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THE DIVINE DESIGN OF CHRISTIAN SUFFERING:  
MORTIFICATION, MATURATION, AND GLORIFICATION

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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by  
William James Brooks, Jr.

May 2016

**APPROVAL SHEET**

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MORTIFICATION, MATURATION, AND GLORIFICATION

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To Aileen, my love,  
and  
Nathan and Bryan,  
wise sons who make my heart sing.

*SDG*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	vi
PREFACE.....	vii
Chapter	
1. SUFFERING IN HISTORY AND BIBLICAL COUNSELING .....	1
Thesis .....	4
Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Suffering .....	10
Methodology .....	29
Summary of Chapters .....	30
2. SUFFERING AND THE DECREASING OF SELF-RULE THROUGH MORTIFICATION .....	34
Suffering Inaugurated by Adam’s Embracing Self-Rule .....	35
Suffering and the Lamenting Psalmists’ Mortification of Self-Rule .....	49
Suffering King Messiah’s Attack on Self-Rule .....	69
Suffering and the Christ-Follower’s Mortification of Self-Rule .....	89
Summary: Suffering Mortifies Self-Rule .....	105
3. SUFFERING AND THE INCREASING OF GOD’S RULE THROUGH THE ENGENDERING OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY .....	109

Chapter	Page
Suffering Engendered Spiritual Maturity in the Lamenting Psalmists .....	111
Suffering Engendered Spiritual Maturity in Jesus .....	126
Suffering Engenders Spiritual Maturity in Christ-Followers .....	151
Summary: Suffering Engenders Spiritual Maturity .....	181
<b>4. SUFFERING FOR THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE OF GOD GLORIFYING HIMSELF .....</b>	<b>185</b>
The Vocabulary and Means of God’s Glory .....	187
The Glory of God Displayed by the Lamenting Psalmists’ Suffering .....	192
The Glory of God Displayed by Jesus’ Suffering.....	203
The Glory of God Displayed by Christ-Followers’ Suffering .....	217
The Glory of God Displayed by the End of Suffering.....	226
Summary: God Glorified through Suffering .....	239
<b>5. THE OBJECTIONS OF OPEN THEISM AGAINST THE DIVINE DESIGN FOR SUFFERING .....</b>	<b>243</b>
Theological Foundations of Open Theism.....	244
Open Theism’s Challenges to the Dissertation Thesis.....	254
Open Theism Undermines Sufferers’ Ability to Suffer with Confidence.....	263
Summary: The Dissertation Argument Defended.....	279
<b>6. IMPLICATIONS FOR BIBLICAL COUNSELING .....</b>	<b>284</b>
The Responding Heart Functions.....	285
Suffering and the Cognitive Functions of the Heart .....	289
Suffering and the Affective Functions of the Heart.....	294

Chapter	Page
Suffering and the Volitional Functions of the Heart .....	300
Biblical Counseling and the Sufferer’s Responding Heart Functions.....	304
Summary: Ministering to the Sufferer’s Responding Heart .....	313
<b>7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>316</b>
Summary of Arguments .....	316
Suggestions for Further Research .....	321
Concluding Thoughts .....	324
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>329</b>

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BDB	Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, <i>Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>
<i>EBC</i>	<i>The Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>
ILP	Individual lament psalm
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDNTT</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i>
<i>NIDOTTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>
NTC	New Testament Commentary
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
<i>TWOT</i>	<i>Theological Wordbook of the OT</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary



## PREFACE

A perfect storm of health, financial, and vocational difficulties culminated in the months prior to my entering Ph.D. studies that made me eventually echo the lamenting psalmist's conclusion, "I am helpless" (Ps 88:15). The basic conceptual trajectory of this dissertation was conceived by reflecting on how God changed my heart during this extended time of hardship. The encouragement is that whether I responded well or poorly to the situations, the Lord remained faithful and has continued to work in me a greater sense of his unfailing steadfast love.

I would not and could not succeed in my studies without the unwavering support and encouragement of my wife, Aileen. She has been with me every step in this process and has served as my best sounding board for ideas; her insights have been invaluable. I especially appreciate her concern for me, wisely exhorting me to take breaks when feeling overwhelmed.

My special thanks to the administration, students, and fellow faculty at Highlands Latin School. The HLS administration hired me early on in my coursework and has been very accommodating to give me time off for school requirements. Several faculty have substituted for me when I had class times that conflicted with my teaching schedule. My students, especially, showed great interest for the day when I would be transformed from "Mr. Brooks" to "Dr. Brooks." Thank you HLS classes of 2015, 2016,

2017, and 2018 for your encouragement and the joy it was to teach you during my Ph.D. studies.

I am grateful for my dissertation committee. I would be a more complete man if I had the determined work ethic of Jeremy Pierre, the infectious passion for Christ of Bruce Ware, and the lively mind of Eric Johnson. You men have taught me both in and out of the classroom and are exemplary examples of Christlike scholarship for the glory of God.

Earning a Ph.D. has been a lifelong hope which I thought would never happen. The Lord, however, in his perfect timing has allowed me to fulfill this desire. All praise and glory and honor be given to the Father who chose, the Son who redeemed, and the Spirit who seals. May he use this work in the lives of his suffering people as we look forward to the time when our Father “will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:4).

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May 2016

CHAPTER 1  
SUFFERING IN HISTORY AND  
BIBLICAL COUNSELING

God's mighty reverberations spoke creation into existence and echoed throughout the cosmos as each creative day brought new splendors in obedience to the divine command. His crowning achievement was the creation of man and woman whose progeny were to fill the earth with his presence and glory (Gen 1:28). The first couple, however, willfully rebelled against the Creator and became estranged from him (Gen 3:1-13). God's responsive curses inextricably wove suffering into the fabric of the post-fall world (Gen 3:14-24; Rom 8:18-23).

Humanity's plunge into the depths of sin and suffering was breathtakingly swift. The toil of tilling the land and the pains of childbirth of the first generation became fratricide in the second (Gen 4:1-11). Generations later, the horrors of suffering have brought an ocean of tears. Death looms. Injustices happen. Fear grips the heart. Sickness racks the body. Evil abounds. Trouble, pain, frustration, bitterness, disappointment with ourselves, the cruelty of others, gnawing guilt, and the oftentimes unfathomable mystery of God's ways bring tears, heartache, and agony. Suffering hurts. The afflictions of soul, mind, and body can be devastatingly paralyzing. The cries and wails of suffering are found in every era of human history and fill the pages of Scripture. Regardless of epoch, of ethnicity, of social status, of intelligence, of gender, of religion, of language, or of

political persuasion, suffering is one common thread that binds humanity together. Not all will suffer to the same degree or with the same duration or with the same frequency or with the same experiences but all will taste the bitterness of suffering in some form.

The presence of suffering has vexed philosophers and theologians, both ancient and modern. Asaph contemplated the incongruous contrast between the prosperous wicked and the afflicted righteous and honestly confessed, “my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped” (Ps 73:2).<sup>1</sup> The Greek philosopher Protagoras’ disillusionment with the arbitrary suffering doled out by the gods led him to declare, “about the gods, I am not able to know whether they exist or do not exist, nor what they are like in form.”<sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis justified his atheism with a well-used argument: “If you ask me to believe that this is the work of a benevolent and omnipotent spirit, I reply that all the evidence points in the opposite direction. Either there is no spirit behind the universe, or else a spirit indifferent to good and evil, or else an evil spirit.”<sup>3</sup> Richard Dawkins echoes a similar sentiment, “The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>All biblical quotes, unless otherwise noted, are from the English Standard Version. The phrase means “that he nearly turned aside from the right way” (Steven J. Lawson, *Psalms 1-75*, Holman Old Testament Commentary [Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003], 366. The same idea was expressed by Job in Job 21.

<sup>2</sup>Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to Pre-Socratic Philosophers: A Complete Translation of the Fragments in Diels, Fragmente Der Vorsokratiker* (Oxford: Alden Press, 1952), 125–26.

<sup>3</sup>C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1962), 14–15.

<sup>4</sup>Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 132. The experience of Bart Ehrman is, perhaps, that of many: “The problem of suffering became for me the problem of faith. After many years of grappling with the problem, trying to explain it, thinking through the explanations that others have offered—some of them pat answers charming for their simplicity,

The seeming natural reflex to the presence and experience of suffering is to question the character of God, biblical writers included. David’s four-fold “how long?” questions in Psalm 13:1-2 “express deep human misgivings about the character and activity of God and their effect on human life.”<sup>5</sup> The Scripture forthrightly acknowledges the real presence and experience of suffering, pain, and evil, and unwaveringly declares the absolute sovereignty and goodness of God but offers no inspired theodicy, which is “an answer to the question of why God permits evil.”<sup>6</sup> Asaph acknowledged God was good (Ps 73:1) yet his attempt to construct a theodicy “seemed to me a wearisome (לְמַלְאָה) task” (Ps 73:16). The noun לְמַלְאָה highlights work and labor that is burdensome, difficult, and full of misery.<sup>7</sup> Asaph’s soul was in turmoil because he could not rationally reconcile God’s goodness with his experiences of suffering. He gained perspective on his theological dilemma when he turned in faith to God (Ps 73:17-28).<sup>8</sup> The issue in

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others highly sophisticated and nuanced reflections of serious philosophers and theologians—after thinking about the alleged answers and continuing to wrestle with the problem, about nine or ten years ago I finally admitted defeat, came to realize that I could no longer believe in the God of my tradition, and acknowledged that I was an agnostic: I don’t ‘know’ if there is a God; but I think that if there is one, he certainly isn’t the one proclaimed by the Judeo-Christian tradition, the one who is actively and powerfully involved in this world” (Bart D. Ehrman, *God’s Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question—Why We Suffer* [New York: HarperOne, 2008], 3-4).

<sup>5</sup>Gerald Henry Wilson, *Psalms*, The NIV Application Commentary Series, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 278.

<sup>6</sup>Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 10. The closest Scripture comes to offering a theodicy is Rom 9:22-23, which reveals that God had a three-fold purpose for allowing sin to enter the creation: “to show his wrath,” “to make known his power,” and “to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy.”

<sup>7</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. “לְמַלְאָה,” by Ronald B. Allen, and *NICOTTE*, s.v. “לְמַלְאָה,” by David Thompson. Moses used this noun to describe the hardship Israel faced during their Egyptian slavery (Deut 26:7).

<sup>8</sup>Theodices tend to lessen God’s sovereignty, attribute too much autonomy to human actions, or dilute the evil nature of evil. Consequently, J. Todd Billings charges that “the constructing of theodices is a destructive practice” (J. Todd Billings, “Theodicy As a ‘Lived Question:’ Moving beyond a Theoretical Approach to Theodicy,” *Journal for Christian Theological Research* 5, no. 2 [2000]: 7). See the following for further discussions concerning theodices: Henri Blocher, *Evil and the Cross: An Analytical Look at the Problem of Pain* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2005); D. A. Carson, *How Long, O*

Scripture is not God having to justify himself for the presence of suffering but on what he accomplishes through the suffering.

### **Thesis**

I will argue in this dissertation that the divine design for suffering in Christ-followers is to decrease self-rule through mortification, increase God's rule through engendering spiritual maturity, with both of these functions serving the ultimate purpose of God glorifying himself in the individual lives of his covenant people. This thesis statement limits the scope of this dissertation in two important ways. First, this dissertation is not intended to be a comprehensive theology of suffering but is narrowly focused on the somewhat neglected theme of suffering designed by God to mortify, vivify, and glorify. Second, this dissertation is biblical and theological in nature, and is not a "how to" manual for counseling sufferers because biblical counselors are varied in their gifts, personalities, spiritual depth, and other host of other factors. The counselor should wisely adapt the material to his or her particular style and circumstances (1 Thess 5:14). The thesis statement will be further explained with brief descriptions of the following salient points: (1) divine design, (2) suffering, (3) decrease self-rule through mortification, (4) increase God's rule through engendering spiritual maturity, (5) the ultimate purpose of God glorifying himself, and (6) covenant people.

First, God declares himself to be absolutely sovereign over all creation and all events under creation, including suffering:

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*Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 23–36; Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986). Surin insists that "the Christian who takes the atonement seriously has no real need for theodicy" (142).

I form light and create darkness,  
I make well-being and create calamity,  
I am the LORD, who does all these things (Isa 45:7).<sup>9</sup>

God is an active agent who directly inflicts judicial suffering and he is the ultimate agent who uses secondary means to afflict his covenant people with suffering.<sup>10</sup> This latter idea is clarified by the two basic propositions of compatibilism:<sup>11</sup> (1) God is absolutely sovereign over all events;<sup>12</sup> and (2) humans are responsible moral agents who have the freedom to act within their nature.<sup>13</sup> The tenets of compatibilism are within the broader context of all of God's attributes (for example, his goodness, mercy, justice), which are never in tension but work in concert with one another.<sup>14</sup> D. A. Carson argues that God's relationship to good and evil are not equal but asymmetrical:

God stands behind evil in such a way that not even evil takes place outside the

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<sup>9</sup>“Calamity” is the translation of עָרָא. Edward J. Young comments that “we are compelled to admit that [עָרָא] includes all evil, moral as well as calamities” (Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 3 [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972], 200). Young continues to explain by putting this statement within the framework of compatibilism. He concludes, “God has included evil in his plan, and has foreordained its existence; and yet He Himself is not evil nor is He its author. Again, we have a line of teaching that we as creatures are unable to harmonize or reconcile; we must be believers” (ibid.).

<sup>10</sup>Lev 10:1-2; Num 16:46-49; 25:9; 1 Sam 6:19; 2 Sam 24:15; 2 Kgs 19:35 show the direct actions of God in bringing judicial suffering. Examples of the interplay of God's sovereignty and secondary means are found throughout Scripture. For example, Job knew nothing of what transpired between God and Satan. Job declared God was the cause of his plight (Job 1:20; 10:2-3, 8, 17) although Satan was the mediating agent God used to afflict Job. God did not correct or chastise Job for this theological perception. Another example is found in the life of David. In 2 Sam 24:1 the text indicates that the Lord incited David to sin and take a census of the nation (pointing to God's sovereignty) but 1 Chr 21:1 reveals that Satan incited David to take the census (God's sovereignty over secondary means).

<sup>11</sup>A good discussion on compatibilism may be found in Carson, *How Long, O Lord?*, 177–203.

<sup>12</sup>Pss 33:11; 115:2-3; 135:6; Prov 16:9; Isa 14:24; 46:9-10; Dan 4:35; Acts 2:23; 17:26; Rom 11:33-36; Eph 1:4, 11; 3:9, 11; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 Peter 1:20-21; Rev 17:17.

<sup>13</sup>Gen 22:12; Exod 16:4; 19:4-6; Lev 20:7-8; Deut 4:5-8; 6:6; Josh 24:14-15; 2 Chr 32:31; Isa 30:18; 65:2; Lam 3:31-36; Ezek 18:30-32; 33:11; Hos 11:7; 13:4; Mic 3:1-12; John 6:37-40; Rom 10:9-11; Acts 18:9-10; Phil 2:12-13.

<sup>14</sup>For example, the unswerving testimony of Scripture is that God is absolutely good so that he can never be accused of being callous, capricious, malevolent, or engaged in evil deeds (Deut 32:4; Pss 34:8; 100:5; 106:1; 107:1; 119:68; Hab 1:13; 1 John 1:5; Luke 18:19; Rom 12:2; Rev 15:3-4).

bounds of his sovereignty, yet evil is not morally chargeable to him: it is always chargeable to secondary agents, to secondary causes. On the other hand, God stands behind good in such a way that it not only takes place within the bounds of his sovereignty, but it is always chargeable to him, and only derivatively to secondary agents.<sup>15</sup>

Scripture consistently presents the twin propositions of compatibilism but reconciling them “defies our attempt to tame it by reason.”<sup>16</sup> This dissertation will present its assertions under the conscious embracement that God’s design of suffering is a function of his sovereignty over all aspects of human life.

Second, suffering is a painful, personal, experiential, and intimate encounter with a fallen world. An objective standard of what constitutes suffering is challenging, if not impossible, to achieve for it is oftentimes tempered by personal and cultural perceptions.<sup>17</sup> Eric Cassell defines suffering in catastrophic terms: “suffering occurs when an impending destruction of the person is perceived.”<sup>18</sup> J. I. Packer defines suffering more generally:

Suffering is in the mind of the sufferer, and may be conveniently defined as getting what you do not want while wanting what you do not get. This definition covers all forms of loss, hurt, pain, rejection, injustice, disappointment, discouragement, frustration, and being the butt of others’ hatred, ridicule, cruelty, callousness, anger, and ill-treatment—plus all exposure to foul, sickening, and nightmarish things that make you want to scream, run, or even die.<sup>19</sup>

This dissertation will use a general definition of suffering, that suffering is any physical,

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<sup>15</sup>Carson, *How Long, O Lord?*, 189.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>17</sup>Norelle Lickiss, “Historicizing Suffering,” in *Perspectives on Human Suffering*, ed. Jeff Hudson and Jeff Malpas (New York: Springer, 2012), 171–79.

<sup>18</sup>Eric J. Cassell, *The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Medicine*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 32.

<sup>19</sup>J. I. Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness: Know the Fullness of Life with God* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1992), 249.



emotional, mental, or spiritual difficulty that may befall the person due to the natural consequences of living in a fallen world or the hardships resulting from a person's identification with God or Christ. Scripture illustrates that suffering may be due to the consequences of personal sin (Ps 51), the divine response to personal sin (Ps 32), the consequences of the sin of others (Ps 22), or a variety of creaturely suffering inherent within a fallen world (Ps 6). Suffering may encompass any part of a person in various combinations such as physical (2 Chr 21:12-15), psychological (Deut 28:28); emotional (Ps 42:5); relational (Ps 55); or spiritual (Ps 31:7).

Third, the natural proclivity of the human heart is toward self-rule. Adam was the covenant head of the human race so that his choices in Eden would determine the fate of all who followed after him (Rom 5:12). He turned from God to himself so that, now, the inclination to the autonomous self is woven into the fabric of the human heart, which expresses itself as “the rearranging of existence around the self, with the result that the human self comes to be its own idolatrous creator, healer, and sustainer.”<sup>20</sup> This dissertation asserts that suffering is designed by God decrease self-rule through mortification, “an habitual weakening,”<sup>21</sup> of the autonomous self that still resides, to some degree, in the heart of every Christ-follower.

Fourth, the believer's union with Christ at conversion results in an immediate

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<sup>20</sup>G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 293.

<sup>21</sup>John Owen, *Mortification of Sin in Believers*, vol. 6 of *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (1656; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 28. Owen goes on to state the intent of God and the duty of the Christ-follower is “mortification of indwelling sin remaining in our mortal bodies, that it may not have life and power to bring forth the works or deeds of the flesh” (ibid., VI:8). Mortification, however, is not and cannot be a total, complete eradication of sin: “To mortify a sin is not utterly to kill, root it out, and destroy it, that it should have no more hold at all nor residence in our hearts. It is true this is that which is aimed at; but this is not in this life to be accomplished” (ibid., 6:24).

ontological change in the deepest core of the soul, the fundamental transformation being the spiritually dead soul is made alive in Christ (Eph 2:1-7).<sup>22</sup> One of Jesus' last commands was to proclaim the gospel to the nations and make disciples of Christ who are characterized as continual learners who obey his commands (Matt 28:19-20). The intended effect of the gospel is for it to continue "bearing fruit and increasing" (Col 1:6) in the soul. Paul's great desire was to "present everyone mature (τέλειον) in Christ" (Col 1:28) so that the "new self" in Christ is continually "being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator" (Col 3:10). Epaphras' prayer for the Colossians was for them to "stand mature (τέλειοι) and fully assured in all the will of God" (Col 4:12). In both instances, τέλος "connotes the quality of being so wholehearted in one's devotion to the Lord that one can be said to be blameless in conduct."<sup>23</sup> These gospel purposes, however, may be stymied when the outposts of the sinful allegiance to self exerts itself (Gal 5:16-26). This dissertation seeks to show that God uses suffering in the lives of his people to increase his rule by supplanting self-rule by engendering spiritual maturity.

Fifth, God has many purposes for all his activities, including his afflictions of suffering in his covenant people,<sup>24</sup> but the ultimate purpose for God's actions is always for his own glory (Prov 16:4; Rom 11:36; Col 1:16; Heb 2:10). In this light, this dissertation will argue that the ultimate purpose for which God afflicts his people with

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<sup>22</sup>John 15:4-5; Rom 6:1-11; 7:1-6; 13:14; Gal 2:20; 5:24.

<sup>23</sup>Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 161.

<sup>24</sup>Joni Eareckson Tada and Steve Estes, *When God Weeps* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 232-40 list thirty-six purposes for suffering.

suffering is to glorify himself.<sup>25</sup>

Sixth, God responded to the fissure sin produced between humanity and himself by taking the initiative to reestablish that relationship through covenant. Jonathan Leeman describes the broad purpose of these divinely driven covenants:

God uses covenants in order to establish his kingdom or rule among a people identified with himself. They are the mechanisms by which his holy love boomerangs outward and draws his people into a loving conformity to his character. Covenants are about relationships, kingdoms are about rule, and God is interested in combining both. God is interested in relationships but relationships of a particular kind; namely, those wherein his rule is displayed.<sup>26</sup>

The culmination of the Abrahamic (Gen 12:1-3), Sinaitic (Exod 19-24), and Davidic (2 Sam 7:1-17) Covenants is the New Covenant, which Christ established with his Church (Jer 31:31; Luke 22:20).<sup>27</sup> The suffering of God's New Covenant people, those redeemed and justified by Christ, is the focus of this dissertation.

Suffering is a divine tool used to shape the souls of his people in this fallen world. The natural proclivity of the human heart is to follow the course of this world, to follow the lies of the devil, and to live to satisfy the sinful desires (Eph 2:1-3). Christ defeated these three enemies yet the soul of the Christ-follower is still susceptible to their alluring power. Suffering is one implement God uses to bring soul-changing refinements in order to wrest the soul from sinful self-indulgence to mortifying the autonomous self,

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<sup>25</sup>For example, Paul related in 2 Cor 12:7-19 that God inflicted him with a “thorn in the flesh” to keep him from conceit (self-idolatry). He learned through this ongoing hardship that Christ's grace was sufficient for him to endure (sanctification), which caused him to boast in the power of Christ (glory).

<sup>26</sup>Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 235–36. Leeman continues to detail eleven purposes of the covenant: “to identify a people with himself, to distinguish them from the world, to call them to righteousness, to make them his witness, to display and share in his glory, to identify a people with one another, to act as a testimony for them, to assign responsibilities to every party, to render accountability, to protect his people, and to provide clarity in all these matters” (236).

<sup>27</sup>See also 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6; Heb 8:8, 13; 9:15; 12:24.

from conformity to the world to spiritual maturity in Christ, and from pursuing Satan to glorifying God.

### **Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Suffering**

Attitudes regarding the meaning and causes of suffering, the theological constructs to explain divine involvement in human suffering, the benefits (if any) of suffering, and how it is lived with or alleviated “are among the most important to society and culture.”<sup>28</sup> One of the most foundational impacts suffering has on society and the individual concerns the theological interpretation of the nature and character of their God/gods. Contemporary attitudes toward suffering are built upon those of the past, which, in turn, help evaluate modern perceptions of suffering. Below is a brief survey of the history of suffering, which will be followed by the methodology and a brief overview of the chapters of this dissertation.

#### **Historical Perspectives**

The pantheons of the ancient Near East contained a multitude of national and local gods, goddesses, and demi-gods who, generally, reflected human characteristics but with a larger-than-life aura. An individual god could be good, just, merciful, compassionate, and kind but at other times vindictive, cruel, gluttonous, capricious, or jealous.<sup>29</sup> Since the gods “manipulated everything,”<sup>30</sup> suffering was interpreted as

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<sup>28</sup>Ronald K. Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering: Pastoral Theology and Lay Piety in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 257.

<sup>29</sup>Etienne Drioton et al., *Religions of the Ancient East* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1962), 95.

<sup>30</sup>Daniel C. Snell, *Religions of the Ancient Near East* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 97.

retribution for acts of omission or co-mission that displeased one or more god.<sup>31</sup>

Suffering had no redeeming value for the individual and was avoided and/or alleviated by attempting to please the gods with a variety of rituals. Polytheism results in constant fear, for what pleased one god may offend another, which would result in retributive suffering.

The polytheistic Athenian playwrights Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles crafted tragic dramas exploring “the problem of suffering in human life.”<sup>32</sup> The Greek god’s ruled over every aspect of life and were depicted in the tragedies as vindictive, volatile, and impulsive curmudgeons “who seemed to enjoy describing precisely how and why they intended to cause human suffering, often regardless of the victim’s guilt or innocence.”<sup>33</sup> Suffering was envisioned as a parasite that grew stronger as it depleted the human host of its vitality.<sup>34</sup> Edith Hall’s in-depth study of the Greek tragedies concluded that none of them “remotely construes suffering as having any immanent value or inherent ‘social meaning’ whatsoever.”<sup>35</sup> The prevailing attitude in Greek philosophy was that “suffering is regrettable, largely random, has nothing whatsoever to recommend it, and needs to be cured or prevented altogether. Ancient Greeks did not believe that suffering ennobled the sufferer.”<sup>36</sup> The ancient Greeks had similar theologies concerning the gods as did ancient Near Eastern cultures with the added concept that doling out

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<sup>31</sup>Snell, *Religions of the Ancient Near East*, 107–20; 173–75.

<sup>32</sup>Edith Hall, “Ancient Greek Responses,” in *Perspectives on Human Suffering*, ed. Jeff Malpas and Norelle Lickiss (New York: Springer, 2012), 156.

<sup>33</sup>Edith Hall, *Greek Tragedy: Suffering Under the Sun* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 7.

<sup>34</sup>Roselyne Rey, *The History of Pain*, trans. Louise Elliott Wallace, J. A. Cadden, and S. W. Cadden (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 15.

<sup>35</sup>Hall, “Ancient Greek Responses,” 158.

afflictions was a sport to the gods for their own amusement. The ancient Near East and Greek theologies of suffering formed the general cultural milieu of the OT, NT, and early church.

The Sinaitic Covenant was a conditional covenant, which promised blessings for obedience to the covenantal stipulations (Deut 28:1-4) and curses for disobedience (Deut 28:15-68).<sup>37</sup> This obedience-brings-blessing-and-disobedience-brings-suffering paradigm also served as the basic theological framework for the Decalogue (Exod 20:1-17) as God promised personal blessings for obedience (Exod 20:6, 12) and warned of punishment for disobedience (Exod 20:5, 7). Suffering under the Sinaitic Covenant, then, was “the just recompense and reward of sin, its necessary accompaniment in the moral government of the world by Yahweh.”<sup>38</sup> Five major theological distinctions, however, distinguished the OT from the surrounding theologies of the ancient Near East: (1) Israel worshipped one, sovereign, almighty God who was the focal point of history and humanity; (2) the relationship between God and people was a moral relationship and not one of power; (3) not all suffering was due to divine retribution for specific sins (Job, the lamenting psalmists); (4) suffering had beneficial value (Ps 119:67, 71); and (5) suffering was under the auspices of the sovereign, good God who took notice of suffering and intervened on behalf of the sufferer (Gen 21:17-18).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Hall, “Ancient Greek Responses,” 156.

<sup>37</sup>Michael Scott Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 11–36, for a good overview of the Sinaitic Covenant as a ancient Near Eastern form of a suzerain/vassal treaty.

<sup>38</sup>H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament*, 2nd rev. ed., ed. L.H. Brockington, Studies in Theology (London: G. Duckworth, 1956), 161.

<sup>39</sup>The first two points are indebted to Hugh S. Tigner, “Perspective of Victory: The Problem of Human Suffering in the Old and New Testaments,” *Interpretation* 12, no. 4 (October 1958): 299.

The embryonic theological developments of suffering in the OT matured in the NT with the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Suffering in the NT centers on and flows from the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross.<sup>40</sup> Jesus told his disciples that suffering for him ought to evoke rejoicing and gladness for the great eternal reward that awaits (Matt 5:11-12). Paul exclaimed, “we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope” (Rom 5:4). James commanded his readers to “count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds” (Jas 1:2) because of the soul-changing benefits incurred through suffering (Jas 1:3-4). Jesus’ suffering forever changed human perceptions on suffering—prior to him suffering was generally viewed as deleterious, after him suffering was commended for its beneficial qualities.<sup>41</sup>

The robust theology of suffering presented in the NT was embraced by the early Church Fathers who, unlike their polytheistic contemporaries, never assigned suffering to fate, bad luck, or to capricious gods but interpreted it in light of the sovereign, good God and the cross of Christ.<sup>42</sup> General suffering was interpreted as

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<sup>40</sup>Matt 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22; 22:15; 24:46; Acts 3:18; 1 Pet 3:18.

<sup>41</sup>The importance of Jesus’ suffering is underscored by Esther Cohen: “The incarnation of Christ, son of God, and the New Adam, betokened the creation of a new, unique type of man. His form and essence were destined never to be replicated, nor was his pain. However, all postincarnational history of human sensations was colored by his experience. His was the perfect body with the perfect, most sharply tuned sensations. All that preceded or followed was no more than a pale simulacrum, to be measured against the absolute yardstick of the Crucifixion. Even martyrdom, to say nothing of more widely experienced human sufferings, paled in comparison. When it came to pain, the Passion was the ultimate extreme of living agony” (Esther Cohen, *The Modulated Scream: Pain in Late Medieval Culture* [Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2010], 198).

<sup>42</sup>Basil the Great illustrated the wonder of God’s benevolence providence toward a sea bird and then applied his observations to humans: “If divine Providence has established these marvellous laws in favour of creatures devoid of reason, it is to induce you to ask for your salvation from God. Is there a wonder which He will not perform for you— you have been made in His image, when for so little a bird, the great, the fearful sea is held in check and is commanded in the midst of winter to be calm” (Basil, *Hexameron, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2, St. Basil: Letters and Select Works*, ed. Philip

beneficial to the soul but suffering tortures and martyrdom for Christ were enthusiastically desired and embraced.<sup>43</sup> For example, Ignatius (d. 107) wrote of his anticipated martyrdom,

Suffer me to become food for the wild beasts, through whose instrumentality it will be granted me to attain to God. I am the wheat of God, and am ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of God. Rather entice the wild beasts, that they may become my tomb, and may leave nothing of my body; so that when I have fallen asleep [in death], I may not be found troublesome to any one. Then shall I be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world shall not see so much as my body.<sup>44</sup>

This theological mindset inspired Cyprian (c. 200-258) to encourage persecuted Christians that their suffering glorified God: “Oh, what a spectacle was that to the Lord,—how sublime, how great, how acceptable to the eyes of God in the allegiance and devotion of His soldiers!”<sup>45</sup> Augustine insisted that Christians who suffered under the Goth’s sack of Rome experienced a three-fold benefit: (1) suffering reminded them of their proclivity to selfish sins that needed to be mortified from the heart; (2) suffering made them realize their tendency to focus on this life too much; and (3) suffering was a means to prove their fidelity to Christ rather than to themselves.<sup>46</sup> The early Church

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Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 8 [repr., Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprint 1983], 98).

<sup>43</sup>Paul Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom and Cosmic Conflict in Early Christianity* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2006), 18.

<sup>44</sup>Ignatius, *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Romans, Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), 75.

<sup>45</sup>Cyprian, *The Epistles of Cyprian. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 1, Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix*, ed. Alexander Robert and James Donaldson, vol. 5 (repr., Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 288.

<sup>46</sup>Augustine, *The City of God. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 1, The City of God, Christian Doctrine*, ed. Philip Schaff ed., trans. Marcus Dods, vol. 2 (repr., Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 6–7.



Fathers understood both general suffering and martyrdom-suffering in light of the cross. However, their romanticizing of martyrdom had a nocuous effect on the theology of suffering in subsequent church history.

Constantine's Edit of Milan in 313 effectively brought an end to widespread persecution of Christians. Persecution in the late medieval period (around the twelfth to sixteenth centuries) was rare but "the thirst for martyrdom was ever present."<sup>47</sup> This desire for martyrdom was fueled by a renewed interest in the Passion of Christ, which served as the driving theological force of the late Middle Ages "to the point of overshadowing his resurrection"<sup>48</sup> so that "much of the devotional life of late medieval saints revolved around pain in various forms."<sup>49</sup> Medieval mystics developed a theology that suffering was necessary to secure union with Christ. Suffering, then, became "the most noble thing on earth, the pinnacle of Christian discipleship and the most reliable—indeed, the only— path to union with God."<sup>50</sup> If God did not grant suffering, especially the stigmata, then self-inflicted sufferings such as self-flagellation and extreme bodily deprivations became necessary in order to "sink into the divine abyss."<sup>51</sup> Redemptive suffering grew out of this theology, positing that suffering may be vicariously applied to

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<sup>47</sup>Esther Cohen, "The Animated Pain of the Body," *American Historical Review* 105, no. 1 (February 2000): 61.

<sup>48</sup>Ewert Cousins, "The Humanity and the Passion of Christ," in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Raitt (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989), 375. See also Richard Kieckhefer, "Major Currents in Late Medieval Devotion," in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Raitt (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989), 83–89, which also discusses the Passion of Christ. Cousins gives an overview of the theological developments that led to a focus on the passion of Christ as does Cohen, *The Modulated Scream*, 198-236.

<sup>49</sup>Cohen, "The Animated Pain of the Body," 61.

<sup>50</sup>Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering*, 74.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*

another, either living or dead, to lessen time in purgatory. Both men and women offered up their own sufferings as atoning sacrifices, which included “tears wrung from their heart, prayers poured like blood from wounded spirits, fever and chills, hunger and sickness and savage blows to the flesh.”<sup>52</sup> Theological innovations in the late medieval era viewed suffering necessary for justification, which had the effect of eclipsing the gospel.

Martin Luther entered the monastery with the Medieval church’s theological mindset of redemptive suffering. Years after the Reformation he recounted his life as an Augustinian monk:

True it is that I was a pious monk, and so strictly did I keep the vows of my order that I may say if ever a monk has entered heaven through monkery, that I also could have entered. All my fellow-monks who knew me will confirm this statement. And if I had continued much longer, I would have tortured myself to death with vigils and prayers, reading, and other work.<sup>53</sup>

Ronald Rittgers traces Luther’s path from monk to Reformer, paying specific attention to his emerging understanding of the role of suffering, and concludes, “Luther’s new evangelical soteriology directly shaped his evangelical approach to suffering. His reformation of suffering went hand-in-hand with his reformation of soteriology.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 119. Redemptive suffering is still incorporated in Roman Catholic theology, which was clearly expressed by Pope John Paul II in *Salvifici Doloris*: “In bringing about the redemption through suffering, Christ has also raised human suffering to the level of redemption. Thus each man in his suffering can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ.” The text goes on to declare: “Those who share in the sufferings of Christ preserve in their own sufferings a very special particle of the infinite treasure of the world’s redemption, and can share this treasure with others” (John Paul II, *On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering: Salvifici Doloris* [Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1984], 21, 34).

<sup>53</sup>Quoted in Wilhelm Rein and George F Behringer, *The Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1883), 32.

<sup>54</sup>Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering*, 87. He traces the key points of Luther’s slow transformation on pp. 84-124.

Luther's recovery of the gospel of justification by faith alone necessarily wrested suffering from its role in redemption and once again made it a divine tool of sanctification, which was "of profound importance in the history of suffering in the Christian West."<sup>55</sup> The liberating Reformation message was suffering was for two overall sanctifying purposes—to test the genuineness of faith and to purify the soul from its sin.<sup>56</sup>

Reformation theology served as the ground from which sprang the Puritans.

Packer points out the importance suffering played in the lives of the Puritans:

They were great souls serving a great God. In them clear-headed passion and warm-hearted compassion combined. Visionary and practical, idealistic and realistic too, goal-oriented and methodical, they were great believers, great hoppers, great doers, and great sufferers. But their sufferings, both sides of the ocean (in old England from the authorities and in New England from the elements), seasoned and ripened them till they gained a stature that was nothing short of heroic.<sup>57</sup>

Their experiences of suffering combined with biblical conviction produced an unmatched literature on suffering from a biblically Christian perspective. They distinguished between suffering that was internal (grief, sorrow, despair), external (sickness, pain, persecution), and spiritual (satanic attacks, God's discipline).<sup>58</sup> They detailed many purposes and/or benefits for suffering. Suffering (1) was for the glory of God, for the good of his children, and for the judgment of the wicked; (2) revealed and mortified sin; (3) produced godliness and other spiritual fruits worthy of Christ; (4) revealed the character of God such as his wisdom, faithfulness, goodness, grace and mercy,

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<sup>55</sup>Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering*, 257.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup>J. I Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 21.

<sup>58</sup>Ann Thompson, *The Art of Suffering and the Impact of Seventeenth-Century Anti-Providential Thought* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 3.

sovereignty, and Fatherly care; (5) made the heart yearn for things eternal; (6) produced sincere faith; (7) encouraged fellowship with God through his Word, prayer, and the Lord's Supper; (8) proclaimed to the world the believer's salvation and the truth of the gospel; and (9) cultivated communion with Christ.

The Puritan model of counseling was listening well, probing, and giving practical counsel that was biblical and realistic.<sup>59</sup> As was seen above, they primarily viewed suffering through the lens of divine glory, divine providence, and focused on the beneficial blessings afflictions produced in the soul. For example, Samuel Willard encouraged pastors to console sufferers by reminding them that these earthly trials “helps them forward for heaven, and contributes to the [increase] of their eternal glory: every reproach and injury doth but add weight to their Crown.”<sup>60</sup> The Puritans, however, generally heeded Richard Sibbes' counsel to “not be too curious in prying in the weaknesses of others”<sup>61</sup> lest the counselee become dependent on the counselor rather than Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Puritans' theology of suffering and practical ministry to sufferers has withstood the test of time.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 944.

<sup>60</sup>Samuel Willard, *The Child's Portion: Or the Unseen Glory of the Children of God, Asserted, and Proved: Together with Several Other Sermons Occasionally Preached, and Now Published* (Boston: Samuel Green, 1684).

<sup>61</sup>Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed* (1630; repr., Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 33.

<sup>62</sup>Some of the more notable English Puritan books on suffering which are still widely published include William Bridge, *A Lifting Up for the Downcast*; Thomas Boston *Crook in the Lot: Living with That Thorn in Your Side*; Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*; John Bunyan, *Advise to Sufferers*; Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*; Thomas Case, *When Christians Suffer*; John Flavel *A Token for Mourners and Facing Grief*; Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed* and *The Soul's Conflict with Itself*. A Dutch Reformer who wrote on suffering was Jean Taffin, *The Marks of God's Children*.

Enlightenment philosophers supplanted the theological presuppositions embraced by the Puritans, and others, with a new set of premises revolving around individualism, relativism, and rationalism. These troika of philosophic axioms, in effect, exalted the autonomous self and made God irrelevant to life.<sup>63</sup> Enlightenment ideas and their offspring have continued to permeate Western culture for the past (nearly) four centuries so that, now, the civil religion of contemporary pop-culture America is what Christian Smith has labeled “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” (MTD).” The credal statement of MTD has five basic tenets:<sup>64</sup> (1) a God exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth;<sup>65</sup> (2) God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions; (3) the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself; (4) God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when he is needed to resolve a problem; and (5) good people go to heaven when they die. Smith summarizes what amounts to suffering in the MTD religion: “perhaps the worst the God of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism can do is simply fail to provide his promised therapeutic blessings, in which case those who believe in him

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<sup>63</sup>Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 40.

<sup>64</sup>Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162–63. Smith uncovered that MTD is not limited to teenagers but “is also a widespread, popular faith among very many U.S. adults” (ibid., 166).

<sup>65</sup>Smith summarizes the MTD deity: “Like the Deistic God of the eighteenth-century philosophers, the God of contemporary teenage Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is primarily a divine Creator and Lawgiver. He designed the universe and establishes moral law and order. But this God is not trinitarian, he did not speak through the Torah or the prophets of Israel, was never resurrected from the dead, and does not fill and transform people through his Spirit. This God is not demanding. He actually can’t be, because his job is to solve our problem and make people feel good. In short, God is something like a combination Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist: he is always on call, takes care of any problems that arise, professionally helps his people to feel better about themselves, and does not become too personally involved in the process” (Smith, *Soul Searching*, 165).

are entitled to be grumpy.”<sup>66</sup> Suffering has no role in MTD. Rather, mortification of self-rule gives way to finding happiness through self-gratification, maturity in Christ is redefined as being nice to everyone, and glorifying God is replaced by self-satisfaction. Smith’s research led him to conclude that a large segment of Christianity in America has “substantially morphed into Christianity’s misbegotten stepcousin, Christian Moralistic Therapeutic Deism”<sup>67</sup> because the faith “is actively being colonized and displaced by a quite different religious faith.”<sup>68</sup>

This brief historical survey of suffering validates Max Scheler’s claim that “a doctrine on *the meaning of pain and suffering* was, in all lands, at all times, in the whole world, at the core of the teachings and directives, which the great religious and philosophical thinkers gave to men.”<sup>69</sup> Modern American culture is awash with a cacophony of voices concerning suffering.<sup>70</sup> This dissertation joins the conversation from a Reformed perspective. I hope to demonstrate in the following pages that the divine design for suffering in Christ-followers is to decrease self-rule through mortification, increase God’s rule through engendering spiritual maturity, with both of these functions serving the ultimate purpose of God glorifying himself in the individual lives of his

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<sup>66</sup>Smith, *Soul Searching*, 95.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 171.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Quoted in Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering*, 3 (italics in original).

<sup>70</sup>Some of these voices include: suffering and a benevolent God cannot co-exist (atheism, agnosticism); suffering is divine retribution for personal sins or lack of faith (prosperity theology); suffering has redemptive qualities (Roman Catholicism); suffering is sovereign over God (Open Theism); suffering is an illusion (New Age, Eastern theologies); suffering is real but serves no purpose and/or is to be endured (Moralistic Therapeutic Deism); suffering is due to societal inequalities (liberalism); and suffering is due to external factors with no individual responsibility (psychological).

covenant people. This message is always one the church, and the world, needs to hear.<sup>71</sup>

## **Contemporary Biblical Counseling Perspectives**

The contemporary biblical counseling movement was born in 1970 when Jay Adams' *Competent to Counsel* “dropped like a bombshell on the conservative Christian world.”<sup>72</sup> The book enjoyed enormous success and was followed three years later by *The Christian Counselor's Manual*. Both works paid scant attention to suffering.<sup>73</sup> Suffering received more attention in *More Than Redemption: A Theology of Christian Counseling* with two extended sections.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>Looking out over the contemporary landscape, Peter Lewis submits, “Every Christian is aware of the many forms of spiritual depression that can and do accompany the Christian life in this uncertain world. Perhaps few ages have been more neurotic than our own, and the crying need for an adequate, biblical, pastoral ministry to anguished minds, disillusioned Christians, stricken consciences and subconscious fears, was never more in evidence than in our day” (Peter Lewis, *The Genius of Puritanism* [Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publishing, 1997], 136).

<sup>72</sup>David Powlison, “Biblical Counseling in Recent Times,” in *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*, ed. John MacArthur (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 23. John Piper defines “biblical counseling” as “God-centered, Bible-saturated, emotionally-in-touch use of language to help people become God-besotted, Christ-exalting, joyfully self-forgetting lovers of people” (John Piper and Jack Delk, “The Glory of God: The Goal of Biblical Counseling,” in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling*, ed. James MacDonald [Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013], 24.). David Powlison defines biblical counseling by distinguishing its common commitments: (1) God is at the center of counseling; (2) commitment to God has epistemological consequences (authority of Scripture, the opposition of sin); (3) sin is the primary problem counselors must deal with; (4) the gospel of Christ is the answer; (5) the biblical change process must aim at progressive sanctification; (6) the situational difficulties people face operate within the sovereign design of God; and (7) counseling is fundamentally a pastoral activity and must be church-based (Powlison, “Biblical Counseling in Recent Times,” 27–29).

<sup>73</sup>To be fair, however, both books were seminal, and Adams never intended them to be comprehensive. For example, he wrote in the introduction to *Competent to Counsel*, “Much work yet remains to be done to consider a full and organized system of biblical counseling, but in this book I shall attempt to sketch the architectural preliminaries” (Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970], xxii).

<sup>74</sup>The section entitled “Misery” focuses on suffering due to sin (Jay E. Adams, *More Than Redemption: A Theology of Christian Counseling* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979], 152-59). The chapter “Counseling and Suffering” discusses suffering due external parties (ibid., 271-75).

Adams called 1 Peter “a handbook on suffering”<sup>75</sup> and wrote *Trust and Obey* as a practical commentary so that “Christians, hopefully, will find it helpful in their struggles with suffering.”<sup>76</sup> This book is his fullest treatment of suffering to date and flows from the exposition of the text. Christians will experience suffering for many reasons (3-11)<sup>77</sup> but are obligated to still give praise to God for his redemptive blessings granted in Christ (12-16). Rejoicing in suffering is possible when the child of God, by faith, looks to the eternal inheritance in Christ (17-20) and draws comfort from the fact that God will never abandon his people (21-24). Christ-followers are responsible to hope in God’s grace (25-33) and to continue to obey him even if suffering (34-39). God uses suffering to expose sinful behaviors (40-47). Suffering is momentary and transitory (48-52) and is used by God to wean the Christ-follower from the world so that he or she will drink deeply from the Word of God (55-60), cling to Christ and value him (61-66), and rest on their identity in Christ (67-74). Suffering is a witness of the gospel of Christ to unbelievers (75-85) as his people follow Jesus’ example, especially if the suffering is due to the unjust actions of others (86-90). If the suffering is due to a spouse, then the Christian needs to be careful to have a Christ-honoring response (93-101). Suffering produces Christ-honoring spiritual maturity (102-06), which includes doing good to those who bring the unjust suffering (107-12) and suffering for doing what is right (113-17). Suffering Christians need to guard against despair by realizing that God is using the

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<sup>75</sup>Adams, *More Than Redemption*, 271n1.

<sup>76</sup>Jay Edward Adams, *Trust and Obey: A Practical Commentary on First Peter* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), vii. Additionally, Adams has published several pamphlets and booklets that address suffering generally: “God has the Answer to your Problems;” “How to Overcome Evil;” “Christ and your Problems;” “How to Handle Trouble;” and the series “What Do You Do When . . .”.

<sup>77</sup>The parentheses represent the page numbers associated with the statement.



suffering to instill perseverance (121-28). Christian duties still need to be performed in trying times (129-34), which include trusting and obeying Christ no matter how serious the suffering (135-40). Church elders, especially, need to continue to joyfully serve Christ and shepherd the suffering in the church if they suffer (143-48). Suffering is an opportunity to resist Satan's temptations to abandon God and to instill humility (149-54).

In 1988 David Powlison surveyed the still infant movement and suggested one area needing development was "the "biblical view of man as a victim,"<sup>78</sup> which he clarified:

[One] central avenue of approach into the life of my counselee, my friend, my fellow, is through his suffering. His body is in pain. Satan is mounting assaults on his faith. He has had a lifetime of ungodly influences which persist into the present. He is experiencing situational uncertainties: his job future and his wife's health. Such a recognition, and the patience to hear it, even to pursue it, will not sabotage recognition of his responsibility. It will rather set his responsibility firmly and realistically in context. His characteristic sins were and are often forged in reaction to suffering and being sinned against.<sup>79</sup>

Subsequent authors within the biblical counseling movement heeded Powlison's advice and have adopted an incarnational model of counseling. The incarnational model of ministry was pioneered and popularized by Sherwood Lingenfelter in light of his experiences as a missionary. Jesus in his incarnation "identified totally with those whom he was sent"<sup>80</sup> therefore, concludes Lingenfelter, "if we are to follow the example of Christ, we must aim at incarnation!"<sup>81</sup> He explains this

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<sup>78</sup>David A. C. Powlison, "Crucial Issues in Contemporary Biblical Counseling," *The Journal of Pastoral Practice* 9, no. 3 (1988): 62.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 63.

<sup>80</sup>Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 17.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 25.

statement:

To follow the example of Christ, that of incarnation, means undergoing drastic personal reorientation. They [missionaries] must be socialized all over again into a new cultural context. They must enter a culture as if they were children—ignorant of everything, from the customs of eating and talking to the patterns of work, play, and worship. Moreover, they must do this in the spirit of Christ, that is, without sin.<sup>82</sup>

The incarnational model presented by Lingenfelter has been adapted to other areas of ministry such as incarnational church planting, incarnational teaching, incarnational spirituality, incarnational discipleship, incarnational youth ministry, incarnational leadership, and incarnational ecclesiology. Bob Kellemen and Greg Cook co-authored a chapter in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling* that begins with a series of important questions: “What is a biblical approach to helping hurting people find God’s healing hope? How does a biblical counselor share God’s sustaining and healing comfort? How do we walk with others through the valley of the shadow of death?”<sup>83</sup> The authors answer their own questions, in part, by first underscoring the necessity to help sufferers emulate the example of Christ who had a consistent Father-ward focus in his sufferings (1 Pet 2:19-25). They then assert that the counselor must enter into the counselee’s story through “incarnational suffering,” which they define as “suffering that enters into the world of another person. Suffering that cares so much that, if possible, it would endure substitutionary suffering.”<sup>84</sup> This position is supported by the incarnation of Jesus who identified himself with those for whom he suffered.

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<sup>82</sup>Lingenfelter, *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, 23.

<sup>83</sup>Bob Kellemen and Greg Cook, “The Ministry of Soul Care for People Who Suffer,” in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling*, ed. James MacDonald (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), 378.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 385.

Other authors identified with the biblical counseling movement may not use the phrase “incarnational suffering” but do promote its concepts. A chapter in Paul Tripp’s *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands* is dedicated to suffering. The chapter contains a brief, two-page theology of suffering but its main objective is to counsel counselors as they counsel sufferers: “You are a sufferer who has been called by God to minister to others in pain. Suffering is not only the common ground of human relationships, but one of God’s most useful workrooms. As God’s ambassadors, we need to learn how to identify with those who suffer.”<sup>85</sup> He continues this theme of shared-identity: “Our service must not have an ‘I stand above you as one who has arrived’ character. It flows out of a humble recognition that we share an identity with those we serve.”<sup>86</sup> The leader’s guide to *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands* was published five years after the book and explicitly uses incarnational language:

God changes people not simply because we have said the hard words of truth to them but because those strong words were said with compassion, humility, gentleness, patience, and love. When we do this, we actually become the physical evidence of the very things we are presenting to others. When this happens, we are not only incarnating truth; we are incarnating Christ, who is with us and our only hope.<sup>87</sup>

Michael Emlet in *CrossTalk* offers a further refinement in the counseling process. He intimates that within any given counseling situation the Christ-follower is simultaneously a saint, sufferer, and sinner, and all three aspects need to be addressed by

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<sup>85</sup>Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2002), 145.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 146. Tripp suggests that identifying with sufferers may be accomplished by telling a personal story of a difficult situation which highlights both the struggles and God’s help to endure. He cautions, however, “your story must highlight God’s grace in your weakness, not your heroic faith” (ibid., 156).

the counselor.<sup>88</sup> He warns that ignoring the suffering aspect could have serious consequences:

We will be insensitive to the relational and circumstantial challenges people face. We will minimize sin committed against them and maximize sin they commit. In our zeal to call people to account for their sin, we will overlook injustice done to them. We will miss the ways they experience the pain of their problems. Bottom line, we will miss their cry for help.<sup>89</sup>

Emlet offers no theological reflections on suffering but emphasizes the need for biblical counselors to enter into the world of the sufferer in order to understand and better minister.

The biblical counseling movement has continued to broaden and develop counseling strategies to help sufferers within an incarnational suffering model. J. Todd Billings critiques the incarnational model primarily from a mission's perspective but his arguments are germane for biblical counseling. He concludes that "the incarnation is simply not a model for ministry that we should follow"<sup>90</sup> because the incarnation was a unique event in redemption history that cannot be repeated, nowhere does the NT suggest that the incarnation should be used as a model for ministry, and becoming incarnated in another's person's life is an impossible task. Billings contends that the fatal flaw in incarnational ministry is "the tendency of practitioners of incarnational ministry to see

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<sup>87</sup>Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: How to Help Others Change (Facilitator's Guide)* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2005), 57-58.

<sup>88</sup>Emlet explains, "[Each] person we meet is wrestling in some way to two problems. First, the problem of identity and purpose: who am I and what in the world should I be doing: (This corresponds to God's address to us as saints.) Second, the problem of evil: evil from "without" (which corresponds to our experience as sufferers) and evil from "within" (which corresponds to our experience as sinners)" (Michael R. Emlet, *CrossTalk: Where Life and Scripture Meet* [Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2009], 74).

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>90</sup>J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 131.

their own presence as inherently redemptive.”<sup>91</sup> This insight, applied to biblical counseling, cautions that the key for ministering to sufferers can subtly shift from Christ and the Holy Spirit to the counselor’s ability to identify with the counselee’s suffering.<sup>92</sup> Consequently, a robust theology of suffering whose focal point is God’s design for suffering to bring about soul-change by decreasing self-rule through mortification, increasing God’s rule through engendering spiritual maturity, both for God’s glory gets replaced with therapeutic techniques to help identify with the sufferer, which subtly shifts the counselee’s dependence from Christ to the skill of the counselor.<sup>93</sup>

Billings rightfully affirms that “the incarnation should set our focus directly upon Jesus Christ, the servant, to whom Christians have been united.”<sup>94</sup> The counselor can never “be Jesus” to the counselee and cannot make him present for then “the burden of incarnation—and revelation—is on the shoulders of the individuals. Such a theology often leads to burnout.”<sup>95</sup> The Holy Spirit is the one who makes Christ present to his people (John 15:26). The counselor, due to his or her union with Christ, is empowered by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and is called not to incarnate Christ but to be his servant and witness. Billings calls this shift in focus a “union with Christ” model of

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<sup>91</sup>Billings, *Union with Christ*, 125.

<sup>92</sup>See *ibid.*, 127, 135, where this concept is applied to missions.

<sup>93</sup>See also Robert W. Kelleman, *God’s Healing for Life’s Losses: How to Find Hope When You’re Hurting* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 2010); James MacDonald, *When Life Is Hard* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009); and Paul David Tripp, *A Shelter in the Time of Storm: Meditations on God and Trouble* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), which all show the same proclivity to focus more on the incarnational, therapeutic method of suffering rather than primarily directing the sufferer to God’s design for the suffering.

<sup>94</sup>Billings, *Union with Christ*, 124.

<sup>95</sup>J. Todd Billings, “The Problem with ‘Incarnational Ministry,’” *Christianity Today* 56, no. 7 (August 2012): 60.

ministry.

One implication of adopting an approach favoring the notion of union with Christ the servant over that of incarnational ministry is that union with Christ puts more emphasis on the specific, concrete ministry and life of Jesus Christ. For incarnational ministry, the pattern of becoming incarnate functions as an abstract pattern—a model promoting immersion into a culture. But for Paul and for a Christian theology of union with Christ it is more concrete: precisely because God has revealed himself in particularity and uniqueness of the obedient Servant, Jesus Christ, Christians are called to reflect this humble service in ministry, as Paul does in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.<sup>96</sup>

Interestingly, authors associated with the biblical counseling movement have yet to produce a book-length work dedicated to a robust biblical theology of suffering explaining the mortification, vivification, glorification themes.<sup>97</sup> This dissertation is a work of biblical counseling which seeks to fill this gap. The sovereignty of God means that suffering is designed by him to accomplish his purposes in Christ-followers' lives. Adopting a union with Christ model of biblical counseling does not negate the need for biblical counselors to be compassionate, sympathetic, or personable as they counsel sufferers. This model, does, however, underscore that no matter the skill, insights, and Christlikeness of counselors, they are but servants of Christ who are to focus sufferers' attention on Christ so that, through the ministering power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, their suffering would be an instrument of soul-change that results in them decreasing self-rule through mortification, God increasing his rule by engendering spiritual maturity,

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<sup>96</sup>Billings, *Union with Christ*, 145.

<sup>97</sup>A point of clarification is warranted. Randy Alcorn, John MacArthur, John Piper, and Joni Eareckson Tada, for example, have written books on suffering, which, presumably, are consulted by biblical counselors. These authors have had a tremendous impact on the movement but are not associated with the biblical counseling movement in the same way as are Jay Adams, David Powlison, Tedd Tripp, Ed Welch, Timothy Lane, Stuart Scott, et al. A vast number of books on suffering—some are theologies, others personal anecdotes, some are practically focused—are available to the biblical counselor. The website [goodreads.com](https://www.goodreads.com) lists books according to number of recommendations. Under “suffering” are listed 488 books; 84 percent of the first fifty are from a broadly Christian perspective (Goodreads, accessed March 3, 2016, <https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/suffering>).

both for the ultimate purpose of glorifying himself. Many of the therapeutic techniques developed by biblical counselors from an incarnational framework are helpful and may be incorporated into a full-orbed theology of suffering. My hope is that this dissertation will further equip biblical counselors to think clearly about suffering and be able to better navigate the soul of the suffering saint.

### **Methodology**

The following dissertation is a biblical, theological, and practical study on the divine design of suffering. The methodology reflects the main points of the thesis statement. A brief introductory chapter is followed by three subsequent chapters dedicated to a core idea contained in the argument. Chapter 2 examines the divine design to decrease self-rule through mortification, chapter 3 the purpose increase God's rule through the engendering of spiritual maturity, and chapter 4 God's ultimate purpose to glorify himself through the sufferings of his covenant people. Chapters 2-4 will follow a biblical theology pattern of laying the foundation with the OT primarily through the lament psalms, showing how the chapter topic was exemplified in Christ, and then applying the theme to Christ-followers. Chapter 5 will defend the dissertation thesis against the claims of open theism. Chapter 6 will offer some theological and practical implications of the study to biblical counseling. The methodology of this chapter will be based upon Jeremy Pierre's dissertation, which explored the biblical view of the heart.<sup>98</sup> A short concluding chapter will round out the dissertation.

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<sup>98</sup>Jeremy Paul Pierre, "'Trust in the Lord with All Your Heart': The Centrality of Faith in Christ to the Restoration of Human Functioning" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010).

Several limitations restrict the scope of the dissertation, primarily due to space requirements. First, the biblical data which could be brought to bear on the topic is massive and, thus, a rigorous exegetical treatment of all the texts is not possible. Those passages which are the most germane to and/or illustrative of the thesis receive a fuller and deeper exegesis. Second, Christian theologians and scholars have written a vast amount of literature concerning God's designs in suffering so that only a small representative portion is utilized in this dissertation. Third, the offered theological and practical implications which result from this study are suggestive and not exhaustive. Fourth, the dissertation is primarily directed to evangelical Christians within a contemporary American evangelical culture.<sup>99</sup> Fifth, this dissertation is a work of biblical theology and will have limited interaction with the extensive materials on suffering generated by the various contemporary psychotherapeutic schools.

The purpose of this dissertation is to offer a constructive proposal on the divine design of suffering in the lives of Christ-followers. Therefore, it is polemical only when necessary in order to show the advantages of the dissertation argument when encountering divergent viewpoints. The proposed methodology will be sufficient to adequately defend the dissertation thesis.

### **Summary of Chapters**

Chapter 1 introduces the general topic of the dissertation. This chapter offers and explains the thesis that the divine design for suffering in Christ-followers is to

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<sup>99</sup>The biblical principles discussed in this dissertation, however, may be applied cross-culturally for God's Word is truth for everyone regardless of location. Granted, how these truths are communicated will vary from culture-to-culture.



decrease self-rule through mortification, increase God's rule through engendering spiritual maturity, with both of these functions serving the ultimate purpose of God glorifying himself in the individual lives of his covenant people. The methodology and limitations of the dissertation are then discussed. The chapter concludes with a chapter-by-chapter summary of the material presented in the dissertation.

Chapter 2 discusses the first divine purpose of suffering in Christ-followers, which is to decrease self-rule through mortification. The chapter begins with an examination of the fall and its aftermath to establish that human self-rule is the inherent motivating factor of the human heart. The mortification of self-rule is then examined via the lamenting psalmists. God's ultimate weapon against human self-autonomy is the cross of the Suffering Messiah, which is the subject of the next section. The next part of the chapter presents how the implications of the cross are applied by the Holy Spirit in order to mortify the residual presence of the proclivity to self-rule, which still lurks in the Christ-follower's heart. The last section offers a summary statement of the findings.

Chapter 3 examines the second divine purpose of suffering in Christ-followers, which is to increase God's rule by engendering spiritual maturity or sanctification. The sanctifying work of suffering is first examined in the lamenting psalmists. Jesus' spiritual development through suffering is the topic of the next section. The following chapter division shows how suffering sanctifies and, thereby, increases God's rule, by examining six NT passages: the Christ-directed hope suffering produces (Rom 5:1-5), suffering to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:18-30), suffering to produce spiritual strength (2 Cor 12:1-10), suffering in order to relationally know Christ (Phil 3:1-11), the discipling use of suffering (Heb 12:3-11), and the spiritual wholeness suffering yields

(Jas 1:2-4, 12). The last section summarizes the chapter.

Chapter 4 explores the third major thesis statement, which God's infliction of suffering in his covenant people to decrease their self-rule and increase his rule is for the ultimate purpose to bring glory to himself. The chapter begins by examining the vocabulary of glory and how God glorifies himself by proclaiming his glorious name, his glorious works (Exod 34:6-7). The divine design to bring himself glory through human suffering is explicated in the next sections of the chapter that focus on the lamenting psalmists and Christ respectively. Next, the chapter will focus on Christ-followers bringing glory to God through their suffering and with the end of suffering. The chapter ends with a summary statement of the findings.

Chapter 5 defends the dissertation thesis from specific disagreements raised by open theism (openness, neotheism). The chapter begins with an explanation and critique of the major theological ideas undergirding open theism. Next, the dissertation argument is defended against open theistic claims that no divine designs or purposes for suffering exists. The last section examines the devastating practical effects neotheistic doctrine has on sufferers' lives. The chapter ends with a summary statement of the major arguments.

Chapter 6 offers implications of the dissertation's findings on a biblical counseling methodology. The chapter begins by defining and discussing the heart's cognitive, affective, and volitional responding aspects. Subsequent sections discuss how suffering mortifies unchristlike thoughts, conforms these thoughts to Christlikeness, both for the glory of God. A similar pattern is followed as focus shifts to heart's affections and volitions. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the implications the dissertation's findings have on a biblical counseling methodology.

Chapter 7 concludes the dissertation with a summary of the arguments made in preceding chapters. This chapter will confirm that the divine design for suffering in Christ-followers is to decrease self-rule through mortification, increase God's rule through engendering spiritual maturity, with both of these functions serving the ultimate purpose of God glorifying himself in the individual lives of his covenant people. Further areas of study either directly or implicitly related to this dissertation will then be suggested. The chapter and dissertation will end with some concluding thoughts.

## CHAPTER 2

### SUFFERING AND THE DECREASING OF SELF-RULE THROUGH MORTIFICATION

Scripture opens with the majestic, sovereign God exercising his kingly rule over all creation. He created Adam and Eve to be his representative vice-regents on earth, which placed humanity in the preeminent position of the created order. Adam, however, attempted to establish his own autarchy with himself as the self-sovereign king to rival the divine King's kingdom and rule. God's judgments enveloped humanity and all creation in suffering. C. S. Lewis famously declared that God "shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."<sup>1</sup> Primarily, suffering is an intimate encounter with the living God who burns with kingly holiness (Isa 6:1-4). Suffering is God's roaring cry for self-styled potentates to mortify their natural inclination of destructive self-serving self-sovereignty.

The argument of this dissertation is that the divine design for suffering in Christ-followers is to decrease self-rule through mortification, increase God's rule through engendering spiritual maturity, with both of these functions serving the ultimate purpose of God glorifying himself in the individual lives of his covenant people. This chapter will hopefully demonstrate the first major element of the thesis—God designs suffering to decrease self-rule in his covenant people through mortification. The first step

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<sup>1</sup>C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1962), 93.

will show that God's response to Adam's sinful failure to fulfill his kingly obligations fomented suffering as God's judicial judgment on all creation. Then I will examine the lament psalms, which are the fullest expressions in Scripture of the continuing judicial suffering God inflicts on rebels bent on self-sovereignty. The laments, however, also show that God designed the suffering to mortify the lamenting psalmists' self-rule. These two sections serve as the backdrop to interpret the profound work of the Davidic King, the Suffering Servant, the Second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ. He fulfilled his kingly obligations, submitted to the will of the Father, and, thus, union with him is the only hope anyone has to restore the soul by mortifying their proclivity to self-rule. The last part will focus on the attraction self-rule still has for Christ-followers and the role suffering plays to decrease self-rule in order to be disciples who submit to his kingly authority.

### **Suffering Inaugurated by Adam's Embracing Self-Rule**

Suffering had not part in the original creation but is a divinely imposed curse instigated by Adam's rebellious desire for autonomy. The fault of the fall and the interjection of suffering in the world lies squarely on Adam as he flagrantly expressed his commitment to self-determination, which, in turn, was imputed to all his posterity.

### **God's Rule or Self-Rule Decided at "The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil"**

The Scripture opens with the divine King exerting his rule and dominion over all creation. Genesis 1:2 states that "the earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep." The terms translated "without form and void" occur together in Isaiah 34:4 and Jeremiah 4:23 as indicators of divine judgment. "Darkness" is

used throughout Scripture as a symbol of sin, evil, death, dread, and judgment (Exod 10:21-22; Matt 8:11-12; Rev 16:10). The picture is that “something is drastically wrong at the outset”<sup>2</sup> because God’s rule is being opposed. Scripture gives no indication of how this dark chaos came into existence or its composition. The chaos is the domain that resists God’s rule and this “inchoate darkness is not good because it resists life.”<sup>3</sup> God exerted his kingly dominion to dismantle the chaos; he subdued it in the first three creative days, and in the last three creative days he filled the creation with life.

The creation of humanity, unlike any other aspect of creation, was preceded by an inter-Trinitarian deliberation as the Godhead determined these particular creatures would be uniquely created in the image of God (*imago dei*; Gen 1:26). The meaning of *imago dei* has been variously explained in terms of intellectual ability, moral decision making, the ability to make willful choices, moral purity, or ruling as God’s representative vice-regents.<sup>4</sup> David Clines’ research uncovered that ancient kings believed they alone were created in the image of their gods to be the representative rulers of the gods on earth.<sup>5</sup> Clines concludes, “All mankind, without distinction, are the image of God. The image is to be understood not so much ontologically as existentially: it comes to expression not in the nature of man so much as in his activity and function. This

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<sup>2</sup>Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 106.

<sup>3</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 180.

<sup>4</sup>See David J. A. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968): 54–61; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 498–517; and Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 442–50.

<sup>5</sup>Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” 85.

function is to represent God's lordship to the lower orders of creation."<sup>6</sup> God created his image bearers to "have dominion" over the created order. "Dominion" occurs twenty-five times in the OT and in all but one means "to rule"<sup>7</sup> and, thus, points to Adam's kingly function.

God's first words to humanity revealed his intent for them to rule over the earth as his vice-regents: "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion" (Gen 1:28). The words "subdue" and "dominion" point to the kingly, royal position and function God appointed for Adam. The verb "subdue" was not part of the inter-Trinitarian deliberation (Gen 1:26) but was included in the divine commission to his vice-regent (Gen 1:28). "Subdue" and its derivatives occur sixteen times in the OT and "assumes that the party being subdued is hostile to the subduer, necessitating some sort of coercion if the subduing is to take place."<sup>8</sup> Allen Ross suggests "subdue" was "perhaps used in anticipation of the conflict with evil."<sup>9</sup> John Oswalt more forcefully asserts that the verb "implies that creation will not do man's bidding gladly or easily and that man must now bring creation into submission by main strength."<sup>10</sup> The forces which would oppose Adam's kingly rule are not specified but his attempts to subjugate them

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<sup>6</sup>Clines, "The Image of God in Man," 101.

<sup>7</sup>The term is also found in Gen 1:28; Lev 25:43, 46, 53; Lev 26:17; Num 24:19; Judg 14:9; 1 Kgs 4:24; 5:16; 9:23; 2 Chr 8:10; Neh 9:28; Pss 49:14; 68:27; 72:8; 110:2; Isa 14:2, 6; Jer 5:31; Lam 1:13; Ezek 29:15; 34:4; Joel 3:13.

<sup>8</sup>TWOT, s.v. "קָבַשׁ," by John N. Oswalt. The term also occurs in Num 32:22, 29; Josh 18:1; 2 Sam 8:11; 1 Chr 22:18; 2 Chr 9:18; 28:10; Neh 5:5; Esth 7:8; Jer 34:11, 16; Mic 7:19; Zech 9:15.

<sup>9</sup>Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 113. See also Jeremy Cohen, *Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It: The Ancient and Medieval Career of a Biblical Text* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 15–19.

<sup>10</sup>Oswalt, "קָבַשׁ."

would not be effortless. The divine commission to Adam echoed God's kingly rule over creation. God subdued the primordial chaos, exerted his dominion over it, and filled creation with life. Adam, likewise, was given the kingly role to subdue the "chaos" which opposed his rule, to exert his dominion over the earth, and to fill the earth with the life of his progeny.<sup>11</sup>

The newly created king and queen, however, were not independent regents, as is God, but dependent vice-regents who were obligated to rule under the auspices of the divine King. Within this framework, the first couple were uniquely given a prohibitive command with an ominous promise: "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen 2:17). The pairing of "good and evil" in the OT always carried the idea of moral right and wrong, which finds its source in the person and nature of God.<sup>12</sup> "Death" certainly meant physical death (as attested in the recurring phrase "and he died" in Gen 5) but also to an immediate moral and spiritual death which would sever and alienate them from God, the Source of Life. The tree, then, served as God's silent sentinel to test Adam's willingness to submit to God's kingly rule or to subvert God's authority and establish himself as a rival king. Disobedience would be Adam's determination to embrace self-rule, his right to choose for himself what was good and evil apart from any relation or obligation to God.

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<sup>11</sup>Warren Austin Gage, *The Gospel of Genesis: Studies in Protology and Eschatology* (Winona Lake, IN: Carpenter Books, 1984), 31–32. See also G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 29–87.

<sup>12</sup>Deut 1:39; 2 Sam 14:7; 1 Kgs 3:9; Isa 1:16-17; 5:20; 7:15.



## The Rise of Autonomous Self-Rule

Enter the chaotic agent Satan into the drama. Satan is described as “crafty” (Gen 3:1), a subtle foe who is full of “malevolent brilliance,”<sup>13</sup> opposed to God’s rule. Satan’s devious wooing of Eve began by focusing her attention on the forbidden tree (Gen 3:1). Eve’s response clearly indicated she understood the grave danger the tree represented, not only was she horrified to eat its fruit she refused to touch it (Gen 3:2-3).<sup>14</sup> Satan responded with a bold contradiction of God’s Word (Gen 3:4-5). Disobedience, Satan argued, would not result in spiritual death but spiritual liberation to become godlike in determining her own moral standards.<sup>15</sup> The allure to become a goddess was powerful: “Here was the opportunity for her to enlarge her personality, to obtain the freedom necessary to give full expression to her own potential, to break the bonds of public opinion and especially the shackles of religion.”<sup>16</sup> Satan held out the prospect of self-rule with all its “benefits.”

Eve now looked at the object of temptation with a different perceptive. She was no longer repelled but gazed on the fruit and contemplated its benefits. She went through a rationalization process which concluded that disobedience was better than obedience. Her musings on the fruit paved the way for desiring it and, finally, boldly taking it in an act of defiant self-rule. Eve died in that moment (Jas 1:13-15). The

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<sup>13</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. “עָרִים,” by Ronald B. Allen.

<sup>14</sup>Allen Ross explains, “The changes that were made between this verse and the giving of the commandment are within the legitimate range of interpretation. There is no violation in free paraphrasing the words of the Lord.” (Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 135).

<sup>15</sup>Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 165–66.

<sup>16</sup>Edward J. Young, *Genesis 3* (London: Banner Of Truth Trust, 1966), 103.

involved narrative describing Eve’s insubordination is in stark contrast to the terseness of Adam’s flagrant disobedience: “she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate” (Gen 3:6). The first act of self-primacy was to entice others to rebel against God.

An immediate and profound ontological transformation transpired in the innermost core of Adam’s soul the moment his teeth bit into the forbidden fruit and instigated a fundamental shift in humanity’s relationship with God. Humanity was created in the *imago dei* to be ruling vice-regents dependent on God’s overarching sovereign rule. The fall, however, twisted the *imago dei* inward so that now Adam and all his offspring desire to be their own self-ruling autarchs apart from God’s sovereign rule. Adam spiritually died. He became severed and alienated from God. He became hostile toward God and embraced his own will in a godlike act of self-determination.<sup>17</sup>

Christopher Wright insightfully explains, “Not that humans have *become* gods but that they have chose to *act as though they were*—defining and deciding for themselves what they will regard as good and evil.”<sup>18</sup> The essence of sin is the desire to be independent from God. The fall was Adam’s self-willed declaration to challenge the kingship of God—*he* would now be the determiner of his own destiny, the author of his own wisdom, the creator of his own reality apart from any obligation, duty, or reference to God.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Rom 1: 18-32; 3:10-18; Eph 2:1-3 became immediate realities.

<sup>18</sup>Wright, *The Mission of God*, 164. Italics in original.

<sup>19</sup>Young comments that the fall was “a whole-hearted devotion to their own personalities” (Young, *Genesis 3*, 109). Iain Provan poignantly describes the craving motivation for autonomy: “The temptation is to take control of the situation and to fulfill human potential in doing so. Delegated, representative divinity is not enough when the real thing is at hand (“you will be like God,” 3:5). Thus the fruit of the tree is taken, as the human pair seek to grasp equality with God by becoming autonomous moral beings. Essentially they have come to believe that the image of God in human beings is something to be

The divinely promised death sentence for disobedience immediately plunged the contumacious couple into the abyss of sin and suffering. They had once stood together naked and unashamed (Gen 2:25) but now their nakedness was a source of suffering shame which they attempted to cover with their own devices (Gen 3:7).<sup>20</sup> Ryan Hanley’s research on biblical nakedness suggests that their new perspective was directly related to their new status before God:

Thus, their awareness of their nudity was synecdotal for their newfound awareness of being naked with regard to guilt before YHWH. They were, in essence, exposed to the shame and guilt that comes from disobedience and a fracture in an intimate relationship, both to YHWH and to one another. One no longer desires to bare all to the other, but rather, he seeks to conceal himself with leaves (Gen 3:7) and amidst the trees (Gen 3:8).<sup>21</sup>

The supposed autarchist fled from God’s presence in terror as he heard the thundering royal judgment of God echoing throughout the sin-stained garden (Gen 3:8-9).<sup>22</sup>

Self-autonomy resulted in suffering betrayal. Marriage, the most intimate of human relationships, is a one flesh relationship (Gen 2:24) which describes a deep union that creates an ontological “corporate personality” through the sexual union of two

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worshiped rather than to be received as a gift and used for service. They engage in self-worship, in pursuit of self-advancement (Iain W. Provan, “To Highlight All Our Idols : Worshipping God in Nietzsche’s World,” *Ex Auditu* 15 [January 1999]: 26).

