

REJOICING IN OUR SUFFERING

CLASS 1: INTRO / A BIBLICAL VIEW OF SUFFERING

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- Suffering is a very normal part of the Christian life.
- It can be hard to comprehend how there is suffering when God, who is good, is sovereign over everything in the world.
- In other words, *how can a good God allow such atrocities to take place right before His face?*
- It has caused many to wonder where or if God is present in the midst of their hardships.
- Combined with a lack of biblical understanding and the church's failure to teach the whole counsel of God's Word, many Christians are left trying to piece together what is going on their life.
- When we are left to our own emotions and experiences to lead, believers often times find themselves staying in the pit of despair or even worse, turning away from the God who loves them.
- Our goal in this class is to develop a proper biblical view of suffering.
- While we will most likely never know why *all* of our suffering is taking place, we can know who God is and what He desires to accomplish through our hardships.
- When we have a biblical understanding of who God is and how He works in His creation, we are then better equipped to not only direct our own hearts but the hearts of those who are suffering around us.
- The Christian should be the most joyous in the world, a beacon of hope to those who are searching and to those who are walking down the same path with them.
- **Here is the schedule for the upcoming lessons:**
 - **April 27th: Introduction/A Biblical View of Suffering**
 - May 4th: Suffering and the Sovereignty of God
 - May 11th: The Purposes for Suffering
 - May 18th: Knowing That God is With Us in Our Suffering
 - May 25th: No Class - Memorial Day Weekend
 - June 1st: Rejoicing in the Midst of Our Suffering
 - June 8th: Growing in the Midst of Our Suffering
 - June 15th: When Believers Face Tragedy
 - June 22nd: Walking With Others in Their Suffering

INTRODUCTION

- As stated above, suffering is a normal part of the Christian life.
 - It has been said that every person is either coming out of a trial, is in the midst of a trial, or is about to be in a trial
 - While that can seem discouraging, we can rejoice knowing that the Bible has much to say about suffering, and the fact that it does indeed have a purpose.
- However, we can be tempted to fall into the trap of thinking that, “Once I become a Christian, everything will become easier.” Or “If God was all-powerful and all-good, He wouldn’t allow believers to endure suffering.”
 - Then, once suffering comes upon us, we can be tempted towards doubt in the character of God (is He *actually* all-powerful and all-good) or discouragement and despair, wondering if we’re actually even saved or if we are under God’s wrath.
 - Trials and suffering, then, become a barometer of our assurance and faith, rather than, as we’ll see today, a normal part of the life of every Christian.
- With all of that said, it is imperative that believers develop a clear, biblical theology of suffering.

WRONG VIEWS OF SUFFERING

- Before laying out a biblical view on suffering in the Christian life, it may be helpful to identify some false views of suffering that are particularly prevalent in the church and world today, knowing that these are constant sources of confusion for believers in this area.

1. Suffering is not God’s will for me...

- One thought we can be tempted to is saying, “I thought my suffering would end after I was saved.”
- This is one of the biggest teachings and tenants of the prosperity “gospel”: that it is not God’s will that believers should suffer, but rather, because of the victory we have in Jesus Christ, we have not only our eternity secured, but bountiful physical blessings and protections from suffering in this life.
 - “Years ago the devil started a rumor. He told a few Christians that as long as they lived in the world, they had to suffer as the world did. He told them they had to share the diseases and the defeat, the poverty and the failure of those around them.

It was a crafty lie—and it worked. Believers accepted it and began to spread it among themselves. You may have even heard it yourself. If so, I want to help you put that rumor to rest today. I want to help you get the facts straight once and for all.

