

DISCIPLESHIP HANDBOOK

XO
RESOURCES



08

Lesson 8 | Suffering

What is Suffering?

Suffering is part of life – we can suffer through sickness, pain, grief, financial problems, loss of relationship, depression, anxiety, etc.

(Definition of Suffering: the state of undergoing pain, distress, hardship)

So, why does God allow it? How can anything good come out of it? And where is God in it? These are huge life questions that we often ask!

Note: In the Bible Luke is known as “the beloved physician” (Colossians 4:14). Seeking medical advice is part of what we do when we are unwell, both physically and mentally. As a Christian, this doesn’t change. We still seek medical advice, but we must seek advice from our ultimate healer – our God (The Great Physician).

Why is There Suffering in the World?

The Bible makes it very clear that all human suffering is the result of the Fall.

(Definition the Fall: The first man and woman (Adam and Eve) lived in the Garden of Eden in a perfect relationship with God. However, they disobeyed God and brought sin into the earth, this is known as “The Fall of Mankind” – Genesis 3:1-19).

Our suffering is directly related to the curse that came upon the earth as the result of sin. With sin came corruption, suffering and death. Suffering is not always the result of an individual’s sin, but rather, that we live in a sinful world.

Good and bad things happen to everyone.

Matthew 5:45 - that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Another version states: Then you will be acting like your Father in heaven. He makes the sun rise on both good and bad people. And he sends rain for the ones who do right and for the ones who do wrong (CEV).

More About Who God Is

God is All Knowing (Omnipotent) - God has infinitely more knowledge than us. His vision is perfect. He sees all. What we see as our day-to-day life, He sees as eternal. He isn't limited to our timeline.

An example is a parent and their child. You take your small children to the doctor when they're sick. They may require medicine to help them improve. If they need an injection, they will cry because of the temporary pain. However, as their parent, you know it will help them recover. You see the whole picture they do not.

Although the difference of knowledge between a parent and a child is large, this does not compare to the knowledge of the Almighty God compared to His children.

Psalm 147:5 - Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite.

1 Corinthians 13:12 - Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely (NLT).

God is Eternal - He created time and He is without beginning or end. We look at our life in the physical. We are born one day then we die. He sees from the beginning of one's life into eternity. In light of this eternal view, God does work all things for our good, there is no question of that, but the good He sees is beyond our limited vision. He sees in full what we see in part.

Romans 8:28 - And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

LIVE FOR THE LINE
NOT THE DOT

YOUR LIFE

ETERNITY



Ecclesiastes 3:11 - He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

Romans 8:18 - I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Why Does God Allow Us to Go Through Seasons of Suffering?

God is glorified through it - John 9:1-3 - Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.

God transforms our character through suffering and brings us hope -

Romans 5:3-5 - Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

James 1:2-5 - Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

God can show His love through our suffering to the world-

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 - Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.

To identify with Christ - Jesus also suffered and understands our pain. Isaiah 53:3 - He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain...

A great Biblical example of suffering is in the life of Joseph. You can find the full story of Joseph in Genesis 37-50:

- Was thrown in a well by his brothers that hated him
- Sold into slavery by his family
- Endured being a slave with such integrity that he was promoted
- Falsely accused of adultery
- Thrown in a dirty prison for years
- Interpreted a dream (with God's help)
- Took two full years before he got the credit for interpreting the dream and was released
- Around 15 years of slavery

Then he was promoted to almost royalty level and used by God to save thousands of lives from a famine that had hit the land. His adversity was not wasted but changed him from a spoiled baby brother to a humble leader that was totally dependent on God and God used him to change history.

Genesis 45:4-8 - And Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come near to me." So, they came near. Then he said: "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvesting. And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

Genesis 50:20 - But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.

Where is God During the Suffering?

Although our God allows suffering and can use it for His glory and our good, it doesn't mean He leaves us or that He doesn't care. Far from it!

Psalms 34:18 - The Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Deuteronomy 31:6-8 - Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you."

Romans 8:38-39 - For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If you have received salvation, God is with you whether you feel it or not.

How Could God Possibly Use My Sickness For Good?

Sickness, cancer, heart attacks, the list goes on and on. Where is hope in sickness, especially chronic or terminal ones? How could God possibly use this for His glory?

Healing - Our God is a God that heals. He did it in the Old Testament, New Testament and ever since. It was, and is, an awesome display of God's power and compassion. Healing is a testament of God's goodness to the person healed and to those around them. Ask God for healing. Go to your church leaders and ask for prayer and pray for each other.

WHEN A TRAIN GOES THROUGH A TUNNEL AND IT GETS DARK, YOU DON'T THROW AWAY THE TICKET AND JUMP OFF. YOU SIT STILL AND TRUST THE ENGINEER. - CORRIE TEN BOOM

James 5:6&14-15 - Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective... Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.

Psalms 41:2-3 - The LORD protects and preserves them— they are counted among the blessed in the land - He does not give them over to the desire of their foes. The Lord sustains them on their sickbed and restores them from their bed of illness.

When God Doesn't Heal? A common misconception is that if God doesn't heal you, He doesn't love you. This is far from the truth! God's love was demonstrated for you on the cross and with the knowledge of eternity with Him. His love is toward you and for you always.

