

# Parent *pages*



Resources for Christian Parents in the 21st Century

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## Rejoice in suffering

“Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us”  
**Rom. 5:3-5.**

**M**y son was 3 years old when he had his first seizure. When he was diagnosed with epilepsy, my husband and I wished for little else than to be able to take away his suffering. We wished we could have endured the needle pokes, the scans, the awful-tasting medicine, and even the seizures for him.

One of the most challenging aspects of parenting is to watch your child suffer. Just ask any parent whose child has gone through months of chemotherapy or years of surgeries and braces. The urge to protect your child is very strong during times of suffering.

### We sin . . . we suffer

Most of us get through our childhoods with a relatively minimal amount of suffering. We don't have to endure medical treatments, and many of us do not suffer

the loss of a loved one until we are well into adulthood. We do much in our lives to avoid any kind of pain or suffering. However, because we are sinners in a sinful world, we must all have some kind of suffering.

God is bigger and stronger than any suffering our world can dream up. He is there to offer encouragement and peace, and He is able to bring good out of our suffering.

In his book (co-authored by Philip Yancey) *Pain: The Gift Nobody Wants*, Dr. Paul Brand points out the benefits of pain and the suffering it can cause. He worked for many years with patients suffering from leprosy. Brand points out that the worst

side effect of leprosy is the loss of the sensation of pain.

Because of this, victims literally destroy themselves, a little bit at a time because they are not aware of damage in order to protect fingers and limbs. They

literally wear the skin away, wear the bone away, and experience wounds that do not heal simply because they cannot feel pain. For leprosy patients, pain is a gift that was taken away, and the loss of it puts their very lives at risk.

### Thank and praise Him

This is the last thing that we as parents

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consider when we see our child in pain or suffering in some other form. We rarely, if ever, stop and thank God for the pain our child is suffering. Yet, in the Romans verse, we see that is exactly what God expects us to do; we are to rejoice in suffering.

But what about the suffering that comes from the natural consequences of our child's behavior? Do we rejoice when our child fails a test, loses his bike to theft, loses a friend because of thoughtless behavior, or even spends a night in jail? Do we rejoice in the suffering of these circumstances? Is this suffering really necessary?

A Growing Christian Makes the Best Parent!

As parents we are certainly to be encouraged to comfort a child after a fall, to kiss boo-boos, and to provide a shoulder to cry on when a relationship doesn't go as planned. This is an important part of parenting and is most beneficial to our children. It is when we go too far as parents, when we try to prevent any and all suffering, or when we don't allow our children to accept responsibility for what their actions have caused, that we travel into the area of "doing more harm than good."

Children do things that cause themselves grief. They are no different than adults in this regard. If I speed on the interstate, I should not be surprised to get a ticket. If I am not careful about what I eat and neglect to exercise, I should not be angry with what the scale, or my doctor, tells me.

I can learn from my self-imposed consequences and I also can learn from the suffering that comes my way through no fault of my own. My own experience with surgery taught me long ago the importance of a visitor while you are recovering. Likewise, when we suffer loss, we learn new things about our own strength, and the value of close relationships.

If we prevent our children from feeling any pain in their lives, we are doing them a great disservice. We are not showing love, but instead, we are telling them that they are not strong enough to survive. We are preventing them from developing a trust relationship with their God, and we are setting them up for failure later in life by trying to smooth over the road for them now.

When our children have to suffer—either because of life's circumstances or because of the natural consequences of their own actions—there are helpful roles that we as parents can assume:

#### ► **Hand-holder:**

Almost every suffering is eased by the presence of a loved one. Let your child know that you support him in this difficulty and that while you will not solve the problem for him, you will be there to offer support, love, and guidance. If your child is suffering the consequences of his own actions, it is especially important to remind

him that he is loved unconditionally by his parents and his heavenly Father.

#### ► **Discerner:**

When we are in the middle of a situation, it can be the most difficult time to wisely evaluate what is going on, what has caused the situation, and what the options are for solving the problem. This is a time for parents to model discernment and to help children to figure things out. Remember to let the child do the work of problem-solving; you are there to guide. The best way to lead the children with discernment is to pray with them.

#### ► **Teacher:**

We are always teachers to our children. Even when we don't intend to be, we are modeling behaviors they will want to emulate. When your child is in the middle of a difficult situation, he will be most ready to hear your counsel and teaching. It is important to remember to stay within the appropriate area of parent involvement. Resentment of your teaching will come if you are trying to handle something your child is capable of doing.

#### ► **Encourager:**

It's hard for both adults and children to get through tough times. As a parent, you are the best person to offer encouraging words and hugs. It is hard to refrain from trying to fix things, but it is always easy to reassure your child that this trouble will pass and that God has a plan to bring good out of everything in our lives. These moments of encouragement will be the faith-sharing that your child will always remember. These words will help your children develop a trust relationship with God that will carry them through other difficult times in their future.

#### ► **Forgiver:**

When your child is struggling with a situation or a decision, it is important to remember that it is his struggle not yours.

It is his failure, not yours, and eventually it will be your child's success, not yours. Being able to separate your responsibility from your child's responsibility will allow you to take on the role of forgiver. You can forgive your child's transgression and help your child to know God's forgiveness. Then your child will be ready to learn from his mistake.

The benefits to allowing our children to manage and survive pain and suffering are many. In doing so, we are modeling trust and hope and encouraging faith growth. A child who has a parent who "fixes" everything will not have use for God. When children get through their own problems, they learn that God has given them the ability to cope with stress and to solve problems—both very important emotional skills. Having a life of no problems, no pain, and no suffering does not create a strong child.

However, getting through these things, with the help of loving parents and an all powerful God, can do great things for developing a strong self-concept and a strong faith.



### **For Discussion:**

- What is the most difficult thing about watching your child suffer through a problem?
- What have you learned from your suffering?
- What damage is done by trying to build a trouble-free life for your child?
- What does a child learn from accepting responsibility for words and actions?

### **For Further Study:**

*Pain: The Gift Nobody Wants*, by Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey