**Week #**

**The Doctrine of Suffering**

**Key Passage**

***Ephesians 3:13 (ESV)***

***So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.***

**Introduction**

In the book of Ecclesiastes King Solomon so aptly described the rhythms of life when he said, “There is a season for everything.” Along with blessings, come trials, and joy is often intermingled with deep sorrow. “Even in laughter the heart may sorrow, and the end of mirth may be grief.” (Proverbs 14:13) The good, the bad and the ugly, are all fragments that make up the mosaics of our lives. Yet, even though we know this in our head, we resist the seasons of trials when they come; but come they will. It is just part of the human experience. The Psalmist must have been in one of “these seasons” himself when he wrote, “The length of our days is seventy years - or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.” (Psalms 90:10) (NIV) So there you have it – the summation of our existence.

For a number of reasons, this sobering subject has occupied my mind a lot lately. Apparently, it occupied Paul’s mind too because he dedicated no small amount of Holy Script to the doctrine of suffering. This is not by coincidence; suffering was an everyday occurrence in Paul’s life. Now, aren’t we glad we are not Paul? For the most part, thankfully, our lives seem boring in comparison and seasons of suffering and trials are few and far between. Even so, because our perception can become clouded in the midst of pain, we seldom see the whole picture.

And so in order to gain a heavenly perspective on a difficult subject, we will be doing a Biblical survey on suffering. Hopefully, we will learn how to gain some stability by aligning ourselves with the Truth when these things come. That being said, with the exception of the above key verse, this lesson will differ from the others in that we’ll not expound on a specific passage or confine our study exclusively to the book of Ephesians.

Now that you know the heavy theme we will be tackling, you may be saying, “I think I might just skip this lesson and go do some laundry!” Now granted, suffering may not be anyone’s favorite topic, but it is however, everyone’s reality. Therefore, I hope you will see this through to the end. Our aim of this lesson is to offer encouragement and help us remember that pure joy awaits us on the other side of suffering. But in the here and now, I want to learn how to rejoice, even in the hard times. Don’t you?

**The Cost of Discipleship**

***Luke 9:22-26 (NIV)***

***And he said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.” Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.***

Large crowds were flocking to Him. They wanted to be healed. They wanted to be feed. They wanted to see what miracles He would perform next. They thought the Messiah would come to set up His kingdom on earth and set them free from the tyranny of Rome. In other words, “to fix all their problems and make them healthy, wealthy and happy.” But, little did they know, He had an altogether different agenda. Holding nothing back, He told them all exactly *why* He came. He said, and I will paraphrase, “I came to bear your grief and carry your sorrows - I am going to suffer persecution, rejection and death.” Simply put – “I came to this earth to suffer and die. I am going to the cross.” Now, after He clarified where He was headed, He turned to them and basically said, “Who wants to go with me?” What would you have done if you were in that crowd? It’s a tuff question. On a number of occasions, He reiterated His mission statement but they were slow to get it. They didn’t want to get it; it was not what they wanted to hear. I can relate - how about you?

It would appear that Jesus was trying to dissuade people from following Him, doesn’t it? In truth, He was just letting them know the cost of discipleship. To be His disciple requires death - death to sin, self-rule and love for the world. This explains why the road is so *narrow* and only a *few* follow Him. By the way, the name Christian means a follower of Christ. And likewise, the Greek word for follow means to be in the same way with or to follow as a disciple. This life is one of promises yes; but also a life of persecutions. To the mind of a lost person, it defies commonsense to follow a leader whose mission is to die! The crowds chose comfort instead of Christ. (John 6:60-69; Galatians 2:20)

***Hebrews 2:10 (HCSB)***

***For it was fitting, in bringing many sons to glory, that He, for whom and through whom all things exist, should make the source of their salvation perfect through sufferings.***

In Webster’s Dictionary, one definition for the word *passion* is “The suffering of Christ on the cross.” Hence, the title of Mel Gibson’s move - The Passion. The move was quite realistic to be sure. However, there is no way anyone could adequately portray the magnitude of suffering Jesus endured. If you’ll remember, from earlier in our study, the word excruciating is derived from the Latin word crux or cross. Seven -hundred and fifty -years before Jesus came to earth, God showed the prophet Isaiah the real “passion of the Christ” and the excruciating pain of a Suffering Servant. Isaiah called Jesus “A Man of Sorrows.” (Isaiah 53:1-12) It bears noting that Isaiah himself was rejected and suffered a martyr’s death by being sawed in two. (Isaiah 6:1-13) But, no one, not Isaiah, the disciples, or anyone else has ever experienced sorrow and suffering more than the Lord Jesus. And lest we forget, as He walked this sin cursed earth, He was as much man, as He was God. Thus, Jesus has become our faithful and merciful High Priest because He is intimately acquainted with our sufferings. (Hebrews 2:10-17, 4:15-16)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Germany theologian, was a man who did not entertain any illusions in the least about what Jesus meant. He wrote, “When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.” Bonhoeffer was executed for his faith. As someone has fitly put it, “The “tongue” in his mouth, matched up with the “tongue” in his shoes.” In other words, his talk matched up with his walk. He practiced what he preached. He followed Christ and he too died a martyr’s death. (1 Corinthians 15:20; John 11:25)

So, how does Jesus teaching match up with what is so often peddled today as the gospel? Or what some have termed “easy believe -ism,” or prosperity gospels? This is just one example; take if you will, the book by Joel Osteen with the title: Your Best Life Now. With all due respect to Mr. Osteen, this gospel bears no resemblance what so ever to the gospel that Jesus and Paul preached. Quite the contrary! Furthermore, how do you explain this concept to our brothers and sisters all over the world who have lost their jobs, homes and family? What of those who are being starved, imprisoned, raped and murdered for their faith? Is this really their best life!? Absolutely not! There are two credible ministries that help the universal persecuted church - Voice of the Martyrs and Open Door Ministries. My family supports them both and when I read about my brothers and sister who are suffering, and begin to pray for them, it gets my eyes off of self and my problems seem trite. (This is Biblical, read Isaiah chapter 58.)

