

but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Therefore strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed."

Discipline includes both instruction and correction. Persecution is a negative discipline that forces us to come back to God again and again for His courage, strength, boldness, and assistance, so that we can face the difficulties rather than attempt to run away from them. In seeking His assisting grace, we are persuaded to turn from our sin and acknowledge our total dependence on Him, so that He can fill us with His Spirit and grace and boldness and power; and in so doing we are strengthened and molded further by His Word and His example, and are thus caused to grow in holiness and joy and encouragement and spiritual vitality and power in our struggles with innate sin and the temptations of Satan and the evil world-system.

6. God uses suffering for Christ's sake to help us to die to self-centered lives, so that we can live Christ-centered lives.

II Corinthians 4:11 – "For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh."

7. God sometimes uses physical suffering to keep us from being proud of our abilities and opportunities.

II Corinthians 12:7 – "And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me--to keep me from exalting myself!"

At times believers who have been given great abilities and opportunities have experienced severe suffering from various illnesses. John Calvin is a prime example. In Thea B. Van Halsema's biography, This Was John Calvin, she mentions some of his physical problems:

Sometimes his asthma gave way to attacks of pleurisy. He who had always to speak, in pulpit and lecture and council and at home, was forced to get his words out deliberately because breathing was not easy. Often Calvin could not sit or move comfortably because of severe hemorrhoids. Or the knifing pain of kidney and gall stones would torment him. If his hemorrhoids were bearable, he would take to his horse and gallop as fast as he could, hoping to jolt loose the stones for which his day knew no surgery. Headache – was he ever free from it? Sometimes he was blinded by the pain or