

Ten Things to Do During Suffering

By: [Ed Welch](#)

Topics: [Suffering](#)

Published: March 25, 2014

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We will all suffer, of that there is no doubt. It is strange, then, that we are often unprepared for it. With that in mind, a useful exercise is to summarize Scripture and identify what words of God can guide us when things are hard.

Here is my current list of ten things to do while suffering (it is always subject to ongoing refinement).

1. Don't be surprised by suffering (1 Pet. 4:12). The Son suffered, so do those who follow the Son. You will not be spared the sufferings that the world experiences, but you will participate in them, both for the world's benefit and your own.
2. Live by faith, see the unseen (Heb. 2:2). Normal eyesight is not enough. Your eyes will tell you that God is far away and silent. The truth is that he is close—invisible—but close. He has a unique affection for fellow sufferers. So get help to build up your spiritual vision. Search Scripture. Enlist others to help, to pray, to remind you of the Truth. Ask the God of comfort to comfort you.
3. Suffering will reveal what is really in your heart. It will test you (Jam. 1:2). Where do you turn when tested? Do you turn toward Jesus or turn inward?
4. God is God, you are not (Job 38-42). This is important. Humility and submission before the King can quiet some of your questions.
5. Confess sin. There is nothing new here; it is a regular feature of daily life. Yet it always helps you to see the cross of Jesus more clearly. It is the quickest way to see the persistent and lavish love of God (Heb. 12).
6. Keep an eye out in Scripture for the Suffering Servant. He has entered into your suffering, and you can enter into his. (Isaiah 39-53, John 10-21)
7. Speak honestly and often to the Lord. This is critical. Just speak, groan, have someone read you a psalm and say a weak, "Amen."
8. Expect to get to know God better while in this wilderness. That is how he usually works with his people (Phil. 3:10-11).
9. Talk to those who have suffered, read their books, listen to them. You are not alone. Insist on being moved with compassion as you hear other stories of suffering.
10. Look ahead. We need spiritual vision for what is happening now and for where the universe is heading. We are on a pilgrimage that ends at the temple of God (Ps. 84).

I have noticed that, during dire times, we can hear our own words repeated back to us more easily than we can hear words from other people. So I hereby authorize my wife, children, and anyone else, to speak these things to me when my hardships are oppressive.

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