

Joni Eareckson Tada and Suffering with Your Eyes Open *Towards a Biblical Theology of Suffering*

Joni Eareckson Tada has an incredible love and respect for the Bible. Her story of Jesus suffering and death in our place opened her eyes to make sense of her suffering. When we come to see the big picture or story of the Bible and that Jesus is the real hero, then things begin to make sense. We may not have all the answers but in light of God's story our own personal story of suffering can only make sense.



We can begin to experience God's peace, not because the pain is less but because behind our trouble is a God who brings good things out of bad, in fact He makes all things work for my good because at core He loves me unconditionally in Jesus. That is pure grace; to know God's love and peace and comfort because throughout the Bible He loves and gives peace and comfort to His people, even when they are unfaithful to Him. Come now and discover God's story and how your story makes sense only in Jesus...

The Bible teaches that suffering is part and parcel of the Christian Life. Its basic premise regarding suffering is threefold;

1. *Jesus Christ suffered for our sins that we might be forgiven and come into relationship with Him.*

The cost of relationship is being prepared to identify with His suffering for future glory.

2. *This world is not perfect, it was and will be but there is a now but not yet aspect to salvation and ourselves. We live in a fallen world marred by sin and its curse. So there is illness, death and accidents.*

3. *But as Job teaches us, God is bigger than our suffering, this is His world, He is in control of all events and our lives, even ordains them cf. Ephesians' 1:3-14 This gives us enormous comfort, that all things are working out for our good (cf. Romans 8:28)*

The Bible also teaches that suffering in and of itself is not bad, far from it, God uses suffering to refine and grow His people when other means want get the job done. You are not the first person to suffer and you want be the last. What is the Bible's message and how does it relate to my suffering?

The Message of the Bible begins like a Beautiful Red Rose Bud

Creation

God saw all he made and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning - the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. Genesis 1:31

God made the world and everything in it, and he made humans in his own image. The first humans were Adam and Eve. As Creator of the world, God is the ruler (or king) of it. However, God blessed Adam and Eve our first parents and appointed them to be rulers over his creation. But tragically...

Our First Parents Fall – The Origin of Suffering

Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth". Genesis 11:4

Adam and Eve chose to reject God their ruler (or king). The effects of rejecting God were devastating. As a result, humans no longer relate rightly to God, to each other, or to the creation in which we've been placed. And worst of all, we die!

The people tried to build a tower so tall that they could make a "name" for themselves apart from God. People followed in Adam and Eve's footsteps, crying out to God, "We know better - we'll do things our way!" God's response to humanity's actions at Babel was to confuse their language, so that they could not complete the tower, and to scatter them over the whole earth. But God begins to reverse the effects of the fall by...

God's Promise – The Sufferers Hope of future Grace

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your fathers household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you". Genesis 12:1-3

God chose one man, Abraham, and made a special pledge to him (also called a "covenant" or "promise"). Whereas at Babel, the people had sought to make a name for themselves, God promised to make a "name" for Abraham, and pledged to him a special relationship.

God would make a great nation from Abraham's descendants, and give them a land of their own. He did this so that in the end, the whole world would be blessed, and humanity's rejection of God would not go on forever.

God's Rescue from Slavery – Deliverance from suffering

During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.

Exodus 2:23 - 24

Abraham's descendants became known as "Israel." They went to Egypt, and there they were made slaves. But God had not forgotten his pledge to Abraham. God saved his people Israel from slavery in Egypt, by bringing them through the sea.

God's Promise of a Home

So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Deuteronomy 26:8-9

God brought Israel through the sea in order to bring them to the land he had promised to Abraham and his descendants. They were to live as God's special people in this land he had given them. The promises to Abraham were beginning to be fulfilled: there was a nation of descendants who were to receive the Promised Land. Next God gives...

How We Shall Then live

On their way to the Promised Land, Israel were given instructions on how to live in their new land. These instructions told Israel about what it meant to be in a special relationship with their God.

The law told them how to live as God's saved people - how to live as the people through whom the whole world would ultimately be blessed. The most famous part of the Old Testament law is the Ten Commandments. God's people wanted a...

King To Rule Over Us

Now here is the king you have chosen, the one you asked for; see the LORD has set a king over you. If you fear the LORD and serve and obey him and do not rebel against his commands, and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the LORD your God - good! 1 Samuel 12:13-14

While they were in the Promised Land, God gave Israel Kings. The king's role was to be God's "representative" on earth by ruling Israel and saving them in battle. The most famous king of Israel was David. The king also represented Israel before God.

But God punished His people by sending them into...

Exile – God’s loving discipline

By the Rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.

How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land? Psalm 137

Throughout their history, God's people disobeyed their law, and neglected their special relationship with God. Even the kings forgot about God. The very people through whom God planned to bring blessing to the world were thinking, "We know better, God - we'll do things our way".

So God took them out of their Promised Land. He sent them away to the surrounding nations. While they were in exile, the people were in anguish, because it seemed that God's promises to Abraham were being undone. Many descendants were wiped out, and those who were left were banished from the Promised Land. They needed words of comfort so God raised up...

The Prophets -

"The time is coming", declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people." Jeremiah 31:31-33

God spoke through prophets to call Israel back to their special relationship with God. The prophets reminded Israel that God had made a pledge with them. They explained that God's people had treated their God badly, and warned the people of God's anger and judgment.

