

# REJOICING IN OUR SUFFERING

## CLASS 5: REJOICING IN THE MIDST OF OUR SUFFERING

### INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

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- 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

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- In these next two classes there is going to be some overlap as we discuss rejoicing and growing in the midst of our suffering.
- Part of our suffering is that we rejoice and by rejoicing we are growing.
- When we grow, there are going to be changes which we will be able to know and see that would never have happened to us had we not gone through the trial the Lord placed us in.
- This means that we rejoice, knowing that there is purpose for and in our suffering.
- But, before we get to the purpose, we have to understand that we *must* rejoice when “bad” and “hard” things come upon us.
- **If we are not able to rejoice, then we will not be able to grow.**
- If we are not able to grow, then we will become stagnant in our Christian walk; never learning what the Lord desires us to.
- **Proverbs 4:23-27** “Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life. Put away from you a deceitful mouth and put devious speech far from you. Let your eyes look directly ahead and let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you. Watch the path of your feet and all your ways will be established. Do not turn to the right nor to the left; turn your foot from evil.”
- Notice in this Proverb that our paths that we walk are governed by our hearts. This means that we must be careful as to what we allow to come in *and* out of our hearts.
- The springs of life, or in other words the *source* of your life is coming from your heart.
  - That means that all you think, say, and do has a source...it is not random nor is it someone else's fault. We are responsible for all of our actions.
- Before our actions though, comes the desires and inputs into our hearts.
- This is why Solomon says *watch over your heart*.
  - It means to keep or guard or watch out for dangers that may come upon you.
  - This includes our thoughts as well as what we are doing. By the time we get to our actions, our heart has already made the choice, and we are merely carrying out what has been decided.
- When we talk about having joy, if you are given over to complaining or murmuring as a normal process of life, you are going to struggle when real trials come upon you.
- If you make it your goal to watch over your heart and your thoughts and take control of your inner self, when trials come, joy may still need to be sought after but it won't be such a long struggle.

## ALL CHRISTIANS SHOULD BE JOYOUS

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- When you think about the *normal Christian life*, does joy come to mind?
- When speaking of joy, the Bible is not talking about what we would consider happiness.
- Without specifically talking about suffering, the Bible is replete with exhortations and commands for the Christian to be joyous.
- “Joy is essential to the Christian life. The Scriptures are clear: God’s people are both commanded to rejoice and characterized by rejoicing. Our heavenly Father is not indifferent to our happiness. Joy is not a garnish on the dutiful entrée of the Christian life. Joy is not the icing on our cake, but an essential ingredient in a complex batter.”<sup>1</sup>
- **John 15:11** “These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.”
  - Jesus is telling us the key to living a life that is full of His joy...it is following His commands just as He followed His Father’s commands.
  - When we follow Christ’s commands we are living for Him and for what He desires. That is where we find our fullness of joy regardless of what is happening in our lives.
- **Philippians 4:4** “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!”
  - Paul says *rejoice* twice and both are in the imperative.
  - This means that it is a command from him to the church.
  - This is not specific to suffering, but how the *normal Christian* is to be in their life.
- Jesus has given us our pathway to joy, and we know that it is commanded to the church in general to be joyful.

### Different kinds of joy<sup>2</sup>

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- David Murray sets forth six different kinds of joy that are available to everyone, regardless of if they are saved or not.
- Nature happiness
  - This is when you see nature all around you; the natural created world brings happiness.
- Social happiness
  - Relationships with our family and friends bring a certain kind of happiness to all people.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/joy-is-not-optional#:~:text=God%20of%20Holy%20Laughter,-David%20Mathis%20Apr&text=Joy%20is%20essential%20to%20the,entr%C3%A9e%20of%20the%20Christian%20life.>

<sup>2</sup> <https://headhearthand.org/blog/2014/09/17/7-types-of-happiness/> used David Murray’s list and modified it for this study.

