Introduction
As we saw in the past 3 sessions discussing chapter 8, because of Adam’s sin against God in the garden, all people now live in a world of profound pain.

Let’s consider the hope and victory that Scripture and the Indwelling Spirit gives to every believer that struggles with the sinful desires of their own heart, the pain and loss they suffer because of the sin of others or the effects of a fallen and cursed world.

Categories of Suffering
In this section we will examine six different categories of suffering that the Bible discusses.

I. Suffering and Human Sinfulness
   1. Adam’s sin makes us guilty, corrupt, and responsible.
   2. Adam’s sin not only leads to our own sin, but that sin leads to suffering.
   3. When we sin or we experience the sin of others, it brings pain into our lives.
      a. Even when we deal with this sinfulness in a biblical way, it does not take away the pain.
      b. Even when we have forgiven and trust in God’s providence, we can wince when remembering past sin.
   4. This pain makes us long for things to be different when Christ returns.

II. Suffering and the World
   1. The “world “ is a mindset of the human race that opposes Christ and his kingdom.
      a. 1 John 2:15–17: Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.
   2. This world system brings about suffering in many ways.
      a. We live in a world where anyone is free to embrace almost any sexual sin he desires.
         i. Pornography is accessible to anyone young enough to surf the Web.
         ii. Advertisements on television, billboards, store windows, magazines promote immodesty
         iii. Expressed concern re: the impact of homosexual marriage on teens is treated as hate speech.
         iv. World’s promotion of immorality increases the suffering of believers who desire to be pure.
      b. Christians will experience direct attacks from a world that hates the Messiah we serve.
         i. John 15:18–19 - If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

III. Suffering and the Devil
   1. Peter tells us that the Devil is a dangerous enemy who is actively seeking out people to destroy.
      1 Peter 5:8 - Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (Jn. 8:44; 1 Jn. 3:8-10; Rev. 12:9)
   2. The Devil brings much agony into the lives of those he seeks to steal, kill and destroy (Jn. 10:10).
IV. Suffering and the Pain of Others
1. Paul observed the separation of Israel from God; he ached for them with unceasing anguish.
   a. Romans 9:2–3 - I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers … according to the flesh.
2. The sufferings of others led to Paul’s suffering.
3. Key Point: A sinful world, which occasions the suffering of so many, ought to cause us pain as we have compassion on them.

V. Suffering and Confusion
1. Because of sin our limited knowledge is separated from the life-giving wisdom of God, so our thinking processes are not only limited but faulty.
   a. This guarantees that we will struggle to make the right decision even when we have a desire to do what is right.
   b. This confusion is the context for much suffering.
      i. Should we stay married or get divorced?
      ii. Should we work harder to earn more money or make less and spend more time at home?
      iii. We are perplexed about how best to invest our money.
      iv. We agonize over what to say to a dear friend who is going astray …
2. Regarding issues where the Bible is not clear, we are to do what our heart believes best honors God, knowing that may be the opposite of what accomplishes that purpose for another believer.
   Romans 14:6 - The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.
3. Key Point: So much of discipleship is helping people make these kinds of difficult decisions in a world where sin causes us to feel puzzled about which path is the wise one.

VI. Suffering and Death
1. Sin results in our bodies experiencing physical weakness and eventually death.
2. We do not just die, we lose our eyesight, we have physical handicaps, we are born with Down syndrome, we develop hypothyroidism or diabetes, we get gangrene in a wound and lose a limb.
3. Even the finest medical care will need to be paired with counsel that points to hope beyond the ultimate failure of every single medical intervention this side of heaven.

Insight from the Biblical Categories of Suffering
1. Biblical view of suffering is just as revolutionary as the biblical view of sin that causes the pain.
2. Bible is unique in its understanding of trouble and human pain; it is God’s perspective.
3. Secular counseling has no category for human sinfulness, a world system opposed to Christ, or a spiritual foe called the Devil.
4. His perspective on our pain is the only one that conforms to the reality of the struggles we face.
5. It is the one that actually stands the test when people come for answers, solutions, and help.
6. God’s Word not only describes the difficulties we have, it also shows us how to address them.
Turing God’s Character

When people come to us for answers about the pain that they are suffering, we need to know how to help them respond.

1. One passage that lays a biblical foundation for the trust we are to have in God:
   
   Psalm 119:68: You are good and do good; teach me your statutes.

2. This passage makes two assertions and an appeal.

3. First assertion is that God is good: the good character of God is the foundation for all the help we have to offer as we counsel those in pain.