But just for the sake of argument, I will concur with Osteen on one point. For the lost person, here and now *is* their best life. In reality for them, living in this sin cursed world is truly all the heaven they will ever experience. As we have already discussed in a previous lesson, Satan give the best at first and saves the worst for last. For example, he tempts you to indulge your flesh in sexual sin with a person whom you are not married to. Sin is pleasurable for a moment, but that moment is as good as it’s going to get. The consequences are never momentary are they? The repercussions could be, sexually transmitted diseases, babies conceived that end up aborted or raised by a single mother. And this is not to mention, broken homes and years of shame, guilt and regret. These are the kind of things that Paul warned the saints about in his letter.

***Ephesians 5:3-13 (ESV)***

***But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore, do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible.***

Now on the other hand, for every follower of Christ our temporary residence in this world is all the hell we are ever going to know, because, not only has He saved the best for last, but our best life will last forever! Amen!? Our hope and future home is a place where there is no sin, no suffering, no death, no crying or pain. Furthermore, if we have been saved from this wicked and perverse generation, should we not become more and more uncomfortable with the darkness that is so prevalent in the here and now?

**DIGGING DEEPER Read the following passages and make note of any insights and personal applications.**

* Luke 9:18-22, 47-59, 16:9-13, 17:33, 18:28-30; 14:25-34; John 6:60-66; Matthew 8:19-20, 10:16-39, 16:13-26, 19:29; John 15:18-21, 16:1-4; 1 John 4:1-6; Mark 8:31-34, 10:24-31, 38-39; 1 Peter 2:24-25; 2 Corinthians 1:5-11, 5:21; Hebrew 12:1-13, 13:12-14; James 1:2-4; Revelation 21:1-9
* From the above list of passages, make a list of everything you find about the cost of being a true follower of Christ. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
  + Now answer this question: Did you find any place in these passages that exempt anyone who is part of the body of Christ from suffering? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
  + Did you find two different categories of followers? If not, what is inferred here? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
  + In John 16:33, Jesus makes two promises. What are they? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Read Jesus’ sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:1-12. Make a list of the kinds of people Jesus called “Blessed.” \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* The apostle Peter wrote 1st and 2nd Peter to the churches who were suffering horrific persecution. Read through 1 Peter chapters 1-5. From this text, what are some truths we can apply to our situations when we are suffering? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Read Hebrews 12:1-3 and answer the following questions. Who are the great crowed of witnesses? What was the joy set before Jesus that gave Him endurance in suffering? Other than the cross, what else did He endure so that we will not grow weary and lose heart?

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**Paul’s Doctrine on Suffering**

***Acts 14:21-22 (HCSB)***

[***After they had evangelized***](http://concordances.org/greek/2097.htm) [***that***](http://concordances.org/greek/1565.htm) [***town***](http://concordances.org/greek/4172.htm) [***and***](http://concordances.org/greek/2532.htm) [***made many***](http://concordances.org/greek/2425.htm) [***disciples***](http://concordances.org/greek/3100.htm)***,*** [***they returned***](http://concordances.org/greek/5290.htm) [***to***](http://concordances.org/greek/1519.htm) [***Lystra***](http://concordances.org/greek/3082.htm)***,*** [***to***](http://concordances.org/greek/1519.htm) [***Iconium***](http://concordances.org/greek/2430.htm)***,*** [***and***](http://concordances.org/greek/2532.htm) [***to***](http://concordances.org/greek/1519.htm) [***Antioch***](http://concordances.org/greek/490.htm)***,*** [***strengthening***](http://concordances.org/greek/1991.htm) [***the***](http://concordances.org/greek/3588.htm) [***disciples***](http://concordances.org/greek/3101.htm) [***by encouraging***](http://concordances.org/greek/3870.htm) [***them to continue***](http://concordances.org/greek/1696.htm) [***in the***](http://concordances.org/greek/3588.htm) [***faith***](http://concordances.org/greek/4102.htm) [***and***](http://concordances.org/greek/2532.htm) [***by telling them,***](http://concordances.org/greek/3754.htm) ***“***[***It is necessary***](http://concordances.org/greek/1163.htm) [***to pass***](http://concordances.org/greek/1525.htm) [***through***](http://concordances.org/greek/1223.htm) [***many***](http://concordances.org/greek/4183.htm) [***troubles***](http://concordances.org/greek/2347.htm) [***on our***](http://concordances.org/greek/2248.htm) [***way into***](http://concordances.org/greek/1519.htm) [***the***](http://concordances.org/greek/3588.htm) [***kingdom***](http://concordances.org/greek/932.htm) [***of God***](http://concordances.org/greek/2316.htm)***.”***

What exactly is doctrine? The Greek word is derived from the word *teach* and it is quite often prefaced with the word sound. In a nut shell, sound doctrine basically means: true, unpolluted, undiluted teaching. Because of Paul’s love and concern for the welfare of all the saints, he taught them sound doctrine - not what people wanted to hear, not his own opinion. He taught the whole truth and that included the doctrine of suffering. Seldom can we find this kind of sound teaching and the doctrine of suffering is curiously missing from the average Sunday morning message.

***Acts 9:15-16 (NASB)***

***But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for my name sake.***

Paul, on the other hand was quite the scholar on this subject. In fact, he majored in it. As you can see from the above passage, right off the bat, Jesus called Paul to a life of suffering for the sake of the gospel. And sure enough, Paul suffered many trials. For instance, during his tenure in Ephesus Paul wrote his letters to the saints in Corinth, and in them he gave a synopsis of what it had cost him thus far to follow the Lord. To simply say his life was hard, would be a colossal understatement!

