

# 14 Kinds of Suffering in the Bible

June 13, 2016 by [Mark Driscoll](#)

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Even though I'm out of town on vacation with our family and largely offline, news of the horrific attack in Orlando got to us quickly. Seemingly everyone we encountered was checking the latest news updates, and processing how they were feeling about the tragedy.

In case it could be of any help, I'm posting this blog as a Bible teaching Christian pastor hoping to help people think and pray through this widespread suffering in their own time of processing with the Lord. In such times we wrestle with the realities of evil, sin, and death as we pray for the victims, all those affected, and the family, friends, ministry leaders, and professional counselors who are entering into long and painful processes of helping people process this tragedy.

Suffering in the Scriptures, like our own suffering, isn't neat, tidy, or systematic. Life is often more complex than clear. While there is no way to answer all the questions regarding suffering, I thought it might be helpful to pull back and look at fourteen kinds of suffering and affliction seen throughout the Scriptures. Hopefully, this will increase our compassion for everyone involved and help us understand how much suffering is occurring.

In massive tragedies, multiple kinds of suffering are occurring at the same time affecting countless people in numerous ways. In regards to this recent tragedy, I am not suggesting that every one of these kinds of suffering is in effect. Rather, I am simply detailing all of the categories of various kinds of suffering that I have found in the Bible to show how many different kinds of sufferings there are to understand suffering more broadly.

## 14 Kinds of Suffering in the Bible

1. **Adamic Suffering:** When Adam sinned, all of us were implicated, and we inherited a sin nature(a) and were born into a fallen world.(b) As a result, some suffering is simply the result of being part of Adam's race. Everyone will suffer to varying degrees and ways because of Adam's sin, our sin, the sins of others, and the curse that permeates all of creation. This will remain the case until Jesus returns, removes the presence of all sin and its effects, resurrects Christians from death, and ushers in a new creation. Subsequently, suffering is a painful and tragic part of life on this side of the kingdom.
2. **Demonic Suffering:** Because Satan is alive and at work in the world, demonic affliction is very real. This includes torment,(c) physical injury,(d) deception arising from false miracles,(e) accusation,(f) and even death.(g) Sometimes demonic suffering can be difficult to discern; unfortunately, Satan is too often blamed for suffering when we're really experiencing consequential affliction from our own decisions. Nonetheless, demonic affliction is real for some and therefore should not be discounted just because some people wrongly blame shift most everything to Satan.
3. **Victim Suffering:** Victims endure affliction by being sinned against. This is a constant and heavy part of pastoral ministry. Evil is real, and its devastating effects are evident in the lives of many.
4. **Collective Suffering:** Sometimes we suffer as a result of being part of a people who are suffering. A biblical example is the Old Testament prophets' frequent repentance of not only their own sins but also the sins of their forefathers and their nation as they lamented the suffering God had permitted to come upon them for chastisement. We're not isolated, autonomous individuals. We're members of families, nations, and cultures—all of whom suffer. Subsequently, we can suffer simply because of such things family ties or

- our nationality. Likewise, those born into poverty, famine, hardship, war, and the like experience suffering simply because of where and when they were born.
5. **Disciplinary Suffering:** God chastens believers in order to mature them. Examples can be found in such places as the Wisdom Literature,(h) the Prophets,(i) and the New Testament.(j) The Scriptures are clear that discipline comes from God, who loves us and is like an honorable father who corrects us to mature and save us from the harm that sin causes. While this kind of suffering is not pleasant at the time, we later see the effects of God's work and thank him for continually working for our growth in holiness and fruitfulness.
  6. **Vicarious Suffering:** Sometimes those in Christ suffer because the ungodly oppose them. Examples include the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles. Vicarious affliction comes in varying degrees, from opposition to persecution. Physical persecution causes some to painfully die for Christ, whereas those who experience verbal opposition painfully live for Christ, as they are maligned, lied about, falsely accused, mocked, and harassed.
  7. **Empathetic Suffering:** This is the suffering that comes when someone we love is hurting. The Bible says this will be common in the church because when people we love suffer, we suffer as well.(k)
  8. **Testimonial Suffering:** Some suffering is a demonstration of the gospel so that others will have a deeper appreciation and understanding of Jesus. This kind of suffering tests our identity in Christ, confirms to us that we are true believers, strengthens our fellow Christians, and evangelizes non-Christians. The classic example is Hosea's marriage to Gomer. God called the prophet to marry and stay married to an unfaithful woman as an example of Jesus' devotion to the church.
  9. **Providential Suffering:** Some of us suffer to teach a lesson about God so that worship of him increases. Examples include Joseph's imprisonment in Egypt, where his suffering resulted in many people being saved physically from starvation and spiritually from sin. The truth is that God can have more purposes for allowing some suffering than can be easily discerned at first glance.
  10. **Preventative Suffering:** Sometimes suffering warns us of greater suffering that will happen if we don't heed God's warnings. This kind of suffering is indicative of the very loving nature of God, who, for instance, allows us to experience lesser degrees of pain (e.g., an ache in our side) in order to warn us of greater degrees of pain (e.g., a burst appendix).
  11. **Mysterious Suffering:** Sometimes God, in his providence, has chosen not to reveal why we suffer. As Scripture says, we know in part.(l) Job is the most obvious example of this kind of suffering, because during his trouble he was unaware of what was occurring between God and Satan. I believe that this category is incredibly important because, if we are humble and honest, the truth is that life is often not as clear as the categories listed in this blog.
  12. **Punishment Suffering:** God judges unbelievers and punishes them for sin. This kind of punishment brings the work of horrendous sin to an end so that those suffering at the hands of evildoers are given reprieve, reveals to unbelievers the urgent need to repent of sin and place their faith in God to avoid eternal punishment, and encourages believers that God will not be mocked and that faith in him is not in vain. It should be noted that God does not punish those in Christ in the same sense that he punishes non-Christians, because Jesus already paid the penalty for his people's sins. Subsequently, even though a Christian and a non-Christian may endure the same suffering, there is often a different use by God for each.
  13. **Consequential Suffering:** Sometimes we suffer because of foolish decisions. We see examples of this throughout Proverbs: the lazy become hungry, adulterers reap what they sow, fools suffer harm, and poor financial stewards are impoverished. Practically, much of life's suffering is consequential, resulting from our decisions.
  14. **Apocalyptic Suffering:** The Bible speaks of increased suffering that will signal the end of this age, as seen in the prophecies of the Old Testament(m) and of Jesus.(n) While we don't know when the end of this age will be or when Jesus will return, we do know that Christians living in the final chapter of human history will suffer greatly as a result of being in Christ. While we shouldn't live in fear of this future, nor seek to predict its timing, these scriptures will serve as a particularly helpful guide when they are needed most.

How about you? How have you experienced suffering in your life, including today? In what ways have you perhaps wrongly understood both suffering and God? How are people you know experiencing suffering, and in what ways could you comfort and counsel them?

- a. Rom. 5:12–21.
- b. Rom. 8:18–23.
- c. Acts 5:16.
- d. Acts 8:4–8.
- e. 2 thess. 2:9–10.
- f. Rev. 12:10.
- g. John 8:44.
- h. Prov. 3:11; 13:24; 15:5.
- i. Zeph. 3:7.
- j. Heb. 12:7.
- k. Rom. 12:15; 2 Cor. 2:4.
- l. 1 cor. 13:9.
- m. Isa. 24–27; Jer. 30–33; Ezek. 33–48; Dan. 2–12; Zech. 12–14.
- n. Matt. 24:3–44; Mark 13.

*Note: Much of the content from this blog was adapted from the book Who Do You Think You Are?*