I. God’s Good Character

1. God’s attributes of strength—his self-sufficiency, infinity, omnipresence, omniscience, omniscapience, omnipotence—as he controls every event that happens in his world.

2. God’s attributes of care—his holiness, faithfulness, goodness, love, mercy, grace, and wrath—as he directs all those events, ultimately, toward the good.

3. When we face trials of various kinds, we need to trust that these trials occur underneath the sovereignty of a good and powerful God who:
   a. will never do anything that is wrong
   b. will never do anything to his people that is not for their ultimate good.

4. Primary Question during trouble, pain: if God is good, how could He allow the kinds of suffering we experience in this world?
   a. If we do not trust the God of the Bible who has revealed himself to be good and strong, then whom will we trust? Ourselves, abstract fate, other people?
   b. The reality is that without God, we are all alone and without help.
   c. That is more fearful than facing hard questions we might not understand how to answer.
   d. Like Peter, we need to not walk away from difficult truths, but trust in God:
      
      John 6:68 - Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life”

II. God’s Good Character Preserved in First and Second Causes

1. God is the primary cause of every event that happens in the world via his sovereign omnipotence.
   a. Nothing comes to pass in this world apart from the sovereign will of God.
   b. God is sovereign over evil since He works all things according to the counsel of his will (Eph. 1:11).

2. Even though God is sovereign over evil, God Himself is good and never does evil.
   
   1 John 1:5 - God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

3. Secondary causes, such as sinful people and demons, are the ones who are held responsible for the evil in the world.
   a. Secondary causes are the other actors in God’s world who operate according to his sovereignty but are responsible for their own actions.
   b. God oversees the world as the sovereign first cause of all that happens and is never charged with wrongdoing.

4. Joseph: an example of when God works together with human actors in every human event.
   a. God was the first cause in this action; he reigned as sovereign king over Joseph’s relocation to Egypt so that God could preserve his people. This He forecast in Joseph’s 2 dreams (Gen 37:5-11)
   b. Secondary cause was Joseph’s brothers, who sinfully sold Joseph into slavery and were rightly held responsible for the sinful action growing out of a wicked intention.
   c. In the one event, there were two different actors with two different intentions.
5. **Crucifixion of Jesus:** The prayer of the early disciples describes this compatibilism concept:  
   
   Acts 4:27–28 - Truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.  
   
   a. **First Cause:** God predestined that Jesus would be executed in Jerusalem.  
   b. **Second Cause:** Herod, Pilate, Gentiles, and Israelites are held responsible for that wicked act.  
   c. There are two sets of actors and a set of different intentions (one good, one evil) in one event.  
   d. While God superintends the act for the salvation of mankind, human actors had various sinful motives that informed their involvement in the death of Jesus.  

   **Key Point:** In the doctrine of compatibilism, the **primary actor** is *always* our **sovereign God**. The **secondary actor** is *always* the **other created agents** who are sinful and charged with wrongdoing.  

III. Preserving God’s Good Character with His Active and Passive Will  

1. Some theologians have called the sovereignty of God asymmetrical: two-sided but not identical.  
   
   a. God’s **active will:** God **positively wills good** in the world through His good attributes  
   b. God’s **passive will:** God **allows sinful people to do wicked acts** that he could prevent as He withdraws His good attributes.  

2. Theologian Jonathan Edwards compares God’s **asymmetrical will** to the **sun**:  
   
   a. Sun’s positive effect is to bring **light** and **heat**.  
   b. Sun occasions **darkness, cold** by the withdrawal of its positive effects via the motion of the earth.  
   c. **Edwards Point:** **darkness and cold**, which come about from the **absence** of the **sun**, proves the true nature of the sun, when there is no light and heat **without** it.  

3. **Key Point:** If **goodness** goes away when God withdraws his **active will**, and **wickedness** happens as a result of God passively allowing what he could forbid with his active will, then it proves **God alone** is indeed the **source** of all **goodness**.  
   
   a. This is another way to demonstrate the goodness of God in a world of evil.  

Character of God and the Task of Discipleship  

1. **Psalm 23** is one example of combining God’s strength and care in a way that ministers tender mercy to people in trouble:  
   
   The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.  

2. **Lord** exerts **his power** for **our good** to (a) keep us from want, (b) make us lie down in green pastures, (c) restore our souls, (d) make us righteous, (e) protect us from evil, (f) ensure that goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our life.  

3. **Psalm 23**, like the rest of the Bible, talks about God’s character in a way that assumes he is **trustworthy** which beckons us simply to **trust him**.  

