

Lesson Six: Walking through Trials



LESSON SIX Walking Through Trials



"The Christian's Suffering"

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A Question Everyone Asks

All people, and certainly all Christians ask why we suffer. Why do bad things happen to people trying to live godly lives? Why does God allow difficult things in our lives and what does that mean about His trustworthiness? Some Christians ask these questions often and some ask them seldom; some ask them early in their life with Jesus and some ask later.

A Hard Reality

It is common to think that if we start following Jesus that everything will begin to go better in our lives. However, Jesus said that if we want to follow Him, we are going to suffer since He did.

Luke 9:23

Then he said to the crowd, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me.

Jesus also said,

John 16:33

"I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."



What has been yo	our view of suffe	ering up to now?	What is your
response to know	ing that following	ng Jesus means s	suffering?

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An Abnormal Normal

Suffering and death are part of everyday life for us now, yet we know they are not the way things are supposed to be. They came into our reality when people first sinned against God. Most of human philosophy and religion makes and attempt to explain and/or deal with these problems but the Bible tells us that they are not God's original design for Mankind. Intuitively, all of us understand that pain, sadness, and fear are not how our lives are meant to be. When Jesus heals and overcomes sickness, death, lies, nature, and demons, He is not doing something abnormal but giving a glimpse of God's original design for a good world. It seems weird to us because all we know is a broken world.



In what ways should we say that suffering is normal and in what ways is it not normal?				

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The Blame Game

People are prone to think of suffering in their lives as their fault or God's fault. This is so common that the Bible speaks to it in several places. Perhaps the briefest response to this way of thinking comes from Jesus in John 9:1-5. What do you see there about moral responsibility for suffering?

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However, Proverbs 10:8 and 22:3 tell us that foolish decisions can lead to suffering. I Peter 3:17 says that it is better to suffer innocently than for evil that we've done.

Pain and Purpose

Throughout the Bible, we see stories of God using pain to accomplish His purposes even though it was not His original design for our lives. The ultimate example of this is Jesus going to the cross on our behalf. This is the best and worst thing that ever happened since it is the most unfair and unjust thing for an innocent Jesus to die, but the best thing because it makes a way to restore our relationship with God.



How does knowing that Jesus suffered unfairly for God's purpose change the way we see our deserved or undeserved suffering?

Growing through Difficulty

If God accomplishes His overall purpose through suffering, we should expect His people's suffering to always have purpose. Suffering has meaning and accomplishes God's purpose in His children, not in everyone (Romans 8:28). For the person who does not follow Christ, suffering may teach some life lessons and the Lord may use it to show them their need for Him. But for the believer, suffering is to be expected (John 16:33), rejoiced over (James 1:2); endured (I Corinthians 13:7). Trials produce Christlike character and are a part of our sanctification process (James 1:3-4; Romans 5:3 -4.) It is important to remember that for the believer, God will allow suffering in our lives sometimes to discipline us as a loving Father must (Hebrews 12:7). We can think of ourselves not as victims but as patients suffering as we are healed and made whole.

A Christian's Suffering:

- Leads to gratitude (Ps. 107)
- Brings us closer to Christ (Phil. 1:29; 3:10; I Pt. 2:21; 4:13; Rom. 8:17-18)
- Builds our character (Matt. 5:12; James 1:2-4; I Pt. 1:6-7; 5:10; Rom. 5:3-5; Prov. 20:30)
- Is for the good of others (Col. 1:24; II Cor. 1:6; II Tim. 2:10; Eph. 3:13) In our suffering, remember that God is our Healer, Teacher, Strength, Father, Head of the Church.

"We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

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Unanswered Prayer

While we learned about prayer in general last time, this time we should address the question of how we deal with our prayers seem to go unanswered.

- Sometimes we wait a long time but God still answers (Lk. 8:41-56).
- God may be showing us that His grace is enough (II Cor. 12:7-10).
- Even Jesus got a "no" to a request but submitted to the Father's perfect will (Mark 14:36).
- God may be doing more than we see (Jer. 29:1-23).
- Persistent prayer keeps us looking to God (I Chron. 16:11; Lk. 18:1-8).
- Ask if you are praying for something in God's will (I Jn. 5:14–15; Mk. 14:36).
- Some things we pray for God to do can be done by us (James 4:17).
- God may be answering "no" or "wait" but those are still answers (Acts 1:7; Ps.27:14).
- Sometimes God answers yes and we never notice or remember (Lk. 17:11-17).
- Prayer changes us (II Cor. 3:18).

The God Who Cares

God can seem distant or aloof when we are suffering. This can be an even stronger notion among committed Christians because we believe that God is real and all-powerful and wants a loving relationship with us.

As you proceed in your knowledge of the Bible, be on the lookout for how Jesus went through the same kinds of trials you listed. You can also see people in the Bible who dealt with these things. Watch for how Jesus responded and ask Him for help in your trials.

