

When we feel we need nothing, but have sufficient resources for almost any contingency, we are more likely to omit God from our considerations. Who needs God when he already has everything! But when people become seriously ill or experience great pain, they begin to realize that all their previously prized trappings of possessions, power, prestige, attractiveness, and pleasure are of no value at all in the midst of suffering.

There is nothing like suffering to bring people of all socio-economic levels down to a common level of felt dependence. Affliction is a great leveler! When people become really sick, they begin to realize their need for and dependence on others; and some even begin to think about God and their need of Him.

What a shame, that human beings choose to wait until they are in situations of extremity to cry out to the Lord in their trouble!

R. C. Sproul, in his book Surprised by Suffering, says:

I remember with much affection my uncle who lived in our house with us as we were growing up. He was a tough man with bulging muscles and a profane mouth. I vividly recall that he always seemed to have a solid black layer of grease visible under his fingernails. My uncle had no time for religion and church. He thought that religion was for sissies.

When I announced that I was going to seminary to prepare for the ministry, my uncle almost had an apoplexy. He teased me relentlessly. He joked that soon I'd be wearing my collar backward and walk around in a black shirt.

Shortly before my ordination my uncle became terminally ill. About a week before he died I visited him in his room. He was dying and he knew it. Now there were no jokes. He was seriously concerned about where he was going. He said to me, "I'm not ready to go."

We talked about Christ. My uncle made a serious profession of faith. He got matters settled between himself and God. He died in faith.

(pp. 69-70)

3. God sometimes uses suffering to help us learn His truth experientially.

Psalm 119:71 – "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes.

Sometimes our lives become so enmeshed with the routines and burdens of living that we cannot find the time to reflect upon the truth of God, especially its overlooked implications for our obedience. And many times it is only when we are brought up short with suffering that God's Word comes really close in application and conviction, and we realize the need of the experiential learning of God's truth and will through the response of obedience.