You see, despite what you may have heard, health, prosperity and victorious living aren't concepts some comfort-hungry believer selfishly dreamed up. They are God's ideas."¹

- According to Copeland, suffering for the believer is a lie propagated by Satan, not a reality upheld in Scripture.
 - In that same article, there is a reference to John 16:33 as a defense for this view:
 - "You may say, "That sounds good, Gloria, but we've got to be realistic. We live in a world that's full of problems. And as long as we live in this world, it seems to me we're going to have our share."
- Yes, that's true. Even Jesus said, "In the world you have tribulation and trials and distress and frustration." But notice, He didn't stop there! He went on to say, "But be of good cheer [take courage; be confident, certain, undaunted]! For I have overcome the world. [I have deprived it of power to harm you and have conquered it for you]" (John 16:33, The Amplified Bible)."²
- The "overcoming" of Christ would, then, guarantee believers' freedom from the harm and suffering that exists in the world.
 - While this is an attractive message, it is inconsistent with the message of Scripture and is a mishandling of the text. (2 Tim 4:3-4)

2. If I experience trials/hardship/suffering, it is because of a lack of faith...

- In a similar vein to the health/wealth/prosperity "gospel", the Word of Faith movement is a branch of charismatic theology which holds to the power of faith and the declaration of blessings for your life (name it and claim it) through faith.
 - "Did you know that what you say about yourself has greater impact on you than anything anybody else says about you? Many people are overly critical of themselves, saying, "I'm so clumsy. I can't do anything right." "I'm so overweight. I'll never get back into shape." "I never get any good breaks." They may not realize it, but they are cursing their future. When discouragement comes, instead of sitting back and accepting it, say, "No, I'm a victor and not a victim. I may have been defeated before, but the past is the past. This is a new day." It's not enough just to think it; you need to hear it, because what we constantly hear ourselves saying we will eventually believe..."

¹ https://www.kcm.org/read/faith-to-faith?langcode=en-US&field_reading_date_value=2025-08-27

² Ibid.

- “Oh, Joel, I can’t say that,” you may be thinking. “None of that is true in my life.”
Yes, it is true! ***That is what faith is all about. The world says you need to see it to believe it, but God says you must believe and then you’ll see it. You must speak it by faith.***³(emphasis added)
- So, then, suffering, hardship, and lack of prosperity is not God’s plan for you, but your lack of faith and not declaring victory over these things are what is causing it.
- You only need to speak it, by faith, and it will be granted to you.
 - This view is not only inconsistent with the word of God, but it points believers inward rather than upward.
 - Rather than seeking to grow and trust the Lord to **endure** and **grow** through trials and suffering, the objective in the Word of Faith Movement is to increase your faith so that you can **escape** it and, instead, prosper.

3. Suffering and trials are always a result of sin in my life...

- Somewhat in the vein of religious moralism and legalism (holding to the moral standards of the Bible as a means of pleasing God), some believers would hold that they can avoid suffering if they live righteous lives.
- Conversely, then, if someone does undergo suffering or affliction, it is always a result of some sin committed.
 - This is closely tied to Jewish tradition in the New Testament.
 - One example would be the comments made by the disciples regarding the man in John 9 who was born blind:
 - **John 9:2** - *And His disciples asked Him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?”*
- While it can be said that all suffering is a result of sin, and there will be times that the Lord uses trials and suffering as a means of discipline for believers, there is not always a direct cause/effect relationship when a believer suffers.
 - **1 Peter 2:21-22** - *For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously...*

³ <https://www.joelosteen.com/inspiration/articles/14745>

A BIBLICAL VIEW OF SUFFERING

- Turning, now, to God's word, we need to ask and answer the question, "What does the Bible say about suffering?"
 - This is crucial because, as we observe these false view on suffering, the common thread amongst them is a mishandling (or perhaps complete disregard) of God's word.
 - "Sadly such teaching seems far removed from the outlook that prevails in large parts of the church today. The impression is given that the purpose of the Christian life is enjoyment. Everything that stands in the way of that is to be eliminated. People are looking for a problem-free Christianity. The health, wealth, and success gospel is having a field day. Purveyors of such a gospel look the part. Unfortunately, the hollowness of such views becomes apparent when suffering, sorrow or disappointment comes. Then it becomes clear that we need a faith that is grounded in God's Word."⁴
 - However, 2 Peter 1:3 says God's word gives the believer all they need "*for life and godliness*"
- Holding to that conviction, we will spend the rest of our time surveying passages that will help to build a framework for a theology of suffering.

