

Story and Suffering - How a painful world impacts our hearts and beliefs

ABC Conference | Track Session 6

1. What is their story of suffering and how have they interpreted it? How have they sought comfort?

2. Brief biblical understanding of suffering

Suffering comes in many forms. We are *sinned against* through betrayal, abandonment, deceit, attack, abuse, meanness, and more. We also suffer as we face life in a *broken, sin-filled world*. Things don't function according to God's created design. Relationships, desires, thoughts, bodies, vocations, dreams, the weather, the earth, authorities, people, animals (and all created things!) . . . every corner of God's creation suffers because of sin's presence. We also face the reality of *our sinful, deceitful, and idolatrous hearts*, which adds to our suffering. We all respond sinfully to being sinned against. If that wasn't enough, we have an evil enemy. We suffer because of *the devil's schemes* aimed against God's people.¹

Pain naturally triggers a cascade of apprehension, unhappiness, and distress and because of the deviance of our hearts, often triggers bad reactions of unbelief and idolatry.²

God uses significant suffering to teach us to need him. And when we need him, we find him.³

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.⁴

It is a painful existence to battle against cravings [you] never asked for and desperately want to disappear, but they obstinately persist nonetheless. This is true regardless of the nature of your struggle with sexual sin. Whether your temptation is toward the same-sex, pornography, emotionally enmeshed relationships, etc., to battle those temptations is suffering!...Freedom is not the absence of temptation; it is the increasing ability to choose holiness out of love for Christ, despite the relentlessness of temptation. To live in freedom from sexual sin usually means ongoing temptations and the suffering they bring, but be encouraged: Your struggle against sexual sin matters to God! The daily decision to die to yourself and to lay your sexual desires on his altar is a precious sacrifice of obedience that is a delight to the Lover of your soul! (See 1 Sam. 15:22 and Rom. 12:1.)⁵

¹ Ellen Mary Dykas, *Jesus and Your Unwanted Journey: Wives Finding Comfort After Sexual Betrayal*, 33. Available online as a free PDF download at: <https://harvest-usa.myshopify.com/products/jesus-and-your-unwanted-journey-wives-finding-comfort-after-sexual-betrayal-participants-guide-free-digital-download>. Leader's Guide also available.

² David Powlison, *God's Grace in Your Suffering* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 49.

³ Powlison, 39.

⁴ Jesus Christ our Lord, describing the normal Christian life! John 16:33.

⁵ David White, *Suffering with Temptation*, <https://harvestusa.org/suffering-with-temptation>, accessed March 24, 2023.

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1. **Counseling pathway: bring Christ and his ministry into their situation as you offer the hope of a transformed tree**

- a) Assess what the most urgent need is
 - a. Comfort of the gospel? *God has real comfort for their struggle with sexuality and/ or gender. (2 Cor. 1:3-4)*

 - b. Challenge of the gospel? *Suffering, sin, desires, or self are not our identity or lord. (Eph. 1:1-2)*

 - c. Discipleship about the Christian life and suffering? *“Like a tender mother...like an engaged father.” 1 Thess. 2:6-12*

- b) Dethrone sexuality, gender, desires, attractions, and anything competing with Christ.

- c) Address beliefs connected to suffering, comfort, and mystery in the Christian life.

- d) Normalize the Christian life for them as you would for any believer: *a lifelong lifestyle of active and growing faith and repentance.*

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