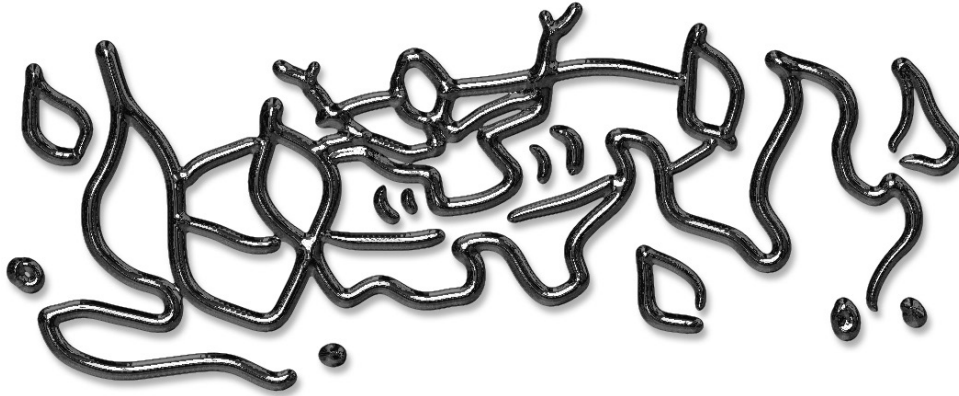


How Much Pain Can We Suffer?



SABBATH—JULY 23

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Genesis 22; John 8:56; Hosea 2:1–12; Hosea 2:14–23; Job 1:6–Job 2:10; 2 Corinthians 1:8, 9; 2 Corinthians 11:23–29; 2 Corinthians 1:4; Isaiah 43:1–7; Hebrews 4:15.

MEMORY VERSE: “The LORD was pleased with this humble [empty of all pride] servant who suffered such [so much] pain. Even after giving himself as an offering for sin, he will see his descendants [future children] and enjoy a long life. He will succeed in doing what the LORD wanted” (Isaiah 53:10, ERV).



When things in life become painful, some people reject God fully.

C. S. LEWIS'S WIFE LAY DYING. During this time, Lewis wrote, “I don't think I am in much danger of not believing in God. The real danger to me comes from my wanting to believe awful things about Him. I don't think I will end up saying, ‘So there's no God after all.’ But I'm afraid I will say, ‘Is this who God really is?’ ”—*A Grief Observed* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1961), pages 6, 7, adapted.

When things in life become painful, some people reject God fully. Other people may feel the same way about God that C. S. Lewis felt. They may start to question their ideas and beliefs about God. They also may start to believe bad things about Him. The question is, How much pain can God's people suffer? That is, how much pain and hard times, tests and troubles must we suffer to look the same as Jesus (Romans 8:29)?

ABRAHAM'S TEST (Genesis 22)

Read about Abraham's difficult test in Genesis 22. God asks Abraham to give Him Isaac, his own son, as a burnt offering. Try to make a picture in your head of Abraham at this time. How do you think he felt? Why does a holy God ask His loyal follower to kill his own son? Also, what about God's promise? God promised to make Abraham the father of many people. How can this promise happen without a son?

Why does God ask Abraham to give Him Isaac as a burnt offering? God knows everything that will happen, right? So, what important lesson does God want Abraham to learn from this test?

God gave Abraham a very difficult test. "God waited to give Abraham this final test when he was very old. At this time in his life, Abraham wanted to rest from hard tests and suffering."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 147, adapted. Was this the test of a crazy god? Of course not! "The test caused Abraham much pain and suffering. God permitted Abraham to suffer this awful pain. God wanted to help Abraham to understand from his own experience how much God must give up so that He can save us."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 154, adapted.

This experience, as awful as it was, was only a test. God never meant for Abraham to kill his son. This test shows us something very important about the way that God works. God may ask us to do something that He never means for us to finish. God may ask us to go somewhere He never really wants us to go. What's important to God is not the end—but what we learn along the way.

