



KICKSTARTER

WEEK 4: *Leaning into Pain and Suffering*

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This series is intended to help jump into a relationship with God by engaging in some 'next level' spiritual disciplines. We hope to give a clear roadmap from which you can begin to live into each discipline.

THE TENSION OF PAIN AND SUFFERING

1 Peter 4: 12-13 (NIV) ¹² Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

What a strange invitation, to participate in suffering and to be happy over it. I'm not sure many of us would RSVP to that Evite, but on a regular basis many of us willingly subject ourselves to pain and suffering. Did you ever take a spin class or have you done a workout until you could barely walk? Maybe you have listened to your Uncle's big fish story for the 100th time and pretend it's the first time he's told it? Have you given birth to children? Even if we try to avoid suffering at all costs, we see it on the news every day - all day. It's sometimes unavoidable, unfair, and incomprehensible. It's not just global; it's up-close and personal. It impacts our friends, our family, our loved ones, and us. If there is a universal experience common to all of humanity, suffering and pain is probably it. We go to great lengths to avoid it and run from it; yet as Christians we are invited to "rejoice". It's a hard teaching - a painful teaching; and when you are in the thick of crisis, it just doesn't seem to make sense. For believers and non-believers alike, this is a stumbling block. Why would an all-good God create people to send to hell? Wouldn't a good God take away all pain and suffering?

DISCUSS/JOURNAL:

What do you think about the invitation in **1 Peter 4:13**? Is it a call to martyrdom or repression of your feelings? Is it a "fake it 'til you believe it" exercise or a call to passive acceptance? Discuss.

Recount and discuss your own struggles with pain, suffering. Did you reconcile it to a belief in a loving God? How did you do this? Do you think God wants you to suffer?

Is all pain and suffering "bad"? Can it have a purpose? Discuss a few examples.

HE DID

1 Peter 2:19 (ESV) ¹⁹ For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.

1 Peter 2:19 helps us unlock some of the mystery of a loving God in the presence of suffering. Something happens; a grace comes in the midst of sorrow when our minds contemplate what we know about God. The Old Testament gives us a glimpse into the characteristics of God. We know that in the beginning God was a community in perfect unity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We know that He created the universe, Adam and Eve, and all the angels. This points us to an incredibly creative God who was friends with man and took care of man by creating a perfect garden to provide for all his needs. God is a cultural architect who determined that the values of Heaven would be humility, not pride. Hence, Satan was cast out of Heaven to Earth; Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden. The story could have ended right there, but we have a narrative after narrative of God throughout the Old Testament pursuing people, blessing them, saving them, showing great mercy.

- Adam and Eve are sent out of Eden so they did not have to live in shame and guilt forever.
- Though every thought of man was evil from birth, God spares Noah and gives humanity another chance.
- God blesses all nations and future generations through Abraham.
- God hears the pleas of the Israelites, sees their suffering, and saves them through Moses.
- The sacrificial system is given to people as an object lesson ⁽¹⁾ on the seriousness of sin and its consequences.
- Through the prophet Isaiah (and others), God promises a final sacrifice for all mankind and to restore his Kingdom to end all pain and suffering.

DISCUSS/JOURNAL:

What characteristics of God do you see? What is His nature? Explain.

What characteristics of humanity do you see? What is its nature? Explain.

What characteristics of relationship between God and humanity do you notice? Explain.

How can you be “mindful of God”, fill your mind with God? Discuss.

HE IS

Mark 1:15 (ESV) ¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

When Jesus came to be the final sacrifice and usher in the Kingdom of God, it became D-Day for all of mankind... game on! In WWII, the Allies knew that D-Day guaranteed V-Day - the final victory. It was just a matter of time. Yes, there were more battles to fight but it was the “clean-up” period, so to speak. And this is where we live now – the in-between, the “already here and not yet” kingdom. The kingdom of darkness (consisting of Satan and his followers/demons) on Earth is defeated, but not ended; the Kingdom of God breaks in and advances to V-Day (read **Colossians 1: 13-14**).

