenly dwelling place to our broken world full of broken people. He came and identified with us. It cost Him dearly. He took our suffering upon Himself. In this way He eased our suffering and eventually removed it completely. He chose to suffer with us, for us, and in our place. His compassion caused Him to sweat blood (Luke 22:44). It brought Him to a terrible place – The Place of a Skull – Golgotha. He died as one accursed, hanging on a wooden cross (Galatians 3:13; Philippians 2:6-8). The cross is a symbol of practical compassion! But even

there He didn't say '*enough is enough*'. It wasn't the end of His compassion!

Now, at the right hand of His Father in heaven, He, our High Priest, still has *compassion* for us in our weakness. He still demonstrates His mercy to us (Hebrews 4:15-16).

Compassion links John 3:16 and 1 John 3:16-18! From this we can see what compassion does: it creates jobs; provides; runs an orphanage; visits convicts (Hebrews 10:33-34); plants a vegetable garden; pays off someone's debt or pays for someone's studies. Compassion jumps out of the car and pays an embarrassed driver's toll fee while others hoot and shout. Compassion keeps you up at night making plans to help the unemployed. It makes you pray when others are sleeping soundly. It makes you visit yet another person who drains your spirit, soul, and body. Compassion sometimes becomes as intense as birth pains – it's no joke (Galatians 4:19)! To save a business and prevent job losses is very hard work. You can only continue solving people's problems and making their lives better if the Supreme Leader is leading you. Everyone who is responsible for a *ministry of compassion* struggles and grows tired. They feel like they are continuously swimming upstream! The temptation to give up is real!

Don't become discouraged even though the price is high. Allow the love of God to compel you and the example of Christ to inspire you! John Maxwell says that when he saw what happens to people who "**quit**" he took a pair of scissors and cut the word "**quit**" out of his dictionary – and thus out of his thoughts too! "**Quitting**" is not an option!

Do what Christ did for you! **Demonstrate compassion!** Keep on serving. Keep on leading. Keep on solving problems. Lighten people's burdens.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you so much for Your compassion for me. Help me to have compassion for others, even if it asks a lot of me. **Amen.**

**Intercession:**

- † *Pray for organisations, groups, and individuals who show mercy to people in need and help by demonstrating practical compassion.*
- † *Pray for churches and church leaders.*
- † *Pray that believers will carry each other's burdens and in this way carry out the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).*

**Pray for Africa:** Focus on farmers, doctors, and politicians in *Somalia*.

# Day 20

## People suffer because Satan and his evil forces hate Christ and His church. (1)

Read: John 15:18 tot 16:4



In the Old testament, David writes:

***"I am a foreigner to my own family, a stranger to my own mother's children; for zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me. When I weep and fast, I must endure scorn"*** (Psalm 69:8-10).

The world hates Christ and His church. Therefore, you suffer because you love and obey Him. Paul writes to Timothy:

***"In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"*** (2 Timothy 3:12). Paul experienced it himself (2 Corinthians 11:22-29).

Millions of Christians throughout the ages have had to make this decision: Deny Christ and save your life or confess Christ and be killed! Many were killed! " ... ***they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.***" (Revelation 12:11. Also acc. to Acts 20:23-24; Hebrews 11:35-40).

As a Christian you must be prepared to share Jesus's fate (Matthew 16:24-28). Whoever tries to avoid suffering by becoming a friend of the world is an enemy of God (James 4:4-5).

Honest Christians pay more in tax because there are godless people who evade tax. Honest people often don't get contracts because they can only be obtained through bribery (which a Christian may not and does not want to do – Psalm 15:5 and Exodus 23:8). I was mocked and provoked a lot at university and in the army. I was *“tormented in my righteous soul”* (acc. to 2 Peter 2:7-8). Far right farmers in the early '90s refused to greet me. They and even tried to chase me out of Memel (our town which they declared a so-called “homeland”) with weapons. The “persecution” in and through the church in the year 1990 was so painful at a stage that I had to reread Gene Edward's book, *“Healing for those who have been Crucified by Christians”*, many times in order to receive healing.

Many Christians are treated terribly and even cruelly. Many are persecuted by their own family for breaking from their traditional religions and accepting Jesus as their only Saviour and King. It happens to Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists who come to salvation. It happens to people who no longer want to consult the spirits of the dead (acc. to Deuteronomy 18:9-14). It happens to people who break away from a friendship circle where everyone is used to debauchery, lust, and parties where everyone eats and drinks too much (1 Peter 4:3-4).

Although some people treat Christians badly we know that they aren't the real enemy. The real enemy is the devil and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. The Bible clearly says that Christians are always locked in a spiritual battle (Ephesians 6:1-10).

