PART 1: Overview of Pain & Suffering

A. INTRO (Glenn)

B. BRIEF THEOLOGY OF SUFFERING (Peggy)

1. Two Kinds of Suffering
   - Suffering for Christ
     If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good. 1 Pet. 4:16, 19
     For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have. Phil. 1:29-30
   - Suffering Common to Man
     - Same Result
       But He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness.” Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may reside in me. So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, catastrophes, persecutions, and in pressures, because of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong (powerful). 2 Cor. 12:9-10
   - The Cross is Still the Way of God
     Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. Col. 1:24

Christ expects every minister and believer to suffer for the church: to complete the church, to bring it to its full measure; to fill it up to the fullness of His will. He expects us to pay whatever price is necessary, to fill up whatever sufferings of pain, sacrifice, fatigue, and exhaustion are lacking. (Preachers’ Outline & Sermon Bible Commentary)

2. The Sovereignty of God & the Consequences of Sin
   We underestimate the consequences of sin in the world.
   God allows many things He hates.
PART 2: Grief & Suffering

A. OUR STORIES

B. RESPONDING TO SUFFERING
   1. Stay in touch with your heart—Keep it real (Peggy)
   2. God suffers with us
   3. Grieving and processing loss – making space (Margo)
   4. What we noted about grief and loss (Glenn)

C. COMFORTING THOSE WHO GRIEVE (Glenn & Margo)
   1. Grief shared is grief halved—standing with those who grieve
   2. Listening without solving
   3. Ways to encourage those in grieving
   4. Questions for opening communication
PART 3: Our Hope in Suffering

- **Abandonment to God**
  Letting Go of “This Is Not The Way Life Should Be” *(Peggy)*

- **Increased Depth and Strength**

- **Truths We Tell Our Heart** *(Margo)*
  Lamentations 3:21 (Jerusalem Bible): *This is what I shall tell my heart, and so recover hope...*

- **Fresh Perspective on How to Companion People who Suffer**
  Luke 24:17b (ESV): *And they stood still, looking sad...*
  Our difficulty with allowing people’s experience to be their experience without us having to rush in to fix or explain or clarify or relate

- **Discovering the Trustworthiness of God** *(Glenn)*

---

**Workshop description:**
We all have painful experiences we may not have chosen. Yet by walking with God through suffering, we can receive certain graces we would never exchange. Our suffering has the potential to broaden and deepen our intimacy with God and our understanding of ourselves, and ripples out into all our relationships. Learn from the difficulties in your life through principles and stories from those whose lives are being transformed through the furnace of suffering.
RESOURCES ON SUFFERING


Who can understand others’ hurts? Those who have been through it wrapped in the blanket of God’s comfort. With God’s arm firmly around my shoulders, I have the strength and stability to place my arm around the shoulder of another. He does not design my ruin—only my refinement. —Charles Swindoll

Someday God will wipe away your tears. The same hands that stretched the heavens will touch your cheek. The same hands that formed the mountains will caress your face. The same hands that curled in agony as the Roman spike cut through will someday cup your face and brush away your tears. Forever. When you think of a world where there will be no reason to cry, ever, doesn’t it make you want to go Home? —Max Lucado

God brought me here; it is by His will I am in this strait place; in that fact I will rest. He will keep me here in His love, and give me grace to behave as His child. He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He intends me to learn, and working in me the grace He means to bestow. In His good time He can bring me out again—how and when, He knows. So, I am here by God’s appointment, in His keeping, under His training, for His time. Andrew Murray

We are going about our ordinary ways and days until pain or crisis comes that sends this whole pack of cards tumbling down...all my little happinesses look like broken toys. Then I remind myself that all these toys were never intended to possess my heart, that my true good is in another world and my only real treasure is Christ. But the moment the threat is withdrawn, my whole nature leaps back to the toys. —C.S. Lewis

We need a condition of soul called “gravitas”—a soul that has developed enough spiritual mass to attract other souls. It makes the soul appear old, but gravitas has nothing to do with age. It has everything to do with scars that have healed well, failures that have been redeemed, sins that have been forgiven, and thorns that have settled into the flesh. It all expands the soul until it is larger than the body that contains it, large enough to hold the truth of the Word of God.

—M. Craig Barnes

Might this thing I long to be different be the actual crucible on which God chooses to shape my soul into something of beauty that perhaps only he sees? Could this disturbing interruption of my plans be the actual way God is molding my heart in some new manner? —Paula Rinehart

Some days I need to be with God with difficult realities: grief, pain, fear, confusion. I need to open my grief to God and see what He will do in that place...to open myself to the possibility of true comfort. I find it inexplicable the way God comes to us and ministers to us when we are willing to trust ourselves to him. God’s way of making his presence known and comforting us in such moments is as individualized and personal as each mother’s way of holding and comforting her own child; it is a very intimate thing. Going all the way into the grief in God’s presence left me feeling tender and vulnerable, but I could also sense that I was held safely. I felt empty and spent, but I also felt comforted by God’s loving presence.
knew I was not alone in my grief. Nothing was fixed, but I was okay. I had not been swept away. —Ruth Haley Barton

One of the hardest things we must do sometimes is to be present to another person’s pain without trying to “fix it”, to simply stand respectfully at the edge of that person’s mystery and misery...The poet Rainer Rilke describes a kind of love that neither avoids nor invades the soul’s suffering. It is a love in which we represent God’s love to a suffering person, a God who does not “fix” us but gives us strength by suffering with us. By standing respectfully and faithfully at the borders of another’s solitude, we may mediate the love of God to a person who needs something deeper than any human being can give. —Parker Palmer

Taking up our cross involves accepting those sources of suffering that we did not originally choose but that, being already ours, we are invited to accept...and while holding it, we can choose to look toward God. If we do, we discover God looking toward us. Taking up our cross is allowing suffering to be a place of meeting God. —David Benner

It can be hard to do the next thing when you are also trying to control your life, protect those you love, answer all the hard questions, anticipate what might happen next, and guard yourself from more pain. It’s tough running the universe. The good news is that’s not our job. We just have to do the next thing God has given us. —Dave Lyons

From Tim Keller’s Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering: Three themes of Christian teaching that serve as “reasons for the heart” when facing pain and suffering:

- **Doctrines of creation and the fall:** The original design of the world is broken. Be unsurprised when life is hard.

- **The final judgment and the renewal of the world:** this present darkness will eventually be remembered as a brief flicker at the beginning of human history..."everything sad is going to come untrue”
  —J. R. R. Tolkein

- **The incarnation and the atonement:** The incarnate God is a God who suffers. The answer to the “why” question cannot be: God does not love us and He does not care.

We must never see suffering as primarily a way to improve ourselves. That view could lead us to a form of masochism, an enjoyment of ache, because we only feel virtuous when we are in pain. Even without such perspective, suffering tends to make you self-absorbed. If it is seen as mainly about you and your own growth, it will strangle you truly. Instead, we must look at suffering as primarily a way to know God better, as an opening for serving, resembling, and drawing near to Him as never before. —Tim Keller

“Affliction is the best book in my library,” said Martin Luther. I doubt I could make such a confident statement. From many witnesses, though, I’ve concluded that pain redeemed impresses me more than pain removed. We’re concerned with how things turn out; God seems more concerned with how we turn out. —Philip Yancey