Maybe Jesus thought about Abraham's experience when He said, "Your father Abraham was filled with joy at the thought of seeing my day. He saw it and was glad" (John 8:56, NIV). Abraham saw the coming of Jesus because he obeyed God. Abraham didn't think that the command to kill Isaac came from Satan. Abraham knew that God asked him to give Him his son. That's why Abraham won and learned from this experience. He knew when God talked to him.

How do you know when God talks to you? What are the ways that God communicates to you His plan for your life?



Abraham saw the coming of Jesus because he obeyed God.

ISRAEL GOES BACK TO DOING EVIL (Hosea 2:1–12)

Hosea's story has some powerful lessons to teach us. Hosea's story is surprising, too. His wife, Gomer, runs away. She has children with other men. After Gomer cheats on Hosea, God tells Hosea to take his wife back and to love her fully. This story is a picture story about God and Israel. The Israelites "cheated" on God with other gods. But God never stopped loving Israel. God wanted to show His love to His people again. Just look at how God does this!

Read Hosea 2:1–12. What does God say He will do to help Israel find Him?

Hosea 2:2, 3 _____

Hosea 2:5–7 _____

Hosea 2:8, 9 _____

Hosea 2:10 _____

Hosea's story shows us two important problems that we may have when God brings us back to Him. First, we may not see that God works to save us. When Israel had difficult and painful experiences, they had trouble seeing that God worked to save them. The same is true for us when life is filled with many troubles. When we can't see where we're going (Hosea 2:6), we may ask, "Where is God?" When we have no food, clothes, or water, or when we feel embarrassed, we may wonder, "Where is God?" Whatever we feel, God always works to save us, because He loves us very much.

Second, we may not understand God Himself when He works to save us. We may see He's at work, but we may not like what He's doing. When we feel hurt and embarrassed, we may blame God for being mean and nasty. Or for not caring for us. Or for not helping us. But God always works to make us new, because He loves us.



God tells Hosea to take his wife back and to love her fully.

Read Hosea 2:14–23. What do these verses teach us about God? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you if you have been running away from God in any part of your life. If you have been, why wait for trouble to come before you give your heart back to God? What's stopping you from giving everything to the Lord now?

JOB'S TROUBLES (Job 1:6–Job 2:10)

What caused Job's suffering? Read Job 1:6–Job 2:10 for the answer.

We see something surprising in Job's story. The angels come to see God. Satan comes with them. God asks Satan where he's been. Satan says, "I have been roaming [wandering] around the earth, going from place to place" (Job 1:7, ERV). Then God asks Satan this question: "Have you noticed [seen and thought about] my servant Job? There is no one on earth like [the same as] him" (Job 1:8, ERV). The question itself is not surprising. What's so surprising is that God asks it. Do you see that Satan is not the one who points to Job as an example to watch? God does. God brings Job to Satan's attention. Down on the earth, Job has no idea how much he will soon suffer. Yes, Satan, not God, causes Job's suffering. But God gives Satan permission to destroy Job's stuff, children, and his health. If God gives His permission for Job to suffer, does it matter who causes the suffering? How can God be holy and good when He allows Satan to cause Job so much pain? Is Job's suffering a special example, or does God work this way with us today?

In Job 1:20, 21, how does Job behave during his troubles?

We can behave in one of two ways when we suffer or are given difficult tests. We can become angry. We can believe bad things about God. Or we can hold on with faith to God more tightly. What does Job do? He stays loyal to God and worships Him.

In Job 1:20, 21, Job does three things that may help us when we suffer. (1) Job accepts he can't change anything. He understands that no one owes him anything: "When I was born into this world [on this earth], I was naked [with no clothes] and had nothing. When I die and leave this world, I will be naked and have nothing" (Job 1:21, ERV). (2) Job believes that God continues to be in full control: "The LORD gives, and the LORD takes away" (Job 1:21, ERV). (3) Job worships God and believes He is worthy of praise: "Praise the name of the LORD!" (Job 1:21, ERV).

Are you suffering? Do the three things that Job did. How do you think these things will help you?