Inaugurated eschatology ⁽²⁾ is the fancy theological term for this viewpoint, that the end times have begun with the coming of Jesus and that His kingdom is here, but not fully realized. There is also a viewpoint that the Kingdom has fully come and if you have enough faith then all of God's promises will come true for you. If they don't then it's an indication that you are still in sin. Then there's the opinion that nothing will happen until Jesus returns and that the power of the Holy Spirit is not available to us.

Fancy theology aside, what we can observe from history is that Jesus came, healed the sick, and raised the dead (including Himself). His 12 disciples did what He did and spread the Good News to all the nations. The early Church lived in close community and grew despite persecution; today there are over 4.5 billion Christians globally and increasing in severely persecuted regions. It looks like the Kingdom has come and that we can trust God in his sovereignty if everything doesn't play out the way we think it should in our time.

DISCUSS/JOURNAL:

Read **Luke 4: 17-21** and **Matthew 10:7-8**. Describe, explain what Jesus thinks/did about pain and suffering? What did he want us to do about pain and suffering, what is our role in his solution?

"Mindful" of Jesus, what viewpoint of the 3 mentioned above on eschatology seems to make the most sense to you? Which one seems the healthiest, the most Biblical? Which one seems to be at play today?

HE WILL

Revelations 21:3-5 (ESV) ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." ⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

Matthew 25:41 (ESV) ⁴¹ "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'

We see in **Matthew 25:41** that hell was originally intended for the devil and his angels. Their goal on Earth is to "steal, kill, and destroy" (read **John 10:10**). The apostle Paul in **Ephesians 6:12** shares his insight on whom our real enemies are. God does not desire for us to suffer but for all to be saved (read **2 Peter 3:9**). In the waiting, in the pain and suffering, we also know that we have hope. We know that our God hears us, has suffered with us, and has suffered for us. This is one of the reasons we celebrate communion. Communion can kick start our faith as we lean into what Jesus has done for us in the here and now and what is ultimately in store for us for eternity.

DISCUSS/JOURNAL:

If our real enemy is trying to use pain and suffering to take us away from God, how can we leaning into kick start our relationship with God?

Is there an area of pain and suffering that you have been avoiding or given up on? What do you want God to do for you? What could you do to release it to God in trust of his good nature?

ACTIVATION

We get to be a part of the solution for today, to be the hands and feet of Jesus. AWESOME! Get in the game. It's a team sport so invite some friends. In whatever you do, know that you make a difference - the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead lives inside you.

"Do Something" by Matthew West <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tF2N7ICbFOU>

ENCOURAGEMENT

While we don't have all the answers and can't know for certain why we suffer right now, why God has not taken this from us yet, we know from Jesus' example that God redeems suffering, it is his nature. While that may not help in the moment, we continually have hope:

*"Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." **Lamentations 3:22-23.***

Because we receive new grace and mercy every day, we don't tackle today's problems with yesterday's grace.

PROVIDE US WITH FEEDBACK

We are excited about the potential these studies have to help each of us process the weekend message at a deeper level, and to see God change our lives in significant ways. In order to make these guides as helpful as possible, we would love to hear which elements are most helpful, which are least helpful, as well as any other comments, questions or suggestions. Feel free to send your feedback directly to Jon Holmberg at jonholmberg@gmail.com.

COME PLAY...

Developing and writing these discussion guides and devotionals are a labor of love. God is faithful and what we give to Him is always made into something way better than ourselves alone. We invite you to explore and deepen your connection with God by joining our writing team.

If you think God would like to communicate to you/through you in this manner, please contact Jon at jonholmberg@gmail.com. If you would like God to communicate through you/to you by writing, send Jon a note too.

REFERENCES

1. Object lesson https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Object_lesson
2. Inaugurated eschatology https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inaugurated_eschatology