

Biblical Counseling 301
Class 1 – June 10, 2018 – Counseling and Suffering

- I. Homework from last week** (*Interpreting Problems Biblically*) **9:00-9:15**
- A. Share memory verse - Proverbs 23:7
 - B. Share the chart empty places (**two interactions you had last week**). *What was the presented issue? What was the natural interpretation or identification? What was a biblical interpretation or identification? (That is, what was really at issue, biblically? How important was it? Don't embarrass anyone in the process. ☺*
 - C. Share 2-3 favorite lines or quotes or observations from **either article** and why.
- II. Basic Observations on Suffering** **9:15-9:25**
- A. It can be defined as “undergoing pain, distress or hardship.”
 - B. It can be physical, relational, spiritual, emotional, or circumstantial.
 - C. To an extent, suffering is defined by the one experiencing it – what qualifies for one may not qualify for another.
 - D. Also, realize that the less dependent we are on Christ, the greater our susceptibility to experiencing life's hardships as suffering. (Philippians 4:13)
 - E. Remember Philippians 4:12 – Paul says we can learn to **prosper in want** (*suffering is a type of want, though want is not necessarily suffering*) as well as **plenty**.
 - F. Remember Stephen in Acts 7:59-60. When being stoned to death, he committed himself to the Lord Jesus and tells Him not to hold this against them. Certainly the experience was suffering, but because of fixing on Christ, that was not his dominant experience.
 - G. Our chief job when counseling someone suffering is not to **judge it** or **alleviate it**. Our job is to enter their suffering (“*weep with those who weep*” and “*bind up the brokenhearted*” and the first seven days of Job's friends) and to help them find the Lord's perspective and presence in the midst of their suffering as He gives us opportunity and they give us access. His perspective on suffering will help them and His presence makes suffering bearable. Philip Yancey, in his *Where is God When it Hurts?*, aptly summarizes Solzhenitsyn's message in his novel, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* as “*Faith in God may not get you out of the camp, but it is enough to see you through each day.*” (See article on page 4 of these notes)
- III. A Few Key Passages on Suffering** **9:25-9:35**
- A. Romans 8:18-39
 1. Suffering here is **far** less than the glory to be revealed
 2. Suffering here is universal
 3. The Holy Spirit inhabits our suffering
 4. Suffering does not mean we are separated from a loving, caring God
 - B. The book of Job
 1. Much of suffering is undeserved
 2. All suffering goes through God's fingers – He is sovereign over it

3. Suffering brings loss and grief – learn to identify, accept those feelings
 4. Suffering tempts us to demand that God explain Himself
- C. Much of the book of 2 Corinthians
1. 1:1-11 – Our suffering – like Paul’s – can be used for others’ good
 2. All of chapter 4 (delivered over to death that life)
 3. Much of chapter 11 (suffering for the cause of Christ)
 4. 12:1-10 (purpose of keeping us humble and dependent)

IV. How to Think Through Suffering? (© ACBC Training Workshop on Trials) 9:35-9:50

- A. Biblical responses of God’s children in trials and suffering
1. God’s children are responsible to please Christ (2 Cor. 5:9-10) since we will give an account (2 Cor. 5:11). This is true when we hurt, don’t understand or are in pain.
 2. Don’t pray for God to just help you “hang in there” through the trial and suffering. Ask God to help you **grow in the midst of the difficulty** to be more like Jesus (Romans 5:3-5; 8:28-29; James. 1:2-4).
- B. Ask yourself:
1. Could God have stopped this? (Read Job 1:8-12, 2:3-6; Lamentations 3:37-38)
 2. Did He? Not at this time.
 3. If He has chosen not to stop it at this time, why not?
- C. God allows trials and sufferings for many reasons. Here are a few common ones:
1. Unconfessed sins (1 Cor. 11:30; 2 Kings. 5:15-27)
Use caution here – Job’s counselors assumed erroneously this was the reason
 2. To chastise His children (Ps. 119:67; Heb. 12:5-11)
 3. God wants to increase our usefulness by pruning – Jn. 15:2; 2 Cor. 1:3-9; 2 Pet. 1:5-8)
 4. To remind us this isn’t heaven and we live in a fallen world (Gen. 3:8-19; Ro. 8:22-24)
 5. To show us that other people’s sins have an effect on us (Eph. 6:4; Josh 7; Jon. 1)
 6. To allow us to reap what we sow (a natural consequence to our own choices – Gal.6:7-8; Prov. 5:22)
 7. To show us our weakness and prompt us to depend on God (2 Cor. 1:8-9; 12:7-10).
 8. 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. 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.
 9. To enlarge our appreciation of His sufficiency (2 Cor. 4:7; 12:7-10).
 10. To test and strengthen our faith (1 Pet. 1:6-7; 4:12).
 11. To create opportunities to witness for Christ (1 Phil. 1:12ff).
 12. To develop Christ-like character (Jas. 1:2-5).
 13. To cause us to recognize our need of one another in the Body of Christ and to draw us closer to one another (38 *One Anothers* 1 Cor. 12:25; Rom. 12:15; Gal. 6:2).
 14. To always bring glory to Himself (John 9:1-7; Job 1:2; 1 Cor. 1:26-31).
 15. It drives us to God’s Word (Ps. 119:71).

V. Biblical Comforts Available Through Christ (© ACBC Workshop) **9:50-10:05**

At your table, take turns reading these, looking up relevant passages.

- A. Recall the comfort that the Father is providentially carrying out His decreed will for our lives: His will is good, perfect and acceptable. (Proverbs 16:1-4)
- B. Christ prays on our behalf (John 17:15-21; Romans 8:34).
- C. His Holy Spirit prays for us and indwells them (Rom 8:26).
- D. His grace is sufficient (2 Cor. 12:7-10)
- E. He always promises victory in, not necessarily deliverance from (2 Cor. 2:14)
- E. There is no temptation that is too powerful (1 Cor. 10:13).
- F. The local church body is to live out the “one anothers” (John 13:14).
- G. Our earthly life is short compared to eternity in Heaven (Rom 8:18).
- H. Heaven is our home and it is sure (John 14:1-3; Heb. 6:19)
- I. Christ is soon to return (1 Pet. 1:13).

VII. Discuss (*Suggested by Paul Tripp*) **10:05-10:20**

At the table level, continue your discussion by answering these questions.

- A. Why might it be easier to justify selfishness in the midst of suffering?
- B. In what ways might you be a more effective ambassador in the midst of suffering?
- C. How does the presence of God enable you to minister to others and put their needs above your own?

VIII. Homework

- A. Memorize either Romans 5:3-4 or James 1:2-3
- B. Read *Buried Treasure* excerpt (p. 4) from Philip Yancey’s book, *Where is God When it Hurts*, and be prepared to discuss the message of the article with your table next week. Where have you seen this to be true? How can you use this truth in counseling someone?
- C. Read Paul Tripp’s *Ministry in Suffering* article (p. 5). Be prepared to discuss next week.

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

© Paul David Tripp – Wednesday's Word 9/17/14

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.