- Vocational happiness
  - Our jobs can bring a sense of happiness and fulfillment to us.
- Physical happiness
  - When we are fit, strong, and healthy. Especially when we recover from surgery well.
- Intellectual happiness
  - When we understand something or when things that are complicated make sense to us.
- Humor happiness
  - When we laugh and are able to use our sense of humor.
- These six fall under common grace, what God has given to all of mankind simply because of His kindness and all mankind being created in His image.
- He has one more kind of joy that is only for the Christian, spiritual happiness.
  - **Psalm 32:1** “How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered!”
  - The Hebrew word for blessed can also be translated happy or joyful.
  - The CSB says “How joyful is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.”
  - This is the special joy that only Christians can experience. The joy of knowing that we have been forgiven of our sins and that we are in right standing before God.

## HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON SUFFERING

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- It is good to look back on history and learn from those who have gone through suffering.
- Some of these men and women faced trials that we will never know or even comprehend.
- Our faith is not in a vacuum but built on faithful men and women who have paved the way for us to walk.
- Dr. Paul Brand (1914-2003), medical missionary to India (orthopedic surgeon) said “I have come to see that pain and pleasure come to us not as opposites but as Siamese twins, strangely joined and intertwined. Nearly all my memories of acute happiness, in fact, involve some element of pain or struggle.”<sup>3</sup>
- Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) said, “They who dive in the sea of affliction bring up rare pearls.”<sup>4</sup>
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) said, “Suffering, then, is the badge of true discipleship. The disciple is not above his master. Following Christ means *passio passiva*, suffering because we have to suffer. That is why Luther reckoned suffering among the marks of the true Church.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/why-we-can-rejoice-in-suffering>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-golden-key-of-prayer/#flipbook/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://billmuehlenberg.com/2023/03/03/40-key-quotes-on-the-problem-of-suffering/>

- Thomas Brooks (1608-1680) said, “As our greatest good comes through the sufferings of Christ, so God’s greatest glory that he hath from his saints comes through their sufferings.”<sup>6</sup>
- Oswald Chambers (1874-1917) said, “To choose to suffer means that there is something wrong; to choose God’s will even if it means suffering is a very different thing. No healthy saint ever chooses suffering; he chooses God’s will, as Jesus did, whether it means suffering or not.”<sup>7</sup>
- Stephen Charnock (1628-1680) on suffering, “We often learn more of God under the rod that strikes us, than under the staff that comforts us.”<sup>8</sup>
- Corrie ten Boom (1892-1983) said, “You may never know that JESUS is all you need, until JESUS is all you have.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Following Quotes Taken from *A Book of Comfort for Those in Sickness*<sup>10</sup>**

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- “God will not send trial without the intention of blessing; therefore, where the trial is great, we may be sure that the blessing intended is great also.”
- “Very often, we have to hunt for our blessings to find them. They are none the worse for that; unless the violet be the worse for having to be looked for amid the leaves. In sickness, little mercies are as sweet and as really great to you, as very great things are to other people in health.”
- “The waters of comfort cannot run up the hills of pride; they fall down into the valleys of humility.”

### **BIBLE VERSES ABOUT REJOICING IN SUFFERING**

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- Nearly every Christian has at one time or another, told or been told that we should “count it all joy” when we are going through our trials.
- While that is true, without any context or being seasoned with love, it can seem undesirable at best and nearly impossible at worst.
- In other words, when we face trials and hardships and someone says *rejoice! or count it all joy!* we either simply don’t want to (or understand why we should) or we think that our situation is so bad that it would be impossible for anyone to rejoice in the midst of it.
- Instead of looking to ourselves, at our suffering, or going to someone else, we should go to the Bible and find out what the Lord has for us.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/374714-you-may-never-know-that-jesus-is-all-you-need>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.challies.com/articles/comforting-quotes-for-those-who-are-suffering/>

- We lack joy because we lack a complete understanding of the providence, sovereignty, and goodness of God. When we rest knowing that God is good and in control, we can have true joy in Him.

