

Equipped to Care 201

Lesson 17 – Suffering

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Learning objectives:

- Understand different sources of suffering
- Explore God’s purpose and expectation in suffering
- Establish a plan of response as we care for suffering people

Outline

1. Transition from Modules 1-4 (foundation) to 5+ (understanding people)
2. Why do people come for soul care (counseling)? Class discussion
3. Suffering – a personal example
4. Teaching - Seeking Counsel and Suffering (pgs. 174-177) and notes below
5. Counseling Suffering People (Saints, Sinners, and Sufferers by Emlet)
6. Case Study-Pascal page 178
 - a. Identify areas of suffering by area (do not look at pages 178-179)
7. Discussion Questions - page 180
8. Prayer
9. Appendix - Helpful articles

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4. Supplemental Teaching from John Morrison’s class notes and ACBC workshop on trials
 - a. Romans 8:18-39
 - i. Suffering here is **far** less than the glory to be revealed
 - ii. Suffering here is universal
 - iii. The Holy Spirit inhabits our suffering
 - iv. Suffering does not mean we are separated from a loving, caring God
 - b. The book of Job
 - i. Much of suffering is undeserved
 - ii. All suffering goes through God’s fingers – He is sovereign over it
 - iii. Suffering brings loss and grief – learn to identify, accept those feelings
 - iv. Suffering tempts us to demand that God explain Himself
 - c. Much of the book of 2 Corinthians
 - i. 1:1-11 – Our suffering – like Paul’s – can be used for others’ good
 - ii. All of chapter (delivered over to death that life of Jesus may be revealed in our body—vs. 10)
 - iii. Much of chapter 11 (suffering for the cause of Christ)
 - iv. 12:1-10 (purpose of keeping us humble and dependent)
 - d. God allows trials and sufferings for many reasons. Here are a few common ones:
 - i. Unconfessed sins (1 Cor. 11:30; 2 Kings. 5:15-27) *Use caution here – Job’s counselors assumed erroneously this was the reason*
 - ii. To chastise His children (Ps. 119:67; Heb. 12:5-11)
 - iii. God wants to increase our usefulness by pruning – Jn. 15:2; 2 Cor. 1:3-9; 2 Pet. 1:5-8)

- iv. To remind us this isn't heaven and we live in a fallen world (Gen. 3:8-19; Ro. 8:22-24)
 - v. To show us that other people's sins have an effect on us (Eph. 6:4; Josh 7; Jon. 1)
 - vi. To allow us to reap what we sow (a natural consequence to our own choices – Gal.6:7-8; Prov. 5:22).
 - vii. To show us our weakness and prompt us to depend on God (2 Cor. 1:8-9; 12:7-10).
 - viii. To have us realize that we have placed our hope somewhere else or have spread it out between God and self/circumstances/other people/possessions, which is idolatry.
 - 1. Our hope is to be squarely fixed upon God alone and His promises (1 Pet. 1:13; Heb. 6:19). At times we don't even know we have "little hopes" elsewhere until God allows a trial to come and reveal them to us.
 - ix. To enlarge our appreciation of His sufficiency (2 Cor. 4:7; 12:7-10).
 - x. To test and strengthen our faith (1 Pet. 1:6-7; 4:12).
 - xi. To create opportunities to witness for Christ (1 Phil. 1:12ff).
 - xii. To develop Christ-like character (Jas. 1:2-5).
 - xiii. To cause us to recognize our need of one another in the Body of Christ and to draw us closer to one another (*One Anothers*, 1 Cor. 12:25; Rom. 12:15; Gal. 6:2).
 - xiv. To always bring glory to Himself (John 9:1-7; Job 1:2; 1 Cor. 1:26-31).
 - xv. It drives us to God's Word (Ps. 119:71).
5. Counseling Sufferers (Saints, Sufferers, and Sinners by Emlet. [pgs. 62-116])
- a. Step into their pain (2 Cor 5:2 – "for in this tent we groan")
 - b. Linger in lament (Emlet pg. 80). Understand their suffering, ministry of presence precedes a ministry of words (Emlet pg. 85)
 - i. Use the Psalms of lament (3, 10, 12, **13**, 22, 38, 42-44, 74, 79, 86, 88)
 - ii. Psalms 13, 22, 88 follow this pattern (Mitch Everingham, "Learning to Lament")
 - 1. Turn to God
 - 2. Cry out your complaint
 - 3. Appeal for God to hear and respond
 - 4. Confess your trust in God
 - c. Recognize two common unbiblical responses (Emlet pg. 79, 88)
 - i. Numb ourselves in resignation
 - ii. Aggressively try and fix it by wielding our own control and power
 - iii. Don't require that someone clean up their response before coming alongside
 - d. Offer words of encouragement
 - i. "Goal is to help them find the Lord's perspective and presence in the midst of their suffering. Ask God to help them grow in the midst of the difficulty to be more like Jesus (Romans 5:3-5; 8:28-29; James. 1:2-4)" (John Morrison)
 - ii. Recall the comfort that the Father is providentially carrying out His decreed will for our lives: His will is good, perfect and acceptable. God is at work in our suffering (Prov 16:1-4, Phil 3:10-11, Rom 8:16-17, 1 Pet 4:12-13, Col 1:24, 2 Cor 12:9-10)
 - iii. Suffering is the gateway to experiencing His resurrection power and glory (Emlet pg. 69)
 - iv. Our suffering has a purpose (2 Cor 1:3-11)
 - v. Avoid asking: "What is God teaching you?" (What Not to Say to Those Who are Suffering, by Ed Welch (ccef.org))
 - e. Resources:

1. <https://fbcva.org/media/vfix82c/walk-in-darkness-part-one>
2. <https://fbcva.org/media/s3hx5y4/walk-in-darkness-part-two>
3. [No Longer Slaves by John Morrison](#)

Buried Treasure

Excerpted from *Where Is God When It Hurts*

by Philip Yancey, Zondervan, ©1997

Following the biblical pattern, our search for meaning should move in a forward-looking direction, toward the results of suffering, rather than dwelling on its cause.

Frankly, to me much suffering would remain meaningless if we spent all our efforts on the unanswerable "Why?" questions. Why did Solzhenitsyn have to spend eight years in a hard labor camp just for making a casual criticism of Stalin in a letter to a friend? Why did millions of Jews have to die to fulfill the whims of a crazed dictator? Such suffering is meaningless in itself, and will remain so unless the sufferer, like a miner searching for diamonds in a vein of coal, finds in it a meaning.

Victor Frankl, who spent time in one of Hitler's camps, said, "Despair is suffering without meaning." Frankl and Bruno Bettelheim extracted meaning from the senseless suffering of the Holocaust: observing the behavior of human beings in the extreme conditions of the camps gave them insights that formed the basis for all their later work. For Elie Wiesel and others, "bearing witness" became the meaning. They now devote themselves to honoring those who did not survive.

In prison Dostoyevski pored over the New Testament and the lives of the saints. Prison became, for him and later for his countryman Solzhenitsyn, a crucible of religious faith. Both describe a process in which, first, the blunt reality of human evil convinced them of the need for redemption. Then, through the living witness of believers in the camps, they saw the possibility of transformation. As Solzhenitsyn elegantly express it in his classic *One Day in the Life Of Ivan Denisovich*, **faith in God may not get you out of the camp, but it is enough to see you through each day.**

Although my own suffering seems trivial in comparison with these pioneers, I too strive to extract meaning from it. I begin the biblical promise that suffering can produce something worthwhile in me. I go through a list like that in Romans 5, where Paul mentions perseverance, character, hope, and confidence. "How does suffering accomplish these?" I ask myself. It produces perseverance, or steadiness, by slowing me down and forcing me to turn to God; it produces character by calling on my reserves of inner strength. I continue through the list, asking how God can be involved in bringing meaning to the suffering process.

John Donne spoke of suffering as a kind of "treasure in bullion." Because it is not coined into currency, the bullion does not always help us defray expenses here on earth. But as we get nearer and nearer our home, heaven, the treasure "that may lie in his bowels, as gold in a mine" takes on eternal value, a weight of glory. If we turn to God in trust, the affliction itself can be redeemed, by helping to form our character, Christ's own image.

We might use a more contemporary analogy to express the same thought. Suffering can be what economists call a "frozen asset." It may not look remotely like an asset at the time, but gradually we can find meaning in it, an enduring meaning that will help to transform the pain.

MINISTRY IN SUFFERING

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We've been spending some time in Psalm 4, learning from David as he responds to deep and personal suffering. Last week we discussed the idea of Conditional Worship, which is the temptation to only praise God when we experience pleasurable circumstances.

Today I want to talk about one of the last things we think about in the midst of suffering - **ministering to those around us.**

Let's be honest. Because of sin, we're self-centered people. We expect others to serve us and treat us as the most important item on the agenda. When suffering enters our door, why would that change? In fact, our selfishness may become more exposed under trial.

In suffering, we expect others to serve us, this time with pity and compassion. And, we probably feel as if we're even more important, considering the current circumstances. "Don't you know what I'm going through? You should pay extra attention to me!"

David does something different. **He ministers.** Psalm 4:6 - "There are many who say, 'Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord!'"

David is writing poetically, so let me try to summarize what's happening. David has a loyal band of companions who have been with him through the entire ordeal, and they approach David and say, "Who will show us some good?" That's another way of saying, "What's going to happen to us now? How can this situation get better for us?"

In that moment, I would struggle not to make it all about me. I would struggle not to compare my suffering with their suffering, naming their trial as "less severe" than my own. I would struggle not to pass off their question entirely and sulk in the corner, meditating on how hard my life has been.

I would guess that David struggled with similar thoughts; after all, he's no biblical hero. But empowered by grace, David prays for his companions. He puts aside his own suffering and asks God to reveal himself to those around him. "Lord, what my people need is to experience your presence. Would you be so tender and loving and kind to shine your face on us? We need to see you!"

David is shepherding his people and interceding on their behalf. He sees the needs of their soul and prioritizes their spiritual care over his own. Rather than making the trial all about himself, David speaks gospel truth to others.

What a beautiful picture of selfless ministry that we should pursue! It won't be easy; it's so easy to justify selfishness in the midst of personal suffering. But like David, we can reach out to God and ask for his presence. He is always near, and his grace enables you to think of others even in the most trying of times.

