

REJOICING IN OUR SUFFERING

CLASS 3: THE PURPOSES FOR OUR 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

- What is the importance of purpose in this life?
- Purpose gives us the *why*...in other words, why would we want to do something or go through something.
- We desire to go through something *for the purpose* of what is at the end or what is gained.
- “I trained 4 years to run 9 seconds.” Usain Bolt
 - He wanted to set a world record for 100 meters and achieved it in 2009.
 - Why (or for what purpose) did he live, think about, and train for only a 9 second run? Because he wanted to have a world record.
 - In other words, the purpose of putting his whole life in one direction for 4 years was a world record.
- The world is replete with purposes, some good and some bad.
- We drive the speed limit *for the purpose of not getting a ticket, not killing someone, etc.*
- We eat food *for the purpose of nutrition and growth.*
- We don’t jump from a high building *for the purpose of wanting to stay alive.*
- The list goes on and on...our lives, our days, are full of purpose...whether we recognize it or not.
- This is built into mankind. We want to know *why...how come...*
- Children go through a natural phase of development by asking the *why* question.
- These times in parenting may not be the most joyful, but they are the most beneficial for the children.
- Why do we go brush our teeth before bed? Why do we go to bed at 9pm? By answering these questions for your children, you are building in them purpose. Do they want to have rotten teeth or no teeth at all? Then they should brush them before bed. Do they want to feel sluggish all day? Then you get good sleep.

A BRIEF EXCURSES ON PURPOSE IN THE BIBLE

An example in the life of Paul:

- **2 Timothy 4:17** “But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, **so that** through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion’s mouth.”
- The words *so that* are a conjunction in the Greek New Testament (GNT) is **ἵνα** and is a **marker to denote purpose, aim, or goal, in order that, that**, final sense¹
- While there are other phrases in the NT which can denote purpose (in order that, that, etc.), so that is the most popular or common.

¹ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 475.

- Why should we pay attention to the purpose statements in the Bible?
- The words before the *so that* conjunction in the Bible is *what* part of the sentence. In above verse, what was the Lord doing to Paul? He was standing with him and strengthening him. Why did the Lord do that? For the purposes that Paul laid out following the *so that*.
- The Lord wanted Paul to do something, so He gave him the strength to do it. Paul was not strengthened by the Lord just because the Lord loved him. It was for a purpose that the Lord expected Paul to do.

Another example in the Christian life:

- **Titus 2:3-5** “Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, **so that** they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, **so that** the word of God will not be dishonored.”
- We have two purpose statements as Paul instructs Titus on how to instruct the women in the church.
- What are older women to do? All that Paul lists off. Why are they doing it? It is for everything that comes after the *so that*, in each instance.
- If we think backwards...do you ladies what the Word of God to be dishonored? No, of course you don't. Then your life should match what Paul says before the *so that* in the verse.
- Pay very close attention to the *so that* conjunctions. This will not just tell you the *what* but also the *why*.
- It is very important that we don't get caught up in performance, just doing things because we think they should be done. What we are told to do from God has power behind it and purpose in it.

BIBLICAL PURPOSES FOR OUR SUFFERING

- “...the theology of suffering emphasizes **participation in Christ's sufferings as a means of spiritual growth** and the blessedness of enduring persecution for righteousness. It underscores the redemptive and transformative value of suffering in our life, framing it not as a random misfortune but as an integral part of the Christian journey, deeply rooted in the pursuit of Christlikeness and the proclamation of the gospel.”²
- We as God's children are not the victims of random events which just happen to fall upon us and then God somehow springs into action to use these random events in our lives.
- The Bible is **overflowing** with purposes for our suffering that we need to not just know but commit to our memory in our heads *and* our hearts.

² <https://thebcd.org/resources/the-purpose-and-role-of-suffering-in-christian-life#:~:text=From%20a%20biblical%20counseling%20viewpoint,of%20enduring%20persecution%20for%20righteousness.>

- “...after conversion we need bruising so that reeds may know themselves to be reeds, and not oaks. Even reeds need bruising, by reason of the remainder of pride in our nature, and to let us see that we live by mercy.”³
- “Let every trial have its sanctifying effect of killing sin, and furthering faith, patience, and love.”⁴
- We cannot allow the enemy or the world to tell us that our suffering is not valid or that it has no place in the life of the Christian. We must “reclaim the mercies and blessings that God often brings through suffering.”⁵

For Our Spiritual Growth⁶

- Suffering is used to refine, perfect, strengthen, and keep us from falling.
 - **Psalm 66:8-10** “Bless our God, O peoples, and sound His praise abroad, Who keeps us in life and does not allow our feet to slip. For You have tried us, O God; You have refined us as silver is refined.”
 - **1 Corinthians 11:31-32** “But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.”
- Suffering allows the life of Christ to be manifested in our mortal flesh.
 - **2 Corinthians 4:7-11** “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.”
- Suffering bankrupts us, making us dependent upon God.
 - **2 Corinthians 12:9** “And He [Jesus] has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.”
 - **2 Corinthians 1:9** “...indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead...”

³ Richard Sibbe, *The Bruised Reed*, 5.

