

# **Toward a Theology of Risk and Suffering**

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## **Toward A Theology of Risk**

Some Preliminary thoughts on risk:

- Risk is part of life in a fallen world. Each of us take risks everyday. But these risks are normative for us and we have adapted. Driving a car is risky, there are far more deaths in automobiles than public aircraft. Our tolerance of risk changes with familiarity.
- What may be perceived as risky for a believer in the midwest of the US who has not traveled internationally will seem pedestrian to cross-cultural workers who move in and out of multiple and/or unstable regions.
- Each of us has a varying threshold of risk as well as personalities that are either more given to risk or conservatism in actions.
- Thus, it is not wise to make decisions into moral issues. Often a decision to “risk” is not a right or wrong issue - especially in non-western cultures. Do not judge others for their decisions on risk.
- As is seen from the passages below, there are times to flee and times to not only stand your ground but willingly head into harm for a greater cause. Paul did both.
- Wise organizations will allow for these variances in determining policy.

Passages to reflect on risk. In working toward a Biblical theology, first read over all applicable passages on the subject. Then list facts and principles from the various passages. From this list one can develop guiding principles for life - thus having a biblically-grounded, practical theology of any given topic.

### **Examples from Jesus and the Apostles**

1. Luke 4:24-30
2. Matthew 12:14-15; Mark 3:6-7
3. Luke 13:31-33
4. John 8:59
5. Matthew 24:1-14
6. Acts 4:1-31
7. Acts 5:17-41
8. Acts 8:1-8; 26-30
9. Acts 9:20-30
10. Acts 14:1-7; 19-28
11. Acts 17:1-15
12. Acts 18:9-11; 22-24
13. Acts 20:22-25; 21:1-14

## Toward A Theology of Suffering

### Some Preliminary thoughts on suffering:

- Our cultural grid

### Defining suffering:

- There are several words used in the Greek New Testament that we render “suffering” in English. These Greek words give breadth to the many English words we use – words like affliction, trial, testing, temptation persecution, rebuke, insult, grief, reproach and more.
- θλιψις (thlipsis) which is used 45 times in the NT, 24 by Paul alone, thus being one of the more commonly used words.
- Two extreme responses to suffering in NA culture:
  - 1.
  - 2.

### A general teaching on suffering from the NT: Acts 14:22

“We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”

- **Context:**
- “**We must**” is the Greek word “**δει**” which means “**of necessity**”.
- The word “tribulation” is thlipsis and thus encompasses all of our earthly trials.
- “Kingdom of God” = a futuristic perspective to it; our eternal glory.
  - ≠ must suffer to be saved
  - = glory upon entrance into heaven is in proportion to our response to the suffering we endure in this life. Romans 8:17 and many references that Jesus made to the weight of glory that awaits those who have suffered for Him are helpful cross-references.
- See the Message paraphrase.

### Summary:

## **NT Passages to Develop a Theology of Suffering**

- James 1:2-4 & Romans 5:2-4 are identical in teaching
- Philippians 1:29 suffering is gift (grace) just as justification is
- 2 Corinthians 1:3-11; 4:7-18; 6:1-10; 7:2-16; 11:22-28; 12:7-10 Paul's experiences and lessons
- John 1:10-11
- John 12:23-26
- John 12:32 Jesus' "mission statement"
- John 15:20
- John 16:1-4
- Luke 12:4-12
- Matthew 4:1
- Matthew 5:10-12 suffering is our heritage
- Matthew 13:53f; Mk 6:1f; Lk 4:16-30
- Luke 17:25; 22:28
- Romans 5; 8:17-39 (reward is tied to suffering well); 9:2; 12:9-21
- 1 Peter 1:11; 2:19-23; 3:14-19; 4:13; 5:1, 9-10 mostly on persecution, but applications to any suffering
- 1 Peter 1:3-7 strengthen our faith
- 1 Peter 4:1-2 teach obedience
- James 1:11
- James 5:11
- Philippians 1:7; 12; 19-20; 27-30; 2:1-11; 2:17-18; 2:25; 3:7-11; 4:11-14;
- Hebrews 2:9-18; 4:14-16; 5:5-11; 11:24-26; 11:36-40; 13:3
- Galatians 1:13; 4:13-15; 5:11; 6:12; 6:17
- Ephesians 6:10-20
- Colossians 1:24
- 1 Thessalonians 1:6-7; 2:2; 3:3-4
- 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12
- 2 Timothy 1:8,12; 2:8-9; 3:12
- Revelation 2:10; 6:9; 12:11; 17:6; 18:24; 19:1-5; 21:4