

Trials & Suffering

Towards a Theology of Suffering

The Gospel Institute – Biblical Counseling & Discipleship

**THE GOSPEL
INSTITUTE**

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How to Handle Suffering, Disappointment & Loss

From *Dealing with Loss and Grief: Be Good to Yourself While You Heal*, by Lynn Newman-Masters in Counseling Psychology
(from tinybuddha.com)

1. Self-care, self-care, self-care
2. Accept there's a lot you don't know
3. Allow time and space
4. Accept that sometimes you have a bad day for no apparent reason
5. Allow light in the middle of it all
6. Accept that this too shall pass...until one day it comes again.

How to Handle Suffering, Disappointment & Loss

"The real test of a theory or way of life, however, is not whether it can relieve pain, but what it says about the pain it can't relieve. And this is where, I believe, psychology lets us down and Christianity supports us, for in psychology suffering has no meaning, while in Christianity it has great meaning." William Kirk Kilpatrick

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, (2 Pet. 1:3)

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law. (Deut. 29:29)

Outline for Suffering

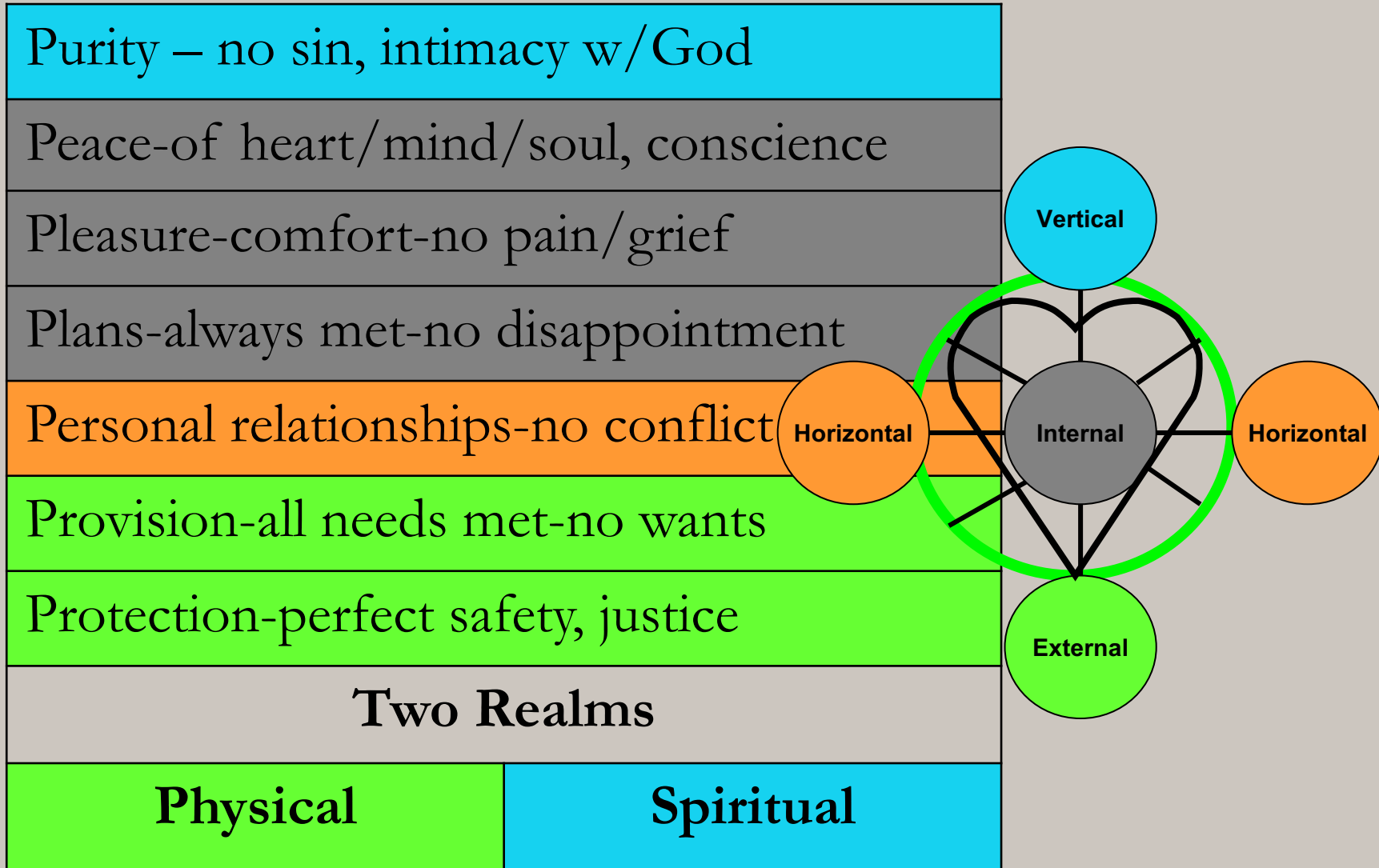
I. The Basics of Human Suffering

II. Causes of Human Suffering

III. Re-interpreting Suffering

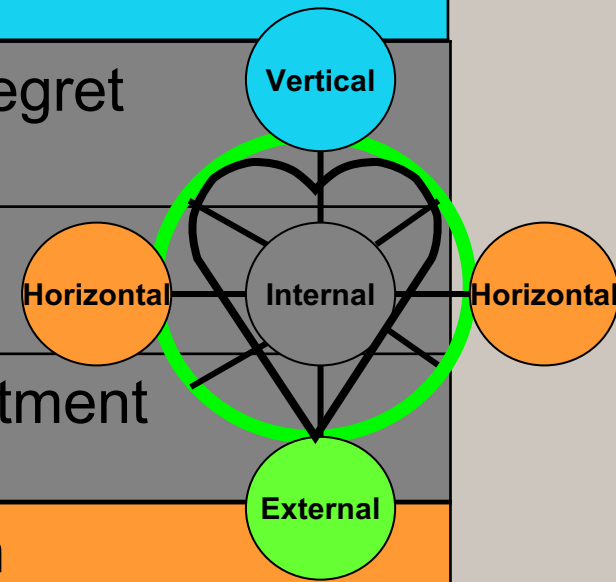
IV. Responding to Suffering

In the Beginning



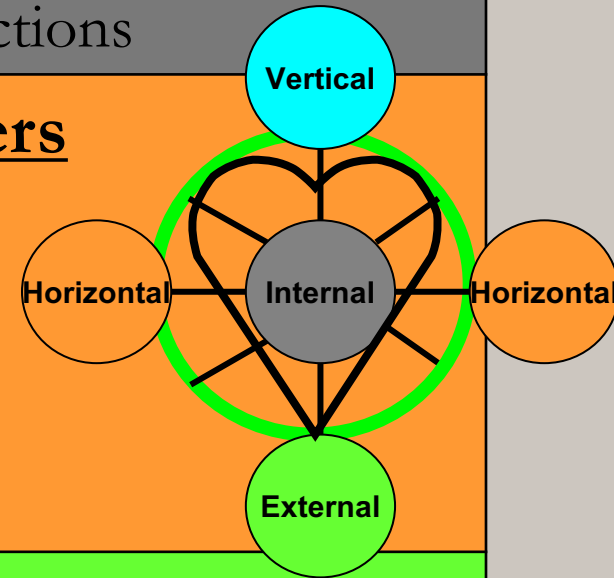
Defining Suffering-Destruction

Purity – no sin, intimacy w/God	Guilt, shame, fear, condemnation
Peace-of heart/mind/soul, conscience	Fear, confusion, regret
Pleasure-comfort-no pain/grief	Pain, suffering
Plans-always met-no disappointment	Failure, disappointment
Personal relationships-no conflict	Isolation, rejection
Provision-all needs met-no wants	Loss, hardship, pain
Protection-perfect safety, justice	Harm, injury, shame, vulnerable