***2 Corinthians 6:4-10 (ESV)***

***But as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.***

At the end of his three years with the saints at Ephesus, the Holy Spirt reminded Paul that imprisonment and afflictions were coming at every turn. Nevertheless, he could not be detoured, because he was resolved to finish the race. Looking forward to the joy to come when he reached the finish line surely must have helped him to keep his eyes on the prize. (Hebrew 12:1-2; Philippians 3:12-14)

***Acts 20:22-24 (ESV)***

***And now, compelled by the spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit Warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.***

It was approximately five or six years later, while he was on house arrest in Rome, Paul wrote his letter to the beloved saints in Ephesus as well the letter to the church at Philippi. (Don’t forget he was incarcerated.) But Paul, gladly accepted his lot; in fact, he rejoiced to “share in Christ’s suffering.” Instead of these things making him bitter, they made him more like Jesus. You see, Paul discovered a secret. With every trial, he came to know Jesus more and gained an even deeper intimacy with his Lord.

***Philippians 3:7-10 (ESV)***

***But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.***

Through a prophet named Agabus, the Lord showed Paul how his earthly journey was going to end and it wasn’t in a blaze of glory - at least not by man’s estimation. (Acts 21:11) As Paul drew near the finish line, his circumstances had digressed considerably. At this time, his spiritual son Timothy was the pastor of the church at Ephesus. Meanwhile, the evil barbaric emperor Nero had Paul, chained like an animal in a cold damp cell in Rome. Only Luke was with him at the end. It’s interesting, that as Paul was close to the end of his life, he wanted three things: his cloak, his parchments (his Bible) and lastly he wanted to see his dear son Timothy. Last words are always the most important. So what was on Paul’s mind? He wants Timothy to join him in suffering for the gospel. It is traditionally believed that Paul was beheaded by Nero around May or June of 68 A.D. and on June the ninth Nero committed suicide. Paul’s suffering came to an end; his killer’s eternal torment had just commenced.

Now presumably, after Paul’s departure from Ephesus, the individuals who made up the church took the Great Commission seriously. This is evident because the church was growing by leaps and bounds and that meant that people were being born again. New believers - all believers need to be taught sound doctrine. We need to understand this on the front end - it’s not going to be easy to follow Christ. But then again, we were never promised it would be. Nevertheless, our momentary trials in the here and now will come to an end; His life is infinitely better that anything this world has to offer. Please don’t miss this: The good news is, for those in Christ, our suffering will end! Hallelujah!

What’s the take away from observing Paul’s life? I suppose it all boils down to three things. One – life is hard. Two – the gospel must be preached regardless of the cost. And three – Jesus is the prize that awaits those who endure till the end. And so the question that begs to be answered is this: Is it really worth it? This is what Paul told the Corinthians, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor mind conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him.” (1 Corinthians 2:9) If we could ask Paul that question, I believe he would answer unequivocally - yes! Jesus was worth it all!

**WORD SEARCH: From Strong’s Concordance**

* Afflictions/Trouble or Tribulation: Strong’s #2346 in Greek is tibia-: *to crowd, afflict, suffer tribulation.* It comes from Strong’s #2347 in Greek – thlipsis: *Pressure, affliction, anguish, burden, persecution, tribulation, trouble, suffering, afflictions.*
* Suffer*:* Strong’s #3958 in Greek is pascho: - *to experience a sensation or impression (usually painful) feel, passion, suffer, vex.* (Luke 9:22, 17:25; 1 Corinthians 12:26)
* Suffer: Strong’s # 4841 in Greek is sumpascho: - *to experience pain jointly or of the same kind (specifically persecution; to “sympathize”) suffer with.* (Romans 8:17; 1 Corinthians 12:26)

**DIGGING DEEPER Read the following passages and make note of any insights and personal applications.**

* Acts 2:42, 9:15-16, 14:19-22, 19:23-41, 20:22-27; Acts 21:11; 1Timothy 1:3,10, 4:6,13, 6:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:10, 4:2-4; Titus 1:9; 2 Corinthians 4:8-11
* Read Philippians 2:20-22. How did Paul describe Timothy? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* After reading the following passages, state why Paul endured all this suffering. Ephesians 3:13; Romans 1:16-18; 2 Timothy 2:3-12 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* In light of the reality that everyone but Luke abandoned Paul, now read about Onesiphorus. Acts 19; 2 Timothy 1:15-18, 2 Timothy 4:19 What can we learn from Onesiphorus that we should emulate? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Look at the above Word Search and find the Greek word that means to sympathize or suffer with. (1 Corinthians 12:26) when was the last time you suffered with someone this way? Has anyone ever suffered with you? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Why is it so important to have close spiritual relationships in our life for times like these?

***2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)***

***Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.***

**Faith Tested by Fire**

***1 Peter 1:3-9 (NASB)***

***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious that gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ, and though you have not seen him, you love him, and though you do not see him now, you believe in him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.***

You know, it’s been said that we are either coming out of a storm, in one now or one’s just over the horizon. Life’s storms come in a variety of forms. They can manifest as illness, deaths, broken relationships, loss of jobs or income, rebellious children or even natural disasters. And when they hit, they will expose the kind of foundation our lives are built upon. Anything or anyone we trust in other than the Lord Jesus Christ will prove to be sinking sand, and every life built on sinking sand will ultimately collapse. Additionally, our lack of faith is amplified during these event.

Storms usually hit us unexpectedly and seem to come at the most inconvenient times. Have you noticed how they wreck all of our “well made plans” bringing life suddenly to a screeching halt? And sometimes, just when you think it can’t possibly get worse - it does? On some level, we have all experienced this. Still other events are so catastrophic, that they seem to split our lives in two. You might even characterize these kinds of traumas in terms of “before this or after that.”

In addition to a few of my own painful experiences, I have observed this phenomenon up close and personally in the lives of others. My dear friend Cathy is one of them. Two weeks before she lost her husband to cancer, she found out she had a brain aneurism, but the surgery would have to wait until she said good bye to her husband. And if all of this wasn’t bad enough, her husband was self - employed so she lost her income, her home and basically everything she owned. There are some very profound lessons that we could learned from her experiences. But I will let her tell her compelling story in just a moment.

