

# Through Many Tribulations

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[Scripture quotations taken from the NASB 1995](#)

In Acts 14, we read that Paul and Barnabas had preached the gospel in Derbe and made many disciples there. After their visit to Derbe they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch “strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘***Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.***’” (Acts 14:22, emphasis added). Paul and Barnabas did not want God’s people to be disillusioned and disheartened by the “many tribulations” that He had allowed to affect their lives but wanted them to understand that these troubles were part of His plan for His people.

Peter also wrote about the tribulation and suffering that we would experience. In 1 Peter 4:12-13, he exhorted believers not to be surprised at the “fiery ordeal” that had come upon them, as though something strange and unexpected were happening. And then he wrote: “but to the degree that ***you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing***, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.” (1 Peter 4:13).

This share in the sufferings of Christ that Peter mentioned is the same suffering he referred to in 1 Peter 4:19 when he taught that those who “suffer according to the will of God” should “entrust their souls to their faithful Creator” and continue to do what is right and good. Suffering according to the will of God has nothing to do with suffering for wrongdoing (1 Peter 4:15-16) but is suffering and loss that God allows to touch our lives apart from any wrongdoing of our own. When we suffer in this way, we share in the sufferings of Christ, and the Bible teaches us that through such sufferings we will bear fruit and thereby share in His eternal glory.

Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans that we are “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.” (Romans 8:17). This is to say that we are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings, in order that we may also share in His glory. Jesus’ sufferings all came about through no fault or wrongdoing of His own (Hebrews 4:15). And yet all His sufferings came about according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23), whereby He would bear the fruit of bringing many sons and daughters to glory.

Likewise, we also will experience tribulation that comes about through sufferings that our sovereign God allows to touch our lives, according to His plan and purpose for each of us, sufferings we experience through no fault or wrongdoing of our own. Just as Jesus bore fruit to the glory of God through the sufferings that He endured, God our Father has ordained that we must follow Him, bearing fruit as we share in His sufferings.

Peter’s teaching, as well as Paul’s, takes us back once again to a passage we have discussed in depth before, which is Jesus’ teaching given in John 12:24-26. In this passage, Jesus used a “grain of wheat” as a metaphor to symbolize His life and the lives of all who follow Him. He taught that unless a “grain of wheat” falls to the ground and “dies”, it will remain only a single grain of wheat, but if it dies, it will bear much fruit.

This “death” of the grain of wheat that Jesus spoke about is the “death”, or the loss, of things that we would choose for ourselves in this life. It is the death, or the loss, of things that we would like to have, to keep, to experience, and to enjoy for ourselves, as our sovereign God may choose to take or withhold these things from us, as part of His plan for each of us individually.

Through these “deaths” in our lives, we will share in the sufferings of the Man of Sorrows (Isaiah 53:2-3). Through these deaths we will follow Jesus (John 12:26), and we also will bear much fruit to the glory of God (John 12:24, Matthew 13:23, John 15:8). Just as Jesus bore much fruit through the suffering, sacrifice, and death that He endured, according to God’s plan and purpose for His life, we also will bear fruit as we share in His sufferings, as God has ordained them for each of us.

Every believer should understand that God our Father is sovereign, and nothing in His creation happens apart from His sovereign will (Matthew 10:29).

When undeserved suffering and tribulation comes into our lives, it is because God has ordained it, and He has done it (Job 12:9-10).

Such sufferings are for us a share in the sufferings of Christ and through these sufferings comes about the death of the grain of wheat that symbolized Jesus' life, and the lives of all of us who follow Him, according to God's plan and purpose for all His people. And we have the assurance that these many tribulations we must endure to enter the kingdom of God will all be made to work together for our eternal good and glory together with His Son, Jesus Christ (Romans 8:28). Even though we suffer according to the will of God in this way, we can take comfort in knowing that our present sufferings cannot be compared to the glory that will one day be revealed in us as a result of having experienced them (Romans 8:18).

In 2 Corinthians 4:15 Paul taught that "all things" are for our sakes. And "all things" include the many tribulations that our sovereign God has ordained for our lives as our share in the sufferings of His Son, in order that we may also share in His eternal glory.

Knowing these things, Paul encouraged God's people saying: ***"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,*** while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:16-18, emphasis added).

Our sufferings may seem anything but "momentary" to us, as they may persist for years or a lifetime, and the weight of our affliction may seem anything but "light" to us. But God's word assures us that the weight of our sufferings cannot compare to the eternal weight of glory they are producing for us. Paul encouraged us not to lose heart, because in the midst of these sufferings we will be "renewed day by day", strengthened and sustained by the God of all grace who called us to faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.