

When the Fire Finds You

Finding God's Purpose in Seasons of Suffering

Nina Cesena

READING SAMPLE

Opening material and Chapter 1: The Myth of the Comfortable Christian Life

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FIRE
FINDS YOU



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in Seasons of Suffering*

NINA CESENA



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Introduction

None of us go looking for the fire.

We do not wake up one morning hoping for illness, loss, disappointment, betrayal, unanswered prayers, or seasons where God feels silent. Yet sooner or later, every one of us discovers that suffering is an unavoidable part of the human experience.

Some fires arrive suddenly, without warning. A diagnosis changes everything. A relationship ends. A dream falls apart. A door closes that we desperately wanted God to open.

Other fires burn slowly. They come in the form of waiting, uncertainty, loneliness, grief, infertility, financial hardship, chronic illness, or prayers that seem to echo back unanswered. Some-

times the fire is not what happens to us but what happens within us as we struggle to understand what God is doing.

If you are holding this book, chances are you have encountered one of those fires yourself.

Perhaps you are walking through one right now.

Before we go any further, it is important that we understand what this book means by suffering.

When many Christians hear the word suffering, they immediately think of persecution for their faith. While persecution is certainly a form of suffering discussed throughout Scripture, it is not the only kind. The Bible presents a much broader picture. From Genesis to Revelation, we see faithful men and women walking through illness, grief, loss, injustice, disappointment, waiting, fear, persecution, unanswered questions, and circumstances they did not choose.

Job suffered the loss of his health, wealth, and children.

Joseph suffered betrayal, slavery, and imprisonment.

David suffered years of hiding, waiting, and uncertainty.

Hannah suffered the anguish of infertility.

The Israelites suffered oppression and bondage.

The prophets suffered rejection.

The apostles suffered persecution.

And even Jesus Himself was described as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

The suffering we will explore in these pages includes all of these experiences and more. It is the pain, hardship, adversity, and brokenness that result from living in a fallen world. It is the reality of walking through circumstances that test our faith, challenge our understanding, and force us to decide whether we will continue to trust God when life does not unfold the way we expected.

This book is not an attempt to explain every reason suffering exists. Some questions remain mysteries known only to God. Nor is this a book filled with easy answers, clichés, or simplistic explanations for pain.

Instead, this is an invitation.

It is an invitation to examine the lives of ordinary people and biblical heroes who encountered their own fires and discovered that God was present in the middle of them.

It is an invitation to wrestle honestly with difficult questions.

It is an invitation to see suffering through the lens of Scripture rather than through fear, disappointment, or cultural assumptions.

Perhaps most importantly, it is an invitation to discover that the fire is not always what it appears to be.

Throughout these pages, we will explore testimonies from both the Old and New Testaments, tracing a thread that runs through all of Scripture. Again and again, we find a God who meets His people in prisons, deserts, storms, waiting rooms, sickbeds, battlefields, and valleys. We find a God who never promises a life free from suffering, but who repeatedly promises His presence in the midst of it.

Along the way, I will also share pieces of my own journey. Some of these stories come from my battle with autoimmune disease. Others emerge from seasons of infertility, waiting, disappointment, unanswered prayers, and learning to trust God when I could not understand His plans. I do not share these experiences because I have mastered suffering or because I have all the answers. I share them because I have learned firsthand that faith is often forged in places we would never choose for ourselves.

The truth is that suffering changes us.

The question is not whether we will encounter the fire.

The question is what the fire will produce within us.

Will it make us bitter or better?

Will it drive us away from God or deeper into His presence?

Will it destroy our faith, or will it refine it?

Scripture repeatedly uses the imagery of fire to describe God's refining work. Gold is purified in the furnace. Clay is strength-

ened in the kiln. Faith is tested and proven through trials. What feels destructive in the moment is often being used to accomplish something eternal.

That does not mean the fire is easy.

It does not mean the pain is good.

It does not mean every question will be answered.

But it does mean that our suffering is never beyond the reach of a sovereign and loving God.

My prayer is that as you read these pages, you will find encouragement for your own journey. Whether your fire is a season of loss, illness, waiting, grief, disappointment, persecution, or uncertainty, I hope you will discover that you are not alone.

More than anything, I pray that you will come to know the heart of God more deeply. That through every story, every Scripture, and every trial we explore together, you will see His character, recognize His faithful presence, and rest in His unchanging goodness. Because even when circumstances are painful and difficult, God is still good. He has not abandoned you. He has not forgotten you. And He has not stopped working.