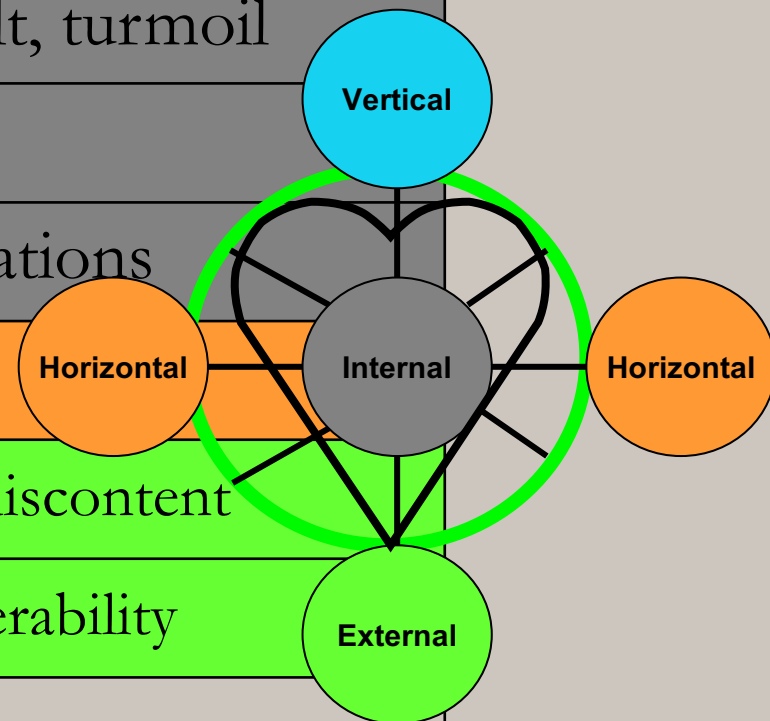
Defining Suffering-Disruption

Vertical	Relationship with God is severed
Internal	Relationship with ourselves: Noetic effect, thoughts, temptations, new negative emotions, guilt, self-perceptions, beliefs, expectations, affections
Horizontal	Relationships with <u>other sinners</u> Family & Friends Church-family Co-workers, Neighbors Enemies
External	Relationship – life in a broken universe; entropy, decay, pain, harm, injury, deterioration, death (Rom.8:22)



Defining Suffering – Disruption or Loss of

Purity	Relationship with God > shame
Peace	Inner peace > guilt, turmoil
Pleasure	Pleasure > pain
Plans	Of plans > frustrations
Relationships	Of relationships
Provision	Provision > lack, discontent
Protection	Protection > vulnerability

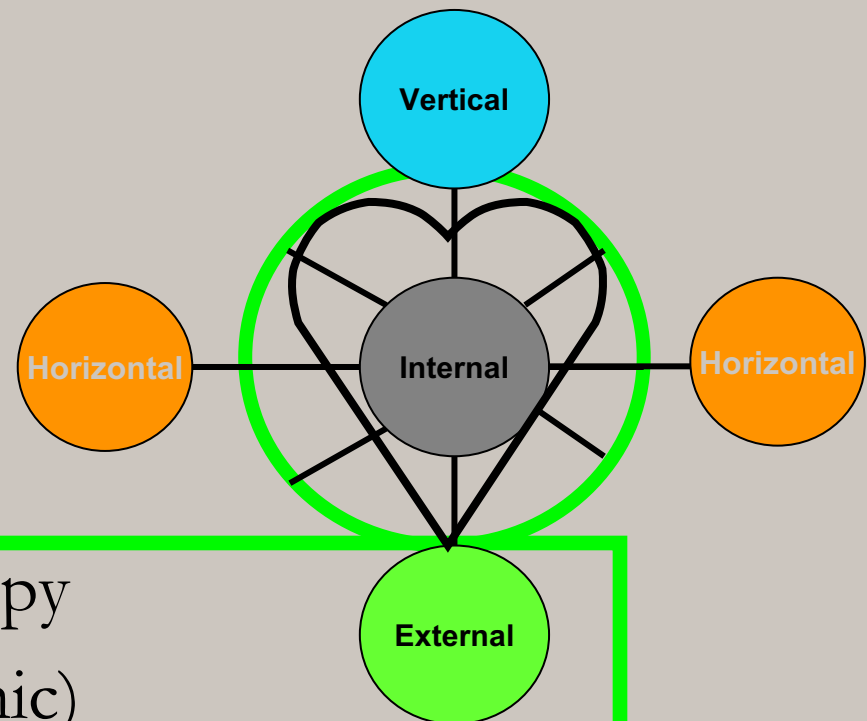


Two Realms

Physical	Spiritual
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Defining Suffering – Total Depravity

