


*From Suffering
to Hope*

Theory & Practice

3. *Why Suffering & Evil?*

Spring 2020



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*Class
Facilitators*

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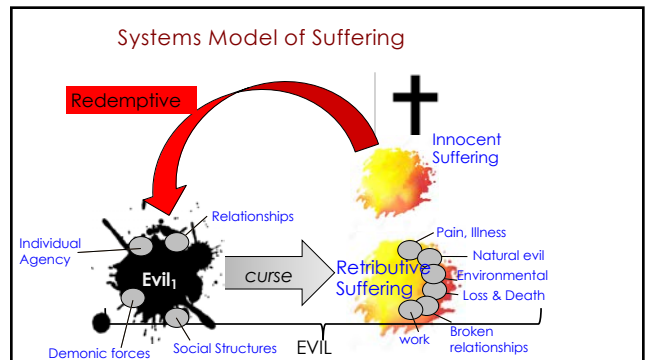
Review

- Evil comes from a broken covenantal relationship with God
- Suffering caused by covenantal curse of God.

Luke 13:1-5

"There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.""

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Retributive vs. Innocent Suffering

Retributive

- Not on the scale deserved (Luke 13:1-5)
- The covenant curse is God's withdrawal
 - o God gives us what we desire (Rom 1)
 - o God's withdrawal yields suffering
- Stigma: sign of God's judgment (Gal 3:13)

Innocent

- Appearance of retribution
- Redemptive power

Galatians 6:17 From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear the marks (*stigmata* | *στίγματα* | *acc pi neut*) of Jesus on my body.

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God's Identification with the Low



Matthew 25: 31-40

Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' ⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

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The Sacramental Nature of Illness

- Luke 10: 33-40; Matthew 25:35-36
- Caring for Christ the sufferer
- Example: Benedictine hospitality
- Sacramental nature of illness
 - If we are to receive the sick as if receiving Christ
 - How should the patient see their own illness?
- Wrong!! "Suffering is an intense disintegration of **personhood**, experienced in loss of a perceived good, resulting from evil."

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Redemptive Suffering

"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,"
 (Colossians 1:24-25)

"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." (2 Corinthians 1:3-5)

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Reversal of Orders

- Upside-down spiritual economy: last are first
- Suffering is a sign of God's presence + blessing
- Can we differentiate retributive vs. innocent suffering?
 - Human finitude = mis-understanding
 - Test / Judge yourself (Gal 6:4; 1 Cor 11:28)
 - Warranted to judge actions (1 Cor 5:12; 6:3) but *seldom* the cause for suffering
 - 1 Cor 11:30: "That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died"
 - Spiritual presumption of innocence

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Five Biblical Reasons for Suffering

Reason / Goal*	Scripture	Concept
1. Repent from sin	Deut 28:30; Prov 3:11-12; Jonah; Ps 90; 2 Pt 3:8-9	God's call to repentance from sin
2. Witness of God's Glory	John 9:1-4; Ephesians 3:7-13; Job	Display of God's power and love; Witness to spiritual powers
3. Union with Christ	1 Pt 4:12-13; Rom 8:17-18	Redemptive suffering of X embodied and extended in our experiences
4. Spiritual Growth ("training")	Heb12:3-15; 2 Cor 4:17-18; Rev 3:19	Purification from sin and training into deeper Christ-likeness
Humility	2 Cor 12:7-10	Personal exaltation risks pride
Patience	James 1:2-4	Product of trial
Hope	Rom 5:2-5	Product of trial
Joy	1 Pt 1:6-9; James 1:4	Product of trial
5. Mystery	Job 38-41	Not for us to know all God's reasons

* Not mutually exclusive categories

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Worldview Comparison

Perspective	Suffering Emphasis	Christian 'rebalance'
Buddhism	Detachment (letting go)	Lament
Hinduism	Karma (retribution)	Innocent suffering
Secularism	Action for better world	Hope for each sufferer
Islam	Patience/test/resolve	Joy
Judaism	Biblical complexity but...	Suffering Messiah Christ

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Why Evil?