<sup>20</sup>In the OT nakedness is seen as a shameful state (Mic 1:11; Nah 3:5; Rev 3:18). Waltke suggests that the covering of the genitals also stems from distrust of one another (Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 263).

<sup>21</sup>Ryan C. Hanley, “Naked and Not Ashamed: A Biblical Examination of Nudity” (seminar paper presented at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, August 1, 2014), 12.

<sup>22</sup>See Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 97–131, and Jeffrey Jay Niehaus, *God at Sinai: Covenant and Theophany in the Bible and Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 155–59, for a defense of this passage describing divine judgment. C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2005), 151–52n 8, however, disagrees with Kline and Niehaus and believes the passage speaks of God’s habit of walking in the garden.

unified spouses.<sup>23</sup> God demanded Adam to explain the couple's rebellious act (Gen 3:9). Adam's self-justification fissured his one flesh, corporate personality with Eve. He who sang the praises of his wife as she stood before him in all her feminine glory, dignity, and splendor (Gen 2:23) now blamed God for giving her to him and blamed her for his disobedience (Gen 3:12). The nascent suffering flowing from rebellious self-rule would now become more profound as the sovereign King steps into the scene as Judge.

### **The Divine Curses on Self-Rule**

Adam failed to exert his kingly authority by succumbing to Satan and, consequently, opposed God by wielding his own self-sovereignty. His rebellious act plunged creation back into chaos. Humanity opposes God's rule, resists being subdued by him, thwarts his dominion, and loves darkness of sin. This new uncreation, the chaos, is the sphere in which suffering exists as God exacted his curses on creatures who presumed godlike supremacy. God declared to the serpent Satan, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring" (Gen 3:15).<sup>24</sup> "Enmity," meaning "hatred and active hostility,"<sup>25</sup> is the first word of this curse to highlight the severe consequences of self-willed rebellion. Eve and her offspring would suffer satanic hostility and its concomitant horrors.<sup>26</sup> The verb form for "I will put" (תִּשְׂטֵן' qal,

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<sup>23</sup>Sang-Won Son, "Implications of Paul's 'One Flesh' Concept for His Understanding of the Nature of Man," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 11, no. 1 (2001): 119.

<sup>24</sup>Satan is identified as "that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" (Rev 12:9).

<sup>25</sup>*NIDOTTE*, s.v. "אִיֵּב," by Tyler F. Williams.

<sup>26</sup>Commentators disagree if "seed" in this passage denotes the collective descendants of Eve (all humanity) with Christ being the primary representative or if the word refers to only Christ. Jack Lewis makes two contributions that gives more weight to the collective view. First, logically if "seed" refers to an

imperfect, first person singular) is found twelve other times in the OT, all but three are uttered by God to show his sovereign rule over the affairs of his creation.<sup>27</sup> The satanically-rooted miseries humanity suffers are divinely imposed by the sovereign King.

The fall was the sinful self exerting its increase of its self-rule. Each divine curse was a divine means to decrease self-rule and to show the impotence the self has in light of the mighty hand of God. Eve received a two-fold divine curse. First was the physical pain associated with the conception, gestation, and birth of children.<sup>28</sup> The children who were to spread God's glorious presence throughout the earth would now come into a fallen world at the price of great pain.<sup>29</sup> Second, Eve's role as helper (Gen 2:18) would be infused with suffering the gnawing desire for marital control: "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Gen 3:16). Eve usurped Adam's authority so now her craving desire is to assert her domination in the marriage relationship.<sup>30</sup> The ideal one flesh relationship would now be supplanted with one marked

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individual descendant of Eve then it should also refer to an individual descendant of Satan. Second, "seed," as it does in Gen 3:15, has a feminine possessive attached to it only five times in Scripture. The two instances in Isaiah refer to literal seed (Isa 17:11) and to the collective offspring of Israel (Isa 51:39). Besides Gen 3:15, this form is found in two other passages in Genesis: Hagar (Gen 16:10) and Rebekah (Gen 24:60), both have "seed" referring to their collective offspring (J. P. Lewis, "The Woman's Seed (Gen 3:15)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34, no. 3 [1991]: 299–300). Thus, the first part of Gen 3:15 refers to the hostility Satan and his followers has for the entire human race but the second part focuses the satanic hostility to one Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will crush Satan and his kingdom.

<sup>27</sup>God utters the phrase in 1 Kgs 11:34; Pss 12:5; 110:1; 132:11; Isa 5:6; 15:9; Jer 3:19; 22:6; Jer 51:39. A human uses the verb form in Pss 13:3; 101:3; Prov 24:32.

<sup>28</sup>Tzvi Novick, "Pain and Production in Eden: Some Philological Reflections on Genesis iii 16," *Vetus Testamentum* 58, no. 2 (2008): 243. The curse of pain in childbearing could possibly also include everything with childbearing which women would come to suffer: barrenness, still born, miscarriages, and death of the mother.

<sup>29</sup>The idea that the divine mandate to Adam and Eve was for them to spread the glory of God throughout the earth will be addressed in chap. 5.

<sup>30</sup>Susan T. Foh, "What Is the Woman's Desire?" *Westminster Theological Journal* 37, no. 3 (Spring 1975): 381–82.

by conflict as both self-centered spouses vie for dominance. They who were to exercise dominion over the creation and subdue it would now focus these efforts on one another.

Adam failed to subdue his enemy Satan therefore God made the ground an enemy to Adam. The ground would rebel against him and no longer be easily subdued to his ministrations: “in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life” (Gen 3:17). The same noun “pain” was used to describe the pain of childbearing. The joy of providing would now be marked with suffering the toilsome labor of sweat and frustration in the conception, gestation, and birth of his harvest.<sup>31</sup> The final divine curse leveled against the insubordinate pair was death. They who were formed from the dust and were to subdue it would now be subdued by the dust and return to it. The divine curses exacted on humanity serves as an ongoing reminder that the creature’s exertion of godlike self-ruling self-autonomy is a fantasy.

Adam’s embrace of self-rule reversed the kingly mandates he received from God. Rather than subduing Satan, Adam succumbed to him. Now Satan is “the god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4), all are born into Satan’s “domain of darkness” (Col 1:13), and human history is rife with satanically-driven oppressive despots. Adam was to exert his dominion over the earth but nature wields its rule over humanity with disease, famine, draught, floods. Eventually, the dust will reclaim each one as the body decays in death. Adam and Eve were to fill the earth with godly offspring to spread the glory of God over the earth, instead they produced offspring who advanced satanic evil and wickedness so

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<sup>31</sup>The only other time this word for “pain” is used in the OT is Gen 5:29 where Lamech says of Noah, “Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands.” The themes of painful production are found in this passage as well as the reiteration of the divine curse on the ground.

that God declares of the human race “in their paths are ruin and misery” (Rom 3:16).<sup>32</sup>

### **The Universality of Self-Rule**

Paul envisioned Adam as the covenant head of the human race (Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:21-22) whose quest for sinful self-reliance was imputed to all his progeny.<sup>33</sup>

The natural bent of the human heart, then, is toward self-idolatry so that “the self is set at the center of existence as a god; ultimate significance is found in god-like individual autonomy, self-set goals and boundaries. The sacred is defined in the first instance in relation to the self.”<sup>34</sup> Adam became his own idol when he turned from God’s goodness, God’s wisdom, and God’s commands to grasp these divine prerogatives for himself.<sup>35</sup> In an instant, Adam’s focus and desire shifted from God-ward to self-ward so that he exchanged the glory of the Creator for the glory of the creature.

Romans 1:18-32 shows that humanity is fallen Adam and, thus, the quest of idolatrous self-determination the universal reality for all people.<sup>36</sup> Adam’s fellowship

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<sup>32</sup>The idea that the divine mandate to Adam and Eve was to produce children to extend the glory of God throughout the earth will be explored in chap. 4.

<sup>33</sup>See John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959) for a thorough discussion of the doctrine of imputation.

<sup>34</sup>Provan, “To Highlight All Our Idols,” 33. Past authors agree with Provan’s assessment. For example, Richard Baxter declares, “Selfishness is the grand Idolatry of the world, and self the world’s Idol” (Richard Baxter, *A Treatise of Self-Denial*, 2nd ed. [London: Robert White, 1675], 353; the old English *f* was replaced with “s”). Thomas Manton offers that, “in all that we do we look to ourselves; vain man sets up self at the end of every action, and jostles out God. In all the actions of life they are but a kind of homage to the idol of self” (Thomas Manton, “A Treatise of Self-Denial,” in *The Works of Thomas Manton*, ed. Thomas Smith, vol. 15 [London: Nisbet & Company, 1873], 183).

<sup>35</sup>Paul King Jewett, “Original Sin and the Fall of Man,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 19, no. 1 (September 1976): 21.

<sup>36</sup>Studies linking Adam to Rom 1 include A. B. Caneday, “‘They Exchanged the Glory of God for the Likeness of an Image’: Idolatrous Adam and Israel as Representatives in Paul’s Letter to the Romans,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 11, no. 4 (Fall 2007): 34–45; James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*

with God was untainted by sin so that he knew God, saw his power, understood his attributes (Rom 1:19-20), and basked in his truth (Rom 1:25). Adam, however, did not honor God as God, acknowledge his good sovereignty (Rom 1:28), or relish in his privileged role as the divine vice-regent (Rom 1:21). Adam's thinking became futile and foolish (Rom 1:21) as he rationalized disobedience and embraced the satanic lie that he could become godlike (Rom 1:25). The wisdom he thought he would gain through his autonomy was actually foolishness (Rom 1:22) so that his soul was immediately darkened with sin (Rom 1:22). Adam exchanged the glory and honor he enjoyed as God's vice-regent for his own idolatrous self-glory (Rom 1:23). Consequently, Adam "became not more like God, but less than the man he was, futile and confused (1:21), not more like the Creator, but less than the creature he had been made (1:25)."<sup>37</sup> Thomas Schreiner contends that Romans 1:18-25 expresses the fundamental Adamic sin imputed to all his descendants: "the root sin is the failure to thank and glorify God for his goodness, the worship of the creature rather than the creator."<sup>38</sup> Adam's imputed sin finds at its core the drive for self-authority, which attributes to the self the glory and honor and worship due to God alone. The result is that Adam's race languishes under the suffering weight of moral perversions (Rom 1:26-27) and chaos (Rom 1:28-32).

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(Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 101–7; Morna D. Hooker, "Adam in Romans 1," *New Testament Studies* 6, no. 4 (July 1960): 297–306; and John R. Levison, "Adam and Eve in Romans 1.18-25 and the Greek Life of Adam and Eve," *New Testament Studies* 50, no. 4 (October 2004): 519–34. Hooker's article is the most comprehensive, showing several verbal and thematic links between Gen 2-3 and Rom 1.

<sup>37</sup>Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 101–02.

<sup>38</sup>Thomas R Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 539. Howard Moxenes comments on human self-glory: "This was the ultimate sin: mere humans not only refused to give due honor to God but even claimed this honor for themselves" (Howard Clark Moxenes, "Honor, Shame, and the Outside World in Romans," in *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism: Essays in Tribute to Howard Clark Kee*, ed. Jacob Neusner et al. [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988], 213).



The devastating truths of Romans 1 fill the pages of Scripture and human history. The soul is ingrained with sinful self-centeredness at conception (Pss 51:5; 58:3) and prideful selfishness is at the core of every human heart (Mark 7:21-23). Kings and potentates swagger with self-importance, boasting of their preeminence and godlike prowess (Dan 4:28-30; Acts 12:21-23). The arrogant “set their mouths against the heaven, and their tongue struts through the earth” (Ps 73:9). Self-worship is antipathetic to Yahweh so that “there is no fear of God before their eyes” (Rom 3:18) and the natural impulse of the human race is to gratify “the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body” (Eph 2:1).

Western culture is inundated with a cacophony of voices that exalts and encourages self-idolatry. A convenient place to begin is with Enlightenment philosophers who rejected Scripture as the source of authoritative truth and exchanged it for human experience and reason. Rene Descartes’ famous “I think therefore I am” essentially made God irrelevant to human existence and “expressed a starting point of complete subjectivity and autonomy.”<sup>39</sup> Existentialism is a child of the Enlightenment and traces its origins to nineteenth century philosophers who “were concerned with the need of the individual to discover truth which was valid for him in the struggles of his personal existence.”<sup>40</sup> This thought has wormed its way into the contemporary church in the form of mysticism. Mysticism rejects the objective truthfulness of God’s Word and considers subjective religious experiences, inner voices, visions, dreams, etc. as credible vehicles of

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<sup>39</sup>Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 122.

<sup>40</sup>Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Baker Reference Library* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984), s.v. “Existentialism,” by C. Brown.

truth. *The Humanistic Manifesto II* proclaims, “As nontheists, we begin with humans not God, nature not deity.”<sup>41</sup> Paul Vitz contends that “contemporary psychology is a form of secular humanism based on the rejection of God and the worship of the self.”<sup>42</sup> The primary purpose of the god of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is to serve the autonomous self by catering to self-gratification and boosting self-esteem. Western civilization is suffering under a chaotic sea of desperate individualism that is hell-bent on removing all vestiges of the sovereign King from its collective consciousness.

In summary, Satan’s nefarious primary goal was realized when the creatures sought to increase their self-rule by severing themselves from the Creator. The clash of kingdoms created a chaotic domain which opposes God’s rule and is cursed with God’s judicial suffering. In the wake of Adam’s grasping after self-primacy has been an almost infinite variety of miseries, hardships, discomforts, difficulties, torments, misfortunes, afflictions, oppressions, distresses, anguishes, hurts, catastrophes, pains, sorrows, troubles, and woes, which are the common experiences of the human race who live in the chaos.

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<sup>41</sup>Paul Kurtz, *Humanist Manifesto II* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1973), accessed March 3, 2016, [http://americanhumanist.org/Humanism/Humanist\\_Manifesto\\_II](http://americanhumanist.org/Humanism/Humanist_Manifesto_II). The latest iteration of the *Humanist Manifesto* states, “We think it time for humanity to embrace its own adulthood—to leave behind the magical thinking and mythmaking that are substitutes for tested knowledge of nature” (Paul Kurtz, *Humanist Manifesto 2000: A Call for a New Planetary Humanism* [Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000], 26).

<sup>42</sup>Paul C. Vitz, *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), xii. In the same vein, Thomas Szasz, himself a psychiatrist, declared that psychology “is not merely a religion that pretends to be a science, it is actually a fake religion that seeks to destroy true religion” (Thomas Stephen Szasz, *The Myth of Psychotherapy: Mental Healing As Religion, Rhetoric, and Repression* [Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1988], 28), and “the implacable resolve of psychotherapy to rob religion of as much as it can, and to destroy what it cannot” (*ibid.*, 188).

## **Suffering and the Lamenting Psalmists’ Mortification of Self-Rule**

The individual lament psalms (ILPs) detail the sufferings God inflicted on his covenant people, either directly or through secondary means.<sup>43</sup> The lamenting psalmists experienced the dark chaotic turmoil as enemies opposed and oppressed them, friends betrayed them, and family members ostracized them. The psalmists suffered from bodily deprivations such as disease, sleeplessness, pain, and physical want. Death loomed over them like a dark cloud.

Traditionally, six ILPs are classified as penitentials (Pss 6, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143).<sup>44</sup> The lamenting psalmists understood and accepted the suffering consequences for sin due to the basic obey-blessing/disobey-judgment framework of the Sinaitic Covenant. What concerned the penitents was the ongoing suffering despite their confession and repentance. The lamenters in the non-penitential ILPs, however, were cast into a theological quandary, for they had not overtly sinned yet they were suffering. The theological dilemma deepened as they complained to God for inflicting the righteous psalmist with suffering while seemingly ignoring those who flaunted their wickedness. Perhaps most perplexing was when their obedience resulted in further and deeper

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<sup>43</sup>The lament psalms comprise nearly one-third of the Psalter, the largest of the psalmic genre. Laments are usually categorized as either communal (Pss 44, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 94, 123, 126, 129) or individual. This dissertation will focus on the ILPs in this and subsequent chapters. The identification of the ILPs is somewhat fluid but for this study they are defined as Pss 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 13, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 35, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 51, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 63, 64, 69, 70, 71, 77, 86, 88, 102, 109, 120, 130, 140, 141, 142, 143. This list is indebted to the work done by Dae Hyeok Kim, “Genre-Sensitive Expository Preaching of the Lament Psalms: Honoring the Message, Medium, and Mood of the Text” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013), 225-27. See Tremper Longman, *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 26–30 for an overview of the lament psalms and the elements associated with them.

<sup>44</sup>Psalm 32 was also classified as a penitential psalm but is not generally viewed as an ILP. I assume the ILPs were all written by men, thus masculine pronouns will be used when referring to the authors of these psalms.

suffering (Ps 69:7-12).

### **The Sovereign King Inflicts Suffering on His Covenant People**

The sovereign King is the focal point of every ILP. Overshadowing all their temporal sufferings is either the implicit or explicit declaration that it was God who inflicted his covenant people with these maladies. One-fourth of the ILPs unequivocally declare that the suffering is due to God's anger as he pours out his wrath on sinning and righteous psalmist alike. Ingvar Fløysvik attributes God's wrath as the underlying factor of all the ILPs:

In these psalms we note that the wrath of God is not only a problem insofar as it deprives people of health, social security, or national independence. God's wrath is a problem because it deprives people of God himself and life with him. The heart of the distress in the complaint psalms is, therefore, the wrath of God.<sup>45</sup>

Adam's quest to increase his self-rule created the chaos which opposes God's rule and this chaos serves as the domain of suffering. Fløysvik's assertion, then, is a sound implication of the fall—at its core all suffering is an expression of God's wrathful response to human self-rule.

The lamenting psalmists, however, also recognized that suffering may also be an avenue for God to show his rich compassion and mercy. The God who cursed the world with suffering is the same God who graciously provided Adam and Eve with clothing suitable for living in a hostile, fallen environment (Gen 3:21). This same tension is evident in the ILPs:

Is God really angry? Yes, he has handed his people over to their enemies and has

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<sup>45</sup>Ingvar Fløysvik, *When God Becomes My Enemy: The Theology of the Complaint Psalms* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Academic Press, 1997), 142.

made them a mockery to their neighbors. He has placed his faithful in Sheol. He has permitted the enemies to roar in his dwelling place. Is God really angry? No, he is rich in steadfast love and faithfulness toward his people. The psalmists do not solve the tension. They take it to God.<sup>46</sup>

The ILPs are the richest genre of Scripture that explore the divine/human relationship in suffering and the devastating suffering that occurs in a chaotic world opposed to God's kingly authority.

**Suffering and the Divine King's wrath.** The lamenters employed a wide variety of verbs, nouns, and phrases to describe divine rage. First, the noun אַף is the most common word used to describe God's anger.<sup>47</sup> God's self-revelation declared he is "slow to anger" (Exod 34:6; appealed to in Ps 86:15)<sup>48</sup> yet becomes angry when his people parade their autonomous defiance against him (Deut 9:8). The psalmists invoked God to unleash his anger on their enemies (Pss 7:6; 56:7; 69:24) yet begged him "rebuke me not in your anger" (Ps 6:1) and "turn not your servant away in anger" (Ps 27:9). Unrelenting, intense suffering led the psalmist to ask, "Has he in anger shut up his compassion?" (Ps 77:9).

Second, the noun נַמְנָם, when used of people, usually conveyed "the concept of

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<sup>46</sup>Fløysvik, *When God Becomes My Enemy*, 159.

<sup>47</sup>See Bruce Edward Baloiian, *Anger in the Old Testament*, American University Studies, vol. vii, Theology and Religion (New York: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 1992) for a detailed study of divine wrath. God is always the subject of the verb אָפַן ("to be angry, displeased;" Deut 1:37; 4:21; 9:8, 20; 1 Kgs 8:46; 11:9; 17:18; 2 Chr 6:36; Ezra 9:14; Ps 2:12 [the divine Son is the subject of the verb]; Pss 60:1; Ps 79:5; Ps 85:5; Isa 12:1). The noun is also "nose" with the idea that the nose dilates in anger (*TWOT*, s.v. "אָפַן," by Gerhard Van Groningen).

<sup>48</sup>The idea "is that God takes a long, deep breath as he holds his anger in abeyance" (Van Groningen, "אָפַן."). This phrase is used of God in Num 14:18; Neh 9:17; Pss 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nah 1:3. A person who is slow to anger is viewed as one who has understanding and wisdom (Prov 14:29; 15:18; 16:32; 19:11) and Christ-followers are commanded to display this virtue (Jas 1:19). See J. Carl Laney, "God's Self-Revelation in Exodus 34:6-8," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158, no. 629 (March 2001): 36-51.

an inner, emotional heat which rises and is fanned to varying degrees” resulting in “anger, hot displeasure, indignation, wrath, rage or fury.”<sup>49</sup> God’s “hot displeasure” was poured out on his covenant people for their self-indulgent unfaithfulness (Deut 9:19). The lamenting psalmists implored God to consume his enemies in his wrath (Ps 59:13). The psalmists sensed God’s wrath was heavy upon them (Ps 88:7) and begged him to stay his disciplining wrath (Pss 6:1; 38:1).

Third, the term זעם expressed God’s personal and intense indignation against those who defied him (Jer 10:10).<sup>50</sup> His indignation against idolatrous self-worship “is more constant than any human zeal, having no tendency to cool down into either compromise or despair.”<sup>51</sup> David declared God “feels indignation every day” (Ps 7:11) and desired his burning indignation to consume the defiant wicked (Ps 69:24). God poured out his indignation on sinful, rebellious self-ruling psalmists both directly (Ps 38:3) and through others (Ps 102:8-10).

Fourth, the root verb חרה and its derived noun חרון were used of God to almost always describe the “legitimate rage of a suzerain against a disobedient vassal.”<sup>52</sup> These terms emphasized the “‘kindling’ of anger, like the kindling of a fire, or the heat of the anger, once started.”<sup>53</sup> God commanded Israel to completely eradicate any city guilty of

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<sup>49</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. “חַמַּי,” by Gerhard Van Groningen.

<sup>50</sup>*NICOTTE*, s.v. “זעם,” by Robert P. Gordon.

<sup>51</sup>Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 14a (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 64.

<sup>52</sup>David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), s.v. “Wrath of God,” by Gary A. Herion.

<sup>53</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. “חָרָה,” by Leon J. Wood.

idolatry “that the LORD may turn from the fierceness of his [burning] anger and show you mercy” (Deut 13:17). Yahweh’s anger burned against his people when they tenaciously clung to their rebellious, idolatrous pursuits (Deut 31:16-17; Judg 2:20). The lamenting psalmist desired God’s burning anger to overtake his enemies (Ps 69:24 ) and acknowledged God’s burning anger had swept over him (Ps 88:16).

The lamenters made assumptions about God’s posture toward them due to the acute, continuous duress of suffering. First, they concluded God had rejected them. Two words were used in the ILPs to describe God’s repudiation of the psalmists. The verb *נָזַח* has the sense of “strong dislike or disapproval”<sup>54</sup> and always appeared in the ILPs in questions directed to God: why has he rejected? (Pss 43:2; 88:14), will he continue to reject forever? (Ps 77:7). The verb *שָׁלַךְ* (“to throw”) was oftentimes used in contexts describing divine judgment: God threw the Egyptians into the sea (Neh 9:11) and threw his disobedient nation into exile (2 Kgs 17:20). Ongoing suffering impelled the psalmist to use this verb as a divinely-directed imperative to strongly implore God not to reject (Pss 51:11; 71:9). Lamenters complained that God had “taken me up and thrown me down” (Ps 102:10) which suggested suffering “violent mistreatment”<sup>55</sup> from the hand of God.

Second, suffering made the psalmists presume God had forgotten them. God as the subject of *שָׁכַח* (“to forget”) did not refer to some divine mental lapse but to his

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<sup>54</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. *נָזַח*,” by Leon J. Wood. Broyles comments that the use of *נָזַח* in the lament psalms has a “peculiarly absolute force to the lament” (Craig C. Broyles, *The Conflict of Faith and Experience in the Psalms: A Form-Critical and Theological Study*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament [Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1988], 68.). See his detailed grammatical study on pp. 67-69 for the reasons he reached this conclusion.

<sup>55</sup>Broyles, *The Conflict of Faith and Experience*, 70.

promised commitment to the covenant.<sup>56</sup> The lamenting psalmists declared God will not forget his people (Pss 9:12, 18; 31:12). They also cried out for him not to forget (Ps 10:12) and asked why or if God had forgotten them (Pss 13:1; 42:9; 77:9).

Third, God “hiding his face” was an idiomatic expression of divine aloofness due to his wrathful punishment of sin so that “he does not listen to prayer and pay attention to his people’s misery. They are in the hands of whoever wants to oppress them and take advantage of them.”<sup>57</sup> Unregenerate oppressors who received no divine retaliation concluded God had hidden his face from his people (Ps 10:11).<sup>58</sup> Despite the crushing circumstances the lamenting psalmists clutched to the deep trust that God had not hidden his face from them (Ps 22:24). Prayers were offered for him not to hide his face (Pss 27:9; 69:17; 102:2; 143:7) and for him to hide his face from their sins (Ps 51:9). The psalmists longed for God’s face (Pss 17:15; 27:4), and asked why and for how long he would hide his face (Pss 13:1; 88:14).

Fourth, continued affliction made the psalmists believe the divine King had forsaken them. God declared he would forsake Israel and they would be devoured by

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<sup>56</sup>NICOTTE, s.v. “שכח,” by Leslie C Allen.

<sup>57</sup>Fløysvik, *When God Becomes My Enemy*, 147. Ballentine states, “When God hides his face, or when he does not see, hear, or answer the suppliant, it is tantamount to cutting off all contact with man” (Samuel E. Balentine, *The Hidden God: The Hiding of the Face of God in the Old Testament* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983], 57). Broyles adds that God hiding his face “depicts a gesture of unwillingness to perceive or respond, thus conveying a sense of estrangement” (Broyles, *The Conflict of Faith and Experience*, 75).

<sup>58</sup>VanGemenen expresses, “The arrogance of the wicked expresses itself in injustice, but his real problem is his utter disregard for the Lord. He has rejected the covenant God, not by speculative thought, but by his speech and actions. As soon as he has set out on the road of independence God, he gains confidence. He mistakes God’s patience with evil for God’s lack of interest in justice and the innocent victims. His boldness grows as he no longer senses any accountability to God for his actions.” (Willem VanGemenen, *Psalms*, in vol. 5 of *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelien and Richard P. Polcyn [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Regency Publishing House, 1991], 127).



enemies if they abandoned him for idols (Deut 31:17). Suffering was devouring the lamenting psalmists and they protested that God was treating them as those who did not belong to him. They faithfully trusted that God had not forsaken them (Ps 9:10), begged him not to forsake them (Pss 27:9; 38:21; 71:9. 18), and asked why he had forsaken and alienated them (Ps 22:1).

Fifth, the psalmists complained that God was actively hostile against them. Psalm 88, especially, records the deep-seated and long term anguish of “a desperate man persistently praying to a deaf deity.”<sup>59</sup> This psalm is the most articulate of the ILPs in charging God of divine animosity:

You have put me in the depths of the pit,  
in the regions dark and deep.  
Your wrath lies heavy upon me,  
and you overwhelm me with all your waves. Selah.  
You have caused my companions to shun me;  
you have made me a horror to them (Ps 22:6-8).

You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me;  
my companions have become darkness (Ps 22:18).<sup>60</sup>

Sixth, the psalmists complained of God’s indifference, aloofness, and passivity as though he was far off, distant, or removed from them. The psalmists implored God not to be far off but to become engaged, to act, to intervene (Pss 22:11, 19; 35:22; 38:21; 71:12). They questioned why he was being remote and indifferent (Pss 10:1; 22:2).

Another expression of God’s seeming indifference was his silence. Prayers were offered

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<sup>59</sup>Fløyvik, *When God Becomes My Enemy*, 141.

<sup>60</sup>See also Pss 22:15; 39:5, 9; 42:7; 51:8; 77:4; 102:23. “Sickness, near-death situations, military defeat, and a generally miserable life are the result of God’s actively hostile action. All of this assumes that sickness and death are in God’s hands, not in the hand of sorcerers or evil spirits nor caused by the law of nature or by a virus. When mighty military powers are able to invade Israel, it is not due to their military strength or tactical skill but because God has become Israel’s enemy and gives their foes the victory. Distress is not just a part of life. It is an experience of God’s wrath” (ibid., 151).

and the psalmists implored God not to be silent but to give an answer and rescue them from their tumultuous circumstances (Pss 28:1; 35:22; 39:21; 109:1). In Psalm 35:17 God is depicted as a cold-hearted, disinterested spectator observing the psalmist's misery and turmoil but refusing to intervene.

Seventh, the lamenting psalmists expressed the fear that they had lost divine favor and pleasure. The penitential psalmist implored God to “rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath” (Pss 6:1; 38:1). “Rebuke” has forensic overtones where the guilt or innocence of the defendant is decided (Gen 31:26). God rebuked his covenant people who were out of favor with him for their stubborn self-willed refusal to keep the stipulations of the covenant (Ps 50:21). The term is not simply the rendered judgment to expose divine displeasure but also contains connotations of repentance—God rebukes in order to engender repentance.<sup>61</sup> “Discipline” denotes a corrective castigation so that the covenant people will obey the Lord's commands. God disciplines his people in order to “break the pride of your power” (Lev 26:19). The psalmist freely acknowledged his sin and implored God to dispense his rebuke and discipline not with anger and wrath but with grace and healing (Ps 6:3).

Physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual suffering was the impetus for penning the ILPs and God's anger and wrath is an underlying theme. God's ire and subsequent actions for self-will are understandable in light of the Sinaitic Covenant but not for the non-penitential ILPs. The sufferers in these psalms protested their undeserved suffering by accentuating their godliness (Ps 86:2), humility (Pss 55:19; 69:10, 32),

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<sup>61</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. “לָנַחַם,” by Paul R. Gilchrist.

integrity,<sup>62</sup> and righteousness.<sup>63</sup> However, a penetrating question emerged from one of the last ILPs that reminds of the chaotic environment in which humanity has created for itself, “If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?” (Ps 130:3).<sup>64</sup> No one could withstand the penetrating, holy scrutiny of God for even the most holy lives in a fallen world and are themselves fallen so that in all of God’s covenant people, “are the seeds of deceit and rebellion, as well as the seeds of honesty, love and obedience; that he is not as sweet, pure, and righteous as he is inclined to fancy. Therefore he deserves to taste a sample of God’s wrath—indeed, deserves to taste worse than he is usually given.”<sup>65</sup>

**The experiences of suffering in the chaos.** The chaos is the domain Adam created due to his flagrant rebellion to secure his self-autonomy from God. The chaos is opposed to God and within it humanity is subjected to innumerable sufferings which takes its toll on every aspect of a person’s being. First, suffering brings a loss of physical vitality. In Psalm 6:2 David described his physical condition by confessing “my bones are troubled.” “Bones” were oftentimes used to refer to the entire person (Ps 38:3), which included the body. “Trouble” referred to emotional alarm and terror when confronted with unexpected, threatening, or disastrous events.<sup>66</sup> Here “troubled” describes his bodily

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<sup>62</sup>Pss 7:8; 25:21; 26:1, 11; 41:12.

<sup>63</sup>Pss 5:8, 12; 7:8, 9; 17:15; 31:18; 35:27; 55:22; 58:10, 11; 64:10; 140:13; 142:7.

<sup>64</sup>The same kind of question is asked in Job 4:17.

<sup>65</sup>Hugh S. Tigner, “Perspective of Victory: The Problem of Human Suffering in the Old and New Testaments,” *Interpretation* 12, no. 4 (October 1958): 402.

<sup>66</sup>Gen 45:3; Exod 15:15; Judg 20:41; 1 Sam 28:21; 2 Sam 4:1; 2 Chr 32:18; Ezra 4:4; Job 4:5; 21:6; 22:10; 23:15; Pss 2:5; 6:2, 3, 10; 30:7; 48:5; 83:15, 17; 90:7; 104:29; Isa 13:8; 21:3; Jer 51:32; Ezek

terrors of “not just the agonizing pain of illness and disease but the suffering fear that can attend the deteriorating life force and loss of control.”<sup>67</sup> Psalm 22 detailed the physical exhaustion inflicted by suffering. The psalmist was being “poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast” (Ps 22:14). Just as heat melts wax so the heat of his torments melted his heart so that “he has no will left to fight.”<sup>68</sup> His body was drained of energy. His bones were contorted so that he was wracked with physical pain and was “in a state of shock.”<sup>69</sup> The psalmists became physically weary with their moaning (Ps 6:6) and crying out (Ps 69:3).<sup>70</sup>

Second, suffering brings a loss of spiritual vitality. David began Psalm 42 highlighting his suffering-induced spiritual draught, “As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God” (Ps 42:1). He continued in the next verse “my soul thirsts for God, the living God.” Suffering had dried him up, his soul was barren, parched, and had an insatiable thirst for some indication of the quenching presence of God. David chastised himself with the thrice repeated, “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?” (Pss 42:5, 11; 43:5) but then confessed “my soul is cast down within me.” (Ps 42:6). The only other use of “cast down” in the OT is Psalm 44:46, “for our soul is bowed down to the dust,” to describe impending death. The LXX

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7:27; 26:18; Dan 11:44; Zeph 1:18.

<sup>67</sup>Gerald Henry Wilson, *Psalms*, vol. 1, The NIV Application Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 179.

<sup>68</sup>Allen Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 1, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2012), 539.

<sup>69</sup>VanGemenen, *Psalms*, 205.

<sup>70</sup>Other ILP passages that address loss of physical vitality include Pss 6:6; 22:2, 15; 31:10; 38:3, 10; 102:5, 23.

translated “cast down” in Psalms 43-43 with περίλυπος, which was employed by Matthew and Mark of Jesus’ agonized soul in Gethsemane (Matt 26:38; Mark 14:34). David’s soul was exhausted, feeble, languishing because his spiritual vigor had been sapped by his afflictions.<sup>71</sup>

Third, suffering brings a loss of human companionship and compassion. David grieved, “I am lonely and afflicted” (Ps 25:16). Suffering affected the closest relationships: “My friends [more literally “the ones I love”] and companions [close friends] stand aloof from my plague, and my nearest kin stand far off” (Ps 38:11). “Plague” described noisome skin diseases such as leprosy (Lev 13:2) and physical assaults (Deut 17:8). Here, the plague was “the crushing severity of God”<sup>72</sup> and he was abandoned because “suffering is too hard to be in the presence of, too threatening, too anxiety-making.”<sup>73</sup> The psalmist blamed God for his loneliness: “You have caused my companions to shun me; you have made me a horror to them” (Ps 88:8; also v. 18). Divine sovereignty bent the hearts of others away from the psalmist so that he was “destitute of all human aid.”<sup>74</sup> “Horror” described the perverse sexual practices of the Canaanites (Lev 18:22), idolatry (Deut 7:25), and child sacrifice (Deut 12:31). God made the psalmist loathsome so that his close friends were horrified by him and shunned him. Another psalmist compared himself to a “desert owl of the wilderness” (Ps 102:6) and a

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<sup>71</sup>Other ILPs that address the loss of spiritual vitality include Pss 6:3; 13:2; 25:1; 31:9; 35:12; 63:1; 88:3, 14; 143:6.

<sup>72</sup>Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 157.

<sup>73</sup>John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 1, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 546.

<sup>74</sup>John Calvin, *Psalms 36-92*, trans. James Anderson, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 412.

“lonely sparrow on the housetop” (Ps 102:7). The desert owl was an unclean animal (Lev 11:17) so that he “was regarded as unclean, and that his situation was made worse by his loneliness.”<sup>75</sup> Pitiful loneliness was expressed as utter abandonment: “there is none who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me; no one cares for my soul” (Ps 142:4). He was friendless, defenseless, miserable, had no advocate, had no rescuer, had no one caring for his life or his safety or his well-being. His suffering misery was compounded by his loneliness.

Fourth, suffering brings emotional turmoil and dismay.

I am weary with my moaning;  
every night I flood my bed with tears;  
I drench my couch with my weeping (Ps 6:6).

David could only muster a sighing moan because of the tremendous stress he felt.<sup>76</sup> He flooded his bed because he was drowning in grief and abysmal despair. “Drench” means “to melt or dissolve” (Josh 14:8; Pss 39:12; 147:18) so that his flood of tears eroded his bed. This hyperbolic language expressed the intense emotional distress and deep despondency he felt.<sup>77</sup> He continued:

My eye wastes away because of grief;  
it grows weak because of all my foes (Ps 6:7).

The eye looked for God to act (Pss 25:15; 141:8) and suffered emotionally when he did not (Pss 69:3; 119: 82, 123). Failed eyesight arose from extreme grief and sorrow, and

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<sup>75</sup>A. A. Anderson, *Psalms*, vol. 2, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 707.

<sup>76</sup>Job 3:24; 23:2; Pss 6:6; 31:10; 38:9; 102:5; Isa 21:2; 35:10; 51:11; Jer 45:3; Lam 1:22.

<sup>77</sup>Allen Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 2, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2013), 268–69, and VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 99.

reflected loss of hope because he hit the nadir of suffering and saw no way out.<sup>78</sup>

Fifth, the psalmists attributed their suffering to God in vivid terms. They declared, “your arrows have sunk into me” (Ps 38:2). God is an archer who sent his arrows to chastise Israel for their self-absorbed idolatry (Deut 32:23). Job felt terror because God’s arrows penetrated him (Job 6:4). The psalmist continued, “your hand has come down on me.” The hand symbolized power and here referred to divine punishment or hostility.<sup>79</sup> In Psalm 42:7 the psalmist grieved with a sense of resignation:

Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls;  
all your breakers and your waves have gone over me.

The phrase “deep calls to deep” harkened back to the chaotic waters of creation (Gen 1:2) and the violent torrents God unleashed at the flood (Gen 7:11). God’s violent waters overwhelmed him, engulfed him, threatened him, gave him no sure footing as wave after wave of God’s breakers unrelentingly swept over him. In Psalm 88:15 the psalmist charged God, “I suffer your terrors.” The word for “terrors” was used seventeen times in the OT and always conveyed the idea of dreadful fear.<sup>80</sup> The wrath of God, his rejection, his forgetting, his hiding his face, his forsaking them, his active hostility and passive indifference, the loss of divine pleasure, the loss of physical and spiritual vitality, the emotional turmoil, the loneliness, and the utter dismay were all summed up in the last phrase of Psalm 88:15, “I am helpless.”

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<sup>78</sup>Other passages in the ILPs that indicate a loss of emotional peace include Pss 5:1; 6:3; 22:1, 11; 25:17-18; 38:8; 39:12; 42:3; 55:2-5, 17; 56:8; 63:1, 3; 69:3; 71:20; 77:2-4; 86:7; 88:3; 102:5, 9, 20; 142:2; 143:11.

<sup>79</sup>1 Sam 6:3, 5; Job 19:21; Ps 32:4; 39:10.

<sup>80</sup>Gen 15:12; Exod 15:16; 23:27; Deut 32:25; Josh 2:9; Ezra 3:3; Job 9:34; 13:21; 20:25; 33:7; 39:20; 41:6; Ps 55:4; Prov 20:2; Isa 33:18; Jer 50:38.

## The Dangers of Suffering to the Self-Ruling

Suffering is an affront to humanity and oftentimes spirals into an antagonistic posture against God as personal outrage for his treatment is expressed. God's covenant people may easily slip into the same stance. The ILPs were an occasion of "covenant interaction"<sup>81</sup> between the psalmist and Yahweh under the Sinaitic Covenant but, at the same time, they were "an exceedingly dangerous moment at the throne."<sup>82</sup> The penitent psalmists confessed their sins but the unrelenting suffering continued. The guilty psalmists dared to voice their indignant disapproval for the holy God's excessive afflictions and lack of relief. Their urgent desire for resolve was expressed as divinely-directed imperatives that functioned as demands for God to turn his attention to them (Ps 6:4), to extend his grace and mercy (Pss 6:2; 51:1), to deliver (Pss 6:4; 51:14; 143:9), to heal (Ps 6:2), to hear (Pss 102:1, 2; 143:1), to answer prayers (Pss 102:2; 143:1, 7), to forgive (Pss 51:1, 2, 3, 9, 10, 12; 143:8, 10), and to act quickly (Pss 38:1; 102:3; 143:7).

This danger was likewise reflected in the non-penitential ILPs. The intensity, duration, and unjustified suffering (in Sinaitic Covenant terms) of these psalmists exploded into a bevy of complaining, exasperated, confident divinely-directed imperatives for him to act and alter the situation.<sup>83</sup> Fifteen (34%) of the ILPs have no preamble but boldly burst into the heavenly throne room with the God-directed imperative as the first word of the psalm. For example (imperative in italics) "*Give ear to*

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<sup>81</sup>Walter Brueggemann, "The Costly Loss of Lament," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 36 (October 1986): 60.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>83</sup>The lamenting psalmists registered a total of 225 divinely-directed imperatives, all but three of the ILPs have at least one God-ward imperative (Pss 42, 63, 77). Twenty-three of these psalms (52 percent) have at least one imperative in the first verse.



my words, O LORD” (Ps 5:1), *Hear* a just cause, O LORD” (Ps 17:1), “*Vindicate* me, O LORD” (Ps 26:1).<sup>84</sup> Sometimes, the urgent, desperate nature of the suffering was so great that the imperatives tumbled out in staccato fashion so that “the piling up of appeals strengthens the urgency of the petition:”<sup>85</sup>

*Turn* to me and *be gracious* to me;  
*give* your strength to your servant,  
and *save* the son of your maidservant (Ps 86:16).<sup>86</sup>

The danger increased as the insulted, offended psalmist expressed his displeasure with the excessive duration of the suffering with a “how long?” question. The only instance of “how long?” in a penitential ILP is Psalm 6:3—“My soul also is greatly troubled. But you, O LORD—how long?” This disjointed question without completion showed David’s urgency and the dark bleakness he felt in his soul.<sup>87</sup> All the other “how long?” questions in the ILPs are found in the non-penitential psalms. The most striking is the four-fold “how long?” in Psalm 13:1-2 which “express deep human misgivings about the character and activity of God and their effect on human life.”<sup>88</sup> The piling up of the questions implied the suffering had gone on long enough, had become obsessive, and needed to end immediately.<sup>89</sup>

The “why?” question, asked only in the non-penitential ILPs, posed the

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<sup>84</sup>See also Pss 35:1; 43:1; 51:1; 55:1; 56:1; 57:1; 59:1; 61:1; 64:1; 69:1; 86:1; 140:1. The only penitential ILP with the imperative as the first word is Ps 51.

<sup>85</sup>Ross, *Psalms*, 1:246.

<sup>86</sup>The psalmists also directed imprecatory imperatives to Warrior Yahweh, pleading for him to wield his might against the enemies who are assailing the psalmist (Pss 17:13; 54:5; 69:27).

<sup>87</sup>VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 98; Goldingay, *Psalms*, 1:137.

<sup>88</sup>Wilson, *Psalms*, 1:278.

<sup>89</sup>Goldingay, *Psalms*, 1:205.

greatest danger to the psalmist. “Why?” demanded God to justify his actions: “Why, O LORD, do you stand far away?” (Ps 10:1); “Why have you forsaken me?” (Ps 22:1); “Why have you forgotten me?” (Ps 42:9).<sup>90</sup> James Barr’s detailed study of the Hebrew “why?” revealed that very rarely was the question asked as a request for information, rather “surprise, wonder, amazement, compassion, blame, reproach, and anger all form one single continuum in the meanings of the Hebrew ‘Why?’”<sup>91</sup> Barr elaborates the point:

If people asked ‘Why?’, it was very usually because something was wrong. They rather seldom asked ‘Why?’ because of joyful news, or because they were simply curious about how things happened; they asked it because they sensed trouble at hand. Any departure from the normal was likely to mean bad news. . . . And in the great majority of cases, when Hebrews asked ‘Why?’, they asked it because there was something in the situation, as they saw it, that was deeply wrong.<sup>92</sup>

The psalmists asked “why?” in the ILPs because they believed something had gone terribly wrong with God’s fidelity to his covenant promises. God never answered any of their questions or offered any justification for his actions. One answer, however, to “why?” may be inferred from the psalmists’ own words. God designed the suffering to mortify the autonomous self-rule that still inhabited the hearts of his covenant people.

### **Suffering and the Mortification of Self-Rule**

If God’s design for suffering is to mortify self-rule then evidence for it should be found in the ILPs. The difficulty, however, is that the basic obey-bless/disobey-curse framework of the Sinaitic Covenant did not readily lend itself to extolling the benefits of suffering. Circumstantially, however, the ILPs show that the God to whom the lamenters

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<sup>90</sup>See also Pss 10:1; 22:1; 43:2; 88:14.

<sup>91</sup>James Barr, “‘Why’ in Biblical Hebrew,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 36, no. 1 (April 1985): 8.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*

complained graciously designed their suffering to break them of their self-sufficiency.

A first indication that suffering mortified self-rule is seen in the universal Godward focus of the ILPs for deliverance and help rather than relying on the self. God demands loyalty (Exod 20:3), stridently calls for his people to worship him alone (Exod 34:14), and to love him with the entire being (Deut 6:5). The psalmists never raged against the impersonal misfortunes of fate but to a man they made a definite “movement toward God.”<sup>93</sup> They cried out to God with their complaints, for answers, and for relief because his is “the only court that can alter their plight.”<sup>94</sup> Claus Westermann’s comment concerning Job’s suffering is germane to this point: the lamenting psalmist “can do nothing but continue to hold on to a God he no longer understands. His lament is the language of one who clings to an incomprehensible God. . . . It is the bitter complaint of one who despairs, who has no one else to whom he can turn.”<sup>95</sup>

Significantly, the first word of the first lament in the Psalter began with Yahweh (יהוה; Ps 3:1; see Exod 3:15).<sup>96</sup> David set the theological and theocentric tone of the laments by appealing to and entrusting his well-being to Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God, the God who is near to his people. Suffering moved the psalmists to plead with God, to question him, to make vows to him, to praise him, to pray to him, and to attempt to steer him, but the common factor is that they were riveted on God rather than

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<sup>93</sup>Claus Westermann, “Role of the Lament in the Theology of the Old Testament,” *Interpretation* 28, no. 1 (January 1974): 32. “Man” is used from the belief that all the psalms were written by men.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>96</sup>David appealed to Yahweh six times in Ps 3 (Ps 3:1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8) and twice to God (Ps 3:2, 7).

the self-ruling self. Yahweh designed the suffering as his instrument to decrease the heart's gaze from lesser objects, especially the self, to himself.

A second evidence that suffering mortified autonomous self-rule is the psalmists' gaining a sense of their own lowliness. Psalm 38 recounted the Lord's rebuking discipline was for sin (Ps 38:3), iniquities (Ps 38:4), and foolishness (Ps 38:5). This latter word pointed to "moral perversion or insolence, to what is sinful rather than to mental stupidity."<sup>97</sup> The proud self-indulgent sin(s) that festered in his soul were physically mirrored in the stinking, rotting wounds the Lord inflicted upon him (Ps 38:5). The psalmist ruefully confessed, "I am utterly bowed down and prostrate" (Ps 38:6). Physically he was crouched over in pain, spiritually he was huddled over before God in humiliation for his guilt.<sup>98</sup> The verb form for "prostrate" (qal) was used elsewhere in the OT to indicate subservience (Job 9:13; Prov 14:19; Hab 3:6), dejection (Pss 10:10; 35:14), and utter humiliation (Ps 107:39; Isa 2:11, 17; 60:14; 3:6). In all cases, the subjects were powerless to lift themselves out of their prostrated position.

He continued, "I am feeble and crushed" (Ps 38:9). "Feeble" connotes a numbing paralysis such as Jacob's heart when he heard Joseph was still alive (Gen 45:26) and corrupt judges who had paralyzed the law (Hab 1:4). God's afflictions leveled against him for his self-indulgent sins were so shocking that he was rendered an emotional paralytic (also Ps 77:2). The verb for "crushed" used here occurs only in the lament psalms and indicates physical and emotional crushing, brokenness, and contriteness due

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<sup>97</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. "אָרַל," by Louis Goldberg.

<sup>98</sup>A. A. Anderson, *Psalms*, vol. 1, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 304.

to sin or enemies (Pss 10:10; 44:19; 51:8, 17). His crushed body mirrored his crushed inner self: “I am ready to fall” (Ps 38:17). He had come to the end of himself, “the suppliant is on the cliff’s edge.”<sup>99</sup>

The lamenter related, “I am spent by the hostility of your hand” (Ps 39:10) meaning “the LORD had brought him to the end of himself, to a place of weakness and complete dependence, so that he might turn to the LORD for his only hope.”<sup>100</sup> Again, “I am gone like a shadow at evening; I am shaken off like a locust” (Ps 109:23). He felt himself ebbing away like a shadow when the sun goes down. He was humiliated and felt like a noisome, puny, repulsive insect that people flick from their clothing.<sup>101</sup> In Psalm 142:6 the psalmist woefully professed, “I am brought very low” which describes “a state of deprivation which in its extremity issues in a cry to God.”<sup>102</sup>

These broken, humiliated, suffering men, wracked with a variety of physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual maladies felt abandoned by God and were bereft of human compassion. God had them where he wanted them—suffering stripped them of their idolatrous self-autonomy, stripped them of earthly ease, stripped them of human companionship and compassion so that their prayers reflected utter dependence on him rather than themselves. Suffering decreased and mortified autonomous self-rule by making the self realize its utter powerlessness.

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<sup>99</sup>Goldingay, *Psalms*, 1:548.

<sup>100</sup>Ross, *Psalms*, 1:848. Anderson explains this statement to mean “I am at the end of my tether” (Anderson, *Psalms*, 1:312).

<sup>101</sup>Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, rev. ed., Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 21 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 105; Derek Kidner, *Psalms*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 14b (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), 391.

<sup>102</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. “לָבַטַח,” by Leonard J. Coppes.

A third sign that suffering mortified vainglorious self-importance was the psalmists' realization of their own mortality because of looming death. Death is God's continual reminder of his curse on Adam's defiant self-lordship. Only the self-existent God has power and authority over death (Pss 56:13; 86:13; 56:13) and death overshadows all of life (Ps 89:48) so that "neither by strength, wisdom, nor virtue can any man escape the common doom, for to the dust return we must."<sup>103</sup> Suffering candidly presented the fleeting nature and frailty of life (Pss 39:5-6, 11; 102:3, 23). The sufferers saw themselves in the throes of death so that they moaned in utter dejection, "my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol" (Ps 88:3).<sup>104</sup> Suffering the prospect of imminent death stripped away all pretense that the autonomous self is the master of its own destiny.

In summary, the lamenting psalmists endured suffering within the chaos Adam created. God, however, does not tolerate any rival kings or kingdoms to his divine rule (Isa 48:11). Embedded in the curses is a nascent word of hope that promises the dismantling of the chaos and a restored creation. The psalmists lived under the theological constraints of the Sinaitic Covenant. This covenant was God's good gift to Israel (Rom 7:16) yet was simultaneously a covenant of condemnation (2 Cor 5:7) and "was thus terrible, fearsome to fallen man."<sup>105</sup> A major step in God's subduing the

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<sup>103</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, *Psalms 1-57, The Treasury of David*, vol. 1 (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d.), 36.

<sup>104</sup> This imagery continued in Ps 88:4-6 as the psalmists declared he was going "down to the pit" (Ps 88:4) and he is "like one set loose among the dead" (Ps 88:5) and it is God who had put him "in the depths of the pit, in the regions dark and deep" (Ps 88:6). See Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 61-62 for a vivid description of Sheol. See also Pss 39:10; 41:5, 8; 102:11, 20, 23-24; 102:24.

<sup>105</sup> Gage, *The Gospel of Genesis*, 38.

present chaos would occur when the Sinaitic Covenant would be supplanted by a New Covenant which would be inaugurated by the Davidic King, King Messiah, the second Adam. This King would properly submit to God's authority and exercise his kingly obligations. This King would also suffer for the redemption of rival kings. The lamenters in the grand scheme of redemptive history serve as types suffering King Messiah, sufferings which would rescue humanity from the chaos and its bent to self-destructive self-rule.<sup>106</sup>

### **Suffering King Messiah's Attack on Self-Rule**

The Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:1-17) was a breathtaking divine promise that one of David's distant sons would forever establish the house, kingdom, and throne of David (2 Sam 7:16).<sup>107</sup> Subsequent OT echoes and expansions of the Davidic King "focus on a Davidic figure who, as Yahweh's son, lived in Zion, ruled over God's people, and was heir to the divine promise."<sup>108</sup> The identity of Jesus Christ as this Davidic King was clearly made in Gabriel's birth announcement to Mary: "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his

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<sup>106</sup>See Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll, *The Psalms of Lament in Mark's Passion: Jesus' Davidic Suffering*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), and Douglas J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives* (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1983), 225–300.

<sup>107</sup>The Davidic Covenant contained ten promises: three would be fulfilled by David (2 Sam 7:9-11); four by Solomon and/or subsequent kings (2 Sam 7:12-15); and three by a future son of David (2 Sam 7:16). See Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 660–61.

<sup>108</sup>Michael A. Grisanti, "The Davidic Covenant," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 10, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 244. The Davidic King is the subject of the royal psalms (Pss 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 110, 144) and other passages such as Isa 9:7; 11:10; 16:5; Jer 23:5-6; 33:15-16.

father David” (Luke 1:32).<sup>109</sup>

Walter Brueggemann underscored the importance of Messiah’s kingly office vis-à-vis suffering with the recognition that in the NT “Jesus’ kingship is presented as God’s response to the world’s lament.”<sup>110</sup> Jesus, the Second Adam, subdued the chaos and succeeded where Adam failed. The primordial chaos (Gen 1:2) was lifeless and dark, in Christ is life (John 1:4) and he is the light which dispels the darkness (John 1:5). King Jesus subdued the oppressive enemy Satan (1 John 3:8). He exercised dominion over the earth by controlling nature (Mark 4:39), healing diseases (Mark 1:34), and overcoming death (Acts 4:33). The redeemed who believe and receive him as Savior “become children of God” (John 1:12) and are commissioned to fill the earth with the glorious name of Jesus (Matt 28:18-20).

The chaos of this present age began and is fueled by human insistence to establish their own collective and private rival kingdoms to God’s rule. The Davidic King conquers the enemy of autonomous self-rule not through his divine might and power but through his suffering. Two major prophetic strands run parallel in the OT: the Davidic King would conquer all his enemies and establish his kingdom, and this King would suffer in order to rescue competing potentates from their self-destructive self-rule.

God declared the end from the beginning even as he cursed his self-seeking creatures who had presumed godlike status:

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<sup>109</sup>For a good overview see Sherman E. Johnson, “Davidic-Royal Motif in the Gospels,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 87, no. 2 (June 1968): 136–50.

<sup>110</sup>Walter Brueggemann, “From Hurt to Joy, from Death to Life,” *Interpretation* 28, no. 1 (January 1974): 19.



I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and her offspring;  
he shall bruise your head,  
and you shall bruise his heel (Gen 3:15).

Edward Young asserts “that the heart of the Biblical message is found in this verse. And the heart of that message is redemption.”<sup>111</sup> God would restore creation by delivering a fatal wound to serpent Satan through an offspring of the woman but not before the serpent inflicted suffering on the offspring.<sup>112</sup> The unfolding of Genesis 3:15 in redemptive history affirmed Messiah would suffer in many ways: rejection (Ps 69:4; 118:22), hated without reason (Ps 69:4; Isa 49:7), murderous plots (Ps 2:1-2), betrayal (Pss 41:9; 55:12-14), stricken and abandoned (Zech 13:7), beaten, spat on, mocked (Isa 50:6), pierced (Zech 12:10), and abandoned by God (Ps 22). Isaiah’s Fourth Servant Song (Isa 52:13-53:12; henceforth “Isaiah 53”) gave the most comprehensive picture of Messiah’s suffering which clearly showed his suffering was for redemptive purposes to decrease self-rule.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>Young, *Genesis 3*, 106.

<sup>112</sup>This verse has rightly been called the “protoevangelium” (“the first gospel”) for “all subsequent Messianic promises are but amplifications of that which is implicit here. . . . Here in embryo state is the whole of God’s program for the human race” (James E. Smith, *What the Bible Teaches about the Promised Messiah* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993], 38). See Raymond Albert Martin, “Earliest Messianic Interpretation of Genesis 3:15,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84, no. 4 (December 1965): 425–27, and Marten H. Woudstra, “Recent Translations of Genesis 3:15,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 6, no. 2 (November 1971): 194–203 for good short studies that tie Gen 3:15 to Messiah.

<sup>113</sup>The four “Servant Songs” are generally recognized as Isa 42:1-7; 49:1-13; 50:4-9; and 52:13-53:12. The identity of the servant in Isa 53 has generated a copious number of suggestions and material. See Christopher R. North, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah: An Historical and Critical Study* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956) for a good overview of the various suggested identifications of the Servant. See Richard Thomas France, “The Servant of the Lord in the Teaching of Jesus,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (January 1968): 26–52, and Robert R. Ellis, “The Remarkable Suffering Servant of Isaiah 40-55,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 34, no. 1 (September 1991): 29, for good defenses of the common arguments made against the Messianic view. This dissertation assumes Isa 53 is a prophecy of the atoning work of Christ, thus “Servant” will be capitalized to reflect his divinity. Studies of Jewish interpretations of Isa 53 include Joseph Alobaidi, *The Messiah in Isaiah 53: The Commentaries of Saadia Gaon, Salmon ben Yeruham, and Yefet ben Eli on Is 52:13-53:12*, *La Bible Dans L’histoire* (Bern:

The Davidic Covenant and Isaiah 53 give the picture of the King who would suffer for his enemies so that they would become his subjects. This conclusion is based on several connections between the two passages.<sup>114</sup> First, the subject of Isaiah 53 is “my servant” (Isa 52:13; 53:11) which was a designation for David (2 Sam 7:5, 8). Second, God took David “from following the sheep” (2 Sam 7:8); in Isaiah 53 the human race is compared to wayward sheep (Isa 53:6) and the Servant is likened to a sheep led to slaughter (Isa 53:7). Third, the Lord will put an end to Israel’s afflictions from her violent enemies (2 Sam 7:10); the Servant was afflicted by violent enemies (Isa 53:7). Fourth, God promised David offspring (2 Sam 7:12) as he did the Servant (Isa 53:10). And fifth, God promised David that when his offspring “commits iniquity” he would discipline “with the stripes (from *עַזָּב*) of men” (2 Sam 7:6); the Servant was stricken (from *עַזָּב*; Isa 53:4, 8) for the iniquities of the unfaithful (Isa 53:5). The atoning grace secured by the Suffering Davidic King is the central message of Isaiah 53 as indicated by the chapter’s chiastic structure:<sup>115</sup>

- A: The Mystery of the Servant (52:13-15)
- B: The Rejection of the Servant (53:1-3)
- C: The Atonement of the Servant (53:4-6)
- B’: The Submission of the Servant (53:7-9)
- A’: The Exaltation of the Servant (53:10-12)

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Peter Lang Publishing, 1998); Adolf Neubauer and S. R. Driver, *The Fifty-Third Chapter of Isaiah According to the Jewish Interpreters* (Oxford: J. Parker, 1876); Risto Santala, “Suffering Messiah and Isaiah 53 in the Light of Rabbinic Literature,” *Springfielder* 39, no. 4 (March 1976): 177–82.

<sup>114</sup>The following insights are indebted to “The Davidic Covenant and Isaiah 53,” *Apologia Pro Ortho Doxa*, accessed March 3, 2016, <http://kabane52.tumblr.com/post/107233193250/the-davidic-covenant-and-isaiah-53>.

<sup>115</sup>The designations are from Walter C. Kaiser Jr, “The Identity and Mission of the Servant of the Lord,” in *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2012), 98–107. See also Derek Kidner, “Isaiah,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. G. J. Wenham and D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 629–70.

This structure indicates that the “C” element is the core strophe around which the chapter revolves.

### **The Servant King Suffers for the Mortification of Self-Rule**

Isaiah 52 began with the attention grabbing interjection “behold” (Isa 52:13), which was “mainly used to emphasize the information which follows it.”<sup>116</sup> The chapter’s first verses described the Servant’s anguish but the core strophe (Isa 53:4-6) revealed the reasons for his suffering. Seven times these three verses affirmed that the cause of the Servant’s suffering was to mortify human self-rule.

First, “he has borne our griefs (וְנִשְׂאָהוּ הוּא הַלְיָנוּ)” or, more literally, “our sicknesses *he* has borne.” “Griefs” primarily referred to physical illnesses and diseases (Deut 28:2) but was also used of sin-sickness (Isa 1:5). The emphatic pronoun הוּא (“he”) vividly contrasted the Servant to others both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitatively, the “many” (Isa 52:14, 15; 53:11, 12), the “us” (Isa 53:1, 5, 6), and the “we” (Isa 53:2, 3, 4, 5, 6) are antithetical to the solitary Servant. Qualitatively, the righteous Servant (v. 11) is dissimilar to those characterized by sin-sickness (Isa 53:3, 4), going astray (Isa 53:6), sins (v. 12), iniquities (Isa 53:5, 6, 11), and transgressions (Isa 53:5, 8, 12). The emphatic הוּא also “highlights the concept of the Servant’s vicarious or substitutionary suffering and death.”<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> *TWOT*, s.v. “הָיָה,” by Carl Philip Weber.

<sup>117</sup> F. Duane Lindsey, “The Career of the Servant in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 (Concluded),” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140, no. 557 (March 1983): 22. Young explains what it means for the the Servant to bear our sickness: “What is meant is not that he became a fellow sufferer with us, but that he bore the sin that is the cause of the evil consequences, and thus became our substitute” (Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 3 [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972], 346).

The Servant bearing the sin-sicknesses of others was described by the common verb נָשָׂא (“to lift, carry, take”). A significant use of נָשָׂא portrayed atoning forgiveness through bearing the guilt of sin either by representation or substitution. The representative priests bore Israel’s sins before the Lord (Exod 28:30; Lev. 10:17), the substitutionary scapegoat bore “all their iniquities on itself” (Lev 16:22) on the Day of Atonement. This first phrase set the theological tone for the remaining, the Servant suffered in order to mortify the sin-sickened preeminent self.

Second, the Servant “carried our sorrows.” “Sorrows” normally implied some combination of physical, mental, and emotional anguish.<sup>118</sup> In verse 3 the Servant was called “man of sorrows” [same noun as in this phrase], and acquainted with grief [same noun used in the first phrase]” which suggested his entire life was characterized by suffering sin-sickness and the full range of creaturely hardships. This phrase in verse 4 clarified that the Servant’s sorrow was not for his own sins but because he carried the sins of others. The verb “carry” usually referred to bearing a heavy physical load or burden.<sup>119</sup> The Servant King carried the heavy burdens of the disobedient, unrighteous, self-sovereign many.<sup>120</sup>

Third, “he was pierced for our transgressions (וְהוּא מְחַלְלֵנוּ מִפְּשָׁעֵינוּ).” The emphatic אָהַב, as the first word, attained greater prominence and “[pointed] to the Servant in

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<sup>118</sup>Exod 3:7; 2 Chr 6:29; Pss 32:10; 38:17; Ps 69:26; Ecc 1:18; 2:23; Jer 30:15; 45:3; 51:8; Lam 1:12, 18.

<sup>119</sup>Gen 49:15; 1 Kgs 5:29; 11:28; 2 Chr 2:1, 17; 34:13; Neh 4:4, 11; Pss 81:6; 144:14; Isa 9:3; 10:27; 14:25; 46:4, 7.

<sup>120</sup>The only other place in the OT where the verb was used of carrying sins was Lam 5:7, where chastised Judah bore the heavy sinful burden of their fathers.

splendid isolation as he tackles our need.”<sup>121</sup> “Pierce” was used only eight other times in the OT and always connoted a savage wounding or a painfully violent death by stabbing.<sup>122</sup> The fundamental idea of “transgressions” is “a casting off of allegiance, a rebellion against rulers.”<sup>123</sup> A transgression is an intentional, knowledgeable, rebellious self-willful act that rejects God’s authority, a “deliberate flouting of the Lord and his law.”<sup>124</sup> The Servant was grievously, painfully, and fatally wounded in order to mortify the self-rule of those who willfully rose up in rebellion against God.

Fourth, the Servant “was crushed for our iniquities.” “To crush” in Hebrew “is the strongest root denoting oppression and conveys the sense of oppression as smashing body and spirit.”<sup>125</sup> The verb pictured a moth being crushed underfoot (Job 4:19), God crushing his enemies (Ps 89:10), and people being trampled to death (Lam 3:34).<sup>126</sup> Young offers that the verb “suggests the complete destruction of the person involved.”<sup>127</sup> The Servant was crushed, beaten to pieces, put under the grinding foot for “our

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<sup>121</sup>J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 430.

<sup>122</sup>Job 26:13; Pss 77:10; 109:22; Prov 26:10; Isa 51:9; Ezek 28:7, 9; 32:26.

<sup>123</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. “עָשָׂה,” by G. Herbert Livingston.

<sup>124</sup>Motyer, *Isaiah*, 430; *NICOTTE*, s.v. “עָשָׂה,” by Eugene Carpenter and Michael A. Grisanti. Also Exod 23:21; Ezra 10:13; Pss 5:10; 37:38; 51:13; Isa 1:2, 28; 43:27; 46:8; 48:8; 53:12; 59:13; 66:24; Jer 2:8, 29; 3:13; 33:8; Lam 3:42; Ezek 2:3; 14:11; 18:31; 20:38; Dan 8:23; Hos 7:13; 8:1; 14:10; Amos 4:4; Zeph 3:11. G. Livingston points out that transgressions, rebellion against God, also creates a distorted self such as hiding actions (Job 34:6) deceitfulness (Prov 28:24), spiritual apathy (Ps 36:1), illness (Ps 107:17), a love for strife (Prov 17:19), a sense of enslavement (Prov 12:13), easily angered (Prov 29:22), hypocritical worship (Isa 58:1), and a sense of defilement (Ezek 14:11) (*TWOT*, s.v. “עָשָׂה,” by G. Herbert Livingston).

<sup>125</sup>*NICOTTE*, s.v. “כָּרַס,” by W. R. Domeris.

<sup>126</sup>See also Job 4:19; 5:4; 6:9; 19:2; 22:9; 34:25; Pss 72:4; 89:10; 94:5; 143:3; Prov 22:22; Isa 3:15; 19:10; 53:10; 57:15; 44:10.

<sup>127</sup>Young, *Isaiah*, 3:347.

iniquities.” The root verb for “iniquity” means “to bend, twist, distort,” so that an iniquity “reflects the bentness or pervertedness of human nature, the result of the fall and the ever-flowing fount of sin.”<sup>128</sup> An iniquity is a moral infraction against God’s ethical expectations that reflect hearts bent to wander from God’s moral standards (Ps 78:35; Jer 14:10).<sup>129</sup> The moral perversions of self-indulgent, self-ruling rebels bent on increasing their autonomy are worthy of his wrath and judgment (Ezek 44:12) yet the Servant King was “crushed to death by the burden of the sin of others which He took on Himself, further weighted by the wrath of God due that sin.”<sup>130</sup>

Fifth, “upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace.” “Chastisement” insinuates “remedy or correction”<sup>131</sup> resulting from discipline, correction, or punishment. “Peace” meant much more than “absence of war” or “cessation of hostilities,” but intimated “completeness, wholeness, harmony, fulfillment”<sup>132</sup> which was the result of God’s activity in covenant. The Servant as the “peace-punishment”<sup>133</sup> was the propitiatory sacrifice to appease God’s righteous and holy wrath so that rebellious self-ruling sinners may be reconciled to and be at peace with him.<sup>134</sup>

Sixth, “with his wounds we are healed.” “Wounds” are severe physical blows resulting in “serious tissue trauma . . . in which the skin was ruptured, blood was lost, and

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<sup>128</sup>Motyer, *Isaiah*, 430.

<sup>129</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. “יָצַו,” by Alex Luc, and *TWOT*, “עָנָה” by Carl Schultz.

<sup>130</sup>Lindsey, “The Career of the Servant,” 25.

<sup>131</sup>Young, *Isaiah*, 3:348.

<sup>132</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. “שָׁמַח,” by G. Lloyd Carr.

<sup>133</sup>Motyer, *Isaiah*, 430.

<sup>134</sup>Young, *Isaiah*, 3:349.

organs or limbs were disabled or destroyed.”<sup>135</sup> The Servant absorbed on his person tortuous physical wounds as the vicarious, substitutionary sacrifice in order to heal, or mortify, the self-indulgent sin-sickness of self-seeking rebels.<sup>136</sup> The peace and healing the Servant secured are forensic declarations of restored fellowship with God because self-rule has been decreased and mortified.

The core strophe’s seventh phrase related both indictment and hope, and “contains the great confession that stands at the focal point and at the heart of the whole passage.”<sup>137</sup>

All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have turned—every one—to his own way;  
and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isa 53:6).

“To go astray” is to live contrary to God’s holy will by engaging in a variety of sins.<sup>138</sup>

The collective race, like a herd of mindless sheep, instinctively indulge base impulses and wander through life with a sense of aimlessness, purposelessness, and utter futility. What is true of the whole is true of the constituent parts: “we have turned—every one—to his own way.” Every individual joyfully and willfully embraces his or her autonomous self in hostile opposition to God’s ways (Ps 14:3). Stephen Charnock captures vividly the

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<sup>135</sup>*NICOTTE*, s.v. “חַבִּיטָה,” by R. K. Harrison and R. D. Patterson. See Gen 4:23; Exod 21:25; Ps 38:5; Prov 20:30; Isa 1:6.

<sup>136</sup>Physical wounds the Lord heals are found in Gen 20:17; Num 12:13; Deut 32:39; 2 Kgs 20:5, 8; 2 Chr 30:20; Job 5:8; Pss 6:2; 30:2; 41:4; 103; 107:20; 147:3; Isa 19:22; 30:26; 57:18-19; Jer 3:22; 17:14; 33:6. The word is also used when God inflicts a wound that will not be healed (Num 12:13; Deut 28:27, 35; Jer 19:11). Spiritual wounds that God heals include idolatry (Isa 6:10), faithlessness (Jer 3:22; 30:17; Hos 6:1; 7:1; 11:3), and apostasy (Hos 14:4).

<sup>137</sup>Kaiser, “The Identity and Mission of the Servant of the Lord,” 101.

<sup>138</sup>2 Kgs 21:9; 2 Chr 33:9; Pss 58:3; 95:10; 107:4, 40; 119:176; Prov 7:25; 10:17; 12:26; 14:22; 21:16; Isa 3:12; 9:15; 29:24; 30:28; 35:8; 47:15; 63:17; Jer 23:13, 32; 42:20; 50:6; Ezek 14:11; 44:10, 15; 48:11; Hos 4:12; Amos 2:4; Mic 3:5.

natural bent to self-determined living:

None seeks after God. None seek God as his rule, as his end, as his happiness, which is a debt the creature naturally owes to God. He desires no communion with God; he places his happiness in anything inferior to God; he prefers everything before him, glorifies everything above him; he hath no delight to know him; he regards not those paths which lead to him; he loves his own filth better than God's holiness; his actions are tintured and dyed with self, and are void of that respect which is due from him to God.<sup>139</sup>

Both individually and collectively the human race prefers the chaos to God's ways.

The divine solution to mortify self-autonomy once again converged on the Suffering Servant King: "and the LORD has laid (וְהִפָּקֵד) on him the iniquity<sup>140</sup> of us all." "The LORD" is the "emphatic subject"<sup>141</sup> and shockingly revealed the divine origin of the Servant's torment. The verb וְהִפָּקֵד is in the hiphil and can have two different meanings, both fitting the context. If it meant "to cause to arrive at" then "it pictures human sin and guilt as coming on the Servant like a destroying foe and overwhelming Him with the wrath it brought with it."<sup>142</sup> If the verb meant "to strike," then "it pictures the fiery rays of judgment that should have fallen on sinners individually but were deflected and converged on Him."<sup>143</sup> Whatever the particular meaning, the hiphil of וְהִפָּקֵד "usually denotes a violent hostile action,"<sup>144</sup> which was necessary to mortify autonomous self-rule.

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<sup>139</sup>Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 1:91.

<sup>140</sup>The same word was used in the fourth statement.

<sup>141</sup>Motyer, *Isaiah*, 431.

<sup>142</sup>Lindsey, "The Career of the Servant," 26.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid. T. T. Birks interpreted verb to mean a "hostile encounter," which are "many shafts aimed at one common target," so that "each sin of every sinner would be like a separate wound in the heart of this Man of sorrows" (T. T. Birks, *Commentary on the Book of Isaiah*, 2nd rev. ed. [London: Macmillan & Company, 1878], 264).



The emphasis on the Suffering Servant's vicarious sacrifice for self-glorifying insurgents is echoed in the remainder of Isaiah 53. In Isaiah 53:8, Isaiah declared the Servant was "cut off out of the land of the living" which pictured a "violent, premature, and unnatural death"<sup>145</sup> because the Servant was "stricken for the transgression of my people."<sup>146</sup> "Stricken" (also Isa 53:4) describes God's crushing severity as he stamped out the Servant's life for the self-willed transgressions of others.<sup>147</sup>

Isaiah 53:10 continued the theme of the Suffering Servant King dying to mortify self-rule: "Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief." Once again the LORD is the emphatic subject and revealed as the agent who imposed crushing grief on the Servant.<sup>148</sup> The Servant, however, was not the mere passive recipient of divine crushing but pictured as a willing and voluntary participant because he offered himself as a "guilt offering."<sup>149</sup> The guilt offering was required "for the

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<sup>145</sup>Lindsey, "The Career of the Servant," 28. The phrase is *מִאֲרֵץ נִגְרַף*. The brutal violence is conveyed when the *נִגְרַף* ("to cut off, divide") is followed by the preposition *מִן* ("from") as it is here. This same construction is found in Hab 3:17, 2 Chr 26:21, Ps 88:5. Motyer adds that the verb has "an almost unbroken record of violence" (Motyer, *Isaiah*, 434).

<sup>146</sup>"Cut off" also referred to the judgment of God (Gen 9:11; Exod 12:15).

<sup>147</sup>The noun "stricken" was used to of a plague (Exod 11:1; Ps 38:11), the infection of leprosy (Lev 13:2), or a physical assault (Deut 17:8) and was used here, as in Ps 39:10, to show "the crushing severity of God" (Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 157). "Transgressions" was discussed in the third phrase.

<sup>148</sup>"Crush" was discussed in the fourth phrase; "grief" in the first.

