

# The Man in the Mirror

Solving the 24 Problems Men Face

## Avoiding Suffering

Unedited Transcript

*1 Peter 4:12-13, 2 Corinthians 12:8-10, Philippians 1:29, 2 Corinthians 4:7-17, 1 Peter 5:10*

Good morning, men! We're going to talk about the chapter out of the book this morning on avoiding suffering. Before we get to that, though, I want us to do a shout out. We have a shout out today to the Men's Fellowship Group of Four Oaks Community Church in Tallahassee, FL. 10 men who have been meeting in members' homes for 2 years on Sundays at 1:00pm using the Video Bible Study. Led by Rudy Overholser and Mike Heller is the Area Director for the Tallahassee, FL region.

We also have a number of Area Directors in town for some preliminary training. Their first training session, their first week of training. I'd just like the Area Directors, if you would, just to stand wherever you are. Hey, I've got an idea here. Why don't you just shout out the state that you're from? Georgia. Indiana. Arkansas. Montana. Tennessee. Alabama. California.

So you can see we have men from all over the country that are entering into this great adventure of helping churches figure out how to disciple men more effectively. For the men's fellowship group and the Area Directors, I wonder if you would join me in giving them a rousing Man in the Mirror welcome this morning? One, two, three, hoorah! Welcome guys and guys online. We're all very glad that you're here with us!

If you would, turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter, chapter 4, verse 12. 1 Peter, chapter 4, verse 12. The series, the Man in the Mirror. Today, the topic, avoiding suffering. What I want to do is I just want to set this up a little bit with you.

Our little dog died, twelve years, eight months old. We put her to sleep. She had been suffering greatly and so I asked my wife, after an appropriate amount of time had lapsed, what she thought about getting another dog. She said, "Oh no. It'll be at least a year before we'll get another dog. Seven weeks later we ended up getting a little dog, about ten days ago. Her name is Missy. She's a little bichon, which is a little poofy, fru-fru, curly haired lap dog for middle aged women. Don't tell anybody because it's a little dog, it's not a guy dog, but I love this dog. I just love this little dog. The dog is a rescue dog. It was not in an abusive home. It was in a neglectful home. And it's only a ten month old puppy but the breeder rescued the dog. It's just been a joy to be part of this little dog's life so far.

Why is it that every dog always wants to sniff at whatever is exactly one foot beyond the end of the leash? What's up with that? The dog has this desire to explore, the desire to be independent, which we talked about last week. So if the little dog, Missy, wants to go and sniff at something that is safe then I am likely to go ahead and extend the leash that extra foot and then, of course, it wants to go another foot. But when Missy wants to go to a place that's not safe, when Missy wants to go into the middle of

the street, doesn't make a difference how much she wants to play in the street, I'm not going to let that happen because that little dog is under my protection.

That's the perspective I want to over arch this message on suffering with, is that you have this desire to be independent and you are pressing the limits and sometimes God is going to let you have a little more leash. But a lot of times he is absolutely not going to let you have more leash because if you were to get that, you're going to do something that's going to potentially just destroy your life. The ultimate boundary beyond which God is not going to let you extend yourself is what? It's eternal life. If you're saved, God may even allow you to make an error in judgement because of free will, which by the way, free will sucks, but he may allow you to use your free will to make a mistake that costs you your life. You might run into an embankment or over a cliff or something. Who knows? You may actually lose your life but God will never, ever allow you to go beyond the limits of eternal life. That's where the end of the leash is. That's kind of a back drop, a perspective for this.

Let's take a look at some of the scriptures. 1 Peter, chapter 4, verse 12. The first thing I want us to see is just that in terms of avoiding suffering, you can't do it. It's not going to happen. It's unavoidable. It's inevitable. It's predicted. It's part of what it means to be a human being, as was said well in the video at the start of the Bible Study this morning; and by the way, the man in the black t-shirt, Jim, is the man who not long after making the video died at the age of 40 in a motorcycle accident.

Chapter 4, verse 12. Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering as though something strange were happening to you but rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. So there's no surprise in suffering. It's unavoidable. It's inevitable.