And then there is a more recent example in the life of another sister in Christ. Her name is Keelee. Despite our fervent prayers for his healing, her husband, only 48 years old, suddenly died and went home to be with Jesus. She is still reeling from the shock and numb with pain and anger - one of the stages of grief. It’s hard to think or see clearly when your eyes are swollen from crying. And for a woman who is fairly new in the faith, this is a hard pill to swallow. Yet, there is another kind of death that is equally as difficult to take. When your husband, after more than a decade together, decides he wants a divorce. Such is the case for another sister whose also part of our disciple group. And when one of us is hurt - all of us hurt. That’s just the way it is when you form true spiritual relationships.

Little doubt, someone reading this can relate to these women. If so, then I assure you that this lesson offers some relevant and practical truths that are going to minister comfort and hope to you. Now on the other hand, if you are presently experiencing a sabbatical from the storms, sorrows and suffering of life, you may want to keep this lesson handy because you’re going to need it sooner or later.

**The Rude Awakening**

***Philippians 1:28-30 (NIV)***

***Without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved -and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.***

It’s confession time. Maybe it was naivety, but when I was a babe in Christ, I got the notion that this world should be like heaven or that being a Christian would somehow insulate me from suffering. Well, I did not get this idyllic doctrine from the Bible - that’s for sure. No one gets a pass from heartaches, pains, sufferings and sorrows.

Furthermore, I assumed that Jesus came into my life to make me happy; I did not know His ultimate goal for my life was not just happiness, but holiness. Yet, without being discipled, how was I supposed to know that I was appointed not only to believe on Jesus, but also to suffer with Him? (Romans 8:17) Needless to say, now I know better! However, experience, so they say, is the best teacher. And while my experiences with trials, troubles and suffering, don’t even come close to the Lord Jesus’ or Paul’ s, they are nonetheless personal and painful to me. (As I am sure yours are to you.)

It is easier to write a lesson on life’s storms, sorrows and suffering, when you are not smack-dab in the middle of one of these painful seasons. For this reason, it has been a real challenge to find a good time to write, what is in my measured opinion, a crucial doctrine in the life of a Christian.

Now, at this very moment, husband and I are having a reprieve from work and the cares of the world. We are at the beach, one of my favorite places on earth, and we just happen to be celebrating 30 years of marriage. (As previously stated, this is no milestone.) It is early in the morning, Art is asleep, and I’m outside on the patio of our rented condominium with my Bible open and coffee in hand. All alone with my Lord Jesus, it just doesn’t get much better than that! It is a rainy day and the usually calm glassy ocean is alive with white caps. In the near distance thunder follows an incredible display of lighting. Instead of slowly lapping on the shore, the waves are crashing in one right after the other obscuring the usual parade of dauphins that swim along the gulf coast. I am relatively confident that this storm will soon pass and the sun will come out, allowing me the joy of walking along the abandoned beach and talking to the Lord about whatever is on my mind at the moment. For now, all is calm and I am so far removed from some of the greatest storms and sorrows of my life that I can speak of them without being hurt all over again.

Sometimes it’s helpful to look back just long enough to learn the lessons from the past and to see the faithfulness of God. But it is notgood to live there. For when we camp-out in the past, our grief could become sinful self-centered focus and our hurts can become idols. The Lord gave me the following verses that have helped move me beyond grief and lifted my head to look up from the ashes and then I see Christ. When my gaze is fixed upon Him, it keeps me from sinking. It gives me hope for a brighter future. Besides that, my hope is not in the past; it’s before me. That hope is Jesus; He is the health of my countenance and the lifter of my head.

***Psalm 30:11 (NIV)***

***You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.***

**DIGGING DEEPER Read the following passages and make note of any insights and personal applications.**

* 1 Peter 1:3-16; Psalm 39:7, 42:5, 43:5; Roman 15:13; James 1:2, 2:4-12

***Isaiah 43:18-19***

***Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. Philippians 3:12-14***

***Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.***

As I share some personal examples, I wish to be as transparent as possible, while at the same time also be mindful of others. I apologize if I don’t give specifics. My goal, however, is to be real. I can’t present to you a picture perfect example of how to suffer. But, however, I can share with you a few coping mechanisms and hard won lessons I learned while suffering through some trials. You’ll be happy to know; I won’t be sharing them all! These are the “class rooms”, if you will, where I learned the doctrine of storms, sorrows and suffering.

The day started out like any other. I got up, made coffee, did a little house work, and sat down at my dining room table to begin to study the lesson I was to teach my Sunday school class the following Sunday. The picture, on the Sunday School book, was a man hanging upside down, and the name of the lesson was, “When life suddenly turns upside down”. But then, without warning, it hit me. The letters were moving on the page and so was the upside-down man. I struggled to focus. Then the next indication that something was not right was nausea. I stood up to walk to the bathroom, it was like I was on a rocking boat, and I clung to the wall to stay upright. I called Art at work and asked him to please come home to help me. When he got there, I could not even stand. We went straight to the doctor, who diagnosed me with vertigo. The medicine he gave me did not help and then came the high fever. To make a long story short, I ended up in the hospital for several days. After much testing, we found out it was an infection in the middle of my brain where the brain stem connects to the inner-ear. Thankfully within a month the infection was gone and I was back upright and life was normal, at least for the time being. Thankfully, this health crisis was short lived.

***Deuteronomy 33:27***

***“The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”***

When my children were little, and storms threatened, I would make them sleep down- stairs with me. If the storm was bad enough, we would grab these essentials: flashlights, pillows and Bible, then we would hunker down in the closet. A few years back we had a rash of tornados that left a path of destruction over several southern states. My husband was seven hours away from home when he called to ask for help to navigate through the tornadoes. Simultaneously, the news reporters were telling us, “Take cover NOW!” The sky had become as black as midnight, as a tornado was coming straight for our small community.