Suffering is a privilege when you are faithful to God. Peter says that it is a confirmation that the Holy Spirit rests upon you (1 Peter 4:12-16). Jesus says that we should feel blessed when people hate us and treat us badly because of Him (Luke 6:22-23).

**Prayer:** Lord, I am scared of suffering and persecution. Help me to not give in to peer pressure in an attempt to avoid being insulted, mocked, and rejected. Help me to never deny You. Help me to remain faithful and stand secure in this spiritual struggle. Please fill me with Your Word and Spirit. **Amen.**

### **Intercession:**

- † *Pray for Christians who are persecuted because they confess Jesus as their only Saviour.*
- † *Pray especially for the youth who are scared to break away from religious traditions that are in opposition to God's Word. Teach them to meet regularly in small groups to strengthen each other (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).*
- † *Pray that spiritual leaders won't preach half-truths in an attempt to gain popularity or to build large churches and obtain lots of money.*

**Pray for Africa:** Focus on farmers, doctors, and politicians in **Ethiopia**

## **Day 21**

### **People suffer because Satan and his forces hate Christ and His church. (2)**

**Read:** John 10:10 and 1 Peter 5:8-9

***"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; ..." (John 10:10a). "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."*** (1 Peter 5:8).

The attack of the Enemy against the church of Christ is not just a theory. It's a real, strategically planned war! One example of this is the *"The Great Invocation"* of Alice Ann Bailey<sup>2</sup>. This plan details how the influence of the Christian religion in the world can and must be destroyed. Bailey's plan and books are financed through Lucius Trust. The name of this trust was formerly Lucifer Publishing Company. It's clear where the inspiration for this plan comes from.

You can find **Alice Ann Bailey's** (1880-1949) *Ten-point plan* to destroy Christianity on the internet:

1. **Take God and prayer out of the education system;**

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<sup>2</sup>Dr. Arno van Niekerk gives a complete discussion of The Great Invocation in chapter 1 of his book, Enough! What is the plan? The book was published in 2015 by Hope 2 Overcome (info@hope2overcome.org) ISBN – 978-0-620-68339-5



2. Reduce parental authority over the children:
  - a) promote excessive child rights;
  - b) abolish corporal punishment;
  - c) teachers are the agents of implementation;
3. Destroy the Judeo-Christian family structure or the traditional Christian family structure:
  - a) promote sexual promiscuity;
  - b) use advertising industry, media - TV, magazines, film industry to promote sexual enjoyment as the highest pleasure in humanity;
4. If sex is free, then make abortion legal and make it easy;
5. Make divorce easy and legal, free people from the concept of marriage for life;
6. Make homosexuality an alternative lifestyle;
7. Debase art, make it run mad;
8. Use media to promote and change mindsets;
9. Create an interfaith movement;
10. Get governments to make all these law and get the church to endorse these changes.

This is exactly what is happening today. Everyone who is opposed to Bailey's Ten-point plan is "*persecuted*" in one way or another. When you take a stand against homosexual relationships, you are called out as unloving. Parents are threatened by the law when they discipline their children in a responsible, Biblical manner. Doctors get flak when they refuse to perform abortions on demand in state hospitals. Even though marriage officers may be convinced based on the Word of God that marriage is a *lifelong commitment between one man and one woman*, they are not allowed to refuse to marry two people of the same sex because they have been appointed by the state. Countries are increasingly being forced to accept Bailey's point of view if they want to be eligible for international aid and/or trade agreements. The United Nations already embrace many of Bailey's principles. But Bailey's plan is definitely not the only plan. There are other similar evil plans (e.g. the plan behind the one world economy).

Satan fights his battle using fear, intimidation, manipulation, and overt persecution. Christians must remain awake and alert, but not fall into a panic. Take note of Psalm 2 and 37!

***"The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, "Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles." The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them."*** (Psalm 2:2-4).

***"The wicked plot against the righteous and gnash their teeth at them; but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he knows their day is coming."*** (Psalm 37:12-13).

In the meantime, Jesus came and won the final victory (Colossians 2:15). He is sits on the throne. He is the Ruler. He is King over the kings of the earth (Revelation 1:5). We can sing a song in the night because He laughs at Satan and his cronies' arrogant and vain attempts to destroy the Church of the Lord Jesus (Matthew 16:18 and Revelation 1:17-18).