The God who walked with Joseph in prison, David in the wilderness, Daniel in the lions' den, and Jesus through the cross is the same God who walks with you today.

Because when the fire finds you—and eventually it will—you may discover that the Refiner was there all along.

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. - 1 Peter 4:12



Part 1

Understanding the Fire — A Biblical Perspective on Suffering





CHAPTER 1

The Myth of the Comfortable Christian Life

Suffering has a way of asking questions we never intended to answer.

Questions like: *Where is God now? Why does faith feel heavier instead of easier? Why didn't obedience protect me from this?* Many believers carry these questions quietly, afraid that voicing them might expose weak faith or hidden sin. Yet these questions

are not signs of rebellion—they are often the birthplace of deeper trust.

Suffering has a way of colliding with what many of us were taught to expect from the Christian life. When pain enters the story, assumptions are exposed. Comfort-driven faith begins to crack, and we are faced with a choice: cling to a version of Christianity that promised ease, or step into a truer, sturdier faith that can survive the fire.

What follows is not meant to strip you of hope, but to anchor it. Not in comfort, but in Christ. Not in the absence of trials, but in the presence of a God who is near, purposeful, and faithful—even when the road is hard.

There is a version of Christianity many of us absorbed long before we ever examined it. It is rarely preached outright, yet quietly assumed. If you love God, obey Him, pray faithfully, and live morally, then life should go reasonably well. Hard seasons may come, but they will be brief, easily explained, and quickly resolved. Comfort becomes the unspoken measure of God's favor.

This belief system—often called cultural Christianity—does not emerge from Scripture as much as it emerges from our desire for control. It offers a subtle bargain: faithfulness in exchange for predictability. Obedience in exchange for safety. And when suffering intrudes anyway, it leaves believers confused, ashamed, or

quietly questioning whether they have failed God—or whether God has failed them.

Yet the Bible tells a very different story.

Jesus never promised comfort—He promised victory

Jesus spoke plainly to His disciples about what life with Him would include. In John 16:33 He said, *“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”*

Notice what He did—and did not—promise. He did not promise escape from trouble. He promised peace *in Him* while trouble remained. Tribulation was not framed as a possibility, but as a certainty. Peace, however, was not rooted in circumstances, but in Christ’s victory.

This distinction matters deeply. When we expect the Christian life to be comfortable, suffering feels like a contradiction. When we understand that suffering is part of the terrain, peace becomes something deeper than relief—it becomes trust.

Few passages confront the myth of comfort more directly than Hebrews 5:7–8:

“In the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able

to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.”

This is not a picture of weak faith. This is the Son of God praying with tears, crying out with intensity, fully dependent on the Father—and still suffering. His prayers were heard, yet the suffering was not removed. Obedience was not learned through avoidance of pain, but through endurance within it.

The Gospels give us another window into this moment of anguish. Luke tells us that in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed in such agony that His sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground. Then Luke adds a detail that is easy to overlook: *“Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him.” - Luke 22:43*

The angel did not remove the cup. The cross was still ahead. But heaven met Jesus in His weakness. Strength was given for what could not be avoided.

If the Son of God experienced anguish so heavy that He required divine strengthening, we should not be surprised when we feel overwhelmed by our own suffering. And just as the Father sent an angel to minister to Jesus, He is faithful to send the comfort we need—often not in the form of escape, but in the form of sustaining grace.

If suffering were evidence of spiritual failure, this passage would make no sense. Instead, it reveals a profound truth: suffering can be formative without being punitive. It can be purposeful without being cruel.

One of the most damaging phrases suffering Christians are often told is this: “God won’t give you more than you can handle.”

Though usually well-intended, this statement is both deeply misleading and biblically inaccurate.

The verse most often used to support this idea is 1 Corinthians 10:13, “*No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*” In context, Paul is speaking about temptation—not suffering. The passage teaches that God provides a way to endure temptation without falling into sin. It is not a promise that believers will never face circumstances beyond their emotional, physical, or spiritual capacity.

In fact, Scripture repeatedly shows us the opposite. There are seasons of suffering that bring human strength to its end. There are seasons that leave us weak, undone, grieving, exhausted, and desperate for God’s help. The Psalms are filled with cries of anguish. Elijah collapsed beneath despair. Paul described being “burdened beyond measure.” Even Jesus Himself wept in agony in the garden.

