

THE PROS AND CONS OF MINISTRY

STUDY FOUR

Don't Miss the Messages in Your Misfortune

Romans 8:28; 2 Corinthians 4:8–9

I want to talk about the unexpected things that happen to us. They are rarely our fault. They happen to us, and they impact us deeply. They hurt us, and they can crush us. Unless we realize they are all for our good and for our God's glory, we'll resent them and even resist them.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

careful study of church history demonstrates a counterintuitive principle: *when God wants to do an impossible task, He takes an impossible person and crushes him or her.* A crushing experience will soften the hardest heart so God can mold it to the exact shape He wants it to be.

Many move through life relying on their own wits, power, wealth, or hard work, and often, their self-reliance keeps them propped up . . . at least for a while. Yet when the hammer of suffering inevitably comes crashing down, it decimates any sense of control. Those who find themselves so crushed have two options: continue to rely on themselves or begin to rely on God.

Sadly, no one is safe from the indiscriminating hand of suffering, and you will face experiences that will crush you. This *Searching the Scriptures* study considers how you can react when you face crushing experiences so you won't miss the messages God has for you in your misfortune.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

You may be no stranger to crushing experiences: an unexpected loss of a loved one, a season of financial uncertainty, a difficult rejection, a health crisis. Before you search God's Word, come to Him with a sincere and open heart. Use this prayer to guide you.

Father, thank You for all the grace You've shown me throughout my life. Though I may not fully understand why I've faced suffering in my life, I still trust You and Your plan. Help me to keep my eyes on Your mercy. I pray in Jesus' compassionate name. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Before his conversion, the apostle Paul certainly was an impossible man. Though he lived his entire life as a pious Jew, he was committed to destroying the church—until he had a personal encounter with the risen Jesus Christ. In a matter of a few days, his life turned entirely around. This once loud opponent of Jesus became His loudest witness.

Similarly, this former persecutor of the faith now faced fierce persecution because of his newfound faith in Jesus. Paul endured several imprisonments, countless beatings, and even suffered shipwrecks until he was finally beheaded. Yet with each trial, his fervor for the good news of Jesus Christ only burned hotter because he knew that God had a greater purpose.



Observation: Exhortation for the Crushed

Because Paul was no stranger to crushing experiences, he had plenty to say about suffering in his letters. Two such places are [2 Corinthians 4:8–9](#) and [Romans 8:28](#). As you turn to these two passages, read and observe them carefully. For now, focus only on what Paul's words say.¹



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In *2 Corinthians 4:8-9*, Paul made four parallel statements about himself and his fellow ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the spaces below, record what Paul and his co-laborers *were*. Then record the corresponding contrast of what they *were not*.

1. They were _____
But not _____
2. They were _____
But not _____
3. They were _____
But not _____
4. They were _____
But not _____

How could Paul maintain such an optimistic attitude despite his difficult circumstances? He answers this question in his letter to the Romans.

For many, *Romans 8:28* is a favorite verse . . . and rightly so! Yet one can easily read such familiar verses without thinking carefully about what the words actually say. Read this verse several times using some *different Bible translations*. What new observations stand out?



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According to this verse, what does God cause or work out?

For whom does He do it?

Though I cannot tell you how or when, God will break you. And the crushing will often be very, very difficult to bear. But He will shape you into the image of His Son, whatever that may take. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Enduring the Crushing

Often, when someone feels crushed by suffering, some natural questions to ask are, “Why?” or, “What did I do to deserve this?”

Many look inward, asking these questions with a sense of personal guilt and despair. Some direct their questions to God, pointing an accusatory finger. Many search for some secret meaning or purpose behind their pain. Each of these responses—while understandable—represents a *temporal* perspective on life.



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Yet Paul had an *eternal* perspective, and he pointed out that God has already determined the ultimate purpose of His people's suffering. What "good" does God offer to *everyone* who believes in Jesus Christ? How can maintaining an eternal perspective affect the way Christians look at their own suffering? See *Romans 8:29–30*.

While Paul looked ahead to eternity, he did not lose sight of God's purposes in the present. According to *2 Corinthians 4:10*, what is one of the results of Christian suffering? How does this help you wrestle with the "Why?" of your own crushing experiences?

Since we don't see and since we can't know, there's only one place to look, and that's up. And there's only one to turn to, and that's the One who sees and knows. His ways are better than our ways, so we look to Him with a sense of confidence. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Correlation: A Painful Picture of Crushing

Another person in Scripture who endured suffering akin to Paul's was Job. According to *Job 1:13–19*, what kind of terrible crushing did Job experience?

Much of the book of Job contains accounts of Job, his wife, and his friends attempting to make sense of Job's horrific suffering. According to *23:10–14*, what was Job's perspective on his experience? How is his example instructive for Christians who are suffering today?

Job didn't claim to know the reason he suffered so terribly, but he trusted that God would produce a good result: "I will come out as pure as gold" (*23:10*). The fire of a trial always is painful, but the flames refine you and cause you to shine brightly as a beloved child of God.



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Application: Learning from the Crushing

Crushing experiences can teach priceless lessons, but often, the value of suffering isn't terribly evident amid the pain. To clarify the the messages in our misfortune, Pastor Chuck Swindoll points out some common kinds of trials and the lessons these trials teach.

1. *I hope you don't know too much success.*
It will teach you to rely on God.
2. *I hope you experience obscurity and anonymity.*
It will teach you to pursue humility.
3. *I hope you fail to reach some personal goals.*
It will teach you to learn from your mistakes.
4. *I hope you are forced to deal with difficult people.*
It will teach you to handle relationships wisely.
5. *I hope you face unexpected obstacles.*
It will teach you to remember what's most important.

What kind of suffering have you experienced in the past? What lessons did these experiences teach you about yourself, about the world, or about God?



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How are you handling the suffering you are experiencing in the present? Are you struggling with feelings of doubt, anger, or fear? Take a moment to write down a prayer about these things. Be honest with God. Try to incorporate into your prayer the timeless truths you've learned in this study.

Believe it or not, God wants to use *you* to do an impossible task. And though He may be ready, you may not be. The hammer of suffering may soon strike you. Thankfully, believers in Jesus Christ can grow despite the crushing. How? Through their hope in the unbreakable and unshakably good God.



A FINAL PRAYER

As you close your time in God's Word today, offer this prayer from Pastor Chuck:

Father, thank You for never leaving me in the lurch. Thank You for teaching life's hardest lessons when I can't even explain why I suffered. I ask You to get me ready for whatever else You have for me. I recognize that when You want to do an impossible task, You take an impossible person, and You crush him or her. May You find it well with my soul following the crushing. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

