

John Holland

## SESSION 1 | GOD'S GRACE IN YOUR SUFFERING

### Chapters 1-2

#### I. INTRODUCTION

*Job 14:1 - "Man who is born of a woman  
is few of days and full of trouble."*

*John 16:33 - "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."*

Three kinds of suffering:

1. **Persecution** - You experience someone opposing you verbally or otherwise *because* you are a Christian or are standing up for Christlike values (2 Tim. 3:12).
2. **Consequence** - You sin, and you suffer self-inflicted consequences like strained relationships or financial fallout as a direct result of your own sin (Num. 32:23, Rom. 1:21-25).
3. **Providential testing** - You suffer some kind of loss (relational, material, or otherwise) not because of your own sin or because of persecution, but as a means of testing and growth in your walk with Jesus (Job 14:1, Matt. 6:34, 2 Cor. 4:16-17).

“When you face trouble, loss, disability, and pain, *how* does the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ meet you and comfort you?” pg. 12

Three things Scripture and experience teach us:

- 1. There is never a “no-fly” zone over our lives for suffering.**
- 2. We also experience good things in this life.**
- 3. God speaks and acts through affliction.**

“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” - C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*

“The purpose of this book is to anchor your experience more deeply in God’s goodness. Suffering reveals the genuineness of faith in Christ. And suffering produces genuine faith. For example, when you struggle under affliction, the Psalms become real. True faith deepens, brightens, and grows wise. You grow up in knowing God. When you are the genuine article, you are also and always a work in progress.” - Powlison, pg. 14

“The wisdom to suffer well is like manna—you must receive nourishment every day. You can’t store it up, though you do become more familiar with how to go out and find what you need for today.” - Powlison, pg. 15

## II. YOUR SIGNIFICANT SUFFERING

“Think of this book as a workshop. Put yourself into the story and you will get more out of it. Scripture is custom-designed to engage any and all difficulties we face in life. So put your troubles on the table. Listen to how our Lord invites us to get personal. . . We live in specifics, not generalities. You are invited to come candidly with your particular afflictions.” - Powlison, pg. 17

“James says that you will meet trials of *various* kinds (James 1:2). These are the exact places where the Lord will develop your steadiness and depth in your faith.” - Powlison, pg. 17

“When I was a child on our family's farm, one of my favorite places was the pond down in the pasture by the barn. Tadpoles and crayfish occupied me for hours. I'd rest on my haunches and wonder where the pond water came from. I'd walk around its edge but could never see any stream splashing into it. No trickling rivulet over a rock. No pipes feeding it from the spring house.

My dad patiently tried to explain that the pond was fed by a spring,

from water deep in the earth. That spring, he told me, bubbled up and filled the pond. If Dad would have dug the pond area larger, the spring would have continued to fill it. To me it was a mystery, but I was sufficiently satisfied to go on playing with frogs and crayfish.

It's no longer a mystery now that I've felt the crunch of decades of paralysis. The encroachments of my limitations often feel like the cutting edge of a spade, digging up twisted vines of self-centeredness and the dirt of sin and rebellion. Uprooting rights. Clearing out the debris of habitual sins. Shoveling away pride. To believe in God in the midst of suffering is to empty myself; and to empty myself is to increase the capacity – the pond area – for God. The greatest good suffering can do for me is to increase my capacity for God. Then he, like a spring, is free to flow through me.”<sup>1</sup> - Joni Eareckson Tada, *When God Weeps*

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 - *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”*

**1. We can and must bless God in the midst of suffering.**

**2. Our Father is the source of all comfort.**

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<sup>1</sup> Pg. 137

**3. God comforts us in all our afflictions.**

**4. We suffer in part to learn how to comfort others in suffering.**

“Perhaps most often, both the bad and the good come out of us. A trial brings out what is most wrong, and God brings about what is most right as he meets you and works with you.” - Powlison, pgs. 20-21

Psalm 119:67 - *“Before I was afflicted I went astray  
but now I keep your word.”*

“Affliction itself is not good, but God works what is very good, bringing the ignorant and wayward back home. Faith’s enduring and alert dependency on the Lord is one of the Spirit’s finest fruits. And you bear that fruit only when you have lived through something hard.” - Powlison, pg. 21

**III. HOW FIRM A FOUNDATION**

How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord,  
is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!  
What more can he say than to you He has said,  
to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled.

- Anonymous

"There is a famous story about a young shepherd boy in the Scottish Highlands in centuries past. His parents died prematurely, leaving the boy in the care of his grandfather, a shepherd. The grandson was raised to be a shepherd too, but he was uneducated.