The problem with this misinterpretation is twofold. First, it subtly paints God as the author of suffering—as though He personally distributes pain according to our perceived strength. But suffering is not proof that God is targeting us for hardship. We live in a fallen world where sickness, loss, betrayal, tragedy, and pain exist because sin has fractured creation itself. Second, when we inevitably encounter circumstances we cannot handle, we begin to believe something is wrong with us. We wonder why we are falling apart if we were supposedly “built” for this. Shame settles in. Faith feels broken.

But perhaps the truth is far more freeing: Sometimes we truly cannot handle what we are facing on our own. That is not failure. That is the very place where surrender begins.

The Christian life was never designed to be lived through self-sufficiency. Trials often bring us to the end of ourselves so that we will finally stop clinging to our own strength and learn to lean fully upon God. We were never meant to carry suffering alone. We were meant to bring it to the feet of Christ, where grace meets us in our weakness.



Five Lies Cultural Christianity Teaches Us About Suffering

Cultural Christianity reshapes suffering into something suspicious, something to fix, or something to avoid at all costs. Scripture reshapes suffering into something that can train us, deepen us, and anchor us more firmly in God.

Lie #1: “If you pray hard enough, you won’t suffer.” Jesus prayed with tears—and still walked the path of suffering. Prayer is not a mechanism to bypass hardship; it is the means by which we are sustained inside it.

Lie #2: “Strong faith prevents hardship.” Hebrews tells us that obedience was *learned* through suffering, not eliminated by faith. Faith does not shield us from pain; it teaches us how to walk through it without losing our footing.

Lie #3: “Suffering means something is wrong—either with you or your faith.” Scripture consistently presents suffering as part of God’s formation, not evidence of failure. Refining fire is not punishment; it is preparation.

Lie #4: “God’s favor always looks like comfort and success.” God’s favor rested fully on His Son—yet that favor led Him

through anguish, rejection, and the cross. Favor is not proven by ease, but by presence.

Lie #5: “If God really loved you, He would fix this by now.” The Bible reveals a God who works through timing, training, and trust. Salvation is not merely rescue from pain; it is transformation through faithfulness.

I have found that when Christians suffer—especially believers who genuinely love God but are not yet deeply rooted—they are often given an unspoken message: something must be wrong. The struggle is not only the pain itself, but the confusion that follows it. *Where is God in this? Why would He allow this? What am I doing wrong?*

I know these questions intimately. Chronic illness has a way of stripping away tidy theology. When my own body became a battleground through autoimmune disease, faith was no longer theoretical. I was not questioning God’s existence—I was questioning His nearness. I prayed. I believed. I served. And still, the suffering remained.

Many believers quietly assume that prayer, church attendance, volunteering, and obedience function like spiritual currency. If we do enough of the “right things,” surely God will lessen the difficulty. When hardship lingers, shame creeps in. Doubt follows close behind. We wonder if our faith is insufficient or if we have somehow disappointed God.

Yet there is something profoundly comforting—and deeply biblical—in realizing that suffering is not always corrective. Often, it is refining. Trials do not automatically signal failure. Sometimes they signal growth.

True peace comes from knowing the Truth.

Ironically, letting go of the myth of a comfortable Christian life brings greater peace, not less. When suffering is no longer interpreted as abandonment or punishment, we are freed to trust God more deeply within it.

Jesus did not say, *“In the world you might have tribulation.”* He said, *“You will.”* And then He anchored our hope not in changed circumstances, but in His finished victory: *“I have overcome the world.”*

This is not a shallow optimism. It is a resilient peace—one that survives fire, loss, and unanswered prayers. It is the peace of knowing that suffering does not disqualify us from God’s love; it often draws us closer to it.

The Christian life is not a promise of comfort. It is a call to faithfulness. And when the fire finds us—as it inevitably will—we

discover not a God who has abandoned us, but a God who walks with us through the flames.

A Word to the One Who Is Suffering

If you are reading this while carrying pain—physical, emotional, or spiritual—hear this clearly: your suffering is not evidence that God has turned away from you. You are not forgotten. You are not weak for feeling overwhelmed. And you are not failing because this hurts.

There are seasons when obedience feels less like confidence and more like endurance. Faith looks less like victory and more like simply staying. These seasons are not wasted. God is not absent in them. He is often doing His deepest work precisely where you feel the most undone.

Just as the Father sent an angel to strengthen His Son in the garden, He is attentive to your need for comfort and strength. You may not be spared the path, but you will not be asked to walk it alone. Peace does not always arrive as relief—but it does arrive as presence. And that presence is enough to carry you, even here.

Thank you for reading

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Nina Cesena

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