Down on the earth, Job has no idea how much he's soon going to suffer.

HOPE THAT SAVES US (2 Corinthians 1:8, 9)

“Yes, we really felt our time had come to die. This [experience] was [happened] to make us trust, not in ourselves, but in God. He brings people back to life. He saved us from the death that was so near, and he still saves us. We believe that God will keep on saving us” (2 Corinthians 1:8, 9, WE).

God chose Paul to preach to the non-Jews. Paul suffered many things in his work for God. For sure, Paul suffered more than most people. But Paul did not give up hope. Paul praised God more. Read about Paul’s list of hard times in 2 Corinthians 11:23–29. Then read 2 Corinthians 1:3–11.

In 2 Corinthians 1:4, Paul says that God comforts us “so that when others have trouble, we can comfort them with the same comfort God gives us” (ERV). Do you think that God uses suffering to show us that He wants us to serve Him? If yes, give reasons why you think this is so.



Paul wants us to know that no matter how bad things get, God can help us.

God wants us to help people who are hurt. So, God may first allow us to suffer the same hurts other people suffer. Then we can encourage them from our own experience. We can tell them about the love and comfort that God gave us. Jesus did this all the time (read Hebrews 4:15).

Paul does not tell us about his hard times to make us feel sorry for him. Paul wants us to know that no matter how bad things get, God can help us. We may want to give up and die. We may be afraid of getting killed. But we must not fear. God is teaching us to depend on Him. We can trust Him, for God brings the dead back to life (2 Corinthians 1:9).

Paul’s faith is supported by three things. Paul talks about these three things in 2 Corinthians 1:10, 11: (1) God saved us from dangers in the past. He will continue to save us (2 Corinthians 1:10). (2) Paul puts his hope in God. (3) Paul is thankful for the prayers of his friends (2 Corinthians 1:11).

What can you learn from Paul that can help you stay strong during hard times and not pity yourself?

HOW MUCH PAIN CAN WE TAKE? (Isaiah 43:1–7)

So far, we've looked at many examples of the tests that God gives us to help us look the same as Jesus. Some people may look at these examples and believe that God is mean and hard on us. They may say, "Sure, we know that God wants something good for us. But these examples don't show us much care and love. God looks the same as a bully. He does things that cause us terrible hard times. That's how things are. We can do nothing about it."

We live on a sin-filled earth. So, we understand only a little bit about why things happen. In heaven we'll understand so much more (1 Corinthians 4:5; 1 Corinthians 13:12). But for now, we must accept that God cares for us, even when things don't always go right or feel so good. Isaiah talks about this problem.

Read Isaiah 43:1–7. God says to His people, " 'Don't be afraid. I saved you. I named you. You are mine. When you have troubles, I am with you. When you cross rivers, you will not be hurt. When you walk through fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not hurt you. That's because I, the LORD, am your God' " (Isaiah 43:1–3, ERV). The rivers and the fire are word pictures. They show us terrible danger. Maybe they also show us the time when God's people crossed the Red Sea and the Jordan. These experiences were scary times for God's people. But they led to a new life. You may expect that God will say that He will protect His people from these dangers and lead them in an easier way. But just as the Shepherd in Psalm 23 is with His sheep, God is with His people. So, we do not need to be afraid when difficult times come.

Look back at Isaiah 43:1–7. Write down the different ways that God comforts His people during hard times. What picture about God does your answer make in your mind? Which promises in these verses do you need the most in your life?

Isaiah 43:1–7 teaches us three things about God's tests for us. (1) God's tests are not meant to destroy us. His tests help destroy our sins. (2) God's tests are not meant to make us feel bad. They are meant to make us clean and holy. (3) God's care for us never stops during our suffering. He loves us with a tender heart. God will never leave us alone, no matter what happens to us.



**“ 'I am with you.
When you cross rivers,
you will not be hurt.
When you walk
through fire,
you will not be burned' ”
(Isaiah 43:2, ERV).**

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “The Test of Faith,” pages 145–155, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; and “Praise Ye the Lord,” pages 315–319, in *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 5.