4. When we disciple or counsel, we point those in need to the strong and loving character of God and plead with them to trust him.  

   **Key Point:** Even when bad things happen, we can trust that God loves us in his care and He is able to use his power in good ways that we may not understand.
I. Trusting God’s Plan

1. The Bible encourages us not only to trust God’s character but also to trust his plan.

   Psalm 119:68 - [Lord] you are good and do good.
   a. The goodness of God’s plans are based on the goodness of his character
   b. Christians are able to trust what He does precisely because of who He is.

2. For every instance of suffering that happens in this wicked world, we can say with Joseph that though sinful men intended it for evil, God intends it for good.

   Romans 8:28 - We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

Transition: Let’s look at the biblical teaching that God uses the suffering we experience for our good. Suffering benefits us in three ways. In a world where humanity has rebelled against God, He uses those actions and overrules the evil intentions of sinners to accomplish His good.

II. Suffering Is Good for Us

1. The Bible teaches that God uses suffering to benefit our lives in the following ways:
   a. Spiritual fruit of joy - because of what pain produces in our hearts and lives.

      Romans 5:3–5 - 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 love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.
   b. Heavenly Hope – confident expectation of a future blessing, reward (Rom. 5:3-5; cf 1 Peter 1:13)
   c. causes us to depend on the Lord - pushes us toward the joy of Christ and eternal things
   d. proves that we belong to Jesus - His promised inheritance belongs to us (1 Peter 1:6-7)
   e. demonstrates we love Jesus – even when we suffer the loss of His good gifts (Hebrews 12:5-8)
   f. produces peaceful fruit of righteousness – painful discipline, joyful fruit (Hebrews 12:10-11)

2. Five ways that the doctrine of last things give hope and joy in the midst of suffering (John 14:1; Rom. 8:18–30; 1 Thess. 4:18; Rev. 21:4)
   a. believers go immediately into the presence of Christ when they die (2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23).
   b. Jesus Christ will physically return from heaven at the end of history to gather his church (1 Thess. 4:14–17; 2 Thess. 1:7).
   c. All of humanity will be exposed to God’s judgment on the last day (Mt. 25:31–40; Rev. 20:11–15).
   d. Christians confess that all those who have not trusted in Jesus Christ will be exposed to the punishment of hell (Matt. 25:41; 2 Thess. 1:8).
   e. Those who trust in Jesus Christ will be ushered into the presence of Christ, living with him in the new heaven and new earth forever (1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 21).

3. Key Point: These five realities encourage us that even when this life is painful, God means to:
   a. judge all actions by the righteous standard of Christ
   b. punish all who oppose Christ and his people
   c. ultimately honor and reward all who trust in him.

III. Suffering Is Good for Others

1. Suffering helps people to see the glory of God (sight given to man born blind, John 9:1–3)
2. Sometimes we are afflicted with pain so that God can be seen to overcome the darkness of this world of suffering with the bright light of his glory.
3. Our suffering spreads the gospel to people who do not know Christ.
   a. God used Paul’s suffering to draw more people know His Son Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Heath Lambert, A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry
I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. … What then? Only that in every way … Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,

4. Suffering also allows us to be a blessing to others: comfort others as we have been comforted

$2 Cor. 1:3-4$ - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

IV. Suffering Glorifies God

1. Primary benefit of suffering is that it glorifies God by maximizing our need for him.

$2 Cor. 1:8-9$ - For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

2. God did not remove the thorn in Paul’s life, so that he might become more dependent on God

$2 Cor. 12:9-10$ - My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

3. Key Point: Irony of suffering’s pain is that it points us to the higher joy found in Christ alone.
   a. We tend to judge how blessed we are by the degree we are afforded comfort and ease.
   b. We will embrace suffering, when we begin to judge our blessings by the degree we are like Christ!

V. Suffering, Discipleship and Biblical Counseling

1. Scripture proclaims that we need to be taught the statutes of a good God who does good things.

Psalm 119:68 - You are good and do good; teach me your statutes.

2. Sufferers need counsel, encouragement from God’s word during difficult times (Ps. 119:67, 69-71)

3. James teaches that suffering believers who ask for help (v. 5) and who are steadfast in their obedience to God’s word will increase their strength (v. 4).

4. Those who trust God and His promises will be blessed, become more mature, complete and lack nothing despite life’s problems.

James 1:2-5, 22 - 2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, … and it will be given him. … 22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

5. The comfort we offer to those in pain is the person and work of Jesus, who displayed God’s good character and God’s good plan to give us hope and joy in the midst of life’s suffering:
   a. John 16:33 - In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.