

Making Sense of Suffering

Goals:

- Help us think rightly about suffering
- Help us know how to respond in suffering
- Apply these truths in our own lives and walking with others to do the same

Defining Suffering

- Pervasive and lasting pain experienced
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____ / _____
 - _____
- Causes of suffering
 - My own _____
 - The _____ of others
 - Living in a _____ world
 - The sovereign _____ of God

“How does God in grace prosecute this purpose? Not by shielding us from assault by the world, the flesh and the devil, nor by protecting us from burdensome and frustrating circumstances, nor yet by shielding us from troubles created by our own temperament and psychology; but rather by exposing us to all these things, so as to overwhelm us with a sense of our own inadequacy, and to drive us to cling to him more closely.” – J.I.

Packer

“One of the main teachings of the Bible is that almost no one grows into greatness or finds God without suffering, without pain coming into our lives like smelling salts to wake us up to all sorts of facts about life and our own hearts to which we were blind.” – Tim Keller

Foundations: Understanding Suffering

- God's _____ cannot be fully grasped by me
 - Romans 11:33; Isaiah 40:28; Proverbs 3:5-6
- God uses our difficult circumstances to develop _____ in us
 - Romans 5:3-5
- No suffering on earth can tear us away from God's _____
 - Romans 8:35; 37-39; Psalm 56:8
- _____ will overwhelm our present suffering
 - Romans 5:1-2; 2 Corinthians 4:17; Romans 8:18; Philippians 3:10-11

“If you have a God great and transcendent enough to be mad at because he hasn’t stopped evil and suffering in the world, then you have (at the same moment) a God great and transcendent enough to have good reasons for allowing it to continue that you can’t know.

Indeed you can’t have it both ways.” - Tim Keller

Responding to Suffering

Problematic Responses

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____ others
- Harbored _____ against God/others

Problematic Helper Responses

- _____ their pain
- Offering _____ solutions
- _____
- _____ when you should be listening

Positive Responses to Suffering

Lament

“Lament is a prayer in pain that leads to trust.” -Mark Vroegop

The Pattern of Lament

1. An address to God
2. A complaint
3. A request
4. An expression of trust or praise

Psalm 13

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

² How long must I take counsel in my soul
and have sorrow in my heart all the day?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

³ Consider and answer me, O Lord my God;
light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,
⁴ lest my enemy say, “I have prevailed over him,”
lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

⁵ But I have trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

⁶ I will sing to the Lord,
because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Address: How long, Lord?

Complaint: Will you forget me forever?

Request: Look on me and answer, Lord

Trust: I trust in your unfailing love...I will sing the Lord's praise for he has been good to me

Engaging in

- Bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2)
- Comfort one another with the comfort we have received in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:3-5)

Trust the Lord's more than relief

- Trouble will come, but Jesus is present
- John 16:33; Matt. 28:20

Do the next thing

- Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:22)
- Respond consistent with the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23)

Treat your suffering less like a reality, and more like a that is intended to prove something in us

- James 1:12; 1 Peter 1:6-7; 1 Peter 4:12-13; James 1:2-4

"We see that he leaves us in a world of sin to be tried, tested, belaboured by troubles that threaten to crush us - in order that we may glorify him by our patience under suffering, and in order that he may display the riches of his grace and call forth new praises from us as he constantly upholds and delivers us." - J.I. Packer

“There is a terrible divine necessity about redemptive suffering. God is doing something so ultimately wonderful that unanswered prayer is the necessary price of achieving it, and Job begins to experience this. His prayers will be answered, but only when his suffering have produced that for which God purposes them.

In a deeper way it was the same for Jesus Christ. In a similar way it is yet the same for Christian people today; when God remains silent in answer to our urgent cries, it is not that he does not hear, but rather that it is somehow necessary for us to cry in vain and wait in hope until he achieves in us, and in his world, what he wills to achieve.” - Christopher Ash

Finding Comfort in Suffering

- We have a God who wore skin and suffered himself for us
 - Isaiah 53
- We have a God who is with us in suffering
 - Matthew 28:20; Joshua 1:5; Isaiah 43;
- We have a God who is bigger than our suffering
 - Revelation 21:4; Philippians 4:7
- Our suffering is seen and known
 - Hebrews 12:1

“We can glorify God when we are unfairly accused and choose to respond with grace. When we are worried about a loved one and choose not to fear. When we are racked with physical or emotional pain and choose to praise God through our tears. These choices all matter, because a heavenly host is watching...

Don't believe the lie that your suffering doesn't matter, that no one is watching, and that there's no point to your faithfulness. While it may seem like you're suffering alone in a dark room, you're actually on an enormous stage with innumerable eyewitnesses. And the stakes are higher than you think. So press on. Fight with joy. Remain faithful. Our lives are on display.” -Vaneetha Risner

Your Next Step

- Read a book on the resource list with a friend
 - I recommend *Angry with God* by Brad Hambrick or *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy* by Mark Vroegop
- Take steps toward community
- Find the truths about God you need to cling to and meditate/pray through them each day
- Pursue counseling/support when stuck

Resources for Further Reading

Angry with God by Brad Hambrick

- Helps the reader process the anger and pain of suffering by engaging with the Lord in it. Short. Practical. Includes journaling exercises and questions at the end of each chapter.

Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy by Mark Vroegop

- Helps the reader engage in the process of lament. Vroegop provides guidance and direction from his own pain and through studying the psalms. There is a companion journal with additional exercises that may be helpful to work through with a friend.

Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering by Tim Keller

- Keller spends the first half of the book first addressing the worldview, philosophical, and bigger spiritual questions about suffering. The second half of the book is more directly speaking to the sufferer of the hope we have in Christ. If your questions are deeper and/or more theologically oriented, this is the book for you.

Suffering by Paul David Tripp

- What Tripp does best is help people understand gospel implications for all of life. From his own season of suffering, Tripp shares how the gospel reaches us in the darkest places.

Suffering is Never for Nothing by Elizabeth Elliot

- Elliot's life has included many seasons of suffering. She writes with the hope she has found through all of it.

The Scars that Shaped Me by Vaneetha Risner

- Great book, beautifully written. It is about how God uses all things in our lives for our good and his glory.

Notes:

Blanks Answer Key

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Defining Suffering:

Physically; Through trauma; Relationally; Mentally/emotionally; In grief

Causes:

Sin; Sin; Fallen; Will

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Foundations:

Wisdom; Maturity; Love; Future Glory

Problematic Responses:

Denial; Avoidance; Self-pity; Attacking; Anger

Problematic Helper Responses:

Minimizing; Simple; Criticizing; Advising

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Community; Presence; Right; Neutral; Trial