⁴ <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/is-my-suffering-a-correction-for-sin>

⁵ https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/articles/suffering-for-his-sake/?srsltid=AfmBOopyJDF_aOleZh6wDXv5WqQYA3vDj1Sff8zzcuY99jZYJmZy8goy

⁶ This list was taken from <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2012/05/04/36-purposes-of-god-in-our-suffering/> and then modified to fit the current teaching. Only the purpose and verse(s) were listed at the above reference.

- Suffering teaches us humility.
 - **2 Corinthians 12:7** “Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me--to keep me from exalting myself!”
- Suffering stretches our hope in the next life.
 - **2 Corinthians 5:2-4** “For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life.”
- Suffering causes us to know and proves our faith.
 - **1 Peter 1:6-7** “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ...”
 - “It is not a random sequence of unfortunate events but a God-orchestrated testing designed to purify and strengthen our faith.”⁷
- Suffering causes us to know the surpassing value of knowing Christ.
 - **Philippians 3:8** “More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ...”

For Building Our character

- Suffering teaches us that God is more concerned about character than comfort.
 - **1 Peter 1:6-7** “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ...”
 - **Hebrews 12:10** “For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.”

⁷ <https://thebcd.org/resources/the-purpose-and-role-of-suffering-in-christian-life#:~:text=From%20a%20biblical%20counseling%20viewpoint,of%20enduring%20persecution%20for%20righteousness.>

- Suffering teaches us that the greatest good of the Christian life is not absence of pain, but Christlikeness.
 - **Romans 8:28-29** “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. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren...”
- Suffering can be a chastisement from God for sin and rebellion.
 - **Psalms 107:17** “Fools, because of their rebellious way, and because of their iniquities, were afflicted.”
- Suffering teaches us obedience and self-control.
 - **Hebrews 5:8** “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.”
 - **Psalms 119:67** “Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I keep Your word.”
- Suffering voluntarily is one way to demonstrate the love of God.
 - **2 Corinthians 8:9** “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.”
 - **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.”
- Suffering is part of the struggle against evil men.
 - **Psalms 82:2** “How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Selah.”
- Suffering is part of the struggle for the kingdom of God.
 - **2 Thessalonians 1:5** “This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering.
- Suffering is part of the struggle for the gospel.
 - **2 Timothy 2:8-9** “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned.”
- Suffering is part of the struggle against injustice.
 - **1 Peter 2:19-20** “For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.”

- Suffering develops endurance.
 - **James 1:2-4** “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”
- Suffering is part of the struggle for the name of Christ.
 - **1 Peter 4:14** “If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”
 - **Acts 5:41** “So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.”
- Suffering indicates how the righteous become sharers in Christ’s suffering.
 - **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,
- Endurance in suffering is given as a cause for reward.
 - **2 Corinthians 4:17-18** “For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

For Our Attitudes Towards Others and God

- Suffering strengthens and allows us to comfort others who are weak.
 - **2 Corinthians 1:3-4** “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.
- Suffering teaches us to give thanks in times of sorrow.
 - **2 Corinthians 1:11** “...you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many.”
- Suffering allows God to manifest His care.
 - **Psalms 56:8** “You have taken account of my wanderings; Put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?”
 - “Christ’s sheep are weak sheep, and lacking in something or other; he therefore applies himself to the necessities of every sheep...His tenderest care is over the weakest...How gently did he endure the unbelief of Thomas and stooped so far unto his weakness, as to suffer him to thrust his hand into his side.”⁸

⁸ Sibbes, 15

- Suffering can be used by God to display His works.
 - **John 9:3** “Jesus answered, ‘It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.’”
 - Sometimes our suffering is not about us, as much as we want it to be. We may simply be a tool or a conduit that Jesus wants to use in order that He is glorified.

For Our Reliance and Awareness of God to be Strengthened

- Suffering is used to increase our awareness of the sustaining power of God to whom we owe our sustenance.
 - **Psalms 6:1-4** “...do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chasten me in Your wrath. Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am pining away; Heal me, O LORD, for my bones are dismayed. And my soul is greatly dismayed; But You, O LORD--how long? Return, O LORD, rescue my soul; Save me because of Your lovingkindness.”
 - **Isaiah 26:16** “O LORD, they sought You in distress; they could only whisper a prayer, Your chastening was upon them.”
- Suffering is always coupled with a greater source of grace.
 - **2 Timothy 4:16-17** “At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear...”
- Suffering produces discernment, knowledge, and teaches us God’s statutes.
 - **Psalms 119:71** “It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes.”

WHERE CAN YOU GO IN TIMES OF SUFFERING?

- Psalms of lament are a great place to go when our souls are in the dark night. (Around 65 in the Bible)
- Lament is a form of praise and prayer with the intent of drawing close to God in times of great suffering and pain. It ultimately is a wonderful gift to the children of God, because it presupposes a relationship with God and depends on it...lament is pleading with God to act in accordance with His character and promises to us. The mere fact we are able to approach God in lament is a sign of intimacy and hope!⁹
- **Psalm 42** describes a soul’s intense longing for God amid overwhelming tears and trials. It metaphorically portrays the soul as parched, desperately thirsting for the living God, like a deer panting for streams of water. This psalm beautifully illustrates that in times of sorrow, our souls can find true rest and rejuvenation in the Lord.¹⁰

⁹ <https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-art-of-lament/>

¹⁰ <https://thecbcd.org/resources/understanding-suffering-from-a-biblical-lens>