<sup>149</sup>Disagreements surround the phrase "when his soul makes an offering for guilt." The ESV (quoted) and NASB has the Servant as the subject, meaning that the Servant is the one who offered himself as the guilt offering. The NIV, however, has the LORD was the subject ("and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering"), which means the LORD is the one offering the Servant. Young makes three valid points in favor of the ESV and NASB understanding: (1) God is the receiver of sacrifices, not the offerer; (2) the LORD is spoken of in the third person both before and after this clause so it would seem strange to have an abrupt second person sandwiched between these two; and (3) the Servant was rewarded for his work in verse 12, which shows he was the one who offered himself as the sacrifice (Young, *Isaiah*, 3:354). But see Lindsey, "The Career of the Servant," 31, who argues for the LORD being the subject.

mishandling of holy (sacred) things as if they were just common.”<sup>150</sup> Self-autonomous Adam treated the holy (set apart) tree of the knowledge of good and evil as an ordinary tree from which he foolishly reasoned he could eat without reprisal. No mere animal sacrifice could atone for the blatant profanities Adam’s rebellious race have committed against every aspect of God’s holy person and work. The Servant “is not ‘bringing’ the sacrifice for he *is* the sacrifice”<sup>151</sup> who willingly offered himself up to pay the incurred debt of humanity’s contempt for the holiness of God.

Isaiah 53:11, according to Alec Motyer, “is one of the fullest statements of atonement theology ever penned.”<sup>152</sup> Isaiah identified the Servant as the “righteous one.” “Righteousness” is “conformity to an ethical or moral standard”<sup>153</sup> and, applied to the Servant, means “he is free from every contagion of our sin.”<sup>154</sup> The Righteous Servant’s sacrifice will “make many to be accounted righteous.” Adam’s sin was imputed to all his descendants, the sins of many were imputed to the Servant, and the Servant’s righteousness was imputed back to the many. The many are declared righteous because

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<sup>150</sup>Richard E. Averbeck, “Christian Interpretations of Isaiah 53,” in *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology*, ed. Darrell L. Bock, and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2012), 47. This purpose of the guilt offering was clearly seen in Lev 5:15. For an extended discussion on the guilt offering see *ibid.*, 45–60, and Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, Anchor Bible Commentary, vol. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 319–78.

<sup>151</sup>Motyer, *Isaiah*, 439 (italics in original).

<sup>152</sup>*Ibid.*, 442.

<sup>153</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. “קִיָּץ,” by Harold G. Stigers.

<sup>154</sup>Motyer, *Isaiah*, 442. This idea is captured well by Young: “When the servant bore the guilt of our sins, we are saying that he bore the punishment that was due to us because of those sins, and that is to say that he was our substitute. His punishment was vicarious. Because we had transgressed, he was pierced to death; and being pierced and crushed was the punishment that he bore in our stead. . . . If, however, the language is to have meaning, the servant must be one who was himself utterly free of transgression and iniquity, else his vicarious suffering could be to no avail. If one who himself was iniquitous bore the sins of another, then there is a travesty upon justice, for the sinbearer in this case would have need that his own sins be borne by another” (Young, *Isaiah*, 3:348).

“he shall bear their iniquities (יִסְבֹּל הוּא וְעֹנֵוֹתָם).”<sup>155</sup> Once again, the emphatic הוּא appeared to clarify any doubts of the agent of justification. The forensic justification inherent in this phrase is explained well by Young:

When the servant bears the iniquities of the many and has been punished for the guilt of these iniquities, the act of bearing the iniquities in itself has not changed the character of those whose iniquities are borne. When the iniquities are borne, i.e., when the guilt of those iniquities involve has been punished, the servant may declare that those iniquities has been punished. Thus, they are justified. They are declared to be righteous, for they have received the righteousness of the servant and they are received and accepted by God Himself. Of them God says that they no longer have iniquities, but they do have the righteousness of the servant. This can only be a forensic justification.<sup>156</sup>

A final statement of the Servant’s vicarious suffering for Adam’s autonomous descendants rounded out Isaiah 53: “he bore the sin of many (נָשָׂא הַטָּאִרְבִּים וְהוּא).”<sup>157</sup> The emphatic הוּא made its final appearance to once again remind that the justification was not obtained through self-effort or self-righteousness but solely by the sacrifice of the Servant. “Sin” is defined as “the failure to hit the mark, a turning away from obedience, a lack of wholeness or of acceptance before God.”<sup>158</sup> The three major words for disobedience—transgressions, iniquities, and sins—appeared in Isaiah 53 to show the complete failure and inability of self-willed rebels to live according to God’s standards. The phrase נָשָׂא הַטָּאִרְבִּים (“he bore the sins”) was used primarily to describe an individual bearing his or her own sin and guilt (Lev 5:17; Num 9:13; Ezek 23:49), Isaiah 53:12 is the only verse in the OT where it was used to describe the vicarious bearing of sin by a

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<sup>155</sup>“Bear” is the verb יִסְבֹּל which was found in the second phrase; “iniquities” is the noun עֹוֹן found in the fourth phrase.

<sup>156</sup>Young, *Isaiah*, 3:358.

<sup>157</sup>“Bore” is the verb נָשָׂא which was also found in the first phrase.

<sup>158</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. “הַטָּאִרְבִּים,” by G. Herbert Livingston.

person.

To summarize, the high-priced nature of mortifying autonomous self-rule is at the heart of redemptive history as witnessed by the costly Levitical sacrifices of, usually, the best animal of the herd (Lev. 22:21). These sacrifices, however, were “but a shadow of the good things to come” (Heb 10:1). The atonement for sins, transgressions, and iniquities would be secured not by the blood of goats or lambs but by the propitiatory sacrifice of the precious blood of the kingly Righteous Davidic Servant who willfully and voluntarily submitted himself to the crushing weight of God’s wrath for those deluded with their own self-sufficiency.

### **King Jesus Suffers for the Mortification of Self-Rule**

F. B. Meyer poignantly asserted of Isaiah 53, “There is only one brow which this crown of thorns will fit.”<sup>159</sup> Isaiah used the imagery of “the arm of the Lord” to convey that when Yahweh bore his holy arm all the nations would see his salvation (Isa 52:10).<sup>160</sup> Jesus is the revealed Arm (Isa 53:1; John 12:38) so that “now, at last, the arm has come, not simply a person behind and through whom the Lord’s power is at work, not just one signally (even uniquely) upheld by the Lord’s power, but ‘the Arm’ himself, the

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<sup>159</sup>F. B. Meyer, *Christ in Isaiah* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1895), 158. See Darrell L. Bock, “Conclusion,” in *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2012), 272–76, which contains several charts showing the direct quotations and allusions of Isaiah 53 in the NT. See also Robert B. Chisholm Jr, “The Christological Fulfillment of Isaiah’s Servant Songs,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163, no. 652 (December 2006): 387–404; France, “The Servant of the Lord,” Kenneth D. Litwak, “The Use of Quotations from Isa 52:13-53:12 in the New Testament,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 26, no. 4 (December 1983): 385–94.

<sup>160</sup>The arm of the Lord is highlighted in Exod 6:6; 15:16; Deut 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 11:2; 26:8; 2 Kgs 17:36; Ps 98:1; Isa 30:30, 32; 33:2; 40:10; 48:14; 51:9; 52:10; 62:8; Jer 32:17; Ezek 20:33.

Lord come to save.”<sup>161</sup> The Arm, however, “looks nothing like our stereotypical conquering hero”<sup>162</sup> for he is the Suffering Servant King of Isaiah 53.<sup>163</sup> Jesus “was numbered with the transgressors” (Luke 22:37), was the sheep led to the slaughter (Acts 8:32-35) as the sacrificial lamb for sin (John 1:29; 1 Cor 5:7; 15:3), and who voluntarily laid down his life for straying sheep (John 10, 11, 15). Jesus was lifted up (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32) to bear the sins and transgressions of many (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45) in order to justify them (Rom 4:25). King Jesus takes away sin (1 John 3:5) and makes the unrighteous righteous (Rom 5:19). Peter appears to have crafted 1 Peter 2:22-25 around Isaiah 53:

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you [entire thrust of Isa 53], leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth [Isa 53:9]. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten [Isa 53:7], but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins [Isa 53:4, 11, 12] in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness [Isa 53:12]. By his wounds you have been healed [Isa 53:5]. For you were straying like sheep [Isa 53:6], but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls [entire thrust of Isa 53].

King Jesus’ suffering on the cross was God’s means to decrease self-rule through mortification. Jesus predicted his suffering and death so he was no stranger to the horrors that awaited him.<sup>164</sup> In Gethsemane he implored his Father three times, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me” (Matt 26:39, 42, 44; Luke 22:42). The “cup” symbolized suffering and the wrath of God (Ps 11:6; Isa 51:17; Ezek 23:33). This

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<sup>161</sup>Motyer, *Isaiah*, 427.

<sup>162</sup>John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah*, The NIV Application Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 583.

<sup>163</sup>Matt 12:18; Acts 3:13; 4:27, 30; Rom 15:8.

<sup>164</sup>Matt 20:17-19; Mark 8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34; Luke 9:22-27; 18:31-24.

cup was the culminated weight of Isaiah 53 bearing down on him when the Father crushed the Son and put him to grief for the transgressions, iniquities, and sins of self-idolatrous creatures. Rebellious self-lordship was most horrifically and appallingly displayed at the cross. Judas betrayed him (Luke 22:48). The disciples abandoned him (Matt 26:56). Faithful Peter denied him (Matt 14:66-72). Roman soldiers tormented him (Matt 27:29). He suffered scourging (Matt 27:26). He endured the mocking scorn of religious leaders and soldiers (Luke 23:35-37), of the crowd (Matt 27:37-40), and of the two criminals (Matt 27:44). When God put himself into the hands of angry sinners, the depraved autonomous self was finally able to accomplish what it had desired since Adam—deicide, the killing of God.

The daytime sun was blotted out as darkness covered the land for the last three hours of Jesus' crucifixion (Matt 27:45). Darkness in Scripture was oftentimes used to describe divine judgment,<sup>165</sup> hell is a place of deep and gloomy darkness.<sup>166</sup> This divinely imposed darkness was a palpable indicator of the imminent presence of divine judgment. Judgment did not consume the rebellious self-glorifying creatures who were hell-bent on killing the Son of God but engulfed the perfectly holy and innocent Servant who offered himself up as the propitiatory sacrifice on behalf of these autonomous creatures.

Out of the darkness the woeful cry of dereliction was heard, "My God, my God." Jesus always addressed God as "Father" or, more specifically, "my Father."<sup>167</sup> His

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<sup>165</sup>Exod 10:21-22; Isa 5:30; 60:2; Joel 2:30-31; Amos 5:18, 20; Zeph 1:14-18; Matt 24:29-30; Acts 2:20; Rev 6:12-17.

<sup>166</sup>Matt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; 2 Pet 2:17, 24; Jude 6.

<sup>167</sup>Matt 7:21; 10:32, 33; 11:27; 12:50; 16:17; 18:10, 14, 19; 20:23; 25:34; 26:39, 42, 53; Luke 9:59; 10:22; 22:29; 24:49; John 5:17; 6:32, 40; 8:19, 38, 49, 54; 10:18, 29, 37; 14:7, 20, 21, 23; 15:1, 8, 15, 23, 24; 20:17; Rev 2:27; 3:5, 21.

first utterance from the cross (Luke 23:34) was to the Father, as was his last (Luke 23:46). This fourth word from the cross was the only time Jesus addressed the Father as “my God.” S. Lewis Johnson suggests this unique designation is explained by Jesus “[regarding] His relationship to God at this precise moment as being a *judicial* one, not a *paternal* one. In other words, He saw Himself primarily as a man before God, not as the eternal Son before His Father.”<sup>168</sup> The unblemished sacrifice hung before God to absorb all his judicial wrath for the sins of self-serving rebels.

“My God, my God, *why* have you forsaken me?” David penned these opening words of the individual lament Psalm 22 some 900 years before Jesus was born. The “why?” question in the ILPs showed the abnormality of the situation, the deep wrongness of it. David’s question implied “you should not have abandoned me, and I appeal to you to come back now.”<sup>169</sup> David’s greater son uttered the same question from the cross *as a man* with much the same concern. Bruce Ware cogently reminds that for the *human* Jesus, obedience and trust were not automatic but he “fought to believe and fought to obey and fought to in prayer as he hoped in what the Father would provide.”<sup>170</sup> Additionally, Jesus in his humanity sometimes fought to understand the ways of his Father. C. H. Spurgeon hinted at the man Jesus’ sheer incredulity of the cross:

[The] Man of Sorrows was overborne with horror. At that moment the finite soul of the man Christ Jesus came into awful contact with the infinite justice of God. The one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, beheld the holiness of God in arms against the sin of man, whose nature He had espoused. God was for

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<sup>168</sup>S. Lewis Johnson, “Death of Christ,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125, no. 497 (January 1968): 14 (italics in original).

<sup>169</sup>Goldingay, *Psalms*, 1:325.

<sup>170</sup>Bruce A. Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflections on the Humanity of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 65.

Him and with Him in a certain unquestionable sense; but for a time, so far as His feeling went, God was against him, and necessarily withdrawn from him. It is not surprising that the holy soul of Christ would shudder at finding itself brought into painful contact with the infinite justice of God, even though its design was only to vindicate that justice, and glorify the Law-giver.<sup>171</sup>

“Why?” Nothing could ever compare with the unmitigated abnormality and wrongness of the cross: the sinless One dying for the sinful, the Righteous One suffering for the unrighteous, the obedient One being numbered with the rebellious self-ruling. God not only failed to act on Jesus’ behalf but had become an active enemy against his own Son because of his sheer hatred for the sins of self-indulgent creatures.

The physical pain of crucifixion was brutal and gruesome but the deepest horror for Jesus was realized when “the concentrated wrath of Heaven descends upon Him.”<sup>172</sup> Jesus cried out from the darkness with an anguished howl, “My God, my God, why have you *forsaken* me?” For Jesus this harrowing cry was not perception but reality. God the Father did, in fact, utterly forsake and abandon God the Son to his misery and desolate loneliness. The mystery of the cross is that the Father made him who was sinless “to be sin” (2 Cor 5:21) so that Christ became “a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). God’s eyes are absolutely pure and cannot look favorably on evil (Hab 1:13). Now the Father looked at his Son and saw all the sins, all the transgressions, all the iniquities his elect have committed, are committing, and will commit heaped upon the Servant King. God

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<sup>171</sup>C. H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon’s Sermons on the Death and Resurrection of Jesus*, ed. Patricia Klein (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 332. John Stevenson adds, “When Christ here speaks of his being “forsaken,” he means that he was under a suspension of that joyful and intimate communion with the Most High, which he had always enjoyed up to this moment. God the Father, and God the Holy Spirit, had withdrawn all sensible influence from Christ’s human nature. He therefore speaks according to that nature, because he felt according to it—he *felt* as a *man*” (John Stevenson, *Christ on the Cross: An Exposition of the Twenty-Second Psalm* [New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1853], 29).

<sup>172</sup>Arthur W. Pink, *The Seven Sayings of the Saviour on the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954), 66.



responded by crushing his Son with all his rage against sin so that self-glorifying rebels may be justified. Jesus cried out in infinite agony because “under the hidings of his Father’s face, the only begotten Son must have experienced what no human intellect can conceive, and which, if it did, no human language could express.”<sup>173</sup> Adam heard the thundering presence of God’s judgment and, now, the Second Adam detected the same deafening roar as he drank the entire cup of God’s infinite wrath. In the darkness of God’s judgment the propitiatory sacrifice suffered “in all its horror the separation from God that sin creates”<sup>174</sup> for Adam’s self-glorifying race.

The suffering King’s attack on self-rule was clearly detailed in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15. Paul began by declaring the foundational motivation for Christian ministry, “for the love of Christ controls us.” Most commentators take this phrase as a subjective genitive (“Christ’s love for us”) rather than objective (“our love for Christ”). The cross was the greatest display of God’s inflexible judgment against sin and the greatest display of his love (Rom 5:8; 1 John 4:7-10). Paul alluded to the cross in the next phrase: “because we have concluded this: that one has died for all.” This clause “is the gospel in summary.”<sup>175</sup> “All” was not universal, meaning that Jesus died for all people, but was

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<sup>173</sup>Stevenson, *Christ on the Cross*, 27. Pink adds, “Behold, how nature herself had anticipated the dreadful Tragedy—the very contour of the ground is like unto a *skull*. Behold the earth trembling beneath the mighty load of outpoured wrath. Behold the heavens as the sun turns away from such a scene, and the land is covered with darkness. Here may we see the dreadful anger of a sin-avenging God. Not all the thunderbolts of Divine judgment which were let loose in the Old Testament times, not all the vial of wrath which shall yet be purred forth on an apostate Christendom during the unparalleled horrors of the Great Tribulation, not all the weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth of the damned in the Lake of Fire ever gave, or ever will give such a demonstration of God’s inflexible justice and ineffable holiness, of His infinite hatred of sin, as did the wrath of God which flamed up against His own Son on the Cross” (Pink, *The Seven Sayings of the Saviour on the Cross*, 72).

<sup>174</sup>R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 266.

<sup>175</sup>Simon Kistemaker, *2 Corinthians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker

qualified by “us” (those whom Christ loves) and by those who live for him in the next verse.<sup>176</sup> The “all” then is limited to all Christ-followers. The love of Christ controls all Christ-followers because he died for them and, therefore, all who follow him have died to sin and its curse.<sup>177</sup> Verse 15 continued the thought: “and he died for all [his people].”

The implication of the gospel and Christ’s death was now addressed. “That those who live” are those who no longer linger in spiritual death and chaos but whom God has made spiritually alive in Christ.<sup>178</sup> The spiritually alive now are to “no longer live for themselves.” Since Adam’s rebellion the human race both collectively and individually has been consumed with idolatrous self-worship so that the self is the “great source and end of action, to please and to obey.”<sup>179</sup> The idolatrous self is in bondage to itself and constantly seeks to gratify its own ease and pleasure, to promote its own self-interest and reputation, to advance the self regardless of the cost to others, and to seek self-aggrandizement and recognition. The Suffering Servant King was crushed in order to crush self-rule so that those who are alive in Christ no longer live to please self “but for him who for their sake died and was raised.” Christ did not endure the infinite misery of

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Academic, 1997), 187.

<sup>176</sup>Kistemaker, *2 Corinthians*, 188. See also Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 40 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986), 131. Context is always the determiner of meaning and “all” oftentimes does not carry universality. For example, a woman with a discharge of blood touched Jesus and was healed. Jesus asked who did this, she “declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him” (Luke 8:47). Here, “all” does not mean every single citizen of Jerusalem but is limited to all the people who were in the immediate vicinity.

<sup>177</sup>See Rom 6:1-4; Gal 2:3:13.

<sup>178</sup>Rom 6:1-11; Gal 2:19-20; Eph 2:1-5; Col 3:3.

<sup>179</sup>Henry Alford, *The Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles to the Romans and Corinthians*, 5th ed., Greek Testament Critical and Exegetical Commentary, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Company, 1865), 276.

the cross and the horrors of his Father's wrath for his own sake but for the sake of rebellious, self-consumed creatures. He burst from the grave in glorious power and might to rescue Adam's doomed race from themselves so that they may live for him rather than for the destructive self, bring him glory, and have him as the object of worship rather than the self.<sup>180</sup>

The summarize, the cross is the King's attack on the autarchic self. Christ-followers are saved by grace, filled with the Spirit, adopted, justified, united with Christ, but live in the "already but not yet" transition between this present age and the age to come. King Jesus subdued the chaos but the chaos has not yet been totally eradicated. The chaos woos Christ-followers to return to its fold and redeemed hearts are still drawn to its siren call. The impulse to self-authority still lurks in the heart of every Christ-follower and still needs to be mortified. Jesus teaches that suffering is one of God's designs to decrease and mortify the impulse to self-rule in the Christ-follower.

### **Suffering and the Christ-Follower's Mortification of Self-Rule**

Peter's confession, "You are the Christ" (Mark 8:29), served as a pivotal point in Jesus' ministry to his disciples. Jesus had previously alluded to his death in vague terms (Mark 2:19-20) but now that the disciples embraced him as Messiah "the time for

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<sup>180</sup>Acts 20:24; Rom 14:7-8; Gal 2:20; 6:14; Phil 1:21; 32:14; Col 3:4. "He died for our sins and rose again for our justification. And it is to this risen Saviour, seated at the right hand of God, to whom all power in heaven and earth has been committed, and who ever lives to make intercession for us, who is the object of the supreme love of the believer" (Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians* [Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974], 514). John Piper adds that Christ "died to wean us from poisonous pleasures and enthrall us with the pleasures of his beauty. In this way we are loved, and he is honored. These are not competing aims. They are one" (John Piper, *The Passion of Jesus Christ: Fifty Reasons Why He Came to Die* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004], 83).

symbols and veiled language was largely over.”<sup>181</sup> Peter’s confession prompted Jesus to plainly tell them he would suffer, die, and resurrect in Jerusalem (Mark 8:31). This revelation ran counter to contemporary assumptions about Messiah.

No single form of messianic expectation was cherished by Jesus’ contemporaries, but the hope of a military Messiah predominated. The promises of a prince of the house of David who would break the oppressor’s yoke from his people’s neck seemed to many to be designated for such a time as theirs, whether the yoke was imposed by a Herodian ruler or by a Roman governor.<sup>182</sup>

Jesus’ disclosure so shocked Peter that he presumptuously rebuked the One whom he had just declared to be Christ for his erroneous theological conclusions (Mark 8:32). Jesus, in turn, strongly admonished Peter, informing him that his conclusions were satanic and derived from human self-interest (Mark 8:33).

Verse 34 begins, “And calling (προσκαλεσάμενος) the crowd to him with his disciples.” “And” suggests Jesus used the opportunity as a segue to immediately teach crowds and disciples alike what it means to be his follower. Jesus as the subject of προσκαλέω always implied a summoning to himself to impart a great, solemn eternal truth.<sup>183</sup> He prefaced the weighty truth with, “if anyone would come after me.” Jesus used the phrase “come after me” on one other occasion (Luke 14:27), also within the context of cross-bearing as a requisite to be his disciple. To “come after Jesus” means to be attached to him, to find one’s identity in him, and to remain loyal to him.<sup>184</sup> Anyone who

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<sup>181</sup>D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 8 of *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein and J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 376.

<sup>182</sup>F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 133.

<sup>183</sup>Matt 10:1; 15:10, 32; 18:2, 32; 20:25; Mark 3:13, 23; 6:7; 7:14; 8:1, 34; 10:42; 12:43; 15:44; Luke 7:18; 15:26; 16:5; 18:16.

<sup>184</sup>William Hendriksen, *Mark*, *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1975), 329.

desires to be Christ’s disciple must obey his three solemn imperatival demands: “let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” All three imperatives imply that one divine design of suffering in Christ-followers is to mortify their disposition to self-rule.<sup>185</sup>

This verse has a chiasmic structure:

A: If anyone would come after me  
B: let him deny himself  
B’: take up his cross  
A’: and follow me

The central elements are parallel in thought: self-denial is taking up the cross, the one who takes up the cross is denying the self. The central idea of this verse is self-denial (mortifying self-rule) is necessary to be a disciple of Christ and those who do not mortify self-sovereignty cannot be his disciples. This verse is not teaching a sequential order of events, that is, to be Christ’s disciple is a three-step process of first denying the self, step two is taking up the cross, and then the final component is to follow him. Rather, the three imperatives describe nuances of the singular act of being Jesus’ disciple. Christ-centered discipleship is self-denial; suffering cross-bearing is following him. The suffering God inflicted on creation was due to Adam’s self-will. This passage shows that one of God’s designed purposes of suffering in the fallen world is to mortify the self-will of his people.

### **Self-denial Mortifies Self-Rule**

Jesus’ first imperative strikes at the very heart of self-rule: “let him deny (ἀπαρνησάσθω) himself” or, more forcefully, “he must deny himself” (NASB, NIV). The

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<sup>185</sup>The three imperatival clauses—“let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”—are exactly the same in the Greek in all three parallel passages (Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23), the only variation is Luke’s addition of “daily.”

fundamental battle of the human heart is who will be the ultimate authority to whom the person acquiesces: self or Christ (2 Cor 5:14-15). The verb ἀπαρνέομαι was used only a handful of times in the NT and means “to turn someone off, to refuse association and companionship with him, to disown him.”<sup>186</sup> Heinrich Schlier adds that denial requires “a previous relationship of obedience and fidelity. It can take place only where there has first been acknowledgment and commitment.”<sup>187</sup>

Peter’s denial of Jesus forms the major cluster of verses in which ἀπαρνέομαι occurred.<sup>188</sup> Matthew Skinner helpfully analyzes Peter’s denial to give an analogous picture of what it means to deny the self.<sup>189</sup> First, true to the definition, Peter’s denial of Jesus was within the context of an ongoing personal relationship. Peter declared with self-imprecatory curses, “I do not know this man of whom you speak” (Mark 14:71). Peter was one of the “inner-circle” disciples who had boldly declared his unending fidelity and commitment to Jesus, even upon pains of death (Mark 14:30) but now “Peter severs himself, not merely from responsibility or obligation, but from Jesus and all that he represents.”<sup>190</sup> Second, Peter’s denial expresses the finality of his disassociation with

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<sup>186</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, *Matthew* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1943), 643. The verb occurs only in Isa 31:7 in the LXX. The more common verb to express denial, ἄρνέομαι, is found thirty-three times in the NT.

<sup>187</sup>*TDNT*, s.v. “αρνέομαι,” by Heinrich Schlier.

<sup>188</sup>The verb is used in Luke 12:9 as a warning that the one who denies Christ before other will be denied by God before the angels. Jesus predicted Peter’s future denial of him (Matt 26:34; Mark 14:30; Luke 22:34) but Peter asserted he would never deny Jesus (Matt 26:35; Mark 14:31). Peter remembered that Jesus predicted his denials (Matt 26:75; Mark 14:72; Luke 22:61).

<sup>189</sup>Matthew L. Skinner, “Denying Self, Bearing a Cross, and Following Jesus: Unpacking the Imperatives of Mark 8:34,” *Word & World*, June 1, 2003, 327. Peter’s denial of Jesus is an incident recorded in all four Gospels (Matt 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-18).

<sup>190</sup>Skinner, “Denying Self, Bearing a Cross, and Following Jesus,” 327.

Jesus. The statement in Mark 14:71 is a “denial of his master in the most emphatic manner possible.”<sup>191</sup> Third, Peter’s denial was a public declaration of his separation from Jesus. Peter denied Jesus in the populated public courtyard (Mark 14:66-68); before bystanders (Mark 14:69-70); and, finally, to the bystanders (Mark 14:70-71).

Self-denial is not religious masochism, self-destructive asceticism, or self-deprecations that abnegate one’s abilities, gifts, accomplishments, or personhood. The “self” that must be denied, decreased, and mortified is Adam’s imputed self-seeking, self-glorifying, rebellious self-willed autonomy apart from God. This self is called the “old self” which is “corrupt through deceitful desires” (Eph 4:22)<sup>192</sup> or, more commonly, “the flesh.”<sup>193</sup> The flesh is characterized by a mind consumed with sinful thoughts and desires (Rom 8:5) because it is spiritually dead (Rom 8:6). The flesh is “hostile to God” (Rom 8:7) and is incapable of pleasing him (Rom 8:8). The flesh is characterized by self-indulgent moral perversions, religious innovations, and interpersonal turmoils (Gal 5:20-21). The flesh seeks to gratify its sinful desires (Eph 2:3).<sup>194</sup> Every person from conception is in an intimate, ongoing relationship with their self-serving flesh (Ps 51:5) and the sovereign Christ demands that this self must be denied (mortified) in order to be his disciple.

Self-denial means to treat the flesh-self as Peter denied Jesus. First, self-denial

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<sup>191</sup>Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 34B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 466.

<sup>192</sup>Also Rom 6:6; Col 3:9.

<sup>193</sup>See David K. Clark, “Interpreting the Biblical Words for the Self,” *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 18, no. 4 (December 1990): 309–17, for a good overview of “old self” and “flesh.”

<sup>194</sup>Rom 7:5, 14, 18, 25; 8: 4, 9, 12, 13; 13:14; 1 Cor 3:1, 3; 2 Cor 1:17; 10:2, 3, 4; Gal 4:23, 29; 5:13, 16, 17, 19, 24; 6:8; Col 2:11, 13, 23; 1 Pet 2:11; 2 Pet 2:18; 1 John 2:16.

requires disassociation of one's relationship with the intimate evil companion that has been the controlling force of the life. Second, Jesus' imperative leaves no room for half-measures but is a demand for a complete and final divorce from the autonomous self so that all its desires are abandoned. Third, self-denial is a public display of one's commitment to Christ which means "living without regard for the security and priorities that people naturally cling to and that our society actively promotes as paramount."<sup>195</sup>

Jesus' imperatival call for self-denial is echoed throughout the NT. For example, Paul in Romans 13:14 exhorted Christ-followers, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." The verb "put on" also means "to clothe." Stripped of the flesh-self, Christ-followers are to clothe themselves with Christ, to embrace him with fidelity and obedience, to have their lives shaped and molded by him, and to trust him completely for their righteous standing before God. Ephesians 4:22-31 uses the same imagery (also Col 3:8-10). The Christ-follower is exhorted to "put off" (deny, decrease, mortify) the lying, unrighteous anger, stealing, cutting remarks, foul language, bitterness, slander, and malice of the chaotic old self and to "put on" the righteousness, holiness, truth-telling, generosity, edifying words, kindness, tenderness, and forgiveness of the new self. Self-denial and the mortification of the autonomous self is non-negotiable for, as J. C. Ryle blatantly noted, "A crucified Saviour will never be content to have a self-pleasing, self-indulging, worldly-minded

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<sup>195</sup>Skinner, "Denying Self, Bearing a Cross, and Following Jesus," 329. In the same vein, Leon Morris comments, "The natural tendency of the race is to affirm oneself, to concentrate on what serves one's own interests, to make oneself as prosperous as one can. Jesus calls on his true followers to renounce such self-interest" (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992], 431).



people.”<sup>196</sup>

### **Cross-Bearing Mortifies Self-Rule**

Self-denial is cross-bearing and this second imperative, “take up his cross,” intimates that being Jesus’ disciple will not be a painless venture. A common crucifixion practice was for the condemned to “take up” the crossbeam upon the shoulders and carry it to the place of execution.<sup>197</sup> This ultimate form of capital punishment was a shameful, humiliating, dehumanizing, repugnant, excruciatingly painful and cruel death “in which all the caprice and sadism of the executioners were given full reign.”<sup>198</sup> The cultured did not speak of crucifixion in ordinary conversations<sup>199</sup> so Jesus’ imperative “would have struck a somber, if not macabre, note in the ears of his audience.”<sup>200</sup> The command to voluntarily take up the cross was shocking and not a matter of indifference or idle philosophical speculation but “it was an utterly offensive affair, ‘obscene’ in the original sense of the word.”<sup>201</sup> The one who took up the cross was on a one-way journey to horrendous pain and death.

The injunction is very specific: “take up *his* cross.” Every Christ-follower will

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<sup>196</sup>J. C. Ryle, *Luke*, vol. 1, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels (1858; repr., Cambridge: James Clark & Company, Ltd, 1969), 310.

<sup>197</sup>John Granger Cook, *Crucifixion in the Mediterranean World* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 423–30. Cooks lists a variety of offenses which could result in crucifixion on p. 518.

<sup>198</sup>Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 25.

<sup>199</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>200</sup>Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 25.

<sup>201</sup>Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 22.

have his or her own unique cross to bear, designed specially by God for them.<sup>202</sup> Luke's version of Jesus' command is "take up his cross daily" (Luke 9:23), which underscores that Jesus was not necessarily speaking of a literal cross but using it metaphorically for suffering, suffering to incur self-denial. Jesus declared of himself that he came to bring his divine sword to the earth (Matt 10:34). An aspect of this sword is the presence of cross-suffering in the lives of his followers in order to decrease their bent to self-rule.

The suffering of the daily cross may be either outward or inward in nature. Outwardly, cross-bearing is not the general suffering all people experience to some degree in a fallen world but the suffering Jesus' disciples specially encounter due to their union with him.<sup>203</sup> To take up the cross//to deny self means to endure any shame, any embarrassment, any reproach, any rejection, any hardship, any persecution, any threat, and any tortuous death for the sake of Christ. Jesus promised throughout his ministry that his followers should expect suffering because of him.<sup>204</sup> Jesus plainly said that his followers would be hated because he is hated (John 15:18-21; 17:14-18). The disciples (Acts 4:1-22; 5:17-42), Stephen (Acts 7:54-60), the church (Acts 8:1; 11:19; Eph 3:13), Paul,<sup>205</sup> and countless others were persecuted because of their union with Christ. Cross-suffering is promised for all Christ-followers (Acts 14:22; 2 Tim 3:12). The imperative to

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<sup>202</sup>For example, after his resurrection Jesus told Peter the type of death he would experience (John 21:18-19). Peter was curious about God's path for John (John 21:20-21) and Jesus simply asked, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?" (John 21:22). Peter and John had different paths of cross-bearing, each designed by God for the particular man.

<sup>203</sup>D. A. Carson remarked that "suffering the opprobrium of the world is bound up with what it means to be a Christian" (D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006], 74).

<sup>204</sup>Matt 5:10-12; 10:16-20, 23; 24:8-14; Luke 21:12; John 16:33.

<sup>205</sup>Acts 16:19-24; 20:23; 13:50; 1 Cor 1:8; 4:12; 2 Cor 4:9; 12:10; Gal 5:11; Eph 3:13; 1 Tim 3:11.

take up the cross means that coming after Christ is a one-way journey to certain suffering, pain, and, possibly, death for the sake of the Savior (Matt 10:38; Luke 14:27). Suffering persecution is a litmus test that proves whether a person's true allegiance is to Christ or to the autonomous self (Matt 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20).

Cross-suffering also has an internal dimension—daily the impulse to self-rule denied, mortified, and crucified. Romans 6 is rife with this language: Christ-followers are buried with Christ so that they may live in the new life Christ provides (Rom 6:4); self-autonomy was crucified with Christ so that his people are no longer enslaved to it (Rom 6:6); disciples have “died with Christ” and now “live with him” (Rom 6:8); they are to consider themselves dead to their rebellious self-will and alive to God in Christ (Rom 6:11). Paul declared, “I die every day!” (1 Cor 15:31). The inward cross' work to mortify self-rule is clearly seen in Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (also Gal 6:14).

The inward crucifixion of the self is no less painful and horrific than the external cross. Richard Sibbes recognized the difficult nature of mortifying the autonomous self in believers: “It is no easy matter to bring a man from nature to grace, and from grace to glory, so unyielding and intractable are our hearts.”<sup>206</sup> A vicious war rages within the heart of every Christ-follower as the desires of the Spirit and the desires of self-lordship engage in daily pitched battle (Gal 5:16-17), the latter hungering, desiring, plotting to lead a coup to overthrow the Lordship of Christ and reestablish itself

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<sup>206</sup>Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed* (1630; repr., Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 6.

as the master of the soul. Discipleship//self-denial//cross-bearing call for “a death to a whole way of life; he was talking about the utmost in self-sacrifice, a very death to selfishness and all forms of self-seeking.”<sup>207</sup> The state forced the doomed criminal to take up his cross. Disciples of Christ take it up willingly, joyfully, and somberly: “Christ, carrying his cross, leads, and all his disciples, each bearing his cross, follow in one immense procession like men being led away to be crucified.”<sup>208</sup>

### **Following Christ Mortifies Self-Rule**

The last command, “follow me (ἀκολουθεῖτω μοι),” once again shows that discipleship is not one full of ascetic bliss but full of self-denial and cross-bearing for it is “a challenge to have one’s whole existence determined by and patterned after a crucified messiah.”<sup>209</sup> Jesus uttered the directive “follow me” on six different occasions.<sup>210</sup> Jesus aimed his first “follow me” to Peter and Andrew (Matt 4:18-22). Jesus simply issues his command without fanfare and explanation: “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt 4:20). They immediately left their livelihood to follow Jesus. Matthew, the tax collector, likewise received Jesus’ summons “follow me.” (Matt 9:9-13). His response

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<sup>207</sup>Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 431. The symbol // means “parallel to.”

<sup>208</sup>Lenski, *Matthew*, 644.

<sup>209</sup>John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 35B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 482.

<sup>210</sup>In addition to the three parallel passages in this section (Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23): (1) the initial call to some of the disciples (Matt 4:19; 9:9; Mark 1:17; 2:14; Luke 5:27; John 1:43); (2) to a man who wanted to first bury his father (Matt 8:22; Luke 9:59); (3) to the rich young ruler (Matt 19:21; Mark 10:21; Luke 18:22); (4) to anyone who would serve Christ (John 12:26); and (5) to Peter after resurrection (John 13:36; John 21:19, 22). Only the first three will be examined in this section. “Follow me” is the translation of δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου (“come after me”) in Matt 4:19; 10:38; Mark 1:17. The more common ἀκολουθεῖ μοι is found in Matt 8:22; 9:9; 16:24; 19:21; Mark 2:14; 8:34; 10:21; Luke 5:27; 9:23, 59; 18:22; John 1:43; 12:26; 21:19, 22.

was identical to the fishermen: “And leaving everything, he rose and followed him” (Luke 5:27).

The next “follow me” statement was issued to a man who wanted to temporarily postpone becoming Jesus’ disciple: “To another he said, ‘Follow me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God’” (Luke 9:59-60). The cryptic “leave the dead to bury their own dead” has received various interpretations but Byron McCane makes a convincing case for understanding the saying in light of contemporary cultural considerations.<sup>211</sup> Ossilegium (“second burial”) was a common burial custom in first century Israel which “refers to the practice of reburying the bones of the dead after the flesh of the body has decomposed.”<sup>212</sup> Ritual mourning for the dead was rather codified. Initially, seven days of secluded, intense mourning by family members was followed by thirty days of continued, but less intense, mourning. During this thirty day period family members “could not leave town, cut their hair, or attend social gatherings.”<sup>213</sup> The death of a father, however, required a public face of mourning for an entire year. Ossilegium occurred about a year after death, which gave the body ample time to decompose. The oldest son oversaw the ceremony—family members entered the tomb, placed the bones in a chest, and reburied them. The ossilegium served

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<sup>211</sup>For an overview of the several interpretations of Jesus’ saying, see Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (I-IX)*, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Commentary*, vol. 28 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), 836.

<sup>212</sup>Byron R. McCane, “‘Let the Dead Bury Their Own Dead’: Secondary Burial and Matt 8:21-22,” *Harvard Theological Review* 83, no. 1 (1990): 31.

<sup>213</sup>*Ibid.*, 35.

as “the closing act in the long process of mourning for the dead”<sup>214</sup> and allowed the resumption of normal life.

Considerable light is shed on this passage if ossilegium serves as the cultural context. The man’s father was dead and he was past the thirty day mourning period since he was at a public gathering. The ossilegium could be in the near future or upwards of eleven months. Regardless, he asked Jesus for a temporary stay on becoming his disciple. Jesus’ reply, “leave the dead to bury their own dead” with the ossilegium in mind means “let the other dead in the family tomb rebury your father’s bones.”<sup>215</sup> Jesus’ expectation is emphatic: “Follow me.”

A rich young man who held a prestigious position in the community ran up to Jesus, knelt before him, and asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17).<sup>216</sup> Jesus’ told the man to obey the Decalogue, which was the “traditional *Jewish* response to a *Jewish* man wanted to enter into eternal life.”<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>214</sup>McCane, “Let the Dead Bury Their Own Dead,” 36.

<sup>215</sup>Ibid., 41.

<sup>216</sup>This man is called “young” in Matt 19:20 and designated as a “ruler” in Luke 18:18. The noun ἄρχων (“ruler) was applied to a wide variety of human authorities such as synagogue officials (Luke 8:41); members of the Sanhedrin (Luke 23:13); or a general reference to leaders (John 7:26). He held a prominent position in some realm but the texts gives no indication of his actual position. Lenski’s assertion, for example, that the man was a ruler of a local synagogue may be correct but is not supported by the text (R. C. H. Lenski, *Mark* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1946], 430). All three parallel passages indicate that the man was rich (Matt 19:22; Mark 10:22; Luke 18:23). Matthew and Mark attribute his wealth to his κτήματα, a word used to describe real estate property (Acts 5:1).

<sup>217</sup>Alan P. Stanley, “The Rich Young Ruler and Salvation,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163, no. 649 (January 2006): 53 (italics in original). This position is warranted by passages such as Deut 30:15-16. Stanley gives a good overview of the different positions: (1) the call to keep the commandments was to show the man he could not keep the commandments; (2) Jesus intended to expose the man’s selfishness; (3) showing the man he failed to keep the second part of the Decalogue would show him he had failed to keep the first part (ibid., 51–53).

Conspicuous is Mark's addition "do not defraud (μη ἀποστερήσης)" (Mark 10:19).<sup>218</sup> The verb ἀποστερέω occurs a few times in Scripture to describe withholding that which was due a person (Exod 21:10; Mal 3:5; 1 Cor 7:5; Jas 5:4) and defrauding or stealing from another (Mark 10:19; 1 Cor 6:7, 8). Richard Hicks asserts that the inclusion of μη ἀποστερήσης is significant for it points "to the interlocutor's guilt throughout the story,"<sup>219</sup> the implication being that the man had gained some of his wealth through fraud.<sup>220</sup> The man's self-righteous claim to have followed the commandments from his youth met with Jesus' non-negotiable retort: "go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" Mark 10:21).

When Jesus summoned the disciples with "follow me," they did. The decision of the man who first wanted to bury his father is unknown. Here, however, Jesus' imperative was met with rejection: "Disheartened (στυγνάσας) by the saying, he went away sorrowful (λυπούμενος), for he had great possessions" (Mark 10:22). The man's commitment to his possessions was greater than his willingness to mortify his self-reliance by denying what he trusted for position, status, comfort, well-being, and security. The man's grief was deep and heartfelt. Matthew would use λύπη ("to grieve") to describe the deep grief Jesus felt in Gethsemane (Matt 26:37).

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<sup>218</sup>Craig Evans surmises that since the man was wealthy he was not prone to coveting (Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 96. A common answer is that Mark's unique insertion is a gloss that includes covetousness.

<sup>219</sup>Richard Hicks, "Markan Discipleship According to Malachi: The Significance of μη ἀποστερήσης in the Story of the Rich Man (Mark 10:17-22)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132, no. 1 (2013): 179.

<sup>220</sup>*Ibid.*, 198. See Jonathan A. Draper, "'Go Sell All That You Have . . .'" (Mark 10:17-30)," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 79 (June 1992): 65. See Jas 5:4.

## **Discipleship and the Mortification of Self-Rule**

“Follow me” is a summary injunction that invites all would be disciples to suffer self-denial/cross-suffering. The “follow me” statements given to these men are instructive for all Christ-followers. First, “follow me” means to mortify autonomous self-rule by making Christ the focal point of one’s life: “follow *me*.” Jesus demands to be the controlling force of their lives. They are to submit their plans, their desires, and their will to the Lordship of Christ and follow him in a radical new way of life. Jesus told the son who wanted to first bury his father to forgo cultural tradition. He told the rich young man sell all he had. Jesus did not negotiate but confronted them with his terms. The summons was a hard line drawn in the sand that was simple and stark: “Will you suffer the consequences of denying yourself, obeying me, and following me, or will you not?”

Second, “follow me” means to mortify self-preeminence by submitting one’s future well-being to Christ. The disciples knew fishing and, presumably, planned on this being their lifelong occupation. Jesus, however, had other plans: “I will make you fishers of men” (Matt 4:19). Jesus, not these fishermen, would determine their role in his kingdom. The young rich man was to sell everything and fall into a state of destitution for the sake of Christ. The fishermen and this man had to deny themselves, subdue their self-reliance, and trust Christ for their futures.

Third, “follow me” means to deny self by quelling selfish personal animosities and prejudices. The fishing industry was highly regulated and controlled by the political elites who sold the fishing rights to brokers (tax collectors), who, in turn, contracted with



fishermen.<sup>221</sup> Matthew was probably one of these brokers and, thus, an integral part of the overbearing tax structure levied against fishermen.<sup>222</sup> A tax collector within a cadre of fishermen was a volatile situation, yet Jesus called both of them to follow him. The rich young man moved in the sphere of the rich and powerful elite having little, if any, contact with the poor, orphans, widows, the diseased, or lowly fishermen. In both cases, “follow me” meant suffering self-death to social status and long held prejudices.

Fourth, “follow me” means to deny self//bear the cross by suffering the consequences of familial and societal rejection. First-century Judah was a collectivist society in which “the goal of life is ingroup (most often family) security and honor.”<sup>223</sup> This goal was achieved when the family was held in respect by others due to solidarity, integrity, and each member performing his or her expected duties.<sup>224</sup> The “ingroup/outgroup” differentiation is important to collectivist societies for,

a person’s behavior toward the ingroup is consistent with what the ingroup expects; but behavior toward everyone else (e.g. strangers) is characterized by defiance of authority, competition, resentment of control, formality, rejection, arrogant dogmatism, and rejection of influence attempts that have the outgroup as the source.<sup>225</sup>

Jesus is the “outgroup” who demands to have authority and control. “Follow

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<sup>221</sup>K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 99.

<sup>222</sup>Ibid. See K. C. Hanson, “The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 27, no. 3 (September 1997): 99–111, for a more detailed look at the fishing industry in first-century Israel. Both Matthew and the fishermen were from Capernaum so it is not too much of a stretch to surmise that Matthew was the broker to whom the fishermen were contracted.

<sup>223</sup>Bruce J. Malina, ““Let Him Deny Himself” (Mark 8:34 & Par) : A Social Psychological Model of Self-Denial,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, September 1, 1994, 111.

<sup>224</sup>Ibid., 111–12.

<sup>225</sup>Ibid., 111.

me” is a summons for these men to reject ingroup expectations. Sons do not leave fathers or the family business to become itinerant preachers, fishermen do not converse with tax collectors, tax collectors do not forgo their lucrative businesses, sons do not neglect the second burial of their fathers, the rich do not become poor to follow a low class carpenter and his fishermen disciples. Jesus was very clear that following him would result in familial strife, division, and hatred (Matt 10:34-39; Luke 14:25-33).<sup>226</sup> The self-denying, cross-bearing Jesus calls his would be disciples to die to self//take up the cross to suffer whatever shame, humiliation, dishonor, ridicule, contempt, and scorn each ones family, friends, or community may heap upon him for his sake.

Jesus’ demands would be especially harrowing for the man who desired to first bury his father because several cherished religious practices would be compromised. First, his public persona would not be mournful, as required, as he proclaimed the kingdom of God which would be construed as disrespectful to his father’s memory. Second, the “let me” in the man’s request (Mark 8:21) indicated he was the oldest son and, thus, his priority was to lead the family in the mourning rites rather than to gallivant after a popular preacher. Third, forgoing the ossilegium meant no closure to mourning and, thus, life would never return to normal. Fourth, and most serious, the commonly held belief was that the yearlong decay of the flesh served as a penance to atone for sins and the second burial was the capstone ceremony which signaled freedom from judgment.<sup>227</sup> Abandoning the ossilegium would forever consign his father to continued

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<sup>226</sup>In both passages Jesus likens the strife he brings into family as cross bearing (Matt 10:38; Luke 14:27).

<sup>227</sup>McCane quoted the Jerusalem Talmud on this point: “When the flesh has wasted away, the bones were collected and placed in chests. On that day [the son] mourned, but the following day he was

judgment.<sup>228</sup>

Discipleship is costly and will involve suffering. Suffering serves to winnow true disciples from false ones (Matt 13:1-23) and it also designed by God to rescue his people from their self-destructive selves so that Christ may be preeminent in their lives. Following Jesus is a trek and like any expedition it requires the child of God to say “farewell” to the familiar (sinful selfishness), to load up the luggage (the cross), to embark on the journey (following Christ), in order to reach the final destination (eternal life; Mark 8:35).<sup>229</sup>

### **Summary: Suffering Mortifies Self-Rule**

The argument of this chapter is that one divine design for suffering is to mortify self-rule in the lives of Christ-followers. The first necessary step in demonstrating this proposition was to investigate the genesis, nature, and pervasiveness of self-primacy in humanity. Adam’s defiance was a perverted expression of his kingly status as God’s representative vice-regent when he exerted his will to grasp godlike self-sovereignty. Adam created chaos, the domain that is opposed to God and in which suffering occurs. Humanity, now, exists in the chaos as the inherent nature of the soul is

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glad, because his forebears rested from judgment” (McCane, “Let the Dead,” 36). See also Mordechai Aviam and Danny Syon, “Jewish Ossilegium in Galilee,” in *What Athens Has to Do with Jerusalem: Essays on Classical, Jewish, and Early Christian Art and Archaeology in Honor of Gideon Foerster*, ed. Leonard V. Rutgers, Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Culture and Religion 1 (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 151–87, and Pau Figueras, *Decorated Jewish Ossuaries*, vol. 20, Documenta Et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1983).

<sup>228</sup>Jesus propounded the centrality of following him on several occasions. He declared, “whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (Mat t 10:38). Jesus died for his “sheep” and, consequently, his sheep follow him (John 10:27). Jesus left no room for self-autonomy when he asserted, “If anyone serves me, he must follow me” (John 12:26).

<sup>229</sup>Lenski, *Mark*, 349.

hostile toward God (Rom 8:5-8). Stephen Charnock memorably asseverated: that, “self is the great antichrist and anti-God in the world, that sets up itself above all that is called God; self-love is the captain of that black band (2 Tim. 3:2): it sits in the temple of God, and would be adored as God.”<sup>230</sup>

The lamenting psalmists lived in the chaos. The depths of the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual toll that suffering produces were eloquently detailed in the ILPs in harrowing poetic language that accentuated the oftentimes intense theological struggle the sufferers had with God. Their suffering laid bare their inability to find answers or relief from themselves or others, their suffering mortified self-pride and humiliated them, their suffering made dependence on God the focus of their hope rather than their sufficient selves. The lamenters in the scope of redemptive history served as types of the prophesied Suffering Davidic King who would commence the dismantling of the chaos.

King Jesus, the Second Adam, began to subdue the chaos through his life, ministry, and suffering. The first Adam, in the pristine garden, looked on the forbidden tree with desire for his foolish rationalization promised he could increase his self-rule by becoming a self-autonomous god. He exerted his foolish, darkened desires and declared, in effect, to God, “my will be done, not yours.” He took the fruit, ate it, and led his future race from freedom in God into the chaos of bondage of death, sin, and self. King Jesus, the Second Adam, was in a garden that had suffered for millennia under the ravages of sin. He looked on his necessary tree with dread for his obedience would bring an unimaginably painful death. He properly exercised his kingly duties, quelled his self-autonomy, submitted to his Father, and said, “not my will be done but yours.” The thorns

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<sup>230</sup>Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 1:121.

which Adam's quest for autonomy produced would crown the Second Adam's head as he was forsaken by God in order to free the many from the bondage of death, sin, and autonomous self-rule.

Christ-followers, like the lamenting psalmists, live in the chaos but on the other side of the cross. They are rescued from the chaos that has begun to be dismantled. The pull of chaos is strong, however, and the mortification of self-rule is still a necessary component of the Christian life. Jesus' imperatival force of what it means to be his disciple cannot be softened. Following in the steps of a crucified Messiah means to suffer as he did at some level which may include (but not be limited to) threats of death (Matt 2:13-16), pervasive opposition (Matt 26:3-4), vicious personal attacks (Mark 3:22), ridicule by family members (John 7:3-5), abandonment by friends (Matt 26:56), betrayal (John 18:15), anguish of heart (John 12:27), mocking and ridicule (Mark 15:20), slander (Matt 26:61-62), hatred (John 15:18), grief over unbelief (Mark 3:5), or death. Ryle captured well the interwoven dynamic of self-denial, internal and external cross-bearing, and following Christ:

But all who accept this great salvation must prove the reality of their faith by carrying the cross after Christ. They must not think to enter heaven without trouble, pain, suffering, and conflict on earth. They must be content to take up the cross of doctrine, and the cross of practice,—the cross of holding faith which the world despises,—the cross of living a life which the world ridicules as too strict and righteous overmuch. They must be willing to crucify the flesh, to mortify the deeds of the body, to fight daily with the devil. To come out from the world, and to lose their lives, if needful, for Christ's sake and the Gospel's.—These are hard sayings, but they admit no evasion. The words of our Lord are plain and unmistakable. If we will not carry the cross, we shall never wear the crown.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>231</sup>J. C. Ryle, *Mark*, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels (1857; repr. London: James Clark & Company, 1965), 169. See also William Penn, *No Cross, No Crown*, ed. Ronald Selleck (1669; repr., Richmond, VA: Friends United Press, 1981]).

Suffering for Christ-followers is not purposeless, meaningless, or arbitrary. One purpose for suffering in Christ-followers is to deny the sinful self so that the chaos will not reclaim the child of God but that he or she will follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

The thesis of this dissertation is that the divine design for suffering in Christ-followers is to decrease self-rule through mortification, increase God’s rule through engendering spiritual maturity, with both of these functions serving the ultimate purpose of God glorifying himself in the individual lives of his covenant people. This chapter has demonstrated the validity of the first major element of the argument—God designs suffering to decrease self-rule in his covenant people through mortification. If mortification was the entire purpose of suffering, however, then Christ-followers would have nothing but the prospect of a joyless, grim existence. Twin ideas are oftentimes bundled together in Scripture: fleeing sin is not enough but requires pursuing holiness, resisting Satan needs to be accompanied by seeking Christ, the “put off” is followed by the “put on.” In this vein, mortification is incomplete without vivification. The soul-shaping suffering that mortifies and decreases self-rule is also designed by God to engender spiritual maturity in Christ—the topic of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### SUFFERING AND THE INCREASING OF GOD'S RULE THROUGH THE ENGENDERING OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

The previous chapter explored God's destructive design for suffering. Adam's kingly responsibility as vice-regent was to subdue those forces which resisted his rule and fill the earth with the glory of God through his offspring (Gen 1:28). Adam's failure plunged creation into a dark chaos resulting in Adam's hostile-to-God's-kingly-rule progeny filling the earth. God's eternal plans, however, are not deterred (Isa 46:10). The cross of the Second Adam waged war on the chaos (2 Cor 13:4) so that under the New Covenant his redeemed-from-the-chaos people are his new Adamic vice-regents. As such, they are called to exert their kingly rule to subdue those who resist their authority and fill the earth with the glory of Christ (Matt 28:18-20). Like the Savior, however, the subjugation of the chaos in this present age is not by militaryesque conquest but through the gospel and Christ-followers living out its implications, especially by remaining loyal to Christ despite the variety of sufferings his vice-regents may experience (1 Pet 3:13-17).

The argument of this dissertation is that the divine design for suffering in Christ-followers is to decrease self-rule through mortification, increase God's rule through engendering spiritual maturity, with both of these functions serving the ultimate purpose of God glorifying himself in the individual lives of his covenant people. This

chapter will attempt to prove the second major statement of the thesis—that God designs suffering to increase his rule by engendering spiritual maturity in his covenant people. Spiritual maturity may be defined by John the Baptist’s self-declaration when in the presence of the Davidic King: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). The suffering that mortifies self-rule is synchronously the suffering that vivifies and this vivification is characterized by God’s ever-increasing rule in the lives of his covenant people.<sup>1</sup> Sanctification-suffering engenders Christlikeness, which, in turn, is the divine means for his vice-regents to subdue the chaos.

I will develop the theme of suffering designed by God to increase his rule by engendering spiritual maturity along three lines. First, I will consider the role suffering played in increasing his rule in the lamenting psalmists by instilling in them spiritually maturing characteristics. The suffering psalmists show the deep soul-change that suffering may produce but they also served as types that looked forward to the Suffering Davidic King. The next section shows how suffering spiritually matured, prepared, and completed Jesus for the rigors of the cross-sufferings he would bear. King Jesus is the ultimate sufferer who is the ground and exemplar of his people. The last portion of this chapter examines six NT passages which underscore suffering as a divine means to extend his rule in the hearts of the redeemed by engendering spiritual maturity.

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<sup>1</sup>This mortification/vivification dynamic of suffering was captured well by J. R. Miller: “Sorrow oftentimes is God’s plow. We dread pain and shrink from it. It seems destructive and ruinous. The plow tears its way, with its keen, sharp blade, through our hearts and we say we are being destroyed. When the process is completed and we look upon the garden with its sweet flowers growing, we see that only blessing, enrichment, and beauty are the result. We complain of our suffering, but we cannot afford to have suffering taken away” (J. R. Miller, *Beauty of Self-Control* [New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1911], 21–22).



## **Suffering Engendered Spiritual Maturity in the Lamenting Psalmists**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Sinaitic Covenant's basic theological paradigm of obedience/blessing and disobedience/suffering did not readily give the lamenting psalmists a category to view suffering in a positive light.<sup>2</sup> Indirectly, however, this most concentrated biblical literature on suffering gives insights on the soul-shaping, spiritually maturing qualities God instills through suffering in receptive hearts.<sup>3</sup>

### **Suffering Engendered Confession of Sin and Death of Self**

God-honoring spiritual maturity cannot develop in a heart-environment where sin and self-rule are embraced. Suffering brought spiritual maturity by causing the psalmists to be aware of their sinful disposition. The penitential ILPs (Pss 6, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143), as expected, contain explicit confessions of transgressions (Ps 51:1, 3), iniquities (Pss 38:4, 18; 51:2, 5, 9), and sins (Pss 38:3, 18; 51:3, 4, 5). The psalmists in the non-penitential ILPs, as well, acknowledged their sins. The psalmist pleads with God, "deliver me from all my transgressions" (Ps 39:8) and "forgive all my sins" (Ps 25:18). He recognizes "my strength fails because of my iniquity" (Ps 31:10) and "my iniquities have overtaken me" (Ps 40:12). In Psalm 69 the hatred of others brought suffering to David (Ps 69:4) yet his suffering made him acutely aware of his tendency to sin:

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<sup>2</sup>Although somewhat rare, the OT did give some indication of the positive results of suffering (Job 5:17; Pss 94:12; 119:67, 71, 75). Later Judaism made deeper connections between suffering and God's blessings. For example, "In the midst of all this [suffering], let us give thanks to the Lord our God, who is testing us just as he did our ancestors" (Jud 8:25; Common English Bible). See also Wis 3:4-9; 4 Macc 7:22; 9:29-30; 11:22.

<sup>3</sup>Some of these qualities will overlap with those in the first chapter. This overlap is indicative of the interconnectedness of the three major elements of the thesis statement.

O God, you know my folly;  
the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you (Ps 69:5).

The “folly” David affirms was no small peccadillo for the term expresses the idea of moral insolence.<sup>4</sup> His “wrongs” were equally grievous for the word signifies guilt, trespasses, wrongdoing, or iniquities.<sup>5</sup> God designed suffering to expose and mortify sin and turn the heart from the chaos to him in repentance and faith.

Turning in faith to God from the chaos necessarily entails self-denial and self-death. David likened his suffering to an overwhelming deluge (Ps 69:1-2) as troubles, turmoil, and anguish engulfed him. He called out to God but God was silent (Ps 69:3). David was opposed by the powerful who sought to destroy him with their lies (Ps 69:4). He was the object of reproach and dishonor (Ps 69:7). His family abandoned him (Ps 69:8-9). His acts of contrition and humiliation were met with mocking scorn (Ps 69:10-11). He was the object of slander and drunken ditties (Ps 69:11). No one offered him any pity or comfort (Ps 69:20). David pled with God to deliver him, to answer him, to show his face, to draw near to him, and to redeem him (Ps 69:14-18). God remained silent. The ILPs, in general, vividly show that the sought after securities of the chaos such as earthly possessions, a good name, favorable circumstances, trusted friends, social attainments, robust health, and wealth are fleeting, liable to sudden change, and are unable to ultimately satisfy the soul.

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<sup>4</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. “תָּוֹלָה,” by Louis Goldberg. The only other use of תָּוֹלָה in Psalms is found in Ps 38:5. Here, David is writhing under the disciplinary hand of the Lord for his sin (Ps 38:3), iniquities (Ps 38:4), and folly (Ps 38:5). The rest of the occurrences of the term are in Proverbs where those exhibiting תָּוֹלָה are deceived (Prov 5:23; 14:8), flaunting their sin (Prov 12:23; 13:16; 15:2), torn down (Prov 14:1), quick tempered (Prov 14:17, 29), simple (Prov 14:18), in a downward spiral of sin (Prov 14:24), feeding on sin (Prov 15:14; 27:22), lacking sense (Prov 15:21, 22), to be avoided (Prov 17:12; 26:4-5), quick to speak (Prov 18:13), brought to ruin (Prov 19:3), abominable (Prov 24:9), and are fools (Prov 26:11).

<sup>5</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. “שָׁמַר,” by G. Herbert Livingston.

God afflicts his beloved children with suffering to move them from self-confidence to self-death so that they understand that true, soul-satisfying life is found only in him. The laments “become a voice for the dying in which we are all engaged, partly because the world is a place of death and is passing away, partly because God gives new life, but only in the pain of death.”<sup>6</sup> The lamenting psalmists’ commitment to their natural self-rule decreased as God designed the suffering to increasingly subdue their soul-chaos of self-glorification and increasingly exert his dominion as he imparted his life-giving spiritual blessings. The lamenters turned from self to God as evidenced by the remaining suffering-induced spiritually maturing qualities God developed in them.

### **Suffering Engendered Seeking after God**

Suffering grabbed the psalmists’ attention so that every ILP is theocentric in nature. Every ILP has at least one occurrence of the covenant divine name Yahweh/Yah (191 times total in the ILPs) or the divine title Elohim/El (139 times total in the ILPs).<sup>7</sup> Four different verbs were employed by the psalmists to show their proactive seeking of Yahweh. First, David declared in Psalm 27:8—

You have said, “Seek (וּלְבַקֵּר) my face.”  
My heart says to you, “Your face, LORD, do I seek (וּלְבַקֵּר).”<sup>8</sup>

The verb *וּלְבַקֵּר* when used of God carried cultic overtones. God said the people would

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<sup>6</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press, 1982), 31.

<sup>7</sup>All but five of the ILPs contain Yahweh/Yah (Pss 43, 51, 57, 61, 63) and all but five Elohim/El (Pss 26, 28, 39, 120, 140). Yahweh was the first word of Pss 3, 6, 7, 27, 38, 88, 102, 141, 143; Elohim the first in Pss 25, 70, 63.

<sup>8</sup>A textual issue concerns this verse. The verse could be a command to which David responds (ESV, NASB) or as David speaking to himself (NIV): “My heart says of you, “Seek his face!” Your face, LORD, I will seek.” For a good discussion of the issue see Peter C. Craigie and Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 1-50*, 2nd ed, WBC, vol. 19 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004), 230. This verb was also used in the ILPs of seeking God in Pss 27:4; 40:16; 69:6; 70:4.

worship idols (Deut 4:28) but his devastating curses on them would cause them to seek him and obey him (Deut 4:29). Seeking the face of God means to decisively turn from wickedness to humble God-ward worship.<sup>9</sup>

The second verb, *נָשָׂא*, was used in Psalm 63 when David used his exile to the arid wilderness as a metaphor for the suffering condition of his soul. The psalm began with a strong indication of spiritual maturity as he affirmed his fidelity to God regardless of his current situation.<sup>10</sup>

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek (*נָשָׂא*) you;  
my soul thirsts for you;  
my flesh faints for you,  
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water (Ps 63:1).<sup>11</sup>

This verb was used 13 times in the OT and was oftentimes translated as an earnest, diligent, or eager seeking.<sup>12</sup> Five times the verb was used of seeking God (Job 8:5; Pss 63:2; 78:34; Isa 26:9; Hos 5:15), in all but Isaiah the seeking was done within the context of suffering and afflictions. The continual sufferings have taken their spiritual, emotional, physical, and psychological toll so that “the poet is as thirsty for God as an exhausted wanderer is for water in a parched land.”<sup>13</sup> David exhibited spiritual maturity as he called out to God, and God’s rule increased as David expressed confidence in God and his

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<sup>9</sup>*NIDOTTE*, s.v. “*נָשָׂא*,” by Chitra Chhetri and Willem VanGemeren.

<sup>10</sup>Kidner explains, “The longing of these verses is not the groping of a stranger, feeling his way towards God, but the eagerness of a friend, almost of a lover, to be in touch with the one he holds dear” (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary, vol. 14a [Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1973], 224).

<sup>11</sup>The psalmist used the metaphor of a parched soul also in Pss 42:2; 143:6.

<sup>12</sup>The thirteen uses of the verb are Job 7:21; 8:5; 24:5; Pss 63:2; 78:34; Prov 1:28; 7:15; 8:17; 11:27; 13:24; Isa 26:9; 47:11; Hos 5:15. The intensified translation (ESV) was used in Pss 63:1; 78:34; Prov 1:28; 7:15; 8:17; 11:27; Prov 13:24; Isa 26:9; Hos 5:15.

<sup>13</sup>A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, vol. 1, *The New Century Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 456.

powerful longing for his presence.<sup>14</sup>

Third, Asaph's prolonged suffering coupled with God's apparent spurning (Ps 77:7) did not detour his seeking God:

In the day of my trouble I seek (יָרַדְתִּי) the Lord;  
in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying;  
my soul refuses to be comforted (Ps 77:2).<sup>15</sup>

The verb יָרַד indicates that Asaph is pondering, investigating, meditating on God.<sup>16</sup> John Goldingay suggests יָרַד means “treating someone or something as a resource of guidance and strength. Looking to Yhwh in this way is a marker of being seriously committed to Yhwh.”<sup>17</sup> His commitment to seek God continued despite prolonged, intense suffering and God's apparent abandonment.

The last verb for “seek” is found in Psalm 141:8—

But my eyes are toward you, O GOD, my Lord;  
in you I seek refuge (יִתְקַן);  
leave me not defenseless!<sup>18</sup>

The “somber aura of death pervades his life”<sup>19</sup> as the psalmist seeks God. The verb יִתְקַן was used 37 times in OT, all but four employed within contexts of seeking God as refuge.<sup>20</sup> This verb “emphasizes human insecurity and inability in the face of calamity,

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<sup>14</sup>Allen Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 2, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2013), 383.

<sup>15</sup>The same verb is used in Pss 9:10; 22:26; 69:32; 77:2.

<sup>16</sup>*NIDOTTE*, s.v. “יָרַד,” by David Denninger.

<sup>17</sup>John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 2, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 704.

<sup>18</sup>The same verb is used in the ILPs in Pss 7:1; 25:20; 31:1; 57:1; 71:1; 77:2.

<sup>19</sup>Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, rev. ed., WBC, vol. 21 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 344.

<sup>20</sup>The verb with God as refuge was used in Ruth 2:12; 2 Sam 22:3, 31; Pss 2:12; 5:11; 7:1;

and divine security and ability to harbor those in distress.”<sup>21</sup> God-centeredness is the necessary requirement of spiritual maturity. Suffering impelled these men to seek God despite feeling abandoned by him, and believing his anger and wrath were directed against them. Seeking God under these conditions is a “[mark] of a growing soul.”<sup>22</sup>

### **Suffering Engendered Knowledge of God**

Jeremiah declared that the ground for boasting is not in earthly attainments or accruelements but in understanding and knowing God (Jer 9:23-24). The first ILP, Psalm 3, indicated that suffering produced a deeper understanding of God in David’s life.<sup>23</sup> Yahweh unfolded before David as his shield, his glory, the One who lifted his head (Ps 3:3). David realized God sustained him (Ps 3:5), would intervene on his behalf (Ps 3:7), recognized that “salvation belongs to the LORD” (Ps 3:8), and that God blesses his people even while suffering (Ps 3:8).

Suffering was the means God used so that his psalmists would know him more profoundly. They came to know in a deeper way that he is “not a God who delights in wickedness” (Ps 5:4) but is “a righteous judge” (Ps 7:11), “king forever and ever” (Ps 10:16), “holy” (Ps 22:3), “enthroned forever” (Ps 102:12).<sup>24</sup> Suffering made the

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11:1; 16:1; 17:7; 18:2, 30; 25:20; 31:1, 19; 34:8, 22; 36:7; 37:40; 57:1; 61:4; 64:10; 71:1; 91:4; 118:8, 9; 141:8; 144:2; Prov 30:5; Isa 14:32; 30:2; 57:13; Nah 1:7; Zeph 3:12. The places where God not the object of the verb are Deut 32:37; Judg 9:15; Prov 14:32; Isa 30:2.

<sup>21</sup>*NIDOTTE*, s.v. “הסח,” by Andrew E. Hill. Seeking refuge in God “stresses the insecurity and self-helplessness of even the strongest of men” (*TWOT*, s.v. “הסח,” by Donald J. Wisemann).

<sup>22</sup>Donald S. Whitney, *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2000), 23.

<sup>23</sup>He appealed to Yahweh six times in this short psalm (Ps 3:1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8) and twice to Elohim (Ps 3:2, 7).

<sup>24</sup>Other declarative passages about the nature or works of God in the ILPs include Pss 9:9; 25:5; 27:1; 28:7; 28:8; 31:3, 4, 14; 40:17; 43:2; 54:4; 56:9; 63:1; 70:4, 5; 71:7, 13; 77:14; 86:2, 10; 102:12,

lamenters recognize the many facets of God’s character as they appealed to him as “my deliverer” (Pss 40:17; 70:5), “my fortress” (Pss 31:3; 59:9, 17; 71:3), “my God” (Ps 5:2);<sup>25</sup> “my help/helper” (Pss 22:19; 27:9; 40:17; 54:4; 63:7; 70:5), “my hope” (Ps 71:5), “my king” (Ps 5:2), “my portion” (Ps 142:5), “my refuge” (Pss 31:4; 61:3; 142:5), “my rock” (Pss 28:1; 31:3; 42:9; 71:3), “my salvation” (Pss 25:5; 27:1; 9; 38:22; 42:5, 11; 43:5; 51:14; 88:1; 140:7), “my strong refuge” (Ps 71:7), “my fortress” (Ps 31:3; 59:9, 17; 71:3), “my strength” (Ps 22:15; 28:17), and “my trust” (Ps 71:5). The constant use of the personal pronoun “my” indicated that the psalmists clung to and hoped in the immanent God who promises to be “a very present help in trouble” (Ps 46:1; also Ps 145:8).

Suffering made the lamenters know in a deeper way the might and sovereignty of God. They acknowledged him as King (Pss 5:2; 10:6) and ruler (Pss 22:28; 59:13). The psalmists were fond of appealing to him as Adonay (אֲדֹנָי; “my Lord”), which exalted Yahweh as their master and owner.<sup>26</sup> Yahweh is depicted as the Divine Warrior who wields his bow (Ps 7:12), his sword (Pss 7:12; 17:13), his shield (Ps 35:2), and his arrows<sup>27</sup> against the psalmists’ enemies. He is the God who is engaged in hand-to-hand combat as a warrior (Ps 120:4) and through his mighty acts (Ps 54:1).<sup>28</sup> Suffering made

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27; 140:6; 142:5; 143:10.

<sup>25</sup>Also Pss 3:7; 5:2; 7:1, 3; 13:3; 22:1m 2, 10; 25:2; 31:14; 35:23, 24; 38:15, 21; 40:5, 8, 17; 42:6, 11; 43:4, 5; 59:1, 10; 63:1; 69:3; 71:4, 12, 22; 86:2, 12; 102:24; 109:26; 140:6; 143:10.

<sup>26</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. “אֲדֹנָי,” by Robert L. Alden. God is appealed to as Adonay in the ILPs Pss 22:30; 35:17, 22, 23; 38:9, 15, 22; 39:7; 40:18; 51:15; 54:4; 55:9; 57:9; 59:11; 69:6; 71:5, 16; 77:2, 7; 86:3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 15; 109:21; 130:2, 3, 6; 140:7; 141:8.

<sup>27</sup>Pss 7:13; 38:2; 64:7; 77:17; 120:4.

<sup>28</sup>See Harold Wayne Ballard, “The Divine Warrior Motif in the Psalms” (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1995); Phillip Ross Bethancourt, “Christ the Warrior King” (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011); Ee Kon Kim, *The Rapid Change of Mood in the Lament Psalms: A Matrix for the Establishment of a Psalm Theology* (Seoul: Korea Theological Study Institute,

the heart receptive to understanding God and knowing him in a deeper and more profound manner, which, consequently, increased his rule in the heart and engendered spiritual maturity.

### **Suffering Engendered Dependant Obedience to God**

Suffering made the psalmists realize the utter folly of imagined self-reliance. The lamenters described themselves as servants<sup>29</sup> who were overwhelmed (Pss 13:4, 55:5, 88:7), helpless (Pss 10:8, 10, 14; 88:15), bowed down (Pss 38:6, 57:6), oppressed (Pss 9:9; 10:18); imprisoned (Pss 69:33, 102:20; 142:7), humbled (Pss 25:9; 69:10, 32), weakened (Pss 6:7; 109:24), afflicted,<sup>30</sup> and ensnared.<sup>31</sup> They groaned<sup>32</sup> because they were accosted by their many foes.<sup>33</sup> Their souls were troubled (Pss 6:3; 88:3; 143:11), in danger of being torn apart/ trampled, (Pss 7:2, 5; 57:4), full of sorrow (Ps 13:2), in need of deliverance (Pss 17:13; 22:20), in distress (Pss 31:7, 9), bereft (Ps 35:12), thirsting for God (Pss 42:1-2; 63:1; 143:6), cast down (Pss 42:5, 6, 11; 43:5), bowed down (Ps 57:6), and restless (Ps 77:2).<sup>34</sup>

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1985); Ee Kon Kim, “‘Outcry:’ Its Context in Biblical Theology,” *Interpretation* 42, no. 3 (July 1988): 229–39; Tremper Longman and Daniel G. Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995).

<sup>29</sup>Pss 27:9; 31:16; 35:27; 69:17; 86:2, 4, 16; 109:28; 143:2, 12.

<sup>30</sup>Pss 9:12; 10:12, 17; 22:24, 26; 25:16; 35:13; 69:29; 88:15; 102:1; 140:12.

<sup>31</sup>Pss 10:8-10; 25:15; 31:4; 35:7, 57:6, 140:5.

<sup>32</sup>Pss 5:1; 22:1; 38:8 102:5.

<sup>33</sup>Pss 3:1; 25:19; 35:19; 38:19; 69:19.

<sup>34</sup>In stark contrast, their assailants were strong and called enemies, adversaries, attackers (Pss 56:1, 69:4; 109:3), lions (Pss 35:17; 57:4; 58:6), dogs (Pss 22:16; 59:6, 14), the wicked, pursuers (Pss 7:1; 35:3), foes, murderers, liars or deceivers, and persecutors (Pss 31:15; 69:26; 142:6).



The most prevalent self-designation was their being poor<sup>35</sup> and/or needy,<sup>36</sup> which were oftentimes used together to “[emphasize] the psalmist’s lowliness.”<sup>37</sup> The “poor and needy” of the ILPs is analogous to the “poor in spirit” (Matt 5:3) who realize, their total spiritual destitution and their complete dependence on God. They perceive that there are no saving resources in themselves and that they can only beg for mercy and grace. They know they have no spiritual merit, and they know they can earn no spiritual reward. Their pride is gone, their self-assurance is gone, and they stand empty-handed before God.<sup>38</sup>

Suffering stripped the lamenting psalmists of their pretence of self-sufficiency. Anguish made them realize their desperate need for God and desire to obey him more fully.

