

REJOICING IN OUR SUFFERING

WEEK 8: WALKING WITH OTHERS IN THEIR 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 class we are completing today:**
 - Class 1: Introduction and A Biblical View of Suffering
 - Class 2: Suffering and the Sovereignty of God
 - Class 3: The Purposes for Our Suffering
 - Class 4: Knowing That God is With Us in Our Suffering
 - Class 5: Rejoicing in the Midst of Our Suffering
 - Class 6: Growing In the Midst of Our Suffering
 - Class 7: When Believers Face Tragedy
 - **Class 8: Walking With Others in Their Suffering**

INTRODUCTION

- “What we need, then is the cultivation of this personal knowledge of God, for it will sustain us when every other pillar crumbles.” (D.A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord?*, 113)
- **Romans 15:1-2** ~ Now we who are strong ought to **bear the weaknesses of those without strength** and not *just* please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification.
- **Colossians 3:12-13** ~ “So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, **put on a heart of compassion**, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”
- The past 7 classes have addressed the nature and remedies of living through suffering and tragedy. This class is for you to address the pain of others and to prepare you to walk alongside.
- What an essential task to be compassionate and kind toward one another, to humbly care for one another, to enter into the world of someone in pain and stay there with them.
- Helping those who are hurting is not an elective in the School of Christ, but rather a core of the curriculum God taught Israel, Jesus trained his disciples, and which the NT churches were instructed.

SYMPATHY, COMPASSION, EMPATHY, COMISSERATION, COMFORT

- **Sympathy** (which means “to feel with”) is only of temporary and insufficient help. And if extended wrongly, may only encourage sin.
- **Compassion** is the outpouring of one’s heart and concern for others in tangible ways—ought to characterize the Christian.¹ We must show God’s compassion toward His children in the way we extend ourselves to help them.
- **Empathy**² (“to enter into the suffering of another”) suggests a deeper involvement than sympathy. As believers, we must empathize more deeply than others; we must enter into the problem so as to see it and feel it as the one in pain does, it is true, but we also must enter into it as God does, and see beyond the problem to the solution, to see the suffering, but also the way out. But merely to enter into the feelings that others have (“I feel your pain”) is still not enough.
 - Caution: We tread on dangerous ground if, like Job’s friends, we pretend to know the reasons for suffering or that there will be assurance of relief this side of the grave.
 - Empathy is entering another’s pain with genuine care.

¹ Jay E. Adams, “[Compassion](#),” in *The Practical Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling* (Cordova, TN: Institute for Nouthetic Studies, 2020), 30.

² Jay E. Adams, “[Empathy](#),” in *The Practical Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling* (Cordova, TN: Institute for Nouthetic Studies, 2020), 63.

- **Commiseration:** (from Latin com = with, miserari = to pity or feel sorrow) means to suffer with someone. Our commiseration means caring in a way that we *“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” — Romans 12:15*
- **Comfort.** We hope that our friends who suffer would glorify God, would benefit others (Phil 2:3-4), and they would find relief from their sufferings for their own benefit.³

WHEN “HELPING” ISN’T HELPFUL

Job’s Wife

- Job lost all his wealth, property, and children. Then his health was stricken. His wife responded:
- **Job 2:9-10** ~ Then his wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!”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.
- She questioned his integrity, that he should let go of his faithfulness to God. She questioned why to remain strong in character if there is no blessing.
- She encouraged him to question God’s faithfulness – just blaspheme God who allowed this and be punished with death (presumably better than life).
- **Deuteronomy 29:29** ~ The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

Job’s Friends

- They heard all that had happened and came to comfort and sympathize with him. For a week they comforted, then they opened their mouths.
- Their accusations and corrections against Job were not true or based on God’s character.
- **Job 42:7** ~ It came about after the Lord had spoken these words to Job, that the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, “My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because **you have not spoken of Me what is right** as My servant Job has.
- Their words were harmful rather than comforting or strengthening.
- **Job 16:1-5** ~ Then Job answered, “I have heard many such things; **Sorry comforters are you all.** ³“Is there *no* limit to **windy words**? Or what plagues you that you answer? ⁴“I too could speak like you, If I were in your place. I could compose words against you and shake my head at you. ⁵“I could **strengthen** you with my mouth, And the **solace** of my lips could **lessen your pain.**

³ Jay E. Adams, [“Comfort,”](#) in *The Practical Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling* (Cordova, TN: Institute for Nouthetic Studies, 2020), 26.

