
ENABLE 2.3

O Lord Hear My Prayer
Small Group Session Seven
Week Beginning 19th November



Suffering and Prayer

This is week three in the School of Prayer and now we come to one of the most challenging questions - what about prayer and suffering?

At different moments in our lives we all experience suffering, sadness, moments of real pain. News of an illness, death of a loved one, relationship breakdown - on and on, we know we live in a world familiar with suffering.

In the face of that suffering we sometimes cry out to God in prayer. Sometimes it seems to us that God answers our prayers, the situation changes, the person gets better, there is some kind of breakthrough. On other occasions things don't change or even get even worse - it seems like God only sometimes answers our prayers.

Of course the Bible reveals to us some of God's answers to these questions. However it would be wrong to think that knowing those 'answers' will take away the pain. Knowing something of the mind of God is reassuring and strengthening, but in this world nothing can take the edge off the pain. The Bible is full of prayers cried out in anguish and pain. **The things we explore in this study will not take that pain away - but will help lay foundations to strengthen us in the midst of our pain.**

Foundation 1: Humanity has rejected God's ways and come under God's judgment. That is why our world is broken, full of suffering and pain - the ultimate cause of all suffering and pain. It impacts humans, our relationships, even the very earth itself. (Genesis 1-3)

Foundation 2: God has set a day when He will end all the suffering. When Jesus returns as judge, all who have rebelled against God will face judgment. In His love, God sent Jesus to our world to rescue rebels from that judgment. Jesus promises to take His people to a new heaven and earth where there will be no more suffering and pain. (John 3:16, Revelation 21:1-4)

Foundation 3: Jesus has not yet returned to bring about the day of judgment and bring in the new heaven and earth. God is patiently waiting, wanting to give time for many to repent. God wants many to be rescued from that day of judgment, even though that means we continue to live in a world of suffering while we wait. (2 Peter 3:9)

Whilst those foundations frame our thinking about suffering - we have not yet answered our question - why does it seem that God sometimes answers our prayers to alleviate our suffering in this world and at other times it seems like He doesn't.

The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Suffering and glory

1 Now and the glory to come

Spend some time talking together about how you pray in the middle of suffering.

- How does suffering impact your prayers?
- If you are able to pray in the middle of suffering, what kinds of things do you pray?
- What does the content of your prayers tell you about how you think about suffering?

In Romans 8, Paul has much to say to the Christians in Rome about how they should think about suffering now in light of the glorious world to come. **Read Romans 8:17-30**

Spend some time exploring the passage, part by part, discussing together the implications. This section will take 20 mins or so.

Part 1 17-18 What should the Christian's perspective be on the present and the future?

Part 2 19-22 What should we expect for the creation now and in the future?

Part 3 23-25 What should we expect for our lives now and in the future?

Part 4 26-30 How does the Holy Spirit help us now? (26-27)

What is 'the good' that God is working in us, even through the midst of suffering? (28-30)

Suffering is an inescapable part of life in this world as we groan, longing for the new creation. God gives His Spirit to pray for us when we can't pray. He also reveals to us that when God does not take away our suffering now in this life, it must be a part of His plan to make us more like Jesus ('conformed to the image of his Son') that Jesus might have many brothers and sisters in eternity.

These truths are challenging. Spend some time exploring why we might find these truths hard to believe? How might believing them bring us much comfort?

2 What good?

One of the reasons we find these verses challenging is because we can forget some of the good things that come out of the most painful sufferings. If you have time you might like to look at some of the quotes on the next page. Look at some of the verses listed and explore some of the other ways God uses our suffering for good.

3 Going home

There can be no doubt that this is a challenging topic. As we said at the start, knowing more of these truths will not take our pain away - but it will help lay foundations to strengthen us in the midst of pain. Why not now share one thing you are each going to take away from this session. Then turn to pray for each other.



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Extra Thinking

Not Meaningless
or Random

"If we really believe that God is purposeful in suffering, that our suffering is not meaningless or random, shouldn't that affect how we pray about the suffering in our lives and in the lives of others?"

As it is, we pretty much only know how to pray for suffering to be removed—for there to be healing, relief, restoration. Praying for anything less seems less than compassionate. But shouldn't the purposes for suffering we find in Scripture guide our prayers more than our predetermined positive outcomes?

We could make a very long list of purposes for which God intends to use suffering according to the Scripture. But here are just a few:

- *To put God's glory on display (John 9:3)*
- *To make the life of Jesus evident (2 Cor. 4:10-11)*
- *To live out genuine faith (1 Peter 1:6-7)*
- *To cause us to depend on him more fully (2 Cor. 1:8-9)*
- *To reveal hidden sin or keep us from sin (2 Cor. 12:7)*
- *To experience that Christ is enough (2 Cor. 12:9)*
- *To discipline us for holiness (Hebrews 12:10-11)*
- *To equip us to comfort others (1 Cor. 1:3)*
- *To make us spiritually mature (James 1:2-5)*
- *To make us fruitful (John 15:2)*
- *To shape us into Christ's likeness (Romans 8:29)*
- *To share in the suffering of Christ (Philippians 3:10)*

What would happen if we allowed Scripture to provide the outcomes we prayed toward? What if we expanded our prayers from praying solely for healing and deliverance and success to praying that God would use the suffering and disappointment and dead ends in our lives to accomplish the purposes he has set forth in Scripture?"

The above quote is taken from an article by Nancy Guthrie. To follow up this idea more, have a look at her book 'The One-Year Book of Hope'.



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Autumn Term Timetable

Introducing ENABLE - Central Meeting

7:30pm Thursday 7th September

Small Group Session 1.1

Week beginning 10th September

Prayer Meeting Week

7:00pm Trinity-wide hosted at All Hallows - 20th September

Small Group Session 1.2

Week beginning 24th September

Small Group Session 1.3

Week beginning 1st October

Small Group Session 1.4

Week beginning 8th October

Prayer Meeting Week

7:30pm 18th/19th October

Half Term Break - Week beginning 22nd October

Small Group Session 2.1

Week beginning 29th October

Small Group Session 2.2

Week beginning 5th November

Prayer Meeting Week

7:30pm 15th/16th November

Small Group Session 2.3

Week beginning 19th November

Small Group Session 2.4

Week beginning 26th November

ENABLE into Action - Group Activities

Week beginning 3rd December

support and
encouragement
to live for Jesus