

The purpose of this weekly discussion guide is merely to be a framework that you use in your small group, family, or personal devotion to help you apply the sermon to your life, live it out more effectively and incorporate the truths in 'real life.' Feel free to use it as you wish, in its entirety or in bits and pieces.....for the glory of God.

We do not get out of this life without suffering. Yet, in Christ, we are called to suffer. The reason we are challenged to Choose To Bless in our suffering is that our focus should not be in our suffering, but what the suffering produces in us, that is, if we choose to be trained by it (Hebrews 12:11). The Job series taught by Pastor Mark should create a turning of our eyes off the suffering and onto a glorious God who has glorious purposes for His people and who can and does use the most horrendous circumstances for good, for righteousness and for a marvelous platform for His glory. So, that, suffering turns eyes to Him and not to us as they watch us suffer.

Romans 5:3-5 - "More than that, 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."

"Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning" (Ps. 30:5). That's the verse behind chapter 8, written by Dustin Shramek. We can wait for joy that comes in the morning because of faith in our good and sovereign God. But we must not forget that the night is often long and dark, and the weeping is often uncontrollable. Through an examination of Psalm 88 – the one psalm that ends without a note of hope – Shramek argues that the Bible presupposes the post-fall normality of deep pain. Minimizing the pain of suffering is a failure to love others and a failure to honor God. Only after we sense the severity of suffering can we truly understand why Paul contrasts "slight momentary affliction" with the "weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Cor. 4:17) Justin Taylor, in the Introduction to Suffering and the Sovereignty of God, John Piper/ Justin Taylor

1. **Right out of the gate, the sermon confronted us with the fact that we most often focus on the why of suffering and trials instead of the WHO. What are the end results of that trap and what does that mentality say about your God right from the get-go? If you focus on figuring out WHY, what are you saying about God and if your life spirals into being consumed with that question, where will that lead in the end?**

"Satan enslaves people in two ways. One way is with the misery and suffering that comes from making us think there is no good God worth trusting. The other way is with

pleasure and prosperity, making us think we have all we need so that God is irrelevant.”
John Piper, Suffering and the Sovereignty of God.

2. Compare in your life a time when you were unthankful for the suffering God has brought into your life. What did your life look like? Then, can you think of a time when you were thankful for God bringing suffering into your life? What did your life look like then? What are the differences between the two? Where do you tend to camp out now: Thankful or unthankful. Does James 1:2-4 tell us to be thankful for the circumstances because they are hard or because of what they produce in us? Discuss that in your group.
3. Why is suffering a direct application of the message of Colossians. What could it possibly have to do with the pre-eminence and sovereignty of Christ? Translate what you have learned from Colossians to the current trials in your life.

“You know what my conclusion is? I don’t think God merely tolerated my dad’s death. I don’t think he turned away when it was happening. I think he planned it. Otherwise I don’t think it would have happened. This was a hard realization for me to come to. I once said that while speaking at a church, and a man came up afterwards and said ‘don’t you ever say that again about my God.’ Afterwards I found these verses in Acts 2:22-23. Then I thought: Don’t anybody tell me that this can’t be. If God could plan the death of his own righteous son, why couldn’t he plan the death of my dad? Steve Saint, Suffering and the Sovereignty of God

4. Suffering is first and foremost a statement of where you are with you and your God. It becomes an interaction not with you and death, you and a spouse, a child, a job, finances or other circumstances. At Ground Zero, it absolutely brings to the surface what you believe about your Maker and what you choose to live out because of that belief. The circumstances are mere puppets in God’s hands just so God can interact with us on a more personal level. They are His means of grabbing our heads and hearts and turning them to Him. So, with that in mind, what do you long for in the current trials you are in? What is the goal of your suffering? Escape? Termination of the suffering? Or, do you long for a depth in Christ that you do not have and you cannot have unless you go through the gauntlet of suffering? Talk through that.....talk through it with God, on your own perhaps, pouring out before Him.

“So my prayer for this book is that God would stand forth and reassert his Creator-rights in our lives, and show us his crucified and risen son who has all authority in heaven and on earth, and waken in us th strongest fiath in the supremacy of Christ, and the deepest comforts in suffering, and the sweetest fellowship with Jesus that we have ever known.
John Piper, Suffering and the Sovereignty of God.

5. What kind of friend do you want to be to others in the midst of their suffering. How do you want to bear their burdens? How do you want to be more of an Elihu than an Eliphaz? What do you want to mark your ministry in their suffering?

*I feel a deep sense of sympathy for your loved one who is suffering so much. And I can certainly appreciate the concern of those God-given friends who are trying to help her bear her cross. Tell her not to lose faith in God. The grace He gives will be in direct proportion to the amount of suffering she must bear. No one else can do this except the Creator who made us and knows how to renew our strength by His grace. None of us are wise enough to properly apportion grace and suffering. We cannot see the extent of our future trials, nor the vast supplies of which God is storing up in us so that we can meet them. And because we cannot see those future trials, we are tempted to become discouraged and despondent in our present situations. We see our trials rolling in toward us like great, overpowering, ocean waves. Our hearts fail us with fear at the prospect of drowning. We do not see that we stand within the point at which God, with a steady finger, has drawn the boundary line. Beyond that line the waves cannot pass. God often allows us to be tested as one is tested by a stormy sea. God stirs up the sea, and makes its great billows seem to threaten destruction. But He is always at hand to say, "Thus far shalt thou go and no farther." "God is faithful. Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able to bear it" (I Cor. 10:13). Fenelon, *The Seeking Heart**

6. **Whatever your situation, whatever your trial, however great your present suffering, how will you this day Choose To Bless, in the midst of not asking WHY, but WHO? How will you move closer to Jesus, instead of moving closer to the exit sign of the suffering? How will you fix your eyes on Jesus, Who right now is perfecting the faith He authored in you (Hebrews 12:1,2, Phil 1:6)?**

"I'm sure you have felt that way at some point. Maybe you feel that way every morning. But Psalm 10:17 says, 'O Lord, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear.'" 'O God', I often pray in the morning, 'God, I cannot do this. I cannot do this thing called quadriplegia. I have no resources for this. I have no strength for this—but you do. You've got resources. You've got strength. I can't do quadriplegia, but I can do all things through you as You strengthen me (Phil. 4:13). I have no smile for this woman who's going to walk into my bedroom in a moment. She could be having coffee with another friend, but she's chosen to come here to help me get up. O God, please may I borrow your smile?" Joni Eareckson Tada, Suffering and the Sovereignty of God