

# Four Universal Goals in Developing a Theology of Suffering

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**BIBLICAL COUNSELING**  
**& DISCIPLESHIP**  
CONFERENCE

# Part 1. Setting the Stage: “Foundational Presuppositions”

- The centrality & sufficiency of Christ
- The superiority and power of God’s Word
- The sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit and prayer.
- The authority of the local church.

## **Overall Goal of the conference**

Embrace a biblical theology of suffering to enable you to speak the truth in love to others who suffer, for their good and God’s glory.

## I. Setting the Stage

# What We've Learned So Far

1. Plenary Sessions 1 & 2 - God rules over all suffering
2. Plenary Session 3 - God is good, merciful and gracious

## I. Setting the Stage

# The Big Idea

## **This Session**

- 1.Examine the Nature of Suffering.
- 2.Learn God's Four Goals for the Sufferer (the "P" Principles).
- 3.Apply these Principles by Examining Case Studies.
- 4.Q&A (answer *some* questions; raise *other* questions)
- 5.Homework Assignment

## I. Setting the Stage

**“Shall we accept good from God,  
and not trouble?” Job 2:10**

**Do You Believe This?**

**“But who do you say that I Am?” Matt. 16**

## I. Setting the Stage

**“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)**

## Part II. Suffering Defined

**Dictionary:** *“to undergo or feel pain or distress; to sustain injury or loss; to undergo or experience an unpleasant condition; to be the object of some unfavorable action.”*

### **Scripture (2 Cor. 4:7, 16-17):**

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves. Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison...”

## II. Suffering

# Suffering Valued: “Eternal Weight of Glory”



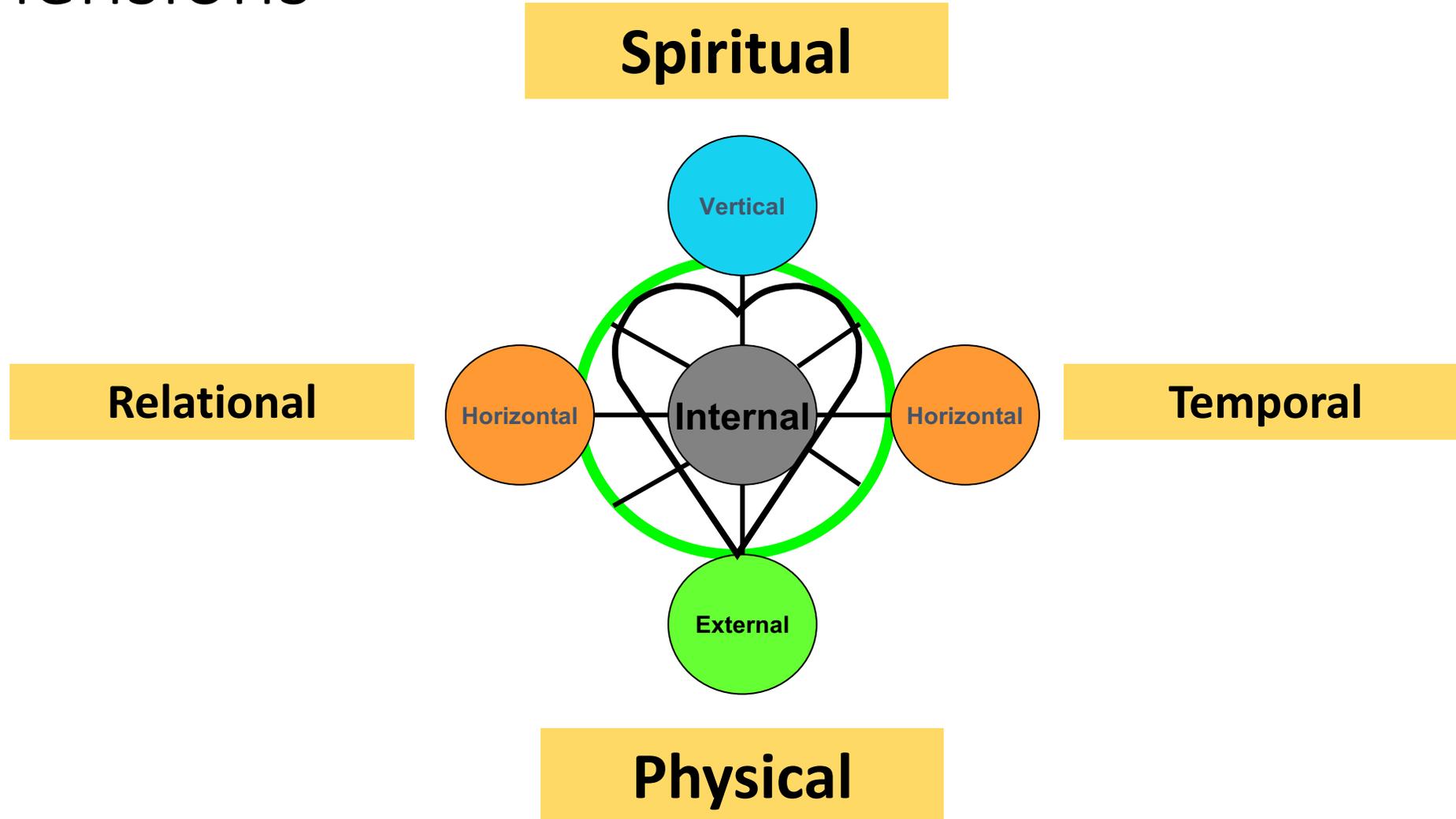
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## II. Suffering