“God always gives His people tests. Suffering is a test. Suffering causes the sin to be separated from us. Then we become the same as gold. Jesus watches us take the test. He knows what we need so that we may become the same as precious metal. Then we can show His love. In this way, God uses painful tests to discipline His servants. God sees that some of His servants have skills that they can use to help His work on earth. So, God gives these persons special tests. He puts them in jobs and in places that will show them what is in their hearts. . . . God shows them their own weaknesses. He teaches them to trust Him. These tests are part of God’s plan. In this way, God’s people are taught, trained, and disciplined. God gets His people ready to do the work He gave them the skills to do.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pages 129, 130, adapted.

“Has God permitted you to suffer? Then accept the suffering and the test. Remember that God has allowed you to have this experience. So, trust Him in the hard times as well as the good times. Believe that He will give you everything that is for your good. . . . When we suffer, we must praise God with thankful hearts. How can we refuse to give God praise when we remember the love He showed us on the cross?”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 5, page 316, adapted.



“God gets His people ready to do the work He gave them the skills to do.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① In class, ask someone to talk about a test of faith that he or she had that was very hard. Did this class member fail or succeed? What can you learn from this person’s experience?
- ② Review the last 24 hours of Jesus’ life before He died on the cross. What were Jesus’ tests during that time? What pain did He suffer? How did Jesus act? What important rules can we learn from His example? How can these rules help us when we suffer?
- ③ How can our suffering bring a blessing to other people who suffer?
- ④ Why is it important to trust God in the bad times and not just during the good ones?

PART 5: STOPPING A BAPTISM

The day of Junior's baptism finally arrived. Junior was getting baptized that afternoon, along with four other people, at Alpha Adventist Church in Manaus, Brazil. Father said, "I won't go." Then he told Mother, "Drive me to the temple."

On the way to church, Mother wondered if Father might show up at Junior's baptism anyway. Maybe Father was going to come in the special clothes that he wore as high priest or top religious leader of the Candomblé temple. "I don't care if Father shows up in all his long clothes," Junior said. "I'll accept him."

At the church, Pastor Ricardo announced that Junior was going to be baptized first. Pastor Ricardo invited Junior to share his story about how Jesus saved him. When Junior finished, he walked into the pool and turned to look at the church members. At that instant, Father entered the church. Father wore his special clothes as top priest. Mother started to cry. "He's here!" she whispered. "He said he was not going to come, but he's here."

Heads turned to look at the back of the church. Mother prayed silently. Church members who knew Father was a Candomblé priest also prayed. Other members stared in surprise at Father's long, flowing clothes. But no one asked him to leave.

A church leader greeted Father. "Welcome, Eduardo!" said the leader. "We were waiting for you. Come!" He led Father to a seat near the pool, where Junior waited to be baptized.

Junior thought, "God planned everything. No one knew that I was going to be baptized first. Father arrived just as I entered the pool. God's plans are perfect!"

A normal baptism at the church lasted only 10 minutes. But Junior's lasted a whole hour! Several friends from the video-game club praised God for Junior's decision to follow Jesus. Pastor Ricardo asked the Pathfinders to sing. The whole church joined in.

When Junior rose from the water, the Pathfinders joyfully waved their yellow scarves. Junior was dripping wet when he hugged his father. "Daddy," Junior said. "We may have different religions. But I love you very much." Then Junior looked at the church members and said, "I thank you all for being here. But most of all I thank my father for being here."

Then Father said, "Son, I kept you away from my religion your whole life. Now, I accept your faith because strange things have happened. I hope that my own journey to Jesus isn't painful."

Later, as the family got into the car, Father said, "This church is a very nice place." His face shone with joy.

Your 13th Sabbath Offering will help build eight churches in South America. Four of these churches will be built in Brazil, where Father (Eduardo Ferreira dos Santos) and his family live.

INSIDE
Story
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



**At that instant,
Father entered the church.**