The lamenting psalmists wailed and cried and protested and complained to God but they never used their suffering as an excuse for disobedience. Instead, the suffering appeared to renew their fidelity to God and intensify their resolve to obey him. The psalmist declared out of the depths of his suffering, “I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart” (Ps 40:8) because the law was “the word of him who never speaks in vain.”<sup>39</sup> They prayed for God to teach or lead them in his ways (Pss 25:4,

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<sup>35</sup>Pss 9:18; 35:10; 40:17; 86:1; 109:16, 22.

<sup>36</sup>Pss 9:18; 35:10; 40:17; 69:33; 86:1; 109:22, 31; 140:12.

<sup>37</sup>Amy C. Cottrill, *Language, Power, and Identity in the Lament Psalms of the Individual*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 493 (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 115. She continued, “The discourse of self-abasement in the laments is unusually prominent, displaying the psalmist’s ready and enthusiastic embrace of his dependency and need” (119). Similarly, Steven Croft concludes, “The suppliant’s purpose in describing himself as poor is that by so doing he places himself under the protection of God and humbles himself before Yahweh. The term embodies both need and self-abasement” (Steven J. L Croft, *The Identity of the Individual in the Psalms*, The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 44 [Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1987], 71). The terms appear together in the same verse in Pss 9:19; 35:10; 140:2. They occur together as “poor (afflicted) and needy” in Pss 40:18; 70:5; 86:1; 109:16, 22.

<sup>38</sup>John MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago Moody Publishers, 1985), 146.

<sup>39</sup>Charles H. Spurgeon, *Psalms 111-115, The Treasury of David*, vol. 3 (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d.), 120. Some of the synonyms for Scripture in Psalm 119 appear in the ILPs. The sufferers expressed their loyalty to obeying God’s Word (Pss 17:4; 56:4, 10; 130:5), his law

9; 27:11), his truth (Pss 25:5; 43:3; 86:11), his wisdom (Ps 51:6), his righteousness (Ps 5:8), and his will (Ps 143:10). David vowed despite his suffering:

But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity;  
redeem me, and be gracious to me (Ps 26:11).<sup>40</sup>

David was realistic with himself. His resolve to obey was tempered by knowledge of his own proclivity to sin and, thus, he cried out to God to graciously grant him the ability to obey his Word.

The “I will” statements in the laments declared the psalmists’ steadfast resolve to cling to the Lord. The psalmists tenaciously professed they would sing praises to the Lord,<sup>41</sup> give him thanks,<sup>42</sup> remember and tell of his mighty deeds (Pss 9:1; 77:1, 12), offer sacrifices to him (Ps 54:6), trust him (Ps 55:23), take refuge in him (Ps 57:1), hope in him (Ps 71:14), and glorify his name (Ps 86:12). They vowed they would be glad (Ps 9:2), perform what they had promised (Pss 22:25; 56:12), guard their ways (Ps 39:1), and not be afraid (Ps 56:4, 11).

The phrase “but I” was used in the ILPs to show that their obedience would be undeterred by their sufferings. “But I,” they declared, “enter your house” (Ps 5:7), “have trusted in your steadfast love” (Ps 13:5), “trust in you” (Ps 31:14), “call to God” (Ps 55:16), “sing of your strength” (Ps 59:16), “hope continually and will praise you” (Ps 71:14), “cry to you” (Ps 88:13), and “give myself to prayer” (Ps 109:4). Suffering has a

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(Ps 40:8), and his testimonies (Ps 25:10). Fidelity to God during time of suffering prove genuine faith, which, in turn, deepens spiritual development.

<sup>40</sup>Other passages from the laments where the psalmist proclaimed his resolve to obey are Pss 22:25; 27:8; 39:1.

<sup>41</sup>Pss 5:7; 9:2; 13:6; 22:22; 43:4; 57:7, 9; 69:30; 71:14, 22.

<sup>42</sup>Pss 9:1; 86:12; 54:6; 56:12; 57:9; 69:30.

winnowing effect to separate those who truly belong to God and Christ from those who do not (Matt 13:20-21). Suffering yielded the heart to God's rule as evidenced by the psalmists' ever increasing desire to depend on and obey God rather than self, which is indicative of spiritual maturity.

### **Suffering Engendered Prayer and Praises to God**

The lamenters' singular focus on God resulted in heart-felt prayers (Pss 5:2; 69:13). Three of the ILPs are designated as prayers (superscription of Pss 17, 86, 102). Every ILP, except Psalm 42, contains a petitionary prayer to God, which may be an impatient, urgent, bordering-on-impertinence imperative to an inarticulate, pain-filled groan or moan.<sup>43</sup> The most common requests were for God to hear their prayer and give a merciful answer,<sup>44</sup> and "be gracious to me."<sup>45</sup> They prayed in the morning (Pss 88:13), in the evening (Pss 42:8; 141:2), and dedicated themselves to prayer (Ps 109:4). Yahweh does not despise the prayers of the destitute whom he has stripped of honor and fortune (Ps 102:17). The suffering psalmists expressed confidence that the Lord had heard and accepted their prayers (Pss 6:9; 102:17). John Calvin stated in his third rule for prayer:

that he who comes into the presence of God to pray must divest himself of all vainglorious thoughts, lay aside all idea of worth; in short, discard all self-confidence, humbly giving God the whole glory, lest by arrogating any thing, however little, to himself, vain pride cause him to turn away his face.<sup>46</sup>

Suffering stripped these men of self-pride, humbled them before God, so that they prayed

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<sup>43</sup>Pss 5:1; 6:6; 22:1; 38:8; 55:2, 17; 77:3; 102:5, 20.

<sup>44</sup>Pss 4:1; 17:1; 39:12; 54:2; 55:1; 61:1; 69:13; 86:6; 88:2; 102:1; 143:1.

<sup>45</sup>Pss 4:1; 6:2; 9:13; 25:16; 26:11; 27:7; 31:9; 56:1; 86:3, 16.

<sup>46</sup>John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1863), 152.

earnestly to him and also joyfully praised him.

Significantly, the lamenting psalmists praised God *during* their time of distress and not *after* the suffering had been lifted. David in Psalm 13 expressed he was experiencing some kind of long term, seemingly never-to-end duress. Yet he declared “I will sing (הִשְׁיִרָה) to the LORD” (Ps 13:6). The verb הִשְׁיִרָה is a cohortative which “expresses the will or strong desire of the speaker. In cases where the speaker has the ability to carry out an inclination it takes on the coloring of resolve.”<sup>47</sup> David died to himself and God was mute in Psalm 69 but he continued to give praise to God:

I will praise the name of God with a song;  
I will magnify him with thanksgiving (Ps 69:30).<sup>48</sup>

Logan Jones’ offers insight into the presence of praise during times of suffering:

The lament with its movement from plea to praise is an act of boldness. Underneath the pain and anguish, the anger and despair, lies a confidence that allows, and even compels, the psalmist to give voice to the darkness. Out of the depths comes the cries of the psalmist, and the cries of all those who have followed. The psalms of lament speak the unspeakable and name the unnamable. In doing so, they offer the hope for transformation. This is not a cheap hope that can be easily confused with optimism. Rather it is a hope wrought in relationship and trust. The depth of pain expressed in the laments is all too real. Yet so too is the possibility that this pain can be transformed, will be transformed, into praise.<sup>49</sup>

Praising God during times of deep suffering is not only an indicator of spiritual maturity but also increased God’s rule by engendering further spiritual development.

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<sup>47</sup>Bruce K Waltke, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 573.

<sup>48</sup>See also Pss 5:7, 11; 9:1, 2, 11; 21:13; 21:13; 22:22, 23, 25, 26; 42:4, 5, 11; 43:4, 5; 54:6; 56:4, 10, 12; 57:7, 9; 68:4, 32; 69:30, 34; 71:6, 8, 14, 22, 23; 86:12; 140:3; 142:7.

<sup>49</sup>Logan C. Jones, “The Psalms of Lament and the Transformation of Sorrow,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 61, no. 1 (Summer 2007): 49.

## Suffering Engendered Hope in God

Three verbs were used in the ILPs to express hope or trust. The first, *הִתְקַדַּח*, was, generally, emotive focused and did not “connote that full-orbed intellectual and volitional response to revelation which is involved in ‘faith,’ [but stressed] the feeling of being safe or secure.”<sup>50</sup> All the occurrences of the verb in the ILPs, except for Psalm 13:5, were statements confirming the psalmists’ “trust (*וַיִּבְטְחוּ*) in the Lord.”<sup>51</sup> The temporal circumstances of the psalmists’ lives were in upheaval, chaotic, unsure, frightening, yet they still expressed their feeling of safety and security in the very God who inflicted their lives with suffering.<sup>52</sup>

The second verb, *קָוָה*, has the idea to wait, hope, or look for with eager, confident anticipation but also recognizes the tension involved in the waiting.<sup>53</sup> Hoping/waiting on the Lord is not passivity but “means preparing for the LORD’s intervention.”<sup>54</sup> The psalmist declared that “none who wait for you shall be put to shame” (Ps 25:3) and waiting is an opportunity for the Lord to teach his truth (Ps 25:5). The delay of the Lord’s anticipated intervention can become tiresome so the psalmist prayed for

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<sup>50</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. “*הִתְקַדַּח*,” Bruce K. Waltke.

<sup>51</sup>The verb is used in the ILPs in Pss 4:8; 9:10; 22:4, 5, 9; 25:2; 26:1; 27:3; 28:7; 31:6, 14; 40:3; 55:23; 56:3, 4, 11; 86:2; 143:8. The unique use of this verb in Ps 13:5 will be addressed in the next chapter.

<sup>52</sup>John Oswalt lists the occurrences of *הִתְקַדַּח* which indicated sources of false security and hope: people (Pss 118:8; 146:3; Prov 25:19; Jer 17:5); wickedness (Isa 47:10); violence and oppression (Pss 55:23; 62:10; Isa 30:12); riches (Pss 49:6; 52:7; Prov 11:28); idols (Pss 31:6; 115:8; Isa 42:17; Hab 2:18); military power (Deut 28:52; Ps 44:6; Isa 31:1; Jer 5:17; Hos 10:13); religion (Jer 7:4, 8, 14); self-righteousness (Ezek 33:13; Hos 10:13); foreign alliances (Isa 36:4ff.; Ezek 29:16) (*TWOT*, s.v. “*הִתְקַדַּח*,” by John N. Oswalt).

<sup>53</sup>*NIDOTTE*, s.v. “*קָוָה*,” by Daniel Schibler.

<sup>54</sup>Allen Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, Kregel Exegetical Library, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2012), 598.

“integrity and uprightness” (Ps 25:7) in the intervening time. Waiting on him engenders the spiritual qualities of strength, courage, and patience (Pss 27:14; 40:1).<sup>55</sup> The third verb, יָחַל, denotes an enduring, expectant hope that expresses faith or trust.<sup>56</sup> God is always the object of this verb in the ILPs.

Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you in turmoil within me?  
Hope (הוֹחִילֵי) in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation  
and my God (Ps 42:5-6).<sup>57</sup>

Hope, הוֹחִילֵי, is an imperative the psalmist directs to his own soul as he commands himself to trust to the Divine King.<sup>58</sup>

These three verbs are closely related to one another so to be nearly synonymous.<sup>59</sup> In all three cases, hope is not resting on human ability or a change of situation but is an active trust in God’s sovereignty, goodness, dependability, unswerving steadfast love, and faithfulness to his people. Ee Kon Kim argues that “the chief emphasis, then, in the individual lament psalms is on the individual confession of [hope].”<sup>60</sup> Walter Brueggemann calls biblical hope “a *massive theological act* that is not about optimism or even about signs of newness; it is rather a statement about the fidelity of God who is the key player in the past and in the future.”<sup>61</sup> Jones declares that hope is

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<sup>55</sup>The verb is also used in the ILPs 39:7; 69:6; 130:5.

<sup>56</sup>*NIDOTTE*, s.v. “יָחַל,” by Daniel Schibler, and *TWOT*, s.v. “יָחַל,” by Paul R. Gilchrist.

<sup>57</sup>Also Pss 31:24; 38:15; 42:11; 43:5; 69:3; 71:14; 130:5, 7.

<sup>58</sup>Perhaps the most memorable use of this verb is found in Job 13:15—“Though he slay me, I will hope (יִחַל) in him.”

<sup>59</sup>The verbs are in parallel in Pss 39:7; 130:5.

<sup>60</sup>Kim, *The Rapid Change of Mood in the Lament Psalms*, 19.

<sup>61</sup>Walter Brueggemann, “Suffering Produces Hope,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 28, no. 3 (September 1998): 99 (italics in original).

“a bold and subversive act of faith.”<sup>62</sup> John Oswalt’s insights are particularly apropos for this point:

This hope in God is not a son of querulous wishing, but a confident expectation. Unlike the pagan religions where unremitting anxiety was the rule, the Hebrew religion knew a God whose chief characteristic was faithfulness and trustworthiness (Deut 33:28; 1Sam 12:11; Psa 27:3). This contrast between anxiety and confidence becomes all the more striking when one recalls that the pagan was never left without mechanisms whereby he felt he had some control over his destiny, while the devout Hebrew knew himself to be utterly without personal resources. But better to be utterly dependent on a gracious and dependable God, than left to one’s own devices in a sea of fickle gods, vengeful demons, and inscrutable magical forces.<sup>63</sup>

Hope is forged in relationship, remembering what God has done (Pss 17:11; 143:5) and trusting him for what he will do (Ps 42:5-6). Suffering produces hope which engenders spiritual maturity (Rom 5:3-5).

In summary, God designed suffering in the lives of the lamenting psalms to make them his kingly vice-regents in order to subdue the chaos and submit to his kingly rule. Their attention was riveted on God, they knew him better, they realized their own spiritual impoverishment and their bent toward sin, they died to themselves. Their faith was strengthened, they made obedience a priority, they shifted their hope from the vicissitudes of this world to the unchanging Person of God. They were singularly focused on God and, consequently, they cried out to him (Ps 3:4), complained to him (Ps 55:17), sang praises to him (Ps 9:2), thanked him (Ps 7:17), worshipped him (Ps 5:7), praised his steadfast love (Ps 31:7), trusted him (Ps 13:5), took refuge in him (Ps 7:1), were satisfied in him (Ps 17:15), lifted up their souls to him (Ps 25:1), prayed to him (Ps 5:2), waited on him (Ps 5:3), called upon him (Ps 61:2), remembered and meditated on his wonderful

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<sup>62</sup>Jones, “The Psalms of Lament and the Transformation of Sorrow,” 53.

<sup>63</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. “תַּחֲנוּן,” by Oswalt.

deeds (Ps 9:1), and sought him (Ps 77:2). Suffering was the divinely ordained path they travelled to create a heart-environment that was eager to embrace God's spiritually developing blessings. The lamenting psalmists modeled that suffering decreased their autonomous self-rule and simultaneously resulted in God's increasing divine-rule, which defines spiritual wholeness and maturity. This spiritual dynamic portrayed by the lamenting psalmists was exemplified by the Suffering Davidic King.

### **Suffering Engendered Spiritual Maturity in Jesus**

The twelve-year-old Jesus is the only glimpse Scripture gives of his developing childhood. The boy Jesus knew and understood by this age his unique relationship with the Father (Luke 2:49). How Jesus acquired this knowledge and how fully he understood its implications is not known but what is clear is that the human Jesus "increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). Jesus, although fully divine, developed like any other human physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Suffering was a soul-shaping tool in God's hands to spiritually develop the lamenting psalmists and, in like manner, the Father used suffering to spiritually mature his Son.

### **Suffering in Life to Learn Obedience (Heb 5:7-9)**

Hebrews 5:7-9 focuses on Jesus' maturation process under the Father's care to prepare him for the cross. The passage begins with the phrase "in the days of his flesh," which acknowledges Jesus' full humanity. "Flesh" underscores that he was truly a man, and lived with the inherent weaknesses and limitations he took upon himself as a full-fledged member of the human race (Phil 2:7-8; Heb 2:14). His dependence on the Father is highlighted in the next phrase: he "offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries



and tears.” The lamenting psalmists prayed to God who was afflicting them with suffering, Jesus prayed to his Father who would one day crush him on the cross. Jesus prayed “to him who was able to save him from death,” meaning that God had the power to rescue him “out of the realm or power of death”<sup>64</sup> as evidenced by the resurrection. This verse is rightfully applied to Jesus’ prayers in Gethsemane and on the cross but it need not be limited to these two occasions. Jesus prayed throughout his life to the Father as an expression of his dependence on him.<sup>65</sup>

Hebrews 5:7 implies that suffering was instrumental in Jesus’ spiritual development. His “loud cries and tears” were reminiscent of the lamenting psalmists as they did not offer up stoic prayers but prayers full of intense passion and deep emotions.<sup>66</sup> Contemporary Hellenistic Judaism prayed to God with “cries and tears” during times of crisis (2 Macc 11:6; 3 Macc 1:16; 5:7, 25). Jesus’ loud cries and tears in prayer “exposes the grim reality of Jesus’ struggles—how intensely He entered the human drama, how real and deep were His experiences of suffering.”<sup>67</sup> His divinity did not shield him from intense suffering.

The Father’s design to engender spiritual maturity in his Son through suffering

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<sup>64</sup>Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2010), 199.

<sup>65</sup>See S. John Roth, “Jesus the Pray-er,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 33, no. 6 (December 2006): 488–500 for a good overview of Jesus’ prayer life from the book of Luke; Patrick Henry Reardon, *The Jesus We Missed: The Surprising Truth About the Humanity of Christ* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2012), 94–111; Leslie T. Hardin, “The Quest for the Spiritual Jesus: Jesus and the Spiritual Disciplines,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 15, no. 2 (September 2012): 221–22.

<sup>66</sup>The phrase “loud cries and tears” is κραυγῆς ἰσχυρᾶς καὶ δακρύων. The preponderance of the use of “cries” (κράζω) in the LXX psalms are in the ILPs (Pss 5:1; 9:12; 102:1) as are “tears” (δάκρυον; Pss 6:6; 39:12; 42:3; 56:8).

<sup>67</sup>Neil R. Lightfoot, “The Saving of the Savior: Hebrews 5:7ff,” *Restoration Quarterly* 16, nos. 3–4 (January 1973): 172.

is stated explicitly in Hebrews 5:8: “Although he was a son, he learned (ἐμαθεν) [the] obedience (τὴν ὑπακοήν) through what he suffered (ἐμαθεν).” Human sons need to learn obedience because of their inherent sin (Heb 12:5-10). Jesus, the eternal Son, did not have to learn obedience in this sense because he was perfectly sinless (Heb 4:15). Still, “he entered into a new dimension in the experience of sonship by virtue of his incarnation and sacrificial death.”<sup>68</sup> Jesus had to learn obedience as the incarnated Son and suffering was the means the Father used to teach him.

The verb μανθάνω (“to learn”) in the LXX was oftentimes used in contexts of learning to obey God’s will as expressed in the revealed Word.<sup>69</sup> This idea was echoed by the rabbis where learning was focused on the “study of the law with a view to knowing and doing God’s will.”<sup>70</sup> “The obedience” Jesus learned was not one of contrasts, that is he did not learn to obey because of any disobedience. Jesus declared on several occasions statements such as, “And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him” (John 8:29).<sup>71</sup> No rebellious self-willed autonomy was to be found in the Second Adam. What he learned from Scripture was God’s will for him as Messiah and Savior. “Obedience,” then, was not a generic obedience but was τὴν ὑπακοήν (“the obedience”) which was “the well-known obedience

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<sup>68</sup>William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, WBC, vol. 47A (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991), 121.

<sup>69</sup>Deut 4:10; 5:1; 14:23; 17:19; 31:12, 13; Ps 119:71, 73; Isa 1:17; 26:9.

<sup>70</sup>*TDNT*, s.v. “μανθάνω,” by K. H. Rengstorf. Jesus used the verb twice in his disputes with the religious leaders. In Matt 9:13, Jesus told them to learn what Hosea 6:6 meant in relation to his ministry to sinners. Jesus refers to the prophets in John 6:45 and declares that if they had properly learned the prophetic message then they would believe in him.

<sup>71</sup>Also John 4:34; 6:38; 12:49; 14:31; 15:10.

expected of the Lord.”<sup>72</sup> At some point in his life Jesus realized that Isaiah 53 was about him and one day his Father would crush him in a climatic, horrendous death. This idea is fortified by the use of *πάσχω* (“to suffer”). The Gospel writers used this term exclusively to refer to Jesus’ crucifixion so that functionally it meant “to die.”<sup>73</sup> “He learned obedience through what he suffered” means that his suffering was necessary to prepare him to carry out the Father’s will, which was death on the cross (Phil 2:8). This passage, then, indicates that Jesus did not simply experience suffering to learn obedience but that suffering was necessary for him to spiritually mature. That is, if Jesus did not suffer then he would not have experientially learned what it meant to obey the Father and, as a consequence, he would not have been qualified to be the Regent to his vice-regents.

As mentioned, Jesus was not born totally mature but increasingly developed over time, a fact that Bruce Ware highlights:

Jesus’ life of perfect obedience did not render his spiritual life a static experience devoid of any growth. Just the opposite: precisely because he obeyed the Father perfectly, including in times of opposition, agony, affliction, and suffering, this perfect obedience actually resulted in the most profound and radical growth in his spiritual life—a growth of faith greater than anyone has ever experienced.<sup>74</sup>

Although the twelve-year-old Jesus understood, in some capacity, his identity as the Son of God, he was not sufficiently prepared at that age for the hardships of Gethsemane and the cross.<sup>75</sup> Over time he understood more fully what it meant for him to be the Suffering

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<sup>72</sup>Simon Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, in *Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1984), 139.

<sup>73</sup>*TDNT*, s.v. “*πάσχω*,” by Wilhelm Michaelis. The verb *πάσχω* is used in the gospel in Matt 16:21; 17:12; Mark 8:31; 9:12; Luke 9:22; 17:25; 22:15; 24:26, 46.

<sup>74</sup>Bruce A. Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflections on the Humanity of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 59–60.

<sup>75</sup>A point made by Ware (*The Man Christ Jesus*, 66–67). Alexander Bruce makes a similar observation: “The child who made the doctors wonder by His quick intelligence, and by His shrewd

Messiah as he studied the Scripture, learned from others, and fervently prayed, Whatever sufferings Jesus experienced in his childhood, if any, to prepare him for the cross are unknown. What is known, however, is that the temptations, the oppositions, the false accusations, and everything else he endured served as the Father's "training program"<sup>76</sup> to prepare him for the rigors of the cross. Jesus responded to all these sufferings with nothing but faith, trust, and obedience as he submitted himself to his Father's will.

The passage rounds out with another statement of the spiritually maturing effects suffering played in Jesus' life: "and being made perfect (τελειωθείς) he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him."<sup>77</sup> Lifelong suffering drove Jesus to passionate prayer, pleading for the ability to submit to and obey all the Father's will for him. A. B. Bruce notes that Jesus' learning the obedience required of Messiah "was by no means easy, but very irksome indeed, to flesh and blood."<sup>78</sup> Ware echoes this idea and fleshes it out:

Throughout his life he fought to believe and fought to obey and fought in prayer as he hoped in what the Father would provide. To put this point differently, Jesus's faith and obedience during these times of testing, in which he offered supplications with loud cries and tears, were not experiences of an easy walk of faith or effortless acts of obedience. Jesus's obedience was not automatic, as though his divine nature simply eliminated any real struggle to believe or effort to obey. No, in his human nature, Jesus fought for faith and struggled to obey; otherwise the reality that

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questions and answers, could not have then have preached the Sermon on the Mount" (Alexander Balmain Bruce, *The Humiliation of Christ* [New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1907], 288).

<sup>76</sup>Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus*, 64. See also Robert P. Lightner, "The Savior's Sufferings in Life," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127, no. 505 (January 1970): 26–37. Bruce states, "Fully equipped for His ministry of righteousness and love at the outset, Jesus yet learned Himself while He taught others; learned decision by temptation, zeal by the contradiction of sinners, sympathy by contact with the miserable, obedience by suffering" (Bruce, *The Humiliation of Christ*, 290).

<sup>77</sup>The idea of Jesus being made perfect is also mentioned in Heb 2:10; 7:28.

<sup>78</sup>Bruce, *The Humiliation of Christ*, 277.

Hebrews 5:7 describes is turned into theatrics and rendered disingenuous.<sup>79</sup>

As with obedience, Jesus “being perfected” does not predicate any imperfections in him. David Peterson argues that Christ being perfected means he is qualified and made completely adequate for his ministry.<sup>80</sup> Leon Morris puts it succinctly, “There is a perfection that results from having actually suffered; it is different from the perfection that is ready to suffer.”<sup>81</sup> Hebrews was written post-resurrection so that the rigors of Gethsemane and the cross were past events. Jesus had obeyed his Father’s will, he had endured the cross, he had been crushed so that now his obedience and moral character is seen in all its perfected glory.

Suffering also perfected (τελειόω) Jesus in the sense that it qualified him to be the great High Priest. The verb τελειόω was used in the LXX Pentateuch as “a special cultic sense of consecration to priestly service.”<sup>82</sup> So here, perfection refers to the “completion of the task Jesus had to perform.”<sup>83</sup> His obedience consecrated him to be the High Priest who offered himself as the propitiatory burnt offering to mortify human self-rule and to be “the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.” The perfected Suffering Servant who learned obedience secured salvation for those who obey. Jesus’ obedience was forged in the fires of suffering and the first sufferings he experienced were

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<sup>79</sup>Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus*, 65.

<sup>80</sup>David Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the “Epistle to the Hebrews”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 73.

<sup>81</sup>Leon Morris, *Hebrews*, in vol. 12 of *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein and J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 50.

<sup>82</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 47A:122. This use of the verb is seen in Exod 29:9, 29, 33, 35; Lev 4:5, 8:33, 16:32; 21:10. Num 3:3.

<sup>83</sup>Kistemaker, *Hebrews*, 139.

in his wilderness temptations.

### **Suffering in the Wilderness to Test Obedience**

Jesus did not have to learn to obey but he did need to learn the obedience necessary for his Messianic ministry.<sup>84</sup> This obedience was not natural but was learned through the trials of suffering:

In the sense that a person knows the taste of meat by eating it, it may be said of our Savior that he ‘tasted death’ when he experienced death. One special kind of obedience is intended here, namely, a submission to great, hard, and terrible things, accompanied by patience and quiet endurance, and faith for deliverance from them. This Christ could not have experience of, except by suffering the things he had to pass through, exercising God’s grace in them all.<sup>85</sup>

The Son may have entered his public ministry with a theoretical knowledge of the obedience required of him as Messiah but it would be solidified only as he suffered experientially. The Father’s first designed sufferings for his Son to learn obedience were the wilderness temptations.

Events occurred in short order when Jesus began his public ministry. He was baptized and as he emerged from the water the Holy Spirit descended upon him (Matt

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<sup>84</sup>John Owens comments on Heb 5:8, “Here it says about the Lord Christ that ‘he learned obedience,’ not that he learned to obey” (John Owen, *Hebrews*, ed. Alister McGrath and J. I. Packer, The Crossway Classic Commentaries [Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998], 127–28; some slight formatting alternations made).

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, 128. Owen continues, “Through his sufferings Christ learned obedience as he had occasion to exercise the graces of humility, meekness, patience, and faith. While these graces always lived in him, they were not capable of being exercised in this special way except through his sufferings. The Son of God is said to learn from his own sufferings in another special sense, because he was a sinless person suffering for sinners, the just for the unjust. The obedience was unique to him, and we can have no similar experience of this” (*ibid.*).

3:16) as a formal coronation of the long anticipated Davidic King:<sup>86</sup>

Behold my servant, whom I uphold,  
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;  
I have put my Spirit upon him;  
he will bring forth justice to the nations (Isa 42:1).

The Father then spoke from heaven, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt 3:17). The Father’s declaration combines Isaiah 42:1 with Psalm 2:7 which “[reflects] the heavenly Father’s understanding of Jesus’ dual role: one day a kingly messiah, but for now a Suffering Servant—both appropriate to his unique identity as the divine son.”<sup>87</sup> The Suffering Servant at the outset of his ministry would have to learn and demonstrate his obedience to be qualified as Messiah.

After the Father spoke, the Spirit “drove him out into the wilderness” (Mark 1:12). “Drove out” suggests the Spirit forcefully thrust or impelled Jesus into the wilderness in order “to be tempted by (πειρασθῆναι) the devil” (Matt 4:1).<sup>88</sup> The verb πειρασθῆναι is an infinitive of purpose, the reason the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness was for him to physically and spiritually suffer so that he would learn the obedience necessary of Messiah.<sup>89</sup> The verb πειράζω is translated “tempted” but carries more the idea of testing. The verb in the LXX nearly always translated πειράζω (“to test”) as God tested obedience (Gen 22:1; Exod 16:4; 20:20), trust (Exod 15:25), and fidelity

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<sup>86</sup>Samuel anointed David with oil signaling he would replace Saul as King. The Spirit then immediately anointed the new king: “the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward” (1 Sam 16:13).

<sup>87</sup>G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 14.

<sup>88</sup>James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, PNTC (Leicester, England: Apollos; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 39.

<sup>89</sup>Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, PNTC (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 71–72.

(Deut 13:4; Judg 2:22; 3:1, 4). God oftentimes brought hardship on his covenant people to test their loyalty<sup>90</sup> and now the Father tests his Son with suffering for the same purpose, “to determine whether or not he will use his divine Sonship for his own advantage or submit himself in obedience to God.”<sup>91</sup> Jesus suffered on multiple levels—the hostile environmental hardships of an arid wilderness, physical deprivations, and most acutely the intense spiritual suffering of the Father’s testing through Satan’s temptations.<sup>92</sup>

The temptations took place in the wilderness, a most inhospitable locale that by its very nature dispensed intense physical duress.<sup>93</sup> George Adam Smith relates his observations of this wilderness:

Short bushes, thorns, and succulent creepers were all that relieved the brown and yellow bareness of the sand, the crumbling limestone, and scattered shingle. The

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<sup>90</sup>Gerhardsson makes an important observation: “It is important to note that JHWH is not said to test heathen people, but only his own, the people of his own possession. When [“testing”] is used of an individual, it is always a pious man, never an ungodly one. Conversely, when Israel is the subject of the verb, it is always JHWH and not the Baals who are tested” (Birger Gerhardsson, *The Testing of God’s Son: (Matt. 4:1-11 & PAR), An Analysis of an Early Christian Midrash*, trans. John Toy [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2009], 26). All the occurrences of God testing are found in the body of the paper. God was tested by his people (Exod 17:2, 7; Num 14:22; Deut 6:16; 33:8; Judg 6:39; Pss 78:18, 41, 56; 95:9; 106:14; Isa 7:12) and individuals tested one another or themselves (1 Kgs 10:1; 2 Chr 9:1; 32:31; Ps 26:2; Eccl 2:1; 7:23; Dan 1:12, 14).

<sup>91</sup>Edwards, *Mark*, 39.

<sup>92</sup>Ware comments, “Granted, Christ was not tempted through a sinful nature, as we are. But Christ was faced with the strongest and most relentless barrage of temptations Satan has devised for anyone. I think we can justifiably assume that what he lacked in terms of internal temptations from a sinful nature, he experienced in far greater measure from the external temptations Satan directly, forcefully, and relentlessly brought against him” (Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus*, 86).

<sup>93</sup>Commentators offer a variety of opinions concerning the extensiveness of the temptations. R. C. H. Lenski, for example, believes Jesus was tempted by lesser demons the entire 40 days without respite to prepare him for Satan, the greatest tempter of all, for the last three temptations (R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1943], 140–4). Donald Hagner and William Hendriksen think Jesus was left alone during his 40 day fast and Satan came to him only at the end (Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33A [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993], 64, and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, NTC [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973], 225).



strata were contorted; ridges ran in all directions; distant hills to north and south looked like giant dust-heaps; those near we could see to be torn as if by waterspouts. When we were not stepping on detritus, the limestone was blistered and peeling. Often the ground sounded hollow; sometimes rock and sand slipped in large quantity from the tread of the horses; sometimes the living rock was bare and jagged, especially in the frequent gullies, that therefore glowed and beat with heat like furnaces.<sup>94</sup>

Jesus' wilderness temptations are cast as dual typologies of Adam and Israel.<sup>95</sup> Satan tempted Adam, the first son of God (Luke 3:38), to disobey in Eden's pristine environment full of placid animals. Jesus, the Son of God, faced his satanic temptations to disobedience in the ravaged wilderness, which is the haunt of wild animals (Mark 1:13) and is associated with demonic activity.<sup>96</sup> Israel, likewise, was God's son (Exod 4:22; Hos 11:1) whose disobedience made them wander in the suffering wilderness for forty years as a time of testing and preparation for their entrance into the Promised Land (Deut 8:2). The Son of God's obedience made him enter the suffering wilderness as a time of testing and preparation for his redemptive ministry.

The satanic purposes behind the temptations are "not to question this status of Sonship, but to abuse it. They are not primarily about his person, but about his work; not

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<sup>94</sup>George Adam Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1894), 313.

<sup>95</sup>I am indebted to the insights of the following works for the OT typologies found in the temptation accounts: Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 12–18; D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 8 of *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 110–15; Terence L. Donaldson, *Jesus on the Mountain: A Study in Matthean Theology*, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 8 (Sheffield, England: The University of Sheffield, 1985), 87–104; John T. Fitzgerald, "The Temptation of Jesus: The Testing of the Messiah in Matthew," *Restoration Quarterly* 15, nos. 3–4 (1972): 152–60; Richard Glover, *A Teacher's Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), 27–34; Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 33A:63–70; MacArthur, *Matthew 1–7*, 83–99; Morris, *Matthew*, 71–79; John A. T. Robinson, *Twelve New Testament Studies* (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1962), 53–60; George Harry Packwood Thompson, "Called—Proved—Obedient: A Study in the Baptism and Temptation Narratives of Matthew and Luke," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 11, no. 1 (April 1960): 1–12.

<sup>96</sup>Isa 13:21; 34:14; Matt 12:43; Luke 8:29; Rev 18:2

about his relation to God, but about his relation to men; not about whether he was the Messiah, but about what kind of a Messiah he should be.”<sup>97</sup> The Father put his Son into this suffering environment to help him learn the obedience necessary of Messiah, which would ultimately culminate at the cross.

**Suffering to learn obedient dependence on the Father.** Satan’s first testing words echo the Father’s declaration of Jesus as the Son: “If you are the Son of God” (Matt 4:3). Satan was not doubting Jesus’ status as Son but demanded that he prove it.<sup>98</sup> Jesus suffered from hunger at the end of his forty day fast and was in need of food (Matt 4:2). Hunger on the verge of starvation lessens spiritual resolve and may easily lead to desperate measures to find relief.<sup>99</sup> Satan’s tempting/testing, then for Jesus to prove his Sonship by turning the scattered stones into bread could easily be justified as providing a genuine need. Perhaps behind the satanic temptation is Proverbs 10:3—“the LORD does not let the righteous go hungry.” The Son of God, the most righteous of all, is on the verge of starvation, so certainly, the satanic logic concludes, the Father would want Jesus to fulfill Scripture by providing bread for himself in order to stave off his biting hunger.

Food was the same tempting object Satan used with Adam. Adam was not hungry but satanic wooing,

made the fruit of the tree a vehicle for declaring his independence of his Maker. In this same vein the devil tempted Jesus to express his Sonship, by behaving like the

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<sup>97</sup>Robinson, *Twelve New Testament Studies*, 54.

<sup>98</sup>Carson, *Matthew*, 112; Morris, *Matthew*, 73. The demons knew that Jesus was the Son of God (Matt 8:29; Mark 3:11; 5:7; Luke 4:41; 8:28).

<sup>99</sup>This fact is recognized by the wise, “People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his appetite when he is hungry” (Prov 6:30). Stealing to satisfy hunger is understandable but not justified (Prov 6:31).

first Adam in an assertion of autonomy, using food as the warrant of his rebellion. He should take the initiative in providing for His needs rather than wait on the Father to do so.<sup>100</sup>

Adam was surrounded by an abundance of food and plunged into self-idolatrous sin by eating the fruit of the one forbidden tree. Jesus, the Second Adam, was suffering hunger, surrounded by a hostile environment with no food, yet showed obedient dependence on the Father by refusing to create for himself what was rightfully his.

Jesus' reply, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God'" is a quote from Deuteronomy 8:3. Israel was on the verge of entering the Promised Land and Moses was recounting their forty year wilderness wanderings. God afflicted his people with suffering hunger in the wilderness to humble and test them (Deut 8:2). They responded by grumbling and pining for the full bellies they had had in Egypt (Exod 16:2-3). God graciously and miraculously provided manna for them to make the point "that life does not depend on material food alone, but on belief in God and reliance on him. It was a lesson of dependence that God was teaching Israel—that the whole of life depends on him, who, when bread fails, can provide a supernatural substitute for it."<sup>101</sup> Suffering near starvation was designed by the Father to teach his Son humble obedience, an obedience that reflected itself in dependence on the Father to provide in his time what he needed. Three years after this event, Jesus would suffer far more intense physical sufferings yet continue to depend on the Father (1 Pet 2:23) and refuse to provide relief for himself (Matt 26:53).<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup>Don B. Garlington, "Jesus, the Unique Son of God: Tested and Faithful," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151, no. 603 (July 1994): 297.

<sup>101</sup>Thompson, "Called—Proved—Obedient," 3.

<sup>102</sup>See Gerhardsson, *The Testing of God's Son*, 43–53 for an extended discussion.

**Suffering to learn obedient trust in the Father.** Satan's first temptation challenged Jesus to prove his Sonship by exerting his self-reliance to relieve a genuine need. The second provokes him to prove his Sonship by creating a need.<sup>103</sup> The devil took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and called on him to hurl himself to the ground for, as he reminds Jesus by quoting Psalm 91:9-12, God will not allow harm to come to his true Son. This satanic ploy was really to help Jesus—the Father's declaration of Sonship would be proven so Jesus could continue his ministry secure in this knowledge.

Satan will always attack God's Word. He tempted the first Adam to distrust God's declaration that disobedience would result in death. The hellish counter-promise was that Adam's exertion of his self-will would actually be good for him for not only would he not die but he would also gain godlike status. Satan tempted the Second Adam to prove his divine status by exercising his self-will and trust God's Word. The Father declared Jesus to be his beloved Son but Satan wanted empirical proof and, like Adam, promised that he would not die.

Jesus responded to Satan with Scripture: "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test'" (Matt 4:7). Jesus was not denying the truth of Psalm 91 but that it was tempered by the evil of willfully creating a harmful situation so to force God to act. This quote from Deuteronomy 6:16 recounts Israel's putting God to the test at Massah (Exod 17:1-7). Israel was moving through the wilderness and camped at Rephidim, the Wadi Refayid, where water was expected but the wadi was dry.<sup>104</sup> The

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<sup>103</sup>MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7*, 93.

<sup>104</sup>Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Exodus*, in vol. 2 of *EBC*, ed., Frank E. Gaebelein and Richard P. Polcyn (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 405.

people grumbled and questioned God’s motives for bringing them out of Egypt where they had an abundance of water. God responded by miraculously providing water for the entire nation from the surrounding rocks. The location was renamed “Massah” (מַסָּה, from מָצָה, “to test”) “because they tested (בִּנְתָּהֶם) the LORD by saying, ‘Is the LORD among us or not?’” (Exod 17:7). Testing God means “to require evidence whether he can provide and carry out his purposes. The man who tests God doubts his power and providence.”<sup>105</sup> God had protected them from plagues, allowed them to plunder the Egyptians, and rescued them from Pharaoh’s army, yet all these miracles still did not instill trust in them.

Jesus would not test the Father but trust his declaration of Sonship was true. He did not require nor would he press for miraculous affirmation of the statement despite the suffering deprivations he experienced in the wilderness. This temptation/test under suffering conditions helped Jesus learn obedient trust in the Father and helped prepare him for the cross-sufferings he would endure. The same satanic challenge to prove his Sonship would be hurled at him during his crucifixion, that he prove his claim to be the Son of God by removing himself from the cross (Matt 27:20).<sup>106</sup>

**Suffering to learn obedient fidelity to the Father.** Satan then took Jesus to a high mountain and set before him a panoramic view of all the kingdoms of the world. He promises, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me” (Matt 4:9). Satan is the god of this world and, apparently, his offer was no idle boast but one of reality.<sup>107</sup> No “if you are the Son of God” preceded this temptation for Satan knows the

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<sup>105</sup>Thompson, “Called—Proved—Obedient,” 4.

<sup>106</sup>Carson, “Matthew,” 113.

<sup>107</sup>John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2; 1 John 5:1.9.

Son will one day rule over the kingdoms of the world (Ps 2). In exchange for worship, Satan was offering Jesus rule of the nations without having to endure cross-sufferings.

Scripture indicates that Eden was a mountain (Gen 2:10-14, Ezek 28:13-16) from which the vice-regent could “gaze on the kingdoms of the world and to see the domain destined to be his under God.”<sup>108</sup> Satan’s promise of godlike status implied that Adam could be his own self-styled autarchic lord of the expanding nations rather than being subservient to God’s rule. Adam worshipped Satan and, thus, lost the honor of spreading God’s glory to all the nations but, instead, introduced suffering into the world. The Second Adam’s faithfulness to the Father led to him enduring cross-sufferings which crushed the serpent’s head (Rom 16:20) and resulted in God’s glory being spread throughout the world.

Jesus’ reply to Satan is also from Deuteronomy: “For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve’” (Matt 4:10; Deut 6:13).<sup>109</sup> Moses, in the verse prior, commands Israel, “take care lest you forget the LORD” (Deut 6:12), as they did with the golden calf, and in the following verse, “you shall not go after other gods” (Deut 6:13). Worship and fidelity is due to God alone and no other lesser being. The suffering deprivations Jesus experienced in the wilderness would only become more intense on the cross as the Father to whom he swore fidelity would abandon him and bring unfathomable agony into his life. Satan offered Jesus the privilege and honor of being the Davidic King without having to become the Suffering Servant, in exchange

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<sup>108</sup>Garlington, “Jesus, the Unique Son of God,” 301.

<sup>109</sup>Jesus’ quote appears to be based upon the LXX Deut 6:13 reads: κύριον τὸν θεόν σου φοβηθήσῃ καὶ αὐτῷ λατρεύσεις καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν κολληθήσῃ καὶ τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ ὀμῆῃ (“the Lord your God shall you fear and him shall you serve/worship and to him shall you cleave and to his name shall you swear”). See Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 17–18.

only for his worship and allegiance. The Son of God remained faithful and would endure whatever cross-sufferings the Father had ordained for him.

Jesus dismissed the tempter with his own authoritative word, “Be gone, Satan!” (ὑπάγε, σατανᾶ)” (Matt 4:10). Satan had no choice but to obey the divine command and withdrew “until an opportune time” (Luke 4:13). One of these opportune times came through Peter who tempted Jesus to forgo the cross. Jesus, in turn, rebuked Peter with the same verbal form he dismissed Satan: “Get behind me, Satan! (ὑπάγε ὀπίσω μου)” (Matt 16:23). Wilderness-suffering helped Jesus learn more fully and deeply the obedience required of him as Messiah and the satanic ploys to keep him from the cross. Davies and Allison makes this last point well: “The end ordained by the Father is to be achieved by the manner ordained by the Father, namely, the cross. And any opposition to this is satanic. To reject the way of the cross is to be on the side of the Devil.”<sup>110</sup> Suffering in the desert tested him, taught him, and solidified Jesus’ obedience to the Father, an obedience which set him on an inevitable collision course with the cross.

### **Suffering at Gethsemane to Culminate Obedience**

Jesus knew during his last week in Jerusalem that the cross was in his near future and the weight of it began to press down on his soul: “Now is my soul troubled (τετάρρακται)” (John 12:27).<sup>111</sup> The verb τετάρρακται is a passive perfect of τάρρασσω. The

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<sup>110</sup>W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, vol. 1, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 372.

<sup>111</sup>“Now is my soul troubled” (ἡ ψυχὴ μου τετάρρακται; John 12:27) was an echo of an ILP: “My soul is cast down within me” (ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἐτάρραχθη; Ps 42:6). The verb τάρρασσω used in both passages means “to shake, to stir up;” when used of people the verb indicated severe mental and/or spiritual agitation due to unsettledness, anxiety, or horror. In Gethsemane, Jesus revealed to his disciples, “My soul

passive form of this verb when used of people in the NT was always in a negative sense to mean “to be disturbed, agitated, confused, even to become alarmed.”<sup>112</sup> The perfect tense suggests Jesus’ troubled soul was an ongoing, gnawing presence.

Jesus continued, “And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.” D. A. Carson asserts that the answer to Jesus’ deliberative question (“And what shall I say?”) is not another question but a statement—“Father, save me from this hour!”—which corresponds to his Gethsemane prayer, “Remove this cup from me” (Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42).<sup>113</sup> The hard obedience required by Jesus as Messiah was beginning to manifest itself. The first stirrings of the suffering he would eventually have to endure tested his resolve to continue to obey his Father’s will for him. The suffering turmoil he felt in his soul resulted in deepening spiritual maturity as he died to himself at that moment by subsuming his own desires to the will of the Father.

Jesus continued to experience agitation in his soul throughout the week. He retired with his disciples to an upper room to give them his last instructions and encouragements before his crucifixion. Jesus and his disciples, *sans* Judas, left the upper

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is very sorrowful (περίλυπος), even to death” (Matt 26:38; Mark 14:34). The intensified adjective περίλυπος means “extremely afflicted, profoundly sorrowful.” The only time this adjective was used in the LXX Psalms was in the repeated refrain “Why are you cast down (περίλυπος), O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?” (Pss 42:5, 11; 43:5). For the connection between the ILPs and Jesus’ passion see Stephen Ahearne-Kroll, *The Psalms of Lament in Mark’s Passion: Jesus’ Davidic Suffering*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 142 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) and Douglas J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives* (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1983).

<sup>112</sup>*NIDNT*, s.v. “Stir Up, Trouble, Agitate,” by H. Müller and Colin Brown. See Matt 14:26; Mark 6:50; Luke 1:12; 24:38; John 13:21; 14:1, 27; 1 Pet 3:14. The verb was used one other time of Jesus, also in the passive, in John 13:21 as he told his disciples his soul was troubled because of the presence of a betrayer.

<sup>113</sup>Carson, *John*, 440.



room and went to the Garden of Gethsemane where his sufferings became more acute as did his ever deepening spiritual maturity. Jesus took his three “inner circle” disciples—Peter, James, and John—with him into the inner garden (Matt 26:27). These same three beheld Jesus’ glorious magnificence on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt 17:1-13) but now they witnessed the agony of his soul.

The Evangelists used a variety of somber synonyms to describe Jesus’ disconcerted heart:

And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful (λυπεῖσθαι) and troubled (ἀδημονεῖν)” (Matt 26:37).

Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful (περίλυπος), even to death; remain here, and watch with me” (Matt 26:38).

And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed (ἐκθαμβεῖσθαι) and troubled (ἀδημονεῖν) (Mark 14:33).

And he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful (περίλυπος), even to death. Remain here and watch” (Mark 14:34).

The verb λυπέω and its derivatives refer to both physical pain caused by physical want (hunger and thirst, heat or cold, illness) and emotional suffering, which is “the anguish of misfortune, death, annoyance, insult, of outrage.”<sup>114</sup> Matthew and Mark used περίλυπος, an intensified form of λυπέω, to convey Jesus’ extreme and profound sorrow.<sup>115</sup> The first uses of the λυπέω family in the LXX are in Genesis 3:16-17 where God declared Eve would experience pain in childbirth and Adam pain in his labors. Pain entered the garden

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<sup>114</sup>*TDNT*, s.v. “λύπη,” by R. Bultmann. This verb was used in the NT in Matt 14:9; 17:23; 18:31; 19:22; 26:22, 37; Mark 10:22; 14:19; John 16:20; 21:17; Rom 14:15; 2 Cor 2:2, 4, 5; 6:10; 7:8, 9, 11; Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 4:13; 1 Pet 1:6. The noun form was used in Luke 22:45; John 16:6, 20, 21, 22; Rom 9:2; 2 Cor 2:1, 3, 7; 2 Cor 7:10; 9:7; Phil 2:27; Heb 12:11; 1 Pet 2:19.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.* The verb was used a handful of times in Scripture: Gen 4:6; Pss 42:5, 11; 43:5; Dan 2:12; Mark 6:26; Luke 18:23, 24.

due to Adam's disobedient self-will and, now, in another garden the Second Adam, the promised seed of the woman, is displaying pain-filled obedient submission in order to rescue Adam's race from itself.

Jesus' intense soul-sufferings and his deepening obedience/spiritual development is seen in Mark's use of the verb ἐκθαμβέω. The intensive of θάμβος ("to be astonished"), ἐκθαμβέω, carries the idea "to be frightfully amazed and alarmed, utterly astonished."<sup>116</sup> This verb graphically denoted "a picture of shocking horror, awe, and dismay."<sup>117</sup> F. W. Krummacher comments the verb shows "something approached Him which threatened to rend his nerves, and the sight of it freeze the blood in his veins."<sup>118</sup> Craig Blaising concludes the verb indicates that a sudden, unexpected horror gripped Jesus' soul in Gethsemane:

Something unexpected, something not previously considered, something outside the conscious contemplation of Jesus at that moment is suddenly thrust upon him, and he shudders in shock and alarm. Whatever it is, it is out of continuity with what Jesus has known, considered or expected up to this time.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup>*NIDNTT*, s.v. "Miracle, Wonder, Sign" by W. Mundle," and *TDNT*, s.v. "θάμβος," by Georg Bertram. The verb is not found in the LXX and used in the NT only by Mark (Mark 9:15; 14:33; 16:5, 6).

<sup>117</sup>Craig A. Blaising, "Gethsemane: A Prayer of Faith," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 22, no. 4 (December 1979): 335.

<sup>118</sup>Fred. W. Krummacher, *The Suffering Saviour*, trans. Samuel Jackson (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1856), 107. Krummacher continues, "The infernal powers have been let loose upon the Divine Redeemer. They are permitted to array against him all their cunning, might, and malice. If they are able to drive the soul of the Holy One of Israel to despair, they are at liberty to do so. It is in their power to distress and torment him to death, for no one hinders them. They may try him as much as they please, no one stands by him to help him. He must look to it, how he can maintain his ground. What I am saying sounds horribly; but he who voluntarily endured the punishment due to us, was not permitted to escaped being given up to the assaults of the powers of darkness. What the latter did to him is not expressly mentioned; but it is certain that they assailed him in the most fearful manner, and strove, with terrific visions, which they conjured up before him, with revolting blasphemies, which they poured into his ear, and with lying suggestions, to induce him to suspect the conduct of his father toward him, and tortured him to with insidious dissuasions from the work of human redemption. Suffice to say that our Lord's faith, as well as his patience, fidelity, and perseverance in the work he had undertaken were never put to a fiercer ordeal than under the fiery darts of the 'Wicked One,' which he endured in Gethsemane" (ibid.).

<sup>119</sup>Blaising, "Gethsemane," 335-36.

The last verb employed by Matthew and Mark, ἀδημονέω, conveys a great anguish and agitation that rendered the person helpless, disoriented, restless, distracted, confused, because of extreme psychological stress.<sup>120</sup> Like the lamenting psalmists, the intense suffering Jesus experienced continued to engender spiritual maturity as he “fell on his face and prayed” (Matt 26:39; Mark 14:35), a physical gesture of awe, fear, and submission.<sup>121</sup>

Luke recounted unique details of Jesus in Gethsemane: “And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony (ἀγωνία) he prayed more earnestly (ἐκτενέστερον); and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:43-44). Jesus’ distraught state moved the Father to dispatch an angel to bolster his Son’s fortitude. The word family derived from ἀγών inherently has the idea of a contest, a fight, a challenge such as athletic competitions, legal proceedings, or moral struggles.<sup>122</sup> The noun ἀγωνία<sup>123</sup> denotes Jesus’ inner conflict, tension, anxiety, and struggle “[not in] fear of death, but concern for victory in face of the approaching decisive battle on which the fate of the world depends.”<sup>124</sup> The adverb ἐκτενέστερον expresses fervency, resoluteness, intensity, and focus of

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<sup>120</sup>Blaising, “Gethsemane,” 336. The only other use of this verb in Scripture is Phil 2:26.

<sup>121</sup>Gen 17:3, 17; 44:14; Num 16:4; Josh 5:14; 7:6; Judg 13:20; Ruth 2:10; 1 Sam 20:41; 25:23; 2 Sam 1:2; 9:6; 14:4, 22; 1 Kgs 18:7; 2 Chr 20:18; Job 1:20; Ezek 1:28; 3:23; 9:8; 11:13; 43:3; 44:4; Dan 2:46; 8:17; 10:9; Matt 2:11; 17:6; Luke 5:12; 17:16; John 18:6; 1 Cor 14:25; Acts 9:4; 22:7.

<sup>122</sup>*TDNT*, s. v “ἀγών” by Ethelbert Stauffer.

<sup>123</sup>This passage was the only occurrence of ἀγωνία in either the LXX or NT. The verb ἀγών was used in Phil 1:30; Col 2:1; 1 Thess 2:2; 1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7; Heb 12:1; the verb ἀγωνίζομαι in Luke 13:24; John 18:36; 1 Cor 9:25; Col 1:29; 4:12; 1 Tim 4:10; 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7.

<sup>124</sup>Stauffer, “ἀγών.”

attention.<sup>125</sup> So intense was Jesus' prayer that he perspired sweat mingled with blood, a condition known as "hematidrosis" which is oftentimes associated with great stress and fear.

All three synoptic authors record Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane with some important differences: Luke records but one instance of prayer (Luke 22:42); Mark records two prayers (Mark 14:36, 39); and only Matthew states that Jesus prayed three times (Matt 26:39, 42, 44). In Matthew, however, a distinction is seen in the prayers. Jesus' first prayer is found in Matthew 26:39: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." As mentioned, "the cup" symbolized suffering and the wrath of God that the Suffering Servant would have to drink in order to secure the justification of self-worshipping sinners (Ps 11:6; Isa 51:17; Ezek 23:33). Jesus' prayer reflects the natural *human* recoil at the pain and suffering he was already experiencing, and the further prospect of the unimaginable horror that awaited him by drinking the cup. Leon Morris elaborates this point:

The question at issue was not whether Jesus should do the Father's will, but whether that necessarily included the way of the cross. The kind of death he faced was the kind of ordeal from which human nature naturally shrinks; thus we discern here the natural human desire to avoid it. But we discern also Jesus' firm determination that the Father's will be done. So he prays for the avoidance of the death he faced, but only if that accorded with the divine plan.<sup>126</sup>

Jesus rose from this prayer, found his disciples asleep, and exhorted them to pray (Matt 26:41). He once again returned to prayer.

The second and third prayers are different than the first: "My Father, if this

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<sup>125</sup>*TDNT*, s.v. "ἐκτείνω," by Ernst Fuchs. The only other occurrence of this adverb was in 1 Pet 4:8. The similar ἐκτενῶς was used in Joel 1:14; Jonah 3:8; Acts 12:5; 1 Pet 1:22.

<sup>126</sup>Morris, *Matthew*, 668.

cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done” (Matt 26:42, 44). Alfred Plummer suggests that in the first prayer “His human will was not yet in absolute unison with the will of His Father.”<sup>127</sup> Although sinless and with no suggestion of rebellious disobedience, the suffering and unsettledness of Jesus’ *human* soul struggled and fought to obey his Father’s will. Jesus learned further obedience, and thus a deepening spiritual maturity, between the first and second prayers. In the second and third prayers the “if” should be understood as “since.” In the first prayer Jesus expresses his desire if it were in accordance with the Father’s will. No hint of Jesus’ will surfaces in the last two prayers but only a joyful submission to the Father’s will as he embraces it as his own, despite the unfathomable horror it possesses (Heb 12:2).<sup>128</sup> Spiritual maturity is displayed and matured when one joyfully embraces God’s will as his or her own, although knowing it will result in suffering.

Satan’s presence in Gethsemane is not explicitly stated but may be reasonably inferred. Satan’s wilderness temptations were unsuccessful but Luke indicates that he kept watching “until an opportune time” (Luke 4:13). Satanic activity became more pronounced as Jesus came closer to the cross. Peter confessed Jesus was the Christ which prompted Jesus to plainly tell them of his future suffering, death, and resurrection. Peter rebuked Jesus for his “error” and Jesus, in turn, rebuked Peter, “Get behind me, Satan!” (Matt 16:23). Peter became Satan’s unwitting spokesman to dissuade Jesus from going to

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<sup>127</sup>Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910), 370.

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*; Morris, *Matthew*, 670.

the cross.<sup>129</sup>

This incident began a marked increase of Satan's presence and activities. Satan entered Judas prior to the Last Supper (Luke 22:3) and was present at the Supper when he again entered Judas (John 13:2, 27). Jesus revealed to Peter during the Supper that Satan had demanded to "sift you like wheat" (Luke 22:31). Jesus prayed for all his disciples just prior to Gethsemane for the Father to "keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15). The betrayer led the throng to arrest Jesus which, he said, "is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53).<sup>130</sup> The betrayer and the religious leaders "have become in this action instruments of Satan against Jesus. In this hour, designated in the purposes of God, the Satanic assault is permitted."<sup>131</sup> Sandwiched between Satan's presence at the Last Supper and his presence at the betrayal was Gethsemane. R. S. Barbour contends that "Jesus is here to be thought of as engaged with the power of the evil one."<sup>132</sup> Krummacher asserts "it is beyond a doubt that Satan essentially contributed to the horrors of that scene."<sup>133</sup>

Gethsemane was an ordeal for Jesus regardless if Satan were present or not: "Though filled with dread and horror, though he staggered before the cup that threatened to consume him forever, his faith did not waiver,"<sup>134</sup> nor did his obedience and neither

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<sup>129</sup>See Aldrich Willard, "Satan's Attempt to Keep Jesus from the Cross," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 102, no. 408 (December 1945): 468-73.

<sup>130</sup>Satan and darkness are tied together in Acts 26:18.

<sup>131</sup>John Nolland, *Luke*, WBC, vol. 35C (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 1089.

<sup>132</sup>Robert S. Barbour, "Gethsemane in the Tradition of the Passion," *New Testament Studies* 16, no. 3 (April 1970): 237-38.

<sup>133</sup>Krummacher, *The Suffering Saviour*, 121-22.

<sup>134</sup>Blaising, "Gethsemane," 343.

did his joy. Jesus' spiritual depth was on display his entire life but was especially pronounced in Gethsemane. Gethsemane was the most difficult suffering Jesus endured prior to the cross. Gethsemane was the Father's final preparation for the Son to learn obedience and, thus, engender in him a deeper and more profound spiritual maturity.

The incarnation exposed Jesus to suffering, a suffering necessary for him to learn the obedience required of him as Messiah. Three summary statements may be made in light of Jesus' sufferings and his response to them. First, he suffered. His was no docetic hardships but were as real and painful and sometimes frightening as the sufferings of any other human. R. C. H. Lenski surmises that Jesus' sinlessness make his hunger in the wilderness not as difficult as it would with other men: "Since the body of Jesus was wholly unaffected by sin, its power of enduring abstinence from food by far exceeds ours."<sup>135</sup> True, nothing about Jesus was tainted with sin but the Gospel accounts give no indication that his sinlessness made him more impervious to the painful ravages of suffering such as hunger, thirst, sleeplessness, scourging, or betrayal.

This idea leads to the second observation, that Jesus endured his sufferings not by relying on the powers afforded to him as the Second Person of the Trinity but through reliance on the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Isaiah foresaw the Spirit resting upon Messiah (Isa 11:1-3; 42:1-4). The Spirit was instrumental in Jesus' conception (Matt 1:20) and descended upon him at his baptism (Matt 3:16). Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit" (Luke 4:1) when he entered the wilderness and "returned in the power of the Spirit" (Luke 4:14) as he left the wilderness. The Redeemer rejoiced in the Spirit (Luke 10:21). In short, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power"

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<sup>135</sup>Lenski, *Matthew*, 139.

(Act 10:38). Jesus remained faithful and obedient in all his sufferings only through the “supernatural empowerment”<sup>136</sup> of the Holy Spirit.

Third, Jesus’ sufferings had multiple purposes. His sufferings are usually thought of in terms of redemption (Isa 53; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18) but, as this section has shown, his sufferings were also the means by which he grew in his spiritual depth and development. Jesus’ also suffered so that he would be qualified to be the “merciful and faithful high priest” (Heb 2:17). He is the great High Priest, “for because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” (Heb 2:18). Peter O’Brien explains, “Hebrews is not here saying that Christ suffered through his temptations, however true this may be. Rather, his suffering was the source of temptation for him, and because he has been tested to the limit and remained faithful, he is perfectly qualified to help those who are tempted.”<sup>137</sup> From his wilderness-sufferings to cross-sufferings, and every other suffering he endured in between, Jesus was constantly tempted “to give up his calling as Redeemer and abandon obedient submission to the will of God.”<sup>138</sup> He did not abnegate his divine calling so that Peter could encourage his persecuted readers, “Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps” (1 Pet 2:21). Jesus’ redemptive sufferings were unique to him but the manner in which he suffered shines as an example to his followers. One example

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<sup>136</sup>Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus*. 38. See also Gerald F. Hawthorne, *The Presence & the Power: The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1991), and Graham A. Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, ed. John S. Feinberg, Foundations of Evangelical Theology Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 149–77.

<sup>137</sup>O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 122–23. David Peterson likewise argues, “Our writer does not mean that Christ ‘suffered by his temptations’ but rather that his sufferings were the particular source of temptation for him” (Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 65).

<sup>138</sup>Eduard Riggenbach *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Leipzig, Germany: Zahn Kommentar, 1993), 63, quoted in Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 66.



the Man of Sorrows leaves for his followers is that suffering is designed by God to engender spiritual maturity in his covenant people.

### **Suffering Engenders Spiritual Maturity in Christ-Followers**

Suffering was necessary for Jesus to learn the obedience required of him as Messiah and to perfect him so that he was qualified for his ministry as Redeemer. Essentially, suffering matured and completed the human Jesus for the work his Father had for him to accomplish. Likewise, suffering in his covenant people is designed by God so that Christ's rule will increase as spiritual development is matured. This section will examine six NT passages which indicate that spiritual maturity is engendered in the redeemed through the divine administration of suffering.

#### **Suffering Engenders Hope (Rom 5:1-5)**

God irrupted into the chaos and manifested his righteousness in the Person of Jesus Christ (Rom 3:21) who was the substitutionary, propitiatory sacrifice who satisfied God's wrath (Rom 3:25). Thus, justification, the forensic declaration of righteousness, is by faith alone in Christ alone (Rom 3:28).

**Justification is the foundation for hope (Rom 5:1-2).** Paul argues in Romans 5:3-5 that one divine design for suffering is to produce hope. This hope is predicated on the hope fashioned by justification. In other words, justification-hope is what allows for suffering-hope so that suffering-hope could not exist without justification-hope. Therefore, it is first necessary to understand justification-induced hope.

One result of justification is that "we rejoice (καυχώμεθα) in hope of the glory

of God.” The verb *καυχάομαι* usually carried the negative connotation of arrogant self-glorifying boasting (Gal 6:13; Jas 4:8) but here boasting is legitimate and encouraged due to its object—boasting in, exalting in, rejoicing “in hope of the glory of God.”

Justification-hope is, according to Leon Morris, “distinguished from secular optimism in that it is grounded in what God has done in Christ.”<sup>139</sup> Ernst Käsemann explains that this hope is not “the prospect of what might happen but the prospect of what is already guaranteed.”<sup>140</sup> Similarly, C. E. B. Cranfield denotes that Christ-centered hope is “the confident anticipation of that which we do not yet see.”<sup>141</sup> The justified are blessed with “the hope of glory” (Col 1:27), “the hope of the gospel” (Col 1:23), “hope of eternal life” (Titus 1:2; 3:7), and have “a living hope” (1 Pet 1:3).<sup>142</sup> Redeemed vice-regents are to be known for “boasting in our hope” (Heb 3:6).

This divinely-secured “hope of the glory of God” is an eschatological hope. Presently, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23) but the confident assurance of the justified is that one day the universal, recalcitrant chaos will be finally subdued by Regent Christ so that “the glory of his own divine holiness and majestic perfection will radiate in us and through us for all eternity.”<sup>143</sup> Justification-hope

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<sup>139</sup>Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, PNTC (Leicester, England: Apollos; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 210.

<sup>140</sup>Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, ed. and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 134.

<sup>141</sup>C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans 1-8*, vol. 1, *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 260.

<sup>142</sup>Other passages that express a God-ward hope are Matt 12:21; Acts 2:26; 23:6; 24:15; 26:6, 7; 28:20; Rom 4:18; 8:20, 24, 25; 12:1; 15:4, 12, 13; 1 Cor 13:13; 15:19; 16:7; 2 Cor 1:10; 3:12; Gal 5:5; Eph 1:18; 4:4; Col 1:5; 1 Thess 1:3; 5:8; 2 Thess 2:16; 1 Tim 4:10; 5:5; Titus 2:13; Heb 6:11, 18; 7:19; 10:23; 11:1; 1 Pet 1:13, 21; 3:5, 15; 1 John 3:3.

<sup>143</sup>John MacArthur, *Romans 1-8, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 280.

serves as the ground for temporal hope in this present age, especially the hope produced by suffering.

**Suffering produces hope (Rom 5:3-5).** The “more than that” signals a change in focus from the eternal to the temporal<sup>144</sup> so that in this present age “we rejoice in (καυχώμεθα ἐν) our sufferings.” The meaning of καυχώμεθα ἐν (same construction in Rom 5:2) has been variously interpreted as “boasting in spite of our sufferings,” “boasting in the middle of our sufferings,” or “boasting on the basis of our sufferings.” James Dunn observes that καυχάομαι ἐν is Paul’s usual way to identify the object of the boasting.<sup>145</sup> The justified, therefore, boast in, rejoice in, and exult in the sufferings they experience.

Suffering commences a chain of Father-pleasing Kingdom fruits. The first is “knowing that suffering produces (κατεργάζεται) endurance.” “Suffering” is any hardship that is the result of living in the chaos: “tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword (Rom 8:35).<sup>146</sup> The verb κατεργάζομαι (“produces”) in

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<sup>144</sup>Martyn Lloyd-Jones comments of the phrase, “what he has been saying is not the end, there is something further, something which in a sense is even stronger” (D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 5* [Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1971], 59).

<sup>145</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Romans*, WBC, vol. 38A (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 250. This construction is also found in verse 2, the object of the justified’s boasting is the hope of future glory (not in spite of it). This construction is also found in the Pauline corpus in Rom 2:7; 5:2; 1 Cor 1:31; 3:21; 2 Cor 10:15, 17; 12:9; Phil 3:3.

<sup>146</sup>Commentators disagree the type of suffering Paul envisioned since θλιβω was used to describe the suffering associated with eschatological tribulation (Matt 24:29), persecution (Mark 4:17), and creaturely suffering (John 16:21). Nothing in the context suggests limiting θλιβω to eschatological or persecution-sufferings. Moo advocates that θλιψις here is unrestrained and that all suffering, ultimately, is due to Christ: “This is so because all the evil that the Christian experiences reflect the conflict between ‘this age,’ dominated by Satan, and ‘the age to come,’ to which the Christian has been transferred by faith. All sufferings betray the presence of the enemy and are attack on our relationship to Christ” (Douglas Moo, *Romans 1-8*, The Wycliffite Exegetical Commentary [Chicago Moody Press, 1991], 310.). Morris adds that θλιψις “does not refer to minor inconveniences, but to real hardships” (Morris, *Romans*, 220).

this context refers to a process that produces results.<sup>147</sup> Endurance, and the other fruits in the chain, are not fully produced immediately but occur over time.

Endurance in secular Greek use was,

a prominent virtue in the sense of courageous endurance. As distinct from patience, it has the active significance of energetic if not necessarily successful resistance, e.g., the bearing of pain by the wounded, the calm acceptance of strokes of destiny, heroism in face of bodily chastisement, or the firm refusal of bribes. . . . [True steadfastness] is not motivated outwardly by public opinion or hope of reward but inwardly by love of honor.<sup>148</sup>

Leon Morris defines “endurance” as “active, manly fortitude;”<sup>149</sup> Douglas Moo as “spiritual fortitude that bears up under, and is, indeed, made even stronger by, suffering;”<sup>150</sup> R. C. H. Lenski simply as “brave patience.”<sup>151</sup> Endurance is not a characteristic conjured up by human will but is a gift granted by God to his covenant people (Rom 15:5).

The next link in the chain is “endurance produces character.” “Character” (δοκιμήν) appears to be a Pauline neologism derived from the root verb δόκιμος (“to test”).<sup>152</sup> The noun “indicates the result of being tested, the quality of being approved on the basis of a trial.”<sup>153</sup> The soul-shaping nature of suffering forges within the justified a

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<sup>147</sup>The verb is used with the sense of process in Rom 7:8, 13; 15:18; 2 Cor 4:17; 5:5; 7:10, 11; 9:11; Eph 6:13; Phil 2:12; Jas 1:3.

<sup>148</sup>*TDNT*, s.v. “μένω,” by F. Hauck.

<sup>149</sup>Morris, *Romans*, 116.

<sup>150</sup>Moo, *Romans 1-8*, 311.

<sup>151</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1936), 337.

<sup>152</sup>The noun does not have any attestations prior to Paul and only Paul used the word in the NT (Rom 5:4; 2 Cor 2:9; 8:2; 9:13; 13:3; Phil 2:22). See, for example, Morris, *Romans*, 220.

<sup>153</sup>*Ibid.*, 221.

tested, proven character such as was found in the lamenting psalmists, Jesus, the saints populating Hebrews 11, and countless others throughout the centuries.

The last link is “character produces hope.” Hope is instilled in vice-regents through two different streams, each stemming from justification by faith and each reinforcing the other. The hope of exulting in a glorious eternal future helps the justified to endure temporal sufferings, which, in turn, give deeper hope in eternity, which gives further support to endure hardships, and so forth for an ever upward, ever expanding spiral of spiritual maturity.<sup>154</sup> This hope is possible only “because God has poured out (ἐκκέχυται) his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” God’s love is identified as the cross of Christ, the propitiatory sacrifice who secured justification-hope for the redeemed (Rom 5:8). The verb ἐκχέω was used in the LXX in anticipation of the day when the Holy Spirit would be poured out (Ezek 39:29; Joel 2:28, 29; Zech 12:10).<sup>155</sup> The Spirit was poured out (ἐκχέω) at Pentecost (Acts 2:17, 18, 33), on Cornelius (Acts 10:45), and continues to be poured out on Christ-followers (Titus 3:5-6). Cross-secured hope is known only because of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Christ-honoring hope is forged in the heart through suffering. The kingly function of subduing the chaos ensues when the vice-regent rejoices, endures, shows fidelity to, and hopes in Regent Christ during times of duress. Eschatological hope forged

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<sup>154</sup>Morris believes, “Steadfast endurance leads to the quality of testedness, and this in turn to hope, for the Christian who has been tested has proved God’s faithfulness and will surely hope all the more confidently” (Morris, *Romans*, 221). Theodore Pulcini said it well: “In short, tribulations are a crucible in which Christians gain a sort of existential-spiritual stamina that shows them to be approved and reinforces that hope of a glorious destiny that will crown their relationship with God (Theodore Pulcini, “In Right Relationship with God: Present Experience and Future Fulfillment: An Exegesis of Romans 5:1-11,” *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 36, nos. 1–2 [1992]: 70).

<sup>155</sup>Isa 32:15; 44:3 also describes a future pouring out of the Spirit but a different Greek verb was used.

in the furnace of suffering is a spiritually maturing act that signals to the chaos that the vice-regent sees beyond its demise to the glorious reign of Regent Jesus.

### **Suffering Engenders Conformity to Christ (Rom 8:18-30)**

Paul's teaching on adoption reminds that being heirs of Christ means "we suffer with him in order to that we may also be glorified with" (Rom 8:17). The next section (Rom 8:18-30) expands this idea and essentially explains the entire purpose of God for his covenant people, all within the context of suffering.

**The groan-suffering of sin (Rom 8:18-22).** Creation "was subjected to futility" (Rom 8:20)<sup>156</sup> by God and is in continual "bondage to corruption (Rom 8:21)<sup>157</sup> because Adam failed to exert his kingly obligations. Since the fall the creation "has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now" (Rom 8:22). The prophets personified the earth so that "the entire creation is groaning in lament because of a history of ongoing human sin and an accompanying divine judgment."<sup>158</sup> Birth pangs were used metaphorically to warn of "sudden and overwhelming pain and destruction."<sup>159</sup> The earth

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<sup>156</sup>Creation was involuntarily forced into "futility," which describes "[the] state of being without use or value, emptiness, futility, purposelessness, transitoriness" (W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, 3rd and rev. ed., ed. F. W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000], s.v. "ματαιότης." The futility is "the frustration of not being able properly to fulfil the purpose of its existence" (Cranfield, *Romans 1-8*, 1:413) namely to be the home of Adam's progeny for the glory of God.

<sup>157</sup>"Bondage" was used in the LXX to translate "the pit" (Ps 103:4; Jonah 2:7), which was a synonym for the grave.

<sup>158</sup>Laurie J. Braaten, "All Creation Groans: Romans 8:22 in Light of the Biblical Sources," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 28, no. 2 (December 2006): 153–54. See Isa 24:1-20; 33:7-9; Jer 4:23-28; 12:1-4, 7-13; 23:9-12; Hos 4:1-3; Amos 1:2 for the groaning earth.

<sup>159</sup>*Ibid.*, 134. See Exod 15:14; Deut 2:25; 2 Sam 22:6; Job 21:17; Pss 18:4, 5; 48:6; 116:3; Isa 13:8; 21:3; 26:17; 66:7; Jer 6:24; 8:21; 13:21; 22:23; 27:43; Ezek 7:4; Hos 9:11; 13:13; Mic 4:9; Nah 2:11; Matt 24:8; Mark 13:8; Acts 2:24; 1 Thess 5:3.

groans under God’s current judgment on human sin but also groans because of the dismal prospect of absorbing God’s final judgment for human wickedness.

Christ-followers “who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly.” The phrase could mean “we groan although we have the firstfruits of the Spirit” or “we groan because we have the first fruits of the Spirit.” Both are possible but the second one is perhaps the intended meaning. “Firstfruits” were the first of the harvest offered to God in anticipation of a greater and completed harvest (Exod 23:19).<sup>160</sup> The Spirit as firstfruits, then, means his present indwelling is in anticipation of the coming harvest of justification-hope (Eph 1:14).<sup>161</sup> Dunn expresses, “it was precisely the coming of the Spirit which set up the already—not yet tension in the believer’s life.”<sup>162</sup> The Spirit exerts his sanctifying power which is but a foretaste, the firstfruits, of the eternal blessings which await the child of God.<sup>163</sup> As a result, the redeemed suffer in this life for sins of omission and co-mission, longing, yearning, groaning in anticipation of full benefits of adoption.