Romans 5:8 - But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

There may be times when God doesn't heal you or He delays healing for a while.

Psalms 73:26 - My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Sometimes we can be sick and unable to complete daily tasks. We might even find ourselves in a hospital bed. During these times it can be easy to say, "How can God use me?" Remember this: when your character reflects Jesus and you are worshiping Him in all you do (Lesson 6), you can be an awesome witness of God's love to doctors, nurses, other patients, family and friends. You can be a warrior in prayer for the need of those around you. Don't be discouraged that you feel you cannot be a tool of God in these times.

Paul in the New Testament struggled with something his whole life and even though he asked God to take it away, He didn't. We don't know what it was, but we know it was unpleasant and caused Paul grief. But Paul discovered something through this problem, that God's grace and salvation was more than enough for him and that God's power was made perfect through Paul's weakness.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 - Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power

is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

If you struggle with illness, please see the testimony included in the “Dig a Little Deeper” section. It shows how good God is in sickness and what can happen to the people around you when you trust in God - even in your darkest moments!

What Does the Bible Say About Anxiety?

Much like sickness, anxiety is in the Bible as well. Paul talks about it to the church in Philippi.

Philippians 4:6-9 - Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

Paul’s advice gives us some guidance on anxiety:

- Prayer - pray immediately - go to God first in prayer
- Supplication (Petition) - tell Him your anxieties (no matter what they are)
- Thanksgiving - remember what He has done in your life and express gratitude
- Think (meditate) on good things (the truth of God)
- Repeat!

The peace of God doesn’t refer to seeing your situation resolved immediately, but rather looking to God and knowing that His ways are perfect, resting in faith that He will work it out in His time according to His will. Praying takes you into God’s perspective.

Who in The Bible Suffered from Depression?

In the Bible there are multiple people who suffered from depression and anxiety. This wasn't a result of their lack of faith but as a result of their circumstances.

Elijah - he sat down under a tree and prayed that he might die...I am the only one left (1 Kings 19:4-10).

Jeremiah - Cursed be the day I was born...why did I ever come out of the womb to see trouble and sorrow and to end my days in shame? (Jeremiah - 20:14&18).

David - How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and everyday have sorrow in my heart, give light to my eyes or I will sleep in death (Psalm 13:2-3)

My tears have been my food day and night (Psalm 42:3)

Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I am in distress, my eyes grow weak with sorrow, and my soul and my body with grief, my life is consumed by anguish (Psalm 31:9)

These three men suffered with depression and anxiety at times, but they asked for God's help and kept on walking in obedience, in spite of how they felt:

Elijah saw God do amazing things throughout his life and in the end, he didn't even die! He was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:1).

Jeremiah might not have seen the results he wanted in his life, but he was known by God, called by God, and trusted Him throughout his life. His input into the Bible reminds us that God can sustain us and use us in great adversity and that trusting in God can anchor us (Jeremiah 17:7-8).

David was used by God throughout his life in amazing ways: from killing a giant (1 Samuel 17) to establishing a place of worship for God (2 Samuel 6)! His lineage can be traced straight to Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:1-17).

Walking with God in Depression

Depression is not a black and white event in people's lives, and it doesn't look the same for everyone. Some people have mild depression that is due to a situation, and it resolves after a short season. Others suffer with depression throughout their entire life in varying degrees.

In the 23rd Psalm, David looks back at his life and sees that God walked with him - the highest peaks and the lowest valleys. Psalm 23:4 - Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

God's comfort was real and present throughout his journey. So, even though you might not feel His presence in these times, it doesn't mean He is not there with you.

Where Do I Find Hope in My Suffering?

Whatever suffering you find yourself in, there is always hope in God!

(Definition of Hope: to trust in, wait for, look for, or desire something or someone; or to expect something beneficial in the future)

Romans 15:13 - Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Ps 42:11- Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.

What does it mean to hope in God in spite of suffering? The human heart finds it easy to despair when we are suffering as we become overwhelmed with our circumstances. David chose to put his hope in God, not his circumstance. He had to remind himself to put his eyes back on to God, his Saviour and Deliverer.

Psalm 16:8 - I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

Proverbs 3:5-6 - Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 - For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Those without Christ hope in tangible things of the world; however, as Christians, our hope is not confined to this life, but is found in an eternal relationship with our loving Father.

Ask the Holy Spirit for help in these seasons:

- Allow friends to pray for you and minister to your needs
- Speak out the promises of God - remembering who your hope is in
- Remember, despite how you feel, God is with you

**THE GREATER YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE
GOODNESS AND GRACE OF GOD ON YOUR LIFE,
THE MORE LIKELY YOU ARE TO PRAISE HIM IN THE
STORM - MATT CHANDLER**

Dig a Little Deeper

Hope Heals - The Story of Jay and Katherine Wolf

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1FDCejzs2AY&feature=share&fbclid=I-wAR3pL-Rv99Stk0bWKgi4FCTvuGx6Ti5bvodsM2viVeinHeoDSNfBEKSxaeQ>

Questions & Notes

Lesson 8 ...

1. What are some of the things you learned about God's purposes in suffering?

2. What does omnipotent mean?

3. What verse in this lesson most spoke to you about God's help in times of suffering?