Reason #1: Free-Will Defense (speculative)

- God desires humans made in God's image to love God out of our own volition without compulsion
- A decision to love must allow its inverse, the human decision to rebel against God
- Evil exists by God's permission but not God's creation (James 1:13-14)
- Goodness chosen in human freedom greater than what evil jeopardizes

James 1:13-14 English Standard Version (ESV)

¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

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Why Evil?

Reason #2: God's Sovereign Good Overturns Evil (Scriptural)

- Signs of God's sovereign rule over evil & suffering
 - Joseph (Gen 50:19-20)
 - Ruth (Ruth 4:13ff.)
 - Satan & Job (Job 1-2)
 - Jesus (Acts 2:23)
 - Paul (Philippians 1:12-14)
 - Romans 8:28: All things work together (συνεργῶ) for good
 - Philippians 1:12-14 English Standard Version (ESV)

Spec

- The Advance of the Gospel
- I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served God? As for to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole world, I am not counting myself in the least to be imperiling my life, and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.
- The drama between beginning and end unfolded in mystery

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Why Evil?

Reason #3: The Necessity of Testing (speculative)

- Who is being tested in Job 1,9?
- Fear = holy awe and wonder
 - Job: Is Job's love not motivated by the gifts of God?
 - God: Job 1:8-11 English Standard Version (ESV) fits?

¶ And the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" ¶ Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason?" ¶ Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. ¶ But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face."

- Untested love lacks certainty for motive
- Tested love satisfies human & angelic finite knowledge about self (God already knows!)
- Without testing we may still doubt our own motives to love God (explaining the test in the Eden?)

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Why Evil?

Reason #4: Mysterious Wisdom of God (Scriptural)

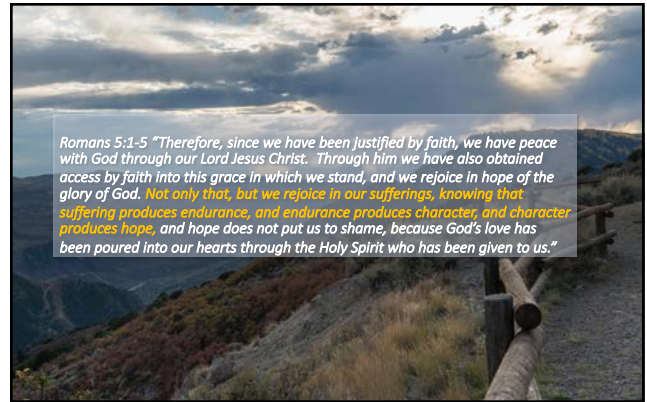
- Job 38-42
 - God always has good reasons for suffering
 - Equally good reasons to not reveal it
 - Human knowledge is greatly limited
 - Reprimand not for asking questions but charging God with fault
 - Will you trust in and know the counsel of the Lord?

38 Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted."
 ¶ "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?"
 ¶ "Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?"
 ¶ "Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."
 ¶ "I will question you, and you make it known to me."

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**A Journey Together from Suffering to Hope:
Four Scripturally-grounded Spiritual Steps**

Week 1: Suffering

- Biblical response to suffering (and its contrast)
- Spiritual practice in suffering

Week 2: Perseverance

- Scriptural portrait of perseverance (and its contrast)
- Spiritual practices integral to building perseverance

Week 3: Character

- Scriptural portrait of character (and its contrast)
- Scriptural practices in the development of Christ-centered character

Week 4: Hope

- Scriptural portrait of hope (and its contrast)
- Scriptural practices cultivating hope (and joy)

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What is character?

- Character (generally): who we are holistically – thoughts, intentions, actions, morals, etc.
- Biblical character = “tested” as by fire that refines us and illuminates who we truly are. Building character is refining and illuminating who we are truly created to be – when fully in Christ, and He fully in us.
- This reality of our oneness with Him is present and also not yet: 1 John 3:2 “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we will see him as he is.”
- Within this simultaneous ‘present’ and ‘not yet’: We are being renewed into our true character, through Christ’s presence with us (individually and collectively) – His Word, His Holy Spirit, His people, and His suffering (bearing the evil of this world).

