

# The Journey to Biblical Manhood

## Challenge 10: Suffering

### Session 1: Where is God When I Am Suffering?

Unedited Transcript

Brett Clemmer

Well hey, it is great to be with you this morning. We are continuing on our journey to Biblical manhood. Before we jump into this, let's give a shout out to the Deer Park Men's Ministry, 20 guys that meet with Lee Howell in Charleston, South Carolina, Wednesday nights at 6:30 PM, guys who want to make disciples who make disciples. They're using the video Bible study to do that. Let's give these guys a big round of applause for joining us.

Glad to have them. On your tables are the faith and life objectives cards. We are now in challenge ten where we've done 27 weeks of the journey to Biblical manhood. We're now coming into the tenth challenge. This is the challenge on sacrifice and suffering. If you look at your faith and life objectives, you'll see our goals for this unit, for these three sessions are to understand what the Bible says about being called to share in Christ's suffering. That's your head. Encounter pure joy when I face trials. Believe in the God who's shaping me, that's your heart. Then finally I will sacrifice my time well and resources to love others and to love God well. That's the sacrifice part and that's the hands part.

Today we're going to talk about this topic of where is God when I am suffering. Where is God when I am suffering? I want to tell you that I am not happy to be talking about this topic. I have really, really struggled in trying to even prepare for this morning as I've looked at suffering. I've got to tell you, this is not a topic that's really hard to talk about. There's tons of stuff that has been written about suffering. You literally can't look at almost any book in the Bible and not see an example of somebody suffering, or a maxim about suffering, or learn a lesson about suffering. I mean suffering is part of the human condition.

No matter where you look, you see it. No matter where you look in a Christian bookshelf, you will see plenty of books, plenty of stuff written about suffering. You know, I've surveyed the stuff that I had, including a lot of stuff that even Pat had written. It's good stuff. There's lots of great truths out there about suffering. Then yesterday, as I sort of had everything laid out and I knew exactly what I was going to go back and sort of study and refine down into, I had an outline kind of, and I was going to refine that down into the talk. You always have more stuff than you need, so you compress it down to the most important things. I had two experiences with staff people at Man in the Mirror that were great. They were about suffering, and the first one encouraged me, and the second one broke me.

I thought after that second experience, "I really don't want to talk to anybody about this." I really don't. Let me tell you the two stories briefly. In the morning we had a call with all of our national field team. We have a monthly conference call, video conference call. It's pretty cool. I got all these guys on there. I

had about 30 guys on the conference call, and you could see all their pictures on your computer. One of the guys is our guy in Northeast Florida. He has been going through a journey with cancer. His name is John.

John looked a little frail, more frail than I've seen him look before, but he shared. In fact, he shared the passage we're going to use today, and how it has inspired him, how it has lifted him up as he's gone through chemotherapy. He explained to us the process that he's gone through with his chemotherapy and probably not an uncommon story about how it effects him physically. You know, has a couple of good days after the chemotherapy and then gets really sick for a few days and recovers just in time for the next session, but that his last PET scan came back totally clear, no cancer present in his body. He's just going to finish this course of chemotherapy. Then he gave us some of these verses that we're going to read in a little bit here and just talked about how encouraged and how deep his relationship with God had grown through this experience, how deep his relationship with his wife had grown through this experience, and just how suffering had tempered him, how suffering had inspired some of these deeper relationships.

I was like, "Awesome." Don't you love stories that end like that? Then in the afternoon I was talking to somebody else about this topic. This person said to me, "Well I already know everything you're going to say." I said, "What do you mean?" They said, "Well, I mean", kind of what I said in the beginning, "I mean there's tons of stuff written about this. I've read it all, but when I was watching my dad who loved God his whole life go through a rapid and horrible demise from brain cancer at the end of his life, it changed everything for me. It changed the way that I look at God. It changed the way that I look at my faith. I didn't see any purpose to it. I didn't see any redemption in it. I don't see how..."

I'm looking at this person, and I've never known this about them before. They don't walk around with a "My dad died horribly of cancer" sign on their forehead. As I was thinking about this, I go back and I look at my notes and everything suddenly just looked so trite. Do you know what I mean? Everything just looked like it was euphemisms and sayings and just kind of empty. I thought, "I wonder if I could catch the flu so I don't have to go and talk about this tomorrow." It kept me up last night. Drag myself out of bed this morning like, "Please trip on something and give yourself a concussion. Just anything to not have to come and talk about this."

