Trials & Suffering
Towards a Theology of Suffering

The Gospel Institute – Biblical Counseling & Discipleship
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
I. The Basics of Human Suffering

In the Beginning

| Purity – no sin, intimacy w/God |
| Peace-of heart/mind/soul, conscience |
| Pleasure–comfort-no pain/grief |
| Plans–always met-no disappointment |
| Personal relationships–no conflict |
| Provision–all needs met-no wants |
| Protection–perfect safety, justice |

Two Realms

| Physical | Spiritual |

Two Realms

| Vertical |
| Horizontal |
| Internal |
| External |

Horizontal

Physical

Spiritual
## Defining Suffering - Destruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purity – no sin, intimacy w/God</td>
<td>Guilt, shame, fear, condemnation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace-of heart/mind/soul, conscience</td>
<td>Fear, confusion, regret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasure-comfort-no pain/grief</td>
<td>Pain, suffering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plans-always met-no disappointment</td>
<td>Failure, disappointment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal relationships-no conflict</td>
<td>Isolation, rejection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision-all needs met-no wants</td>
<td>Loss, hardship, pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection-perfect safety, justice</td>
<td>Harm, injury, shame, vulnerable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Defining Suffering - Disruption

I. The Basics of Human Suffering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vertical</th>
<th><strong>Relationship with God is severed</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal</td>
<td><strong>Relationship with ourselves:</strong> Noetic effect, thoughts, temptations, new negative emotions, guilt, self-perceptions, beliefs, expectations, affections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal</td>
<td><strong>Relationships with other sinners</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family &amp; Friends</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Church-family</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Co-workers, Neighbors</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enemies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External</td>
<td><strong>Relationship –</strong> life in a broken universe; entropy, decay, pain, harm, injury, deterioration, death (Rom.8:22)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## I. The Basics of Human Suffering

### Defining Suffering – Disruption or Loss of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purity</th>
<th>Relationship with God &gt; shame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peace</td>
<td>Inner peace &gt; guilt, turmoil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasure</td>
<td>Pleasure &gt; pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plans</td>
<td>Of plans &gt; frustrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Of relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision</td>
<td>Provision &gt; lack, discontent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection</td>
<td>Protection &gt; vulnerability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Two Realms

- **Physical**
- ** Spiritual**
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)
I. The Basics of Human Suffering

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 5 he predestined us…(Eph.1:4-5 ESV)
Developing an Eternal Perspective

Suffering is God’s plan for our present path

18 Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. 19 For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 20 For 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. 21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 When 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

34 At 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; 35 all 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?”

37 Now 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

7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.
8 Indeed, 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—
10 that 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

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And 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)

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. (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, 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, 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

13 let us go to him [Christ] outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. 14 For 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

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. 5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And 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

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

SUFFERING = The Heat

Life-Domaining Sins
Depression
Bitterness
Anxiety
Insensitivity
Anger
Selfishness
Pride

MAN SEES

Joy,
Love,
Patience,
Kindness,
Peace,
Gentleness,
Self-control

GOD SEES

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

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

Jesus:
- Provides atonement
- Identifies idols (wants, desires, cravings)
- Calls you to repentance
- Transforms heart / mind
III. Responding to Our Suffering

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)
12. *Why Was this Man Born Blind?*, John Piper. Audio Message
   [http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/why-was-this-child-born-BLIND](http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/why-was-this-child-born-BLIND)
14. *Darlene Rose testimony*, (Audio Message, YouTube)
15. *Tusting 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
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)