



Every human will experience suffering in this life. Experiencing pain is simply unavoidable in a fallen world. The true struggle for most is making sense of our suffering. Many who are seeking to understand will often look for the “cause and effect” of their suffering. They will look at past actions and try to discern “why” God is doing or allowing this. Though natural consequences, such as getting a speeding ticket for... speeding, will always be a part of life, God beautifully works above, beyond, and through our suffering. He has an amazing way of bringing “beauty from ashes” in our human experience, if we will only have eyes to see and hearts that want to honor Him.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. [DISCUSSION #1: Something Rich & Beneficial](#)
2. [DISCUSSION #2: Presence and Restoration](#)
3. [DISCUSSION #3: Beautiful Mystery](#)
4. [DISCUSSION #4: Ultimate Deliverance](#)
5. [DISCUSSION #5: There Will Be A Day](#)

DISCUSSION #1: SOMETHING RICH AND BENEFICIAL

In this discussion we will explore how God often allows suffering to produce something rich and beneficial to us.

MY STORY | Starting Place

In what ways have the trials you’ve experienced, and survived, increased your resilience? Give an example.

DIGGING DEEPER | Practical Biblical Application

We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Romans 5:3-5

The five stages of grief are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Which of these five stages is Paul describing here in Romans 5? How do these stages possibly work together with what Paul is describing in Romans 5?

React to the following quote: “Joy is so much more than happiness. Joy is a sense of well-being in Christ that stays steady no matter what emotion, or circumstance, we’re experiencing.”

What does that “sense of well-being” look like when our suffering produces sadness? Anger? Fear? Guilt?

GROWING TOGETHER | Spiritual Friendship

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:2-4

How have you become more like Christ because of the difficulties you've experienced? How would you be different today if you had not experienced those significant trials?

What are you lacking in your spiritual formation that might only be provided through suffering?

How does the absence of deep relationships affect someone in suffering? How do supportive friends in hard seasons help in the grieving process? How might Christian friends especially support you?

MOVING OUTWARD | Faith in Action

Make a list of the top ten significant losses you've experienced in your life. Do any of those remain unresolved for you? How are you different today because of those trials? Talk about what you discover with someone you trust.

DISCUSSION #2: PRESENCE & RESTORATION

This discussion unpacks the promise that God offers His presence and restoration through our suffering.

MY STORY | Starting Place

Describe a time of intense suffering from which you have either been healed or restored.

Was it easier to sense God's presence & involvement during the trial, or only after it was over?

Explain whichever of the two you experienced (during or after)—and why you think your ability to sense God's presence was impacted by what had happened.

DIGGING DEEPER | Practical Biblical Application

*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.* Isaiah 43:2

Is Isaiah being literal or metaphorical here (when it comes to water and fire)? Why would it matter?

These situations represent real dangers that are being entered into, either willingly or involuntarily.

In reading Isaiah 43, is it helpful to know that the trail we are on leads to (and through) hardship? Why?

Why does the promise of healing and restoration make a trial easier to endure?

GROWING TOGETHER | Spiritual Friendship

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. 1 Peter 5:10

What if "this too shall pass?" turns out to not be true? What are we to make of God's promises to heal and restore if that happens?

Is it a cop-out to say "Well, we will all be healed and delivered in the age to come?" Why or why not?

MOVING OUTWARD | Faith in Action

Find someone who is suffering and offer to grieve with them—without any offers or attempts to fix their problem (which is probably beyond your capacity anyway). How will your presence make a difference in this person's life? How might their sense of God's presence be enhanced by your company?

DISCUSSION #3: BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY

This discussion explores how there is a beautiful mystery in our suffering, because the mind and heart of man cannot fathom the richness that awaits us on the other side.

MY STORY | Starting Place

How are you a deeper, more empathetic, more Christlike person today because of the painful challenges you've experienced?

What would you be like today if those trials had never happened?

DIGGING DEEPER | Practical Biblical Application

For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:17-18

In light of all the agonizing and painful trials Paul experienced, how can he possibly describe his pain as light & momentary?

Where does he get off telling us to see our own suffering in the same way?

How would your perception of suffering change if this life was all there was—if you had no eternal perspective upon which to hope?

GROWING TOGETHER | Spiritual Friendship

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. Romans 8:18

How will the “glory” Paul described be revealed in us—both in this age and the age to come?

What types of suffering will enhance and amplify the glory that is to be revealed in us?

What types of suffering will have absolutely no eternal value to us? (Zero. Nothing. Nada.)

MOVING OUTWARD | Faith in Action

List out your current painful challenges and take a guess at what you'll be like, or what you'll enjoy, if those trials are resolved in a way that's honoring to God and healthy for you. In other words, what could healing look like for you?

DISCUSSION #4: ULTIMATE DELIVERANCE

In this discussion we will see how, in our suffering, the victory of Jesus works in and within us toward our ultimate deliverance.

MY STORY | Starting Place

Describe a time when the healing that you or someone else experienced was clearly supernatural—because there was no possible natural reason for what happened.

DIGGING DEEPER | Practical Biblical Application

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world. John 16:33

Does experiencing the peace of God assume the absence of emotions like anger, sadness, fear, or guilt? Why or why not?

What is Jesus crystal-clear about in regard to our expectations when it comes to experiencing suffering and tribulation?

Why does knowing that Jesus wins in the end (and many times before the end), help us to endure painful circumstances?

GROWING TOGETHER | Spiritual Friendship

*He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.* Isaiah 53:3-5

This Messianic passage describes the ministry of God's chosen one before He appeared on the scene 700 years later.

In what sense does this passage from Isaiah demonstrate how Jesus overcame the world (in John 16:33 above)?

What was His strategy?

In what ways, beyond physical pain, was Jesus wounded on the cross?

What does it mean to be healed by the wounds of Christ on the cross? What types of wounds are included in this

supernatural work? Does it include physical, emotional, mental, spiritual wounds? Explain.

Will that healing sometimes happen in this lifetime, and always in the age to come? Explain.

MOVING OUTWARD | Faith in Action

Consider the wounds you are currently nursing. What would healing look like for you? What role could you play in that healing? What part of the healing process is completely out of your hands and utterly dependent upon God?

DISCUSSION #5: THERE WILL BE A DAY

In this discussion we will see that a day is coming when, through the victory of Jesus, that pain, suffering, and death will not be a reality anymore.

MY STORY | Starting Place

If it were possible, for one hour, to completely eradicate the presence of evil in your life (including the shadow in your own soul), what would that look and/or feel like?

DIGGING DEEPER | Practical Biblical Application

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. Revelation 21:4

Why does the presence of evil have to be completely eradicated from the universe for there to be no more suffering?

What is God's plan to get us to that place? How can he do that while not violating anyone's free will?

GROWING TOGETHER | Spiritual Friendship

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been. Revelation 6:9-11

This scene in Revelation happens before the final judgment, when all forms of evil will be forever eradicated from the universe. These saints who stand before God are glorified, and so what they say cannot be sinful.

And they're asking God to go after those who took their lives.

What was God's response to these distressed souls in heaven? How can this be reconciled with Revelation 21:4 (above)? What might the white robes He gave to them represent?

How can we apply God's promise to them while we are suffering the consequences of evil on this side of heaven?

MOVING OUTWARD | Faith in Action

Listen to the song called "There Will Be A Day" by Jeremy Camp, and describe the ways that "day" will finally bring that deep sense of emotional equilibrium most of us desire in this chaotic world.