Here's why I say that, because I know sitting in this room, I know watching this lesson online there are going to be people who are going through tremendous suffering, and you can't see a purpose to it right now, and you can't see any redemption to it, and you are this close, maybe this close to losing your faith over it, to just deciding that "well if there is a God, he's either not powerful, or he doesn't care, or he's not worth worshiping."

I can sit here and spout Bible verses and famous Christian authors and say things that make sense logically, but you know when you're in that experience, when you're in the midst of that I think you come to the point where my friend yesterday came to, where they just said, "You know at some point I just had to decide to believe. I just had to decide to believe, and it changed the way that I look at faith."

I don't want to give you any trite answers this morning. I don't want to sort of do that Christian jargon crap that people say. You know, "Oh, did you lose a loved one? They're in a better place.", or "There's always a greater good being served." I don't want to do anything. Here's the thing: suffering sucks. It's terrible. There's times when you suffer, and it's just horrible. I don't want to whitewash that at all. We may get to the end of today, we may get to the end of this three sessions and you may not have any

more answers than when you started, but at least maybe we can go through that together, and if you're watching this online you have a group of guys that you're going through it with. At least we can find some way to connect with each other to deepen our relationships with each other and to learn more about God in a way that at least lets us know that there could be a purpose, even if you can't see it. There could be a purpose.

Let's jump into this. The title today is "Where is God when I'm suffering?". We're going to kind of go through three questions. Before we do this, I just want to give you the big idea up front. Suffering will force you to change your perspective. Suffering will force you to change your perspective, or at least examine it. If there's one thing in both the stories yesterday morning and the story yesterday afternoon, if you look through the scriptures of people that have suffered, the one thing that I can say about suffering for sure is that it will force you to change your perspective, or it will at least make you examine your perspective and decide if it's correct or not.

What are we going to look at? We're going to look at these three questions. What is causing my suffering? How does my suffering help others? How does my suffering help me? What is causing my suffering? One of the things that causes suffering is simply failure. Right? I fail in doing something, and so I cause some negative consequence. This can be little things like, "I failed to study for a test, and so I failed the test and then I don't pass a class." That can cause all kinds of ripple effects. It could be "I failed to keep my promises." Think about all the different places in your life you make promises. You make promises to your mortgage holder. You make promises to your government to pay your taxes, or they sort of force you to promise that. You make promises to everybody that you're in a relationship, that you're going to be faithful in that relationship in whatever way is appropriate for that relationship, your wife, your kids, your boss, your coworkers.

When we fail, sometimes, oftentimes, that failure causes us to suffer. It's a character issue. Other people's failure, so somebody else fails to stop at the red light and crashes into you. Somebody else fails to tell you to be honest with you, and so you suffer for their dishonesty. Failure is a common cause of suffering.

Your faith can cause you to suffer, and this we're going to talk a little bit more about. Sometimes when you stand firm for your faith you suffer. My daughter has a friend who just recently had to quit her job because they're asking her to do illegal things in her record keeping. They're like, "Oh, don't worry about it. We do this all the time. It's no big deal." She's like, "No, that's not who I am. That's not what I believe. This isn't right. I believe that God calls me to be honest." "No, you don't understand. It's fine. You have to do." "No." She had to quit her job. A lot of times we stand firm in our faith, and sometimes it's subtle, but sometimes it can be a big thing.

Frankly, and I think this is the biggest one. You know, we live in a fallen world. The world is broken and the world is corrupt. You realize this, right? This is what makes suffering feel so futile sometimes is that we just simply live in a world that doesn't work right. You have a blowout on a highway, and your car spins and flips and takes out somebody's family. You know, things just don't always work the way they're supposed to work. Cancer. The world is broken. When sin came into the world it didn't just impact like our ability to always do the right thing. It didn't just impact our personal relationship with God. It impacted the entire way the world works. Things that go wrong in the world for no apparent reason, they go wrong because of the fall. They go wrong because the things that are supposed to work one way have been corrupted and slowly over time it gets worse and worse and worse, and then sometimes we suffer the ramifications of that.

I think that's the kind of suffering that's so hard to understand, and that's the kind of suffering that's so hard to overcome is suffering that comes, you can't figure out, it's not my fault, I can't find a good reason for it, it just happened. Why do people get sick? Why do bad things happen? A lot of stuff happens that seems meaningless. It seems causeless almost. There is a cause, and the cause is that we live in a broken world.