1. Spiritual
2. Emotional
3. Relational
4. Intellectual
5. Volitional/Responsible
6. Desires of the Heart
7. External - physical entropy
(DNA, family, culture, organic)



Extent of Suffering

Who?

1. Creation groans
2. Unbelievers
3. The wicked
4. Believers

When?

1. From the cradle to the grave?
“but man is born to trouble
as the sparks fly upward.”
(Job 5:7)
2. I have said these things to
you, that in me you may have
peace. In the world you will
have tribulation. But take
heart; I have overcome the
world.” (John 16:33)

Suffering is relative, experienced on a continuum

10 Causes of Human Suffering

1. **Satan** – This is Satan's world, BUT Satan is God's devil; he does nothing that God does not allow him to do. Job 1:10; 2:1-Fall-out
2. **Fall - Exhaustive Entropy**
deterioration>decay>destruction>death
3. **World system** ruled by Satan a fallen system of ideals, beliefs, etc.
4. **Flesh & the noetic effect** – flawed thinking, internal distress, emotions, sin-nature, passions; lust of the flesh/eyes/pride of life
5. **Personal Entropy** - effects of personal, physical deterioration & how those struggles tempt us to sin.

10 Causes of Suffering

6. **Harvest** - consequences of our own sin can bring great suffering.
7. **Punishment** – God punishes the wicked, e.g. Pharaoh, Sodom, Gomorrah
8. **Evil** – from the sins of other people; Naboth at the hand of Jezebel & Ahab
9. **Discipline from God** - to the believer; David suffered as a result of his sins against Bathsheba and Uriah.
10. **Display God's Glory** – all suffering will ultimately bring God glory, however some events of suffering are specifically designed to display His glory; e.g. The Crucifixion, the blind man. (John 9:1-7)

The Story Line of Suffering

God's plan from Eternity Past

Creation

Fall

Redemption

Sanctification

Judgement

Glorification

Eternal worship & joy in the presence of the LORD

The Story Line of Suffering

The only way to fully know God and His glory. How else would we know God and truly understand his character and nature if not juxtaposed with suffering?

God's sovereignty

God's holiness

God's active love

God's omnipotence

God's mercy

God's compassion

God's kindness

God's goodness

God's faithfulness

God's grief

God's anger

God's jealousy

God's judgement

Developing an Eternal Perspective

Suffering is God's plan from eternity past

¹⁸ ...you were ransomed ... ¹⁹ ...with the precious blood of Christ, ... ²⁰ He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for [your sake] ... (1 Peter 1:19-20 ESV)

⁴...he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵he predestined us...(Eph.1:4-5 ESV)

Developing an Eternal Perspective

Suffering is God's plan for our present path

¹⁸Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. ¹⁹For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. ²⁰For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. ²¹For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²²He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

(1 Peter 2:18-23 ESV)

Developing an Eternal Perspective

Suffering is God's plan for our present path

- ¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. ¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

(1 Peter 4:12-17)

Embracing the Purpose of Suffering

Suffering is God's plan to redeem us

³⁴At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; ³⁵all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?”

³⁷Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble. (Dan. 4:34-37 ESV)

Embracing the Purpose of Suffering

Suffering is for the sake of Christ

For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake (Philippians 1:29 ESV)

The more you suffer, especially from evil, the more you will know and understand the cost Christ paid for your salvation.