In the chapter in the book, I've got a couple little epigrams at the beginning of each chapter. One's a quote and one's a scripture. The scripture in this chapter, 1 Thessalonians, chapter 3, verses 2 and 3. We sent Timothy to strengthen and encourage you in your faith so that no one would be unsettled by these trials (watch this), for you know quite well that we are destined for them. It's part of the makeup of what it means to be a creature. A creature.

Acts 14, verse 22. It is through many hardships that we must enter the kingdom of God. Jesus. Matthew 16:33. In this world you will have trouble but take heart, of course, I have overcome the world.

## **The Problem of Suffering**

The questions that are presented by suffering, the classic argument against the existence of God by the atheists, because of the problem of suffering, is, does He know what's going on? Because if He does know what's going on, it doesn't look like He cares. But if He does know and He does care then can He do anything about it? And when you look around, when you see all the suffering in the world, it doesn't look like He has the power to do anything about it. So, does He know? Is He omniscient? Does He care? Is He benevolent and loving? Can He do anything about it? Is He omnipotent? This is the question, the amalgamation of questions about suffering.

## **7 Reasons We Suffer**

- **An Innocent Mistake**
- **An Error in Judgment**
- **An Integrity Problem**

- **The Environment Changes**
- **Evil Happens**
- **God Disciplines**
- **God Tests**

In the book are these seven reasons that we suffer and I've decided I'm not going to do a deep dive on any of these. Just sort of overview them, you can look them up. We suffer when we make a mistake of an innocent nature. So you invested in an oil deal. Okay. Oil prices are at 50% of what they were a few years ago so maybe it was just an innocent mistake that you made.

Maybe it was an error in judgement. Maybe you cosigned a note for somebody. According to the FTC, 50% of all people who cosign notes pay the note. Maybe it's an integrity problem. Maybe you lied about the product feature and the buyer found out about it. He went to your boss. You lost your job. Or maybe the environment changes. Maybe a tax reform act or some law changes the way that your taxes are structured. Maybe the health care law or something like this has put your business at danger. Evil happens. Yeah there are bad people out there and so maybe you're in the insurance business. You have sold a number of policies over a number of years to somebody. They're great policies but an unscrupulous person comes along and persuades your client to liquidate those policies and replace them with inferior ones. Why? So that that person can make money. Evil happens.

And then God disciplines, so maybe it's something where you have gone astray. Maybe you sinned and so Hebrews chapter 12. God disciplines those he loves. So these are just some of the reasons that we suffer. Yeah, we suffer when we sin but there are lots of other reasons we suffer, too. We suffer when other people sin. Lots of times we're caught up in other people's sin and it can be devastating.

God is not the author of any evil. He is not the author of it. It is either because of sin or because of the radical effects of the fall. Because of sin the earth fell and because the earth fell the entire creation has fallen. Now watch this, the fall is an offense to your human reason. It is. It is patently, it just seems unfair that you and I would suffer because somebody else sinned a long, long time ago. That doesn't seem fair, does it? The fall is an offense to human reason. But watch this. Once accepted it makes perfect sense of the human condition. Everything makes sense once you accept the fall.

Because of what Francis Schaeffer called the domino effect of the fall, we're living in a broken world. Now hear this: God uses the fall. God uses the futility of the fall, the frustration, the meaninglessness, the brokenness, the groan that comes from the fall. He uses this to make us. To shape us. To mold us. To protect us.

Romans 8:20. The whole creation has been subjected to futility not by its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, who's that? God. Why? So that the whole creation including us might be liberated from our bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of light. You see how God takes the fall and actually uses that to bring us to the place where we want to be anyway? The Big Idea for it this day is this, oh I guess there's one more God tests. One more.

The Big Idea: **Suffering compels us to seek the God success makes us think we don't need.** When you and I are successful and doing well (and we looked at some of this in this previous message on the desire to be independent), when we are doing well, we are lulled into false thinking. We're pressing against the end of the leash. We want more. We want more. And God uses suffering to get our attention. As I just

said in Romans, 8:20. He uses suffering to compel us to seek the God that success makes us think we don't need.

