

Questions to Consider

1. What is the most difficult aspect of enduring suffering?

Common answers:

- * *Feeling of isolation and abandonment (by God, by family and friends, etc.)*
- * *Despair over losing a major role in life*
- * *Inability to show emotion through tears, anger, etc.*
- * *Can not feel God’s presence in the midst of suffering*

Possible approaches (keeping in mind that every person is unique and no two people respond to suffering and comfort in exactly the same way):

- * *Music, a universal language of comfort*
- * *Psalms are very meaningful*
- * *Touch (holding hands, caressing, hugging) conveys support and commitment*
- * *Tears and laughter release tensions and bond people together*
- * *Let the person in pain set the pace—be alert to his/her energy level and attention span (usually much lower for hospital patients)*
- * *Tell the person to be strong and courageous (“tough talk”) if wallowing in self-pity*

2. Why would a loving God call anyone to suffer?

Sometimes the presence of pain in my life has the practical benefit of sanctifying me. God is sometimes only able to work in me through affliction. As uncomfortable as pain can be, we do know the Scriptures tell us again and again that tribulation is a means by which we are purified and driven to a deeper dependence upon God. There is a long-range benefit to us that we would presumably lose were it not for the pain that we are called to endure for a season. Notice what the Scriptures say: Endure it for a season—because that which is stored up for us in the future is far beyond any pain that we have to endure now.

3. What is the meaning of filling up “what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ” (Col. 1:24)?

*In terms of the value of Jesus’ suffering, it is blasphemous to suggest anything was lacking—the merit of His atoning sacrifice is infinite. The answer to this difficult question lies in the broader teaching of the New Testament of the believer’s call to participate in the humiliation of Christ. Our very baptism signifies that we are buried with Christ. Paul rejoiced that his own suffering was a benefit to the church. The suffering of Christians may benefit other people, but will always fall short of atonement. It may also serve as a witness to the One whose sufferings were an atonement (“witness” = *martus* (Latin) = *martyr*). What is lacking in the afflictions of Jesus is the on-going suffering which God calls His people to endure.*

Source: “Surprised by Suffering—Study Guide for the Video or Audio Series”, p. 90-92
Surprised by Suffering, p. 37-39