

SIX
CAN YOU THANK GOD FOR
PAIN?



Thank You for the Pain

*Thank You for the broken heart;
it is softer than before.*

*Since the pain ripped it apart,
it's insensitive no more.*

How can I accept the pain?

*Now I am more prone to pray,
to yield to Your mighty reign
and to let You have Your way.*

*I've no choice but to depend
upon Your sustaining grace.*

*You will pay a dividend
for each tear upon my face.*

*For You accept as sacrifice
a heart that's broken in two.*

*You already paid the price
for the pain I'm going through.*

*There is no way I would choose
 this hurt, all the times I've cried.
 Yet it's a gift I won't refuse,
 for it cleanses me inside.
 I'm driven to wield Your Sword;
 to give Your Spirit His due.
 So thank You for the pain, Lord,
 for it draws me close to You.*

That's a poem I wrote while in the throes of a depressive episode. Neither prayer nor medical intervention and counseling removed the despondency, so I figured God wanted to use it redemptively. His Spirit reminded me of how desperately I cling to Him during such times, which is a good thing. The lyrics cite these benefits of my despondent spirit: increased dependence on and intimacy with the Lord; a softer heart; a hunger for God's Word; prayer for sustenance and inner cleansing.

Grateful for Despondency

Any type of trial potentially offers benefits. My depression is merely a case in point. How the nemesis of despondency contributes to my spiritual development can also become true for you in relation to your own trials.

When despair generates bouts of weeping, my heart is softer than usual. It's during such times that the Holy Spirit often convicts me of wrong thoughts or behavior patterns. Since I'm already in a dependent state due to depression, I pray

more often, if only for relief. And anytime I'm in a "seeking God" mode, the Holy Spirit is more liable to engage in a purifying work within my heart. In a sense, tears serve as a cleansing agent for me. Anything that softens my heart makes me more receptive to the Holy Spirit and what He wants to do in my heart.

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Discouragement drives me to the Word of God for relief. Memorization of promises, especially from the Psalms and Prophetic books, instills a disciplined study habit that carries over long after a dark mood lifts. I'm reminded of the hard truth in Psalm 119:71, that suffering of any sort deepens my dependence on God's Word: "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn Your statutes."

Paul illustrated this perspective. His burdensome experience of persecution wielded benefits for the spiritual realm. Referring to an affliction he encountered in Asia, he wrote: "For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead" (2 Corinthians 1:8-9).

Like Paul, pain and adverse circumstances of any kind inevitably draw me closer to the Lord. That's why I thanked Him for the pain in poetic form.



Probes to Ponder

Can you identify a time when God used a painful experience to facilitate a time of spiritual renewal? How should that remembrance affect your attitude toward a current stressor?

How is having “nowhere to look but up” a good thing?

Identify a current challenge or adversity. Are you willing to say this to the Lord? “Lord, please don't waste this pain! Redeem it somehow, for my good and for Your glory.”



Prayer Response

Allow the words of my prayer to serve as a catalyst for what you need to say to God concerning your own source of affliction. Just as I cite my despondency in the prayer, your adaptation should pinpoint a current personal challenge.

Father, I don't enjoy hard times, whether they're due to challenging circumstances or to temperamental weaknesses. Yet so far, the special graces of prayer and Your Word have not removed my depression, nor have the common graces of medicine or counseling eradicated it. Though I'll keep fighting for my joy, I do recognize that this form of affliction has kept me desperately dependent on You, and that's a good thing. Thank You for using my pain this way. In the name of Jesus, “who for the joy

that was set before him endured the cross” (Hebrews 12:2), amen.



A Pertinent Word

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Romans 5:1-5



An Apt Quote

Joni Eareckson Tada, who has been a quadriplegic since a diving accident in her teens, gave this testimony:

Somehow, in the midst of your own suffering, the Son of God beckons you into the inner sanctum of His own suffering—a place of mystery and privilege. I have suffered, yes. But I wouldn't trade places with anybody in the world to be this close to Jesus.¹

God, thank You for the deeper healing You gave me. That no (for physical healing) meant yes to a stronger faith in You, a deeper prayer life, and a greater understanding of

Your Word. It has purged sin from my life, forced me to depend on Your grace, and increased my compassion for others who hurt. It has stirred an excitement about heaven and pushed me to give thanks in times of sorrow. It has helped me to love You more, Jesus.²

—*Beside Bethesda: 31 Days Toward Deeper Healing*