The Spirit groans because of human “weakness” (Rom 8:26). “Weakness” was used to describe human limitations and fallibilities (Heb 7:28), illness (Luke 5:15),

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<sup>160</sup>The first Christians were called the firstfruits (1 Cor 16:15; Rom 16:5; 2 Thess 2:13; Jas 1:18) and Jesus’ resurrection is the firstfruits in anticipation of the resurrection of the redeemed (1 Cor 15:20, 23). The word is also used in Rom 11:16; Rev 14:4.

<sup>161</sup>Also Moo, *Romans 1-8*, 556.

<sup>162</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 310.

<sup>163</sup>Ibid., 311. Moo echoes the point, “it is *because* we possess the Spirit as the first installment and pledge of our complete salvation that we groan, yearning for the fulfillment of that salvation to take place” (Moo, *Romans 1-8*, 557). Morris avers, “Perhaps Paul’s thought is that we groan partly because of those privileges, for they Measure of HS now is a foretaste of what is to come or gift of Spirit now is a foretaste of the many other blessings to come” (Morris, *Romans*, 323). See 2 Cor 5:2; 15:35-58; Phil 3:20-21; 1 John 3:1-3).

proclivity to sin (Rom 6:19), the weakness associated with fear (1 Cor 2:3).<sup>164</sup> The redeemed pray for relief from these groan-causing maladies but another weakness is that “we do not know what to pray for as we ought,” meaning human limitations prevents prayers from always reflecting God’s will. Therefore, sin-induced weaknesses make it necessary for the Spirit, who knows the will of God, to intercede “for us with groanings too deep for words.”<sup>165</sup>

**Conformity to Christ (Rom 8:28-30).** God is working his eternal purpose for his adopted within the context of suffering. His purpose is reserved only “for those who love God” who, according to Jesus, are those who keep his commandments (John 14:15, 21, 31; also 1 John 1:6) which, in turn, keeps his people secure in the love of God (John 15:10).<sup>166</sup> The adopted are assured that “all things work together for good.”<sup>167</sup> “All

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<sup>164</sup>See also Matt 8:17; Luke 8:2; 13:11, 12; John 5:5; 11:4; Acts 28:9; 1 Cor 15:43; 2 Cor 11:30; 12:5, 9, 10; 13:4; Gal 4:13; 1 Tim 5:23; Heb 4:15; 5:2; 11:34.

<sup>165</sup>The groans of the Spirit do not refer to his work in the Christ-follower, e.g. the giving of ecstatic utterances, but of his “intercession on our behalf in the divine sphere where human words are totally inadequate (cf. 2 Cor. 12:4)” (*TDNT*, s.v. “στενάζω,” by Johannes Schneider).

<sup>166</sup>“Love” is in the present tense and “[reveals] an attitude and activity in accord with the very nature of God Himself” (D. Edmond Heibert, “Romans 8:28-29 and the Assurance of the Believer,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148, no. 590 [April 1991]: 178). Heibert continues with a good reminder that “such love in the hearts of believers is not meritorious; their love for Him does not prompt God to begin working all things for their good. Such as love is not native to the human heart; it can only be known as the result of God’s love being poured out in the believers’ hearts through the Holy Spirit” (178).

<sup>167</sup>The majority of Greek texts have this phrase as οἶδαμεν δὲ ὅτι τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν τὸν θεὸν πάντα συνεργεῖ εἰς ἀγαθόν. In this rendering, πάντα is the subject of the verb, making the phrase read “and we know that for those who love God all things work together for good” (ESV). Some texts (p<sup>46</sup>, uncials A and B, minuscule 81, coptic, Ethiopic, and Origen) have the reading οἶδαμεν δὲ ὅτι τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν τὸν θεὸν πάντα συνεργεῖ ὁ θεὸς εἰς ἀγαθόν, which would make ὁ θεὸς the subject of the verb: “and we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God” (NASB). The inclusion of ὁ θεὸς into the text is readily explained by an editor wanting to explicitly clarify that Paul was not proclaiming deism but God’s active sovereign involvement in the creation. Moo argues for the majority text with the caveat, “it is important to insist that ‘all things’ do not tend toward good in and of themselves, as if Paul held to a ‘naively optimistic’ interpretation of history (Dodd’s objection to this rendering). Rather, it is the sovereign guidance of God that is presumed as the undergirding and directing force behind all the events of life. This being so, it does not finally matter much whether we translate ‘all things work together for good’



things” is inclusive and may include divine attributes, promises, and mercies; the graces of the Spirit; the angels; the prayers of the saints and Christ; affliction, temptation, desertion, sin, and so on.<sup>168</sup> This truth does not mean that all things are good, or that evil will be turned into good, or all things work together for good for all people. The “good” is not yet defined but is reserved “for those who are called according to his purpose.” The “good,” then, is the divine goal for his covenant people, the final and supreme good.

God “foreknew” his adopted, which refers to “that special taking knowledge of a person which is God’s electing grace.”<sup>169</sup> God also “predestined” his adopted, which conveys the eternally predetermined intent and purpose he has for his people. The predetermined good God has for his vice-regents is that they would “be conformed to the image (εἰκὼν) of his Son,” an image that is forged within the furnace of suffering.<sup>170</sup> Vice-regent Adam was created “in the image (LXX εἰκὼν) of God” (Gen 1:27) but embraced self-rule, which created the chaos and introduced suffering. Now, suffering is designed by God to conform his new Adamic vice-regents into the image (εἰκὼν) of the Second Adam, “the image (εἰκὼν) of the invisible God” (Col 1:1), who undoes the chaos, and will one day wipe away every suffering tear (Rev 21:4).

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or ‘God is working in and through all things for good’” (Moo, *Romans 1-8*, 565) See also William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 1981), 279–80. See Hiebert, “Romans 8,” 174–76, who argues that the minority texts are the correct rendering of the phrase. Cranfield, *Romans 1-8*, 425–28, has an extended discussion and opts for the shorter reading.

<sup>168</sup>Thomas Watson, *All Things for Good*, Puritan Paperbacks (1663; repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), 5. An illustration of this truth may be found in the natural world. Sodium (Na) is a poisonous metal and chloride (Cl) is a poisonous gas. Combining one atom of each yields NaCl, common table salt, a good substance.

<sup>169</sup>Charles E. B. Cranfield, “Romans 1:18,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 21, no. 3 (September 1968): 431. “Foreknow” literally “prior knowledge” and was used only twice with this meaning in the NT, both with people as the subject (Acts 26:5; 2 Pet 3:17). The other uses of the word are applied to God’s foreknowing his chosen in salvific grace (Rom 8:29; 11:12; 1 Pet 20).

<sup>170</sup>The word translated “conformity” is found only here and Phil 3:21.

Spiritual maturity means God increasing his rule so that his child will be conformed to the image of Christ which is accomplished through suffering. Conformity to Christ has temporal and eternal implications as it includes both his “character and destiny.”<sup>171</sup> Jesus is the moral exemplar to imitate—his humility (John 13:15), welcoming (Rom 15:7), love (John 13:34; 15:12; Eph 5:2, 25), forgiveness (Col 3:13), patience (1 Tim 1:16), suffering (1 Pet 2:21), purity (1 John 3:3), and righteousness (1 John 3:7). One divine design of suffering is to forge these, and other, Christlike characteristics into his adopted. The destiny of the vice-regent matches the career of Jesus: his people suffer with him (Rom 8:17), are crucified with him (Rom 6:6); have died with him (Rom 6:8; 1 Tim 2:11) were buried with him (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12), are made alive with him (Col 2:13), are raised with him (Col 2:12; 3:1), will be joint-heirs with him (Col 3:1; Rev 20:4), and will reign with him (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 20:4). Suffering engenders conformity to Christ, the ultimate soul-maturing blessing of the Father and evidence of self-rule decreasing as God’s rule increases.

### **Suffering Engenders Spiritual Strength (2 Cor 12:1-10)**

Paul confessed to the Corinthians that he “was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling” (1 Cor 2:3). “Fear and trembling” is a phrase used in Scripture to indicate anxiety and unsettledness.<sup>172</sup> Paul learned, however, his weaknesses gave him the opportunity to trust in Christ’s strength, which, in turn, made him spiritually strong.

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<sup>171</sup>Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Louis Kregel, 1882), 448. Commentators disagree whether or not the conformity is strictly eschatological or includes both temporal and eternal aspects. See Hendriksen, *Romans*, 283–84. for the arguments each side makes for their case.

<sup>172</sup>Ps 55:5; Mark 5:33; Acts 16:29; 2 Cor 7:15; Eph 6:5; Phil 2:12;

The Corinthians had become enamored with “super-apostles” (2 Cor 11:5; 12:11) who seduced them by slandering Paul (2 Cor 2:17-3:3; 10:10) and boasting of their own spiritual prowess (2 Cor 11:8). False teachers are wont to rest their authority on supernatural tales (Ezek 22:28; Col 2:8) and “it is not improbable that the rivals were quite ready to feed the Corinthians’ appetite for spiritually thrilling visions. Their accounts of supernatural revelations gave a boost to their authority.”<sup>173</sup> Paul was fighting for souls and was forced to boast of an extraordinary vision he had received, although he knew the boasting was inherently foolish (2 Cor 12:11).<sup>174</sup> He gave no sensationalized details but deftly turned the topic from boasting about the Paul who saw the unimaginable glory of God’s abode to boasting about the Paul who toils on earth in weakness: “I will not boast, except of my weaknesses” (2 Cor 12:5).<sup>175</sup> “Weaknesses” is the same word examined in the Romans 8 passage and may refer to creaturely limitations, illness, temptation, and any other maladies that remind the child of God that he or she lives in the chaos.

**Thorn-suffering (2 Cor 12:7-8).** The “surpassing greatness” of Paul’s revelations did not propel him into ascetic bliss but resulted in physical suffering. He, too, was a son of Adam whose predisposition was to worship the bloated self and, just

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<sup>173</sup>David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, The New American Commentary, vol. 29 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 508. “Boast” is a key word in 2 Cor and some form of it is found in 5:12; 7:14; 9:2; 10:8, 13, 15, 16, 17; 11:12, 16, 18, 30; 12:1, 5, 6, 9.

<sup>174</sup>Paul received many visions and revelations throughout his life (Acts 9:3-12; 16:9-10; 18:9-10; 22:17-21; 23:11; 27:23-24; Gal 1:11-12) but the one he relates here is unique. “Boast” is a key word in 2 Cor and some form of it is found in 2 Cor 5:12; 7:14; 9:2; 10:8, 13, 15, 16, 17; 11:12, 16, 18, 30; 12:1, 5, 6, 9.

<sup>175</sup>Simon Kistemaker, *2 Corinthians*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997), 412. “Weakness” is a key word in Paul’s correspondence with the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:25, 27; 2:3; 4:10; 8:7, 9, 10, 11, 12; 9:22; 11:30; 12:22; 15:43; 2 Cor 10:10; 11:21, 29, 30; 12:5, 9, 10; 13:3, 4, 9).

like the super-apostles, was prone to “becoming conceited” because of the visions.<sup>176</sup>

Paul related that “a thorn was given me in the flesh” by God to thwart his bent to conceit and self-glory.<sup>177</sup>

The phrase σκόλοψ τῆ σαρκί (“thorn in the flesh”) has been the topic of much speculation. In secular Greek σκόλοψ referred to a pointed object, especially a stake for impaling. All three uses of the noun in the LXX referred to thorns (Num 33:55; Ezek 28:24; Hos 2:6). Perhaps Paul employed a somewhat ambiguous noun to indicate the intensity of his suffering while simultaneously trivializing it in light of the “eternal weight of glory” that awaited him (Gal 2:20; 2 Cor 4:17).<sup>178</sup> Speculations of the identity of the thorn may be generally categorized as physical (a disability, disease), relational (the super-apostles, other opponents), or moral (temptation to a particular sin). The term “flesh” seems to point to some kind of unspecified physical malady.<sup>179</sup>

This thorn was “a messenger of Satan.” Satan and the demonic realm are sometimes associated with physical disorders such as madness (1 Sam 18:10), loathsome sores (Job 2:7), muteness (Luke 11:14), convulsions/epilepsy (Luke 9:42), and crippling

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<sup>176</sup>The only other time the word translated “conceited” was used in the NT was 2 Thess 2:4 where “the man of lawlessness,” the Antichrist, “exalts himself (ὑπεραίρομαι) against every so-called god or object of worship.” The verb was used in LXX 2 Chr 32:23; Pss 38:4; 72:16; Prov 31:29.

<sup>177</sup>The subject of the verb ἐδόθη (“was given”) is not explicitly stated but is understood to be God. ἐδόθη is an indicative aorist passive, third person singular, and was oftentimes used in the NT to refer to God as the giver without explicitly naming him as the subject (Matt 28:18; Gal 3:21; Eph 3:8; 4:7; 1 Tim 4:14; Rev 6:2, 4, 8, 11; 7:2; 8:3; 9:1, 3, 5; 11:1, 2; 13:5, 7, 15; 16:8; 19:8; 20:4).

<sup>178</sup>*NIDNTT* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), s.v. “Fruit, Fig, Thorn, Thistle,” by C. Brown; *TDNT*, s.v. “σκόλοψ,” by Gerhard Dellling; David M. Park, “Paul’s ΣΚΟΛΟΥΣ ΤΗ ΣΑΡΚΙ: Thorn or Stake?,” *Novum Testamentum* 22, no. 2 (April 1980): 179–83.

<sup>179</sup>For an extended discussion on the different options in all three categories (physical, relational, moral), see Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, WBC, vol. 40 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), 412–16. Kistemaker has a good discussion limited to give suggestions: depression, poor eyesight, epilepsy, enemies, demon visitation (Kistemaker, *2 Corinthians*, 416–18).

diseases (Luke 13:10-17).<sup>180</sup> Sydney Page gives a good reminder:

the Bible portrays Satan as an implacable enemy of God, whose designs on humanity are malicious; however, it does not represent Satan as God's equal or as one who acts independently of divine control. . . . Satan may be portrayed as acting with the permission of God or as an unwitting instrument of God, but in either case, he fulfills the will of God in what he does.<sup>181</sup>

Paul described this messenger's treatment with the verb *κολαφίζω*, which was used of Jesus being struck in the face (Matt 26:67; Mark 14:65), rough treatment (1 Cor 4:11), and the beatings of persecution (1 Pet 2:20). The verb in the present tense suggests the pain was not only intense but continuous. The irony is that Paul was privileged to see God's peaceful abode but it resulted in ongoing physical pain "as a kind of divine protection"<sup>182</sup> to keep him from becoming a bloated egotist. Paul, like Jesus in Gethsemane, pleaded three times for the torment to be removed.

**Suffering and spiritual strength (2 Cor 12:9-10).** Jesus answered Paul's request not by removing the suffering but by assuring him of his all-sufficient grace: "My grace is sufficient for you."<sup>183</sup> "Sufficient" means "being enough"<sup>184</sup> so that Paul did not need anything else other than the sustaining grace of Christ to endure the suffering that

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<sup>180</sup>Also Matt 9:33; 15:22-38; 17:14-18; Mark 7:24-30; Luke 8:29.

<sup>181</sup>Sydney H. T. Page, *Powers of Evil: A Biblical Study of Satan and Demons* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books; Leicester, England: Apollos, 1995), 465.

<sup>182</sup>Frank J. Matera, *2 Corinthians*, The New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 282.

<sup>183</sup>The Greek for this phrase is ἀρκεῖ σοι ἡ χάρις μου ("sufficient for you is my grace") The verb in the first position makes the sufficiency prominent, the noun in the last position emphasizes the grace (Kistemaker, *2 Corinthians*, 419; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* [Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1946], 303).

<sup>184</sup>Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 40:419.

God had graciously inflicted on him.<sup>185</sup>

Jesus continued, ἡ γὰρ δύναμις ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τελεῖται.<sup>186</sup> The issue in this phrase revolves around two nearly identical verbs, τελειόω and τελέω. The verb not used, τελειόω, has a wide range of connotations such as “to perfect, to make genuine, to complete, to succeed fully, to initiate, to make happen, to become.”<sup>187</sup> The verb that is used, τελέω, is more restricted and always “[signifies] some sort of finishing or ending or accomplishing.”<sup>188</sup> The verb τελέω (“to end”) in the phrase is usually translated as though it were τελειόω (“to perfect”)<sup>189</sup> but if τελέω kept its normal NT meaning then the translation is, “my grace is sufficient for you, for power is being ended in weakness.”<sup>190</sup> The power, then, is Paul’s decreasing power; his weakness has brought an end to his strength so that he must rely on the all-sufficient grace of Christ. The lamenting psalmists discovered the same truth, the ongoing suffering they experienced weakened them and

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<sup>185</sup>This incident illustrates Rom 8. His three pleadings “discloses that he did not immediately understand God’s purpose in allowing Satan’s angel to torment him. Or if he understood it, he had not yet reconciled himself to God’s purpose” (Matera, *2 Corinthians*, 284). Paul prayed for what seemed best but prayed in weakness for he did not know the will of God for him. The Spirit interceded for him before God’s throne, knowing that God’s will was for him was to endure the thorn. Paul would be conformed to the image of Christ not by the absence of suffering but because of it.

<sup>186</sup>The ESV translates this phrase, “for my power is made perfect in weakness” (also NIV). The possessive “my” is not found in the text but is an editorial gloss. The NASB is more literal: “for power is perfected in weakness.”

<sup>187</sup>Marva J. Dawn, *Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacling of God* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 38. The verb τελειόω is used in Luke 2:43; 13:32; John 4:34; 5:36; 17:4, 23; 19:28; Acts 20:24; Phil 3:12; Heb 2:10; 5:9; 7:19, 28; 9:9; 10:1, 14; 11:40; 12:23; Jas 2:22; 1 John 2:5; 4:12, 17, 18.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid., 39. The verb τελέω is used in Matt 7:28; 10:23; 11:1; 13:53; 17:24; 19:1; 26:1; Luke 2:39; 12:50; 18:31; 22:37; John 19:28, 30; Acts 13:29; Rom 2:27; Rom 13:6; 2 Cor 12:9; Gal 5:16; 2 Tim 4:7; Jas 2:8; Rev 10:7; 11:7; 15:1, 8; 17:17; 20:3, 5, 7.

<sup>189</sup>Murray Harris lists several of the renderings commentators have given to τελεῖται in this passage (Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2005], 863.). He recognizes that τελέω means “to end” but does not push it in his comments.

<sup>190</sup>Dawn, *Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacling of God*, 41.

brought an end to their own abilities so that their only recourse was to trust in the all-sufficient increasing grace of God.

Paul's boasting about his vision is now redirected, "therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon (ἐπισκηνώσῃ) me" (also 2 Cor 11:30). The healthy do not need a physician but the ill (Matt 9:12), likewise strong boasters do not need Christ's grace but the humble weak.

Charles Hodge said it well:

When emptied of ourselves we are filled with God. Those who think they can change their own hearts, atone for their own sins, subdue the power of evil in their own souls or in the souls of others, who feel able to sustain themselves under affliction, God leaves to their own resources. But when they feel and acknowledge their weakness he communicates to them divine strength.<sup>191</sup>

The verb ἐπισκηνώω is a *hapax legomena* but its parent verb, σκηνώω is used throughout Scripture of God "tabernacling" with his people. Jesus is the Word that "became flesh and dwelt (σκηνώω) among us" (John 1:14). In eternity God will "spread His tabernacle" (σκηνώσει; Rev 7:15; NASB) over his people because "the tabernacle (ἡ σκηνὴ) of God is among men, and He will dwell (σκηνώσει) among them" (Rev 21:3; NASB). God afflicted Paul with suffering in order to make him a weak vessel so that Jesus' grace and power could tabernacle with him.

The last verse summarizes the passage with a triumphant aphorism for the redeemed: "for when I am weak, then I am strong." Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel, the lamenting psalmists, and Jesus all illustrate that God is not "frustrated by human

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<sup>191</sup>Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians* (Leicester, England: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 665.

weaknesses but attracted to it.”<sup>192</sup> Paul’s universal truth for Christ-followers is hollow if it is separated from the cross of Christ who “was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God” (2 Cor 13:3). Paul’s seemingly paradoxical statement “is *not* saying that weakness *is* power. Rather, weakness becomes the place or the occasion for Christ to manifest his power, just as the weakness of the cross was the occasion for God to manifest his power in Christ.”<sup>193</sup> The axiom Paul penned at the end of this passage is a universal truth for all vice-regents, God designs suffering so that his people would realize their weakness in order to become spiritually strong, that they would decrease and he would increase.

### **Suffering Engenders Relational Knowledge of Christ (Phil 3:8-11)**

Knowing Christ is the central thrust of the complicated sentence comprising Philippians 3:8-11. Paul repudiated all his gains in Judaism “because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” Israel knew God through his self-revelations expressed in specific acts of redemption (Exod 10:2). Knowing God, then, “means to enter into the personal relationship which he himself makes possible.”<sup>194</sup> Knowing God meant fidelity to covenant obligations (Jer 22:16) and, consequently, those who abandoned the covenant did not know him (Hos 4:1-2). Christ-followers under the New Covenant “shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest” (Jer 31:34).

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<sup>192</sup>Dane Ortlund, “‘Power Is Made Perfect in Weakness’ (2 Cor. 12:9): A Biblical Theology of Strength through Weakness,” *Presbyterion* 36, no. 2 (September 2010): 107.

<sup>193</sup>Matera, *2 Corinthians*, 286.

<sup>194</sup>*NIDNTT*, s.v. “Knowledge, Experience, Ignorance,” by E. Schutz for the quote and the general information in this paragraph.



Knowing Christ is a “knowledge that has to do with personal experience and intimate relationship”<sup>195</sup> which expresses itself in devotion to him (1 John 2:4). Eternal life is not defined by duration of existence but by knowing God and Christ (John 17:3). The sentence concludes with final purpose clause (Phil 3:10-11) which commentators generally recognize as a chiasm:<sup>196</sup>

That I may know him, that is  
A: the power of his resurrection  
B: and may share his sufferings  
B': becoming like him in his death  
A': that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead

This parallelism “suggests that the resurrection of Christ and the sufferings of Christ are integrally bound together.”<sup>197</sup> Knowing Christ for spiritual maturity means to know both the power of his resurrection and to know his sufferings.

**“The power of his resurrection” (A).** The resurrection was a vivid demonstration of divine power (Rom 1:4; Eph 1:19-20).<sup>198</sup> Paul first encountered the

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<sup>195</sup>Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 318.

<sup>196</sup>See, for example, *ibid.*, 329; L. Gregory Bloomquist, *The Function of Suffering in Philippians* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1993), 180; G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2009), 243; Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Bletchley, England: The Paternoster Press, 1991), 407–8 argues against the parallelism of these verses.

The ESV's translation of this verse is technically correct: “that I may know him and (καὶ) the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.” This translation gives the impression that Paul is desiring three separate objects: knowing Christ, the power of his resurrection, and sharing in his sufferings. Many commentators, however, view the καὶ as epexegetic, that is Paul is explaining in the following clauses what it means to know Christ. Thus, the translation would be, “so that I may know him, that is, this power of his resurrection and sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.” See, for example, Fee, *Philippians*, 327–28; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1946), 840; O'Brien, *Philippians*, 402–03.

<sup>197</sup>Bloomquist, *The Function of Suffering in Philippians*, 180.

<sup>198</sup>Everything associated with Christ breathes of power. He demonstrated divine power in his

power of the risen Christ at his conversion around A. D. 34 (Acts 9:1-18). He wrote Philippians around A. D. 60-62 and although in the intervening years Paul had personally experienced the power of the resurrection he still “longs for an ever-increasing supply of the power that proceeds from the risen and exalted Savior.”<sup>199</sup>

The power that breathed life back into Jesus’ dead body is the same power that breathes life into the dead, cold soul that was enamored with the chaos (Rom 4:3-5; Eph 2:1-10). The power of the resurrection in God’s vice-regents subdues the chaos as the powerful Holy Spirit (Eph 1:19-10; 3:20-21) continues to decrease the heart’s attraction to sin and produce Christlike Kingdom fruit. Vice-regents know that they know Christ with realized holiness (Rom 4:6- 14; Gal 5:17-25). Knowing the power of the resurrection, knowing Christ, will not be accomplished painlessly.

**“And may share his sufferings” (B).** The key word in this phrase is “*his* sufferings,” persecution-sufferings due to union with Christ. The resurrection of Christ was eschatological power irrupting into the present age which began the process of dismantling chaos. The demise of the chaos is sure but it will not go away peaceably. Christ’s vice-regents are not of the chaos and, like Jesus, will be persecuted at some level.<sup>200</sup> Spiritual maturity develops by knowing the power of the resurrection, a

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earthly life (Luke 5:17; Acts 10:38). The cross was an act of divine power (1 Cor 1:18). The gospel is his powerful message (Rom 1:16). The resurrected Christ now sits “at the right hand of Power” (Mark 14:62), dispenses his power to his people (2 Cor 12:9; 2 Pet 1:16) through the indwelling ministry of the powerful Holy Spirit (Mic 3:8; Acts 1:8). Jesus will return as the powerful Lord to crush all his enemies (Rev 12:10).

<sup>199</sup>Hendriksen, *Philippians*, 168. See 1 Cor 2:4; 2 Cor 4:7; 6:7; 12:9; 13:4; Eph 3:7.

<sup>200</sup>Jesus allowed the chaos to kill him and he promises that his followers may expect the same treatment in some form and degree in order to know him so that “any genuine knowing of Christ means participation in his suffering, since only in such sufferings does one truly know Christ” (Fee, *Philippians*, 332). Christ-followers are promised suffering due to their union with Christ in Matt 10:22; John 17:14; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim 3:12; 1 Pet 4:12-13.

knowledge that is achieved through persecution-sufferings.

“Sufferings” is plural which suggests a wide-range of persecution-sufferings are possible such as those Jesus experienced: threats of death (Luke 4:29), pervasive opposition (Luke 26:3-4), vicious personal attacks (Mark 3:22), ridicule by family members (John 7:3-5), abandonment by friends (Matt 26:56), betrayal (John 18:15), anguish of heart (John 12:27), mocking and ridicule (Mark 15:20), slander (Matt 26:61-62), hatred (John 15:18), grief over unbelief (Mark 3:5), or death. Persecution-sufferings are cross-sufferings, which is following Christ in self-denial. All these sufferings are designed by God so that his children would rely on the resurrection power of Christ so that they will know him and, thus, grow and develop in their spiritual maturity.

**“Becoming like him in his death” (B’).** The prototypical nature of Christ’s death, not his type of death (martyrdom/ crucifixion), is in view. Jesus did not grasp his heavenly privileges but took on the form of a servant and being found like a man willfully submitted himself to death (Phil 2:7-11). Paul tells his story in like terms: he did not grasp his earthly privileges for he wanted to be found in Christ so that he willingly submits himself to a cross-suffering death of self (Phil 3:1-11).<sup>201</sup> This path is the same for all his eternity bound vice-regents as they are conformed to Christ’s death; refusing to grasp the gains the chaos promises; being found in Christ by being united with him; taking up the cross and dying to self.

Michael Gorman coined the term “cruciformity” to mean “conformity to the

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<sup>201</sup>See Fee, *Philippians*, 333-34, which makes explicit the verbal and thematic ties between the Christ hymn (Phil 2:6-11) and Paul’s description of himself (Phil 3:1-11).

crucified Christ.”<sup>202</sup> Jesus was “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa 53:3), which suggested his redemptive sufferings were constant companions. Consequently, Christ-followers from the moment of rebirth become men and women of sorrows, subjected to cross-suffering so that the “Christian life is cruciform in character; God’s people, even as they live presently through the power made available through Christ’s resurrection, are as their Lord forever marked by the cross.”<sup>203</sup> The entirety of the Christian life is becoming like the crucified Savior in order to know him, which, in turn, engenders spiritual maturity. Cruciformity, however, is not the *telos* of the Christian life, the *telos* is the redemption of the body in resurrection.

**“That by any means<sup>204</sup> I may attain the resurrection from the dead” (A’).**

This chiasm began by drawing attention Christ’s resurrection power to endure gospel-sufferings and ends with the final resurrection to give eternal perspective to temporal persecution-sufferings. The final resurrection completes the parallel Paul was drawing between Christ and himself (and, thus, all Christ-followers): Jesus died and was raised in glory; Paul died and will be raised to glory where Christ will be known more fully.

The underlying theme in every element of the chiasm is that suffering is

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<sup>202</sup>Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul’s Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 4.

<sup>203</sup>Fee, *Philippians*, 334–35. Ahern posits a similar idea. The death “consisted not merely in momentary death with Christ, but in the fact that it inaugurated a lifelong *state of death*, through the power of the Spirit, to the world, to the flesh, and to sin” (Barnabas Mary Ahern, “The Fellowship of His Sufferings (Phil 3,10),” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 22, no. 1 [January 1960]: 31).

<sup>204</sup>The phrase εἴ πως καταστήσω more literally is “if I may attain,” which implies some doubt on Paul’s part of his attaining this final resurrection. Paul expressed uncertain confidence in the final resurrection (Rom 6:5; 1 Cor 15:42-44) so the phrase cannot mean he has doubts that it will occur. Perhaps the best way to interpret the phrase is his “*deep humility* and commendable distrust *in self*” (Hendriksen, *Philippians*, 170; italics in original). See Fee, *Philippians*, 336, and Andrew C. Perriman, “The Pattern of Christ’s Sufferings: Colossians 1:24 and Philippians 3:10-11,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 42, no. 1 (May 1991): 70, for alternative interpretations of the phrase.

designed by God to instill in his people the spiritual blessing of knowing Christ.<sup>205</sup> No follower of Christ will go through this life without receiving some battle scars for the faith. God is not calling his children to be spiritual masochists but simply stating that suffering is inevitable for his people, designed by God to engender the spiritual fruit of knowing Christ Jesus the Lord.

### **Suffering Engenders Righteousness (Heb 12:4-11)**

Hebrews 12 begins with the challenge to put off “[the] sin (τὴν ἁμαρτίαν) which clings so closely.” The definite article with “sin” is probably generic, not referring to a particular sin but sin in general, sin that is “always acting, always conceiving, always seducing and tempting.”<sup>206</sup> Sin is the controlling idea that segues into divine discipline-suffering (Heb 12:4-12).

**The necessity of discipline-suffering (Heb 12:4-8).** The Father’s discipline-suffering is necessary because his children are in a “struggle against [the] sin (τὴν ἁμαρτίαν),” the ever-present desire for sin to consume them. Divine discipline is cast within a loving familial relationship as evidenced by the abundant family-oriented language in this passage: father (3 times), son (6 times), children (Heb 12:8), “the one he loves” (Heb 12:6), and discipline (9 times). The means of discipline are unspecified but most commentators see suffering as one of the Father’s key disciplinary tools which may

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<sup>205</sup>Bloomquist offers, “Paul insists that there is no resurrection transformation without suffering” (Bloomquist, *The Function of Suffering in Philippians*, 181).

<sup>206</sup>John Owen, *Mortification of Sin in Believers*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 6 (1656; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 11. The meaning of the definite article is discussed in O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 452, and William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, WBC, vol. 47B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 409.

include “war, plague, illness, rebuke, ill-defined and rather personal ‘thorns,’ bereavement, loss of status, personal opposition, and much else beside”<sup>207</sup> in order to decrease sinful self-rule in his children.

“Discipline” is a familial term that primarily points to “the act of providing guidance for responsible living, upbringing, training, instruction.”<sup>208</sup> Discipline-suffering may be either corrective (Ps 51:1; 1 Cor 11:32) or preventative (2 Cor 12:7-8). Discipline was also preparatory as an earthly father,

would spend much care and patience on the upbringing of a trueborn son whom he hoped to make a worthy heir; and at the time such a son might have to undergo much more irksome discipline than an illegitimate child for whom no future of honor and responsibility was envisaged, and who therefore might be left more or less to please himself.<sup>209</sup>

The Father adopts the justified into his family,<sup>210</sup> which makes them heirs to all the Father’s filial blessings (Rom 8:32). God’s Fatherly discipline is one of his familial blessings in order to make his vice-regents worthy heirs of his Kingdom (Gal 4:7).

The Father disciplines the ones he loves (Heb 12:6) for no dichotomy exists between discipline and love (Prov 23:13) and his lack of discipline would be an indicator of his hatred (Prov 13:24; 29:15). The Father does not discipline “illegitimate children”

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<sup>207</sup>D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 65.

<sup>208</sup>*BADG*, s.v. “παιδεία.” John MacArthur offers that discipline “[signifies] whatever parents and teachers do to train, correct, cultivate, and educate children in order to help them develop and mature as they ought” (John MacArthur, *Hebrews, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* [Chicago Moody Publishers, 1983], 385).

<sup>209</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev., ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 342–43.

<sup>210</sup>Rom 8:14-17; Gal 4:4-7; Eph 1:5; 1 John 3:1-2.

for they are outside his familial blessings and the protection he affords to his children.<sup>211</sup> All of Adam's self-seeking race are naturally born as illegitimate children and are under divine wrath. The Father, out of his gracious love, adopts his elect to be part of his family, calls them "children of God" (John 1:10; 1 John 3:2), gives them all the privileges of sonship (1 Pet 1:3-9), which includes his loving discipline. Divine discipline for sin, while it may be trying, is actually a cause for joyful celebration since it verifies that one is actually a member of the family of God.<sup>212</sup> His children take comfort that the Father will not discipline beyond what they are able to endure (1 Cor 10:13).

**The purpose of discipline-suffering (Heb 12:9-11).** The author makes an analogy between earthly fathers and the divine Father. A loving earthly father disciplines his children and the children who respond respect him for his loving care. The verb "respect" (ἐντραπήσονται; Heb 12:9) is passive with a middle sense and has the idea "to turn oneself toward."<sup>213</sup> Children with pliable hearts turn themselves to their parents and submit to parental discipline. Rebellious, foolish children chafe under discipline and destroy the family (Prov 28:24), curse their parents (Prov 30:11), and mock them (Prov 30:17).

The author uses a "lesser to the greater" argument: since a wise child respectfully submits to his or her earthly father's discipline then "shall we not much more

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<sup>211</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 423.

<sup>212</sup>*Ibid.*, 420.

<sup>213</sup>Barbara Friberg, Timothy Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), s.v. "ἐντρέπω."

be subject to the Father of spirits and live?”<sup>214</sup> “Subject” has the connotation of “voluntary submission” where the child of God willingly subsumes his or her will to that of the Father.<sup>215</sup> Calling him “the Father of spirits” (Num 16:22; 17:16) indicates his transcendence and sovereignty, which highlights all the more reason to submit to his discipline-suffering. The Father afflicts his children with discipline-suffering in order to instill in them the blessing of spiritual life (John 10:10).

Earthly fathers “disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them.” An earthly father’s discipline is only for a few short years and even the best of fathers are sometimes fallible, inconsistent, and failures in their discipline. The heavenly Father, however, begins his discipline at conversion and continues with it for the remainder of his child’s life. His discipline is perfectly dispensed for the Father is perfect in his wisdom and goodness. Divine discipline-suffering, then, is always infallible in every respect and is always “motivated by an intrinsic concern for our welfare”<sup>216</sup> so that he always “disciplines us for our good.”

The “good” that the Father’s discipline-suffering instills in his children is sanctification, “that we may share his holiness.” “Share” was used to describe the fellowship of shared food (Acts 2:46; 27:33, 34) and the blessing God shares to give rain for crops (Heb 6:7). Holiness is an essential quality of God (Lev 20:26; Isa 6:3; Rev 4:8) so that the divinely adopted are “a holy nation” (1 Pet 2:9) and his great concern for his

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<sup>214</sup>William Lane points out that the assertion about earthly fathers followed by a rhetorical question demanding a affirmative answer “[makes] a strong impact upon the emotions and the imagination” (Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 423).

<sup>215</sup>*TDNT*, s.v. “τάσσω,” by Gerhard Delling,

<sup>216</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 424.



children is for them to “be holy, for I am holy” (Lev 11:44, Eph 1:4; Col 1:22). His children are his vice-regents who are his heirs and he loving subjects them to his discipline-suffering so that they would be prepared vessels to share the blessing of his holiness for “apart from disciplinary sufferings it is not possible to share in it at all.”<sup>217</sup>

The last verse of this section serves as a summary statement. The lamenting psalmists could attest to the truthfulness that “for the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant.” “All” is comprehensive for from a human perspective every aspect of the Father’s discipline-suffering superficially appears destructive rather than constructive. Suffering, however, plows up and cultivates the soil of the heart so that it “yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (if a hendiadys, so ESV) or “a harvest of righteousness and peace” (if not a hendiadys, so NIV). Isaiah proclaimed, “And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever” (Isa 32:17). The “fruit of righteousness” is holiness, trust, and peace as explained well by F. F. Bruce, “The person who accepts discipline at the hand of God as something designed by his heavenly Father for his good will cease to feel resentful and rebellious; he has ‘calmed and quieted’ his soul, which thus provides fertile soil for the cultivation of a righteous life, responsive to the will of God.”<sup>218</sup>

Proverbs 22:15 memorably stated, “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline will remove it far from him.” The chaos-foolishness of self-rule still clings to the heart of the redeemed child of God. The perfect heavenly Father,

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<sup>217</sup>O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 468. This conclusion is stated by Lane as well: “The clear implication is that it is impossible to share in God’s holiness apart from the correction administered through disciplinary sufferings” (Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 425).

<sup>218</sup>Bruce, *Hebrews*, 346.

then, exercises his disciplinary rod of suffering to increase his rule in his children because “suffering is not in spite of sonship but because of it.”<sup>219</sup> The Father’s disciplinary rod of suffering is applied in order to engender the spiritual fruits of holiness, righteousness, peace, and trust. The Father’s discipline is an improving ministry for at some level it attacks and mortifies “[the] sin which clings so closely.” As the naturally resistant heart yields and discipline-suffering is embraced, trust in the Father’s good sovereignty, holiness, and righteousness is deepened within the soul, spiritual fruits that engender spiritual maturity in Christ.

### **Suffering Engenders Spiritual Wholeness (Jas 1:2-3, 12)**

James wrote his letter “to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion” (Jas 1:1), former Jews who became Christians but who were now scattered in Gentile lands because of persecution (Acts 8:1; 11:19). The life of a religious refugee is not easy and, from the contents of James, these dispersed Christians faced “trials of various kinds” (Jas 1:2) such as illness (Jas 5:11, 14), injustice (Jas 2:6; 5:6); slander (Jas 3:9-10; 4:11; 5:9), and prejudice (Jas 2:2-4).

**Suffering and joy (Jas 1:2).** James boldly pronounced into this tumultuous milieu of hardship, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds” (Jas 1:2). The imperative “consider” is a verb of thought that connotes “to think, to regard as.”<sup>220</sup> James is commanding these Christ-followers how they ought to think about and

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<sup>219</sup> Peter Rhea Jones, “A Superior Life: Hebrews 12:3-13:25,” *Review & Expositor* 82, no. 3 (Summer 1985): 391.

<sup>220</sup> *TDNT*, s.v. “ηγέομαι,” by Friedrich Büchsel.

evaluate their trials so to have a settled attitude toward them.<sup>221</sup> The attitude they are to have concerning their trials is “all joy.” This phrase,

suggests intensity (complete and unalloyed joy) rather than exclusivity (nothing but joy). . . . James does not, then, suggest Christians facing trials will have no response other than joy, as if we were commanded never to be saddened by difficulties. His point, rather, is that trials should be an occasion for genuine rejoicing.<sup>222</sup>

The joy is not for the specific hardship but for the spiritually maturing blessings the hardship will yield. This injunction would probably shock the readers for “Mediterranean antiquity was marked by a profound pessimism concerning life”<sup>223</sup> so that “joy is rarely mentioned, except as an illusion.”<sup>224</sup> In Christ joy is not an illusion but reality, even during the trials of life.

The verb translated “meet” was used two other times in the NT:<sup>225</sup> in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the victim met the robbers on the road who then beat him (Luke 10:30); Paul’s ship met a reef and subsequently broke up (Acts 27:21). Whatever was met was sudden and unexpected, and resulted in difficult circumstances. The contents of James indicates that a trial may be any hardship or suffering and all are to be occasions for joy.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>221</sup>Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 49.

<sup>222</sup>Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Leicester, England: Apollos, 2000), 53; Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 48.

<sup>223</sup>L Gregory Bloomquist, “Subverted by Joy: Suffering and Joy in Paul’s Letter to the Philippians,” *Interpretation* 61, no. 3 (July 2007): 271.

<sup>224</sup>*Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>225</sup>The verb was used in Ruth 2:3; 2 Sam 1:6; Prov 11:5; Dan 2:9 in the LXX.

<sup>226</sup>The noun *πειρασμός* could be translated either “temptation” (Matt 6:13) or “trials” (Rev 3:10). “Trials” would be the better translation since it is used parallel with “testing” (Jas 1:3) and refers to all external hardships a Christ-follower may experience. James has several affinities to the Sermon on the

Biblical joy is “a deep-seated longing for something that is supremely desirable.”<sup>227</sup> Joy is not based on the life-situation of the moment. Joy is not a denial of the seriousness of the tragic circumstances. Joy is not a self-manufactured sense of peace. Joy is not the absence of emotional anguish. Joy is a gift from God that is possible only through the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22). Jesus in Gethsemane and on the cross exemplified the meaning of joy. Jesus met unexpected and unwelcomed intruders in Gethsemane that resulted in extreme psychological, emotional, and spiritual stresses so intense his body shuddered with recoiling horror at the prospect of the cross. Jesus, however, “for the joy that was set before him endured the cross” (Heb 12:2). The cross was supremely desirable for Jesus not because of the infinite pain he would endure but for the joyful results it would produce—the destruction of the chaos, heirs for his Kingdom, and his own exultation (Phil 2:9-11). The redeemed, likewise, may consider trials as occasions of joy because of the maturing spiritual benefits suffering increases in the soul.

**Suffering and spiritual maturity (Jas 1:3-4, 12).** James detailed three blessings and benefits which attend the various kinds of trial-suffering the child of God encounters. The first is to produce steadfastness of faith, “for you know (γινώσκοντες) that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.” The verb γινώσκω (also Phil 3:10) is experiential knowledge with “always the implication of grasping the full reality and

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Mount and the trials/persecutions Jesus mentions are all external. See Virgil V. Porter Jr., “The Sermon on the Mount in the Book of James. Part 1,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162 [September 2005]: 470–82).

<sup>227</sup>David M. Howard, Jr., “‘Surprised by Joy’: Joy in the Christian Life and in Christian Scholarship,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 1 (March 2004): 5.

nature of the object under consideration.”<sup>228</sup> This knowledge cannot be gained by academic study but only through the school of trials. “Testing” was a numismatic word referring to testing the genuineness of coinage or metals.<sup>229</sup> The faith tested is the subjective faith of the person, the saving faith he or she professes to have in Christ. The Lord tests the genuineness of his people’s faith with suffering in order to produce “steadfastness” (ὑπομονήν).<sup>230</sup> “Steadfastness” (“endurance” [Rom 5:3]; “patience” [Rom 8:25]) was examined above. The term signifies a tenacious “persistent determination”<sup>231</sup> of fidelity to Christ in the face of trial-suffering. Steadfastness is a gift granted by God to his covenant people (Rom 15:5).

A second purpose for trials is to produce Christlike character, “and (δὲ) let steadfastness have (ἔχέτω) its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” The conjunction δὲ at the beginning of the verse is probably an adversative to “[warn] that endurance, however dogged and determined, should not lead to obstinacy or fanatical stubbornness.”<sup>232</sup> The verb ἔχω (translated “let have”) is a present, active, imperative which indicates the Christ-follower is to always, continuously, allow steadfastness produce its “full effect.” Steadfastness is not the goal but the necessary condition in order to instill the “full effect” of what God intends in trial-suffering: “that you may be perfect (τέλειοι) and complete (όλόκληρον).”

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<sup>228</sup>*NIDNT*, s.v. “Tempt, Test, Approve,” by H. Haarbeck.

<sup>229</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>230</sup>God is seen testing his people in Gen 22:1; Exod 15:25; 16:4; 20:20; Judg 2:22; 3:1; 2 Chr 32:31; Pss 11:4, 5; 26:2; 105:19; Prov 17:3; Eccl 3:18; Jer 17:10; 20:12; Zech 13:9. Ps 26:2 was an invitation for the Lord to test.

<sup>231</sup>Ralph P. Martin, *James*, WBC, vol. 48 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), 16.

<sup>232</sup>*Ibid.*

The noun τέλειος was used in the OT to refer to those who were blameless, but not perfect, before God, characterized by holiness and obedience.<sup>233</sup> In the NT, τέλος was oftentimes used in this sense of moral blamelessness, spiritual completeness and maturity.<sup>234</sup> Τέλειος is used synonymously with ὀλόκληρος (“complete”), which probably made the phrase “perfect and complete” a hendiadys, “wholly complete,” suggesting “perfection is not just a maturing of character, but a rounding out as more and more ‘parts’ of the righteous character are added.”<sup>235</sup> The last phrase “lacking in nothing” expands the idea to mean that the divine design for trial-suffering is to engender a full-ordered spiritual maturity in the lives of his people.<sup>236</sup>

The previous verses identify the temporal purposes of trial-suffering, which, in turn, prepares his vice-regents for the third purpose of trials, God’s eschatological blessing: “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast (ὑπομένει, also in Jas 1:3) under trial, for when he has stood the test (δόκιμος, also in Jas 1:33) he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him” (Jas 1:12). “The crown” was the wreath of victory in an athletic competition, which was the honor given to the one who overcame the obstacles and won.<sup>237</sup> The “crown of life” for the redeemed is the honor,

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<sup>233</sup>See 2 Sam 22:26; 1 Kgs 8:61; 15:14; Song 5:2; 6:9. James used derivatives of τέλος four other times (Jas 1:17, 25; 2:22; 3:2).

<sup>234</sup>Matt 5:48; 19:21; Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 2:6; 13:10; 14:20; Eph 4:13; Phil 3:15; Col 1:28; 4:12; Heb 5:14; 9:11; 1 John 4:18.

<sup>235</sup>Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 70.

<sup>236</sup>Douglas Moo, however, maintains that “the rendering [of τέλειος as] ‘mature’ does not quite capture the idea” (Moo, *James*, 56.). He continues, “James, we must remember, is presenting this as the ultimate goal of faith’s testing; he is not claiming that believers will attain to the goal. But we should not ‘lower the bar’ on the expectation James sets for us. Nothing less than complete moral integrity will ultimately satisfy the God who is himself holy and righteous, completely set apart from sin” (ibid.).

<sup>237</sup>Moo, *James*, 70. The word was used this way in 1 Cor 9:25—“Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath (στέφανον), but we an imperishable.”

the reward, the blessing of life—the abundant, soul-satisfying, thirst-quenching, life that is found only in Christ (John 10:10). God is at the center of trial-sufferings—he afflicts his covenant people with trials, instills in them steadfast endurance, makes them spiritually whole, then eternally blesses them for the spiritual maturity he engenders in them through trials.<sup>238</sup>

In summary, the six NT passages examined in this section clearly indicate that suffering is a tool in God’s hands to increase his rule by engendering spiritual maturity in his children. Suffering rouses the soul to endurance, proven character, and hope. God designs suffering to conform his adopted to the image of Christ. Thorn-suffering foments spiritual strength, persecution-suffering the knowledge of Christ, discipline-suffering holiness and righteousness, and trial-suffering develops spiritual wholeness. Sinaitic Covenant saints rarely stated any positive benefits in suffering because it was interpreted as God’s punishment for sin. New Covenant saints rarely express suffering in negative terms but explain it as a positive, albeit painful, benefit for the self is decreasing, Christ is increasing, and spiritual maturity is engendered in the Christ-follower.

### **Summary: Suffering Engenders Spiritual Maturity**

The argument of this chapter is that one divine design for suffering is for God to increase his rule by engendering spiritual maturity in his covenant people. The first step to verify this premise was to examine the spiritual maturity gained through suffering in the lamenting psalmists. Their suffering decreased their inclination to self-rule (chap.

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<sup>238</sup>Revelation highlights the “overcomers,” those who remain loyal to Christ, who cling to Christ despite the sorrow, sufferings, hardships, or persecutions which are faced in this life. Overcomers receive in this life and in eternity: life (Rev 2:7); security (Rev 2:11); fullness (Rev 2:17); authority (Rev 2:26); purity (Rev 3:5); strength (Rev 3:12); honor (Rev 3:21); and intimacy with God (Rev 21:7).

2), which was a necessary condition for the same suffering to increase God's rule in their lives so that he could engender a deepening spiritual maturity in them. The discussion of the ILPs gave ample evidence that suffering generated in them a singular desire to seek God, a far greater knowledge of God both intellectually and experientially, confession of sin, dependence on God, death to self, a more profound obedience to him, prayer, praises, and a deep-seated confident hope in the divine promises, all soul-nurturing blessings induced by suffering. The psalmist wrote in a rare OT appreciation for suffering:

It is good for me that I was afflicted,  
that I might learn your statutes (Ps 119:71).

The lamenting psalmists did not connect affliction with goodness but they realized its truth as their souls blossomed with spiritual blessings that matured their souls before God. The lamenters, as suggested in chapter 2, in the grand scope of redemptive history served as types of the Suffering Messiah who would one day appear and give a full-orbed meaning to suffering.

The lamenting psalmists learned obedience through suffering as did Jesus. His formative years were unremarkable in the sense that he was born, grew, developed, and matured like any other Jewish boy of his day. These years were also remarkable in that by the time he was twelve-year old Jesus knew he was unique Son of God in human form. The sufferings he experienced prior to beginning his public ministry are unknown but what is known is that his sufferings during this time and throughout the course of his earthly life caused him to learn the obedience required of him as Messiah.

Gethsemane was prelude to the cross and here Jesus endured a burden "no



heart of man can conceive.”<sup>239</sup> Jesus’ obedience to the will of his Father shined brightly in Gethsemane. His soul writhed in unthinkable agony as he contemplated his Father’s abandonment and receiving the full crushing weight of his infinite wrath against sin. The spiritual depths which suffering engendered in Jesus was humbly expressed when he prayed “not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42) and was boldly displayed as he joyfully took up his cross, denied himself, and followed the will of his Father.

Jesus was the firstfruits (1 Cor 15:23), meaning that he was the first of a company who would populate his Kingdom. Jesus told his followers, “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master” (Matt 10:24). Since suffering was necessary for the Master to learn to do God’s will, then his followers must also endure many sufferings within the Kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). Suffering shaped Jesus’ soul so that through the power of the Holy Spirit he embraced prayer, obedience, joy, endurance, proven character, hope, holiness, righteousness, spiritual wholeness, and other Kingdom fruits *as a result of* and *during* his sufferings. Suffering shapes the souls of his followers and the same powerful Holy Spirit indwells the justified child of God so that suffering may engender these same fruits for an ever-deepening spiritual maturity. As spiritual maturity is developed, self-rule decreases and God’s rule increases.

The thesis of this dissertation is that the divine design for suffering in Christ-followers is to decrease self-rule through mortification, increase God’s rule through engendering spiritual maturity, with both of these functions serving the ultimate purpose of God glorifying himself in the individual lives of his covenant people. The first two

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<sup>239</sup>J. C. Ryle, *Matthew*, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels (1856; repr., Cambridge: James Clark & Company, 1974), 362.

points, examined in chapters 2-3, focus on the benefits suffering develops in the child of God. Eric Johnson correctly maintains that “the central, underlying thrust of the whole Bible is an articulation of the glory of the triune God. . . . When the Bible is read this way, its theocentric agenda is understood to be a project that simultaneously (though secondarily) promotes human well-being.”<sup>240</sup> The proximate designs of suffering in covenant people are for God to graciously mortify self-rule and vivify spiritual maturity. The ultimate purpose of suffering, however, is the glory of God, the topic of the next chapter.

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<sup>240</sup>Eric L. Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 28.

## CHAPTER 4

### SUFFERING FOR THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE OF GOD GLORIFYING HIMSELF

The previous two chapters focused on the human element of suffering. Specifically, chapter 1 concentrated on the destructive nature of suffering, the mortification of self-rule; chapter 2 on the constructive nature of suffering, the engendering of spiritual maturity. These ideas are not mutually exclusive but simultaneously interact with one another in a complex, dynamic process of soul change. These human benefits, however, do not constitute the ultimate divine goal of suffering. God works and ordains all events in creation through his providential care for the supreme purpose of glorifying himself.<sup>1</sup> The crowing divine design of suffering, then, must be for God to bring himself glory.

The thesis of this dissertation is that the divine design for suffering in Christ-followers is to decrease self-rule through mortification, increase God's rule through engendering spiritual maturity, with both of these functions serving the ultimate purpose of God glorifying himself in the individual lives of his covenant people. This chapter will attempt to justify the third element of the argument, that the ultimate divine design for suffering in his covenant people is to glorify himself. Pain, in and of itself, is not the glorifying aspect of suffering. Suffering acts as a soul-changing catharsis that results in

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<sup>1</sup>Pss 8:1; 104:31; 148:3; Prov 16:4; Isa 6:3; Rom 11:36; Col 1:16; Heb 2:10.

the mortification of self rule and engendering of spiritual maturity, and God is glorified by the soul change that occurs as a result of the suffering. C. H. Spurgeon made this point as he challenged his congregation:

We cannot show our courage unless we have difficulties and troubles. A man cannot become a veteran soldier if he never goes to battle. No man can get his sea legs if he lives always on land. Rejoice, therefore, in your tribulations, because they give you opportunities of exhibiting a believing confidence, and thereby glorifying the name of the Most High.<sup>2</sup>

Courage, confidence, mortification, prayer, joy, and all the other spiritual qualities suffering induces are glorifying to God.

I will argue in this chapter's five sections that suffering is designed by God to bring him glory. The first defines "glory" and how God glorifies himself through his self-revealing name and works (Exod 33:18-34:7). The second portion of the chapter examines God's self-glorifying name and works he revealed in Exodus as used by the lamenting psalmists. They proclaimed and/or appealed to each of these divinely glorifying self-disclosures, which, in turn, glorified Yahweh. The ultimate expression of suffering glorifying God through his divine works were realized in Jesus Christ (John 1:14). The third part will focus on John's use of ὑψόω ("to lift up, to exalt") in his gospel to show that Jesus' cross-sufferings were ultimately for the glory of the Father and the Son. Jesus suffered and so will his followers, which is the topic of the fourth section. The various sufferings a Christ-follower may experience are examined, each with the intent of showing how the suffering-wrought soul change glorifies God. The confident hope of the

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<sup>2</sup>C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 38 (Pasadena, CA: Pilgrim Publications, n.d.), 2. Spurgeon suffered from many physical, emotional, and spiritual ailments. For a good overview see Peter J. Morden, "C. H. Spurgeon and Suffering," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 35, no. 4 (October 2011): 306–25.

redeemed is that suffering will one day cease. The last section considers how God and Christ are glorified with the end of suffering.

### The Vocabulary and Means of God's Glory

The primary word used in the OT for “glory” (כְּבוֹד) means “to be heavy or weighty.” This verb was used literally to describe heavy objects (1 Sam 4:18; 2 Sam 14:26) and metaphorically to those whose hearts were heavy with spiritual dullness (Exod 7:14; Isa 6:10).<sup>3</sup> Applied to people, כְּבוֹד portrays “a ‘weighty’ person in society, someone who is honorable, impressive, worthy of respect.”<sup>4</sup> In this light, כְּבוֹד was used as a “technical term for God’s manifest presence with his people”<sup>5</sup> for he is the self-existent, sufficient, majestic, awesome God who is “a person of great and weighty reputation.”<sup>6</sup> In the LXX, כְּבוֹד was translated with δόξα, which in secular Greek usage referred to a person’s opinion.<sup>7</sup> The LXX translators “initiated a process of substantial semantic change”<sup>8</sup> to give δόξα the meaning of God’s “luminous manifestation of his person, his glorious revelation of himself.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. “כְּבוֹד,” by John N. Oswalt

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.* See, for example, Num 22:15; 1 Chr 29:12.

<sup>5</sup>*NIDOTTE*, s.v. “כְּבוֹד,” by John E. Hartley.

<sup>6</sup>Tremper Longman III, “The Glory of God in the Old Testament,” in *The Glory of God*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, Theology in Community (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 77. The OT has a number of synonyms that relate to the glory of God. The words תְּפִאָּרָה (“beauty”), הוֹד (“splendor”), הוֹד (“majesty”), and יְפָי (“beauty”) are all used to refer to the majestic splendor of God’s glory. See, for example, Pss 8:1; 96:3, 6; 145:5; Isa 28:5.

<sup>7</sup>*TDNT*, s.v. “δοκέω,” by Gerhard Kittel.

<sup>8</sup>Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., “The Glory of God in Paul’s Epistles,” in *The Glory of God*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, Theology in Community (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 131.

<sup>9</sup>*NIDNTT*, s.v. “Glory, Honour,” by W. Bauder and H. G. Link. Thus, δόξα was “a term that was initially subjective (‘opinion’) is thus adapted to express something that is absolutely objective, the

The manifestation of his person is both transcendent and immanent. God's transcendent glory is his ontological and intrinsic glory full of splendor, might, power, and beauty that pervades his entire being. He is the "King of glory" (Ps 24:7) and "the God of glory" (Ps 29:3). Each member of the Godhead is equally glorious: the Father is "the Father of glory" (Eph 1:17); the Son is "the Lord of glory" (1 Cor 2:8); and the Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of glory" (1 Pet 4:14). God's transcendent glory, however, is not limited to his character but is "an aura, an environmental presence that no one can escape."<sup>10</sup> God's transcendent glory is "above earth and heaven" (Ps 148:13) yet his people pray for his glory to be "above all the earth" (Ps 57:5, 11). While "the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isa 6:3) as declared by the angelic host, God's people continue to pray for "the whole earth be filled with His glory" (Ps 72:19) while mindful of his promise that "all the earth will be filled with the glory of the LORD" (Num 14:21).

God's transcendent glory is expressed immanently in the world. The creation, for example, is an immanent statement his transcendent glory (Ps 8) as well as theophanies (Num 16:42).<sup>11</sup> The ultimate purpose for all of God's immanent actions is for his own glory (Prov 16:4; Rom 11:36; Col 1:16; Heb 2:10) so that he "communicates himself to the *understanding* of the creature, in giving him the *knowledge* of his glory."<sup>12</sup>

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reality of God" ("δοκέω" by Kittel).

<sup>10</sup>Richard R. Melick, Jr., "The Glory of God in the Synoptic Gospels, Acts, and the General Epistles," in *The Glory of God*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, Theology in Community (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 85.

<sup>11</sup>Theophanies were oftentimes a visible, overt, unmistakable, and luminous showing his Glory-Presence, "the reality of His presence manifested in power, splendor, and holiness as the supreme ruler of his people, who, unlike pagan gods, was a living Being, dwelling in the midst of His people" (R. K. Harrison, *Numbers*, Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary [Chicago: Moody Press, 1990], 212).

<sup>12</sup>Jonathan Edwards, "The End For Which God Created The World," in *God's Passion for His Glory*, John Piper (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 245–46, (italics in original).

Christopher Morgan asserts that knowledge of God’s glory is seen by God “displaying himself. As he puts his works on display he glorifies himself.”<sup>13</sup>

In Exodus 33:18-34:7 (esp. Exod 34:6-7), God clearly communicates his glorious works and puts them on display so that his covenant people will glorify him.<sup>14</sup> The historical context of the passage is Israel’s abysmal plunge into idolatrous worship of the golden calf so that God threatened to “consume them” (32:10). Moses interceded for the nation three times (Exod 32:11-13, 31-32; 33:12-18)<sup>15</sup> and in the last he pled with God “please show me your glory” (33:18). God responded, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The LORD’” (Exod 33:19). The divine response suggests that the essence of his glory is summed up in his name and his goodness.<sup>16</sup> His covenant people glorify him, then, by proclaiming his glorious name and by proclaiming/appealing to/experiencing his glorious goodness.

God once again summoned Moses to climb Mount Sinai (Exod 34:1). The Glory-cloud descended on the mountain and Yahweh “proclaimed the name of the Lord” (Exod 34:5) in “the longest and most complete description of the Lord’s character to be found in the Scriptures:”<sup>17</sup>

The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God

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<sup>13</sup>Christopher W. Morgan, “Toward a Theology of the Glory of God,” in *The Glory of God*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, Theology in Community (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 158.

<sup>14</sup>The same idea is seen in John 2:11; Rom 9:20-23; Eph 2:4-10.

<sup>15</sup>W. Ross Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 28 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 169–79.

<sup>16</sup>Michael P. Knowles, *The Unfolding Mystery of the Divine Name: The God of Sinai in Our Midst* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 37.

<sup>17</sup>Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 28:153.

merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation" (Exod 34:6-7).

"Proclaimed" (קָרָא) was used of people calling on the name of the Yahweh (Gen 4:26; 2 Kgs 5:11; Zeph 3:9) but here Yahweh is proclaiming his own name to "[stress] that human beings can call upon the name and celebrate the attributes of God because God has first chosen to declare them."<sup>18</sup> The name of a person in the OT carried with it the connotations of character, purpose, and reputation so that the revelation of the name of God "signifies the whole self-disclosure of God in his holiness and truth."<sup>19</sup> The repetition of the divine name signifies the real presence of God with his covenant people.<sup>20</sup>

The importance of Exodus 34:6-7 cannot be underestimated for in it God is self-describing that which glorifies him in moral, relational, and covenantal terms.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Knowles, *The Unfolding Mystery of the Divine Name*, 45.

<sup>19</sup> *TWOT*, s.v. "יְהוָה," by Walter C. Kaiser. For example, God changed Abram's name to "Abraham" ("father of many," Gen 17:5) to reflect his divine purpose. "Nabal" ("fool") was named due to his reputation (1 Sam 25:25). God has several titles in Scripture, each revealing something of his character. For example, he is El Shaddai (God Almighty; Gen 17:1), El Elyon (the Most High God;" 14:19), El Olam (the everlasting God;" Gen 16:3), Yahweh Yireh (the Lord will provide;" 22:14), Yahweh Nissi (the Lord is my Banner;" Exod 17:15), Yahweh Shalom (the Lord is Peace; Judg 6:24), Yahweh Sabaoth (the Lord of Hosts; 1 Sam 1:3), Yahweh Maccaddeshcem (the Lord your Sanctifier; Exod 31:13), Yahweh Ro'I (the Lord my Shepherd;" Ps 23:1), Yahweh Tsidkenu (the Lord our Righteousness;" Jer 23:6). Some resources that are helpful in explaining the name and various titles of God include Ken Hemphill, *The Names of God* (Nashville: B&H Books, 2001); Mary Foxwell Loeks, *The Glorious Names of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986); Nathan J. Stone, *Names of God* (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute, 1944); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Classic Sermons on the Names of God* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> John I. Durham, *Exodus*, vol. 3, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 453.

<sup>21</sup> Knowles, *The Unfolding Mystery of the Divine Name*, 45.



Terrence Fretheim describes this passage as “a virtual exegesis”<sup>22</sup> of the divine name. Hans Ucko goes so far to call this passage “a summary of the scriptures.”<sup>23</sup> Moses asked God to show his glory and Yahweh responded not by reiterating his transcendent attributes (holiness, omnipresence, sovereignty, etc.) but by proclaiming his glorious name, which is revealed in his glorious, immanent works of mercy, grace, patience, steadfast love, faithfulness, forgiveness, and justice. Yahweh’s self-glorifying description found in Exodus 34:6-7 “cuts across the Old Testament as a statement of basic Israelite convictions regarding its God. It thus constitutes a kind of ‘canon’ of the kind of God Israel’s God is, in the light of which God’s ongoing involvement in its history is to be interpreted.”<sup>24</sup> God revealed his glorious name and works not when Israel was at the apex of its spiritual height but in the nadir of its failure and, thus, unworthy of his mercy and grace.<sup>25</sup> This passage was oftentimes appealed to in similar circumstances in Israel’s subsequent history: rebellion against God (Num 14:18); national confession of sin (Neh 9:17); during a siege prompted by abject disobedience (Jer 32:18-19); a prophecy of certain doom (Nah 1:3); and calls for repentance (Joel 2:13).<sup>26</sup> Israel knew their God for he revealed himself to them. Their times of spiritual darkness glorified him as they

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<sup>22</sup> Terrence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 301.

<sup>23</sup> Hans Ucko, “Full of Grace and Truth: Bible Study on John 1:14-18,” *The Ecumenical Review* 56, no. 3 (July 2004): 345. He continues by stating that the words from this passage are written on the arks and curtains that shelter the Torah scrolls in synagogues (*ibid.*).

<sup>24</sup> Fretheim, *Exodus*, 302.

<sup>25</sup> Knowles, *The Unfolding Mystery of the Divine Name*, 45; R. W. L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32-34*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 22 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1983), 88.

<sup>26</sup> The passage is also quoted in Pss 103:8, 17; 145:8; Jonah 4:2 and alluded to in Exod 20:5; Deut 5:9-10; 1 Kgs 3:6; Lam 3:32; Dan 9:4. For a study on the impact of this passage in Judaism see Karla R. Suomala, *Moses and God in Dialogue: Exodus 32-34 in Postbiblical Literature*, ed. Hemchand Gossai, *Studies in Biblical Literature* 61 (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

sought afresh his glory by appealing to, trusting in, and desiring to experience the soul-changing transformations his glorious name and works produce.

### **The Glory of God Displayed by the Lamenting Psalmists' Suffering**

Dan Liroy coined the phrase “axis of glory” to refer to “a variety of terrestrial shrines [that] are regarded as sacred points of contact between the God of glory and His creation.”<sup>27</sup> One terminal point of the axis is God’s dwelling place in heaven, the other is in the earthly place God chooses for his glory to dwell. The garden of Eden was the original and prototypical earthly terminal point of the axis.<sup>28</sup> The first post-fall earthly axis of glory was Israel, divinely chosen “that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory” (Jer 13:11).<sup>29</sup> The lamenting psalmists were chosen by God to suffer so that they would be a glory to him.

Suffering, as was seen earlier, resulted in the lamenting psalmists had an exclusively theocentric focus, which both glorified God and caused them to appeal to his glory.<sup>30</sup> The psalmist likened his adversaries to rapacious beasts (Ps 57:3) and called out:

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens!

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<sup>27</sup>Dan Liroy, *Axis of Glory: A Biblical and Theological Analysis of the Temple Motif in Scripture*, Studies in Biblical Literature 138 (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 1.

<sup>28</sup>T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic and Professional, 2009), 20–31; G. K Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 17 (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press; Leicester, England: Apollos, 2004), 60–80; James M. Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 73–74.

<sup>29</sup>See also Isa 43:1; 44:23; 49:3; 60; 61:3. The nation was born in God’s Glory-presence displayed as a “pillar of cloud” or a “pillar of fire.” The divine Glory-presence brilliantly shined on Mount Sinai (Exod 19:18-20; 24:17), and filled the tabernacle (40:35) and the temple (1 Kgs 8:6-13).

<sup>30</sup>An overview of the ILPs and which ones were used in this dissertation may be found in chap. 2n43.

Let your glory be over all the earth! (Ps 57:5, 11).<sup>31</sup>

This theophanic type language “expresses the desire for a saving manifestation of glory and power of the divine presence in the heavens and over the earth.” More specifically, suffering provoked in the lamenters the desire to see God’s self-glorifying immanent works of mercy, grace, patience, steadfast love, faithfulness, forgiveness, and justice to be displayed. First, however, they appealed to and proclaimed the divine name.

### **God Glorified by the Proclamation of His Name**

The revelation of the divine name in Exodus 3:15 in anticipation of the exodus was “originally invoked not as a tool of cultic invocation but as an affirmation of certainty in the divine power,”<sup>32</sup> and, thus, evoked might and victory in war (Exod 15:3). God appeared to Moses in the Glory-cloud and made the point with his first words that the proclamation of the divine name is the foundation of his being glorified,<sup>33</sup> “The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD’” (Exod 34:6). The repetition of the glorious name would cause Moses “to pause and reflect on its meaning and the description that follows.”<sup>34</sup> God gloried himself by proclaiming his own name and, likewise, the lamenting psalmists glorified him by proclaiming, appealing to, and trusting in his name.

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<sup>31</sup>God’s glory is also mentioned in the ILPs 22:23; 26:8; 63:2; 71:8; 86:9, 12; 102:15, 16.

<sup>32</sup>Ee Kon Kim, *The Rapid Change of Mood in the Lament Psalms: A Matrix for the Establishment of a Psalm Theology* (Seoul: Korea Theological Study Institute, 1985), 31.

<sup>33</sup>Significantly, the first petition of the Lord’s Prayer is, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name” (Matt 6:9).

<sup>34</sup>J. Carl Laney, “God’s Self-Revelation in Exodus 34:6-8,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158, no. 629 (March 2001): 41.

“The most wise God,” counsels John Flavel, “doth illustrate the glory of his own name, clearing up the righteousness of his ways by the sufferings of his own people.”<sup>35</sup> God declared to Israel that their sufferings were for the purpose of refining them and to bring his name glory:

Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver;  
I have tried you in the furnace of affliction.  
For my own sake, for my own sake, (לְמַעַן לְמַעַן) I do it,  
for how should my name be profaned?  
My glory I will not give to another (Isa 48:10-11; see also Isa 42:8).

The lamenting psalmists used the rhetorical phrase לְמַעַן קְדוֹשׁ (‘‘for the sake of your name’’) which is ‘‘an appeal to Yahweh’s reputation’’<sup>36</sup> for him ‘‘to maintain his reputation, or character’’<sup>37</sup> and ‘‘to demonstrate before the creation, the wicked, or the righteous (or all three) the certainty of his covenant.’’<sup>38</sup> Suffering evoked in the lamenters the longing for God to glorify himself by displaying his character and covenant commitments: ‘‘for your name’s sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great’’ (Ps 25:11); ‘‘deal on my behalf for your name’s sake’’ (Ps 109:21); and ‘‘for your name’s sake, O LORD, preserve my life!’’ (Ps 143:11). These appeals were ‘‘not to any fancied virtue in our own names, but to the glorious goodness and graciousness which shine resplendent in the character of Israel’s God.’’<sup>39</sup> Suffering glorified God in the psalmists for they appealed to him to act in accordance with glorious nature, character, and works.

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<sup>35</sup>John Flavel, ‘‘Preparations for Sufferings: Or the Best Work in the Worst Times,’’ in *The Whole Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel*, vol. 6 (1682; repr., London: W. Baynes and Son, 1820), 9.

<sup>36</sup>Kim, *The Rapid Change of Mood in the Lament Psalms*, 36.

<sup>37</sup>BDB, s.v. ‘‘לְמַעַן.’’

<sup>38</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. ‘‘עָנָה,’’ by Leonard J. Coppes.

<sup>39</sup>C. H. Spurgeon, *Psalms 1-57, The Treasury of David*, vol. 1 (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d.), 58.

Suffering glorified God in the laments as it forced them to focus their attention, trust, and praises toward him alone. The lamenting psalmists acknowledged that knowing God's glorious name means to trust him:

And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you (Ps 9:10).

They glorified God by realizing that he is the only source of relief from suffering:

O God, save me by your name,  
and vindicate me by your might (Ps 54:1).

Suffering, as detailed in the previous chapter, engendered the spiritual fruit of praise in the laments despite the depths of their duress. Psalm 66:1-2 exhorts:

Shout for joy to God, all the earth;  
sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise!

The purpose of all true worship and praise is "the glory of his name," and the one who calls on God, praises him, and gives thanks to him glorifies him (Ps 50:23). The name of God inherently includes recalling his transcendent and immanent glory, his glorious deeds, and his glorious attributes. Yahweh was glorified as the lamenting psalmists out of their intense suffering-pain praised, thanked, and worshiped his name: "I will sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High" (Ps 7:17); "I will sing praise to your name, O Most High" (Ps 9:2); "I will give thanks to your name, O LORD, for it is good" (Ps 54:6); and "I will praise the name of God with a song" (Ps 69:30).<sup>40</sup>

The lamenting psalmists' invocation of God's name was much more than simply designating him from among the pantheon of gods of the surrounding nations. Calling on his name claims and acknowledges his glorious presence in their suffering, a

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<sup>40</sup>The name of God is also mentioned in the ILPs 5:11; 22:22; 61:5, 8; 63:4; 69:36; 86:9, 11; 102:15, 21; 140:13; 142:7.

presence which includes all his divine character, nature, and works.<sup>41</sup> The suffering psalmist declared in Psalm 86:12—“I will glorify your name forever.” God explained to Moses that his name is glorified as he displays the immanent works of mercy, grace, patience, steadfast love, faithfulness, forgiveness, and justice, all works which the lamenters longed to see displayed in their suffering to the glory of God.

### **God Glorified by the Display of his Works**

Moses asked God to show him his glory, God responded, “I will make all my goodness pass before you” (Exod 33:19). Douglas Stuart suggests God is promising Moses will receive “an even fuller sense of who I am than you have thus far been able to grasp.”<sup>42</sup> Moses grasped a fuller sense of divine goodness only because of Yahweh’s self-revelation of his self-glorifying works, which are his mercy, grace, patience, steadfast love, faithfulness, forgiveness, and justice. Suffering glorified God as the lamenting psalmists appealed to, trusted in, and longed for the display of these divine works.<sup>43</sup>

**God is glorified by his mercy.** Suffering aroused in the lamenting psalmists the yearning desire for God’s self-glorifying mercy to be displayed in their lives. Yahweh first declared to Moses his glory-work of רַחֲמֵי (“mercy,” “compassion”). The word family for רַחֲמֵי primarily “refers to deep love (usually of a ‘superior’ for an ‘inferior’) rooted in

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<sup>41</sup>John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 3, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 702. Marvin Tate points out that “the prayer presupposes a theology of the Name, which is an expression of the presence of God. . . . To invoke his name was to invoke his presence” (Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, WBC, vol. 20 [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990], 47).

<sup>42</sup>Stuart, *Exodus*, 2:706.