### **What We Gain by Suffering We Gain No Other Way**

Let's talk about what we can gain by suffering that we can't gain any other way. Turn to 2 Corinthians, chapter 12. If you're a new person to the Bible, you can look on with the person next to you. You can ask them to help you find it. Give them an elbow and say hey, help me find that. Or you can look it up in the table of contents or just listen. But it is good to look at the words for your own self, just from a learning theory perspective.

Verse 8. While you're turning there, let me read to you from James, chapter 1, verse 2 and following. The teaching of James is this: Consider it pure joy my brothers whenever you face many kinds of trials because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. So one of the things that we gain from suffering that we don't gain any other way is spiritual maturity. There is a maturity of soul, mind, and spirit that can be gained only by suffering, and no other way.

And then we see in the text on 2 Corinthians, 12, this is where Paul talks about receiving a thorn in his flesh. We don't know what it is. Three times he prays that this thorn would be removed. Verse 8. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me but He said to me (you'll notice if you have a red letter Bible, that Jesus is the one who responds to his prayers), My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in your weakness.

Paul was suffering. Some people think it might have been an eye problem. That's where I tend to, it's just a guess but, sometimes he said that he wrote with big letters. Maybe he needed glasses or something like that. Maybe he couldn't see very well. Who knows? But anyway, the point is that he suffered. Well he didn't just suffer for that. He suffered in so many ways. Shipwrecks, beatings, all these things that he went through. Almost drowning. Stoned. Left for dead. All kinds of sufferings. But he prayed to God that God would remove his suffering and Jesus said to him, you don't need to have your suffering removed. My grace is sufficient for you for my power, my power is made perfect in your weakness. In other words when you're weak then I am stronger than I am when you are strong.

Then Paul says, therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that Christ's power may rest on me. When you're suffering, enter into it. You don't have to love suffering but you should embrace it. You should never go looking for suffering. Only a fool would do that but when it comes to you, embrace it.

I had a man and a woman who went through a terrible marital crisis. He was emotionally and psychologically abusive to her but she decided to soldier through that and God ended up delivering them and turned him around. Humbled his heart. He came to Christ in a powerful way and she said to her father, she said, Dad it was the toughest thing that I ever had to go through. But I wouldn't trade it for anything. The lesson that I learned from that situation is that when you're going through a hard time, it's a good idea to not try to shorten the duration of the hard time. To artificially shorten it. But rather it's more valuable to learn everything that God has for you during that time of suffering, during that hard time, learn everything you can that God has for you. But if you cut it short, you may find you just have to go that route again someday. Embrace the suffering. That is why for Christ's sake, I delight in

weaknesses, hardships, insults, persecutions, difficulties. For when I am weak, Paul writes, then I am strong.

How many of you like nice things? Raise your hands if you like nice things. How many of you don't care about nice things? Raise your hands. A few of you. There are liars in every group. No, I get it. Some people like my wife, she could just care less about nice things. I love nice things. I am a materialist. How many of you who like nice things thinks they're also materialists? Yeah. Well, I've got you beat because I am a double materialist. You see, I not only want nice things so that you'll be impressed, I want nice things for me because I like them, too!

Now God in his grace has delivered me from caring about whether you are impressed by whether or not you like my nice things. And that's been a blessing but I still like nice things. In fact, I have an appreciation for excellence and quality that is right up there in the top 1% of all people, I'm pretty sure! I was never a crass materialist anyway. I was always a very refined materialist.

I like the nicer things in life but materialism is an addiction. An addiction is just another word for idol. An idol is anything of which we say Jesus Christ is not enough for me. I also need X. Or I also need Y in order to be happy. I still love nice things but I don't actually need any of that to be happy. My joy is not found in my circumstances.

I can be suffering and feel the suffering, the sorrow but simultaneously still be walking in the joy of the Lord. Now that's, to me, that's like wow, I never even thought that was possible. That's like way advanced to me, spiritual maturity. That's maturity that I can't even see myself but I think it must be there. Some of you know what I'm talking about and I hope all of you will.