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, You are the King who rules over all the kings and leaders of the world. You are the Victor! Help me to remember that You are not threatened by Satan and his army. You laugh at their *stupid* arrogance. Help me not to be afraid. Help me not to allow myself to be intimidated or manipulated by them. I love Your Word! Your Word is the Truth! **Amen.**

**Intercession:**

- † *Pray that Christian presidents, politicians, and leaders will have the courage and conviction to take a stand against the evil plans that godless people and countries want to force on them.*
- † *Pray for the Christians who are being persecuted.*
- † *Pray that the Church of Christ will never compromise the truth of the Word.*

**Pray for Africa:** Focus on farmers, doctors, and politicians in **Sudan and South-Sudan.**

**Summary:**

1. You can't solve all suffering and problems with only one text in the Bible. The Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the Bible to examine suffering from different angles and thus give different perspectives on it.
2. Problems usually enter your life in one of the five abovementioned

ways. Often they even come in two or three (or even four or all five!) of these ways at the same time. When you are suffering, speak to God about all five of these possibilities. Ask Him to make everything clear to you.

## Day 22

### A song in the night

**Read:** Isaiah 40:25-31

It's just after midnight on the morning of 10 June 2020. I feel overwhelmed. We are going through the most difficult time of our life. Not the worst time, but definitely the most difficult. I don't have the strength to go on, but neither do I have the conviction to give up. Challenges surround us like mountains – mountains that I am convinced the Lord said we must move. But we won't move them with picks and shovels and earthmoving machinery. There is only one way to do it: Believe and accept the **authority** that Christ has given us. **Speak to the mountains and declare** (proclaim) what must happen in the current situation based on the crucifixion, resurrection, and victory of Jesus Christ (Mark 11:23-25).

Worn out, tired, weary, overburdened with tasks and responsibilities, fragile and afraid, surrounded by mountains, I begin praying and making notes in my devotional journal. The Holy Spirit reminds me of Isaiah 41:8-20 and the note which I made there long ago: *Remember Who God is. Remember who you are. Remember what He can do through you. Think about the "impossibilities" that you can achieve together!* (I know I am now reasoning like the ant sitting on the elephant's back when they crossed the suspension bridge. He said: Just look at how we're making the bridge sway!) But that's when Isaiah 40:27 catches my eye. In my heart, this is how I feel: **"My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God."** I want to blame the Lord in the words of the disciples in Mark 4:38 during the storm at sea: **"..., don't you care if we drown?"** We are in a life-threatening storm and You're sleeping! What kind of Friend are You?

But then the Holy Spirit shows me who God is. My accusation immediately turns into a song of praise. A Song in the Night – my dark

night! Spontaneously I respond with praise and worship! Look at what it says in verse 28!

Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary,  
and his understanding no one can fathom.

I realise that God has enough time to carry me through this crisis. I don't need to rush Him. His ability is great enough to help me. He created everything simply by speaking! I don't have to doubt. God has enough energy, wisdom, insight, and understanding to properly help me. You see, these abilities aren't just God's abilities: He pours His abilities out onto us. **He gives the worn out "Hennies" power. He strengthens him when he can't go on. He takes him from lying flat on the ground to flying high in the sky again.** Read verses 29-31!

He gives strength to the weary  
and increases the power of the weak.

Even youths grow tired and weary,  
and young men stumble and fall;  
but those who hope in the Lord  
will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;  
they will run and not grow weary,  
they will walk and not be faint.

Lord, I'm no longer afraid that time will catch up with me,  
**BECAUSE YOU** are eternal!

Lord, I'm no longer afraid of my inabilities,  
**BECAUSE YOU** are the Almighty Creator!

Lord, I'm no longer worried that my body won't make it,  
**BECAUSE YOUR** energy flows through my veins (Colossians 1:29)!

Lord, I'm no longer afraid of despair,  
**BECAUSE YOUR** insight is unlimited!

Lord, I will sing about You! I won't sing about my circumstances. I will sing about Who You are and what You are doing! I will sing about my

cause that You won't disregard. I will sing about the cross and what it means. There You righteously redeemed me through judging Jesus as cursed in my place (Galatians 3:13). There You justified me by making me one with Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). You demonstrated Your righteousness to me by acquitting me of the eternal judgement that awaits everyone who doesn't believe in Christ (Romans 3:25-26). Oh, my cause was never disregarded by my God! How foolish was I to think that of You! Please forgive me!

**Prayer:** Hallelujah, I praise You, Lord my God! You are who You say You are! You do what You say You do! You give what You promise! You are in me and I am in You (John 15:4-8). Therefore the mountains will and must give way! Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! **Amen.**

**Intercession:**

- † *Ask the Lord to reveal Himself anew to His children so that their accusations against Him will turn to songs of praise.*
- † *Pray for people who still believe that God doesn't care about what happens to them. Ask that they will realise how incredibly much God cares when they consider the crucifixion of Jesus.*
- † *Ask that the Holy Spirit will remind you of God's characteristics every day. Ask that He will drive all fear out of your life!*

**Pray for Africa:** Focus on farmers, doctors, and politicians in the **Central African Republic.**