Embracing the Purpose of Suffering

Suffering is for the sake of knowing Christ

⁷But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

⁸Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

¹⁰that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

(Phil. 3:7-11)

Embracing the Purpose of Suffering

Suffering is God's plan to test us

And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.... (Deut. 8:2)

Job

Embracing the Purpose of Suffering

Suffering is God's plan to perfect us

²Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4 ESV)

Embracing the Purpose of Suffering

Suffering is the perfecting path of Praise

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Pet. 2:9 ESV)

¹²Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. (1 Peter 4:12-13)

Embracing the Purpose of Suffering

Suffering manifests the power of God thru us

⁵For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

⁷But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. (2 Cor. 4:5-7)

Embracing the Purpose of Suffering

God uses suffering to prepare an audience

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. (2 Cor. 4:7)

¹³ Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. (1 Pet. 3:13-17)

Embracing the Purpose of Suffering

Suffering equips for ministry

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵ For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. (2 Cor.1:3-5)

Embracing the Purpose of Suffering

Suffering points us to eternity

¹³let us go to him [Christ] outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. ¹⁴For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. (Heb. 13:13-14)

4 Key Elements to Respond to Suffering

1. **Prayer** – begin with calling upon God (Deut. 4:29)
2. **Faith** – without it, you can't please God (Heb. 11:6)
3. **Meekness** – true saving/sanctifying faith will result in a whole-person surrender to Him
4. **Worship** – exchange all good things of value for the One of infinite value

1st Key Element in Respond to Suffering

PRAYER

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:4-7)

In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears. (Ps. 18:6)

In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. (Ps. 120:1)

2nd Key Element to Respond to Suffering

FAITH

Faith is

Believing God's Word

and acting upon it,

from a heart of worship

for the glory of God

no matter how I feel,

or what I think

knowing that God promises

a good result

in His own time.

3rd Key Element to Respond to Suffering

MEEKNESS

Meekness is an inwrought grace of the soul; and the exercises of it are first and chiefly towards God.

It is that temper of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us [especially when He sovereignly superintends that we experience suffering]

as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting.

Vine's Expository Dictionary

4th Key Element to Respond to Suffering

WORSHIP

“...the submission of all of our nature to God.
...the quickening of conscience by His Holiness;
The nourishment of mind by His Truth;
The purifying of imagination by His beauty;
The opening of the heart to His love;
the surrender of will to His purpose
all of this gathered up in adoration, the most self-less
emotion of which we are capable”

William Temple

Becoming a Learner in Our Suffering

A follower of Christ is a disciple, a disciple is a learner.

Suffering is a sobering call to remember our identity as a disciple and recommit to being a learner.

1. Suffering teaches us about ourselves.
2. Suffering teaches us to focus on others.
3. Suffering teaches us to seek God and cling to Him.
4. Suffering exposes our 'functional gods' and motivates us to reject them, repent and recommit to finding our hope in God alone.
5. Suffering teaches us about what is truly valuable.
6. Suffering calls us to true worship, to turn from worthless idols to the God of ultimate value.

Exchanging what We Worship

WORSHIP involves exchanging things of value

Value	Man-centered	God-centered
Expectations	Need/demands	Rom. 6:23; 15:13; Ps. 37:4
Peace	Feeling-oriented	Rom. 5:1; Phil.4:7
Ease	Laziness	Lu. 17:3-10
Autonomy	Control, Manipulation	Lu. 1:38; 2 Ki. 5:2; Esther
Comfort	Numbing	2 Cor. 1:3-11; Heb. 11; Rev. 21:4
Experience	Sensations; defines reality	Matt. 4:4; Jn. 8:29-36
Wealth	Substance, material	Ps. 50:10; 1Cor. 4:7; Rom. 8:7
Knowledge	State of mind; Pride of life	Jer. 9:23-24; Phil. 3
Refuge	Self; men; power, drugs	Ps. 46; Eternity
Justice	System, self	Rom. 12; 13; Hab.; Rev.

SUFFERING=

The Heat

Life-Dominating Sins

Depression
Anxiety
Anger

Bitterness
Insensitivity
Fears
Selfishness
Pride



MAN SEES

Joy,
Love,
Patience,
Kindness,
Goodness,
Faithfulness

Peace,
Gentleness,
Self-control



“HEART” =
sinful, calculating,
selfish, greedy,
depraved,
self-love!