Here's the thing. Almost all of the spiritual progress that's taken place in my life has happened after God refined by fire something that I could not or would not take care of on my own. He had to yank on the leash because I was going to run into the road and be destroyed. You know what I'm talking about. The Big Idea today is this: Suffering, it compels us to seek the God that success makes us think we don't need.

### **When the Pain Seems Too Much To Bear**

Finally, what do we do when the pain just seems like it's too much, too much to go on? Turn with me to 2 Corinthians, chapter 4, verse 7. The Bible even says it's a privilege to suffer. Did you know that? Philippians 1:29, now, it is being granted unto you not only the privilege of trusting Christ Jesus as Lord but also of suffering for Him. 1 Peter, chapter 1, verse 21 says something similar.

So you and I, the way that we have been made by God, we can handle almost anything if we believe that there's a purpose for it. If you think that there is a valid reason for your suffering then you can handle it. It's when you feel like you have this meaningless suffering that it becomes too much. But the point that I hope you'll take away this morning, one of them, is that there is no meaningless suffering. There's a purpose to all of our suffering. Even when we don't see what it is. The mature thing to do when we don't see it is to understand that God is yanking on our leash because he's a loving father. He is great. He is good.

My daughter-in-law found out this week she has cancer. You know what she said to me? She said, I have a peace about it because I believe in the sovereignty of God. I believe that God is good. I believe that

God is great. He's great and He's good. Now she didn't say this but I heard what she meant, even if I die. You see? God is great and God is good even if He kills you. You see? God is great and God is good and God loves you even if He lets you die. Because He will never let you go beyond the boundary of his eternal life. Death, is no big deal. Your life is only an inch anyway. Death is no big deal, death is a release. So let's take a look at the text.

Chapter 4, verse 7. But we have this treasure, our lives. We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all surpassing power is from God and not from us. There's a reason. There's a purpose. Jump over to verse 16. You can read the rest of it in between on your own. Therefore, we do not lose heart. When the pain seems too much to bear, understand that you carry this treasure in a clay jar. Therefore we do not lose heart though outwardly we are wasting away yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day for our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

Chapter 5, verse 2. We have these tents in which we live, meanwhile we groan longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked for while we are in this tent we groan. We groan and are burdened. So go ahead and groan. It hurts. Don't deny that it hurts. You've heard of sweet sorrow. You can be in the midst of great sorrow and still find your confidence, even your joy in the Lord.

When the pain seems too much to bear, just go ahead and groan. But here's the thing. Don't grumble. Groan but don't grumble. 1 Peter, chapter 5, verse 10. It's God's promise. We'd already read at the top of the message from 1 Peter, 5. Don't be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering as though something strange is happening to you. Then in verse 10, and the God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, that's the boundary beyond which you will never be able to pull the leash, after you have suffered a little while (because life is an inch) will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness. To Him be the power for ever and ever, amen.

Brothers, this suffering that we have, it compels us to seek the God that success makes us think we don't need. The topic of the day is avoiding suffering and the point is don't try to avoid it. Just embrace it and understand that a great and a good God is taking care of you no matter what you're going through. No matter how much it hurts. I'm looking around the room and I know there's so much suffering that you men are going through. 50 to 80% of you right now are struggling with something that's so overwhelming, humanly speaking, that it feels like you'll never get by it. I understand that.

But God loves you very much and he's taking care of you. You are under his protection. You get that? No matter what you're going through, you are under God's protection. No matter what you've been through, you are under God's protection. No matter what you're going to go through, you are under God's protection. Let's pray!

### **Closing Prayer**

Heavenly father, our dearest father, thank you so much for the teaching that you give us to help us to understand suffering. Lord, suffering is just one of your tools. A lot of the suffering we have is caused by others. It's caused by the fall. But each and every one of us, we affirm that you are great and you are good and you are sovereign and even if we die we are under your protection. You are using this suffering to compel us to seek the God that success makes us think we don't need. We ask this and make this prayer in Jesus' name, amen!