1. Suffering is inevitable

- **1 Peter 4:12** - *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;*
 - As stated previously, suffering is a normal part of life, one that is not removed once you become a believer.
 - In fact, suffering is likely to **increase** for believers.
- **John 15:20** - *Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also"*
 - As a believer is transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Col 1:13), their relationship with the world completely changes.
 - We go from being one with the world to being set apart from the world.
 - Our union with Christ will include persecution from the world. (John 15:18; 2 Tim 3:12)
- **1 Peter 2:21** - *For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.*

⁴ John Murray, *Behind a Frowning Providence*, p. 11.

- Why is this an inevitable reality for believer? It is because we have been called for this purpose!
 - **Philippians 1:29** - *For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.*
- Believers, in this way, actually share in the sufferings of Christ. Again, this is part of our union with Christ.
 - **Colossians 1:24** - *Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.*
 - **1 Peter 4:13** - *but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.*
- Aside from all of this, we know that suffering is inevitable because we live in a world cursed by sin, with suffering/trials/affliction being a direct implication of that.

2. Suffering is subject to the sovereignty of God

- While this will be covered next week, it's important to note on the outset of this class that we cannot separate anything that takes place in this world from the sovereignty of God, including suffering.
- Men such as Joseph, Job, David, Elijah, even Jesus Himself, all experienced suffering and hardship.
 - However, it is clear throughout Scripture that God was sovereign over it all.
 - **Joseph:** *Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.* (Gen 45:5)
 - **Job:** *He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD."* (Job 1:21)
 - **Jesus:** *Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.* (Acts 2:22-23)
- The greatest cause we can have to rejoice in the midst of trials and suffering is knowing that God is in control of it all!
- "The sovereignty of God is the pillow upon which the child of God rests his head at night, giving perfect peace." (Charles Spurgeon)

3. Suffering always has a purpose

- Again, this will be covered in the following weeks, but it must be understood that BECAUSE God is sovereign over all and BECAUSE there is nothing that can separate believers from the love of God in Christ, we can **know** that sufferings in the life of a believer are not chaotic, random, or senseless, but that they serve, ultimately, for God's good purposes.
- **Romans 8:28** - *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*
 - **All things:** nothing (not even sufferings and affliction) are exempt
 - **Good:** According to God's will and plan, not ours
 - **His purpose:** Found in the next verse (v. 29) – to conform us to Christ!
- Paired with this is remembering how Romans 8 begins: *Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*
 - This means that we cannot say, “God, why are you punishing me?”, but rather, “God, how are you using this to make me like Christ?”

HOW DO WE PREPARE FOR SUFFERING?

- With all of this in view, it may be helpful to consider how believers can prepare to “suffer well”. What is it that we can be doing **now** to prepare for these times of suffering?

1. Know God

- When we consider the idea of rejoicing in suffering, this cannot be done without a robust understanding of the character of God.
 - **Jeremiah 9:23-24** - *Thus says the Lord, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things...*

2. Trust God

- As you learn more of the character and goodness of God, we must trust that He is who His word says He is, allowing that trust in God to fortify our hearts.
 - **Psalms 40:11** - *You, O Lord, will not withhold Your compassion from me; Your lovingkindness and Your truth will continually preserve me.*

- **1 Corinthians 10:13** - *No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.*

3. Renew Your Mind

- None of this can be accomplished if we aren't in the word. If we're not filling our minds with truth, likely we will allow our own thoughts to run wild OR allow the world to shape our thinking.
 - **Psalms 119:25** - *My soul cleaves to the dust; Revive me according to Your word.*
 - **Romans 12:2** - *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*

4. Run to God in Prayer

- Pray that the Lord would guard your hearts and minds from doubt or discouragement as trials and suffering come upon you. This, again, builds up those fortifications to guard us amid suffering.
 - **Philippians 4:6-7** - *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

CONCLUSION

- As we continue through this class, the hope is to get very practical and answer the questions that we all, likely, wrestle with in the midst of suffering.
- The greatest comforts are knowing that God is not distant or indifferent to our suffering, but, as we'll see in later weeks, He is with us and is using these trials for a purpose, ultimately for our good and His glory.
- Additionally, the hope is that, through our time in God's word surveying this topic, we will not only be able to endure suffering, but we can truly rejoice and thrive in the midst of it.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- *Behind a Frowning Providence* by John Murray
- *God's Grace in Your Suffering* by David Powlison
- *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering* by Timothy Keller
- *The Power of Suffering* by John MacArthur