My sons, at the time, were eighteen and twenty. And would you believe - they would not get into the closet with me!? At this point, none of us knew how destructive this storm was, or how many lives were being lost. This “mother hen” was having a fit of fear and frustration. How dare my grown babies refuse to get under my “wings of protection” in the closet! You see, as a mom, not only do I not want to suffer, I want to keep my children from suffering. But in reality, it’s just one in the same because our hearts are so bound to them. I might add, as a recovering “control freak” - they have always though I over react. With phone in hand, I was telling Art about the tornado about to hit us, when I heard a terrifying sound on the other end of the line. A drunk driver hit my husband’s car, I could hear the sound of the impact and squealing tires. (My blood pressure goes up just remembering that night.) As you might imagine, I forgot all about the tornado and I think I stopped breathing until Art’s car came to a stop and I heard he was alright. Praise the Lord, he was not hurt. The tornado missed our house, and only the Lord knows if that wreck kept Art out of the path of a deadly tornado. We dodged these bullets.

So our family survived these storms, but then, only two months later, came the record breaking floods. When the waters overflowed the banks of the Mississippi River, the flood waters reached our small town just north of Memphis. Once again, I needed to hear from God, so I got out my Bible. When I am paralyzed with fear, so often I find my voice in the Psalms. There is hardly a human emotion that is not expressed there and they are packed full of powerful prayers to cry out to the Lord in every circumstance. The following are a few examples.

***Psalms 56:3 (HCSB)***

***When I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not fear. What can man do to me?***

***Psalms 29:1-11 (NASB)***

***Ascribe to the LORD, O sons of the mighty, Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to His name; worship the LORD in holy array. The voice of the LORD is upon the waters; The God of glory thunders, the lord is over many waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; Yes, the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.7 the voice of the LORD hews out flames of fire. The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; the lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the Lord makes the deer to calve and strips the forest bare; And in His temple everything says, “GLORY!” The LORD sat as KING at the flood: Yes, the LORD sits as KING forever. The LORD will give strength to His people; The LORD will bless His people with Peace.***

***Psalm* *46*:*1-7, 10-11***

***God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth should change and thought the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains quake at its swelling pride. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God the holy place where the most High dwells. God is in the mist of her, she will not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. The nations made uproar, the kingdoms tottered; He raised His voice, the earth melted. The LORD of Hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our stronghold. 10-11 “Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth.” The Lord of host is with us; The God of Jacob is our strong hold.”***

**From the Mountain Top into a Deep Pit**

*Footnotes:*[*1 Peter 2:4*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+2%3A4-7&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-30404) *Lit chosen; or elect*[*1 Peter 2:5*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+2%3A4-7&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-30405) *Or allow yourselves to be built up; or build yourselves up*[*1 Peter 2:6*](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+2%3A4-7&version=NASB;KJV#en-NASB-30406) *Or a scripture*Of all the stormy trials of my life, none can compare to the year 2001. The physical, relational, spiritual and emotional sufferings of that year were unprecedented. Looking back, now I can see the blessing that were birthed out of all this pain, and I can truthfully tell you that the blessings far surpassed any suffering I had to endure. “They who dive in the sea of affliction bring up rare pearls.”—C.H. Spurgeon. As this quote so beautifully puts it, all of my painful trials were, in reality, valuable life lessons … rare pearls indeed! Yet, admittedly, when you are caught in the vortex, struggling to regain your equilibrium, you can’t imagine how anything good could possibly come of it. With that said, I want to major on the good and minimalize the bad, and if possible, I’ll do my best to make these long stories short.

***Isaiah 45:3 (NASB)***

***I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden wealth of secret places, so that you may know that it is I, The Lord, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name.***

It all started towards the end of 2000. First was the beginning of my parents’ divorce and the inevitable drama that followed. Now all I want to say about that is this: It does not matter if you are 8 or 38 when your parents’ divorce, it’s very much like a death in the family. But in this case, wounded people are still walking around trying to function. If you have been there, then you know what I am talking about.

After the divorce proceedings began, to add insult to injury, I receiving a diagnoses of cervical cancer. Let me just say this, one of my coping mechanisms is to go into denial – impossible in this situation. One thing is for sure, when life is going good we tend to drift away from God and seeking Him is not a high priority. But all that changes when things like this happens. Thankfully, I had enough history with the Lord at that point to know that if I was going to survive, I had better cling tightly to God’s Word. And so, before I went “under the surgeon’s knife” - I got a little black book and wrote down a list of passages to meditate on and right up to the moment they put me under anesthesia. (One of these passages, quoted below, is Isaiah 43:1-5) These verses subdued my fears and fortified my faith.

Because God will not revoke a single promise He has made, we can bank on the fact that He will always keep His Word. My black book of verses has become my “go to bank” when I am fearful. Did you know that God has given us three hundred and sixty-five “fearnot” passages in the Bible? That is one for every day of the year! And most of the “fear nots” are followed by these words - “Because*,* *I am with you.*” Why is this so important to know? Because, when we are hurt and afraid is when we so often feel most alone.

***Isaiah 43:1-5 (NIV)***

***But now, this is what the Lord says--he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel:  
“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;  
I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead. Since you are precious, and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east, and gather you from the west.***

Now back to my story. When God answered my prayers and saved my husband, I was on the mountain top. I stood in my church and earnestly prayed Philippians 3:7-11. This prayer was a prelude to the worst year of my life. That was on Saturday; the next day Art and I were baptized together. But, little did I know we had another baptism to endure, and for both of us it was a baptism by fire. Just three days later, on a Monday morning, I went from the mountain top to plummet into the deepest darkest valley of my life.

In my *Daily Light Journal* by Anne Graham Lotz, on the passage for March 15; I found a vivid description of my soul. The day’s title was “Perfect through Suffering.” ***“My soul is exceedingly* sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with me.” “He went a little farther and fell on *His face, and prayed, saying” O MY Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood on the ground. The pains of death surrounded me, and the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow. Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone- to take pity, but there was none; and comforters, but I found none. Look on my right hand and see, for there is no one who acknowledges me; refuge has failed me; no one cares for my soul. He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.*** (Hebrews 2:10, Matthew26:38-39, Luke 22:44, Psalm 116:3, Psalm 69:20; Psalm 142:4, Isaiah 53:3) The question she asks is this: “How are you suffering today? How did God in Christ suffer in a similar way?” I had prayed to know him in his *sufferings* –I am now sure I did not really understand what I was asking of him just 3 days earlier. At the bottom of the journal, she says, “God understands –in the flesh-what it feels like to suffer physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.”

