

# How Should I Approach Suffering?

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R. C. SPROUL

How Should I Approach Suffering?

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*How Should I Approach Suffering?*

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## Chapter One

# Suffering, Perplexity, and Despair

Christians are those who have faith in Christ. We all aspire to possess a faith that is strong and enduring. The reality, however, is that faith is not a constant thing. Our faith wavers between moments of supreme exultation and trying times that push us to the rim of despair. Doubt rises up in us and threatens our peace. Rare is the saint who has a tranquil spirit in all seasons.

Suffering is one of the most significant challenges to any believer's faith. When pain, grief, persecution, or other



## How Should I Approach Suffering?

forms of suffering strike, we find ourselves caught off guard, confused, and full of questions. Suffering can strain faith to the limits.

Paul wrote poignantly about his own struggles in times of distress: “We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body” (2 Cor. 4:8–10, NKJV).

The Apostle said that he was “hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed.” He made no attempt to mask his pain in a fraudulent piety. The Christian is not a Stoic. Neither does he flee into a fantasy world that denies the reality of suffering. Paul freely admitted the pressure he experienced.

We all know what it means to be hard pressed. We use the word *pressure* to describe tense moments in our lives. Troubles in our jobs, troubles in our marriages, and troubles in our relationships can mount up and attack our spirits. If we add the tragic death of a loved one or the difficulty of a prolonged illness to these daily pressures, we feel the pain of being hard pressed all the more.

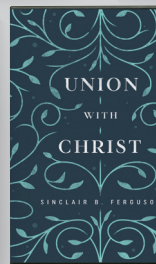
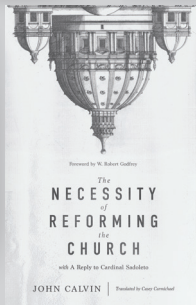
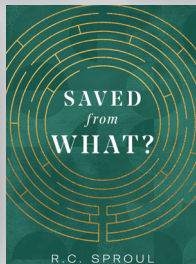
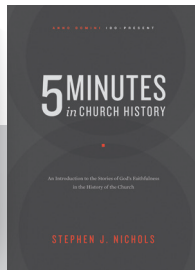
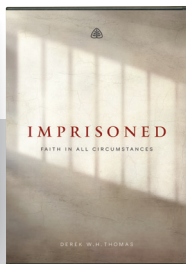
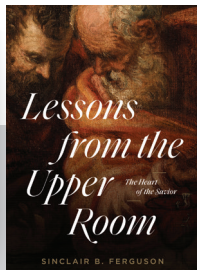
To be hard pressed is to feel as though we are used automobiles that have been consigned to the junk heap and put in a metal compactor. To be hard pressed is to feel a massive weight that threatens to crush us.

When we experience severe heartbreak, we may be inclined to say, “I’m crushed.” But this is hyperbole. We may feel crushed; we may even come close to being crushed. But the bold declaration of the Apostle is that we are *not* crushed.

God knows our limits far better than we do. In one respect, we are very much like camels. When a camel’s load is heavy, it doesn’t ask its master for more weight. Its knees get a bit wobbly and it groans beneath the burden, but it can take on more before its back will break. The promise of God is not that He will never give us more weight than we *want* to carry. The promise of God is that He will never put more on us than we *can* bear.

Note that Paul did not say, “We are *lightly* pressed on every side.” He said that we are *hard* pressed. At first glance, these words seem in direct conflict with the promises of Christ. Jesus said: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in

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