- They assumed sin because of the suffering.
- **Job 22:5** ~ “Is not your wickedness great, and your iniquities without end?” (Eliphaz’s accusation)

The Church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 13)

- In the context of a church of chaos (14:26-33), each member of a church wasn’t using their spiritual gifts for the building up of the body (14:26) for the common good (12:7). They were selfish, lacking care for one another, causing the body to suffer greater (12:25-26).
- **1 Corinthians 13:1-3** ~ If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a **noisy gong** or a **clanging cymbal**. ² If I have *the gift of* prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, **I am nothing**. ³ And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, **it profits me nothing**.

Modern Misguided/ Bad Help

- Grandpa is now your Guardian angel: People don’t become angels when they die.
- Guarantees: “You’ll be healed.” It doesn’t always happen. Encourage perseverance and dependent prayer.
- Worse, “if you have faith, you will be healed”: Our prosperity is not based on a measure of faith.
- Replacement Notions: If someone has lost something, even another great person can’t replace what was lost.
- Platitudes like “This too shall pass” and “God is good all the time”. These antidotes may be true, but they can often be delivered with an attitude of “You’ll be fine, get over it.” Be careful you communicate truth in a way that is wrapped in a blanket of sympathy during their pain.
- 1-Upmanship or “at least you don’t...”: Be careful not to compare any current or past pains you face with their current struggles. Better, “I don’t pretend to understand what you’re going through, but I want to try. Help me understand how you are feeling.”⁴
- **2 Corinthians 1:3-7** ~ “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **the Father of mercies and God of all comfort**, ⁴ 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. ⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. ⁶ But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; ⁷ and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are *sharers* of our comfort.”

⁴ Dave Furman, [*Being There: How to Love Those Who Are Hurting*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 105.

- Mr. Fixit: “I know what will cure you, you just need to try ____.” Struggling people have probably already seen numerous doctors and undergone different treatments. Unless they are sitting around and not doing anything, they have people with actual medical degrees who are looking into their situation.⁵
 - Better, Sometimes the best thing you can do is say, “I’m sorry, can you help me better understand what you are going through?” And then listen.⁶
 - Love assumes the best (1 Cor 13:7), so be careful not to ask questions insinuating the person is at fault. Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15).

BEING A CLOSE FRIEND WHO COMFORTS

- The first week Job’s friends spent with him, they sympathized, cried, provided, listened, and mourned.
- Jesus wept when Lazarus, whom he loved, had died (John 11:35-38).
- Jesus also genuinely cared for those he healed during his ministry (Luke 4:18-19)
- The first church sacrificed much so that those in need had provisions (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32-37).

Reflecting our God Who Comforts⁷

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 ~ the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the **Father of mercies and God of all comfort**, ⁴**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.

- God’s purpose for his comfort. As we look to God for comfort and hope in suffering, he means to spur us on to comfort others who are being afflicted *with* the same comfort we’ve received from God.
- God comforts us *so that* we can comfort others.
- God grants us mercy *so that* we can be merciful to others.
- God stands whole-heartedly with us in our suffering *so that* we will stand whole-heartedly with others who are suffering.
- God never leaves us alone in our suffering *so that* we won’t leave others alone in theirs.

⁵ Dave Furman, [*Being There: How to Love Those Who Are Hurting*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 103.

⁶ Dave Furman, [*Being There: How to Love Those Who Are Hurting*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 104.

⁷ Dave Zuleger, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-brings-us-suffering-for-others-sake>

Praying and Preparing to Help

- There are likely people you know who you want to help.
- Pray for such opportunities to encourage (1 Thess. 3:1-5).
- Prepare your heart to grieve, listen, care, and comfort.
- Don't assume someone else will check in on them. Move toward those who may need you.
- **2 Corinthians 9:6-8** ~ Now this *I say*, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for **every good deed**;
- Be generous with your help.
- Be ready with specific ways to help, not merely general offers. Make a point to offer it again.

The Body of Christ as Helping Members

One couple that had a miscarriage described the help they received this way:⁸

- The ears were the first to come, leaning in and listening well.
- But the feet weren't far behind, arriving early and ready to run errands.
- Then came the hands, carrying flowers and Starbucks drinks and donuts for the kids.
- And with them, the arms that wrapped themselves tight around the family and wouldn't let go.
- The noses followed, with some of their favorite meals.
- The mouths were slower than normal to speak, but came with meaningful words of courage and hope.
- And sprinkled among the rest were the eyes, attentive and filled with tears.