<sup>43</sup>“Goodness” (Exod 33:19) is probably not meant as an attribute of God in this context but a summary statement of all his attributes, which are delineated in 34:6-7. God’s goodness, nonetheless, is proclaimed in the ILPs 4:7; 25:7, 8, 13; 31:19; 38:20; 54:6; 69:16; 86:5; 109:21; 143:10.

some ‘natural’ bond.”<sup>44</sup> Robert Girdlestone defines this glorifying divine attribute as “a deep and tender feeling of compassion, such as is aroused by the sight of weakness or suffering in those that are dear to us or need our help.”<sup>45</sup> The term was used of the womb (Gen 29:31) for a mother expresses merciful/compassionate care for her vulnerable infant. God’s compassion is dispensed only by his sovereign choice (Exod 33:19) and is a function of his fatherly care for his children (Ps 103:13). The suffering psalmists were weak, in need of divine help, and solicited divine mercy. The ongoing suffering made David bold to imperatively beseech God, “remember your mercy, O LORD” (Ps 25:6). Hope and trust were expressed in the glorious Yahweh when the psalmist uttered, “you will not restrain your mercy from me” (Ps 40:11). David’s repentance for his grievous sin with Bathsheba was the ground for him to appeal to God, “according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions” (51:1). The intense, ongoing suffering prompted the psalmist to wonder, “Has he in anger shut up his compassion?” (77:9). The question may “be a not-so-subtle prod for God to demonstrate his favor, love, grace, and compassion here and now.”<sup>46</sup> Yahweh declared that he glorifies himself when he manifests his divine mercy. The lamenters, then, glorified him as they made entreaties for him to exhibit this divine work in their lives.<sup>47</sup>

**God is glorified by his grace.** Suffering made the lamenters hunger for God to

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<sup>44</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. “חַסָּדִים,” by Leonard J. Coppes.

<sup>45</sup>Robert Baker Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament* (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1871), 179.

<sup>46</sup>Allen Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 2, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2013), 636.

<sup>47</sup>God’s compassion is also mentioned in the ILPs 69:16; 103:13.

display his glory by extending his grace to them. Yahweh proclaimed to Moses his glory-work of graciousness (from נָנִי). This verb and its cognates “depicts a heartfelt response by someone who has something to give to one who has a need . . . an action from a superior to an inferior who has no real claim for gracious treatment.”<sup>48</sup> God grants grace, or favor, at his discretion and pleasure (Exod 33:19). The imperative of this verb was the most common use of נָנִי in the ILPs: “Be gracious to me and hear my prayer!” (Ps 4:1).<sup>49</sup> This imperatival cry was an appeal to “[obtain] an audience with a gracious sovereign—in his good grace he will grant the petition, although there may be no reason binding for him to do so.”<sup>50</sup> The sufferers used the imperative to implore God to be gracious for they were languishing (Ps 6:2), afflicted (Pss 9:13; 25:16), in distress (Ps31:9), repentant (Ps 51:1), oppressed (Ps 56:1). David implored Yahweh to be gracious “for to you do I cry all the day” (Ps 86:3). The lamenting psalmists also linked divine graciousness with his granting redemption (Ps 26:11), refuge (Ps 57:1), and strength (Ps 86:16). The terms “grace” and “mercy” were used together throughout the OT as near synonyms (see Pss 51:1; 102:13).<sup>51</sup> The appeals to divine grace brought Yahweh glory because grace is one of his self-proclaimed glorious works.<sup>52</sup>

**God is glorified by his patience.** “Slow to anger” was one of Yahweh’s self-proclaimed self-glorifying work. David was under siege by a band of indolent, ruthless

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<sup>48</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. “נָנִי,” by Edwin Yamauchi.

<sup>49</sup>Also Pss 6:2; 9:13; 25:16; 26:11; 27:7; 31:9; 51:1; 56:1; 57:1; 86:3, 16.

<sup>50</sup>Allen Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 1, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2012), 234.

<sup>51</sup>“נָנִי,” by Yamauchi.

<sup>52</sup>Grace is also found in the ILPs 6:2; 9:13; 31:9; 59:6; 142:2.



men (Ps 86:14) but he responded to his suffering with a Yahweh-ward acknowledgement and trust in Exodus 34:6—“But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Ps 86:15). The “but” announces a sharp contrast between the vicious attackers and Yahweh for “we get away from the hectorings and blusterings of proud but puny men to the glory and goodness of the Lord.”<sup>53</sup> Suffering glorified God in that it was the means God used to teach and show David he was a God of patience who was slow to become angry.

**God is glorified by his steadfast love.** Suffering glorified God in that the suffering psalmists appealed to and trusted in his steadfast love. Yahweh is glorious because he is “abounding in steadfast love” (see also Deut 5:10; Exod 20:6). God’s steadfast love is his “faithful commitment to the relationship, both to act in accordance with it, and to preserve it despite the failure of his covenant partner.”<sup>54</sup> David confesses:

But I have trusted (בַּחֶסֶדְךָ) in your steadfast love;  
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation (13:5).<sup>55</sup>

The verb בַּחֶסֶד conveyed trust due to feelings of safety and security. David glorified God for, despite the unsettledness suffering brought, he felt sheltered for he trusted in Yahweh’s steadfast love. The suffering psalmist despairingly questioned, “has his steadfast love forever ceased?” (Psa 77:8; also 88:11). Despite the outward circumstances, the lamenters clung to the hope that Yahweh was still dedicated to his

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<sup>53</sup>C. H. Spurgeon, *Psalms 58-110, The Treasury of David*, vol. 2 (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d.), 464.

<sup>54</sup>Robin L. Routledge, “Ḥesed as Obligation: A Re-Examination,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 46, no. 1 (May 1995): 196.

<sup>55</sup>Also Pss 4:5, 9; 9:10; 22:5, 9; 25:2; 26:1; 27:3; 28:7; 31:6; 31:14; 40:3; 55:23; 56:3, 4, 11; 86:2; 143:8.

steadfast love<sup>56</sup> and acknowledged his steadfast love is abundant (Pss 5:7; 69:13; 86:5, 15), eternal (Ps 25:6), good (Pss 25:7; 69:16; 109:21), one of his essential qualities (Ps 25:10; 130:7), equated with his compassionate mercy (Ps 40:11; 51:1), and is of infinite worth (Pss 57:10; 63:3). Therefore they focused on his steadfast love (Ps 26:3) and appealed to it to rescue them (Pss 6:4; 31:16; 109:26; 143:12). The suffering psalmists rejoiced in (Ps 31:7), declared (Ps 40:10), and praised (Ps 59:16) Yahweh's steadfast love. Yahweh proclaimed to Moses that he is glorified by his display of his abundant steadfast love. Suffering glorified God for it gave the lamenting psalmists an increased vision of the multi-faceted nuances of this self-glorifying divine work.

**God is glorified by his faithfulness.** Suffering made the sufferers declare him to be the faithful God, despite appearances, which, in turn, glorified him.<sup>57</sup> “Faithfulness” underscores God’s firmness, certainty, trustworthiness, dependability, and truthfulness.<sup>58</sup> The lamenting psalmists declared him to be the “faithful God” (31:5) whose faithfulness is infinite (57:10) and who abounds in faithfulness (86:15). God is dedicated to his faithfulness (25:10) and the psalmists trust he will send his glorious “saving faithfulness” (40:11; 57:3; 61:7; 69:13) to deal with enemies (54:5). The suffering psalmists complained to God for his treatment but they vowed to continue to “walk in your faithfulness” (26:3), declare his faithfulness (40:10), and praise his unending faithfulness (71:22). The fires of suffering did not deter the psalmists from tenaciously embracing

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<sup>56</sup>Pss 17:7; 31:21; 42:8; 57:3; 59:10, 17; 61:7; 86:13; 143:8.

<sup>57</sup>The word used in Exod 34:6, אֱמֶת, may also be translated “truth” (so NIV and NASB). The ESV translated the term as “truth” in the ILPs 25:5; 43:3; 51:6; 86:11.

<sup>58</sup>*NIDOTTE*, s.v. “אֱמֶת,” by R. W. L. Moberly; *TWOT*, s.v. “אֱמֶת,” by Jack Scott.

Yahweh's faithfulness, which, in turn, exalted his glorious name.

**God is glorified by his forgiveness.** Yahweh declared to Moses his glory is exalted through his “forgiving (נָשַׁח) iniquity and transgression and sin.” The lamenters knew they were imperfect and deserving of the suffering, yet they appealed to God to display his glory by forgiving them of their unfaithfulness. The common verb נָשַׁח (“to take away, to bear”) was used in certain contexts to refer to forgiveness between God and humans (Exod 32:32), forgiveness between persons (Gen 50:17), and forgiveness due to the vicarious bearing of sin (Lev 16:22; Isa 53:4). Surprisingly, perhaps, the non-penitential Psalm 25:18 is the only instance of נָשַׁח meaning “forgiveness” in the ILPs:<sup>59</sup>

Consider my affliction and my trouble,  
and forgive all my sins.

His suffering was not directly tied to sin but God designed the suffering to make the psalmist aware of his sins and seek divine forgiveness, a forgiveness that glorifies him.

**God is glorified by his justice.** God forgives for his glory but also applies divine justice to glorify himself as he declared to Moses, “but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.” God does not punish children for their parent's sins (Deut 24:16; Ezek 18:20) but children and subsequent generations oftentimes experience the natural consequences of sinful parental behavior.<sup>60</sup> Suffering instilled in

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<sup>59</sup>The verb was used in other ILPs to mean “lift up” (Pss 4:6; 7:6; 10:12; 25:1; 28:2; 63:4; 86:4; 102:10; 143:8); “carry” (28:9); or “to bear” (55:12; 69:7; 88:15). “Forgive” is found in Ps 86:5 but is a different verb (נָשַׁח). God was always the exclusive subject of נָשַׁח (“to forgive, pardon”) and, thus, could be rendered “divine forgiveness.” See John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 2, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 618–20.

<sup>60</sup>Laney, “God's Self-Revelation in Exodus 34,” 50. Stuart has a different view of this phrase:

the lamenters a passion for God to glorify himself by dispensing his justice. David appears to have crafted Psalm 109 with this idea in mind. He was accosted with vicious lies (Ps 109:2-5) and calls for God to enact his forensic judgment so that the perpetrator's wife would become a widow and his children orphans (Ps 109: 8-9). David wanted them to experience the harsh economic consequences of the father's sin: "May his children wander about and beg, seeking food far from the ruins they inhabit!" (Ps 109:10). God's work of judgment brings him as much glory as do his other self-revelatory attributes.

In summary, Moses asked God to show him his glory and God's response indicated his transcendent glory is revealed in proclaiming his name, and displaying his immanent works of mercy, grace, patience, steadfast love, faithfulness, forgiveness, and justice. God is glorified when he is the central focus of one's life. Suffering not only gave the lamenting psalmists a theocentric vision to the glory of God but also, in varying degrees, they proclaimed/appealed to/trusted in/better understood his glorifying name and works he declared of himself in Exodus 34:6-7, which, in turn, glorified him. This section gave a brief sketch of each individual attribute as they are found in the ILPs but these attributes are also linked together. Steadfast love is paralleled with faithfulness,<sup>61</sup> compassion (25:6; 69:16), goodness (25:7; 109:21), and grace (51:1). Three of the attributes—steadfast love, compassion, faithfulness—are found in Psalm 40:11. Grace and compassion are found together in Psalm 77:9. Psalm 86 appears to have been crafted

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"it describes God's just punishment of a given type of sin in each new generation as that sin *continues* to be repeated down the generations. In other words, God here reminded his people that they could not rightly think something like 'we can probably get away with doing this in our generation because God punished an earlier generation for doing it, so the punishment for it has already been given, and we don't have to worry about it'" (Stuart, *Exodus*, 2:717).

<sup>61</sup>Pss 25:10; 26:3; 40:10; 57:3, 10; 61:7; 69:13; 88:11.

around Exodus 34:6-7 with verse 15 of this psalm quoting Exodus 34:6.<sup>62</sup> Jonathan Edwards maintained that “God is glorified not only by His glory’s being seen, but by its being rejoiced in, when those that see it rejoice in it.”<sup>63</sup> Suffering moved the lamenters to yearn for God’s glorious name and works to be seen but even when they were not they still continued to rejoice in them to his glory.

Israel’s infidelity eventually resulted in God’s Glory-presence departing from them (Ezek 8:1-11:25)<sup>64</sup> with the promise of a restored community (Ezek 40-48) where the Glory-presence would return to earth to reside in a new temple (Ezek 43:1-12).<sup>65</sup> The suffering psalmists glorified God but they were forerunners of the Suffering Messiah who would be divine glory incarnate (John 1:14) whose sufferings would glorify his Father.

### **The Glory of God Displayed by Jesus’ Suffering**

The Lord Jesus Christ is the divine Glory-presence incarnate and is the ultimate earthly terminal point on the axis of glory (John 1:11, 14). The noun *νῶς*

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<sup>62</sup>The psalm is directed to Yahweh (Ps 86:1) and has several occurrences of Elohim (Ps 86:2, 10, 12). “Grace” is mentioned in Ps 86:3, 6, 16 as well as “good” (Ps 86:5, 17), “truth/faithfulness” (Ps 86:11), “steadfast love” (Ps 86:13), and “name” (Ps 86:11) with special attention to glorifying God’s name (Ps 86:9, 12). The verb *נָשַׁף* was used in Exodus to mean “to forgive” and is found in the psalm to mean “to lift up.”

<sup>63</sup>Thomas A. Schafer, ed., *Works of Jonathan Edwards: The “Miscellanies,”* vol. 13 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 495.

<sup>64</sup>Ezek 8:1-11:25 was a single vision in which the Lord showed the prophet the gradual departure of his glory from the nation: (1) God’s glory was still present in the temple but would leave for the abominations which were occurring in the temple of God—idols in the temple (Ezek 8:5-13), the worship of Tammuz (Ezek 8:14-15) and the sun (Ezek 8:16); (2) the first step was God removing his glory from the Most Holy Place to the threshold of the temple (Ezek 9:3); and (3) from the threshold, the glory of God returned to the cherub and both departed from the temple (Ezek 11:22-23).

<sup>65</sup>Zerubbabel led a group of exiles back to a destroyed Jerusalem (c. 538 B. C.) to rebuild the temple but the glory of the Lord did not fill it (Ezra 1-6).

indicated “the innermost shrine that houses the god.”<sup>66</sup> In Israel, this structure was the Holy of Holies (Exod 26:34), the place where God chose for his Glory-presence to dwell (Exod 25:22; 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; Ps 80:1). Jesus is the embodiment of the temple (ναός; John 2:19-21) and in his earthly life was the living, breathing Holy of Holies in whom the Glory-presence dwelt (John 1:14; 17:5, 25). John did not simply give an historical account of Jesus’ life but “[stated] an historical event in such a way as to reveal its theological meaning and hidden reality.”<sup>67</sup> One theologically revealing thread John weaves throughout his gospel is the glorifying nature of Jesus’ crucifixion through the use of the verb ὑψόω (“to lift up,” “to exalt”). The verb is used five times in John in three pericopes, each one revealing the glorifying nature of Jesus of Jesus’ cross-sufferings.<sup>68</sup>

### **The Use and Meaning ὑψόω in the Gospel of John**

Some preliminary groundwork first needs to be addressed before the ὑψόω pericopes of John are examined. First, each use of ὑψόω in John is in relation to Jesus’ self-designation as the “Son of Man.”<sup>69</sup> Jesus said to Nicodemus, “so must the Son of Man be lifted up (ὑψωθῆναι)” (John 3:14) and to the crowd, “when you have lifted up

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<sup>66</sup>*TDNT*, s.v. “ναός,” by O. Michel.

<sup>67</sup>John W. Romanowsky, “When the Son of Man Is Lifted Up’: The Redemptive Power of the Crucifixion in the Gospel of John,” *Horizons* 32, no. 1 (2005): 106–07.

<sup>68</sup>The verb is used in John 3:14 (twice); 8:28; 12:32, 34.

<sup>69</sup>The origin and meaning of Jesus’ “Son of Man” is the topic of considerable scholarly debate. Some studies that give good overviews and suggested solutions as to origin and meaning include Delbert Royce Burkett, *The Son of Man Debate: A History and Evaluation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Peter Lewis, *The Glory of Christ* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster Press, 2001), 59–76; Larry W. Hurtado and Paul Owen, “Who Is This Son of Man?”: *The Latest Scholarship on a Puzzling Expression of the Historical Jesus* (London: T & T Clark, 2011); Francis J. Moloney, *The Johannine Son of Man*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1978); Robert Rhea, *The Johannine Son of Man* (Zürich, Switzerland: Theologischer Verlag, 1990).

(ὁ υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου) the Son of Man” (John 8:28). In John 12:23 Jesus calls himself the Son of Man and the people later ask, “how can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up (ὁ υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου)?” (John 12:34).<sup>70</sup> Jesus’ self-disclosure as the Son of Man has its roots in Daniel’s messianic vision:

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed (Dan 7:13-14).

William Hendriksen asserts that “the derivation of the term from Dan. 7:13, 14 is scarcely debatable.”<sup>71</sup> D. A. Carson adds that Jesus “shapes [the Son of Man] content, and under its rubric fuses the authoritative figure of Daniel 7 with the righteous sufferer motif from the Old Testament, a motif that reached its high point in the ‘servant songs’ of Isaiah 42:1-53:12.”<sup>72</sup> This Danielic “son of man” is depicted as a divine personage distinguished from the Ancient of Days (also Dan 7:9, 22) who rides the divine Glory-cloud, is worshipped, and will eternally rule over the nations.<sup>73</sup> Jesus’ self-description as the Son

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<sup>70</sup>This designation of Jesus is also found in John 1:51; 5:27; 6:27, 53, 62; 9:35; 13:31. “Son of Man” is used of Jesus some 184 times in the synoptic gospels.

<sup>71</sup>William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1953), 206. Rhea concludes “that the term Son of Man does not function as an apocalyptic title in the Gospel of John. There is no evidence within the Gospel itself which supports the theory that the Evangelist has patterned his use of the term on the Danielic concept of the transcendent Redeemer, the celestial Son of Man of 1 Enoch, or the Man who rises from the sea in IV Ezra” (Rhea, *The Johannine Son of Man*, 69).

<sup>72</sup>D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*. PNTC (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 164.

<sup>73</sup>See Markus Zehnder, “Why the Danielic ‘Son of Man’ Is a Divine Being,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 24, no. 3 (2014): 331–47.

of Man, then, is an assertion of his heavenly origin as the inherently glorious eternal Son who became the Regent Man in order to subdue and have dominion over the nations.<sup>74</sup>

Second, each use of ὑψόω in John is within the context of redemption. As mentioned, John's purpose is not simply retelling historic events but interpreting these events within the scope of redemptive history so that the reader may put saving faith in Christ. John uniquely used the verb ὑψόω to indicate not only Jesus' physical lifting up on the cross for crucifixion but also his theological lifting up for God's glorious redemptive purposes. Jesus explained to Nicodemus that his lifting up was necessary to secure eternal life (John 3:15), to the crowd that unbelief would result in them dying in their sins (John 8:24), and to the people that his lifting up would draw all nations to himself (John 12:32). The verb, then, was used to indicate that Jesus is the source of salvation and this salvation is possible only because he is lifted up as the cross-suffering Savior.

Third, the use of ὑψόω in the LXX informs the meaning of the word in John's gospel. The verb ὑψόω in the LXX was used to describe the physical lifting of objects (Gen 7:17), lifting up the voice in prayer or praise (Ps 20:14), or the exaltation/glorifying of God (Ps 18:46).<sup>75</sup> Most commentators recognize that the introductory preamble to

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<sup>74</sup>The allusion to Jesus' heavenly origin is made in each of the passages under consideration. He told Nicodemus that he could speak of heavenly truths because he had "descended from heaven" (John 3:13). Jesus plainly told the crowd, "I am from above" (John 8:23). John gives an editorial comment after Jesus' last public appearance, asserting that Isaiah "saw his glory and spoke of him" (John 12:41; Isa 6:1-5). Moloney observes that nearly every use of "Son of Man" in John is a concluding statement that answers questions concerning Jesus' identity or corrects misconceptions of his nature (Moloney, *The Johannine Son of Man*, 214).

<sup>75</sup>The verb was used to exalt God also in Exod 15:2; 2 Sam 22:47; Pss 21:13; 30:1; 34:3; 46:10; 57:5, 11; 99:5, 9; 108:5; 145:1; 148:13.



Isaiah 53 serves as the background for John's use of ὑψόω:<sup>76</sup>

Behold, my servant shall act wisely;  
he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted (ὑψωθήσεται καὶ δοξασθήσεται  
σφόδρα (Isa 52:13)).<sup>77</sup>

God himself introduces his Servant and declares he “shall act wisely” in that no matter the atrocities delineated further in Isaiah 53 he will prosper because he will fulfill his God-commissioned work as the vicarious Suffering Servant.<sup>78</sup> The verbs in LXX Isaiah 52:13, ὑψόω and δοξάζω (“to glorify”), were used together several times so as to be synonymously parallel.<sup>79</sup> All the occurrences of ὑψόω in the NT simply meant “to exalt” without the connotation of being physically lifted up.<sup>80</sup> John, however, relies on the rich LXX background so that ὑψόω in his gospel has a double entendre of “[combining] the notions of being physically lifted up on the cross, with the notion of exaltation.”<sup>81</sup> M. C. De Boer understands ὑψόω to refer to “the rejection-crucifixion of the Son of Man *and* his resurrection-ascension.”<sup>82</sup> John Romanowsky offers that the verb “[speaks] of the

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<sup>76</sup>Martinus de Boer, “Johannine History and Johannine Theology: The Death of Jesus as the Exaltation and the Glorification of the Son of Man,” in *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. G. van Belle (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007), 308.

<sup>77</sup>David Baron points out that “behold” was used in the OT as an attention-grabbing preface to introduce Messiah. He is the Servant (here and also Zech 3:8), the son of David (Jer 23:5-6), a Man (Zech 6:12), and the King (Zech 9:9) (David Baron, *The Servant of Jehovah: The Sufferings of the Messiah and the Glory That Should Follow* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1922], 52–53).

<sup>78</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. “כָּפַץ,” by Herbert Wolf; *NICOTTE*, s.v. “שָׁכַל,” by Terence E. Fretheim. The Servant speaks of the sufferings he will endure in Isa 50:4-9.

<sup>79</sup>Margaret Pamment, “The Meaning of Doxa in the Fourth Gospel,” *Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft Und Die Kunde Der älteren Kirche* 74, no. 1–2 (1983): 13. The two verbs are used together of God in the LXX in Exod 15:2; Neh 9:5; Pss 57:5, 11; 108:5; 113:4 Isa 5:6; 6:1; 30:18; 33:10; 35:2; Jer 27:5; Dan 4:34. In Isa 4:2 the verbs are used in conjunction of Messiah and are used together in the NT of Jesus (Luke 2:14; 19:38; Heb 1:3).

<sup>80</sup>The verb is used in, *sans* John, Matt 11:23; 23:12; Luke 1:52; 10:15; 14:11; 18:14; Acts 2:33; 5:31; 13:17; 2 Cor 11:7; Jas 4:10; 1 Pet 5:6.

<sup>81</sup>Carson, *John*, 200.

<sup>82</sup>de Boer, “Johannine History and Johannine Theology,” 305 (italics in original).

crucifixion as one historical event and the crucifixion, exaltation and glorification of the Son of Man as manifesting *one* theological reality.”<sup>83</sup> Leon Morris advocates that John’s use of ὑψόω, informed by its OT background, is,

to show that Jesus showed forth his glory not *in spite of* His earthly humiliations, but precisely *by means of* those humiliations. Supremely is this the case with the cross. To the outward eye this was the uttermost in degradation, the death of a felon. To the eye of faith it was (and is) the supreme glory.<sup>84</sup>

John’s use of ὑψόω, then, infers that the Father designed Jesus’ cross-sufferings to glorify both the Father and the Son. This idea will be explored below in the three Johannine pericopes in which ὑψόω occurs.

### **The Father and Son Glorified in Jesus’ Cross-Sufferings**

The first sign Jesus performed “manifested his glory” (John 2:11) and in his High Priestly prayer he asked the Father, “glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed” (John 17:5).<sup>85</sup> Sandwiched between these two statements are the three “Son of Man” sayings which use the verb ὑψόω to indicate that his cross-sufferings glorified the Father and/or the Son.

**Jesus lifted up as the glorious giver of eternal life (John 3:1-15).** The first use ὑψόω in the gospel of John sets the theological tone for the other uses. Nicodemus’ nocturnal visit with Jesus quickly found this teacher of Israel soteriologically floundering

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<sup>83</sup> Romanowsky, “When the Son of Man Is Lifted Up,” 108 (italics in original).

<sup>84</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 226, (italics in original).

<sup>85</sup> The term “glory” appears in some form in the gospel of John 42 times. The Father glorifies the Son (John 8:54; 12:16; 13:32; 17:1, 5, 10, 22, 24), the Son glorifies the Father (John 7:18; 13:31; 14:13; 17:1, 4), the Son is glorified by the Spirit (John 16:14), both the Father and Son are glorified by others (John 9:24; 13:31; 11:4; 15:8).

in his understanding so that he incredulously asked, “How can these things be?” (John 3:9). Jesus explains heaven’s soteriological perspective by pointing Nicodemus to the cross-sufferings the Son of Man will endure: ““And as Moses lifted up (ὑψωσεν) the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up (ὑψωθῆναι), that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:14-15).

Jesus’ allusion to the wilderness serpent introduces sin, confession, God’s justice and grace, and life into the conversation. Israel had sinned against God (Num 21:5) and God responded by sending venomous “fiery serpents” who bit and killed many (Num 21:6). The people confessed their sin and God responded by commanding Moses to “make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live” (Num 21:8). All people, including Nicodemus, have sinned against God and God responded in his grace by sending from heaven the divinely glorious Son of Man who “must” (δεῖ) be “lifted up.” “Must” means “the element of necessity in an event”<sup>86</sup> and signaled to Nicodemus that the lifting up of the Son of Man is “not *a* remedy; it is *the only possible* remedy for sin.”<sup>87</sup> Craig Keener adds, “This passage clarifies the prerequisite for birth from above; not mere faith in Christ in an abstract sense, nor faith *despite* the crucifixion, but faith in the crucified Jesus.”<sup>88</sup> The lifting up of the Son of Man points to the physical cross-sufferings of the Suffering Servant, a point Nicodemus would not have missed. Standing before Nicodemus was the inherently glorious Son of

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<sup>86</sup>*TDNT*, s.v. “δεῖ,” by Walter Grundmann.

<sup>87</sup>Hendriksen, *John*, 138 (italics in original). “Must” was used several times in connection with Jesus’ life and ministry (Matt 16:2; 26:54; Mark 8:31; Luke 2:49; 4:43; 9:22; 17:25; 22:37; 24:6, 7, 26, 44; John 3:7, 14, 30; 4:4, 20, 24; 9:4; 10:16; 12:34; 20:9. 3:7; 4:4; Acts 4:12; 17:3).

<sup>88</sup>Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 563, (italics in original).

Man, the one descended from heaven (John 3:13), the one who would be “pierced for our transgressions” (Isa 53:5; also Zech 12:10).

Jesus explicitly states the purpose of his being lifted up: “that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:15). God averted his wrath and graciously granted physical life to those who looked in faith on the upraised serpent.<sup>89</sup> The issue for Nicodemus is far more weighty, not physical life but eternal life was before him. The divine solution, then, is far more sublime, not a serpent but the Son of Man. Gazing on the uplifted serpent in faith was the God-given means to show his willingness and ability to forgive sin, stay death, and grant life. Gazing on the far greater uplifted Antitype on the cross is the only God-given means to declare his willingness and ability to forgive sin, stay spiritual death, and grant spiritual life.<sup>90</sup> Jesus told Nicodemus prior that he would ascend back to heaven (John 3:13) so that in this inaugural use of ὑψόω, Jesus’ “crucifixion is not presented as Jesus’ humiliation but as the exaltation of the Son of man. The reason, obviously, is that Jesus’ suffering and death were the way in which he would return to God and be glorified by him and that in that way he would grant eternal life to those who believed in him.”<sup>91</sup> In time, Nicodemus would gaze upon the cross-sufferings of the uplifted Son of Man and receive the Father’s forgiveness and eternal life (John 7:50; 19:39). God blots out sin for his own glory (Isa 43:25) and the means he blots out sin in the New Covenant era for his glory is through the blood of Jesus who offered

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<sup>89</sup>Jewish wisdom literature held that “those who turned to that sign [the serpent on the pole] were saved not by what they saw but by you, the savior of all” (Wis 16:7; Common English Bible).

<sup>90</sup>Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 137.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

himself as the glorious Son of Man as the cross-suffering sacrifice.

**Jesus lifted up as the glorious forgiver of sin (John 8:21-30).** The phrase ἐγὼ εἶμι is the emphatic form of εἶμι (“I am”). Jesus uttered this phrase with the predicate nominative to reveal something of himself: “I am the bread of life (ἐγὼ εἶμι ὁ ἄρτος τῆς ζωῆς)” (John 6:35).<sup>92</sup> In John 8:24, however, Jesus uttered ἐγὼ εἶμι without the predicate nominative, “I am he.”<sup>93</sup> The background for ἐγὼ εἶμι is LXX Exodus 3:14 where God revealed his divine name to Moses: ἐγὼ εἶμι ὁ ὢν (“I am the existing one”).<sup>94</sup> God used ἐγὼ εἶμι, *sans* the predicative nominative, of himself in Deuteronomy 32:39—

“See now that I, even I, am he  
and there is no god beside me;  
I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal;  
and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.”

The translation “I am he” is of the Hebrew phrase אֲנִי הוּא, an emphatic אֲנִי (“I”) followed by the masculine pronoun הוּא (“he”). The same phrase אֲנִי הוּא is found five other times in the OT, all in the book of Isaiah, all translated with the masculine pronounless ἐγὼ εἶμι, and all with God declaring eternal truths of himself.<sup>95</sup> Anyone who embraced “I am he” for himself would be subjected to God’s wrath for blasphemy (Isa 47:8; Zeph 2:15).

Jesus’ self-designation “I am he,” then, is a bold proclamation of his deity.

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<sup>92</sup>Other examples of this construction in John are found in 6:48, 51; 8:12, 18; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5.

<sup>93</sup>The same construction is also found in John 4:26; 6:20; 8:28, 58; 13:19; 18:5, 6; 18:8.

<sup>94</sup>George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 2nd ed., WBC, vol. 36 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 130–31; Carson, *John*, 342–44; J. C. Coetzee, “Jesus’ Revelation in the Ego Eimi Sayings in Jn 8 and 9,” in *A South African Perspective on the New Testament*, ed. J. H. Petzer and P. J. Hartin (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 170–77; Edwin Freed, “Ego Eimi in John VIII. 24 in the Light of Its Context and Jewish Messianic Belief,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 33, no. 1 (April 1982): 163–67; Hendriksen, *John*, 46; Morris, *John*, 446–47; Keener, *John*, 1:744; Andreas J. Kostenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 259.

<sup>95</sup>Isa 41:4; 43:10, 13, 25; 48:12.

Jesus spoke ἐγώ εἰμι in John 8:24 and again in verse 28 with his second Son of Man saying with ὑψώω: “So Jesus said to them, ‘When you have lifted up (ὑψώσητε) the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he (ἐγώ εἰμι).’”<sup>96</sup> One of Yahweh’s self-glorifying works he revealed to Moses is his “forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty” (Exod 34:7). One of the Isaianic “I am he” sayings underscored that only God is the forgiver of sin:

“I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins” (Isa 43:25).

“For my own sake” reveals that the divine motivation for forgiving sins is for his own self-glory. Jesus’ cross-sufferings will reveal him as the glorious “I am he,” the forgiver of sin for his own sake, for his own glory. D. A. Carson gives insight into this truth:

One of the functions of the cross is to reveal who Jesus is. That is when the Jews will know the truth. By this John is not saying that all of Jesus’ opponents will be converted in the wake of the cross. But if they do come to know who Jesus is, they will know it most assuredly because of the cross. And even those who do not believe stand at the last day condemned by him whom they ‘lifted up’ on the cross, blinded to the glory that shone around them, yet one day forced to kneel and confess that Jesus is Lord (*cf.* Phil. 2:10-11).<sup>97</sup>

The cross reveals the willingness and the ability of the Father to forgive sin, which glorifies both him and the Son.

**Jesus lifted up as the glorious Savior of the world (12:12-33).** Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem just prior to his last Passover (John 12:12-19) prompted a

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<sup>96</sup>All the uses of ὑψώω in John are in the passive voice except two. The first instance of the verb in John 3:14 is in the active voice, Moses is the one who lifted up the serpent. The active voice is also used in 8:28, the people will be the ones to lift Jesus up to his death on the cross: “In the activity of crucifying Jesus the Jews have been accessories to the glorification of Jesus. If they wish to be saved from their sins, they can still find that salvation in the cross of Christ whom they themselves have crucified” (Moloney, *The Johannine Son of Man*, 137).

<sup>97</sup>Carson, *John*, 345.

variety of reactions: the people praised him (John 12:12-15), the Pharisees denied him (John 12:19), and some Gentile's sought him (John 12:20). Jesus' acknowledgement of the latter group's request signaled that a radical change in redemptive history had occurred: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (John 12:23). The "hour" was "the appointed time for Jesus' death, resurrection, and exaltation—in short, his glorification"<sup>98</sup> and prior to this occasion had always been in the future tense (John 2:4; 5:25, 28; 7:30; 8:20) but now "the hour" is upon him.

Yahweh glorified his name, the lamenting psalmists glorified the divine name, and now that Jesus knows the consummation of his earthly ministry is quickly rushing upon him calls out, "Father, glorify your name" (John 12:28).<sup>99</sup> Glorifying the Father's name was his highest priority (John 8:29, 50) and now his first and greatest concern was that the intense, incomprehensible, infinite cross-sufferings he would endure would not deter from the Father's glory.<sup>100</sup> The Father responded, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again" (John 12:28).<sup>101</sup> The Father's name was glorified through Jesus' perfect

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<sup>98</sup>Carson, *John*, 437.

<sup>99</sup>Name in the NT relating to the Father or Son is found in John 1:12; 2:23; 3:18; 5:43; 10:25; 12:13, 28; 14:13, 14, 26; 15:16, 21; 16:23, 24, 26; 17:6, 11, 12, 26; 20:31; Acts 2:21, 38; 3:6, 16; 4:7, 10, 12, 17, 18, 30; 5:28, 40, 41; 8:12, 16; 9:14, 15; 9:16, 21, 27, 28; 10:43, 48; 15:14, 17, 26; 16:18; 19:5, 13, 17; 21:13; 22:16; 26:9; Rom 1:5; 2:24; 9:17; 10:13; 15:9; 1 Cor 1:2, 10; 5:4; 6:11; Eph 5:20; Phil 2:9, 10; Col 3:17; 2 Thess 1:12; 3:6; 1 Tim 6:1; 2 Tim 2:19; Heb 1:4; 2:12; 6:10; 13:15; Jas 5:10, 14; 1 Pet 4:14, 16; 1 John 3:23; 5:13; 3 John 7; Rev 2:13; 3:8, 12; 11:18; 13:6; 14:1; 15:4; 16:9; 19:12, 13, 16; 22:4.

<sup>100</sup>Andreas Köstenberger points out that Jesus' request reflects the OT theological perspective that God's glory was the terminal aim for all salvific acts (Pss 79:9; Isa 63:14; 66:5; Ezek 38:23) (Kostenberger, *John*, 381).

<sup>101</sup>The Father spoke on two other pivotal occasions in Jesus' life: at his baptism (Matt 3:17) and at his transfiguration (17:5), both times declaring, "this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." "This pronouncement, then, provides a sort of pivot in the glory theology of John's Gospel in that it makes reference to both a past and a future glorification of Jesus" (Andreas J. Kostenberger, "The Glory of God in John's Gospel and Revelation," in *The Glory of God*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, Theology in Community [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010], 113).

obedience to his will (10:17) and will continue to be glorified through the Son's obedience in denying himself, taking up his cross-sufferings, and following the will of his Father.<sup>102</sup>

John 12:31-32 contains three clauses describing how Jesus' cross-suffering death will glorify the Father. The first is an echo of Yahweh's declaration that he is glorified by his enacting justice (Exod 34:7), "now is the judgment of this world" (John 12:31). The cross is the ultimate means of God's glorifying justice to be meted out on those who reject Christ:

Since the Son of Man is sent by God into the world as his representative and agent, rejection of the Son of Man is rejection of God himself. In the murder of the Son of Man sin is exposed in its most dreadful form. Insofar as the judgment of this world is a revelation of its sin and occasion of its condemnation, the death on the cross and exaltation by God to heaven is that moment.<sup>103</sup>

The ultimate ground of glorious divine justice is found at the glorifying cross of Christ.

Second, the cross-suffering death of Jesus glorifies the Father because "now will the ruler of this world be cast out." The "ruler of this world" is Satan, the Satan who wooed the first Adam to succumb to his nefarious plans to separate the created vice-regents from God's kingly rule.<sup>104</sup> The Second Adam crushes Satan's head (Gen 3:15) in

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<sup>102</sup>Jesus glorified his Father because "the servant who does not stoop to his own will, but who performs the will of the one who sent him—even to the death of the cross—is the one who glorifies God" (Carson, *John*, 440).

<sup>103</sup>Beasley-Murray, *John*, 213.

<sup>104</sup>Scripture contains a rich, varied, and complex vocabulary to describe the archenemy of God and Christ: Satan (Matt 4:10); the devil (John 6:70); the evil one (17:15); the prince of the power of the air (Eph 2:2); an angel (2 Cor 11:14); Belial (2 Cor 16:15); Beelzebub (Matt 10:25); the enemy (1 Tim 5:14); the serpent and deceiver of the whole world (Rev 12:9); the dragon (12:4); the tempter (Matt 4:3); the strong man (12:9); and the god of this world (2 Cor 4:4). Satan is the ruler of a host of malevolent spirits who, likewise, are described with a vivid vocabulary: powers or authorities (Eph 1:21); dominions and thrones (Col 1:16); angels (Rom 8:38); world rulers and spiritualities (Eph 6:12); rulers (1 Cor 2:6); elemental spirits (Gal 4:3); and, most commonly, demons (1 Tim 4:1). These descriptions are not intended to reveal the hierarchical structure of the demonic world but to paint a picture of the vast, powerful,



that “when Jesus was glorified, ‘lifted up’ to heaven by means of the cross, enthroned, then too was Satan dethroned.”<sup>105</sup> Jeremy Treat, likewise, views the cross as Jesus’ coronation as the glorious cosmic King:

For John, everything is moving toward this climatic hour, when Jesus being ‘lifted up’ on the cross, is truly being enthroned in glory. The cross becomes not only the center of redemptive history, but the fulcrum on which the logic of the world is turned upside down. Shame is transformed to glory, humiliation to exaltation, foolishness to wisdom, and the cross is the throne from which Christ rules the world.<sup>106</sup>

The cross is the means through which Regent Christ delivers chaos-loving sinners from Satan’s dark domain and transfers them his Kingdom to be his New Covenant vice-regents (Col 1:13) to spread God’s glory throughout the earth (Matt 28:18-20).

Third, Jesus’ cross-sufferings glorify the Father for its worldwide impact:

“And I, when I am lifted up (ὕψωθῶ) from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32). “All” cannot mean universality in that everyone without exception will be drawn to Christ. OT prophecies proclaimed Messiah would be the Savior of both Jew and Gentile (Isa 11:10; 42:1; 49:6) and the Greeks’ request signaled that “his ministry in Judaism is finished and he now belongs to the wider world.”<sup>107</sup> Jesus is now glorified as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29) and exalted as “the Savior of the world” (John 4:42). The “all” refers to all peoples without distinction, salvation is no longer parochially attached to Israel but now is granted to all peoples so

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organized, and malicious army that is arrayed against Christ and the human race.

<sup>105</sup>Carson, *John*, 443.

<sup>106</sup> Jeremy R. Treat, *The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 160.

<sup>107</sup>Gary M. Burge, *John*, The NIV Application Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 343.

that God's name would be glorified among the nations.<sup>108</sup> Eden was the focal point from which vice-regent Adam was to spread God's glory throughout the earth through his progeny. The cross of Regent Second Adam is the focal point to which all nations look so that his redeemed children serve as his vice-regents to disseminate the glory of the Father and the Son throughout the world.

To summarize, the verbs ὑψόω (“to lift up, exalt”) and δοξάζω (“to glorify”) were so often intertwined in the LXX as to make the one inform the other: to be lifted up/exalted was to be glorified, to be glorified was to be lifted up/exalted. John's use of ὑψόω took this idea and gave them a deeper, richer meaning in light of the eternal Word who became flesh:

In Isaiah [12:2; 40:5; 44:23; 63:12-14], and elsewhere in the O. T., God manifests his glory in saving Israel *from* suffering. . . . In the Fourth Gospel, God's glory is manifested *in* the suffering and death of the Son of man on the cross. The forceful effecting of salvation through God's power, pictured in the O. T., is replaced in John by the effecting of God's salvation through the Son of man's voluntary self-surrender: the gift of God's son.<sup>109</sup>

Jesus' glorious cross-sufferings are inherent within the Johannine use of ὑψόω. The Son suffers on the cross, which glorifies him but because he is glorified the Father is glorified so that he, in turn, further glorifies the Son.<sup>110</sup> The sufferings of the redeemed, likewise, glorify both the Father and the Son.

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<sup>108</sup>Pss 86:9; 102:15; Isa 62:2; Jer 33:9; Rev 15:4.

<sup>109</sup>Pamment, “The Meaning of Doxa in the Fourth Gospel,” 16 (italics in original).

<sup>110</sup>In John, “the glory of the Father and the Son are so closely related . . . that it seems that the glory of the one equals the glory of the other” (W. Robert Cook, “The ‘Glory’ Motif in the Johannine Corpus,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27, no. 3 [September 1984]: 294).

## **The Glory of God Displayed by Christ-Followers' Suffering**

Jesus instituted his church as the final earthly terminal point of the axis of glory in this present age. Paul with seemingly incredulity asked the sinning Corinthians, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple (ναὸς) of the Holy Spirit who is in you?” (1 Cor 6:19). Like Jesus, every Christ-follower is a living, walking, breathing, suffering temple who houses the divine Glory-presence.<sup>111</sup> All the pruning-sufferings, justification-hope sufferings, groan-sufferings, thorn-sufferings, persecution-sufferings, discipline-sufferings, trial-sufferings, and fallen creation-sufferings the child of God experiences in this life are designed by God to conform them to Christ, which leads to the higher purpose of glorifying the Son and the Father.

Suffering is not an independent entity but, like all things, is under the auspices of the sovereign God. The consistent witness of Scripture is that God is the one who inflicts suffering and he is the one who heals, all for his own glorifying purposes.<sup>112</sup> Christ-followers are subject to all the general creation-sufferings as well as the added layers of persecution-suffering, pruning-suffering, and discipline-suffering, all of which may occur independently or concurrently in some combination with each other. These sufferings are for a purpose, to not only decrease self-rule and increase God's rule, but ultimately to glorify God.

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<sup>111</sup>The entire universal church is “a holy temple (ναὸν) in the Lord” (Eph 2:21); every congregation is “a temple of God (ναὸς θεοῦ)” (1 Cor 3:16).

<sup>112</sup>God as healer of sickness (Exod 15:26; Deut 7:15; 32:39; 1 Kgs 13:6; Job 5:17-18; Pss 41:3-4; 107:17-20; 147:3; Isa 30:26; Jer 30:17; 33:6; Hos 5 :13-6:2); God as inflictor of sickness (Lev 26:14-16; Num. 12:9-15; Deut 28:20-22, 27, 29, 35, 59-61; 32:39; 1 Sam 5:6-12; 25:37-38; 2 Sam 12:15; 1 Kgs 13:4; 2 Kgs 5:27; 2 Chr 21:14-15, 18-19; 26:19-21; Job 5:17-18; Pss 38:1-8; 106:15; Isa 10:16; 30:26; Jer 16:3-4).

## God Glorified by Persecution-Suffering

Peter wrote his first letter to a persecuted community (1 Pet 1:6-7; 3:13-17; 4:12-19; 5:9) and throughout connected their persecution-suffering to God's glory. The prophets predicted through the Spirit "the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories" (1 Pet 1:11). The plural "sufferings" indicates the variety and intensity of his earthly sufferings.<sup>113</sup> The plural of his sufferings is offset by the plural of his "subsequent glories" which was realized in his resurrection when God "raised him from the dead and gave him glory (1 Pet 1:21). Thus, Jesus serves as the ultimate example of persecution-suffering to the glory of God (1 Pet 2:21).<sup>114</sup> Peter declares that the crucified, resurrected Savior both glorifies God and is to be glorified: "in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (1 Pet 2:11). Jesus, who suffered, died, and resurrected, will one day return to earth as the King of Kings "when his glory is revealed" (1 Pet 4:13).

Unlike Peter, these persecuted believers had never seen the human Jesus yet their redemption makes them to "rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory" (1 Pet 1:8). Peter reminds them that persecution is not an excuse to disobey Christ but that their obedience is a witness of Christ to the glory of God: "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles ["pagans," NASB] honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation (ἡμέρα ἐπισκοπῆς)" (1 Pet 2:12). The ἡμέρα ἐπισκοπῆς ("day of visitation") has been variously interpreted as the final day of judgment or the time when the believer stands trial before

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<sup>113</sup>Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of James*, in *James, Epistles of John, Peter, and Jude*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1986), 54. See also 1 Pet 3:8-17.

<sup>114</sup>Jesus' suffering is also mentioned in 1:11; 3:18; 4:1; 5:1.

the heavenly court. Probably the best interpretation is it refers to the moment God visits the pagans with his salvific grace, which, in turn, will make them give glory to him for his mercy and goodness.<sup>115</sup> Peter urges this persecuted community to exhibit God's glorifying moral excellence so that their conduct would be attractive and draw their persecutors to Christ for his glory.<sup>116</sup> Peter, echoing Jesus, reminded these persecuted saints that "if you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you" (1 Pet 4:14) and that the ultimate purpose of their persecution-sufferings for Jesus is to "glorify God" (1 Pet 4:16).

Some of Jesus' last words to Peter were somber for they predicted his death:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me" (John 21:18-19).

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<sup>115</sup>Kistemaker, *James*, 97; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1966), 108; J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, WBC, vol. 49 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 118. Jesus used the phrase τὸν καιρὸν τῆς ἐπισκοπῆς σου ("the time of your visitation") in Luke 19:44 as he wept over Jerusalem for their rejection of him as Messiah.

<sup>116</sup>Kistemaker explains, "The good works of true believers have a strong missionary power. Deeds that are done by consistent conduct speak louder than words. Deeds that re-enforce doctrine, the gospel in both Word and life, draw men to God through Jesus Christ. Worldly Christians hinder home missionary work" (Lenski, *Peter, John, Jude*, 108). Similarly, "God calls us to be his people in the society in which we live. He wants us to be living testimonies of his love and mercy toward sinners because through our lives he calls others to himself. Our conduct and confession, then, ought never to be stumbling block for our unbelieving neighbors" (Simon Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and the Epistle of Jude*, in *James, Epistles of John, Peter, and Jude*, NTC [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1987], 96). Sharing Jesus' sufferings means to consider persecutions for the sake of Christ as blessings from the Father (Matt 5:10-11), to rejoice when they occur (Matt 5:12), and to pray for the persecutors (Matt 5:43-45). The first Christians exhibited resurrection power in their responses to their Christ-sharing sufferings. The persecuted church responded by praying for boldness to proclaim the gospel to their persecutors (Acts 4:23-31). The disciples left the Council with bruised bodies, "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" (Acts 5:41). Stephen prayed for God's mercy on those who were stoning him (Acts 7:60). Paul and Silas responded to their unjust flogging and incarceration by praying and singing hymns (Acts 16:25). Paul urges Christ-followers to be patient, kind, and gentle with their persecutors so that they may be won to Christ (2 Tim 2:24-26). Some Christians "joyfully accepted the plundering of your property" (Heb 10:34). God designs the outward sufferings of cross-bearing to make his children rely on the resurrection power of Christ so that they will know him.

Jesus' words are the words of crucifixion. Peter's first letter was probably written sometime during the Neronian persecution of Christians in the A. D. 60s. If so, then Peter had Jesus' prediction weighing on him for nearly thirty years. Peter, like countless others, did deny himself, took up his persecution driven cross-sufferings, and followed Jesus to the glory of God.<sup>117</sup>

### **God Glorified by Pruning-Suffering (John 15:8)**

The blessed man or woman is likened to “a tree planted by streams of water” (Ps 1:3; see also 92:12-15; Jer 17:8) for they refuse to find their identity in the company of the self-willed unregenerate but their hearts are attentive to the Word of God.<sup>118</sup> This tree is not a wild bramble but planted and cultivated, a tree that is cared for, pruned, watched over, and nourished so it will produce an abundance of luxurious fruit.<sup>119</sup> God's purpose is for his people to bear spiritual fruit in their lives under his protective care and

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<sup>117</sup>See Oscar Cullman, *Peter: Disciple, Apostle, Martyr* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), for a thorough examination of Peter's life, both fact and legend.

<sup>118</sup>Psalms 1 is usually categorized as both a wisdom psalm, a psalm that declares the right way to live and/or how to apply God's truth to life, and a Torah psalm, one that focuses on the Word of God. Other wisdom psalms include Pss 22, 34, 49, 73, 111, 112, 119, 127, 128, 133 (see also Prov 2:12-15, 20-22); Torah psalms include Pss 19 and 119. The first word of Psalm 1, and thus of the entire Psalter, is “blessed.” Two Hebrews verbs, בָּרַךְ and אָשַׁר, both mean “to bless.” The first verb, בָּרַךְ, was used for God taking the initiative to bless his people, even if undeserved (Gen 1:22). The verb used in Psalm 1:1, אָשַׁר, connotes “to be envious with desire” and was used of God blessing them as the result of the person doing something: “Their happy estate is not something given automatically by God, but is a direct result of their activity” (Peter C. Craigie and Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 1-50*, 2nd ed, WBC, vol. 19 [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004], 60). This verb was used 25 times in Psalms (Pss 1:1; 2:12; 32:1, 2; 33:12; 34:8; 40:4; 41:1; 65:4; 84:4, 6, 12; 89:16; 94:12; 106:3; 112:1; 119:1, 2; 127:5; 128:1, 2; 137:8, 9; 144:15; 146:5) and 7 times in Proverbs (Prov 3:13; 8:32, 34; 14:21; 16:20; 20:7; 28:14).

<sup>119</sup>“Fruit” used as a metaphor for spiritual expression, good or bad, may be seen in 2 Kgs 19:30; Ps 58:11; Prov 1:31; 10:16; 11:30; 12:14; 13:2; 15:6; 18:20, 21; 19:22; 27:18; 31:16, 20, 31; Hos 9:16; 10:12, 13; 14:9; Mic 7:13; Isa 27:6; Jer 12:2; 17:8, 10; Ezek 17:8, 9, 23; 19:10; Matt 3:8, 10; 7:16-20; 12:33; 13:8, 26; 21:43; John 4:36-37; 12:24; Gal 5:22; Eph 5:9; Phil 1:11; Heb 12:11; 13:15; Jas 3:17, 18.

pruning.<sup>120</sup>

This same idea is carried over in the NT as Jesus, the True Vine, is the source of spiritual nourishment of his people (John 15:1-11; see ch. 3). The Father is the Master Gardener who wields his pruning-suffering shears in order to remove dead branches to make room for more and better fruit. The ultimate purpose of pruning-suffering, however, is not human-centered but Father-focused: “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples” (John 15:8).

The Father pruned Jesus with suffering (Heb 5:8) and was glorified with the Son’s continual obedience which culminated with his willful and joyful embrace of his cross-sufferings (John 12:31-32; 17:1, 4). Likewise, the Father is glorified by the Kingdom fruits suffering produces in the redeemed. R. C. H. Lenski reminds, “The Father is glorified, not by his or our *will* to bear fruit, but by the *fact* that we actually bear fruit; an not simply some fruit but ‘much fruit.’”<sup>121</sup> The abundant, glorifying Kingdom fruit that the Father’s pruning-suffering produces is visible to all as an expression of

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<sup>120</sup>Wisdom is likened to a tree (Prov 3:18) and the righteous exhibit fruits from a tree (11:30; 15:4). Water is a biblical metaphor for wisdom where one is instructed from the law and, thus, from God. Aridness, consequently, is the absence of wisdom, fruitlessness, and being forsaken of God (13:14; 18:4; Jer 2:18-19; 14:3; 17:5-8). See also Prov 25:14; 2 Pet 2:17; Jude 12 where false teachers are described as not having water.

Craigie and Tate expand on the tree imagery: “The happy estate of the righteous is illuminated in v 3 by the simile of the tree. A tree may flourish or fade, depending upon its location and access to water. A tree transplanted from some dry spot (e.g., a wadi, where the water runs only sporadically in the rainy season) to a location beside an irrigation channel, where water never ceases to flow, would inevitably flourish. It would become a green and fruitful tree. The simile not only illustrates colorfully the prosperity of the righteous, but also make a theological point. The state of blessedness or happiness is not a *reward*; rather, it is the result of a particular type of life. Just as a tree with a constant water supply *naturally* flourishes, so to the person who avoids evil in the lights in Torah *naturally* prosperous, for such a person is living within the guidelines set down by the Creator. Thus the prosperity of the righteous reflects the wisdom of a life lived according to the plan of the Giver of all life” (Craigie and Tate, *Psalms 1-50*, 60–61).

<sup>121</sup>Lenski, *Peter, John, Jude*, 1042 (italics in original).

Christ-centered discipleship (Matt 7:20; Luke 6:43-44).<sup>122</sup> “Fruitlessness,” on the other hand explains D. A. Carson, “not only threatens fire (v. 6) but robs God of the glory rightly his.”<sup>123</sup> Pruning-suffering glorifies the Father for the Kingdom fruits it produces in the lives of his children.<sup>124</sup>

Suffering producing Kingdom fruit is also the subject of Galatians 5. The redeemed incur internal groanings due to the presence of the Spirit (Rom 8:23). Now the inherent desire for self-rule is in pitched battle against the desires of the Spirit (Gal 5:17) so that the adopted inwardly groan with suffering as they simultaneously love the desires of the flesh and hate them, are concurrently drawn and repulsed (Gal 5:17). The lure of the “works of the flesh” (Gal 5:19) tempt the justified to embrace self-gratifying moral perversions (sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, drunkenness, orgies), self-glorifying religious innovations (idolatry, sorcery), and self-generated interpersonal conflicts (enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions). These internal cross-sufferings are the context in which the fruits of the Spirit are grown, cultivated, nurtured, and come to fruition. In other words, the Kingdom fruits of the Spirit are not produced in a vacuum but through the heart-sufferings of the children of God as they battle themselves through the power of the Spirit to the glory of God.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup>Hendriksen connects spiritual fruit with God’s glory: “The spiritual graces or fruits which adorn the children of God reflect his own being. Accordingly, seeing himself (his communicable attributes) reflected in their lives, he is thereby glorified, and this especially when the fruits are bountiful (‘much fruit’)” (Hendriksen, *John*, 302; passage references within the quote were deleted).

<sup>123</sup>Carson, *John*, 518.

<sup>124</sup>Applying this passage, in retrospect, to the lamenting psalmists would give further evidence that God was glorified by the spiritually maturing fruits suffering produced in them.

<sup>125</sup>Other ways believers glorify the Father are seen in Matt 5:16; John 14:13; Rom 6:4 (?); 15:5-6; Phil 2:11.



## God Glorified by Groan-Suffering

Groan-suffering is the divine path for the Father's adopted to fulfill his ultimate purpose for them "to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom 8:29). The ultimate divine end of suffering, however, is not for the benefit of his adopted but for the glorification of his Son: "in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Rom 8:29).

"Firstborn" was used literally of the "the first to open the womb" (Exod 13:2).<sup>126</sup> The firstborn occupied a favored position within the family as witnessed by God's last plague on Egypt, which was specially directed against the firstborn (Exod 11:5). In Israel, all the firstborn are consecrated to God (13:2). The firstborn son received the rights of primogeniture, which included the father's special blessing (Gen 27), preferential treatment (43:33), honor above his brothers and sisters (49:3), and a double portion of the family inheritance (Deut 21:17).<sup>127</sup> God called Israel his "firstborn" (Exod 4:22), which made the nation the object of his special love as they "received a position of honor and privilege, though she was youngest and least among the nations (Exod 4:22; Jer 31:9)."<sup>128</sup> Rabbinical Judaism applied the special blessings associated with the firstborn to Israel, Torah, Adam, and, based on Psalm 89:27, the expected King Messiah:<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup>The information in this paragraph was gleaned from, *NIDOTTE*, s.v. "בכר," by Bill T. Arnold; *TDNT*, s.v. "πρῶτος," by Wilhelm Michaelis; *TWOT*, s.v. "בְּכֹר," by John N. Oswalt.

<sup>127</sup>The pagans would offer the firstborn, both human as animal, as scarifies to their gods in order to curry their favor (2 Kgs 3:26-27), which some in Israel practiced (2 Kgs 16:2). The OT uniformly condemns child sacrifice (Josh 6:26; 2Kings 3:27; Jer 32:35; Mic 6:7), which was profoundly displayed in God stopping Abraham from sacrificing Isaac (Gen 22).

<sup>128</sup>"בכר," by Arnold.

<sup>129</sup>"πρῶτος," by Michaelis.

And I will make him the firstborn,  
the highest of the kings of the earth.

Jesus is called the “firstborn” five times in the NT. He was the firstborn of Mary for he opened her womb (Luke 2:7). Regent Jesus is “the firstborn of all creation” (Col 1:15) who exerts his cosmic kingly rule because “he is both prior to and supreme over that creation since he is its Lord.”<sup>130</sup> Jesus “is the beginning (ἐστὶν ἀρχή), the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent” (Col 1:18). The anarthrous noun ἀρχή in this context connotes “founder,”<sup>131</sup> that is, resurrected Jesus is the founder of a new people and is, thus, supremely preeminent and is “the ruler of kings on earth” (Rev 1:5).<sup>132</sup> The Father “brings the firstborn into the world” (Heb 1:6) in his incarnation so that “all the angels of God worship him.”<sup>133</sup> Jesus as the Firstborn has inherent glory for he is worshiped by angels, the preeminent and supreme ruler of the cosmos, and has resurrected glory.

Groan-suffering, then, glorifies God and Christ in two-step process.

Penultimately, suffering glorifies the Son as conformity to him is the highest attainment of his people and, ultimately, he then stands preeminently glorified among the “many brethren” who are conformed to his image. The “in order that” in Romans 8:29 conveys

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<sup>130</sup>Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, WBC, vol. 44 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 45.

<sup>131</sup>*TDNT*, s.v. “ἀρχω,” by Gerhard Delling.

<sup>132</sup>O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 50–51; Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 129.

<sup>133</sup>Commentators disagree if this phrase should read “And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world” (referring to his incarnation) or “But when God shall bring again his firstborn into the world” (referring to his Parousia). Kistemaker opts for the first reading by asking, “Why does the writer of Hebrews speak of a second coming of Jesus when he has not said anything in the immediate context about Christ’s first coming?” (Simon J. Kistemaker, “Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews*, NTC, [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1984], 38).

“the great [eschatological] end contemplated in the predestination of God’s people”<sup>134</sup>  
The Father was so well-pleased with his Son that he determined to glorify him above all others for all eternity by multiplying his image into “many brethren,” a vast redeemed multitude drawn from all the nations.<sup>135</sup> “Brother” is oftentimes used in the NT to refer to the familial relationship followers of Christ have with one another (Acts 17:10). Jesus is the “Elder Brother” of his people (Heb 2:11) in that he is “like them but above them in rank and dignity, since He remains their Lord.”<sup>136</sup> The Son of Man will be supremely glorified as he stands as the preeminent Head of a vast multitude made up of all the nations, these whom he redeemed through his cross-sufferings, those whose groaning-sufferings have conformed them to his image, those who have resurrected to both glorify him and sing praises to his glory for all eternity (Rev 5:8-14).

In summary, King Messiah exerted his rule over suffering as he forgave, exorcised, and healed many which issued in a chorus of God-glorifying praises. Christ-followers groan in this age under the burdens of pruning-suffering, justification hope-suffering, thorn-sufferings, persecution-suffering, discipline-suffering, trial-suffering, and a host of creaturely sufferings, all superintended by God to bring the greatest good to his children, conformity to Christ, and the greatest honor to himself, his glorification. The sufferings all people experience in this age will glorify God in the eschaton either by the termination of suffering or by suffering becoming more intense when the Son of God

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<sup>134</sup>Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Louis Kregel, 1882), 449.

<sup>135</sup>C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of the New Testament*, vol. 3 (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, n. d.), 76; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 455.

<sup>136</sup>“πρῶτος,” by Michaelis.

returns in glory to establish his eternal kingdom.

### **The Glory of God Displayed by the End of Suffering**

The glorious grace of God that inflicts suffering on his people to mortify their self-sufficiency for his glory and to engender spiritual maturity for his glory is the same grace that ends suffering for his glory. God glorified for the end of suffering is seen in both the temporal and eschatological eras.

### **The Lamenting Psalmists Glorify God for the End of Suffering**

The lamenting psalmists express their suffering as a present reality. One common feature of the ILPs is the psalmists' vow to publically praise God if/when he delivers from the suffering (Pss 22:22; 35:18). The declarative praise psalms<sup>137</sup> (oftentimes called "thanksgiving psalms") are "a response to answered lament"<sup>138</sup> because God has rescued the psalmist from his suffering so that "the vow of praise that was made during the prayer now is to be fulfilled in public."<sup>139</sup> The declarative praise psalm, usually, recounted the specific distress(es) which caused the suffering—oftentimes revolving around impending death (18:4-5), fears (34:4), or oppressive

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<sup>137</sup>A designation offered by Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: J. Knox Press, 1981), 31, 34. Westermann prefers calling these psalms "psalms of praise" rather than "thanksgiving psalms" for no verb exists in Hebrew which means "to thank." He further delinates Psalms of Praise into Declarative Praise psalms (focus on the past actions of God) and Descriptive Praise psalms (psalms which describe who God is and/or what he does).

<sup>138</sup>Tremper Longman, *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 30. Typical elements in these types of psalms include: (1) the call to give praise; (2) an account of the difficulty; (3) praises offered to God for his deliverance; (4) the presentation of a sacrifice with offertory words; (5) blessings conferred on those who are present; and (6) an exhortation to give praise to God. Declarative praise psalms are both individual (Pss 18; 21; 30; 32; 34; 40; 41; 66; 92; 103; 116; 118; 136; 138) and corporate (Pss 65; 67; 75; 107; 124; 136).

<sup>139</sup>Ross, *Psalms*, 1:123.

enemies (92:5-9)—and God’s subsequent deliverance from them. Claus Westermann’s work in the praise psalms underscores that the one being praised is elevated in stature and importance, and involves looking away from self to being fully focused on the one being praised. He also highlights that praise is joyful and occurs in a group setting.<sup>140</sup>

The declarative praise psalms, as are the laments, are all theocentric compositions. God is elevated and glorified for his deliverance from suffering as the psalmists, especially, praise and extol his name. The lamenters invoked Yahweh’s name for relief because “the actual uttering of the name makes the presence of the person a reality.”<sup>141</sup> Yahweh delivered them from their suffering and now these former lamenters sing the praises of his name (18:49; 66:4; 92:1) “give thanks to his holy name” (30:4), “exalt his name” (34:3), “sing the glory of his name” (66:2), “bless his holy name” (103:1), continue to call upon his name (116:4, 13, 17), secured their victory over enemies “in the name of the LORD” (118:10, 11, 12), and give thanks to his name because “you have exalted above all things your name and your word” (138:2).

David appears to have written the thanksgiving Psalm 103 in light of God’s self-revelation to Moses. Moses is mentioned in verse 7, and verse 8 is a virtual quote of God’s self-glorifying self-declaration: “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” Divine compassion is highlighted (Ps 103:13),<sup>142</sup> as well as his steadfast love (Ps 103:4, 8, 11, and 17), forgiveness (Ps 103:3), and his

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<sup>140</sup>Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 27.

<sup>141</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 3, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 759.

<sup>142</sup>Ps 116:5 exalts the God who is so compassionate (the ESV translates רַחֵם as “merciful”). Divine compassion and grace are linked together in Pss 103:8; 116:5.

glorious “justice for all who are oppressed” (Ps 103:6).<sup>143</sup>

Psalm 18 especially features God’s self-glorifying justice. The superscription states David wrote the psalm “to the LORD on the day when the LORD rescued him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul.” The opening verses glorify God with a series of titles which reflect his powerful victory to end David’s suffering (Ps 18:1-2). David glorifies Yahweh as he calls upon him “who is worthy to be praised” (Ps 18:3). God’s justice on David’s behalf was cast in terms of his glorious theophanic presence when he delivered Israel at the Red Sea and when the Glory-cloud descended on Mount Sinai (Ps 18:9-19).<sup>144</sup> The psalmists were quick to give God glory for the end of their sufferings:

Shout for joy to God, all the earth;  
sing the glory of his name;  
give to him glorious praise! (Ps 66:1-2).

All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O LORD,  
for they have heard the words of your mouth,  
and they shall sing of the ways of the LORD,  
for great is the glory of the LORD (Ps 138:4-5).

### **Sufferers Glorify God for the End of Suffering**

The Gospels are replete with Jesus’ miraculous healings of suffering which resulted in God being glorified. Sometimes sin is at the root of physical duress as was the

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<sup>143</sup>All these attributes are found in other thanksgiving psalms as well: Grace (Ps 116:5); slowness to anger (Ps 30:5); steadfast love (Pss 18:25, 50; 32:10; 40:10, 11; 66:20; 92:2; ; 118:1, 2, 3, 4, 29; 138:2, 8); faithfulness (Ps 40:10, 11; 92:2; 138:2); and forgiveness (Ps 32:1).

<sup>144</sup>Craigie and Tate, *Psalms 1-50*, 73–74; Goldingay, *Psalms*, 1:259–65; Ross, *Psalms*, 1:226–50.

case of the paralytic (Luke 5:17-26).<sup>145</sup> Jesus exerted his divine prerogative to forgive sin, a glorifying work of Yahweh (Exod 34:7), and the physical suffering was immediately cured. The man “went home, glorifying God” (Luke 5:25) and the onlookers “glorified God and were filled with awe” (Luke 5:26). Death is the ultimate curse God inflicted on the human race but it served to bring glory to God. The funeral procession for the only son of a widow passed by Jesus (Luke 7:11-17). He “had compassion” (Luke 7:13) for her, a Yahweh-glorifying attribute (Exod 34:6), simply spoke his powerfully divine words, life was restored, “and they glorified God” (Luke 7:16). Other times physical suffering was due to oppressive demonic forces. A woman suffered for eighteen years from a “disabling spirit” who bent her over (Luke 13:11). Jesus commanded, the spirit left her, she was healed, “and she glorified God” (Luke 13:13). Maladies could also be experienced for no other reason than life in a fallen world. A blind beggar persistently cried out “Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Luke 18:39). Jesus healed the man, the man followed Jesus, “glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God” (Luke 18:43). Lazarus suffered illness and died but Jesus declared that his death was “for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (John

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<sup>145</sup>The connection of sin resulting in specific acts of suffering is a difficult, complicated issue. A man was born blind (John 9:1). The disciples exhibited a misconstrued understanding of the tight connection between sin and suffering with their question, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9:2). In general, all suffering and all maladies are because of Adam’s sin but this overarching truth does not mean that every instance of suffering is necessarily a divine *quid pro quo* for a specific as evidenced by Jesus’ reply, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him” (John 9:3). The genetic anomaly that caused this man’s blindness was not outside the purview of God’s sovereign hand but was predeterminedly inflicted on him for the specific purpose of glorifying the works of God. Jesus healed the man who eventually worshiped him as the gloriously divine Son of Man (John 9:35-38). At the same time, however, neither should Jesus’ statement be generalized to conclude that suffering is never divine intervention for specific sins. Suffering due to specific sin is linked together in Num 12:1-16; 2 Chr 21:6-20; 26:16-23; Acts 5:1-11; 12:20-23.

11:4), which occurred when Jesus resurrected him from the dead (John 11:44).<sup>146</sup>

Jesus' miraculous healings of suffering glorified God both in the present and for what the healings signaled in terms of redemptive history. John the Baptist was languishing in prison and sent word to Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (Matt 11:3). Leon Morris lists several possible interpretations of John's question but submits the most satisfying reflects John's puzzlement because Jesus did not fit the contemporary expectations of Messiah—he sought sinners out and did not judge them; he did not fast but ate and drank; he "violated" the Sabbath; and he left righteous John to suffer in prison while immoral kings were free.<sup>147</sup> Jesus answered John's question by highlighting his miraculous healings: "the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them" (Matt 11:5).<sup>148</sup> The miraculous healings proved him to be Messiah but also were "revelatory deeds of the eschatological kingdom."<sup>149</sup>

### **The Glorified Redeemed Glorify God for the End of Suffering**

The culminating event of redemptive history is the new heaven and new earth, the descent of the New Jerusalem from heaven so that "the dwelling place of God is with

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<sup>146</sup>See Matt 15:30-31; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 17:11-19 for further examples of Jesus' miraculous healings resulted in God being glorified.

<sup>147</sup>Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 274–75. Morris concludes that John's question revealed a slight doubt in John's mind concerning Jesus: "Was Jesus, like John, a kind of forerunner? Would a greater come and bring judgment on sinners?" (275).

<sup>148</sup>Jesus' reply alludes to language found in Isaiah concerning Messiah and/or a restored Israel (35:5-6; 26:19; 29:18-19; 61:1).

<sup>149</sup>Mark Saucy, "Miracles and Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153, no. 611 (July 1996): 262.



man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God” (Rev 21:3). John described this magnificent city (Rev 21:10-21) and noticed it had no temple “for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (Rev 21:22). Andrea Spatafora explains:

The transcendent enters into the human world and is united to it. The separation between the earthly and divine is abolished. The city, therefore, is a theophany, a direct encounter with God. The experience of God, which was the privilege of few in the OT and, which was possible in an incomplete way in the Church, is now the heritage of all people. All the eschatological hopes of the OT that were centered on Mount Zion are now fulfilled in the New Jerusalem. Give that the mountain is a cultic place, the city is indicated as the place where man will worship God.<sup>150</sup>

The glory of the God continuously illumines the city so that no hint of sin-darkness is to be found.

God’s *telos* for creation and his redeemed is not groaning under the burden of suffering but unending and unimaginable joy in Christ as the “eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor 4:17) becomes the new reality. Revelation 21 opens with the declaration of the new heaven and earth which is characterized by “a majestic chorus of concord and hope.”<sup>151</sup> The first hopeful quality mentioned for this new eternal reality is “the sea was no more” (Rev 21:1). The removal of the sea is not referring to the drying up of the world’s oceans and other bodies of water but represents the culmination of the hope of King Messiah’s triumph over his enemies which, consequently, abrogates suffering. The eradication of

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<sup>150</sup>Andrea Spatafora, *From the “Temple of God” to God as the Temple: A Biblical Theological Study of the Temple in the Book of Revelation* (Rome, Italy: Gregorian University Press, 1997), 228–29.

<sup>151</sup>Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmann’s Publishing Company, 2001), 191. Scholar’s disagree whether the new heaven and earth are a transformation of the current heaven and earth or are a brand new creation because the first has been utterly destroyed. See Gale E. Heide, “What Is New about the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3,” *Journal for the Evangelical Theological Society* 40, no. 1 (March 1997): 37–56 for a good argument for the former position. Isa 65:17-18 foretold a new heaven and earth.

the sea is the necessary condition in order for God to dwell with his covenant people in unhindered fellowship for all eternity and, thus, “provides a passage into a renewed cosmos.”<sup>152</sup>

The biblical writers employed the mythopoetic imagery of the sea from their polytheistic neighbors, but not their theology, in order to show Yahweh’s might, power, majesty, and sovereignty. The surrounding polytheistic religions “deified [the sea] as a chaotic entity and set over against the gods of order.”<sup>153</sup> The primordial chaos, as was discussed in chapter 1, was a domain that resisted God’s rule and was described as a realm characterized by judgment, the darkness of evil and dread, lifelessness, and a raging sea (Gen 1:2). The presence of this rebellious, anti-creation sea “is a reality rejected by God”<sup>154</sup> so that he wields his kingly authority to subdue the chaos and exert his dominion over it through the acts of creation. Job 26:12, for example, casts creation as an act of God’s subduing the chaotic forces, which opposed his rule: “By his power he stilled the sea; by his understanding he shattered Rahab.” “Rahab” was a mythical semi-demonic primeval monster, which sought to destroy creation. The Creator subdued his antagonists at creation, which serves to show that “at a time the Lord decides, the Rahabs

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<sup>152</sup> David Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: The Meaning and Function of the Old Testament in Revelation 21.1-22.5*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 238 (London: Academic Press., 2003), 68.

<sup>153</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 181. See Bruce K. Waltke, *Creation and Chaos* (Portland, OR: Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1974), for a fuller treatment.

<sup>154</sup> Childs expands, “Nevertheless, the OT writer struggles to contrast the creation, not with a background of empty neutrality, but with an active chaos standing in opposition to the will of God. It is a reality which continues to exist and continues to threaten his creation. The chaos is a reality rejected by God. It forms no part of the creation, but exists nevertheless as a threatening possibility. Thus Jeremiah pictures a return to this chaos when God rejects his people in judgment (4.23-26)” (Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, *Studies in Biblical Theology*, vol. 27 [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009], 42).

of the world will be destroyed with all the other principalities and powers that have arrogantly confronted the living God.”<sup>155</sup>

God created humanity to be his vice-regents who were given the authority to subdue the forces which would oppose their rule and exert their dominion over the earth by spreading the glory of God throughout the earth through their children. However, they exerted their self-rule, rebelled against God, followed Satan, and, as a result, created a new chaos, which re-introduced God’s suffering judgment on the dark, life-resisting world. This Adamic-generated chaos is the realm in which suffering occurs and is also symbolized in Scripture as a tumultuous sea in rebellion against God’s kingly rule.<sup>156</sup>

God, however, continues to wage war against the sea. The exodus is the climatic redemptive event in the OT and “is conceived of as a victory over the primordial powers of chaos and evil which oppose and oppress God’s people.”<sup>157</sup>

Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD;  
awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago.  
Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon?  
Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep,  
who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over? (Isa 51:9-10).

Drying up the waters which allowed his covenant people to escape the bondage of slavery to enjoy the blessings of the Promised Land. Isaiah calls out for the “arm of the LORD,” the coming Messiah (also 53:1; see John 12:38), to once again arise, subdue the sea so that his redeemed may pass to the safety of their Promised Land.

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<sup>155</sup>*NIDOTTE*, s.v. “Rahab,” by Frank Anthony Spina. Rahab as a mythical creature is also mentioned in Job 9:13; Ps 87:4; Isa 30:7; 51:9. Ps 89:9-10, as does Job, links Rahab with the raging sea.

<sup>156</sup>See, for example, Pss 18:15; 29:3; 4:13-14; 77:16; 89:9-10; Jer 5:22.

<sup>157</sup>Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 67. Other OT passages which depict God drying up the sea as a sign of victory include Pss 106:9; 114:3; Isa 44:24-27; Isa 50:2; Jer 51:36; Nah 1:4.