Sometimes figuring out what's causing your suffering can help you figure out how to approach that. If it's your failure, then repentance is the answer to that. If it's other people's failure, then forgiveness is the solution to that. If it's standing firm for your faith, it's recognizing that God promises that he's going to be with you in those times when you do that. We'll talk a little bit more about that. If it's because of the fall, sometimes you just have to long for the next world.

This is where we're going to answer these questions in these next two parts is how do we deal with those. Suffering will force you to change your perspective or at least examine it. How does my suffering help others? The first way your suffering can help others is it inspires people and it spurs them on. We're going to look at 2 Corinthians four. Let me show you the other one. It inspires and it spurs us on, and then it points us to Christ. If you have a Bible, turn to 2 Corinthians chapter four.

I'm going to read all the way from seven to 18. Then we'll come back and we'll break this into some pieces. Okay? This is Paul talking to the Corinthians. He says, "But we have this treasure", the treasure is the gospel. "We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, I believed and so I spoke. We also believe and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart."

These are the verses that the guy in North Florida recited to us yesterday as sort of the verses that had carried him through his treatment regimen. "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 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."

Let's break this down. The first thing in the first three verses what we see here is that suffering can inspire others. Here are those verses again. Look at this. "We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us." What he's saying is that our bodies are the jars of clay. What's the meaning of the jars of clay? Well, a jar of clay is what? Easily broken. What he's saying is that we carry the gospel with us in these bodies that are easily broken to show that it's not our power that's carrying us through, it's God's power that's carrying us through. Then he gives an example of how this sustains him.

I love this little paradigm he gives because he talks about afflicted, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed. What he's talking about, if you look at these four combinations, he's talking about the mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical suffering that we can go through. The mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical suffering. We're afflicted but we're not crushed. That's the mental suffering that you can go through. We're perplexed but we're not in despair. That's the emotional reaction to suffering. We're persecuted but we're not forsaken, we're not abandoned. Spiritually God doesn't abandon us. We're struck down physically, but we're not destroyed.

Now, you know how Paul died, right? He was beheaded for his faith. Eventually his body would be destroyed, but his point is "I'm not really destroyed", because he had faith of where he was going to be as he says later on in the passage. Our suffering, as Paul talks about his suffering his goal is to inspire the Corinthian church. If you know anything about Corinth, Corinth was sort of like the New York City of its day. It was a center of commerce, but also a center of all kinds of different worship of different kinds of idols and gods. To stand up in Corinth and be a Christian, you know, those Christians were going through suffering and through persecution. Paul is like, "No, I've been all over the place. I've been through a lot worse than this. You guys will get through this. Look at my example. Look what I've gone through."

When people watch us as Christians suffer, they watch us go through trials and they see that we're not crushed, we're not in despair, we don't walk around like we're forsaken and we don't let it destroy us, then that's an inspiration to those people. That points people towards the gospel because they recognize that we're walking around with these frail bodies and yet we're victorious.

The second way that suffering can help others is that it points them towards Christ. If you look at the next few verses he says "We're always carrying on in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies." He's talking about how we walk around with this sin nature, but as we overcome that what people see is the redemption that comes through the resurrection of Christ. "For we who live", verse 11, "are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you."

He goes on. He says, "Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, 'I believed, and so I spoke,' we also believe, and so we also speak". Paul is saying that as they've gone through these trials, as their belief has deepened, they speak. They're just continually pointing people towards Christ. Right? They're inspiring people with their ability to overcome or to suffer well, but they're also pointing people to the source of that strength, which is their relationship with Christ. Not just the relationship with Christ, but like if the world is broken and Christ brings redemption, that is the actual power to overcome the effects of suffering. If the world is broken and corrupt, Christ started the process of redeeming the world, of changing the world, of helping the world become more like it was originally created to be. "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done", where? On earth as it is in heaven.

While Adam, you know the first man, brought us down into this ditch, Christ redeems us from the ditch, and doesn't just redeem us, redeems the world overtime. We're going to look at even what that looks like down the line here. What does suffering do for others? Well it inspires them and it points them towards Christ. Suffering will force you to change your perspective, or at least examine it.

How does my suffering help me then? The first thing it does is it inspires us to the right outlook. We'll go through these verses, but it also joins us to Christ Peter tells us in 1 Peter four. Then it points us to the next world. We'll look at Revelations. Let's look at these passages as well. Continuing on in 2 Corinthians,

"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 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."

Paul is saying, we're trying to inspire you, but we're not losing heart. This is what our suffering is doing for us. It's reminding us that even though our outer self, these jars of clay may be wasting away, we're all getting older. Anybody not getting older? Right, we're all getting older. We're all suffering the effects of age. We're all suffering the effects of a world that's broken and corrupt, and yet the inner self, our soul, the part that is in communion with God, that gets renewed day by day.

