

Do Faithful Christians Suffer?

Rod Reynolds

Some believe that if one has enough faith and simply “claims God’s promises,” that his life will be blessed with happiness, abundance, good health. Is this what the Bible REALLY Teaches?

Some — perhaps a great many — who profess to be faithful Christians find that when faced with trials, setbacks, or disasters their faith wavers. Some have turned completely against God and denied him altogether, because of failing health, the death of a loved one, marital problems, or some other serious crisis in their lives.

Some professing Christians have reasoned that because they are trying to practice obedience to God, or exercising faith by “claiming God’s promises,” God will “protect” them from serious problems in their lives. They assume that they will be “blessed” with financial prosperity, good health, and success and happiness in their family relations and other aspects of their lives.

When they see another Christian suffering, they may suppose it’s because of some secret sin, or character flaw, that has led to the person being cursed or punished. Or perhaps it may be assumed that the person just doesn’t have “enough faith” to be free of suffering.

Such thinking has especially been promoted by proponents of what is sometimes referred to as the “prosperity gospel.” Followers are taught that faith, “positive confession,” and giving money to the ministry doing the teaching will lead to God delivering on perceived promises of prosperity, good health, security and personal happiness.

It shouldn’t be surprising that when life turns out to be less than ideal, then, an individual with such perceptions might experience a crisis of faith. He or she might believe God has not lived up to his promises, that God is to be blamed for allowing such afflictions, or for not granting immediate deliverance.

However, one who has a mature understanding of how God works in our lives will see through such deceptions. The fact is, anyone or any Church teaching that obedience to God means you’ll be free from trials, setbacks, and being victimized by evil, is teaching false doctrine. Godly faith is not based on men, or what men say, or what a Church teaches, but on God’s word, which teaches nothing like that.

Did God protect “righteous Abel”? ([Genesis 4:4, 8](#); [Matthew 23:35](#); [Hebrews 11:4](#)). Did God protect Lazarus? He was a diseased beggar who was laid at the gate of a rich man, having nothing, who died in that circumstance, having been neither healed nor blessed with abundance, though judged worthy of God’s kingdom ([Luke 16:20-22, 23, 25](#); for more on this parable see [Lazarus and the Rich Man](#)). Did God protect Christ from being crucified? Did God protect Stephen, “full of faith,” from being martyred? ([Acts 6:8](#); [7:59-60](#)). What about the faithful mentioned in [Hebrews 11:36-38](#)?

It’s certainly not wrong to pray for God’s deliverance, protection, blessings, guidance and healing. Indeed we should, along with giving thanks, be praying for all these things for others as well as ourselves ([Philippians 4:6](#); [1 Timothy 2:1](#); [James 5:13-16](#)).

And the truth is, God does protect us, often without our realizing it. God does intervene at times to heal miraculously, and bless us in other ways. But in accordance with his purpose and will, which does not always correspond with our desires or preferences (cf. [Matthew 26:39, 42](#)).

Also, God gives us his laws to promote our well-being ([Deuteronomy 5:31-33](#)), and it's not his fault when people break them. And he doesn't keep anyone from breaking them. And God doesn't guarantee we'll always be protected and never afflicted. Indeed just the opposite ([John 16:33](#); [Acts 14:22](#); [2 Timothy 3:12](#)).

What if close friends, family members, your own husband or wife forsook you? Would that cause you to forsake God? What relationship is more important to you, your marriage, family, friends, or your relationship with God? Christ requires that we put our relationship with him above any other ([Matthew 10:35-39](#), [Luke 14:26-27](#); "hate," [Greek: *miséō*] in this context means to love less by comparison, cf. Adam Clarke's *Commentary*). What if a loved one dies, or you are a victim of disease, or become impoverished through no fault of your own, or are persecuted? Would that cause you to question God, or forsake him altogether?

What interests you more, manipulating God to do your will or finding out what his will is and submitting to it? Jesus Christ, facing death on the cross, said, "not My will, but Yours, be done" ([Luke 22:42](#)). How do the trials you've experienced stack up against what many have endured, such as, like Lazarus, long-term illness and poverty, or being forsaken by mates or other family members, beatings, loss of homes and virtually every material possession, being driven to a strange land, torture, imprisonment and martyrdom?

Yet, sometimes trials that are trifling by comparison overwhelm us, because we are weak in genuine faith and spiritual understanding. We become upset, disoriented, confused, because God doesn't play by our rules. As one person commented to me in reference to this subject, "Even God's people can get side-tracked when he refuses to read the script we have prepared for him. Odd that he does not see the wisdom of our ways."

Understanding and knowledge begin with the fear of God ([Psalm 111:10](#); [Proverbs 1:7](#)). In order to have spiritual insight and deeper understanding into life's questions we need to work on developing a proper fear or reverence toward God.

Job, although he never turned aside from God, in the midst of his suffering questioned God's judgment and fairness ([Job 34:5-9](#)). In his mind, he was more righteous than God ([Job 32:1](#); [35:2-3](#)). In their own self-righteousness, people often want to call God to account, as Job did ([Job 35:2-14](#)). But God is not accountable to men ([Job 33:12-13](#); [Isaiah 45:9](#); [Daniel 4:35](#)), nor are we his judges, but he is ours ([Proverbs 16:2;21:2](#); [Hebrews 12:23](#); [1 Peter 4:5](#)). God never perverts justice, and his judgments are always just ([Job 34:12](#); [Revelation 15:3](#)).

Our physical lives, including the trials that we are allowed to suffer, are given to us to be "exercised" (afflicted, chastened, humbled) thereby ([Ecclesiastes 1:13](#); [3:10](#)). Paul wrote, "...we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope" ([Romans 5:3-4](#)).

None of us is unique in suffering affliction. Everyone of us has or will suffer afflictions of

various kinds in this life ([Philippians 1:29](#); [1 Peter 4:12-19](#); [5:6-10](#)). They are permitted or given to us not only to humble us, but to test our faith, to help us learn patience, to perfect us, and as a witness to others ([Matthew 24:9](#); [Mark 13:9](#); [Romans 8:35-37](#); [2 Corinthians 12:7-10](#); [2 Thessalonians 1:4-5](#); [Hebrews 5:7-9](#); [James 1:2-4](#); [5:8-11](#); [1 Peter 1:6-7](#)). To be disciples of Christ and to share in his glory we must be willing to suffer whatever God requires of us ([Matthew 10:37-39](#); [Luke 14:27](#); [Romans 8:17-18](#); [Matthew 26:39, 42](#); [Romans 12:1](#); [1 Peter 4:19](#)).

In due time, his time, not necessarily ours, God will deliver us from every trial ([Psalm 34:17-19](#); [Isaiah 49:8](#); [Hebrews 10:35-39](#); [1 Peter 1:3-6;5:6](#)). But God decides in each case when that time is ([Ecclesiastes 3:3](#)). We must learn to submit to God's will and wait on him with faith and patience ([Job 35: 14](#); [Psalm 27:14](#); [37:1-11, 16-20, 27-29, 34-40](#); [Proverbs 20:22](#); [Isaiah 40:31](#); [49:23](#); [Lamentations 3:24-26](#)).

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