This OT backdrop informs Jesus' two encounters with the sea.<sup>158</sup> The first (Matt 8:23-33; Mark 4:36-41; Luke 8:22-25) was a great storm of wind and surging waves which threatened to swamp the boat. The disciples woke Jesus, he rebuked the wind and the waves, and immediately "there was a great calm" (Matt 8:26). The second (Matt 14:22-25; Mark 6:45-51; John 6:16-21) was another great storm of wind and waves but Jesus was not in the boat. He walked unaffected on the thrashing waves and the storm immediately ceased when he entered the boat. Taming and walking on the sea was a divine prerogative (Job 38:16; Ps 77:19; Isa 43:16; Hab 3:15) so that when Jesus subdues the sea "he is doing what is done only by the transcendent Creator."<sup>159</sup> The sea raged against Jesus but Jesus put the sea under his feet, a biblical symbol of mastery (1 Kgs 5:3; Pss 8:6; 110:1; Eph 1:22; 1 Cor 15:25). In both instances, the turbulent sea brought fear but Jesus rendered the sea powerless, which resulted in the disciples' awe and worship of him. Jesus' mastery over the sea, like his miraculous healings, was not simply a demonstration of divine power but "are glimpses of the restoration that will one day be fully and finally consummated—the miracles, in other words, are eschatological."<sup>160</sup> The sea—a symbol of fear, chaos, repression, dread, darkness, evil, sin, the grave, death, and

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<sup>158</sup>Leviathan was another mythical sea creature mentioned in Scripture. This creature was powerful and dreadful (Job 41:1-8; Isa 27:1), with which God is at war. Satan is described as a serpent and dragon who, after being cast out of heaven, "stood on the sand of the sea" (Rev 12:17).

<sup>159</sup>Dane Ortlund, "The Old Testament Background and Eschatological Significance of Jesus Walking on the Sea (Mark 6:45-52)," *Neotestamentica* 46, no. 2 (2012): 327.

<sup>160</sup>*Ibid.*, 330. J. Moltmann helpfully explains, "When Jesus expels demons and heals the sick, he is driving out of creation the powers of destruction, and is healing and restoring created beings who are hurt and sick. The lordship of God to which the healings witness, restores creation to health. Jesus' healings are not supernatural miracles in a natural world. They are the only truly 'natural' thing in a world that is unnatural, demonized and wounded. . . . Finally, with the resurrection of Christ, the new creation begins, *pars pro toto*, with the crucified one" (J. Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, trans. M. Kohl [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 98–99).

suffering—opposes God. Jesus, however, the Arm of the LORD, will one day reign as the visible and undisputed King who forever puts the sea under his feet so that his people will forever be freed from the pains of suffering.

Revelation, echoing the rest of Scripture, uses the sea “as a symbol of chaos, the source of evil and powers hostile to God.”<sup>161</sup> The sea in this book symbolizes the realm of evil (Rev 4:6; 12:18; 13:1; 15:2), the rebellious nations who oppose God and persecute his redeemed (Rev 12:18; 13:1), death (Rev 20:13), and idolatrous practices (Rev 18:10-19).<sup>162</sup> The climatic opposition to God’s rule from one of his fallen vice-regents will come when Antichrist rises from the sea (Rev 13:1). Thus, “there is no more sea” means that King Jesus has subdued all his enemies so that “only God and his people [are] dwelling together in a place that is cleansed from the stain of sin.”<sup>163</sup> The removal of the sea is crucial for,

just as Yahweh won a victory over chaos by ‘drying up’ the Red Sea which barred the way to freedom, so he will once again remove all opposition by a victory over the hostile forces when he dries up the sea of chaos and affliction in a new exodus from exile so the redeemed can cross over safely into their inheritance.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup>Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 65.

<sup>162</sup>G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Carlisle, England: The Paternoster Press, 1999), 1042. “Sea” is also used in Rev as a literal body of water (Rev 5:13; 7:1-3; 8:8-9; 10:2, 5-6, 8; 14:7).

<sup>163</sup>Heide, “What Is New?,” 45. G. K. Beale elaborates on this idea with the observation that “the sea was no more” may include all the nuances of “sea” used in Rev: “That is, when the new creation comes there will no longer be any threat from Satan because he will have been permanently judged and excluded from the new creation. Nor will there be any threat from rebellious nations, since they will have suffered the same fate as Satan. Neither will there be death ever again in the new world, so that there is no room for the sea as the place of the dead. There also will be no more idolatrous trade practice using the seas as its main avenue. Even the perception of the literal sea as a murky, unruly part of God’s creation is no longer appropriate in the new cosmos, since the new creation is to be characterized by peace. Literal seas separate nation from nation, . . . but in the new creation such a separation can be no more, since all are in close fellowship with one another and with God” (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1042).

<sup>164</sup>Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 67.

The Adam-produced chaos is the sphere in which suffering occurs. Jesus, the Second Adam, is the chaos-tamer whose final victory puts an end to suffering.

Isaiah expressed the great hope of God's covenant people for a suffering-free new creation:

He will swallow up death forever;  
and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces,  
and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth,  
for the LORD has spoken (Isa 25:8).

And the ransomed of the LORD shall return  
and come to Zion with singing;  
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
they shall obtain gladness and joy,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away (Isa 35:10; 51:11).

“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth,  
and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind” (Isa 65:17)

“I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people;  
no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress” (Isa 65:19).

John incorporated this Isaianic language to describe life in the new creation. The removal of the sea is the removal of the realm of suffering and the first pronouncement of personal life within this new created order revolves around the end of suffering: “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:4).<sup>165</sup> The “former things” are the heartaches, miseries, griefs, despairs, and sufferings

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<sup>165</sup>Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1049. Mathewson points out that Rev 21:1-5 has a chiasmic structure (Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 33):

- A. The new heaven and new earth (Rev 5:1a)
- B. The first heaven and first earth have passed away (Rev 5:1b)
- C. The sea is no more (Rev 5:1b)
- D. The new Jerusalem-bride (Rev 5:2)

which characterize life in the current chaos. The sea-free eternity will make suffering a distant memory for which the glorified redeemed will eternally glorify God.

“He will wipe away (ἐξαλείψει) every tear from their eyes” (also Rev 7:17) shows God’s initiative to comfort his people: “Like a mother who bends down and tenderly wipes away the tears from the eyes of her weeping child, so the Lord God stoops down to dry the tear-filled eyes of his children. Here is a telling portrait of God’s tender mercies extended to the suffering members of his household.”<sup>166</sup> The verb ἐξαλείφω was used metaphorically to mean “to wipe out, to obliterate, to cancel or destroy.”<sup>167</sup> God himself will annihilate the tears his redeemed have shed throughout the centuries due to the nearly infinite varieties of suffering they have endured.<sup>168</sup> In the new creation will be no tears of pain, injustice, fear, sickness, evil, trouble, regret, frustration, disappointment, cruelty, guilt, remorse, heartache, betrayal, misfortune, afflictions that characterize this age for God himself will extinguish them.

The physical and spiritual death Adam secured for his progeny will, likewise, be forever gone for “death shall be no more.”<sup>169</sup> Paul declared that “the last enemy to be

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- D'. The dwelling of God is with humanity (Rev 5:3)
  - C'. Evil and pain are no more (Rev 5:4a-c)
  - B'. The former things have passed away (Rev 5:4d)
  - A'. All things are made new (Rev 5:a)

The literary parallel of the C and C' elements support the idea that the meaning of the removal of the sea is expanded in Rev 5:4.

<sup>166</sup>Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 557–58.

<sup>167</sup>*NIDNTT*, s.v. “Destroy,” by J. I. Packer.

<sup>168</sup>Hell, in contrast, is characterized by continuous weeping (Matt 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28).

<sup>169</sup>Hell is the second death (Rev 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8).

destroyed is death” (1 Cor 15:26). Physical death is still a reality for all in this age yet its fearful power has been nullified by the Suffering Servant who died a violent death for the spiritually dead so that they may enjoy the blessings of life. This truth caused Paul to triumphantly question: “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (1 Cor 15:55). The glorious God in the new heaven and earth will wipe away all threats of death and with it all mourning and crying and pain.<sup>170</sup>

The chaos-free new heaven and new earth is the realm in which persecution-suffering, groan-suffering, pruning-suffering, thorn-suffering, discipline-suffering, and trial-suffering have ceased. King Jesus has crushed Satan’s head and the Satan-esque head residing in the human heart. The adoption of the children of God is fully consummated so that they are revealed with divinely-imputed glory. The Christ-follower is now conformed to the Son and the Son, in turn, is eternally glorified as “the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom 8:29). The creation is fully restored as well as the redeemed heart. God’s covenant people will be forever freed from the chaos and will enjoy the transformation of the weak, limited body “to be like his [Jesus’] glorious body” (Phil 3:21)<sup>171</sup> and forever enjoy the ever-deepening blessings of their eternal inheritance secured by Christ. The full decrease of self-rule and increase of God’s rule in the lives of the redeemed will be realized and experienced in eternity so that they achieve the divine mandate to fill the earth with the glory of God as his vice-regents. The divine presence which sinful Adam spurned, the Second Adam and his New Covenant Adamic vice-regents embrace for God dwelling with his people “represents the fulfillment of all his

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<sup>170</sup>See also 2 Tim 1:10; Heb 2:14.

<sup>171</sup>See also Rom 8:30; 1 John 3:1-2.



covenantal and saving promises as is the climax of all of redemptive history.”<sup>172</sup>

The realized eschatology where the child of God is basking in the glow of divine glory with unhindered fellowship (Rev 21:9-17) and freed from the presence of sin, suffering, and death, results in everlasting praise and worship of the redeemed for the Lamb. The praises of the glorified saints recorded in Revelation,

while not depreciating human experience, the songs about the throne are occupied with a greater theme: God is their object—His character, His attributes, His acts, His benefits, His pleasure—and it is in beholding His glory that the creature has the highest joy. These songs, then, can be said to represent the language of heaven.<sup>173</sup>

Lament psalms are not heard in the new heaven and new earth. The thanksgiving psalms and Jesus’ healing ministry were the merest foretaste of the restoration of the body and soul which await his people in the eternal Kingdom of God. The temporal end of suffering resulted in God being glorified, the eternal end of suffering will, likewise, result in the many conformed-to-Christ brethren singing forever to the Father and the Son: “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen” (Rev 7:12).

### **Summary: Suffering Glorifies God**

The argument of this chapter is that the ultimate divine design for suffering in his covenant people is to glorify himself. Isaiah foresaw the great eschatological ingathering of all God’s covenant people scattered throughout the world (Isa 43:5-6) whom God identifies as “everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my

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<sup>172</sup>G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 848.

<sup>173</sup>Robert E. Coleman, *Songs of Heaven* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1982), 17.

glory, whom I formed and made” (Isa 43:7). The covenant people of all eras “have been conquered by God and belong to Him as His subjects”<sup>174</sup> for the express purpose to bring him glory (1 Cor 10:13; Col 3:17; 1 Pet 4:11).

God’s glory pervades every aspect of his being and was displayed as he revealed himself in a variety of ways. His self-disclosure to Moses revealed that he is glorified by the proclamation of his name and the display of his works, which include his compassion, grace, patience, steadfast love, faithfulness, forgiveness, and justice (Exod 34:5-8). God chose Israel and its citizenry “that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory” (Jer 13:11),<sup>175</sup> which the lamenting psalmists did in their suffering. The suffering psalmists glorified God as longed for him to display his glorious name and works which he revealed to Moses. The lamenters were foreshadows of the ultimate Sufferer who glorified God with his suffering.

The Son suffered to learn obedience to the glory of the Father, which culminated with his glorifying cross-sufferings. Jesus was lifted up to endure his Father-ordained cross-sufferings to be the giver of eternal life, the forgiver of sin, and the Savior of the world. which bring eternal blessings to the redeemed but, ultimately, was for the purpose of glorifying the Father. Jesus suffered to the glory of God and serves as the example by which his people ought to mimic during times of duress.

Each member of the Godhead was involved in the redemption of self-ruling rebels for the ultimate purpose of bringing glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy

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<sup>174</sup>Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 146.

<sup>175</sup>See also Isa 43:1; 44:23; 49:3; 60; 61:3. The nation was born in God’s Glory-presence displayed as a “pillar of cloud” or a “pillar of fire.” The divine Glory-presence brilliantly shined on Mount Sinai (Exod 19:18-20; 24:17), and filled the tabernacle (Exod 40:35) and the temple (1 Kgs 8:6-13).

Spirit (Eph 1:3-14). The divine exhortation to glorify God in all circumstances, including suffering, is still the clarion call of the Trinity (1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17, 23). Christ-followers are subject to all the sufferings inherent in a fallen world but also to sufferings reserved only for the redeemed. All the Pruning-sufferings, justification-hope sufferings, groan-sufferings, thorn-sufferings, persecution-sufferings, discipline-sufferings, and trial-sufferings are designed by God to conform them to the image of the Son. which, in turn, leads to the higher purpose of glorifying the Son and the Father.

God is also glorified through suffering when the suffering is ended. The lamenting psalmists became thanksgiving psalmists when God intervened and lifted their hardships. These declarative praise psalms clearly show that the healed psalmists glorified God by extolling his name and the same self-glorifying works he revealed to Moses. Sufferers miraculously healed by Jesus and those who witnessed their cure were quick to give God glory. These temporal deliverances from suffering, however, were but foreshadowings of the eternal cessation of suffering for the redeemed. The suffering-infused chaos humanity instituted and continues to propagate through the promulgation of self-rule, God will destroy when the eternal King establishes his rule on the earth. Time will give way to eternity and suffering will give way to unending joy as God himself will wipe away the tears of pain and suffering. The natural response to God's fully realized grace in the eschaton will result in unhindered glorification of God and the Lamb forever.

The biblical and theological arguments regarding suffering presented in this chapter and the previous two are not met with universal agreement within evangelicalism. The greatest challenge within evangelicalism to the propositions defended thus far come

from open theism (openness, neotheism).<sup>176</sup> The objections raised by this theological system against the divine design of suffering will be addressed in the next chapter.

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<sup>176</sup>Roger Olson claims open theism is “the most significant controversy about the doctrine of God in evangelical thought in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries” (Roger E. Olson, *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology*, The Westminster Handbooks to Christian Theology [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004]), 190; bold type was removed from the original).

CHAPTER 5  
THE OBJECTIONS OF OPEN THEISM AGAINST  
THE DIVINE DESIGN FOR SUFFERING

The argument of this dissertation rests on two broad convictions. First, the “divine design” language inherently includes the compatibilistic understanding that God exerts absolute sovereignty over all creation (including the choices which bring about events), each person makes free decisions within his or her nature, and individuals are morally responsible for their actions. The second conviction is that suffering is never meaningless but always serves divine purposes. Scholarly debate over open theism has tapered off in recent years but its theology has been incorporated into and continues to be popular within segments of the wider evangelical community.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is to defend the dissertation thesis against the challenges of open theism. I will begin by outlining and critiquing the two major theological lynchpins which undergird neotheism—the centrality of divine love and libertarian freedom. These two theological tenets make open theists conclude that no divine design for suffering exists and suffering is purposeless. These conclusions disagree

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<sup>1</sup>See Jeff Robinson, “Is Open Theism Still a Factor 10 Years after ETS Vote?” The Gospel Coalition, accessed March 3, 2016, <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/is-open-theism-still-a-factor-10-years-after-ets-vote>. Gregory Boyd is the most prolific open theistic author. His most recent book, *Benefit of the Doubt: Breaking the Idol of Certainty* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), continues to espouse open theistic theology. Boyd wrote the forward to a recently released book: Jessica Kelley, *Lord Willing? Wrestling with God’s Role in My Child’s Death* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2016), which is from an openness perspective. Active websites promoting open theism include [opentheism.info](http://opentheism.info) and [Boyd’s reknew.org](http://Boyd’sreknew.org).

with the dissertation argument and will be addressed in the second section. All theological beliefs affect life. The third section will examine how open theistic ideas about God affects sufferers' confidence in God, Christ and the gospel, prayer, and eternal hope.

### **Theological Foundations of Open Theism**

An emphasis on love as the defining divine attribute and libertarian freedom forms the foundation of openness theology. These theological propositions must first be explained and critiqued for they are the basis from which open theists develop a theology of suffering with its attendant practical implications.

#### **Open Theism and Divine Love**

“God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). Open theists take these verses, and others, as the undisputable *sine qua non* theological center of the divine nature. Richard Rice, for example, contends that “God’s love is supreme”<sup>2</sup> and “love is the most important quality we attribute to God”<sup>3</sup> He continues, “From a Christian perspective, *love* is the first and last word in the biblical portrait of God. . . . The statement *God is love* is as close to as the Bible comes to giving us a definition of the divine reality.”<sup>4</sup> Rice believes, “love is the concrete reality that unifies all of the attributes of God. A doctrine of God that is faithful to the Bible must show that all God’s characteristics derive from love.”<sup>5</sup> Divine

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<sup>2</sup>Richard Rice, *God’s Foreknowledge and Man’s Free Will* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1985), 29.

<sup>3</sup>Richard Rice, “Biblical Support for a New Perspective,” in *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; Carlisle, England: The Paternoster Press, 1994), 15.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 18; italics in original.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, 21. Gregory Boyd echoes this thought: “The most basic and yet more profound teaching

love, then, is not only the center of the divine nature but is the progenitor of all of God's other attributes. Divine love is the filter through which open theists view and interpret reality.

Christian theologians throughout the centuries have universally maintained that divine love is an intrinsic aspect of God's character. Love was active among the members of the Trinity before creation (John 17:24). God's benevolence is an expression of his love to both the just and unjust (Matt 5:45). Divine love, however, is usually focused on God's redemptive work and is directed to his covenant people. Jesus comforted his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion by telling them, "the Father himself loves you" (John 16:26). The Father's love sent Christ to the cross (Rom 5:8), his love "predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ" (Eph 1:5), the Holy Spirit pours out God's love into the redeemed heart (Rom 5:5), and God's fatherly love afflicts his children with discipline-suffering (Heb 12:5-11). John Owen counseled Christ-followers, "The greatest sorrow and burden you can lay on the Father, the greatest unkindness you can do to him is not to believe that he loves you."<sup>6</sup> The fact of God's love is not disputed. What is contested, however, is the openness contention that love is *the* defining divine attribute.

First, the insistence that love is the core divine attribute begs the simple question, "Why?" Openness advocates are not the first to posit that one divine attribute is

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of the Bible is that 'God is love' (1 Jn 4:8, 16)" (Gregory A. Boyd, *Is God to Blame?* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003], 62). Sanders in *The God Who Risks* has an extended section on God's love where he states, "Whereas classical theism's root metaphor to God as the pillar around which all else moves, the root metaphor for relational theism is a personal God in loving relations with creaturely persons" (John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998], 175). Explaining and defending "creative love theism" is the purpose of Clark Pinnock and Robert C. Brow, *Unbounded Love: A Good News Theology for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; Carlisle, England: The Paternoster Press, 1994).

<sup>6</sup>John Owen, *Communion with God*, ed. R. J. K. Law, abridged ed. (Edinburgh: The Banner of  
245

more important than others and the one from which all the others are derived. For example, past theologians have declared that, rather than love, God's infinity, or his aseity, or omnipotence, or holiness were *the* ruling divine attribute.<sup>7</sup> Wayne Grudem explains that "when Scripture speaks about God's attributes it never singles out one attribute of God as more important than all the rest."<sup>8</sup> "God is love" is absolutely true but Scripture also declares that God is, for example, "a consuming fire" (Deut 4:24), "peace" (Jdg 6:24), "good" (Ps 100:5), and "a jealous and avenging God" (Nah 1:2). God is an infinitely complex being and to focus in on a single attribute as the defining one is an unsound theological practice. The net result creates a warped view of God.

Second, neotheism's overemphasis on divine love creates a vulnerable God. Clark Pinnock asserts that divine love means God reacts with "responsiveness, generosity and sensitivity, openness and vulnerability" with humanity.<sup>9</sup> John Sanders adds, "God, in vulnerability, binds himself to others in love"<sup>10</sup> and "the Father has always loved his creatures—in spite of sin—and makes himself vulnerable to them."<sup>11</sup> Gregory Boyd believes God's love-induced vulnerability is a sign of strength: "It takes a truly self-

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Truth Trust, 1991), 13.

<sup>7</sup>See John M. Frame, *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: R & R Publishing, 2001), 51–53.

<sup>8</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 178. Grudem's section on God's unity is insightful as he further explains this concept (177-79).

<sup>9</sup>Clark Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; Carlisle, England: The Paternoster Press, 1994), 103.

<sup>10</sup>John Sanders, "Historical Considerations," in *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; Carlisle, England: The Paternoster Press, 1994), 100.

<sup>11</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 178. Sanders has an extended section of love expressing itself as vulnerability on pp 177-79.



confident, sovereign God to make himself vulnerable.”<sup>12</sup> Vulnerability in open theism creates a God who does not assert himself but is needy,<sup>13</sup> dependent,<sup>14</sup> malleable,<sup>15</sup> pleading, wounded, oftentimes frustrated, regretful, and disappointed.<sup>16</sup>

In context, the indicative “God is love” (1 John 4:8) is immediately defined. First, “in this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world” (1 John 4:9). John defines God’s love in terms of the incarnation. Second, “in this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). John also casts divine love in terms of the cross. “Propitiation” means “the turning away of wrath by an offering.”<sup>17</sup> John’s declaration “God is love,” then, is not “an ontological statement describing what God is in his essence; rather he is, . . . speaking about the loving nature of God revealed in saving action on behalf of humankind.”<sup>18</sup> Divine love, then, is not sentimental vulnerability but

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<sup>12</sup>Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 149.

<sup>13</sup>Pinnock believes, “In a sense God needs our love because he has freely chosen to be a lover and needs us because he has chosen to have reciprocal love, not because it was foisted on him from without” (Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001], 30).

<sup>14</sup>Rice asserts, “God is dependent on the world” (Rice, “Biblical Support for a New Perspective,” 16).

<sup>15</sup>Boyd states, “I believe that any model of providence that hopes to be considered plausible by followers of Jesus must be able to render intelligible the loving, communal way God operates in the world as well as God’s loving willingness to be affected and influenced by humans” (Gregory A. Boyd, “God Limits His Control,” in *Four Views on Divine Providence*, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011], 187).

<sup>16</sup>Boyd, *Is God to Blame?*, 53–87.

<sup>17</sup>Walter A. Elwell, ed., *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), s.v. “Propitiation,” by L. Morris. The word is also used in Rom 3:25; Heb 2:17; 1 John 2:2.

<sup>18</sup>Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Leicester, England: Apollos), 157.

an act of the almighty sovereign God, which led his Son to the cross for his glory.<sup>19</sup> The magnification of divine love over all the other attributes also significantly affects the open theistic understanding of the divine-human relationship.

### **Open Theism and Libertarian Freedom**

Divine love, according to open theists, demands God create moral beings, both human and angelic, with libertarian freedom. Pinnock defines this term:

What I call ‘real freedom’ is also called libertarian or contra-causal freedom. It views a free action as one in which a person is free to perform an action or refrain from performing it and is not completely determined in the matter by prior forces—nature, nurture, or even God. One acts freely in a situation if, and only if, one could have done otherwise. Free choices are choices that are not causally determined by conditions preceding them. It is the freedom of self-determination, in which the various motives and influences informing the choice are not the sufficient cause of the choice itself. The person makes the choice in a self-determined way.<sup>20</sup>

Pinnock continues to explain that this divinely bestowed freedom was “for the sake of love.”<sup>21</sup> Thomas Oord expands on the necessary connection between divine love and libertarian freedom in openness theology:

One of the keys to constructing an adequate theology of love is to portray God as

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<sup>19</sup>The same idea is seen in John 3:16 (“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son”) and Rom 5:8 (“But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”). Wayne Grudem defines God’s love as, “God eternally gives of himself to others. This definition understands love as self-giving for the benefit of others. This attribute of God shows that it is part of his nature to give of himself in order to bring about blessing or good for others” (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 198). The other use of the phrase “God is love” is found in 1 John 4:16. John again prefaces God’s love with incarnational and propitiatory language: “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14). The next verse speaks of confessing Jesus as “the Son of God,” a title of deity, in order to abide in him (1 John 4:15). John then highlights God’s love at the beginning of 1 John 4:16: “so we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us.” The redeeming love of God was put on display when the Son of God became the Suffering Servant. The verse continues, “God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” Again, “God is love” is within the context of the Son being sent by the Father to be the propitiatory sacrifice for sin, which, in turn, glorified the Father.

<sup>20</sup>Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 127.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 132.

unable to coerce. This means God cannot entirely control others. An adequate theology of love, however, should present God as almighty. Being almighty need not entail the capacity to coerce others, in the sense of overriding, withdrawing, or failing to offer freedom. Coercion and love are irreconcilable.<sup>22</sup>

Boyd gives his insights, “Of course [God] could have created a world where we *have* to do his will, but it would have been a creation denied of love.”<sup>23</sup> Divine love, according to open theists, demands libertarian freedom, a freedom that is able to choose or refrain any action regardless of internal and external influences.

Several problems exist with this understanding of the divine-human relationship. First, libertarian freedom has difficulty adequately accounting for the powerful presence of indwelling sin. Scripture teaches that the Adam-inherited sin nature enslaves the soul so that contrary choices are impossible (Rom 6:6). The enslaving sin nature dictates the individual will always freely choose to sin because the natural posture of the self-ruling is hostility to God (Rom 8:7) so that “those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom 8:8). The sin nature restricts the freedom of being able to please God and to believe the gospel. The gospel is believed and received, and God is loved, only through the efficacious work of the Spirit as he exerts his will on the soul to open it to the truth of God’s Word (John 16:7-11; Acts 16:14).<sup>24</sup> Open theists claim libertarian freedom

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<sup>22</sup>Thomas Jay Oord, *The Nature of Love: A Theology* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2010), 114. Clark Pinnock expresses a similar idea: “In order to bring out the truth of God’s rule over the world, the dynamic character of his nature and the openness of his loving relationships more effectively, myself and some colleagues offered the ‘openness of God’ model, so-called because it was an appealing and unused term. In it we portrayed God as a triune communication who seeks relationships of love with human beings, having bestowed upon them genuine freedom for this purpose. Love and not freedom was our central concern because it was God’s desire for loving relationships which required freedom” (Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 3).

<sup>23</sup>Boyd, *Is God to Blame?*, 63.

<sup>24</sup>This statement is an affirmation of the efficacious work of the Spirit (irresistible grace): “In addition to the outward general call to salvation, which is made to everyone who hears the gospel, the Holy Spirit extends to the elect a special inward call that inevitably brings them to salvation” (David N. Steele,

means one may overcome his or her nature. Scripture teaches that the inherent sin nature renders unfettered free choices impossible.

Second, Scripture is replete with clear affirmations that God directs decisions and directs free choices for his purposes and according to his will.<sup>25</sup> Joseph's brothers freely chose to sell him into slavery yet their decision was ordained by God (Gen 45:5-8). God's foreordaining the brothers' decision to sell Joseph into slavery also meant God restricted their free choices of being able to kill him, something they contemplated doing (Gen 37:20). God predetermined Cyrus would choose to rebuild Jerusalem (Isa 44:28) and Judas would betray Jesus (Luke 22:21-22). God determines the decisions political leaders will make for his purposes (Prov 21:1) and has determined the choices everyone will make (Prov 16:1, 9; 19:21).<sup>26</sup> Sin is freely chosen but sinful decisions "are no less under God's control."<sup>27</sup> Pharaoh freely hardened his own heart (Exod 8:15) but God told Moses prior to any exodus events he would harden Pharaoh's heart (Exod 4:21).<sup>28</sup> The decisions of the individual whose sinful choices brought about the crucifixion were according to God's predestined plan (Ps 118:23; Luke 22:22; Acts 4:28; 13:27). The

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Curtis C. Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended*, 2nd ed. [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishers, 2004], 7). Sanders despises this theological tenet: "Irresistible grace may be thought of positively as divine liberation from an invincible prison. But it may also be seen negatively as *divine rape* because it involves nonconsensual control; the will of one is forced on the will of the other. Of course, the desire God *forces* on the elect is a beneficent one—for their own good—but *it is rape nonetheless*. Love cannot be forced because it involves the consent of persons" (Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 239–40; italics in original).

<sup>25</sup>This paragraph is indebted to Frame, *No Other God*, 64–67.

<sup>26</sup>Also Prov 16:1; 19:21.

<sup>27</sup>Frame, *No Other God*, 68.

<sup>28</sup>God hardening Pharaoh's heart is also seen in Exod 7:3, 13; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8). See also Deut 2:30; Josh 11:18-20; 1 Sam 2:25; 2 Chr 25:20; 1 Sam 16:14; 1 Kgs 22:20-30; Isa 6:10; 63:17; Matt 13:13-15; John 12:39-40 for other examples of God hardening hearts.

decisions of the future Antichrist are foreordained by God (Rev 7:17). Libertarian apologists remove God's sovereignty from any and all human decision-making. The few passages cited, which could be multiplied many times over, clearly show decisions are not free from divine control but reflect divine purposes.

Third, open theism grants God exhaustive omniscience of past and current events, but deny him infallible and comprehensive knowledge of any future event.

Pinnock argues:

Philosophically speaking, if choices are real and freedom significant, future decisions cannot be exhaustively foreknown. This is because the future is not determinate but shaped in part by human choices. The future is not fixed like the past, which can be known completely. The future does not yet exist and therefore cannot be infallibly anticipated, even by God. Future decisions cannot in every way be foreknown, because they have not yet been made. God knows everything that can be known—but God's foreknowledge does not include the undecided."<sup>29</sup>

God makes predictions but, according to openness advocates, his prophecies are not according to definite foreknowledge but on what God thinks will probably happen: "Isn't a God who perfectly anticipates and wisely responds to everything a free agent might do more intelligent than a God who simply knows what a free agent will do? Anticipating and responding to possibilities takes problem-solving intelligence. Simply possessing a crystal-ball vision of what's coming requires none."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," 123. Rice has similar thoughts: "Perfect knowledge, or omniscience, is not simply 'knowing everything.' Rather, it is 'knowing everything there is to know.' And, as we have seen, future free decisions are not there to be known until they are actually made. Accordingly, God's not knowing them in advance does not imply that His knowledge is less than perfect. It simply means that His knowledge corresponds precisely with where there is to know" (Rice, *God's Foreknowledge and Man's Free Will*, 54–55).

<sup>30</sup>Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 127–28. Basinger succulently sums up the open theistic view of divine foreknowledge: "God does not possess exhaustive knowledge of exactly how we will utilize our freedom, although he may well at times be able to predict with great accuracy the choices we will freely make" (David Basinger, "Practical Implications," in *The Openness of God* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; Carlisle, England: The Paternoster Press, 1994], 156).

Fourth, the result of open theism's demand of libertarian freedom creates a God who is perpetually ignorant, powerless, and agitated. The open God is always ignorant of what is going to happen next: "If God does not foreknow future free actions, it is not because his knowledge of the future is in any sense incomplete. It's because there is, in this view, *nothing definite there for God to know!*"<sup>31</sup> God cannot guarantee any future event for, "God chose to create us with incompatibilistic (libertarian) freedom—freedom over which he cannot exercise total control."<sup>32</sup> God's will is not the determining factor for how the future will unfold. The future is a cooperative effort between Creator and creature: "God's will is not the ultimate explanation for everything that happens; human decisions and actions make an important contribution too. Thus history is the combined result of what God and his creatures decide to do."<sup>33</sup> The neotheistic God, then, is oftentimes surprised and shocked at the decisions his creatures make,<sup>34</sup> he is constantly learning new knowledge,<sup>35</sup> he sometimes makes mistakes because he did not correctly

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<sup>31</sup>Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 16; italics in original.

<sup>32</sup>Basinger, "Practical Implications," 156.

<sup>33</sup>Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective," 16–17. Clark Pinnock echoes a similar idea: "When God gave creatures freedom, he gave them an open future, a future in a degree to be shaped by their decisions, not a future already determined in every detail" (Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," 123).

<sup>34</sup>Sanders comments on the fall and believes that from God's perspective "a break in the relationship does not seem *plausible* considering all the good that God has done. . . . Yet there is no reason to expect anything except love in return to the loving providence of God, for God has (so to speak) stacked the deck in his favor. In Genesis 3 the totally unexpected happens" (Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 45–46). Sanders addresses the fall later in the same work: "God did not know, for a fact, when he decided to create that we would commit moral evils. God did not foreknow that we would actually sin, only that it was possible; thus he cannot be held morally culpable" (259). See also Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 39–42.

<sup>35</sup>God's lack of foreknowledge "implies that God learns things and (I would add) enjoys learning them" (Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," 123). Rice echoes a similar idea: "Instead of perceiving the entire course of human existence in one timeless moment, God comes to know event as they take place. He learns something for what transpires" (Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective," 16).

anticipate his creatures' decisions,<sup>36</sup> he becomes frustrated because what he desires to happen does not,<sup>37</sup> and he regrets having made erroneous decisions.<sup>38</sup>

Omniscience is a function of divine sovereignty and may be defined as, "God fully knows himself and all things actual and possible in one simple and eternal act."<sup>39</sup> "All things actual" means "all things that exist and all things that happen."<sup>40</sup> Everything that has happened and is currently happening, from the orbit of a galaxy to the path of a muon, is a present reality to God so that "no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Heb 4:13). "All things actual" means all future events are also infallibly known by God. God clearly declares of himself that his omniscience includes perfect knowledge of future events:

"Remember this and stand firm,  
recall it to mind, you transgressors,  
remember the former things of old;  
for I am God, and there is no other;

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<sup>36</sup>Sanders states, "In other words, given the depth and breadth of God's knowledge of the present situation, God forecasts what he thinks will happen. In this regard God is the consummate social scientist prediction what will happen. God's ability to predict the future in this way is far more accurate than any human forecaster's, however, since God has exhaustive access to all past and present knowledge. This would explain God's foretelling Moses that Pharaoh would refuse to grant his request. Nonetheless, this does leave open the possibility that God might be 'mistaken' about some points, as the biblical record acknowledges. For instance, in Exodus God thought that the elders of Israel would believe Moses, but God acknowledges that Moses is correct in suggesting the possibility that they may not believe him (Ex 3:16-4:9). God also thought the people of Jeremiah's day would repent and return to him, but they did not, to God's dismay (Jer 3:7, 19-20)" (Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 131–32.).

<sup>37</sup>Pinnock concludes, "Commenting on Israel's wickedness, God expresses frustration: 'nor did it enter my mind that they should do this abomination' (Jer 32:35 NRSV). God has not anticipated it" (Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," 122).

<sup>38</sup>Greg Boyd comments, "To begin, one aspect of the portrait of God in Scripture that suggest the future is partly open is the fact that God sometimes regrets how things turn out, even prior decisions that *he himself made*" (Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 55; italics in original). He continues, "Common sense tells us that we can only regret a decision we made if the decision resulted in an outcome other than what we expected or hoped for when the decision was made" (56).

<sup>39</sup>Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 190.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

I am God, and there is none like me,  
declaring the end from the beginning  
and from ancient times things not yet done,  
saying, ‘My counsel shall stand,  
and I will accomplish all my purpose,’  
calling a bird of prey from the east,  
the man of my counsel from a far country.  
I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass;  
I have purposed, and I will do it (Isa 46:11).<sup>41</sup>

God’s omniscience is an “eternal act,” meaning “that God’s knowledge never changes or grows. If he were ever to learn something new, he would not have been omniscient beforehand.”<sup>42</sup> Scripture very clearly declares that God “knows everything” (1 John 3:20) without any qualifying statements of concerning past, present, or future events.<sup>43</sup>

In summary, open theism is grounded in two theological tenets. Divine love is *the* cardinal attribute of the divine nature. His love demands he create moral agents, both human and angelic, with libertarian freedom. The net effect of these propositions produces a God who is ignorant of exact knowledge of future events, needy, dependant, fallible, and regretful over some of the decisions he makes. The openness concept of God has significant implications on a theology of suffering and on sufferers’ lives.

### **Open Theism’s Challenges to the Dissertation Thesis**

The argument of this dissertation is that the divine design for suffering in

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<sup>41</sup>See also Isa 41:22-23; 44:7; 45:21. Boyd maintains his position despite the clarity of the passage quoted: “He tells us that he is talking about *his own will* and *his own plans*. He declares that the future is settled to the extent that he is going to determine it, but noting in the text requires that we believe that *everything* that will ever come to pass will do so according to his will and thus is settled ahead of time” (Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 30; italics in original).

<sup>42</sup>Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 191–92.

<sup>43</sup>See also Job 11:11; 26:6; 28:24; 34:21-23; Pss 14:2; 17:2; 33:13-18; 102:19; 139:1-4, 12; 147:4; Prov 5:21; 15:3,11; Isa 29:15; Jer 17:10; Amos 4:13; 40:26; Matt 6:8, 32:10:30; Luke 16:15; Acts 1:24; 1 Thess 2:4; Heb 4:13; Rev 2:23.



Christ-followers is to decrease self-rule through mortification, increase God's rule through engendering spiritual maturity, with both of these functions serving the ultimate purpose of God glorifying himself in the individual lives of his covenant people. The two overarching theological ideas informing this statement are God's absolute sovereignty over suffering and the divine purposes of suffering. Neotheism challenges both of these propositions.

### **Open Theism Challenges Suffering has a Divine Design**

Open theists deny any divine design for suffering. Boyd's comments are representative of neotheistic reasoning:

Even more troubling, if God foreknew that Adolf Hitler would send six million Jews to their death, why did he go ahead and create a man like that? If I unleash a mad dog I am certain will bite you, am I not responsible for my dog's behavior? If so, how is God not responsible for the behavior of evil people he "unleashes" on the world—if, in fact, he is absolutely certain of what they will do once "unleashed"?

Moreover, if God is eternally certain that various individuals will end up being eternally damned, why does he go ahead and create them? If hell is worse than never being born, as Jesus suggests (Matt. 26:24), wouldn't an all-loving God refrain from creating people he is certain will end up there: If God truly doesn't want "any to perish" (2 Peter 3:9), why does he create people he is certain will do just that?<sup>44</sup>

Boyd answers his own questions by appealing to libertarian freedom: "Once God gave people this [libertarian] freedom, however, the purpose for their actions lies in *them*, not God. Since it was not settled ahead of time how people would use the freedom God gave them, God cannot be blamed for how they use it."<sup>45</sup> Openness theology challenges the

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<sup>44</sup>Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 10–11.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 99; italics in original. Pinnock echoes a similar thought: "God may be responsible for creating a world with moral agents capable of rebelling, but God is not to blame for what human beings do with their freedom" (Clark Pinnock, "God's Sovereignty in Today's World," *Theology Today* 53, no. 1

“divine design” language of the dissertation thesis in three ways: (1) God is not sovereign or responsible for suffering for it is the function of free moral agents; (2) libertarian freedom is the model of the divine-human relationship rather than compatibilism; and (3) love prevents God from willingly inflicting suffering. Each one of these neotheistic objections will be briefly addressed below.

First, openness theology denies that there is a divine design for suffering because God is not sovereign over or responsible for suffering. God as ultimate responsible agent for all suffering is illustrated by the “spectrum texts” of Scripture, texts which “indicate that the whole sweep of life, both ends of the spectrum, as it were, and everything in between are in the control of God.”<sup>46</sup>

Then the LORD said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD” (Exod 4:11)?

“See now that I, even I, am he,  
and there is no god beside me;  
I kill and I make alive;  
I wound and I heal;  
and there is none that can deliver out of my hand” (Deut 32:39).

“The LORD kills and brings to life;  
he brings down to Sheol and raises up” (1 Sam 2:6).

And he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21).<sup>47</sup>

In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has

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[April 1996]: 19.

<sup>46</sup>Bruce Ware, “Despair Amidst Suffering and Pain: A Practical Outworking of Open Theism’s Diminished View of God,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 4, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 66.

<sup>47</sup>Boyd has an extended section on Job in Boyd, *Is God to Blame?*, 85–102. His basic contention is that Job is expressing bad theology in Job 1:21 and the rest of the book records God’s attempt to liberate him from his erroneous ideas.

made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him” (Ecc 7:14).

“I form light and create darkness,  
I make well-being and create calamity,  
I am the LORD, who does all these things” (Isa 45:7).

Is it not from the mouth of the Most High  
that good and bad come (Lam 3:38)?

Death and life, prosperity and adversity, well-being and calamity, and everything in between these extremes is ultimately from the sovereign hand of the eternal King as he rules over his creation. God may use secondary means to bring about his sovereign will but Scripture does not present God as having a *laissez faire* relationship to suffering. He is the ultimate responsible agent for all suffering, even suffering that results from free sinful choices.

Second, neotheists deny compatibilism as the biblical model for the divine-human relationship in favor of libertarian freedom. Compatibilism asserts that God is absolutely sovereign over all events in creation (thus preserving his sovereignty), each person is free to make moral decisions within his or her nature (thus acknowledging the sin nature), and individuals are morally responsible for their decisions. Open theists are correct in that suffering oftentimes results from the free choices of moral agents. Hitler and his followers freely chose to commit atrocities. Openness advocates are in error, however, for they sacrifice divine sovereignty on the altar of libertarian freedom. Scripture teaches, however, that both divine sovereignty and compatibilistic freedom are true. For example, God told Habakkuk he was going to sovereignly send the Babylonians as his means to judge Israel (Hab 1:5-11) but then would judge the Babylonians because they freely chose to invade Israel (Hab 2:6-20). The sage declared:

The LORD has made everything for its purpose,  
even the wicked for the day of trouble (Prov 16:4).

Charles Bridges reflects well a compatibilistic understanding of this passage while, at the same time, acknowledging the inherent tension:

And thus *all things* return to that boundless ocean, from whence they sprung. Even *the wicked*, whose existence might seem scarcely reconcilable to the Divine perfection, he includes in the grand purpose of setting out his Name. “It is the greatest praise of his wisdom, that he can turn the evil of men to his own glory!” . . . *Wicked* they are of themselves. He made them not so. He compels them not to be so. He abhors their wickedness. But he foresaw their evil. He permitted it; and though “he hath no pleasure in their death,” he will be glorified in them *in the day of evil*, and when they sin by their own free-will, he ordains them to punishment, as the monuments of his power, his justice, and his long-suffering.<sup>48</sup>

The good, loving, and kind God did, in fact, foreknow and exercise his sovereign control over all the sinful atrocities unleashed by Nazi Germany, and he holds them morally responsible for their actions.<sup>49</sup>

Third, openness theology maintains that a loving God would not willingly inflict suffering on his creation. If all the accumulated brutal actions of humanity from the fall to Parousia could be bundled into one package, it would pale in comparison to the barbarities perpetrated against the sinless Son of God on the cross.<sup>50</sup> The human element

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<sup>48</sup>Charles Bridges, *Proverbs*, Geneva Series (1846; repr, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), 227–28.

<sup>49</sup>A good and insightful overview of compatibilism may be found in D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 177–203. Carson acknowledges the inherent tension within compatibilism but concludes with wise insight, “The mystery of providence defies our attempt to tame it by reason. I do not mean that it is illogical; I mean that we do not know enough to be able to unpack it and domesticate it. Perhaps we may gauge how content we are to live with our limitation by assessing whether we are comfortable in joining the biblical writers in utterance that mock our frankly idolatrous devotion to our own capacity to understand. Are we embarrassed, for instance, by the prophetic rebuke to the clay that wants to tell the potter how to set about his work (Isa. 29:16; 45:9)? Is our conception of God big enough to allow us to read ‘The LORD works out everything to its proper end—even the wicked for a day of disaster’ (Prov. 16:4) without secretly wishing the text could be excised from the Bible?” (201-2).

<sup>50</sup>According to MacArthur, “No victim of injustice was ever more innocent than the sinless Son of God. And yet no one ever suffered more agony than He did. He was cruelly executed by men who

of Jesus' cross-sufferings were performed under the sovereign will of the loving God:

The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone.  
This is the LORD's doing;  
it is marvelous in our eyes (Ps 118:22-23).

Jesus is the rejected stone (Matt 21:42; Mark 12:10-11; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet 2:4) who became the cornerstone upon which the church is built (Eph 2:20). Both of these acts are "the LORD's doing," the loving Father sovereignly superintended the physical suffering his Son experienced. The greatest suffering Jesus experienced, however, was when his loving Father crushed him (Isa 53:5) and abandoned him (Matt 27:46). The cross of Christ is the greatest expression of God's love (1 John 4:10) and, simultaneously, the place of the greatest suffering any person has or will ever experience. Divine love and suffering are necessarily wedded together in the cross.

Divine love and suffering are also expressed in the Father's relationship with his children. Scripture declares, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (Jas 1:17). Suffering is a good gift the loving Father inflicts on his covenant people (Phil 1:29-30). God's love inflicts thorn-suffering so that Christ-followers will learn to rely on the sufficient grace of Christ (2 Cor 12:7-9). Love motivates God to inflict suffering so his covenant people will know Christ (Phil 3:10). The loving Father exerts discipline-suffering on his children in order to prevent and/or correct sin in their lives, and a lack of discipline-suffering is indicative of his hatred (Heb 12:5-11).

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openly acknowledged His faultlessness. . . . It was the greatest travesty of justice the world will ever see. . . . It is easy to look at the cross and conclude that this was the worst miscarriage of human justice in the history of the world. And it was. It was an evil act, perpetrated by the hands of wicked men" (John MacArthur, Jr., *The Murder of Jesus* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004], ii).

Conforming his adopted children to the image of the Son is the greatest act of love the Father bestows on his people, which is accomplished through suffering (Rom 8:18-29). Divine love and suffering are not antithetical to one another, as openness apologists maintain, but complementary in the divine design and purposes he has for his people.<sup>51</sup>

### **Open Theism Challenges Suffering has a Divine Purpose**

This dissertation has argued throughout that suffering has the overarching purposes to decrease the Adam-inherited, rebellious self-rule through mortification, to increase God's rule by engendering spiritual maturity, both for the ultimate objective of glorifying God. Openness advocates disagree. Libertarian freedom has "liberated" God from responsibility for suffering so that "horrible events happen that God does not want specifically to occur."<sup>52</sup> Suffering for open theists, then, is a meaningless anomaly that serves no divine purpose. William Hasker points out:

God knows that evils will occur, but he has not for the most part specifically, decreed or incorporated into his plan the individual instances of evil. Rather, God governs the world according to *general strategies* which are, as a whole, ordered for the good of the creation but whose detailed consequences are not foreseen or intended by God prior to the decision to adopt them. As a result, we are able to abandon the difficult doctrine of "meticulous providence" and to admit the presence in the world of particular evils God's permission of which is not the means of bringing about any greater good or preventing any equal or greater evil.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Boyd revisits Hitler: "If you claim that God foreknew what Hitler would do and created him anyway, it's hard to avoid the conclusion that the world must somehow be better with Hitler than without him. Think about it. If God is all good and thus always does what it best, and if God knew exactly what Hitler would do when he created him, we must conclude that God believed that allowing Hitler's massacre of the Jews (and many others) was preferable to his not allowing it. If you accept that premises that God is all good and all powerful and that he possesses exhaustively settled foreknowledge, the conclusion is difficult to avoid" (Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 98–99). Using neotheistic logic, one would have to ask if the world would be better off without the cross than with it.

<sup>52</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 268.

<sup>53</sup>William Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective," in *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; Carlisle, England: The Paternoster Press, 1994), 152.

David Basinger believes that “much of the pain and suffering we encounter may well be gratuitous—may well not lead to any greater good” and “[we] need not assume that some divine purpose exists for each evil that we encounter.”<sup>54</sup> He continues,

[Open theists do not] deny that something good can come out of even the most tragic occurrence. . . . But even in those cases where something of value appears, we who affirm the open model need not assume that God caused or allowed the evil in question as a means to this end. We remain free to assume that such evil was an undesired byproduct of misguided human freedom and/or the normal outworking of the natural order.<sup>55</sup>

An overemphasis on divine love and the insistence of libertarian freedom leads to the following conclusions: (1) God is ignorant of the suffering his creatures will decide to inflict on each other; (2) he is surprised and frustrated with the depths of suffering; (3) suffering is outside God’s plans and he cannot intervene to alleviate and/or prevent suffering; and (4) suffering is meaningless and purposeless, and any good that comes from it is more accidental than purposeful.

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<sup>54</sup>Basinger, “Practical Implications,” 170.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid. Other open theists make this same point. Sanders believes, “Within general providence it makes sense to say that God intends an overall purpose for the creation and that God does not specifically intend each and every action within the creation. Thus God does not have a specific divine purpose for each and every occurrence of evil. Some evil is simply pointless because it does not serve to achieve a greater good. The ‘greater good’ of establishing the conditions of fellowship between God and creatures does not mean that gratuitous evil has a point. Rather, the possibility of gratuitous evil has a point but its actuality does not. That is, God has a reason for not preventing gratuitous evil—the nature of the divine project—but there is no point for the specific occurrence of gratuitous evil” (Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 262). Basinger posits that open theists “unlike proponents of specific sovereignty, need not assume that some divine purpose exists for each evil that we encounter. We need not, for example, assume when someone dies that God ‘took him home’ for some reason, or that the horrors many experience in this world in some mysterious way fit into God’s perfect plan. We can justifiably assume, rather, that God is often as disappointed as we are that someone’s earthly existence has ended at an early age or that someone is experiencing severe depression or that someone is being tortured” (Basinger, “Practical Implications,” 170). Boyd asserts that “Scripture does not support the view that there must be a specific divine reason behind all events” (Gregory A Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001], 14). Boyd gives an illustration of a family turning around in an alley only to be in the crosshairs of a gang war. One of the gangs shot up the car and their young daughter was fatally wounded. Boyd analyzes this event, “Regarding all the details of this tragedy—why

According to Scripture, suffering is never purposeless. Suffering in the unregenerate may be to showcase God's justice (Acts 12:22-23), his power (Rom 9:17), or his mercy to bring them to repentance and the gospel (Acts 9:1-16). Suffering for the redeemed may include to teach the sufferer to develop reliance on God (2 Cor 1:9), to prove that the sufferer's faith is genuine (1 Pet 1:6-7), to engender obedience (Ps 119:67, 69, 75), to be able to minister to others (2 Cor 1:4), to prepare for eternal glory (2 Cor 4:17), to bring repentance (Ps 32:3-4), to develop humility (2 Cor 12:7), to make the sufferer spiritually strong in Christ (1 Pet 5:10), to build character (Rom 5:3-5), and for the ultimate purpose to conform the suffering Christ-follower to the image of the Son (Rom 8:28-30). God designs suffering so that his suffering covenant people will be a witness of his divine glory (2 Tim 2:8-10; 1 Pet 3:13-17) and grace (2 Cor 12:9) in order to provide an avenue for the proclamation of the gospel (2 Cor 4:8-12). Suffering is used to broaden his people's ministry by giving them the opportunity to witness for Christ in areas otherwise closed (Phil 1:12-14). Suffering may occur simply as an avenue for God to display his glorious works (John 9:3). Admittedly, God's purpose(s) for suffering are oftentimes shrouded in mystery and, like Job, the child of God may never know what God was accomplishing through the suffering.

To summarize, neotheists deny any divine design to suffering and any divine purposes behind it. This section defended the dissertation thesis by demonstrating, from Scripture, that a divine design for suffering exists due to God's sovereignty, compatibilism as the biblical model of the divine-human relationship, and that divine

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*this* particular family, *this* particular girl, at *this* particular moment, and so on—we must conclude that it was, in the end, simply bad luck” (ibid., 389; italics in original).



love and suffering are complementary with one another. Scripture also indicates that a host of divine purposes exist for suffering. At least one seeming purpose for suffering is always to increase the faith and trust of the redeemed in God so that he or she may suffer with confidence.<sup>56</sup>

### **Open Theism Undermines Sufferers’ Ability to Suffer with Confidence**

A. W. Tozer rightly stated that “what comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”<sup>57</sup> He continues, “A right conception of God is basic not only to systematic theology but to practical Christian living as well.”<sup>58</sup> Every theological tenet will, eventually, affect how one lives and responds to life’s circumstances, especially suffering. Open theism’s overemphasis on divine love and the consequential belief in libertarian freedom creates a version of God that has profound implications on sufferers. This dissertation has argued that the sovereignty of God over suffering develops and deepens a greater confidence in God, Christ, the gospel, prayer, and eternal hope. Open theists claim their view of God results in greater confidence for sufferers. The logical conclusions of openness theology, however, result in nothing but despair and hopelessness.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>A caution is in order to refrain from over-interpreting or over-analyzing the suffering. The danger lies in the child of God justifying the suffering because he or she has discovered *the* reason for it. God has a multitude of purposes for everything he does. Scripture gives several reasons for suffering, as noted, yet, at the same time, does not give an exhaustive list.

<sup>57</sup>A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1961), 1.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>59</sup>Basinger, “Practical Implications,” 176, extols the superiority of open theism for practical Christian living. Boyd uses words to this effect throughout *God of the Possible*, 89-92.

## Open Theism Undermines Sufferers' Confidence in God<sup>60</sup>

The open theistic God does not and cannot exert his will so that he is reduced to a cooperative agent working in tandem with his creatures. Pinnock maintains that “in creating Adam God showed himself willing to share power. He does not insist on being the only power.”<sup>61</sup> He explains later, “The situation is pluralistic: there is no single and all-determining divine will that calls all the shots.”<sup>62</sup> Events in history, then, occur due to “the combined result of what God and his creatures decide to do”<sup>63</sup> because “behind every particular event in history lies an impenetrably vast matrix of interlocking free decisions made by humans and angels.”<sup>64</sup> The seeming arbitrariness of life is due to “the way the decisions made by an unfathomably vast multitude of free agents intersect with each other.”<sup>65</sup> God, then, “must put up with the ongoing *effects* of agents’ free decisions.”<sup>66</sup> Boyd asserts that a God who insists on having absolute sovereignty is demeaned<sup>67</sup> for it “is the surest sign of insecurity and weakness”<sup>68</sup> Pinnock believes that a

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<sup>60</sup>This section is indebted to the many insights offered by Thomas K. Ascol, “Pastoral Implications of Open Theism,” in *Bound Only Once: The Failure of Open Theism*, ed. Douglas Wilson (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2001), 173–90.

<sup>61</sup>Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 42.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 53. See also Rice, “Biblical Support for a New Perspective,” 127–28.

<sup>63</sup>Rice, “Biblical Support for a New Perspective,” 16.

<sup>64</sup>Boyd, *Is God to Blame?*, 80.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>67</sup>Boyd charges, “Despite the various claims made by some today that we must protect ‘the sovereignty of God’ by emphasizing his absolute control over creation and thus by denouncing the open view, I submit that we ought to denounce the view that God exercises total control over everything, for this very same reason: *It demeans the sovereignty of God*” (Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 150; italics in original).

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 149.

God who refuses to share his power is “infinitely egocentric”<sup>69</sup> and “is a cosmic stuffed shirt who is always thinking of himself.”<sup>70</sup> Open theistic sufferers, then, rely on a vulnerable God who “rules” only with the permission and input of his creatures.

Suffering is often a frightening experience and Boyd, at least, recognizes how embracing the open theistic God could exacerbate fear:

It is true that according to the open view things can happen in our lives that God didn't plan or even foreknow with certainty (though he always foreknew they were possible). This means that in the open view things can happen to us that have no overarching divine purpose. In this view, “trusting in God” provides no assurance that everything that happens to us will reflect his divine purposes, for there are other agents who also have power to affect us, just as we have power to affect others. This, it must be admitted, can for some be a scary thought.<sup>71</sup>

Suffering under the open theistic God warrants a greater sense of panic. The open God is vulnerable, needy, dependent, malleable, pleading, wounded, frustrated, regretful, disappointed, surprised, always learning, prone to make mistakes, resourceful but not sovereign,<sup>72</sup> a risk-taker but not omniscient.<sup>73</sup> He is a God who cannot act independently

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<sup>69</sup>Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 5.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>71</sup>Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 153.

<sup>72</sup>Rice states, “God, in grace, grants humans significant freedom to cooperate with or work against God's will for their lives, and he enters into dynamic, give-and-take relationships with us. The Christian life involves a genuine interaction between God and human beings. We respond to God's gracious initiatives and God responds to our responses . . . and on it goes. God takes risks in this give-and take relationship, yet he is endlessly resourceful and competent in working toward his ultimate goals. Sometimes God alone decides how to accomplish these goals. On other occasions, God works with human decisions, adapting his own plans to fit the changing situation. God does not control everything that happens. Rather, he is open to receiving input from his creatures. In loving dialog, God invites us to participate with him to bring the future into being” (Rice, “Biblical Support for a New Perspective,” 127–28).

<sup>73</sup>Ascol, “Pastoral Implications,” 177. Ascol expands on the meaning: “Open theism reduces God to a cosmic gambler—and not a very successful one at that. He created billions of image bearers, gambling that they would choose to love and trust Him. This was to have been an “almost sure thing” because of His love and provision. Nevertheless, in terms of sheer quantitative analysis, His gamble hardly paid off. From creation to the present, the openness God has continued to take risks, only to experience repeated failures. Both the Bible and history are filled with accounts of people and “projects” that he

but only when give permission. The open theistic God regrets what happens to sufferers, is grieved over their suffering, suffers with them, offers contingency plans, but refuses/is incapable of exerting his will lest he violate his love by overriding libertarian freedom.<sup>74</sup> The neotheistic God has good intentions but routinely sees his will thwarted, makes plans he hopes will happen in the future but cannot know exactly what will happen, and is sorrowful when he realizes his good decisions made in ignorance actually proved to be errors in judgment. The open theistic God is reduced “to the level of a television meteorologist—one who, because he is an expert in his field has access to information which is not readily available to others, is in a better position than most to make educated guesses about the future.”<sup>75</sup> Yet, Boyd concludes, “Without having the open view to offer, I don’t know how one could effectively minister to [sufferers].”<sup>76</sup>

The Scripture portrays God as the Sovereign Ruler over all the earth and the nations (47:7), over all acts of nature (89:9), and over every decision that is made (Prov 16:9, 33; 21:1). He is “Lord God the Almighty” (Rev 15:3), “robed in majesty” (Ps 93:1), who “will reign forever and ever” (Exod 15:18; also Ps 146:10; Rev 11:15; 22:5). He is the God “declaring the end from the beginning” and who will accomplish all his purposes (Isa 46:10). Yahweh is perfect in all his works and decisions (Deut 32:4) and he does not change his decisions (Num 23:19). God derides those who think they can slough off his lordship and act contrary to his sovereign will (Ps 2:2-4) and is incensed with those who

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counted on in vain” (177). He continues, “I would sooner risk my family’s finances on a lottery ticket than my soul to a gambler with such a poor track record” (178).

<sup>74</sup>Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 105–6.

<sup>75</sup>Ascol, “Pastoral Implications,” 179–80.

<sup>76</sup>Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 106.

think they can teach him or influence him (Job 38:2). He does not share his glory or power with anyone (Isa 42:8), he acts and it cannot be reversed (Ps 33:11; Isa 43:13). God is omniscient and is not taught or gain knowledge through anyone or anything (Isa 40:13; 44:7; 45:21; 1 Cor 2:16; Rom 11:24). God is independent and does what he pleases (Ps 135:6), everything that happens is for a purpose (Prov 19:21), and his will cannot be thwarted (Prov 21:30).

Sufferers were effectively ministered to under the belief of the absolutely sovereign God long before open theism made its appearance. The suffering lamenting psalmists cried out to God, prayed to him, believed his promises, and expressed confident hope because they knew him to be the absolute Sovereign over all the earth and everything that occurred in their lives (Pss 5:2; 10:16; 22:28). Jesus suffered well because he had confidence in the sovereign will of his Father (Matt 26:39). Countless Christ-followers throughout the ages have suffered and died with their confidence in the God who is independent, trustworthy, consistent, sovereign, purposeful, good, and loving.<sup>77</sup>

Everything begins with God and stems from one's conception of him. Thomas Ascol wonders about the neotheistic God:

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<sup>77</sup>Joni Eareckson Tada is, perhaps, the most celebrated sufferer in contemporary Christianity. Her story is well-known—a diving accident rendered her a quadriplegic at age 17, yet in the intervening years she has continued to minister to others in a variety of ways. She reveals of herself, “As I have stated in the pages of this book, so many have tried to get me to say that my accident forty-three years ago was never part of God’s plan. That my paralysis was never His intention. That quadriplegia was never necessary. That chronic pain didn’t have to be. That suffering was never part of His plan. That the many tears and groans and struggles and sleepless nights were needless and a waste of my energy and my life.

I know differently.

It was all planned long ago, and God brought it about in His perfect faithfulness. And because He allowed it and permitted it, because He has walked with me through every moment of it, His plan has been marvelous for Joni Eareckson Tada.

And let me add this. I mean these words as much as I have ever meant any words:

I am content” (Joni Eareckson Tada, *A Place of Healing: Wrestling with the Mysteries of Suffering, Pain, and God’s Sovereignty* [Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010], 197).

How can such a God be trusted? If that which He has intended to do has so catastrophically and repeatedly failed to come to pass, why depend on him to fulfill any of his promises, no matter how well-intentioned they may be? I would sooner risk my family's finances on a lottery ticket than my soul to a gambler with such a poor track record.<sup>78</sup>

Sufferers oftentimes have much fear and the open theistic God can do nothing to alleviate dismay but only deepen it. Divine sovereignty breeds confidence in sufferers.<sup>79</sup>

### **Open Theism Undermines Sufferers' Confidence in Christ and the Gospel**

Christ's atoning sacrifice and death, the gospel, was foreknown by God *before* creation came into existence (Eph 1:3-6; 2 Tim 1:8-11; 1 Pet 1:18-20; Rev 13:8). These passages clearly indicate that God had exhaustive foreknowledge of humanity's rebellion against him and the need for redemption through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Sanders, however, believes differently, "God did not know, for a fact, when he decided to create that we would commit moral evils."<sup>80</sup> He thinks the above passages

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<sup>78</sup>Ascol, "Pastoral Implications," 178.

<sup>79</sup>God's Word is an extension of himself. The Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:19-21), which reflects both divine and human authorship (Mark 12:36; Acts 4:24-25). Like God, the Scripture is inerrant and infallible (Ps 19:7-9; Titus 1:2), and authoritative (Ps 119:9; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3). The canon of Scripture is closed and cannot be added to or subtracted from (Gal 1:18-12; Heb 1:1-2; Jude 3). Sufferers, then, find hope, comfort, peace, as they trust that what the Bible says is true and accurate (Ps 119). The open theistic God erodes trust in the Scripture for, by logical necessity, it would reflect the character of their God. God, in the open theistic theological system, could not guarantee beforehand if the biblical authors would choose to write, what they would write, and could not correct them if they wrote something erroneous. Open theists, then, cannot guarantee that anything recording in Scripture is actually true. Trust in Scripture, then, is undermined. Trust in God's character is also undermined if the open theist claims the Bible is inspired by God. Inspiration requires the outside agency of the Holy Spirit moving and directing the minds of the biblical authors to write what they did (2 Pet 1:20-21). So if the Bible is inspired, authoritative, infallible, and inerrant, then, in openness terms, the only way this could happen is if God violated his divine love. The logical conclusion, then, is an inerrant Scripture is the product of an unloving act of God.

<sup>80</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 259.

refer only to the incarnation but not the crucifixion.<sup>81</sup> Sanders constructs his own narrative of the Passion. The Passion events were unforeseen by Father and Son, and they realized at the last minute that the crucifixion was inevitable:

The path of the cross comes about only through God's interaction with humans in history. Until this moment in history other routes were, perhaps, open. . . . In Gethsemane Jesus wonders whether there is another way. But Father and Son, in seeking to accomplish the project, both come to understand that there is no other way. . . . After his session of wrestling with the Father Jesus no longer questions which path to take. Will this gambit work?<sup>82</sup>

The central focus of the Christian faith, according to Sanders, was not part of the divine plan, indeed it could not be since the God of open theism is ignorant of future events. Rather, circumstances foisted upon Father and Son forced them to broker the gospel as a hastily conceived "gambit," a divine maneuver in response to unforeseen circumstances that may or may not work.

Boyd disagrees with Sanders but the gospel still suffers. Boyd believes both the incarnation and crucifixion were divinely predestined and foreknown.<sup>83</sup> Bruce Ware rightly questions, "What can save Boyd's position from being charged with entailing, on openness grounds, that the crucifixion of Christ, as predetermined by God, constituted the most egregious act of divine coercion perpetrated in the history of the universe?"<sup>84</sup>

Boyd's reply to Ware is instructive: "let me simply go on record as saying that I, for one,

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<sup>81</sup>Sanders explains, "My own view is that the incarnation was always planned, for God intended to bring us into the joy and glory shared among the triune Godhead (Jn. 17:22-24). Human sin, however, threw up a barrier to the divine project, and God's planned incarnation had to be adapted in order to overcome it" (ibid., 103.)

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 100-1.

<sup>83</sup>Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 45.

<sup>84</sup>Bruce Ware, "What Is at Stake in the Openness Debate? The Gospel of Christ," in *Beyond the Bounds*, ed. John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjoss Helseth (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 322.

hold that Jesus possessed compatibilistic freedom. In my view, Christ was humanity *eschatologically defined*.”<sup>85</sup> Compatibilism is openly despised by open theists for they maintain it portrays an unloving God. In Boyd’s view, to be consistent, the openness Father violated his love for he overrode his Son’s libertarian freedom. The gospel, then, is born out of an unloving act the Father perpetrated on his own Son.

In either scenario, the content of the gospel suffers. The gospel is the message of redemption for sinful humanity. Sin in the neotheistic gospel, however, is not a forensic declaration of guilt due to rebellion against God’s rule but is reduced to a family spat: “The Fall was a disruption of family relationships: persons fell out of loving relationship with God and one another.”<sup>86</sup> Sander’s defines sin in similar terms: “First, I understand sin to primarily to be alienation, or broken relationship, rather than a state of being or guilt.”<sup>87</sup> The openness gospel requires no propitiation and forensic forgiveness but the healings of relationship: “Christ is not appeasing God’s wrath. God is not sadistically crucifying his beloved Son. . . . Let us strive for a relational understanding of the cross, in which we frame the problem as broken relationships, not divine anger and honor.”<sup>88</sup> Actually, openness advocates declare the gospel is unnecessary for salvation:

According to the Bible, people are saved by faith, not by the content of their theology. Since God has not left anyone without a witness, people are judged on the basis of the light they have received and how they have responded to that light.

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<sup>85</sup>Gregory A Boyd, “Christian Love and Academic Dialogue: A Reply to Bruce Ware,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 2 (2002): 242. Italics in original.

<sup>86</sup>Pinnock and Brow, *Unbounded Love*, 65. Pinnock gives further insights into his conception of sin: “In creative love theism, sin is a rejection of God’s love and a turning away from his gracious presence” (58); “Because God is love, sin should be understood essentially as a refusal of love” (59); “In creative love theism, sin is a misuse of human freedom and a repudiation of the divine love” (65).

<sup>87</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 105.

<sup>88</sup>Pinnock and Brow, *Unbounded Love*, 103.



Faith in God is what saves, not possessing certain minimum information. . . . The Bible does not teach that one must confess the name of Jesus to be saved.<sup>89</sup>

No eternal punishment exists for those who reject the gospel for they will be annihilated out of existence.<sup>90</sup>

Suffering is oftentimes an unsettling time replete with significant changes in life that can be unnerving. The biblical gospel gives spiritual stability to sufferers for the content of the gospel and its ramifications are always true regardless of life's circumstances. At the moment of conversion, the former Christ-enemy is redeemed (bought with the price of Christ's blood), reconciled (a former enemy of God transformed into his child), justified (declared righteous by God), sanctified (declared holy by God), regenerated (given a new nature that desires to please God), and forgiven (the guilt, punishment, and power of sin is removed forever). In Christ the child of God is lavished with grace (favor which is not deserved), mercy (the removal of judgment which is deserved), wisdom (the ability and desire to live life pleasing to the Father), and power (the ministry of the indwelling Holy Spirit to give strength to live for Christ). In Christ

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<sup>89</sup>Clark H Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 157-58. Basinger agrees, "While proponents of the open view do believe in an afterlife, many maintain that each person's eternal destiny will ultimately be determined by God on the basis of the 'light' available to him or her (or by other criteria)" (Basinger, "Practical Implications," 175.). Sanders espouses a similar idea in John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmanns Publishing Company, 1992). The ideas expressed by these two men certainly contradict John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 16:31 and a host of other NT passages.

<sup>90</sup>Pinnock and Brow explain the justification for annihilationism: "No set of human choices can deserve everlasting conscious torment. No crime could deserve such punishment. It goes far beyond the Old Testament standard of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, the standard of strict equivalence. What, we ask, would a sinner have to do to earn 'everlasting punishment.' Even Hitler could not impose everlasting punishment on his victims, horrid though their fate was. Therefore Hitler himself did not deserve everlasting conscious punishment on an eye-for-an-eye basis. This is apart from the fact that Jesus calls us to a higher standard than strict equivalence. In terms of justice, the traditional view of hell is simply unacceptable. It is a punishment in excess of anything that sinners deserve. It creates a disproportion between sins committed in time and suffering experienced forever" (Pinnock and Brow, *Unbounded Love*, 93).

the sufferer is the Father's adopted child (made part of his family), his heir (the beneficiary of every spiritual blessing), his righteous one (covered with the righteousness of Christ), his holy one (set apart to receive his blessings), his beloved one (showered with his eternal love), his sheep (who are led and cared for by the Good Shepherd), his ambassador (representatives of God to the world), his minister (who minister to others in his name), and his vessel of honor (God displays his people as his prized possession). All who are in Christ are preserved (he will not abandon his children), protected (he watches over his people), prayed for (the Son and the Holy Spirit intercede for the forgiven ones), and defended (Christ is the Advocate who speaks for the justified). The redeemed child of God is forever sealed in Christ by the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13).

The openness gospel can offer none of these comforts or confidences. The ignorant God of open theism could not guarantee Jesus would choose to become incarnate, that the events surrounding the crucifixion would actually take place, and that Jesus would be willing to die. The crucifixion happened only because God guessed and/or manipulated the situation correctly. The openness gospel is decimated of its redemptive power and has nothing of substance to offer sufferers. The gospel of Jesus Christ, determined from before the world was by the omniscient, omnipotent God gives confidence and eternal hope to sufferers.<sup>91</sup>

### **Open Theism Undermines Sufferers' Confidence in Prayer**

The open view of God undermines a sufferers' confidence in prayer in several

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<sup>91</sup>See John MacArthur, Jr., "Open Theism's Attack on the Atonement," in *Bound Only Once: The Failure of Open Theism*, ed. Douglas Wilson (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2001), 95–108.

ways. First, neotheistic prayer is the creature giving God permission to act.

We must realize that if God is serious about our having morally responsible say-so on a spiritual level—coreigning with him—he must bind himself to the necessity of prayer, just as he binds himself to the stability of the world and to irrevocable freedom. God decided to create a world in which agents *really* have say-so on a spiritual level and *really* have the power to influence him and what comes to pass. Therefore things *really hang* on whether or not God’s people pray. By his own design, prayer is a crucial variable that conditions what God can and can’t do in any particular situation.<sup>92</sup>

Boyd offers several variables which contribute to answered and unanswered prayer.<sup>93</sup> The first is God’s will but, cautions Boyd, “we must be careful not to conclude that because God willed something, it is part of ‘his perfect plan.’”<sup>94</sup> The remaining variables are mainly performance-based. Prayer is answered, or not, based on the faith of the pray-er and pray-ees, persistence, the numbers praying and the quality of their combined spiritual strength, human and angelic free wills competing with God, and the presence of sin. An honest assessment makes sufferers realize they could always have more faith, more fervency, more holiness, and enlist more help. Praying to a performance-oriented God offers no comfort to sufferers.

Second, even if God did act on prayer his options are severely limited for he cannot supersede libertarian freedom. Basinger admits God “can unilaterally intervene in earthly affairs” but quickly adds,

a key assumption in the open model is that God so values the inherent integrity of significant human freedom—the ability of individuals to maintain control over the significant aspects of their lives—that he will not as a general rule force his created moral agents to perform actions that they do not freely desire to perform or

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<sup>92</sup>Boyd, *Is God to Blame?*, 130–31; italics in original. See also Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 269–74, where similar points are made.

<sup>93</sup>Boyd, *Is God to Blame?*, 135–51.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, 135.

manipulate the natural environment in such a way that their freedom of choice is destroyed.<sup>95</sup>

The “natural environment”—rain, wind, trees—in open theism is controlled either by Satan<sup>96</sup> and/or operates randomly apart from God’s control.<sup>97</sup> Either way, God cannot assert his will to protect from satanic attacks, prevent evil from occurring or stop it once it has begun, and cannot remove the virus, the drought, or the cancer lest he overstep his bounds and become unloving. Praying to a constricted God offers no comfort to sufferers.

Third, even if the openness God could act, no guarantees exist that his granted prayer requests would be actually benefit the sufferer. Scripture reveals the human condition as one of “weakness” (Rom 8:26), which refers to creaturely limitations and fallibilities (Heb 7:28). This weakness means that “we do not know what to pray for as we ought” (Rom 8:26). Prayers normally reflect what the pray-er wants to happen, yet human limitations prevent him or her from knowing what is best in light of the broader scope of life and eternity. The open theistic God is weak as well for he is limited and fallible. Since he is as ignorant of the future as is the pray-er, he can only answer the prayer based on what he thinks best at the moment. As time unfolds, however, his answered prayer requests may prove to be disastrous and put the sufferer in a worse condition. He will have regrets and will express sorrow but can do nothing to remedy the situation. Praying to a weak God secures no confidence in sufferers.

Jesus taught his disciples to pray to the Father, “your will be done, on earth as

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<sup>95</sup>Basinger, “Practical Implications,” 160–61.

<sup>96</sup>Gregory A Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 206.

<sup>97</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 263.

it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10), “that the Father’s will shall be obeyed as *completely*, *heartily*, and *immediately* on earth as this is constantly being done by all the inhabitants of heaven.”<sup>98</sup> Jesus gives no hint that the Father’s will is a synthesis of his own with another, no indication that the Father is seeking the input of human or angelic agents, and no impression that nothing else other than the Father’s will will prevail. Prayer is the hallmark of sufferers: the lamenting psalmists prayed (Ps 5:2), Jesus prayed (Heb 5:7), Paul prayed (2 Cor 12:8), and Christ-followers are exhorted “with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16).<sup>99</sup> No grounds for confidence exists and prayer becomes a useless exercise if “the throne of grace” is occupied by a God who is powerless to exert his will, who is dependent on his creatures’ input for the future they decide to create together, who may have to repent of the prayer requests he grants now, and knows that suffering is ultimately purposeless.<sup>100</sup> The psalmists, Jesus, and Christ-followers have confidence in prayer because they have confidence in God—a God who is trustworthy, unchangeable, sovereign in his foreknowledge and in his infallible providence over all creation, a God whose presence is promised during times of suffering, a God who is good and generous and loving.

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<sup>98</sup>William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1973), 331, (italics in original).

<sup>99</sup>The noun *παρησία* (“confidence”) in Hebrews was also used to convey the confident hope Christ-followers have by being in Christ (Heb 3:6), the confidence of God’s presence through Christ (Heb 10:19), and a warning not to “throw away your confidence” (Heb 10:35).