# Suffering Visualized: “Realms and Dimensions”



## II. Suffering

# Suffering Experienced: “Disruption and Loss”

Purity	Shame and guilt
Peace	Anxiety, distress, and paralysis
Pleasure	Pain
Plans	Frustration and disappointment
Relationships	Alienation and brokenness
Provision	Discontent and envy
Protection	Vulnerability and fear
<b>Suffering Designed: “What’s Gained”</b>	
Faith (in God)	To grow and be strengthened

## II. Suffering

# Suffering Interrupted: "The Human Condition"

- "A text without a context is a pretext for a proof text". (Dr. John Street, Master's University)
- Meaning is determined by context; context sets our interpretation.
- What is "theodicy"?
- Illustration of Interpretation of Suffering:

"But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand. When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they *began saying to one another*, "Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live." (Acts 28:3-4)

## II. Suffering

# Suffering Illustrated: What do you see? Sinner or sufferer?

“Simon,  
do you  
see this  
woman?”  
(Luke 7:44)

How do you  
see Christ in  
your  
trouble?



“We now  
recognize no  
one according  
to the flesh;  
even though  
we have known  
Christ  
according to  
the flesh, yet  
now we know  
*Him in this way*  
no longer.”  
(2 Cor. 5:16)

# Part III. Principles in Suffering

## (God's Four Goals for the Sufferer)

- **Perspective (worldview)** – learn to see suffering from an eternal view through God's eyes (Job 19:23-27; Ps. 73:13-17).
- **Purpose (meaning)** – learn to go to God for answers to the suffering questions (Job 28:28; Ps. 73:13-14, 21-24).
- **Person (identity)** – learn to trust God in suffering by knowing Him and knowing your identity and union in Christ (Job 23:8-17; Ps. 73:25-26).
- **Pupil (discipleship)** – learn to commit to a life of discipleship by responding to suffering in a God-honoring way (Job 40:1-5, 42:1-6; Ps. 73:28).

### III. Four Principles

## The Existential Questions of Life (Being) (that everyone asks in suffering)

- **Perspective** – Where did I come from? Where am I going? How do I know? Who says? The “here-fore” question of *authority* and *destiny* (worldview).
- **Purpose** – Why am I here? What for? The “wherefore” question.
- **Person** – Who is God? What is He like? Who am I? The “who-fore” (Identity) question.
- **Pupil** – How then am I to live? What am I to do? The “therefore” question.