But the prophets also comforted the people, telling them that God would not forget his pledge to Abraham and his descendants. The prophets pointed forward to the ultimate fulfillment of this pledge.

The message of the Bible now changes from being like a beautiful rose in bud to full bloom

And what a beautiful full bloom it is...the message continues with

Jesus' Comes On Mission - The Sufferers Life

Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2:11

After John was put in prison, Jesus went out into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God. "The time has come," he said, "the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" Mark 1:14-15

God kept his pledge by sending his son Jesus into the world. Jesus was a Jew, an Israelite who was a descendant of King David. He lived the life of special

relationship with God, that all Israel was supposed to live.

He fulfilled the words of the prophets. Unlike Israel (and unlike Adam and Eve), Jesus never disobeyed God. He told people that it was time for God's people to be reconciled to him.

But Jesus' Died – The Suffers New Relationship with God

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his love in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:6-8

Jesus willingly died to take on himself the punishment because of the rebellion of God's people. The Old Testament was pointing towards this event. In the cross of Jesus, God the King was God the Saviour too.

It was God's plan to demonstrate his love for his people by this act of self-sacrifice. It is an astonishing way to establish a Kingdom. But what validated it was...

Jesus' Resurrection – The Suffers Hope

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures... 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

God raised Jesus from death, showing that the penalty for disobedience had been paid and that His people could now be reconciled to God. After appearing to his followers, Jesus ascended to the right hand of God the Father, where he began his reign as the saving ruler of God's Kingdom.

His resurrection began the age of resurrection, in which God's people will inherit eternal life with Christ. But there is more...

The Promise of the Spirit – Pentecost – The Suffers Power

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. 1 Corinthians 2:12

When Jesus returned to God, he sent the Holy Spirit to live in his followers. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit "the spirit of truth" (John 14:17) and tells us that the Spirit makes Christ known to his people and to the world.

The Holy Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost, when a group of believers saw "tongues of fire" descend on them from heaven. They began to speak in different languages, and three thousand people in Jerusalem heard the news of the risen Christ and believed. God's pledge to Abraham, that he would provide a blessing to all nations, was being fulfilled. The next event on God's calendar is

Jesus' Return – The beginning of the end of suffering

“As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?” And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray.

For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet.” Mathew t 24:3-6

Jesus will return as the powerful and glorious King. At that time, he will express the fullness of God's Kingdom by judging the whole world, and punishing "Babel-ish" pride and rejection of God.

But those who trust in Jesus will be saved from God's judgment and be with God forever. Until Jesus returns, his people are to live here in a manner worthy of the Kingdom of God.

The message of the Bible ends with...

The Promised of the New Creation –The End of Suffering

Revelation 21:3-4

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with humans, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

After Jesus' return, God will make a new heavens and a new earth which will last forever. This can be thought of as the ultimate "Promised Land". Death and pain will be destroyed.

God will dwell with his people in perfect fellowship in the Kingdom he has made. God's plan for the world began with Creation and ends with the New Creation. Once again, God will rule as King, with his people ruling the New Creation under him.

Putting it all together

“Jesus suffered so must we – suffering is part of the now, not yet of salvation but God through His plan in Jesus

He gives me new meaning and purpose as I suffer for my growth and His glory!

Suffering with your eyes open – Diagram

My Current	God's Big Picture of	Transforming My Thoughts	Practical outworking
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Position	Suffering The Message of the Bible	on Suffering Worship!	in my daily life
	God Plan in Eternity He is Sovereign & Loving	God ordained my suffering He chose me for Himself	It's no accident _ God loves me so much -He's planned this for my eternal good.
Suffering	Creation – Perfection in Nature & Adam & Eve	Become Like Christ	God is working daily to transform me – live new
	The Fall – Suffering Begins	One day my suffering will end	I can't change my situation But I can change my attitude
	Making a Promise -	God Promises grace in my suffering	I need to pray and trust God to make God on His promises
	Out of Slavery	My suffering will end	If not in this life – In the next I will be suffering free
	The Promised Land	God promises me Heaven	My suffering is nothing compared to the glories of heaven
	The Law	God's word is to be my hope	I must reprogram my mind with His word – not TV or Culture
	A King to Rule Over Them	Jesus is to be my King in Suffering	I'm not my own, I have a new boss and He calls the shots
	Exile	God disciplines me because of my rebellion	God disciplines me in love –Hebrews 12 :1-19 so don't sin
	The Prophets	God Speaks through His Preachers	I need to hear God's word Every week to feed my soul
	Jesus –His Life	He suffered – so will I	Jesus is my example be Christ

			like
	Jesus - His Death	He suffered for Me – I'm forgiven	My suffering is nothing compared to His
	Jesus – His resurrection	He promises me real life	I'm a new person in Christ I have new life
	The Promise of the Spirit	The power and comfort of the Holy Spirit is my	As I feed on the Bible, pray and fellowship, God will empower & comfort me in suffering
	Jesus' Return	My suffering has purpose	Think Big Picture
	A New Creation	My suffering has meaning I'm being made like Jesus!	God ordained my suffering God ordained my salvation –It's guaranteed – Worship Him