HOW CAN I HELP?⁹

Dave Furman is a pastor who has for 18 years struggled with chronic pain and physical disability. Here are some of the main points from his book, which should help us help others:

1. Commune with God. The heart work of helping others is hard work. A compassionate caretaker must grow in relationship to God: "if we don't first love God, we won't have any strength for ministry."

⁸ Marshall Segal, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/find-your-way-to-help-the-hurting>

⁹ Dave Furman, *Being There: How to Love Those Who Are Hurting* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016). This wonderful book is written by a pastor who largely has to live dependent on the care of others for his physical needs.

- “If you’re going to help the hurting, your heart needs to be healthy. Your efforts in your own strength can go on for only so long.”
2. A Silent Presence: Job’s friends, for a few days did something well. They went. They gave their time, money, and resources. They showed their Sympathy and Comfort (Job 2:11-13)
 3. True Fellowship: continue opening up about your own life. Open up about your struggles and joys.
 4. Loyal Friendship: An important ministry of loyalty, sticking with the hurting.
 - **Proverbs 18:24** ~ A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.
 - **Proverbs 17:17** ~ A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.
 5. Spirit of Forgiveness: “When you are ministering to those who are hurting, it is inevitable that they will offend you.”
 6. Ministry of Joy: Have a little bit of fun to remember the joys and common grace offered to us. Find something that might bring them joy and lift their spirits.
 - **Proverbs 17:22** ~ “A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.”
 7. Talk about Christ, with your friend. Know the gospel and its implications. When people suffer, they sometimes forget or set aside the gospel of first importance (1 Cor 15).
 8. Speak, for the power is in the gospel, not in you.
 - **Romans 1:16** ~ “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”
 - “The gospel is powerful regardless of who speaks it or how eloquent they are in sharing it.”
 9. Serve in Lowly Ways.
 - “Distinctly Christian love and service is a humble, selfless love that says I want your best even if it costs me.”
 - “When we serve those who are depressed, disabled, handicapped, and hurting, we’re going to have to serve without need for recognition or thanksgiving.”
 - Our giving of service cannot be dependent on the response we get.
 - Distinctly Christian service must be humble and lowly, and we must aim to honor the Lord if we want to look like Jesus.
 10. Serve with your words.
 - **Proverbs 12:18** ~ There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.
 11. Serve in unique and specific ways. Surprise them, write a letter, watch a movie together, drive them to a sunset, buy a gift, watch their children, clean their bathrooms, involve your small group to make a

special meal, get tickets to a concert or big game, organize a work project day around their house, read a book with them. Your presence may be their joy.

12. Pray with them and for them. Learn the lament Psalms and their general pattern¹⁰:

- Turn to God: Address God as you come to him in prayer. This is sometimes combined with complaint.
- Bring Your Complaint: Identify in blunt language the specific pain of injustice. *Why* or *how* is often part of the complaint.
- Ask Boldly: Specifically call upon God to act in a manner that fits his character and resolves your complaint.
- Choose to Trust: Affirm God's worthiness to be trusted and commit to praising him.

13. Encourage them to pray as well: For their healing, for perseverance, for sanctification.

14. Gently Correct.

- **2 Timothy 2:24-26** ~ The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, **with gentleness correcting** those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses *and escape* from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.
- **2 Timothy 3:16-17.** Correcting is one of the purposes of Scripture.
- **Proverbs 27:6** ~ Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.

15. Counsel them to worship rightly.

- Jeremy Pierre and Deepak Reju describe counseling in this way: "Counseling is not primarily an attempt to fix problems, but is an attempt to reorient worship from created things to the Creator by means of the gospel of Jesus Christ."¹¹
- The goal of counseling is not simply to provide specific guidance for the person's problems but to uncover what his heart is worshipping and to offer redemptive remedies for his struggles.¹²

16. Pray for wisdom to discern what is condonable, and what needs correction.

Pray and Then Go S. L. O. W. ...¹³

Show up.

Listen.

Offer Specific Help.

Words of Grace.

¹⁰ Mark Vroegop, *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 203. See also Appendix 2 for a list of Lament Psalms by category: Personal, Corporate, Repentant, Imprecatory, Partial, and Debatable.

¹¹ Deepak Reju and Jeremy Pierre, *The Pastor and Counseling: The Basics of Shepherding Members in Need* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 38–39.

¹² Ibid, 40.

¹³ Vaneetha Rendall Risner, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/s-l-o-w>. She suggests praying and listening more than speaking. But show up, and be willing to share the hope and comfort that God has given you.