## **A General Knowledge of Afflictions**

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- It is helpful to know that *all* Christians (or righteous people by God's standards) are going to go through hard times and times of great affliction.
- We can rejoice knowing that to be included in the family of God means that we must encounter hard times.
- There is no Christian walk that does not include times of great sorrow.
- The degree of sorrow is not up to us, that is in God's good and sovereign hands, but the fact that we face such sorrow should be a source of great joy.
- Without our trials and times of great testing, we may be left to wonder if we truly are living for Christ and in the family of God.
- **Acts 14:21-22** "After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.'"
  - Part of strengthening the church was to encourage them that they were going to face tribulations. In fact, if you want to enter the kingdom of God, the only road that goes there has tribulations.
- **Psalms 34:19** "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all."
  - As air is to the life of a person, so afflictions are to those who are righteous. Our goal should not be to have a life free from affliction but to know that we are going the right way in them.
- **John 16:33** "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."
  - Jesus did not say *you might have*, but that we have tribulation in the world. He did not leave us though, while the world may come at you, you can go to Jesus who has already overcome the world.
- **2 Timothy 3:12** "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."
  - Simply put, in a world that hates Jesus, to desire to live like Him will bring persecution.
- **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..."
  - Interestingly, from Peter we should not be surprised when *fiery ordeals* come upon us...we should not think it *some strange thing*.
  - The *fiery ordeals* that Peter is talking about are "calamities or trials that test the character." It is a word used for "the burning by which metals are roasted and reduced."
  - Since God wants our character to be like Jesus', He is going to use this for our good.

- It is also interesting that he says *strange*, we should not think of these fiery ordeals as strange but part of the normal Christian life.
- **Job 2:10** “But he said to her, ‘You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?’ In all this Job did not sin with his lips.”
  - We love to accept good from God. To Job’s point, why not also have the same joy and acceptance when adversity comes to us?

### **Looking to joy in the midst of our trials.**

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- **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.”
  - The word that James uses for *consider* is an imperative, or command to the believer.
  - Interestingly, it can also be translated *lead, rule, have authority over*. In other words, this really means “to lead before the mind.”
  - This is strengthening your conviction about something, in this case it is joy. You are leading yourself by your convictions about joy when various trials come upon you.
- **Romans 5:3-5** “And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”
  - Paul says to *exult in our tribulations*, this means “to glory on account of a thing.” It can also be translated to boast or take pride in something.
  - While this will be taught on next week, we can glory in our tribulations because we know that they are upon us for a reason from God Himself.
- **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.”
  - Another imperative (command) for us to rejoice. This is not just a once off but a lifestyle in which *we keep on rejoicing*.
- **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.”
  - He is rejoicing in his suffering for two reasons:
    - For the sake of the church at Colosse.
    - For the identification that he has with Christ’s afflictions.

- **2 Corinthians 6:10a** “...as sorrowful yet always rejoicing...”
  - “Not that we’re dull to the multifaceted pains of life in this age, but in Christ we have access to subterranean joy that is simultaneous with, and deeper than, the greatest of our sorrows — we are ‘sorrowful, yet always rejoicing’”<sup>11</sup>

## WHEN WE ARE NOT JOYFUL

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- If we are honest, we all go through seasons of life where joy seems as impossible to grasp as the wind that blows by us.
- Our hearts desire it and we know that we need to rejoice, but nothing comes out. The best we can come up with is being more condemned by our lack of joy, knowing that we need to be joyous.
- This was also common the Bible, as it is common to all men.
- While the command to be joyful may seem unreachable or even condemning, God desires us to walk in the fullness of His joy regardless of what we are facing.
- Our prayers for joy, though seemingly unanswered, must not stop invading the throne room of God.
- **Psalm 119:25** “My soul cleaves to the dust, revive me according to Your word.”
- **Psalm 51:12a** “Restore to me the joy of Your salvation.”
- Our thoughts, though not able to see past our current demise, must look to what we cannot see for hope the One who is eternal.
- **2 Corinthians 4:16-18** “Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. 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.”
- Joy is a key aspect of the Christian life. In fact, speaking of Jesus:
- **Hebrews 12:2** “...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”
- Sometime it’s a different perspective that we need so that we are able to not just endure what has come upon us, but joyfully respond to the sweetness of our trials from the hand of our loving Father.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/joy-is-not-optional#:~:text=God%20of%20Holy%20Laughter,-David%20Mathis%20Apr&text=Joy%20is%20essential%20to%20the,entr%C3%A9e%20of%20the%20Christian%20life.>