Even though my husband, and subsequently my father’s salvation is the eternal good that came out of it all, were it not for God’s abundant grace and mercy, I seriously doubt I would have made it through that year. And honestly, at my lowest point, I despaired of life and just begged the Lord to please take me home. I had had enough of this place and I wanted to be in heaven with Him! Suffice to say, this request was obviously not granted.

I will spare you the details of my suffering. But if you have suffered deep sorrow, and if you live long enough, you surly will, then you can relate. A few months into my very bad, horrible, year, I went to camp with our church youth group. When I got on the church van to leave, I was in tears. On the first day of camp, I wrote in my prayer journal, “*Where are you Lord? Have you forsaken me?”* I was alone in my pain because at that time, I did not know what it meant to have real spiritual relationships - and this, in spite of the fact that I was very active in church. No one else around knew the deep sorrow of my heart– but God knew. The last night of camp we were in an open air pavilion when a man walked up out of the darkness and asked our youth pastor, Ron, to pray for him and his son. His wife had abandoned them. Ron prayed for him and as he stepped out to leave, I felt drawn to him like a moth to a flame. As I approached him to speak, the youth gathered around him. I stood listening as he spoke to them. Then he stopped and locked eyes with mine and said to me: “You know what I am taking about don’t you?” I did not say a word to the man I just nodded my head. He began to speak as if the Lord Himself had walked up into the darkness to answer my question “Where are you?” Then he said these very words: “God wants you to know that when you are broken, the way you are broken now, he has never been closer to you”. I took off running to get as far away from everyone as I could because I wanted to open my mouth and let go of the pent up flood of emotions of my broken heart. As I ran I began to weep. Sometimes, what we really need is to get alone with Jesus and cry our eyes out. It was the Psalmist who wrote that the Lord has kept our tears in a bottle and recorded them on a scroll. (Psalm 56:8) When I read that, I was imagining how full my bottle must be!

You may question the ability of God to speak personally to us through others. But consider this, if God can speak through a donkey, then don’t you think He can speak through a broken man or broken woman? Now let’s test this story against God’s Word to see if it has any Biblical validity or if it is just my vain imagination. First off, Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice”. When we hear the Word of God, there is no doubt God speaking. To those who are crushed in spirit - *Psalms* *34*:*18*-*19* *The LORD is near to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. 19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all.* *He heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds.*

Surely your aware that the year 2001 was a very tragic year for the United States of America. And many lives were forever changed by the events of September 11. Yet, that horrible day seemed to be a blip on my Richter scale with all that was shaking in the world around me. When you are in the midst of your own storm is difficult to see beyond your own pain to others isn’t it? You sort of go into a survival mode. Virtually everything that gave me security was removed. I felt completely alone and as if I were standing on the edge of a cliff as the wind pushed me toward the edge. I was filled with anxiety. Even to the point of needing medication!

To be brutally honest, I have had bouts of depression throughout my life. Actually, depression runs in my family. This season of my life, however, was unparalleled to anything I had ever faced before. The Devil assaulted me with every lie in his arsenal. I knew them well. Such as, “You’re unlovable, and your life is useless. No one cares about you and you deserve everything that’s happened to you. Why don’t you just end it?” Please don’t miss this: If Satan can tempt Jesus - who is God - to kill Himself, don’t think that he won’t use the same tactic on you especially in your darkest moments. Why do you think there are so many suicides? “Mental pain,” said C.S. Lewis, in his book entitled The Problem with Pain, “is less dramatic than physical pain, but it is more common and also more hard to bear. The frequent attempt to conceal mental pain increases the burden: it is easier to say “My tooth is aching” than to say “My heart is broken.”

Here are a few tips for those who desire to help the hurting. When someone’s heart is shattered and their mind is numb with pain, quoting verses to them or offering pithy little sayings pose little consolation; especially if you have not walked in their shoes. Perhaps it would be best to be quiet and just listen. As I said, I was alone in my pain because no knew what I was going through, and the few who did, either stayed away or inflicted more grief with their words. But my lifelong friend Elaine, was with me at the camp and watched me suffer. When I finally swallowed my pride and told her my story, she did something for me that that no one else had ever done and really it’s hard to describe how it ministered to me. Would you like to know what it was? She wrapped her arms around my neck and she wept for me and with me. She did not even realize that she was *living* the Word of God.

* Do you think that “suffering in silence” is Biblical? Does it help or hurt? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Read Romans 12:15 and Galatians 6:2-10 and answer these questions: What are some way you can apply these passages in situations like I have just described?

What are some ways that others have ministered Grace towards you? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* Now it is your turn. Have you ever felt that you were being assaulted by Satan’s lies? If so, what were the circumstances? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

In all seriousness, when we are suffering we are prone to fall into depression. This may be a good time to share an excerpt from a lesson that is rather applicable here. It is entitled The Health of My Countenance and in this lesson are some very practical suggestions that may be of help in this area. (You can find this on our website: strandofpearls.org.) The following quote is from a devotional by John Piper. (solidjoys.desiringgod.org)

