

**Core Seminar**

**Suffering for the Glory of God**

**Class 10: Applying the Framework in a Practical Scenario**

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**Introduction and Framework**

In our class so far, we’ve been working down from the theoretical to the practical. So we started with the Bible’s answer to the problem of suffering, moved to some practical classes on fighting for faith, and then touched on how our suffering can witness to the power of the gospel.

This morning, I’m not going to add to that body of teaching—but I want us to take a week and apply it. And to do that, I want to summarize our class so far into a basic framework for working through suffering. When you’re suffering, there are a few questions that are bound to come up. Why is this happening? How long will God allow it to happen? How can I trust him? And what should I do? To answer these, I want us to think of a four-part framework. I’m not going to go through it much in depth because, as you look at it, you’ll recognize the outline of the course so far.

1. How does this suffering challenge my view of who God is?

2. What am I tempted to trust in other than God?

3. How can I fight for faith?

4. How can conduct myself so that God is glorified in my life through this difficult time?

Over the next few minutes, I’d like to go through this framework twice. First, we’re going to work through it in the context of [Guest’s] experience. (S)he’ll be talking about a difficult time in life and what these four questions looked like for her/him. And then we’ll work through these more in-depth with a purely hypothetical scenario.

So first, [Guest]:

[Start with a testimony about suffering from a member of the church. Ideally, someone who has been attending the class for the last nine weeks. Ask each of these four questions in interview format—along with whatever follow-up questions are necessary.]

[Pray for the person who just shared.]

OK. So having worked through our framework once, let’s go through it a second time—in a bit more detail—with a more hypothetical situation.

**Scenario**

For the rest of our time together, we’re going to be talking about ‘Jim’. Twenty years ago, during his second year at University of Maryland, Jim dropped out of school to help a friend start a window-manufacturing company in Prince George’s County. A few years later, God used a good friend to bring Jim to faith in Christ. And a few years after that, Jim met Natalie at church, and they got married, had three kids, and settled themselves into the life of their church. The window company was a moderate success, and so it’s been the only job Jim’s ever known.

But it’s been a really rocky year for the company. Earlier this year, one of the company’s five machinists hurt himself badly while he was working. Which, as you can imagine, devastated Jim. And as it turns out, the company was partially at fault for what happened. So as court costs and liabilities mount, the business goes under and Jim is suddenly without a job just as his kids begin hitting their teenage years. He’s got no college degree, no real professional network, a mortgage to pay, a family for which provide, and only a small amount of savings. So, while even from a worldly perspective, things are certainly not without hope, they’re sure looking pretty bleak.

For the rest of our time, I want us to think through how Jim can conduct himself in such a way as to suffer well using the framework we just talked through.

1. **How does this suffering challenge my view of who God is?**

Q: You may remember from one of our earlier classes that we talked about the difference between our *professed* theology—what we know about God in our heads—and our *functional* theology—the assumptions about God that become implicit in how we live. Let’s assume that Jim is thoroughly orthodox in his professed theology. What are some ways in which he may be tempted to make bad assumptions about who God is in his practical theology?

**[When God’s sovereignty comes up]**

Q: Why is it important for a Christian to be thoroughly convinced that all suffering is within the control of a sovereign God? Can you think of examples from Scripture of how God’s sovereignty helped someone suffer well? (Gen 50:20,[[1]](#footnote-1) Psalm 42:7,[[2]](#footnote-2) Acts 4:28)

“It would be a very sharp and trying experience to me to think that I have an affliction which God never sent me, that the bitter cup was never filled by his hand, that my trials were never measured out by him, nor sent to me by his arrangement of their weight and quantity[[3]](#footnote-3).”

C. H. Spurgeon

**[When God’s goodness comes up]**

Q: What kinds of attitudes or behaviors might Jim stumble into that might suggest he’s having a hard time believing that God is good?

Q: As Christians, the truth of the cross should always be the center of our theology. If Jesus *didn’t* die and rise again, our theology should completely fall apart. In Jim’s situation, what about God could **only** be true because of the cross?

1. **What am I tempted to trust in other than God?**

Q: In class 5, we talked about various unbiblical reactions to suffering. The stiff upper lip—which we termed the atheistic response to suffering; escape—running to false gods; the idea that I deserve better than this, that God rewards the righteous in this life; fear—because God can’t help what’s happening; and “God’s got it out for me”—he might be good, but I can’t trust that his plans are good *for me*.

What are some ways in which you think Jim might be tempted to trust in something other than God?

Q: *Take some of the “false gods” mentioned in the previous question. They often surface in seemingly innocuous ways in our lives. Work through a list of three.*

* What are ways in which you think each might surface in Jim’s life?

Q: *Go through the same list of three.*

* What are some strategies/scripture passages that would be useful in battling these false responses to suffering?

1. **How can I fight for faith?**

Q: Let’s start first by thinking of the strategies for fighting for faith as individuals that we discussed a few weeks ago. They’re all one form or another of taking in Scripture. What are some that Jim should be doing to fight for faith?

Q: Now let’s think about how others can help him fight for faith. What would that look like?

Q: *Take 3-4 of the strategies that the class mentioned.* What are some of the barriers that you think Jim will likely encounter as he strives to fight for faith in these ways?

Q: *For the same list of 3-4:* What advice would you give to Jim in how to move beyond those barriers to faith?

Q: What are some Scripture passages that you would point Jim to in particular?

1. **How can I conduct myself so that God is brought glory?**

Q: Let’s hypothesize for a moment: what are the ways in which you think God might be using this situation for His glory?

Q: What are the ways in which you think God might be using this situation for Jim’s good?

Q: In what way would these “reasons for Jim’s suffering” be helpful to share with Jim right now?

Q: What are some things that Jim should be careful *not* to do if he seeks to use this trial to bring praise and honor to God?

Q: What are some things that Jim should be careful *to* do if he seeks to use this trial to bring praise and honor to God?

**Any final questions?**

**Close in prayer.**

1. As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people[a] should be kept alive, as they are today [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Deep calls to deep / at the roar of your waterfalls; /all your breakers and your waves / have gone over me [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. "The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon," p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)