Then we get this new perspective. What we're going through is a light and momentary affliction. Now I got to tell you, there's a lot of times it doesn't feel like a light and momentary affliction. There's a lot of times where it feels like a dark and endless affliction. This is part that I struggle with even talking to you about, because I can just say, "Look, no seriously. Paul just said it's light and momentary. Don't worry about it." "You don't understand. My dad is dying of brain cancer." "Light and momentary." It's not light and momentary. It doesn't feel light and momentary. The only way it feels light and momentary is this. The only way it feels light and momentary is this, is if you have an eternal perspective.

I was trying to think of an analogy and the only one I could come up with that even came close is kind of dumb. I remember when I was a little kid my dad used to take me skiing. The part I hated the most was the walk from the lodge to the lift and up the lift the first time. It was so cold. I would be thinking the whole way, "Why is my dad making me? He must hate me, making me be this cold." My toes would get numb really quick. I think I must've had bad circulation. My ears would turn red and my fingers would start to tingle and I would hate it. Then the bar would go up and I'd get off the lift, and like the rest of the day was absolutely amazing, but I had to get up to the top of the mountain first. I hated that part.

It's sort of a dumb analogy, but it gives you that sense that sometimes you walk through a difficult thing to get to that thing that's going to be so amazing. Here's the thing. Eternity, seriously, it actually lasts forever. You know, if you've been a Christian for a long time I think you're like, "Oh, yeah, eternity. That's like I've got two halves of my life. I've got the half before I die and then the half after I die." No, no, no. You have one infinitesimal percentage of an infinitesimal percentage before you die, and then 100% after you die.

You're going to get to that point when you're in the new heavens and the new earth when you're in the presence of God, then you will realize that no matter what happened here in the light of that it is a light and momentary affliction. When you're in the middle of it it's not light and it's not momentary. It's dark and it feels like it will have no end. You have to change your perspective or you will give in to despair. You will be crushed, you will feel forsaken. You will feel destroyed unless you change your perspective.

It inspires us to change our perspective. The next thing it does is this. It joins us to Christ. Turn over to 1 Peter, which is almost at the end of the New Testament. Go to Hebrews and go one book over. 1 Peter 4:12-16. Look at this. Look what Peter says. He says, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name."

There's sort of two different pieces here I think of how we're joined with Christ. One is you realize that everything that you are subject to as a human being walking around this earth from disease to feeling cold, to feeling hot, to feeling abandoned by your family, to having broken, I mean all the stuff that you experience as a human being, Jesus experienced all those things. Jesus is in heaven right now at the right hand of God, and he literally knows exactly what you're going through, because he went through it too.

When they whipped him and almost beat him to death before they finally executed him, he wasn't using his godly power to avoid the pain. He experienced every single lash. He felt everything. He was thirsty. He was desperate. In the garden, even though in his divine nature he knew exactly what was going to happen, in his human nature he was hoping that his father would give him a way out in the garden. He's been through everything that we've been through. We're joined with him in that everything that we go through, we are sharing that experience.

I found out a young man that grew up with our kids joined my fraternity at his college. Yesterday I found this out on, where else but Facebook, right, standing there, holding up the fraternity flag. I'm like, "What? We're brothers." Right? You and Jesus are brothers. You're in the same fraternity. You've been through the same experiences. You're joined with him in that brotherhood. Just like Jesus suffered, when we suffer we have that shared experience, and then even more so when you suffer for your faith.

Peter reminds us, hey if you're insulted for the name of Christ, that's awesome basically. That's the original Greek. Right? Don't suffer for the wrong things, he says, and he gives a list of pretty drastic things not to suffer for, but if you suffer as a Christian don't be ashamed. Be happy. Be excited that you got to suffer as a Christian just like Jesus suffered.

All right. The last piece that this does is ... Oh, there it is. It points us to the next world. This is the part I think that is the only thing that can get us through sometimes. Turn over just another couple pages, another book, to Revelation 21:1-4. Listen to this. This is the thing that we need to be reminded of. This is John's vision that God gave him to show him what it was going to be like in eternity.

He said, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is", where, "with man." 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. 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."