GOD SEES

Jesus:

- Provides atonement
- Identifies idols (wants, desires, cravings)
- Calls you to repentance
- Transforms heart / mind

“HEART” =
Loves God first, at peace,
guilt free, secure,
loves others
before self

Responding with Purpose

Glorify God – give other people of right opinion of Him while you suffer

- a. Imitate God, suffer like Christ 1 Pet. 2:18-25
- b. Fear God, Love God, Obey God, thank God, praise God

Please God

- a. Jn. 8:28-50
- b. 2 Cor. 5:9
- c. Rom. 15:20
- d. Carry their burdens
- e. Restore their usefulness to God

Responding with Purpose

Grow to be more like Christ

- a. Ja. 1:2-4
- b. Rom. 8:28-29

Love and serve others

- a. Rom. 12:10 Love and honor
- b. Gal. 6:1-2 Carry their burdens
- c. Gal. 6:1-2 Restore their usefulness to God
- d. Jn. 15:13-17 lay down your life

Learning about Your Own Heart



1. What are my goals, expectations, or intentions?
2. What do I become anxious over or fearful over?
3. What makes me happy?
4. What motivates me?
5. What would I like, possibly more than anything?
6. In what situation do I respond in anger?
7. What perceived right(s) has been denied?
8. What biblical standard or principle permits that thought, word, or action?

1. **Memorize Ps. 119:67-75**
2. ***Romans, Philippians, 1 Peter, & James***
3. ***God in the Psalms***, Bible study on finding God in the Book of Psalms (Word doc)
4. ***Praying According to Philippians 4***, Bible study on how to respond to trials and the promises of God (Word doc)
5. ***The Attributes of God***, A.W. Tozer
6. ***When Trouble Shows Up***, Robert Jones (booklet)
7. ***Where is God When Things Go Wrong***, John Blanchard (booklet or also available in pdf format)
8. ***Ultimate Questions***, John Blanchard, (booklet or also available in pdf format)
9. ***Knowing God***, J.I. Packer (booklet or book)

10. *Don't Waste your Cancer*, John Piper, (book)
11. *Getting Past Your Past*, Steve Viars, (book)
12. *Why Was this Man Born Blind?*, John Piper. Audio Message
<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/why-was-this-child-born-BLIND>
13. *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, John Piper - John Piper, (book or download)
<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/online-books/suffering-and-the-sovereignty-of-god>
14. Darlene Rose testimony, (Audio Message, YouTube)
http://jesusaogm.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=section&id=13&Itemid=41

15. *Trusting God, Even When Life Hurts*, Jerry Bridges
16. *You Can Trust God*, Jerry Bridges, (booklet)
17. *It's Not Fair*, Wayne Mack & Deborah Howard
18. *Christ & Your Problems*, Jay Adams
19. *The Power of Suffering*, John MacArthur
20. *The Cup and the Glory: Lessons on Suffering and the Glory of God*, Greg Harris
21. *How to Handle Trouble*, Jay Adams
22. *Overcoming Evil*, by Jay Adams
23. *Damsels in Distress*, Martha Peace

LOOKING AHEAD:

- **Physical Illness and Biblical Counseling**
- Teacher:
- **HOMEWORK: Chapters 25-26**
- Listen to **BtBtL Track I.8 *Dealing with Disappointment and Loss***, Neil Gerber
- Listen to **BtBtL Track I. *What is My Purpose in Life?***

<http://www.bethanycommunitychurch.org/ministries/home.asp?id=513>

A Theology of Suffering

Understand the Story-line - from eternal death & torment, to temporary suffering, to eternal life

- Pursue an eternal perspective
- Embrace God's purposes
- Develop a learner's spirit
- Respond to worship [value], glorify [reflect] and please God.
- Know God, Grow to be more like His Son, Show others

Embrace the Key elements

1. Faith (saving & sanctifying faith)
2. Meekness (negative response to God in total surrender)
3. Worship (positive response to God in exaltation)
4. Prayer (knowing God intimately)