**Six Ways Jesus Fought Depression**

***Matthew 26:36-39 (HCSB)***

[***Then***](http://concordances.org/greek/5119.htm) [***Jesus***](http://concordances.org/greek/2424.htm) [***came***](http://concordances.org/greek/2064.htm) [***with***](http://concordances.org/greek/3326.htm) [***them***](http://concordances.org/greek/846.htm) [***to***](http://concordances.org/greek/1519.htm) [***a place***](http://concordances.org/greek/5564.htm) [***called***](http://concordances.org/greek/3004.htm) [***Gethsemane***](http://concordances.org/greek/1068.htm)***,***  [***and***](http://concordances.org/greek/2532.htm) [***He told***](http://concordances.org/greek/3004.htm) [***the***](http://concordances.org/greek/3588.htm) [***disciples***](http://concordances.org/greek/3101.htm)***,*** [***“Sit***](http://concordances.org/greek/2523.htm) [***here***](http://concordances.org/greek/847.htm) [***while***](http://concordances.org/greek/2193.htm) [***I go***](http://concordances.org/greek/565.htm) [***over there***](http://concordances.org/greek/1563.htm) [***and pray***](http://concordances.org/greek/4336.htm)***.”*** [***Taking along***](http://concordances.org/greek/3880.htm) [***Peter***](http://concordances.org/greek/4074.htm) [***and***](http://concordances.org/greek/2532.htm) [***the***](http://concordances.org/greek/3588.htm) [***two***](http://concordances.org/greek/1417.htm) [***sons***](http://concordances.org/greek/5207.htm) [***of Zebedee***](http://concordances.org/greek/2199.htm)***,*** [***He began***](http://concordances.org/greek/756.htm) [***to be sorrowful***](http://concordances.org/greek/3076.htm) [***and***](http://concordances.org/greek/2532.htm) [***deeply distressed***](http://concordances.org/greek/85.htm)***.*** [***Then***](http://concordances.org/greek/5119.htm) [***He said***](http://concordances.org/greek/3004.htm) [***to them***](http://concordances.org/greek/846.htm)***,*** [***“My***](http://concordances.org/greek/3450.htm) [***soul***](http://concordances.org/greek/5590.htm) [***is***](http://concordances.org/greek/2076.htm) [***swallowed up in sorrow***](http://concordances.org/greek/4036.htm)[***— to the point***](http://concordances.org/greek/2193.htm) [***of death***](http://concordances.org/greek/2288.htm)***.***  [***Remain***](http://concordances.org/greek/3306.htm) [***here***](http://concordances.org/greek/5602.htm) [***and***](http://concordances.org/greek/2532.htm) [***stay awake***](http://concordances.org/greek/1127.htm) [***with***](http://concordances.org/greek/3326.htm) [***Me***](http://concordances.org/greek/1473.htm)***.”*** [***Going a little***](http://concordances.org/greek/3397.htm) [***farther***](http://concordances.org/greek/4281.htm)***,***  [***He fell***](http://concordances.org/greek/4098.htm) [***facedown***](http://concordances.org/greek/1909.htm) [***and***](http://concordances.org/greek/2532.htm) [***prayed***](http://concordances.org/greek/4336.htm)***,*** [***“My***](http://concordances.org/greek/3450.htm) [***Father***](http://concordances.org/greek/3962.htm)***!*** [***If***](http://concordances.org/greek/1487.htm) [***it is***](http://concordances.org/greek/2076.htm) [***possible***](http://concordances.org/greek/1415.htm)***,*** [***let this***](http://concordances.org/greek/5124.htm) [***cup***](http://concordances.org/greek/4221.htm) [***pass***](http://concordances.org/greek/3928.htm) [***from***](http://concordances.org/greek/575.htm) [***Me***](http://concordances.org/greek/1473.htm)***.*** [***Yet***](http://concordances.org/greek/4133.htm) [***not***](http://concordances.org/greek/3756.htm) [***as***](http://concordances.org/greek/5613.htm) [***I***](http://concordances.org/greek/1473.htm) [***will***](http://concordances.org/greek/2309.htm)***,*** [***but***](http://concordances.org/greek/235.htm) [***as***](http://concordances.org/greek/5613.htm) [***You***](http://concordances.org/greek/4771.htm) ***will.”***

“There were several tactics in Jesus’ strategic battle against despondency. 1. He chose some close friends to be with him. “Taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee...” (Matthew 26:37). 2. He opened his soul to them. He said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death…” (v. 38). 3. He asked for their intercession and partnership in the battle. “Remain here, and watch with me” (v. 38). 4. He poured out his heart to his Father in prayer. “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me” (v. 39). 5. He rested his soul in the sovereign wisdom of God. “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” (v. 39) 6. He fixed his eye on the glorious future grace that awaited him on the other side of the cross. “For the joy that was set before him [he] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).”

***Psalm 37:39 (NIV)***

***The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord; he is their stronghold in time of trouble.***

You may ask, “So where was God when I was in pain? He was right there with me. I just couldn’t see Him for the darkness. As Jacob said, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.” Genesis 28:16 (NASB) Do you suppose that tears open our eyes to see God as He truly is? At the end of Job’s suffering, he proclaimed, “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.” (Job 42:5)

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make notes of any insights and personal applications.**

* 2 Timothy 3:12; Romans 8:17-22; Philippians 1:29, 3:10, 4:4-6; 1 Peter 3:10-18, 4:13, 5:7;

2 Corinthians 1:5, 4:7-11, 6:4-10,7:5, 11:23-28; Colossians 1:24; Luke 9:21-26;

1 Thessalonians 3:2-4; Acts 9:15-16; 14:19-22, 16:22, 19:11-41, 20:17-24, 22:38; Psalms 23:4, 56:13, 138:7-8; Daniel 3:8-30, 6:10-24; Job 42:1-6

**Why Suffering?**

I don’t fully understand the ways of the Lord, nor can I give you the answer to why God allowed your suffering, or mine. But I humbly submit what we can know Biblically. For the child of God, suffering always has purpose. One such purpose is the refining influence it has on our life. It cures us of being enamored with the world.