Look at this, verse four. No death, no mourning, no crying, no pain. Afflicted but not crushed, perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed. There's an incredible parallel between what we go through in this life and what heaven is going to be like. It's going to take away all those things, the mental, the emotional, the spiritual, the physical suffering that we go through. When we get to heaven God takes all those things away for how long? Forever we get to live in that. Is it a light and momentary affliction? Yes. Does it feel like that? Nope. It doesn't feel like that at all.

I think the only way you get through these things, and this is ultimately what my friend said to me yesterday afternoon. They said "It changed the way I look at God. It changed the way I look at faith. I

realized that sometimes I just have to have faith." It's not going to feel good. I'm not going to like, "Oh, yay, I'm going through suffering." I'm not going to feel like that, but I can know in my heart, not in some temporary emotional feeling, but I can know in my heart and my soul, in the thing that's connected with God, that I'm going to spend eternity with him.

Let's pray. Lord, we do live in a broken and corrupt world. We live in a world that doesn't operate the way it's supposed to, the way that you made it to operate, Lord, but it will. We're grateful, Lord, that you would send your son to die for us to begin that process of redemption here, Lord, but we look forward to and long for the day that the Bible describes as glory, simply because it's so wonderful where you do take away all of our suffering, all of our death, our mourning, our tears, our sickness and Lord, we get to enjoy your presence. You're not just like creating a place for us to go and live forever. You're bringing us to you. You're coming with us. You're coming to us so that we can live in your presence forever. Father, we long for that day.

Father, will you help those of us that are going through suffering now, and all of us that will go through suffering in the days ahead, will you help us to have this eternal perspective, Lord, so that we can bear up under the weight of a world that wants to break us, of an enemy that wants to deceive us? Lord, deepen our belief and our faith so that we, Lord, can be an inspiration to others, and so that we can even remind ourselves every day of the gospel. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Hey, it looked like great discussion around the tables. Would you stand with me? I want to read you a Bible verse and then I want to pray with you. If everyone would stand. Maybe, you guys over here, get close to somebody so you can reach them when the time comes. Towards the end of his life, Jesus sat down with his disciples. He told them in John 16, he said, "I've been doing a lot of preaching and figures of speech", he says, you know parables and things like that. "But trust me, it's going to get clear. It's going to get clear and it's going to get hard." He even tells the disciples, he speaks prophecy over them, they're going to be scattered and things are going to happen.

He says in John 16:33, he says, "In this world you will have troubles, you will have tribulations. But take heart. I have overcome the world." That's our comfort. That's our peace is that Jesus has overcome the world. He's started this process of redemption that we get to be a part of. In fact, the part of it that's reconciling people with God, Paul says we actually get to be partners with him in helping to make that happen. He uses us to make that happen. In this world you will have troubles, he said, but Jesus has overcome the world.

With that thought, here's what I'd like to do. I'd like for us to spend a minute or two in prayer. Here's what I'm going to ask you to do. If you are going through a time right now of suffering, of trial, of tribulation and you would like guys to pray for you, would you just sit back down right where you're at? Just sit down. Then the guys around you will gather around you. We're going to freak you out. We're going to put our hand on your shoulder. Okay? It'll be okay.

If you would like guys to pray over you, if you will just sit down wherever you're at, then the guys at your table will gather around you. Then let me pray for us. Okay? Thanks, guys. Be bold. All right. If you don't have anybody near you, maybe just grab the shoulder of the guy next to you. Don't grab his hand, just grab his shoulder. All right?



All right, let's pray. Father, there are men sitting in this room that are going through difficult times of struggle and suffering. There are guys standing right now that are also going through difficult times of struggle and suffering. Lord, I pray that through the friendships that we have with each other, the brotherhood that we share as brothers in Christ, Lord, but even more as members of this group or in groups that are watching this, Lord, that you would use us to provide strength, to lift each other up, to encourage each other and to bear one another's burdens, as Paul tells us to in Galatians, that we would be able to walk alongside of our brothers that are going through difficult times. Even more than that, Lord, if you would through the power of your Holy Spirit bring peace and comfort.

We know, Lord, it says in Psalm 34:18 that the Lord is close to the brokenhearted and he's with the crushed in spirit. Lord, if there are people who are brokenhearted, who are crushed in spirit, would you make your presence known to them, Lord? Would you wash over them with the peace of your Holy Spirit? Lord, would you give them strength to rise up, to not be in despair, to not be crushed, to not feel forsaken, and Lord, to realize that they are not going to be destroyed? Lord, give us that perspective, that eternal perspective of the things that we're going through are for now but they're not forever, and that we will live in eternity with a God who loves us so much that he wants to be with us forever. Lord, bless these men as they go out from this place. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.