He never went to school and he was unable to read. His grandfather taught him the first five words of Psalm 23 by taking the boy's left hand and, as he said each word, pointing to a finger. Soon the boy could say the words himself, holding one finger and then the next as he did so: "The-Lord-is-my-shepherd." On one occasion when the boy was out in the hills tending the sheep, a terrible blizzard swept in, engulfing the mountains, and the boy and the sheep did not return home. His grandfather set out to find him, but the brutal winds and blinding snow made that impossible. He knew he would soon lose all sense of direction and so, fearful and heartsore, he returned to spend a long and restless night in his chair. When at last he was able to search the hills, tragically, he found his grandson frozen to death in the snow. But as he stooped to lift the child, he noticed that the boy's hands were clasped in a peculiar way. His right hand firmly gripped the fourth finger of his left hand: "The Lord is *my* shepherd."<sup>2</sup>  
- David Gibson, *The Lord of Psalm 23*

"A sufferer's primal need is to hear God talking and to experience him purposefully at work." Powlison, pg. 25

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<sup>2</sup> Pg. 22

"The Holy Spirit works powerfully and intimately in this age of new creation to communicate God's words, presence, and love in our hearts. Sufferers awaken to hear their Father's voice and to see their Savior's hand in the midst of significant suffering." Powlison, pg. 28

"You awaken. You take it to heart, and you take heart. You experience that this is so. The world changes. You change. His voice changes the meaning of every hardship. What he does—has done, is doing, will do—alters the impact and outcome of everything happening to you. Your faith grows up into honest, intelligent humanness, no longer murky and inarticulate. You grow more like Jesus: the man of sorrows acquainted with grief, the man after God's own heart, who having loved his own, loved them to the end." - Powlison, pgs. 28-29

Isaiah 40:27–31

*Why do you say, O Jacob,  
and speak, O Israel,  
"My way is hidden from the LORD,  
and my right is disregarded by my God"?  
Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.  
He gives power to the faint,  
and to him who has no might he increases strength.  
Even youths shall faint and be weary,*

*and young men shall fall exhausted;  
but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;  
they shall run and not be weary;  
they shall walk and not faint.”*

“Singing songs of suffering is not an option for Christ-followers. It is not a mere invitation. When Christians in Colossae were struggling to survive under the reign of the madman Nero, Paul ordered them, ‘Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...singing songs and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God’ (Col. 3:16). When the Ephesians were being persecuted and threatened with torture, Paul commanded them to encourage ‘one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, making melody to the Lord with your heart’ (Eph. 5:19). Paul himself takes his own advice when—bloodied, bruised, and shackled in jail—he boisterously sings a hymn at midnight, proving that spiritual songs can provide powerful ammunition for embattled Christians (Acts 16:25).”<sup>3</sup> Joni Eareckson Tada, *Songs of Suffering*

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

“...God will surprise you. He will make you stop. You will struggle. He will bring you up short. You will hurt. He will take his time. You will grow in faith and love. He will deeply delight you. You will find the process harder than you ever imagined—and better. Goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your

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<sup>3</sup> Pg. 19

life. At the end of the long road you will come home at last. No matter how many times you've heard it, no matter how long you've known it, no matter how well you can say it, God's answer will come to mean something better than you could ever imagine. He answers with himself." Powlison, pg. 16

### **Suffering introduction worksheet:**

What is the most significant suffering you experienced in the past?

What is the hardest thing you are facing right now?

What are you afraid you might have to go through some day?

Where are you struggling to make sense of things?

Where do you need help?

Where do you need wisdom?

Where do you need courage?

Where do you need mercy?

Where do you need protection?

Where do you need strength?

Recommended Resources:

- *God's Grace in Your Suffering* by David Powlison
- *Seasons of Sorrow* by Tim Challies
- *The Lord of Psalm 23* by David Gibson
- *Songs of Suffering* by Joni Eareckson Tada
- *God in the Dark* by Os Guinness
- *Suffering: Gospel Hope When Life Doesn't Make Sense* by Paul David Tripp
- *Trusting God* by Jerry Bridges
- *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross* by Christopher Ash
- *The Letters of Samuel Rutherford* published by Banner of Truth
- *Rejoicing in Lament: Wrestling with Incurable Cancer & Life in Christ* by J. Todd Billings

Recommended hymns and songs:

- "How Firm a Foundation"
- "Jesus! What a Friend for Sinners!"
- "Be Still, My Soul" by Katharina von Schlegel
- From Everlasting (Psalm 90) by Sovereign Grace Music
- Christ Our Wisdom by Sovereign Grace Music

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