

In an article entitled "The Place of Suffering in the Christian Life," which appeared in the April 1984 issue of Tenth, Jonathan Chao, Director of the Chinese Church Research Center in Hong Kong, writes:

A Chinese preacher who suffered persecution for sixteen years says that he did not really know Christ as fully as God intended until his second imprisonment. He told us that his knowledge of Christ and his style of ministry were limited by tradition. "Through suffering," he said, "my religious traditions, like a jade jar, were broken and the ointment of Christ came out. Now I have come to know the depth of the love of God, the mercies of God and the faithfulness of God through suffering. I came to know what it means to be identified with the death of Christ and to enjoy the power of his resurrection." Suffering, for Christians in China, has become an avenue for knowing God. "You don't know the holiness of God," they say, "until you have suffered."

(p. 15)

4. God uses sufferings to develop various qualities of Christian character in us.

Romans 5:3 – "And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance."

I Peter 5:10 – "And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you."

I Peter 2:19-23 – "For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously."

James 5:10-11 – "As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful."

God uses suffering to produce Christian character. Character must be developed, tested, proved by experience. God uses unjust suffering to develop patience in us. He has provided us with Christ's example to help us learn not to return evil for evil in the midst of our suffering, but to be patient under affliction. God also uses suffering to develop endurance in us. Endurance, stamina, staying power must be built up and developed by experience of hardship, difficulty, struggle, and sometimes pain and suffering.