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How does suffering → perseverance → character?


1. Suffering and persevering in suffering are **educational**, refining our characters
2. Suffering and persevering in suffering are **sacramental**; we commune in a unique way with Jesus in suffering → intimacy with him in suffering illuminates and shapes us into our true characters

Philippians 3:7-10, “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.”

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The Bird Prophecy...


- 2002 graduated med school. Prior to starting internship, went to S. California beach house with family
- Christian for a few years, baptized, married Michael 2001 (PSC)
- I was nervous to start internship, now only a week away, praying about whether this was what God wanted
- Worried about work within medicine, the impact on Michael & his calling as a pastor, any future family. Wondered whether it was truly MY calling, or just a way I found identity in the world and a source of idolatry (which it was)
- I was with a friend down on the beach, Michael in the water, and we saw splashing in the water – a seagull struggling. We ran to it, and it was nearly drowning, so I picked it up only to find it attached to a dead seagull by fishing line. Brought it on the beach, held it in a towel. My friend got scissors so we could free the bird.
- The bird was terrified, yet completely still in my lap. It was exhausted and could not struggle. The scissors arrived and we spent 30 min delicately removing fishing wire entwined all over the seagull's body. The wire was taut against the bird's flesh, cutting into its skin. The bird let us turn him/her over, twist him around, roll him to one side then the next. We had to get very close just to find the clear fishing wire next to the skin and make sure we didn't cut the bird instead of the wire. Finally we freed the bird of the final fishing wire, and of the dead bird it was attached to, and set him/her free.



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The Bird Prophecy...

- Later that day, it became clear to me that God was answering my fervent prayers about what I should do through this experience with the bird. He was showing me that I was like that seagull, helplessly intertwined with my dead bird. But running from medicine would not free me. Only He can do that. More than that, I knew that this is what he intended to do through my entering a career in medicine.
- I understood then that in going forward with a career in medicine, I would experience struggle and suffering, and yet, he would rescue me, only once I was drowning and exhausted. Then place me on his lap in intimacy, and by his power, patience, and loving hand slowly release me.
- This is what suffering does, as we suffer, it causes us to become utterly undone, helpless, injured, hurting, nearly drowning. And yet IN that helplessness, IN that utter inability to save ourselves, we become surrendered. And then, with us abiding in his lap, He can carefully untangle the knots and extract what is dead, evil within and without us. Through these times of utter surrender, intimately communing in His lap, His love and tender presence enables us to increasingly be who He has created us to be, more of who we truly are.



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Suffering

More difficult path: Seeing and entrusting suffering to God


Practices: Lament, worship (others to be discussed)

Easier path: Denying suffering, not entrust God with suffering (relying on self, running from God)

Practices: Avoidance, withdrawal...

Fall → evil in us & evil around us →

Christ Follower → Moment to moment choice



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Perseverance

More difficult path: To grow deeper roots in our relationship with God and in relationships with one another

Practices: Root growth! Eph. 6:13-18

Easier path: To withdraw from God and from one another

Practices: TO GIVE IN, TO FAIL TO STAND

Fall → evil in us & evil around us →

Christ Follower → Moment to moment choice



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Character

More difficult path: To humbly abide in Jesus through testing, which is the (1) refining and (2) the illumination of our true characters through communion with Him.

Practices: Abiding in Jesus, John 15:1-12

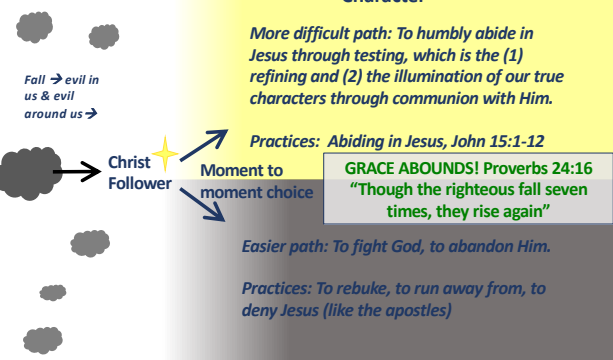
GRACE ABOUND! Proverbs 24:16
"Though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again"

Easier path: To fight God, to abandon Him.