Another reason for suffering is that God can use your situation to help others who are hurting. Take, Joni Earekson Tada for example. In her booklet, Where’s The Miracle? (page 22-25), she wrote of the benefits of suffering. As one who has lived in a wheel chair as a quadriplegic since 1967, and traveled the world ministering to hurting people, she is acutely aware of suffering. She writes, “God’s purpose in redeeming us is not to make our lives happy and healthy. God’s purpose in redeeming us is to make us more like Jesus. And often suffering is God’s choicest tool to do just that. “

***2 Corinthians 1:3-10 (ESV)***

***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. For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort. For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.***

In her book, “In the Secret Place of the Most High” Cynthia Heald describes the soul cleansing work of the Lord’s discipline and correction – two of the purposes of suffering. But before we go there, I would like to add this disclaimer: When the Lord allows suffering into the lives of His children, we must not be hasty, like the friends of Job, to jump to the conclusion that our sorrows are the discipline of the Lord. Sometimes they are. And yes, God disciplines those who He loves. (Hebrew 12:1-11) So, this quote is not a perfect illustration. However, the insight found in it about the end result of suffering, is spot-on. Cynthia Heald quotes C. Jerdan and he said, “Sorrow accepted as Divine chastisement refines and sanctifies the soul. It stirs its tenderest emotions, and touches its richest cords. It draws the heart towards God himself, as its only Rest and Strength and Joy. The most beautiful human faces are not those which show merely the most regular features and the purest complexion; they are those saintly faces which have been beautified by chastisement- “made perfect through sufferings.”

Nevertheless, we still grapple with the age old question of why God allows pain and suffering, especially in the lives of His Children. This, I believe, is the very heart of the matter. Am I going to believe what the Bible says about Jesus? Does Jesus Christ have all power in heaven and on earth? Has the Father really placed all things under His feet? These are legitimate questions, and in my opinion, it is not necessarily wrong to ask them. Still, at the end of the day, we have a decision to make. Are we going to believe God? And if the answer is yes, then we must believe that He rules over the affairs, even the details, of our lives. And this includes our pains and suffering. Furthermore, when the world around us is on the brink of collapse, if we are going to survive with our mind and faith in tact, must be at peace with the One who commands the wind and the waves and they obey Him. Jesus *is* our peace.

* Read the following passages and then answer these questions. Is suffering always a sign that God is angry at you or that you are being punished for sin?

Luke 13:1-5; John 9:1-4; Acts 7:51-60; Job 1:1-22, 4:1-9; 8:20; Psalms 34:15-19, 36:6-7, 37:25 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* Read the following passage and answer this question: What is one good thing that can come from afflictions? Psalms 119:71 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Job didnot understand why he was suffering the loss of everything. His wife and three friends did not help; they added to his pain with words. What can we learn from their poor examples when we see disaster and tragedy strike some ones lives? What How should we respond that will help them and not hurt them? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**A Note to Those Who Are Suffering**

***Nahum 1:7***

***“The LORD is good, a stronghold in a day of distress; He cares for those who trust in Him.”***

As you read this, maybe this hits close to home. Are you sitting among the ashes of what was your life, wondering if God exists and if he loves you, then why would He let this happen? Perhaps some fiery trial has consumed your hopes and dreams and you realize that you don’t have a leg of faith upon which you could stand. What are we to do when all that makes us feel safe and secure is removed from us? You are not the first to ask these questions. Their echoed in a Psalm of David where he asks, “When the foundations are destroyed what can the righteous do.” (Psalms 11:3) And then there is Job. See if his words ring true with you; I know they did for me.

***Job 10:1-9 (NIV)***

***“I loathe my very life; therefore, I will give free rein to my complaint and speak out in the bitterness of my soul.2I say to God: Do not declare me guilty, but tell me what charges you have against me.3Does it please you to oppress me, to spurn the work of your hands, while you smile on the plans of the wicked? 4Do you have eyes of flesh?  Do you see as a mortal sees? 5Are your days like those of a mortal or your years like those of a strong man, 6that you must search out my faults and probe after my sin—though you know that I am not guilty and that no one can rescue me from your hand? 8“Your hands shaped me and made me. Will you now turn and destroy me? 9Remember that you molded me like clay. Will you now turn me to dust again?***

My friend, while I may be a stranger to you as that man was to me, I want to be the voice of truth that you need to hear today. I only wish I could look into your tear-filled eyes and tell you. God does not stand aloof, untouched, or unmoved when we suffer. (Matthew 9:35-38; John 11:1-44) I know how the enemy is trying to isolate you from God and others; telling you that no one cares. But the truth is, God was there with you when it happened and He has felt your pain. And while you might not know Him and His matchless love, He knows you intimately. (Psalms 139:1-16) Even now, in your brokenness and sorrow the Lord Jesus is saying, “I AM HERE… I LOVE YOU… I SUFFERED AND DIED TO SAVE YOU… I AM ALIVE… I OFFER YOU LIFE, HOPE AND A FUTURE!” Although your circumstances may not change, in Christ, you will find real love, joy, peace, that can sustain you, come what may. And then, one glorious day, when this night of weeping is over - eclipsed in everlasting light, the nail-scared hands of Jesus will wipe away every tear! In the meantime, and to end on a positive note, God has given you some great and precious promises to cling to. They have been deposited into your account and whenever you should need them you can make a withdrawal.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. Have you ever seen a righteous person suffer unjustly? How did they respond? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 3:3-4. What did Paul tell the saints in Thessalonica about suffering? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Jesus said, “The rain falls on the just and the unjust.” (Matthew 5:45) What did He mean by this? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Chances are, is it raining in your life even now. If so, will you describe your situation? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Can you describe a time when you went into a survival mode and the reason for this? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. When we have been hurt, we have a greater propensity to protect ourselves. Is it possible to protect ourselves and deny ourselves at the same time? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. Have you personally experienced abandonment at a time of your greatest need? If so, did you run to God or from God?
8. From everything we have learned, what are some reasons for suffering?

## Think On These Things

Did you learn something new? Did the Lord speak personally to you through this chapter? Did you find a new promise to claim as your own? Did you find a command to obey, a sin to confess or avoid? Is there a passage you could turn into a prayer?

## Memory Verses

***Romans 8:15-18 (HCSB)***

***For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out Abba, Father! The Spirit Himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God’s children, and if children, also heirs-heirs with and co-heirs with Christ- seeing that we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed in us.***