# Perspective: the Biblical Narrative

- Eternity Past (God's plan and purposes in Christ)
- Creation (man in the image of God, very good)
- Fall (sin brings suffering and separation)
- Redemption (Christ and the cross)
- Consummation (the return and judgment)
- Recreation (glorification and unification)

### III. Four Principles

# Perspective: God's View is Eternal

- **Ecclesiastes 3:11–14.** “He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart...there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime...it is the gift of God. Everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him.”
- **Ecclesiastes 12:13–14.** “The conclusion, when all has been heard, *is*: fear God and keep His commandments, because this *applies to* every person. <sup>14</sup> For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.”
- **1 John 2:15–17.** “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him...the world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.”
- **Matthew 6:33.** “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

### III. Four Principles

# Purpose in Suffering

1. Suffering is part of God's eternal plan (1Pet. 1:19-20)
2. Suffering is redemptive (Dan. 4:34-37; 1Pet. 4:12-17)
3. Suffering is designed to conform us to Christ in holiness (Rom. 8:28-29; Phil. 1:29, 3:7-11; and Heb. 12:4-15)
4. Suffering is designed to increase our faith and trust in God (Deut. 8:2; James 1:2-4)
5. Suffering manifests the glory of God through us to others (2 Cor. 4:5-7)
6. Suffering enables us to comfort and encourage others (2 Cor. 1:3-11)

### III. Four Principles

# Person: Learning to Know God and Your Identity in Christ

- Suffering teaches us about ourselves (and others).
- Suffering exposes our 'functional gods' and motivates us to reject them (as worthless and useless) and recommit to finding our hope (trust) in God alone.
- Suffering calls us to true worship, to seek God and find our identity and joy in Christ as our ultimate purpose (treasure).
- Suffering calls us to see others as Christ sees them, and come along side them in ministry and love.

# Pupil: Choosing to Suffer Well *for Christ*

The following disciplines are vital to help you grow in living out a robust theology of Suffering.

- Prayer
- Faith
- Repentance
- Worship
- Meekness

(Sunday Morning's topic)

## IV. Homework

# Homework: Applying the Four Goals

**Genesis 17:1, 8** – “The LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless. I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants...for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you...”

**Jer. 31:33-34 (Heb. 8:10-11)** – “But this is the covenant which I will make with Israel...declares the LORD, I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD...”.

**John 14:6-7** - “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. Now you know Him and have seen Him.”

## Part IV. Case Studies in Suffering

### **God's Four Goals:**

- Let's examine how the people in these stories might have seen their situation in suffering through human eyes.
- Then let's examine how they could have seen their trouble through God's eyes (through using the four "P" principles).

### **Three Romans 8:28 Questions:**

- How do we define "good"?
- What things are "good"?
- "Good" for whom?

# Biblical illustration: The Rape of a Daughter”

Amnon took hold of her and said to her, “Come, lie with me, my sister.”<sup>12</sup> But she answered him, “No, my brother, do not violate me, for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do this disgraceful thing! However, he would not listen to her; since he was stronger than she, he violated her and lay with her.<sup>15</sup> Then Amnon hated her with a very great hatred... And Amnon said to her, “Get up, go away!” 2 Samuel 13:11-15.

## V. Case Studies

### Case Study: “The Dying Mom”

Mom had experienced a difficult marriage and was divorced from Dad years ago. She was left without financial resources, she worked hard her whole life, and she lived mostly in poverty. Now she lies in a hospital dying from cancer.

Her daughter sits beside her bed. Mom turns to her daughter, and gives her daughter her “inheritance”. It consist of a folded piece of paper, with words written on both sides. It was a “record of wrongs” (1Cor. 13:5). Mom explains that she has not, cannot, and will not ever forgive Dad. She has lived with bitterness and pain this whole time.

## V. Case Studies

### Case Study: "The Disabled Child"



## V. Case Studies

### Case Study: “The Bullied Teenager”

The teenager was different from his high school peers. At school, the other boys picked on him and made fun of him. The teachers were either unaware or did nothing. The parents were mostly unaware also.

He grew more sullen and withdrawn as time passed. He became anorexic (self-starvation and weight loss). He also became obsessed with his after school part-time work.

What was going on? What did we do wrong (as parents)?