8	What about Jesus is shows that God cares about our suffering?
REFLECT	

All's Well that Ends Well

The Bible tells us what God is going to do in the future when Jesus comes back to rule the world. While until then we will have difficulties, Jesus will one day take care of all our pain. In the meantime we wait patiently and hopefully knowing that God will make it all right.

Revelation 21:4

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.

Various Trials

The book of James 1:2 and I Peter 1:6 use the phrase, "various trials". "Trials" is another way to talk about difficulty and involves the idea of being tested.



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Take a moment to ask God for help and to help you trust Him and know

Him more closely through your current trials.

NOTES	REFLECT	What different types of trials can you think of?		
	DISCUSS	What are some implications of the fact that there are various kinds of trials?		
	suffering suffering or at lea glimpse when Pa	le has a theme of God not always explaining why people are g. In the book of Job, for example, while it is clear that Job is not g for his own sins, it is not fully clear why he is chosen to suffer – st God never answers the question for Job. Rather, God shows Job of God's greatness and sovereignty. God is the answer. Likewise, and asks God three times to remove some problem, God answers grace is sufficient and His strength is made perfect in weakness (II		
	DISCUSS	What is the difference between wanting more of God in your life and wanting your difficulty to go away?		
	REFLECT	At the close of this section, reflect on why you think the Bible (James 1:2) tells us to rejoice when we find ourselves in trials.		
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"Spiritual Warfare"

Spiritual Warfare

You will hear Christians use the term "spiritual warfare" from time to time. This is not a term from the Bible and different people mean different things by it. Some mean the activity of fervent prayer over a serious matter. Some mean processes of spiritual growth or healing.

Most mean a struggle against demonic influence in our lives or our world. This becomes a complex topic but here are some basics.

- The Bible says that demons and the devil are real.
- Demons influence people and are given a measure of power in our world (Ephesians 6:12.
- We struggle against demonic influence through prayer, sticking to Biblical truth, and using Jesus' authority over them.
- The Bible says there is a difference between demonic influence, physical sickness, and mental illness (Matthew 4:24).
- Demons always cause harm. They can oppress people emotionally and physically (I Samuel 16:14; 18:10; 19:9; Mark 5:2-5; Matthew 17:14-18; II Corinthians 12:7).
- God might allow demonic influence in peoples' lives but God is always in charge. The devil or demons are not equal to God. They are bound by space and time (Daniel 10:12-14) and are not all-powerful or all knowing.
- The Bible does not say that demons read our thoughts. They, like angels can observe our actions and communicate things (I Timothy 4:1).
- Different Christians and Christian groups have different beliefs on this topic. Some have attempted to explain away demons as something unreal the Bible authors believed in or something only symbolic of evil. Others have come up with teachings and methods of dealing with demonic influence that are not in the Bible. We should be careful to not either see the work of the devil and demons everywhere or nowhere. We should also be careful to see what the Bible does and does not say.

This is not meant to scare you – or make this class more interesting!- but to make you aware of one cause of suffering. Remember that we can pray to the God who oversees the whole universe and who will one day cast Satan and demons away forever into the "lake of fire".



"Knowing God's Will"

Something that is very difficult for followers of Jesus is knowing what God's will for us is. This can be a trial all its own when we feel that we just cannot seem to figure out what God would have us do in our situation.

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MEMORY VERSE: James 1:2-3

(ESV) Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

(NLT) Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow.

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Revealed and Unrevealed Will

Finding God's will for us is mostly a difficulty when we are trying to find God's will for a specific question that the Bible does not address. Should you take a certain job? Should you confront that person who hurt you? What school should you apply for? While these are good things to handle reflectively, it will be very difficult to know God's specific will for them. We often feel that we are being asked to choose the right prize behind several doors, knowing that we will suffer great failure or punishment if we choose incorrectly.

Deuteronomy 29:29

The Lord our God has secrets known to no one. We are not accountable for them, but we and our children are accountable forever for all that he has revealed to us, so that we may obey all the terms of these instructions.



Drawing from what you know of God and the fact that you are His child, how can you respond to concerns about God punishing us for not figuring out His secret will?

We actually can know God's will since He has revealed it to us in the Bible. But this is His will in general, not in every particular situation. As we get to know God's heart and what He tells us about His purpose for us and what it means to follow the way of Jesus, we will find that we are able to discern what God would have us do. By focusing on God's "revealed" will, we can use wisdom to make godly choices.

Principles on knowing God's will:

- Do what is clear (Deuteronomy 29:29; James 4:17)
- Trust God to be in control (Proverbs 3:5)
- Ask for wisdom from God through the Bible and the Spirit (James 1:5)
- Ask for advice from others (Proverbs 11:14; 24:6)
- Look for what gives abundant life (John 10:10; Deuteronomy 30:19)
- Know that you cannot plan everything (James 4:13-17; Proverbs 16:1)



The Bible says that we are to rejoice even in our trials (James 1:2-3; I Peter 1:6-7). Having completed this lesson, why do you think the Bible tells us that?



How does this lesson change your perspective on the difficulties of the Christian life? What do you need to do as a result? We will discuss some possibilities in class.