Practices: To rebuke, to run away from, to deny Jesus (like the apostles)

Fall → evil in us & evil around us →


Christ Follower → Moment to moment choice



11

Spiritual Practices for the Week: Abiding in Jesus Yields the Refining and Illumination of our True Characters, John 15:1-12

- Monday – John 15:1-3 Jesus is the true vine, God is the gardener who tends and prunes it (pruning → suffering)
 - Jesus is the true vine. What are the untrue vines that we (our church, our culture) have remained in, and how has that led to being fruitless?
 - What does it mean that not only branches that don't bear fruit, but even ones that DO will be pruned? Where do you see that in your circumstances?
 - What branches within our church body, and within our culture, are being pruned in this challenging season?
 - Meditate on Jesus as the true vine. Pray for the pruning process we as a church and culture are going through, that God would help us to receive it and remain in Him.
- Tuesday – John 15:4 Abiding in Jesus in suffering
 - Reflect on yourself – all of who you are – where have you remained in Jesus. What has "remained" looked like? What fruit have been borne?
 - Where do you see that have not remained in Jesus and/or have attempted to bear fruit apart from Him?
 - Meditate on remaining/abiding. Ask God for strength to abide, especially in suffering or challenges. Ask God to show you specifically how, e.g., in your daily practices, to be abiding in Jesus through this time.



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Spiritual Practices for the Week: Abiding in Jesus Yields the Refining and Illumination of our True Characters, John 15:1-12

1. Wednesday – John 15:5 Spiritual fruit through abiding, particularly in suffering

- We need to remain in Jesus to bear much fruit. How do you see how remaining in Jesus, particularly in suffering, is or will in the future be producing spiritual fruit? Consider what spiritual fruit have come thus far what future fruit might be.
- Pray into your circumstances and for the strength to abide, even in suffering. Pray for spiritual fruit to come through your life, and even through suffering.

2. Thursday – John 15:6-8 The Lord commands us to wish for and ask for fruit from our lives

- Our Lord asks us to, as we abide in Jesus and have his word abide in us, to ask for whatever we wish. As you abide in Jesus, and as you reflect on His Word, how does this shape "whatever you wish"?
- How have your wishes been transformed by Jesus and by His Word, perhaps especially in your suffering?
- Pray that your wishes, your hopes, your dreams would be transformed by Jesus to become more and more the wishes of Jesus' heart. Pray for your heart's wishes that they would come to fruition in the name of Jesus, and according to His perfect will.



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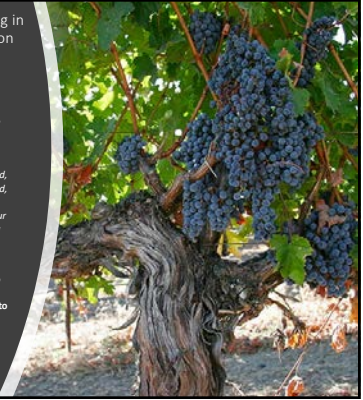
Spiritual Practices for the Week: Abiding in Jesus yields the Refining and Illumination of our True Characters, John 15:1-12

1. Friday – John 15:9-10 Experiencing Jesus' intimacy and love in abiding in suffering

- Abiding in Jesus means being in His love. How have you experienced the love of Jesus even as you have suffered? Even if hard to see, consider ways Jesus is present with and near to you in this difficult time.
- Abiding in love means keeping God's commandments – which is most important? Mark 12:29-31: Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" Consider how you can love God with all of who you are, and love others, even in suffering.

2. Saturday – John 15:11-12 Abiding in Jesus' love, we are to love one another, willing to suffer on behalf of others

- Meditate on God's amazing love, pray for greater love to pour into your heart to love Jesus and others
- Jesus calls us to love each other, as He loves us. He calls us to lay ourselves down for others. Consider how you might lay your own needs down to love someone today. Pray for your heart to overflow with love as you lay yourself down for them.



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