<sup>100</sup>Thomas Ascol asks, “How could someone pray passionately for God to restrain evil people or protect His own people if he genuinely believes that the rules by which God is bound prohibit Him from ever removing the potential to choose evil from a person? Would not such prayer be asking God to do what He has committed Himself not to do? (Ascol, “Pastoral Implications,” 185–86).

## **Open Theism Undermines Sufferers' Confidence for Eternal Hope**

Open theists maintain that despite the inability of God to exert his will to achieve the outcomes he desires, “there is no reason to worry that this battle will rage on forever.”<sup>101</sup> Sanders offers, “the eschaton will surprise us because it is not set in concrete, it is not unfolding according to a prescribed script”<sup>102</sup> but assures “we have every confidence that God will bring his project to the fruition he desires because God has proven himself faithful time and again.”<sup>103</sup> God’s eschatological promises will be fulfilled because he will override libertarian freedom: “While God’s will is not consistently carried out in world history, for this depends somewhat on the free cooperation of free agents, it will be carried out in the eschaton.”<sup>104</sup> Openness theologians’ claims that God will bring about his intended eschatological end contradicts the core theologies their system rests upon.

First, libertarian freedom means God is incapable of foreknowing or predestinating future events. Boyd maintains that “in a cosmos populated by free agents, the outcome of things—even divine decisions—is often uncertain.”<sup>105</sup> Open theists, to be consistent, cannot declare with any certainty that God will achieve his intended end. God, according to neotheists, made confident prophecies, promises, and assurances in the past

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<sup>101</sup>Boyd, *Is God to Blame?*, 121.

<sup>102</sup>Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 125.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 129.

<sup>104</sup>Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 421.

<sup>105</sup>Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 58. Sanders echoes the same thought: “God does not exercise meticulous providence in such a way that the success of his project is, in all respects and without qualification, a foregone conclusion” (Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 40).

but, as history unfolded, he discovered that what he thought would probably happen, in fact, did not. Since the openness God was fallible in some of his past promises and assurances, then confidence in the veracity of his still future promises of actually occurring remains questionable.

Paul predicted the rise of Antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4. Boyd's interpretation of the text is instructive: "[This] passage does not rule out the possibility of the future being somewhat open. It simply assumes that God knows the character of Satan well enough to predict some of his strategy at the end of the age when he releases his fury one final time."<sup>106</sup> Satan's eschatological defeat, then, is not due to God's sovereign power but because he will outthink and outmaneuver Satan. Satan however, may be able to develop a stratagem God did not foresee happening so that the entire eschatological house collapses in on itself. Another aspect concerns God's inability to exert his control over nature. God cannot be certain that a rouge asteroid, whose path he does not know and cannot control, will not strike the Earth, resulting in a species ending event, all before his promise of Christ's return is fulfilled. The fallible, powerless God of open theism gives no eternal hope to sufferers.

Second, open theistic assurances that the eschatological future is certain due to God's predetermined foreknowledge creates a moral dilemma. Openness advocates assert that a loving God must grant libertarian freedom, otherwise the reciprocal love is coerced and disingenuous. Boyd, from an earlier reference, believes Jesus possesses compatibilistic freedom because he is the model of the divine-human relationship in the eschaton. Compatibilism is routinely criticized by neotheists as being the theology of an

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<sup>106</sup>Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 49.

unloving God<sup>107</sup> but, somehow, a megashift occurs in the divine nature so that what is unloving prior to the eschaton suddenly becomes loving in the eschaton. In openness terms, the eschaton arrives only when God violates his love and asserts his sovereign will on his free moral agents. Libertarian freedom is removed in eternity so that God rules with unloving compatibilism. The logical conclusion of neotheistic teaching is that the greatest blessing God grants his covenant people, conformity to the Son, is achieved only through an unloving act of God, which gives no confidence to sufferers for eternal hope.<sup>108</sup>

Hopelessness is, perhaps, the most powerful temptation sufferers must battle. Hope is the confident assurance of that which is not yet known (Rom 8:24-25; Heb 11:1). Hope is born out of trust in God (Ps 71:5) and his promises (119:16, Titus 1:2; Heb 10:23). The one who has hope in God will be helped (Ps 43:5) and will not be shamed or disappointed (Rom 5:5). Trustful hope in God results in divine protection and help, both temporally and for the future (Jer 29:11). New Covenant hope is grounded in what God has done for his child in Christ (Rom 5:2) and is strengthened through the ministry of the indwelling Spirit (15:13). Gospel-driven hope will be culminated in the future (Col 1:5) as the suffering child of God hopes in the final resurrection (Acts 23:6) where the body will be redeemed to Christlikeness (Rom 8:23-25; Phil 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2-3), and

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<sup>107</sup>Pinnock's comments are typical: "[Compatibilism] would seriously undermine the reality of our decision if they were known in advance, spelled out in a heavenly register and absolutely certain to happen. It would make the future fixed and certain and render illusory the sense of our making choices between real options. We might think of this with the analogy of parents and children. As a parent, God knows what he needs to know to deal with any contingency that might arise but does not know or need to know every detail of the future. God is a person and deals with us as persons. This means that God understands us, has intuition into every situation we face and is able to deal appropriately with every situation" (Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," 123).

<sup>108</sup>See A. Boyd Luter and Emily Hunter McGowin, "From Bad to Worse: A Portrait of Open  
278



suffering will end (Rev 21:4). Open theism's powerless, ignorant, fallible God can offer no eternal hope to sufferers. Hope is produced by trust in the sovereign God who knows and controls the future, who has the ability to exert his will so that the future he envisions will, in fact, come about, and who will keep his promises without fail.

In summary, open theism, as are all worldview systems, is not simply a theoretical theological exercise but has real life implications for how sufferers suffer. Suffering, at its heart, is theocentric, one's conception of God will determine how one suffers. Confidence in God is undermined because the open God is ignorant of the future and fallible. Security in God is subverted because the openness gospel is decimated of its redemptive message and consequent promises. Comfort from God is ruined because the neotheistic God cannot answer prayers that prevent or stop the evil choices of libertine free moral agents. Eternal hope is eroded since the open theistic God cannot guarantee his eschatological promises will actually become reality. Sufferers, both ancient and contemporary, find comfort in the sovereign, infallible God who rules the nations and the future with his good, unwavering hand. Sufferers find confidence, security, trust, comfort, and eternal hope in the absolutely sovereign God.

### **Summary: The Dissertation Argument Defended**

The argument of this dissertation is that the divine design for suffering in Christ-followers is to decrease self-rule through mortification, increase God's rule through engendering spiritual maturity, with both of these functions serving the ultimate purpose of God glorifying himself in the individual lives of his covenant people. The

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Theism as a Theological System," *Criswell Theological Review* 1, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 162–63.

purpose of this chapter was to defend this statement against disagreements raised by open theism.

The first necessary step was to lay the theological groundwork by examining the two theological tenets which support open theism: love as the most important divine attribute and libertarian freedom. These theological pillars are connected in that love is freedom, freedom to make self-determined choices apart from and contrary to any external or internal factors. The neotheistic God, then, cannot possess foreknowledge or exert his will for it would override libertarian freedom and, thus, be an unloving act. The consequences are significant. God is vulnerable, he learns new knowledge, he changes his plans according to the situation, he is needy and dependant on his creatures as they all work together to create the future, he becomes frustrated because what he wants to have happen does not, and he makes mistakes, which leads to regret.

Open theistic assertions were countered by first showing that “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16), in context, defines divine love as Christ’s redemptive, propitiatory sacrifice on the cross (also John 3:16; Rom 5:8). Open theistic claims were also countered by showing from Scripture that God has comprehensive, infallible foreknowledge, and he is the one who ultimately directs all decisions and limits free choices for his sovereign purposes. Thus, the presentation in this dissertation of God being the absolute sovereign King who wields his will over creation was adequately defended.

The next section answered specific open theistic challenges to the dissertation thesis. The first focused on the “divine design” language. Openness theology posits that God is not sovereign over or responsible for suffering. Scripture indicates otherwise as several “spectrum texts” were highlighted that clearly shows God is not only sovereign

over but is also the ultimate responsible agent for suffering. Open theism opts for libertarian freedom as the model for divine-human relationship rather than compatibilism. A biblical defense showed that God is sovereign over all events in creation (denied by open theists), each person is free to make decisions within his or her nature (also denied by openness doctrine), and individuals are morally responsible for their decisions (mutual agreement on this point). Neotheists believe God's love prevents him from willingly inflicting suffering. Scripture shows, however, that divine love and suffering are not antithetical to one another. The supreme expression of divine love is in the cross-suffering of Christ. His love motivates him to inflict thorn-suffering and discipline-suffering so that his covenant people would know Christ and be conformed to him. The dissertation argument concerning God's design for suffering was adequately defended.

The second disagreement concerns open theism's insistence on the purposelessness of suffering. Since God cannot direct what free agents will or will not do, suffering is not planned by him but results from the misuse of freedom. Thus, suffering has no divine purpose and the good that results from suffering, if any, is accidental rather than purposeful. The first three chapters of this dissertation, hopefully, showed that suffering has three overarching purposes: to decrease of self-rule through mortification; to increase God's rule through engendering spiritual maturity; both functioning together to bring glory to God. Additionally, several biblical passages were cited which clearly indicated some, but not all, the specific purposes God has for suffering. The dissertation argument concerning God's purposes for suffering was adequately defended.

The last section of this chapter examined the practical implications openness theology has in sufferers' lives. This dissertation made several claims in the previous

chapters that suffering was beneficial in that it engendered trust and confidence in God, Christ, the gospel, prayer, and eternal hope. Ideas have consequences and the consequences of neotheistic theology in sufferers lives was shown to be devastating for it leaves sufferers with no basis to trust or have confidence in God, and no promises of sustaining power or hope from God. The practical implications drawn in the previous chapters, which rest on the theological foundation of a sovereign God, are adequately defended.

The God of classical Reformed theology, which this dissertation joyfully embraces, has little in common with the God of open theism. Basinger's summary, then, is quite incredulous in this light: "Just as not all children will agree on the most appealing parenting style, and not all Christians will agree on the most appealing teaching style, not all Christians will agree on the most appealing type of divine-human interaction."<sup>109</sup> The idea that mere humans are free to create a designer God who suits individual tastes is far from the teachings of Scripture. The great I AM is who he is and it is the incumbent duty of the creatures to bend their wills to the Creator. John Frame surmises that "the concept of human freedom in the libertarian sense is the engine that drives open theism."<sup>110</sup> If so, then the core issue of neotheism is the clash between divine sovereignty and the sovereignty of the created. If God's intent is to decrease self-rule and increase his rule, then open theism seeks to increase what God despises and decrease what he cherishes. Jonah realized from the belly of the fish that "those who pay regard to vain idols forsake

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<sup>109</sup>Basinger, "Practical Implications," 176.

<sup>110</sup>Frame, *No Other God*, 119.

their hope of steadfast love” (Jonah 2:8; also Eph 2:12).<sup>111</sup> Open theism offers no hope for sufferers.

This chapter has defended the biblical and theological proposition that the suffering that mortifies self-rule is the suffering that engenders spiritual maturity is the suffering that glorifies God. Grant Osborne, however, argues that theology without application is incomplete:

Some have a false concept of exposition as a mere explanation of the meaning of a passage. Complex overhead transparencies and presentation of the Hebrew or Greek details highlight such sermons. Unfortunately, although the people go away impressed by the learning demonstrated, their lives often remain untouched, and they are convinced they can never study the Bible for themselves but just have to go back to hear the ‘expert.’ We are back to the Middle Ages! The ‘horizon’ of the listeners must be fused with the ‘horizon’ of the text in true expository preaching (see the discussion of Gadamer in appendix one). The preacher must ask how the biblical writer would have applied the theological truths of the passage if he were addressing them to the modern congregation.<sup>112</sup>

Osborne’s comments are apropos for biblical counselors. Ministering the Word of God in counseling does not mean to simply explain the grammatical and theological nuances of the text but to practically apply it in order to make disciples. Some of the methodological implications of chapters 2-4 within a biblical counseling context is the topic of the next chapter.

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<sup>111</sup>See Joost F. Nixon, “Open Idolatry,” in *Bound Only Once: The Failure of Open Theism*, ed. Douglas Wilson (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2001), 205–22.

<sup>112</sup>Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 12.

## CHAPTER 6

### IMPLICATIONS FOR BIBLICAL COUNSELING

Chapters 2-4 exegetically and theologically explored the overarching divine designs for suffering to decrease self-rule through mortification, increase divine rule through vivification, both for the glory of God. Scripture teaches a practical theology, a theology that is to inform how the child of God lives worthy of Christ within the chaos (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:6, 11). J. I. Packer astutely comments,

[All] theology is also spirituality, in the sense that it has an influence, good or bad, positive or negative, on its recipients' relationship or lack of relationship to God. If our theology does not quicken the conscience and soften the heart, it actually hardens both; if it does not encourage the commitment of faith, it inevitably feeds pride. So one who theologises in public, whether formally in the pulpit, on the podium or in print, or informally from the armchair, must think hard about the effect his thoughts will have on people—God's people, and other people.<sup>1</sup>

Packer's comments are apropos for the counseling room as well. How one suffers and how one counsels sufferers reflect theological beliefs and priorities.

I will argue in this chapter that God graciously, kindly, and lovingly disrupts his covenant people's peace with suffering in order to shape their hearts to Christlikeness by choosing *his* wisdom, desires, and will over their own. I will endeavor to substantiate this argument by weaving several of the biblical and theological strands from the previous chapters. First, I will give a brief overview of the heart and its three

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<sup>1</sup>J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 15.

interconnected, responding aspects which consists of the cognitions, affections, and volitions. Next, I will examine God’s design for the heart’s cognitions, namely to decrease unchristlike thoughts through mortification in order increase Christlike beliefs, both for the glory of God. The next two subsequent sections will follow a similar pattern, each respectively focusing on the heart’s affections and volitions. In short, suffering is divinely designed to motivate the heart from its natural passivity/hostility against God to actively believing him, desiring him, and obeying him.

### **The Responding Heart Functions**

Individuals react to suffering in vastly different ways based upon an almost infinite variety of factors such as religious convictions, tolerance for pain, familial and cultural background/expectations, or the severity and length of the suffering. What is common to all redeemed sufferers, however, is that God designs the suffering to shape the heart so that he is glorified as self-ruling unchristlikenesses decrease and his rule increases through conformity to Christlikeness.

The sage understood the importance of the heart and the key role it plays in a person’s life:

Keep your heart with all vigilance (לֵב נֹצֵר מְכַל־מִשְׁמֶרֶת),  
for from it flow the springs of life (Prov 4:23).

The phrase מְכַל־מִשְׁמֶרֶת (“all vigilance”) underscores the forcefulness of the proverb. The noun מִשְׁמֶרֶת is derived from the root verb שָׁמַר, which means “to exercise great care over”<sup>2</sup> or “to pay careful attention to.”<sup>3</sup> The phrase conveys the special care covenant people are

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<sup>2</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. “שָׁמַר.”

<sup>3</sup>*NIDOTTE*, s.v. “שָׁמַר,” by Eugene Carpenter. This verb was also used in Prov 10:17; 13:3, 18; 285

to take with their hearts for it is the nerve center which “governs all activity.”<sup>4</sup> Jesus, as well, identified the heart as the foundational controller of life: “For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness” (Mark 7:21-22; also Matt 15:19; Luke 6:45).

The constitutional aspects of the heart have been broadly described as the cognitions, affections, and volitions.<sup>5</sup> Andrew Tallon’s phenomenological philosophical study concludes that each individual is a “triune consciousness” so that “only as a triune synthesis of affection, cognition, and volition is [the consciousness] able to progress operationally along a developmental continuum.”<sup>6</sup> Bob Kellemen and Sam Williams describe the *in toto* human personality expresses passionate and affective relations, rational thought, volitions, and emotions.<sup>7</sup> Jeff Forrey and Jim Newheiser envision the individual as a psychosomatic unity composed of a material body and immaterial thoughts, behaviors, and feelings.<sup>8</sup> Jeremy Pierre’s biblical and theological research

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15:5; 16:17; 19:8, 16; 21:23; 22:5; 27:18; 29:18.

<sup>4</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 298.

<sup>5</sup>See Jeremy Paul Pierre, “‘Trust in the Lord with All Your Heart’: The Centrality of Faith in Christ to the Restoration of Human Functioning” (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 5-19 for a brief history of “the heart” in Western movements, including contemporary biblical counseling.

<sup>6</sup>Andrew Tallon, *Head and Heart: Affection, Cognition, Volition as Triune Consciousness* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 290.

<sup>7</sup>Bob Kellemen and Sam Williams, “The Spiritual Anatomy of the Soul,” in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling*, ed. James MacDonald, Bob Kellemen, and Steve Viars (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), 108–9.

<sup>8</sup>Jeff Forrey and Jim Newheiser, “The Influences on the Human Heart,” in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling*, ed. James MacDonald, Bob Kellemen, and Steve Viars (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), 127–28.



resulted in a clear definition of the “heart” as “the indivisible whole of internal human functioning— cognition, affection, and volition—that operates in relationship to God and others through words, emotions, and actions. The heart is also the seat of faith.”<sup>9</sup>

These threefold heart functions appear to be derived from a biblical anthropology. The primary words translated “heart” are *לֵב* (OT) and *καρδία* (NT).<sup>10</sup> These terms are used to refer to the inner person, in general (Neh 9:8; Phlm 20), and are also used specifically to identify the heart as a composite of cognitive, affective, and volitional activities. First, the heart’s cognitive functions refer to the internal thinking processes and the beliefs a person assumes to be true, the rationale. The cognitions are a complex, dynamic mix of thoughts (Ps 139:23), reasonings (Deut 15:9), ponderings (Luke 1:66), imaginations (1 Cor 2:9), internal self-talk (Mark 2:6-7), wisdom and discernment (1 Kgs 3:12; 4:29), perceptions and understandings (Mark 8:17), and knowledge (2 Cor 4:6). Second, the affections of the heart are an amalgam of emotions, desires, and motivations. Affections include emotions (Jer 4:19; Acts 7:54)<sup>11</sup> and desires,

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<sup>9</sup>Pierre, “Trust in the Lord,” 78.

<sup>10</sup>Other NT words are translated “heart:” *ψυχή* (“soul”), *πνεῦμα* (“spirit”), and *νοῦς/φρόνημα* (“mind”). The discussion above is limited to *לֵב* and *καρδία*. All the functioning aspects of the heart are found in these two words and, to varying degrees, also in the others. All of these words are used generally to speak of the inner person but are also used to show the specific cognitive, affective, and volitional aspects of the heart. See *ibid.*, 31–79 for a detailed study and conclusion.

<sup>11</sup>The ILPs are a study of emotions expressed during suffering. The suffering psalmists freely expressed and acknowledged their honest emotions such as joy (33:1), gladness (100:2), fear (56:3), anger (Ps 4:4), languishing (Ps 6:2), weariness (Ps 6:6; 69:3), shakiness (Ps 13:4), loneliness and affliction (Ps 25:16), distress (Pss 31:9; 69:17), feebleness (Ps 38:8), being spent (Ps 39:10), restlessness (Ps 55:2), fear (Ps 55:5), despair (Ps 69:20), pain (Ps 69:29), being troubled (Ps 77:4), weakness (Ps 88:4), and helplessness (Ps 88:15). Especially heart-wrenching are the seemingly never ending tears (Pss 6:6, 88; 39:12; 42:3; 56:8; 102:9). Jesus prayed with great emotional fervor as he “offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears” (Heb 5:7). God created humans as emotional beings so that there is “a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance” (Ecc 3:4). Suffering is an emotional experience with God. Redeemed sufferers who express their emotions before God are not sub-Christian or unbelieving but make an emotional “movement toward God” (Claus Westermann, “Role of the Lament in the Theology of the Old Testament,” *Interpretation* 28, no. 1 [January 1974]: 32). Caution,

which may be righteous and godly,<sup>12</sup> or evil and sinful.<sup>13</sup> The affections of the heart determine what is valued (Matt 6:21). Third, the volitional functions of the heart are expressions of the will exhibited by the person's choices and behaviors. Volitions express themselves as willful actions and decisions, including disobedience (Acts 7:39) and obedience (Eph 6:5) to God's commands. Individuals willfully turn from God (Heb 3:10). Volitions are the visible actions a person exhibits to others (Jer 17:10; Luke 8:15).

Scripture illustrates that all the heart's functions actively respond in a complex, dynamic relationship with one another. The first sin was a collapse of the entire heart to the wiles of Satan. Eve cognitively understood the dangers of the tree (Gen 3:3) yet Satan convinced her that her beliefs about God's promised reprisals were false. This cognitive shift resulted in her affectionally desiring the tree, which led to her to volitionally taking the fruit and eating it (Gen 3:6). Paul implores, "put off your old self [volitions], which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires [affections], and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds [cognitions]" (Eph 4:22-23). Scripture reveals the heart of the unregenerate: "For we ourselves were once foolish [cognitions], disobedient [volitions], led astray [cognitions], slaves to various passions

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however, is in order. Suffering does not give license to exhibit emotions in a sinful manner. The sage recognized that "a fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back" (Prov 29:11). The proverb is not calling all who express emotions foolish but those in whom the emotions control. Scripture calls for the redeemed, even sufferers, to be filled and controlled by the Spirit, not by their emotions (Eph 5:15-18). Jesus was an emotional man and had great, deep emotions during his suffering, yet his emotions never clouded his thinking, or led him into sin or unbelief. Biblical counselors should encourage suffering counselees to express their emotions yet, at the same time, be prepared to give pointed counsel if the emotions are beginning to overwhelm the disciple to despair, hopelessness, or anger. See Matthew A. Elliot, *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2006) for a good study of emotions from a biblical perspective.

<sup>12</sup>Pss 20:4; 21:2; 37:4; 40:8; Rom 10:1; 1 Pet 1:22.

<sup>13</sup>Ps 35:25; Prov 6:25; Matt 5:28; Rom 1:24; Jas 3:14; 2 Pet 2:14.

and pleasures [affections], passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another [volitions]” (Titus 3:3). Pierre uses this perichoresis type interaction between the responding aspects of the heart to tease out a methodology for biblical counseling:

*First, counseling should be directed to the breadth of the heart’s functions and have as a goal the unification of these functions.* The necessary interrelatedness of the heart’s functions compels the counselor to address each of these functions as interdependent upon the others. Emphasizing one aspect without due attention to the others will lead to a lopsided view of people and a lopsided methodology in handling them. The cognitive, affective, and volitional ought not to be treated in isolation from one another.<sup>14</sup>

Suffering will affect all three heart activities to varying degrees and, thus, the biblical counselor should be ready to encourage the mortification of unchristlikeness, the maturation of conformity to Christlikeness, all for the glorification of God.

### **Suffering and the Cognitive Functions of the Heart**

God places a high premium on the heart’s cognitive functions for he is “wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom” (Isa 28:29). Thus, the great call to covenant people is “get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight” (Prov 4:7; also 3:21; 4:5; 8:10; 23:23). The Spirit gave Christ wisdom (Isa 11:2) and Jesus is the Wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24). The redeemed will forever extol and praise the wisdom of God and Christ (Rev 5:12; 7:12). Thus, Christ-followers are to pray for God to grant them his wisdom (Rom 1:17; Col 1:9) and strive to conduct themselves wisely in the world (Col 3:16).

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<sup>14</sup>Pierre, “Trust in the Lord,” 220 (italics in original). Tallon also expresses the necessity of balance in his “triune consciousness” model: “If any one mode of the triad is too dominant, or slighted, or suppressed, a functional imbalance results” (Tallon, *Head and Heart*, 290).

Adam's offspring are in natural cognitive rebellion with God's thoughts. The self-ruling heart "suppress the truth [about God]" (Rom 1:18) and "set their minds on the things of the flesh" (Rom 8:5). The unregenerate mind hates God because it is "depraved" (Rom 1:28), "hostile to God" (Rom 8:7), "blinded" (2 Cor 4:4), "darkened in their understanding" (Eph 4:18), and baffled by spiritual truth (1 Cor 2:14). The self-ruling mind rejects the life-giving wisdom from above but embraces the death-producing counterfeit wisdom from below which is "earthly, unspiritual, demonic" (Jas 3:15). Unchristlike cognitions "despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov 1:7) but "love being simple" and "hate knowledge" (Prov 1:22). The self-wise idolatry their own opinions and, thus, are "wise in his own eyes" (Prov 3:7),<sup>15</sup> which makes it impossible to correctly perceive and interpret reality. The redeemed "have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16) yet still harbor thoughts and beliefs contrary to God's knowledge of himself. These unchristlike cognitions God mortifies through suffering.

Perhaps the foundational cognitive lesson suffering teaches is God's sovereignty over all the affairs of life, including suffering. Biblical figures, including Jesus, understood their sufferings as sovereignly ordained by God.<sup>16</sup> Suffering for Christ-followers is no different. The Father is the one who inflicts pruning-suffering (John 15:2) and discipline-suffering on his children (Heb 12:6). Paul intimated that the sovereign God not only afflicted him with thorn-suffering but also sovereignly refused to bring physical relief (2 Cor 12:7-9). God's sovereign providence ordains who will suffer (1 Thess 3:3), when the suffering occurs (John 12:23), what will be suffered (Acts 9:16), the depths of

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<sup>15</sup>Also Prov 12:15; 26:5, 12, 16; 28:11; Isa 5:21.

<sup>16</sup>1 Sam 2:7; Job 1:21; Ps 88:8, 18; Prov 22:2; Ecc 7:14; Isa 45:7; Luke 24:26, 44; Acts 2:23; 3:18; 13:27; 26:22-23.

suffering (12:23), the means of suffering (Hab 1:12), the duration of suffering (Gen 15:13), the purposes of suffering (Exod 9:16), and when suffering terminates (Ps 139:16). Self-ruling heart-cognitions believe in the sovereign self, which is in conflict with God's knowledge of himself. God loves his covenant people and breaks into their lives with suffering so that their hearts will not wallow in the self-destructive, unchristlike fiction of self-sovereignty but would come to know him.

Knowing God is, perhaps, the greatest Christlike cognitive blessing God designs suffering to instill in his people. Knowing God “refers not to merely abstract knowledge, but to joyful *acknowledgment* of his sovereignty, glad *acceptance* of his love, and intimate *fellowship* with his person (through Scripture, that is, through his Word to us; and through prayer, that is, through our word to him).”<sup>17</sup> Suffering, as detailed previously, made the psalmists know God more profoundly. The redeemed are to boast in their knowing God (Jer 9:23-24). Knowing God is one of the great New Covenant blessings Messiah secured for his disciples (Jer 31:34). Jesus knows the Father and the Father knows him (Matt 11:27; John 7:29; 8:55; 10:15; 17:25). The intimate fellowship between Father and Son is mirrored in the redeemed for “eternal life” is not defined as duration of existence but as a quality of life characterized by knowing God and his Son Jesus Christ (John 17:3).

Consequently, the redeemed are “known by God” (Gal 4:9) meaning that “through Christ the individual Christian has become an object of God’s personal

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<sup>17</sup>William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1953), 350, (italics in original).

recognition and favor.”<sup>18</sup> God is delighted when his covenant people know him (Hos 6:6). The gospel transforms the heart’s cognitions from rebels who do not know God (1 Thess 4:5) to beloved children who have “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16). Suffering continues to deepen the heart’s cognitive functions so that sufferers may “count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:8). Suffering mortifies trust in self-sovereignty so that sufferers may know God and, thus, glorify him with their faith and trust.

Faith and trust in God are, perhaps, the greatest ways sufferers glorify God through their thoughts and beliefs (Rom 4:18-21).<sup>19</sup> Faith, according to the author of Hebrews, is characterized by “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). William Lane explains:

Faith is thus an effective power directed toward the future. It springs from a direct, personal encounter with the living God. The forward-looking capacity of faith enables an individual to venture courageously and serenely into an unseen future, supported only by the word of God. As a positive orientation of life toward God and his word, faith has the capacity to unveil the future so that the solid reality of events as yet unseen can be grasped by the believer.<sup>20</sup>

God lovingly irrupted into the lamenting psalmists’ lives with suffering to teach and

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<sup>18</sup>James Montgomery Boice, *Galatians*, in vol. 10 of *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 476, (italics in original). Richard Longenecker similarly explains: “Thus here, as elsewhere throughout Scripture, experiential relations between God and his people are set out in terms of God’s initiative and mankind’s response. Relationship with God does not have its basis in man’s seeking (mysticism), or doing (legalism), or knowing (gnosticism), but it originates with God himself and is carried on always by divine grace” (Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC, vol. 41 [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990], 180). God knowing his people is also found in Gen 18:19; Exod 33:12, 17; Nah 1:7; John 10:14, 27; Rom 8:29; 2 Tim 2:19.

<sup>19</sup>Calvin demonstrated a dependant faith when, on his deathbed and wracked with pain, he uttered, “Thou, Lord, bruise me, but I am abundantly satisfied, since it is from Thy hand” (Theodore Beza, *The Life of John Calvin*, trans. Francis Sibson [Philadelphia: J. Whetham, 1836], 92).

<sup>20</sup>William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, WBC, vol. 47B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991), 329.

deepen their trust and faith in him (Pss 25:2; 31:6, 14; 55:23; 56:3, 4, 11; 71:5; 143:8). Jesus' life was difficult throughout (Matt 11:19; 26:67; 27:30, 39-44; Mark 3:22) but his most intense suffering was during his Passion where his spiritual posture was trust in his Father (1 Pet 2:23).<sup>21</sup> In light of Christ's suffering, Peter reminded his suffering readers that "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps" (1 Pet 2:21). Jesus' suffering was for redemptive purposes which no mere human may emulate. Redeemed sufferers do, however, follow in Jesus' steps and glorify God with their heart's cognitions when they endure suffering with faith and trust, knowing that their afflictions are not curses but given because they are his beloved children (Eph 5:1; 1 John 3:2).

Faith understands that suffering is not meaningless but has the purpose of conforming the child of God to the image of Christ. Faith guards against hard-heartedness and foolish speculations about God and his ways. Faith sees the suffering as a means of tremendous gain, not loss. Faith will calm the soul knowing that "God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:19). Faith knows

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<sup>21</sup>The verb translated "entrusting" is *παράδιδωμι* ("to give over"). The verb does not have an object so that the "himself" is added by editors. J. Ramsey Michaels argues that the object of the verb is not Christ but his persecutors. That is, Christ remained silent and gave no word of judgment because he gave over or entrusted his accusers to his Father who is the righteous Judge (J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, WBC, vol. 49 [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988], 147). Alan Stibbs suggests the object was left open because of the theological complexity of the crucifixion: "[When] the sinless One suffered as if He were the worst of sinners, and bore the extreme penalty of sin, there is a double sense in which He may have acknowledged God as the righteous Judge." He continues, "On the one hand, because voluntarily, and in fulfillment of God's will, He was taking the sinner's place and bearing sin, He did not protest at what He has to suffer. Rather He consciously recognized that it was the penalty righteously due to sin. So He handed Himself over to be punished. He recognized that in letting such shame, pain and curse fall upon Him, the righteous God was judging righteously. On the other hand, because He Himself was sinless, He also believed that in due time God, as the righteous Judge, would vindicate Him as righteous, and exalt Him from the grave, and reward Him for what He has willingly endures for others' sake by giving Him the Right completely to save them from the penalty and power of their own wrongdoing" (Alan Stibbs, *The First Epistle of Peter*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 17 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959], 119).

that God will not allow his child to suffer beyond his or her abilities (1 Cor 10:13). Faith trusts that God will instill his wisdom (Jas 1:5). Faith knows that God has sufficient power to preserve the soul so that Satan, natural weaknesses, ignorance, sin, mistrusts and doubts will not overcome the soul so that it will not slip into unbelief or apostasy (Ps 121:5-7; Isa 41:10).

In summary, all cognitive activities are transparent to God for he “knows the thoughts of man, that they are but a breath” (Ps 94:11). The natural self-ruling mind is in opposition to God.<sup>22</sup> The mortification of the self-centered mind through the gospel begins the transformative development of the mind to Christofornity, which is an ongoing, lifelong process (Rom 12:1-2; Eph 1:17). Kellemen and Williams suggest biblical counselors “don’t help people to change one thought; we help people to understand the *pattern* of their thinking—their mindsets.”<sup>23</sup> Biblical counselors who continuously encourage and exhort sufferers through the Word of God, and point them to the Suffering Servant and his cross will create an environment for the Holy Spirit to change thought patterns and mindsets to be in conformity with God’s thoughts, which, ultimately, brings him glorify. This rich dynamic occurring in the heart’s cognitive functions also transpire in the affections.

### **Suffering and the Affective Functions of the Heart**

The two greatest commands reveal the importance God places on the heart’s

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<sup>22</sup>For a good historical study on the noetic effects of sin see Stephen K. Moroney, *The Noetic Effects of Sin: An Historical and Contemporary Exploration of How Sin Affects Our Thinking* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999). See also Bradley G. Green, *The Gospel and the Mind: Recovering and Shaping the Intellectual Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

<sup>23</sup>Kellemen and Williams, “The Spiritual Anatomy of the Soul,” 112.



affections: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt 22:37) and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:39; see Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18). The deepest affections of the heart are to be directed God-ward and not to any earthly pleasure, relationship, or circumstance (Matt 10:37). Sufferers, especially show their love for God when they love the ones responsible for inflicting the suffering by responding with goodness, blessings, prayers on their behalf (Luke 6:17-28) and forgiving them (Matt 18:21-22).<sup>24</sup> What the affections crave will be treasured (Matt 6:21) and God’s desire is that the redeemed heart will adore him.

The natural, self-ruling motivations of the heart are oftentimes described with the verb ἐπιθυμέω (“to desire, to lust after”) and its cognate noun, ἐπιθυμία (“desire, passionate longing, lust”). These terms may refer to morally neutral desires such as food (Luke 15:16), or commendable desires such as fellowship (22:15) and knowing God’s mind (Matt 13:17). Usually, however, the words connote the Adam-inherited attribute of a sinful “impulse, lust, or anxious self-seeking.”<sup>25</sup> Paul reminded his redeemed readers that they were once “sons of disobedience” who “lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind” (Eph 2:3). No Christ-follower is immune from the effects of the still indwelling unchristlike affections which oppose God’s rule, affections which God mortifies through suffering.

The call for the redeemed to mortify unchristlike affections is particularly highlighted in Scripture. Paul exhorted all Christ-followers, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you” (Col 3:5). God’s grace was exhibited in Christ to “[train] us to renounce

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<sup>24</sup>See John Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006).

<sup>25</sup>*TDNT*, s.v. “θυμός,” by Friedrich Büchsel.

ungodliness and worldly passions” (Titus 2:12). Sufferers are not to be conformed to sinful passions (1 Pet 1:14) for they oppose God’s desire for them (1 Pet 4:2). Union with Christ crucifies the sinful passions with both internal and external cross-sufferings (Gal 5:24). John Piper asserts that the foundational divine desire for suffering in his covenant people is directed to the heart’s affections, namely to develop “more contentment in God and less satisfaction in self and the world.”<sup>26</sup> The residual self-ruling affections in the redeemed heart are still at war with God’s desires for them. God’s love for his children motivate him to disrupt comfortable lives with suffering so that his covenant people will desire him above all else in life. The great danger, however, is for redeemed sufferers to adopt a sense of hopelessness.<sup>27</sup> The suffering God inflicts to mortify self-centered affections is the suffering he designs to foment Christlike hope (confident assurance) in his eternal promises.

Suffering made the lamenting psalmist realize the fleeting nature of earthly enjoyments and made them long to “dwell in your tent forever” (Ps 61:4). Groan-suffering makes the redeemed living in this fallen world “wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:23). Suffering “is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Cor 4:17) as it strips the away the pursuit of

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<sup>26</sup>John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 2003), 265.

<sup>27</sup>A sampling of psychological studies which connect suffering and hopelessness include Maurizio Pompili et al., “Depression, Hopelessness and Suicide Risk among Patients Suffering from Epilepsy,” *Ann Ist Super Sanita* 43, no. 4 (2007): 425–29; Maurizio Pompili et al., “Hopelessness and Suicide Risk Emerge in Psychiatric Nurses Suffering from Burnout and Using Specific Defense Mechanisms,” *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing* 20, no. 3 (June 2006): 135–43; G. K. Tiwari, “Chronic Physical Illness Affects Emotion Regulation Process: A Case of HIV/AIDS,” *The International Journal of Indian Psychology* 3, no. 1 (December 2015): 158–66; Sharma Ujjwal and Sinha Uday Kumar, “Perceived Expressed Emotion and Hopelessness in Patients of Depression,” *Indian Journal of Clinical Psychology* 42, no. 2 (2015): 122–28.

sinful indulgences for the better blessings of Christ's eternal kingdom.

Eschatological hope gives sufferers perseverance and perspective to temporal suffering. Paul mentions his hope for eternal blessings six times in *Philippians*, written while he was suffering imprisonment. He did not know how long he would suffer, what it would entail, and how his imprisonment would end (release or execution) but “the bright light of that future day filled the darkest days in Paul’s Roman prison.”<sup>28</sup> Peter wrote his first letter to a suffering community and began by drawing attention to Christ’s redemptive/eschatological hope (1 Pet 1:3). This hope is “an inheritance that is imperishable [not subject to decay], undefiled [pure and without stain], and unfading [eternally beautiful], kept in heaven for you” (1 Pet 1:4). The Father’s eternal, heavenly inheritance for his adopted children (Rom 8:15, 23; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5) is the imperishable, undefiled, and unfading Son and all the bountiful blessings which flow from him (Rev 21:1-7). This eschatological hope puts temporal suffering in its proper perspective for “while other worldviews lead us to sit in the midst of life’s joys, foreseeing the coming sorrows, Christianity empowers its people to sit in the midst of this world’s sorrows,

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<sup>28</sup>G. Walter Hansen, *Philippians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2009), 50. The “day of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:6, 10; 2:16) is the still future day when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to earth so that “*he* will be manifested in glory, will be met by his bride (the church), will judge, and will thus be publicly vindicated” (William Hendriksen, *Introduction to the Epistle to the Philippians*, in *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, NTC [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1962, 55 [italics in original]). Hendriksen continues by listing biblical synonyms to “the day of Christ Jesus:” “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:8); “the day of our Lord Jesus” (2 Cor 1:14); “the day of the Lord” (Acts 2:20; 1 Cor 5:5; 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Thess 2:2; 2 Pet 3:10); “that day” (1 Thess 5:4; 2 Thess 1:10; 2:3; 1 Tim 1:12; 2 Tim 1:18; 4:8); and “the coming” or “his coming” (Matt 24:7, 39; 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess 2:1, 8; Jas 5:7, 8; 2 Pet 3:4, 12; 1 John 2:28) (ibid.) Paul, however, was still a man and felt the pressures of his situation so that his “desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better” (Phil 1:23) for he would enjoy unending, unhindered, face-to-face fellowship with the Savior. Paul contemplated the blessings of his heavenly citizenship of having a glorified body (Phil 3:20-21) that would no longer suffer aches and pains and hunger and fatigue. Paul also alludes to eternity when he mentions “the resurrection from the dead” (Phil 3:11).

tasting the coming joy.”<sup>29</sup> Suffering helps the child of God trust in Christ’s sustaining presence during the suffering and hopefulness for the day when they will inherit his promised eternal blessings which will never be destroyed (Rom 5:1-5). The suffering that mortifies the embrace of sinful passions and conforms the affections to Christlike hope is also the suffering that glorifies God.

One of Jesus’ primary motivations was to always glorify his Father (John 4:34; 6:38), which especially shined during his Passion. His triumphal entry into Jerusalem resulted in deep spiritual and emotional turmoil as the impact of being the Savior of the world fell upon him (John 12:27; 17:4). The depths of his heart turbulence, however, did not deter him from his first concern: “Father, glorify your name” (12:28). The Savior’s last hours before the crucifixion were spent with his disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem (John 13-17) where Jesus began to pray, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you” (17:1).<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Edwards comments,

As this is his first request, we may suppose it to be his supreme request and desire, and what he ultimately aimed at in all. If we consider what follows to the end, all the rest that is said in the prayer, seems to be but an amplification of this great request. On the whole, I think it is pretty manifest, that Jesus Christ sought the glory of God as his highest and last end.<sup>31</sup>

In Gethsemane Jesus recoiled at the prospect of drinking the cup of his Father’s wrath for sin yet his desire to obey the Father’s will for him was greater. D. A. Carson comments

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<sup>29</sup>Timothy Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* (New York: Dutton Adult, 2013), 31.

<sup>30</sup>This prayer of Jesus was answered. Stephen, just before his martyrdom, saw the glorified Christ (Acts 7:55-56). When Christ returns he will not come as the meek and lowly Suffering Servant but as the glorified Son of God (Matt 24:30).

<sup>31</sup>Jonathan Edwards, “The End For Which God Created The World,” in *God’s Passion for His Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 202.

that “the servant who does not stoop to his own will, but who performs the will of the one who sent him—even to the death of the cross—is the one who glorifies God.”<sup>32</sup> Jesus suffered as an example for the redeemed to follow (1 Pet 2:21) and his example is to glorify God in all circumstances of life, including times of suffering.

The first question of the Westminster Larger Catechism directs attention to the motivational affections of the heart: “What is the chief and highest end of man?” The ultimate, God-ordained purpose of the individual is an unchangeable absolute that is not swayed by the vicissitudes of life. The answer to the question is biblically sound and echoes the Savior’s heart: “Man’s chief end and highest end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”<sup>33</sup> Sufferers glorify Christ when they desire him, regardless of the circumstances, so that he is esteemed above all (Pss 92:8; 97:9), he is adored and worshiped (Ps 29:2; Rev 5:8-14), he is loved (Deut 6:5); and he is obeyed (John 14:15, 23).<sup>34</sup> Suffering does not change the heart’s affectional priority to glorify God and Christ but offers “a golden opportunity to show that he is worth more than life.”<sup>35</sup>

To summarize, God knows the affections of the suffering heart: “O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear” (Ps 10:17). The natural and good desire is for suffering to cease. More important to God, however, than painlessness is mortifying the self-ruling affections which still

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<sup>32</sup>D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 440.

<sup>33</sup>*The Westminster Larger Catechism* (Radford, VA: Wilder Publications, 2012), 5. See Ps 73:24-28; John 17:21-23; Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 10:31.

<sup>34</sup>Thomas Watson, “Man’s Chief End Is to Glorify God,” *Fire and Ice: Puritan and Reformed Writings*, accessed March 3, 2016, <http://www.puritansermons.com/watson/watson5.htm>.

<sup>35</sup>John Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Cancer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 15.

inhabit the redeemed heart in order to treasure Christ and to strengthen the heart with eternal hope for his glory. The heart's volitions are also subject to the mortification, vivification, glorification heart dynamic.

### **Suffering and the Volitional Functions of the Heart**

The opening pages of Scripture gives evidence to the great value God places on human choices and behaviors. Adam was to reflect God's actions by subduing the earth, exerting dominion over it, and filling it with life. God commanded Israel:

You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them.  
I am the LORD your God.  
You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules;  
if a person does them, he shall live by them:  
I am the LORD (Lev 18:4-5).

Andrew Bonar highlights that the "I am the LORD" language is the sovereign God exerting his will over those prone to self-will: "He knows our frame, and He sees that man resents interference with his liberty in the things of daily life and private actions, more than in anything else; therefore, to silence objection, and to draw the will, He adduces the argument of His sovereignty and love."<sup>36</sup> The Son perfectly obeyed his Father's will (John 4:34; 6:38; 17:4). Jesus asked an incredible question: "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" (Luke 6:46). Christ-followers are enjoined to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (Eph 4:1) and to "be imitators of God" (Eph 5:1). Love for God under the Sinaitic Covenant was proved by obeying his commands (Exod 20:6; Deut 7:9; Neh 1:5). The New Covenant promised a new heart, indwelt by the Spirit, which would be able to obey

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<sup>36</sup>Andrew Bonar, *Leviticus*, Geneva Series of Commentaries (1846; repr. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 328-29.

God's commands (Ezek 36:27). The redeemed in Christ prove their love for him by keeping his commands (2 Thess 1:8; 1 John 2:3-4; 5:2).

Adam exerted his self-will so that since the fall “the great contest indeed between God and the creature is, whose will shall stand, God's will or ours; who shall prescribe to us, self or God.”<sup>37</sup> Romans 3 contains a catena of statements which indicate the natural disposition of the heart's choices is toward an unchristlike antagonism to God's rule: “all have turned aside” (Rom 3: 2), “no one does good, not even one” (Rom 3:12), and “their feet are swift to shed blood” (Rom 3:15). Several “do not” commands directed to the redeemed imply the potential for volitional rebellion still resides in the heart: “do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness (Rom 6:13), “do not be conformed to this world” (Rom 12:2), “do not go on sinning” (Rom 15:34), “do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh” (Gal 5:13), and “do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance” (1 Pet 1:14).<sup>38</sup> The self-willed are a “stiff-necked people,” characterized by a volitionally hardened (Exod 7:3) and/or obstinate (Isa 48:4) heart.<sup>39</sup> The self-willed “do not listen or incline their ear” (Jer 17:23) but, rather, willfully refuse to obey God's commandments (Neh 9:16, 17, 29). In the NT, the adjective αὐθάδης (“self-will”) connotes a sinful self-satisfied egocentrism that leads

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<sup>37</sup>Thomas Manton, “A Treatise of Self-Denial,” in *The Works of Thomas Manton*, ed. Thomas Smith, vol. 15 (London: Nisbet & Company, 1873), 183.

<sup>38</sup>Other “do not” commands in this vein include 1 Cor 10:7; 2 Cor 6:14; Eph 4:30; Col 3:9; 1 Thess 5:19; 2 Thess 3:13; Jas 4:11; 5:9; 1 John 2:15; 3 John 11.

<sup>39</sup>The phrase “stiff-necked people” finds its origin when Israel substituted the worship of Yahweh for the golden calf (Exod 32:9) The phrase is also used in Exod 33:3, 5; 34:9; Neh 9:16, 17, 29; Prov 29:1; Jer 7:26; 19:25; 17:23). See G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 76–122 for an extended discussion.

to an arrogant disregard for God and others.<sup>40</sup> God loves his adopted children so that he will exert his sovereign will on them in order to mortify their sinful self-will, which paves the way for him to instill humble submission and obedience.

Suffering is God exerting his will (1 Pet 4:19) and is a direct challenge to the sufferer's self-ruling volitions which "cannot endure to bear another king and another sovereign, because it effects a supremacy, and it cannot endure that any should lord it over us."<sup>41</sup> God inflicted suffering on Israel to break their wills so that they would humbly and joyfully submit to his rule (Deut 28:15-68). Suffering stripped the lamenting psalmist of prioritizing his own will so that he could declare, "I delight to do your will, O my God" (Ps 40:8). At the same time, however, the psalmist realized suffering could tempt him to exert his own will so that he prayed, "Teach me to do your will, for you are my God!" (143:10). This prayer was fulfilled in Jesus as he never sought to do his own will but only that of the Father's (John 4:34; 6:38; 17:4).

Suffering was the instrument the Father used to teach his Son the obedience necessary for him to fulfill his role as Messiah (Heb 5:8-9). The Suffering Servant's unswerving obedience to his Father's will meant he would endure an unfathomably horrific death on the cross (Phil 2:8). His agonizing pain filled every part of his being in Gethsemane yet his faith-filled prayer, "not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42), was a declarative statement that suffering had taught his heart's volitions to fully trust

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<sup>40</sup>*TDNT*, s.v. "αὐθάδης," by Otto Barenfeind. The two occurrences of αὐθάδης in the NT are in contexts of disobeying God's commands (Titus 1:7; 2 Pet 2:10). The word is also used in the LXX Gen 49:3, 7; Prov 21:24.

<sup>41</sup>Manton, "A Treatise of Self-Denial," 241.



and obey the Father's will for his life.<sup>42</sup> Since suffering was necessary for the Son of God to learn obedience then it is necessary for Christ-followers to suffer in order to learn to obey. Calvin counseled concerning suffering in the lives of Christ-followers, "I say, that by the cross they are also trained to obedience, because they are thus taught to live not according to their own wish, but at the disposal of God."<sup>43</sup> The Father perfectly and lovingly inflicts discipline-suffering on his children so that they may learn to bow their will to his, obey him, and be conformed to Christlikeness (Heb 12:3-11). The suffering that breaks self-will and conforms the heart to Christlike obedience, is a means to glorify God as his people remain loyal to him.

Jesus instructs his disciples, whether they are suffering or not, to "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:16). Sufferers glorify God through their heart's volitions in their continued fidelity to him. The lamenting psalmists glorified God with their continued trust and faith in him despite the contemptuous castigations (Pss 35:21, 25; 40 :15; 70:3), tauntings (42:3, 10), and mockings (22:8) the unrighteous hurled at them. Jesus glorified the Father as he remained loyal to his will regardless of his enemies' slanderous accusations (Mark 6:3; Luke 11:15) and vicious insults during his crucifixion (Luke 22:64; Luke 23:35). Jesus could have rescued himself at any time (Matt 26:53) but chose to glorify the Father through his cross-sufferings. Children of God endure pruning-sufferings (John 15:8), groan-sufferings (Rom 8:29), and persecution-sufferings (1 Pet

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<sup>42</sup>John Calvin said of Jesus that "the only thing which made it necessary for our Lord to undertake to bear the cross, was to testify and prove his obedience to the Father" (John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008], 458).

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 459.

4:14) to not only mortify unchristlike behavior and conform the will to Christlikeness, but also as an avenue to glorify God.

In summary, God knows all the activities done in creation for “no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb 4:13). The self-ruling volitions are in opposition to God’s will and, to a degree, this proclivity still resides in the redeemed heart. God, therefore, motivated by love inflicts suffering on his children to mortify their heart’s sinful volitions toward self rule, to conform the behaviors to God’s rule, and provide an avenue for the adopted child to glorify both Father and Son by remaining loyal to them.

### **Biblical Counseling and the Sufferer’s Responding Heart Functions**

The heart’s cognitions, affections, and volitions are both affected by suffering and respond to the suffering. Biblical counselors ought to be alert for and be ready to correct false theological concepts, to expose ungodly desires, and to rebuke unbiblical choices which tempt sufferers with the false hope that these will bring relief to suffering. At the same time, biblical disciplers should be compelled to encourage sufferers by pointing them to God, his Word, Christ and the gospel, worship, and hope.

### **Indicators of a Self-Ruling Heart**

Common to all redeemed sufferers is that the residual effects of the fall continue to pit self-rule against God’s rule. Adam’s rebellion was a declaration that *his rule* would increase and God’s decrease, that *he* would now arrange his life around *his own* priorities and agenda. Thomas Manton claims “that man’s will is the proudest enemy

that Christ hath on this side of hell, it resisteth Christ in all his offices.”<sup>44</sup> If so, then disciples need to be aware of some common indicators of self-ruling heart functions.

Cognitive self-rule in redeemed sufferers may include bargaining with God (“If you relieve my suffering then I will...”), thinking God has a personal vendetta against them, questioning God’s motives and abilities, or spending an inordinate amount of time learning about whatever is causing the suffering and its cure rather than seeking God.<sup>45</sup> The sufferer may easily become the center of his or her own universe so that the heart collapses in on itself with a practical atheism (Ps 14:1), Cognitive self-rulers refuse to be filled with the Spirit who dispenses godly wisdom (Eph 1:17) and shun godly counsel (Jas 1:5). Redeemed sufferers may begin to think of themselves in terms of the suffering rather than their identity in Christ. Persistent unbelief and refusals to bow to God’s sovereignty may have to be met with Thomas Manton’s warning: “It is a high contempt of God, when you make your bosom your oracle; you take his work out of his hands.”<sup>46</sup>

Affectional self-rule may show itself in self-absorption as the sufferer justifies immoral actions, unbiblical theological conclusions, or unconcern for others (Gal 5:19-

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<sup>44</sup>Manton, “A Treatise of Self-Denial,” 241.

<sup>45</sup>The medical benefits of modern culture are a blessing but sometimes the quest to find a cure can be an indicator of desperate self-sovereignty. Where this line is crossed is dependent on a number of variables and probably cannot be objectively determined. John Piper offers some wise counsel concerning cancer but his comments are apropos for all suffering: “It is not wrong to know about cancer. Ignorance is not a virtue. But the lure to know more and more and the lack of zeal to know God more and more is symptomatic of unbelief. Cancer is meant to waken us to the reality of God. It is meant to put feeling and force behind the command, ‘Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord’ (Hosea 6:3). It is meant to waken us to the truth of Daniel 11:32, ‘The people who know their God shall stand firm and take action.’ It is meant to make unshakable, indestructible oak trees out of us: ‘His delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers’ (Psalms 1:2–3). What a waste of cancer, if we read day and night about cancer and not about God” (Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Cancer*, 11).

<sup>46</sup>Manton, “A Treatise of Self-Denial,” 218.

21).<sup>47</sup> Refusal to repent from sin is a sure indicator that the sufferer would rather satisfy his or her sinful desires rather than please Christ. A sufferers' refusal to self-denial in favor of personal relationships, worldly ease, comfort, and pleasure is a sign of self-ruling affections (Matt 10:37-38; Luke 14:26-27, 33).<sup>48</sup> Self-ruling affections are seen in a morose sense of hopelessness, purposelessness, meaninglessness, self-pity, cynicism, unbelief, bitterness, self-protection, or complaining. Sufferers who continue to indulge their sinful heart passions may need to be warned that not only are they enslaving (Titus 3:3) but are also the mark of the unregenerate (1 Thess 4:5).

Self-ruling self-will is commonly manifested by the sufferer's indignation against God for "undeserved suffering."

When men will come and challenge God as if he were in debt to them, it is a sign their hearts secretly run upon their own righteousness. Murmuring is the fruit of merit. If God be not a debtor, why should we complain where nothing is due? Therefore the complainers speak perversely against the providence of God, It is a sign they think they have deserved better. Those that prescribe to God ascribe too much to themselves. Proud hypocrites think God is beholden to them, that he is bound to hear them, therefore they murmur if they have not what they expect. They entertain crosses with anger, and blessings with disdain.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>These actions may be virtual or real. For example, indulging the sinful heart-affections through internet pornography or escaping into romance novels, or engaging in sexual relations outside of marriage. Some may turn to alcohol, drugs, consumerism, isolationism or rely on relationships, all in an effort to relieve the pain of suffering.

<sup>48</sup>Jesus' unequivocal clarion call to self-denial is his call to mortify self-ruling affections, to extinguish the heart-loves which are contrary to God's rule. Denying self-love "does not mean that you deny yourself the right to have any fun in life or that you deny yourself certain pleasantries in life. Rather you submit to what God wants you to think and to do" (Paul Tanner, "The Cost of Discipleship: Losing One's Life for Jesus' Sake," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56, no. 1 [2013]: 47). Vincent develops this idea: "When my flesh yearns for some prohibited thing, I must die. When called to do something I don't want to do, I must die. When I wish to be selfish and serve no one, I must die. When shattered by hardships that I despise, I must die. When wanting to cling to wrongs done against me, I must die. When enticed by allurements of the world, I must die. When wishing to keep besetting sins secret, I must die. When wants that are borderline needs are left unmet, I must die. When dreams that are good seem to be shoved aside, I must die" (Milton Vincent, *A Gospel Primer for Christians: Learning to See the Glories of God's Love* [Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2008], 41).

<sup>49</sup>Manton, "A Treatise of Self-Denial," 212–13. Manton has several pointed comments about murmuring against God: (1) "We look no higher than the creature, and so are apt to murmur" (257); (2)

Sinful self-will may show itself in impatience, rudeness, anger, grumbling against God, envy or bitterness because others are not suffering, or cynicism for the apparent lack of divine justice. Disobedience in all its forms to Christ's commands is a visible, tangible, expression of a self-volitional act in opposition to God's rule. Redeemed sufferers exhibit rebellious volitions by their refusal to accept correction, by excluding themselves from the "one-anothers" but expecting others to live by them, by embracing a works-oriented sanctification (Gal 3:3), spiritual laziness, or by becoming bored with Christ, the cross, and the gospel. A warning may have to be issued that those who repeatedly thwart discipline-suffering "will suddenly be broken beyond healing" (Prov 29:1; also Exod 33:5).

### **Suggestions to Help Sufferers Conform Their Heart Functions to Christlikeness**

God, his Word, Christ and the gospel, worship, and hope are central elements to biblical counseling and span all the heart's functions. First, the biblical counselor ought always point sufferers to the Person and works of God. C. H. Spurgeon was acquainted with much suffering throughout his life and advised fellow sufferers:

Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity. And,

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"Thou art a creature, and a guilty creature, and God is the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth ; let this stop thy mouth" (258); (3) Murmuring "is but a taxing of God, and it is an high presumption for creatures to tax their creator, as if they were wiser than he; it is, in effect, to say, this is not well done ; there is an error in providence, which we would fain correct. If it be good, and best, why should we repine?" (258). Vincent offers a good insight for this point: "[The] the deeper I go into the gospel, the more I comprehend and confess aloud the depth of my sinfulness. A gruesome death like the one that Christ endured for me would only be required for one who is exceedingly sinful and unable to appease a holy God. Consequently, whenever I consider the necessity and manner of His death, along with the love and selflessness behind it, I am laid bare and utterly exposed for the sinner I am" (Vincent, *A Gospel Primer*, 33).

whilst humbling and expanding, this subject is eminently *consolatory*. Oh, there is, in contemplating Christ, a balm for every wound; in musing on the Father, there is a quietus for every grief; and in the influence of the Holy Ghost, there is a balsam for every sore. Would you lose your sorrows? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea; be lost in his immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of grief and sorrow; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead.<sup>50</sup>

Sufferers are to know God with their cognitions (Gal 4:9), love him with their affections (Matt 22:37), and obey him with their volitions (1 John 5:2). Counselors who direct sufferers to believe and trust the transcendent, imminent, majestic, omnipotent, omniscient, omnisapient, omnibenevolent, infallible, purposeful, good, loving, kind, holy, and infinite divine King will serve them well so that they may be Christlike in their thoughts, desires, and actions.

Second, disciplers ought to always derive their counsel from God's Word. The Word of God is the wisdom of God (Deut 4:5-6). Biblical wisdom finds its genesis in

a personal God who is holy and just and who expects those who know him to exhibit his character in the many practical affairs of life. . . . The emphasis of OT Wisdom was that the human will, in the realm of practical matters, was to be subject to divine causes. Therefore, Hebrew wisdom was not theoretical and speculative. It was practical, based on revealed principles of right and wrong, to be lived out in daily life.<sup>51</sup>

Biblical wisdom, therefore, is truth applied so that sufferers should study the Word (1 Tim 2:15), long for the Word (1 Pet 2:2), and live according to the Word (Ps 119:105).

Biblical wisdom "[makes] wise the simple" (Ps 19:7), "imparts understanding to the

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<sup>50</sup>C. H. Spurgeon, *The New Park Street Pulpit* (Pasadena, CA: Pilgrim Publications, 1975), 1. For an overview of Spurgeon's sufferings see Peter J. Morden, "C. H. Spurgeon and Suffering," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 35, no. 4 (October 2011): 306–25. Joel Beeke has a good chapter on the Puritan practice of meditation that could be easily taught to disciples (Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* [Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004], 73–100).

<sup>51</sup>*TWOT*, s.v. "חָכְמָה," by Louis Goldberg,

simple” (119:130), and “[gives] prudence to the simple” (Prov 1:4) so that sufferers will know how to mortify self-ruling thoughts, desires, and choices, be taught how to conform their heart functions to Christlikeness, and be encouraged to dedicate their whole heart to glorifying God.<sup>52</sup>

Third, biblical counselors ought always be proclaiming Christ and the gospel to sufferers. Christ and his gospel revives the soul (Acts 3:21), changes foolish self-ruling sinners to wise children of God (1 Cor 1:24; Col 2:3), is the source of true and eternal joy (John 15:11), enlightens the eyes (John 1:9), gives his people enduring strength (Rom 16:25), and makes his people righteous before the Father (Phil 3:8-9). Vincent gives good insight into the gospel’s effect on suffering:

More than anything I could ever do, the gospel enables me to embrace my tribulations and thereby position myself to gain the full benefit from them. For the gospel is the one great permanent circumstance in which I live and move; and every hardship in my life is allowed by God only because it serves His gospel purposes in me. When I view my circumstances in this light, I realize that the gospel is not just one piece of good news that fits into my life somewhere among all the bad. I realize instead that the gospel makes genuinely good new out of every other aspect of my life, including my severest trials. The good news about my trials is that God is forcing them to bow to His gospel purposes and do good unto me by improving my character and making me more conformed to the image of Christ.<sup>53</sup>

In Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3).

Christocentric and gospel wisdom affects every aspect of the sufferer’s heart as both are to be believed (Mark 1:15; 1 John 3:23), be the motivation for living (Phil 1:21, 27), and

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<sup>52</sup>Scripture is the primary text yet counselors should take advantage of all available materials that will spur sufferers on to Christlikeness. John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* is a classic allegory of the Christian life which would be beneficial for sufferers to read. The book shows how the riches of dependent faith are gained through the trials and hardships of life. A well-received study guide is available for the book as well: Maureen L. Bradley and Timothy Will Bradley, Jr., *The Pilgrim’s Progress Study Guide* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1994).

<sup>53</sup>Vincent, *A Gospel Primer*, 2008, 31-32.

be obeyed (John 15:10; 1 Pet 4:17). Sufferers need to continue to obey God, Christ, and the gospel even if the feelings to do so are absent. Richard Sibbes gives good insights into the importance for suffering disciples to obey Christ's commands:<sup>54</sup> (1) obedience results in spiritual growth and protection, neglect allows incremental spiritual corruption to creep into the soul; (2) obedience is a means through which the Holy Spirit strengthens and encourages the soul; (3) God delights in the obedience of his children and will accept it, however imperfect or unenthusiastic it may be; and (4) the lifting of the oftentimes crushing emotional, psychological, and spiritual dread accompanying suffering is usually granted through obedience not apart from it.<sup>55</sup>

Fourth, counselors should continually encourage and exhort sufferers to engage in public and private worship, praise, adoration, and exaltation of God and Christ. Sufferers may need to be reminded that worship is to engage the mind (Ps 9:10), the emotions (27:6), and the will (69:30). The individual lament psalms give the biblical counselor a wealth of ideas to implement volitional heart-glorifications of God. The laments had a consistent, fervent God-ward focus that did not waiver as they cried out to him,<sup>56</sup> complained to him (55:17), sang praises to him,<sup>57</sup> thanked him,<sup>58</sup> worshiped

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<sup>54</sup>Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed*, Puritan Paperbacks (1630; repr., Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 53–54.

<sup>55</sup>Edwards resolved “never to give over, nor in the least to slacken my fight with my corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be” (Jonathan Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards' Resolutions and Advice to Young Converts*, ed. Stephen J. Nichols [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001], 24.

<sup>56</sup>Pss 3:4; 22:2; 27:7; 28:1, 2; 31:17; 57:2; 86:3; 88:1, 13; 130:1; 141:1; 142:1, 5.

<sup>57</sup>Pss 9:2; 13:6; 22:22; 27:6; 57:7; 57:8; 71:14, 22.

<sup>58</sup>Pss 7:17; 28:7; 54:6; 35:18; 57:9; 59:17; 69:30; 86:12; 109:30.



him,<sup>59</sup> praised his steadfast love,<sup>60</sup> trusted him,<sup>61</sup> took refuge in him,<sup>62</sup> were satisfied in him (Ps 17:15), lifted up their souls to him,<sup>63</sup> prayed to him (Pss 5:2; 35:13), waited on him,<sup>64</sup> called upon him,<sup>65</sup> remembered and meditated on his wonderful deeds,<sup>66</sup> and sought him (Ps 77:2). Significantly, the psalmists performed these activities while they were under duress and not after divine relief had come. Jesus engaged his volitions in glorifying his Father as his life was characterized by prayer (Matt 4:23; Mark 1:35), during his intense suffering in Gethsemane (Luke 22:44), and from the cross (Matt 27:46; Luke 23:34, 46). The responses of the lamenting psalmists and Jesus are instructional for the contemporary suffering Christ-follower. Suffering is not an excuse to abandon praying, worshiping, praising, thanking, and seeking God but a means to glorify him as each heart function is engaged.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Pss 5:7; 26:12; 31:21; 41:13; 43:4.

<sup>60</sup>Pss 31:7; 56:10; 59:16.

<sup>61</sup>Pss 13:5; 25:2; 26:1; 31:14; 55:23; 56:3, 4; 143:8.

<sup>62</sup>Pss 7:1; 25:20; 31:1; 59:9; 71:1; 141:8; 143:9.

<sup>63</sup>Pss 25:1; 31:5; 86:4.

<sup>64</sup>Pss 5:3; 25:5, 21; 40:1; 130:5.

<sup>65</sup>Pss 61:2; 86:7; 88:9; 120:1.

<sup>66</sup>Pss 9:1; 77:3, 11, 12; 143:5.

<sup>67</sup>Suffering counselees need to understand that their reticence to worship and glorify God is a result of the fall. Adam and Eve were created as perfect doxological worshippers but when Adam sinned he became a self-worshiper. Since the fall, every person naturally worships the idolatrous self because the self-styled god does not want to share his or her glory with another. Admittedly, some types of suffering are very difficult and lodge deep in the soul so that sufferers may have a difficult time worshiping or thanking God. At the very least, a biblical counselor can point the sufferer of the grace of God which brought redemption by rehearsing to him or her the gospel. One of Jonathan Edwards' resolves reminded him to recall the gospel when he was afflicted: "Resolved, when I feel pain, to think of the pains of martyrdom, and of hell" (Edwards, *Resolutions and Advice*, 18). Suffering is an ever present reminder that not all is right with this world but the hope in Christ is that God in his grace "has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess 5:9). Suffering in this life is the closest the child of God will get to hell and this somber truth should provoke some heart-felt praise to the glory of God

Fifth, Biblical counselors should always express both temporal and eternal hope to sufferers. Sufferers are to cognitively know their hope in Christ (Eph 1:18), affectionally draw near to God because of their hope in Christ (Heb 7:19), and volitionally hold fast to their hope in Christ (Heb 10:23). Jay Adams counsels counselors:

It is [the counselor's] task always to sound the note of biblical optimism that is warranted by the promises of God. A counselor must be, above much else, a man of hope. He himself must believe what he says about hope, or he will communicate the opposite. He must be fully persuaded of the faithfulness of God in fulfilling His promises. Nothing less than this will give him the confident enthusiasm that is needed in speaking of hope (expectation) of change with conviction and assurance.<sup>68</sup>

Waiting for the bright day of eschatological hope to become a reality should give temporal perspective to redeemed sufferers. For example, counselees who have suffered betrayal by friends, employers, church or family members glorify God as they put their hope in their eternal friendship with the betrayed Christ (Luke 12:4; John 15:13-15) whom they will see in all his glorious splendor (John 17:24; 1 John 3:1-2).<sup>69</sup> Disciples who have suffered financial setbacks, material want, physical deprivations glorify God as they contemplate the inestimable eternal wealth being stored up for them by the generous hand of the Father.<sup>70</sup> Counselors stimulate hope with counselees suffering physical ailments when they remind them of the day when God himself will make pain cease (Rev 21:4). Suffering is designed by God to turn his people's heart-affections to the enduring substances of his eternal Kingdom, which, ultimately, glorifies him.

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for what they have been spared through "the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor 4:4; see also 1 Tim 1:11).

<sup>68</sup>Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 39–40.

<sup>69</sup>D. A. Carson makes an important point that his followers are called his friends but never is Jesus (or God) called the friend of anyone. Friends of Christ are those whom he loves (John 15:13) and are characterized by their obedience to him (John 15:14). Thus, "mutual reciprocal friendship of the modern variety is not in view, and cannot be without demeaning God" (Carson, *John*, 522).

<sup>70</sup>Rom 9:23; 10:12; 11:23; Eph 1:18; 2:7; 2:8.

In conclusion, the greatest danger facing sufferers is their own hearts. The heart, even of the redeemed, needs little excuse to exert its own thoughts, desires, and will against God. Sufferers are more susceptible to these rebellions and, sometimes, will attempt to justify them. Biblical counselors will serve suffering counselees well by understanding the natural bent of the heart to embrace self-rule and, with wisdom and love, bring biblical correction. Counselors will also minister as instruments in God's hands as they hold up before sufferers a vision of hope and worship based on God's promises found in his Word, Christ and the gospel.

### **Summary: Ministering to the Sufferer's Responding Heart**

The argument of this chapter is that God graciously, kindly, and lovingly disrupts his covenant people's peace with suffering in order to shape their hearts to Christlikeness by choosing *his* wisdom, desires, and will over their own. The first necessary step was to identify the responding functional aspects of the heart. Scripture indicates the heart is the inner life of the person and is comprised of the cognitions (thoughts, beliefs, rationale), affections (desires, motivations, emotions), and volitions (behaviors, choices, will). These threefold heart functions are interconnected, affecting each other in a complicated rich dynamic.

The self-ruling heart, however, is the inheritance Adam passed down to every one of his progeny and is characterized by the attempt to live as autocratic despots on a never-ending quest to increase their independence from God. Thus, each functional aspect of the heart is naturally in active rebellion against God and attempts to thwart his rule. The self-ruling cognitions are actively hostile to God's wisdom and are expressed by

unbelief, spiritual blindness, and depraved thinking. The self-ruling affections actively oppose God's rule and are consumed with self-absorption, selfishness, and indulging sinful desires. The self-ruling volitions are in active defiance against God's will and are characterized by a self-will which refuses to submit to the Lordship of Christ. All the redeemed once lived under the tyranny of their own hearts and may confess, "I was dead in iniquities, having no eyes to see thee, no ear to hear thee, no taste to relish thy joys, no intelligence to know thee."<sup>71</sup> The Holy Spirit, however, bursts the light of the gospel of Christ into the dark heart so that worship shifts from self to Christ. The redeemed, however, are still burdened with the vestiges of self-rule in each one of the heart's responding aspects so that the decreasing of self-sovereignty is resented and the increasing of divine rule is resisted. The Father's love compels him to inflict suffering on his covenant people in order to mortify in their hearts that which remains in anti-conformity to Christlikeness.<sup>72</sup>

The suffering that mortifies that which is repulsive to God is the suffering he uses to vivify in order to conform the heart to Christlikeness. Suffering mortifies the thoughts and beliefs that were once hostile to God and, simultaneously, helps sufferers to understand and embrace God's sovereignty, to know him, and to express faith and trust in him. Suffering subdues the desires and motivations that once repelled God so that

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<sup>71</sup>Arthur Bennett, ed., *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 47.

<sup>72</sup>Jesus comforted his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion by telling them, "The Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God" (John 16:26). The Father's love sent Christ to the cross (Rom 5:8), his love "predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ" (Eph 1:5), the Holy Spirit pours out God's love into the redeemed heart (Rom 5:5), and his Fatherly love afflicts his children with discipline suffering (Heb 12:5-11). John Owen counseled Christ-followers: "The greatest sorrow and burden you can lay on the Father, the greatest unkindness you can do to him is not to believe that he loves you" (John Owen, *Communion with God*, ed. R. J. K. Law, abridged ed. [Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991], 13).

sufferers have a new desire to shun selfishness, to have eternal hope in God's promises, and to seek to glorify God in all of life. Suffering quells the behaviors and choices that once rebuffed God's will in order to instill humble and joyful submission to God's will in obedience, and to continue to remain loyal to him despite the oftentimes devastating experiences of suffering. God's purposes for his children is for them to spiritually flourish like a luxuriant tree and like a fruit-laden vine (Ps 1:1-3; John 15:1-8). Suffering mortifies the dried, shriveled, potentially disease-laden branches that sap the soul in order to produce Christ-honoring Kingdom fruit. This mortification/vivification dynamic in the all the heart's responding aspects, while beneficial to the redeemed sufferer, is ultimately for the purpose of God to bringing glory to himself.

Biblical counselors are in a God-ordained position to help guide sufferers. Wise counselors will understand and be mindful of the lurking self-ruling thoughts, desires, and will which still reside within the redeemed heart. If sufferers exert these rebellions, then disciplers need to be quick to offer rebuke and point them God-ward. God, his Word, Christ and the gospel, worship, and eternal hope should be among the foundational elements in a biblical counselor's arsenal. These integral components span all the heart functions and constitute the God-given means for sufferers to mortify unchristlikeness in the heart, conform the heart's functions to Christlikeness, all so that the heart in all its responding functions will glorify God.

## CHAPTER 7

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This dissertation is a work of biblical counseling and necessarily embraces Scripture as the authoritative voice to address the theological and personal issues involved in suffering. This dissertation, then, has attempted to demonstrate the validity of its argument by utilizing a plan of study that any work of biblical counseling should follow: (1) grounded and rooted in the authoritative Scriptures; (2) exegetical study of key passages; (3) incorporating the appropriate biblical and systematic theological resources; and (4) making biblically sound methodological and applicational conclusions. The remainder of this chapter will summarize the findings of this dissertation, offer suggestions for further study, and end with some concluding thoughts.

#### **Summary of Arguments**

This dissertation has made a series of arguments about suffering that followed from and explained the thesis: the divine design for suffering in Christ-followers is to decrease self-rule through mortification, increase God's rule through engendering spiritual maturity, with both of these functions serving the ultimate purpose of God glorifying himself in the individual lives of his covenant people. Following is a summary of each chapter's findings.

Chapter 1 positioned the subject of suffering within its contemporary

theological context. Suffering has been a topic of intense interest from ancient times to the modern setting and, presumably, will not abate until history comes to a close. This chapter gave an historical overview of the theology of suffering and an evaluation of the incarnational suffering model that has been adopted by many in the biblical counseling movement. The incarnational approach, it was suggested, subtly shifts the emphasis from the sufferer's dependence on Christ to the counselor's therapeutic skills. A "union with Christ" model was presented as superior for it de-emphasizes the counselor's skill, as important as it is, and emphasizes dependence on Christ and the Holy Spirit. This chapter also offered the thesis statement and its explanation, and the methodology of the dissertation, contending that the divine design for suffering in Christ-followers is for mortification, maturation, and glorification. Three subsequent chapters each explored one major point of the thesis statement.

Chapter 2 demonstrated that one divine design for suffering is to decrease self-rule through mortification. The necessary theological groundwork was laid by mapping out the rise of self-rule through Adam's rebellion, God's responsive curses which ushered suffering into human life, and the universal presence of self-rule in humanity. The chapter next examined the mortifying effects suffering had on the lamenting psalmists' self-rule. Suffering decreased their self-rule as evidenced by their God-ward focus, the sense of their own lowliness, and the prospect of death. The cross of Christ as God's solution to mortify self-rule was the subject of the next section. Isaiah 53 clearly shows that the reason the Davidic King suffered was to mortify human self-rule and redeem a people for himself. Jesus' unambiguous command to his redeemed to embrace self-denial, which will necessarily include both internal and external cross-sufferings to

varying degrees, affirms suffering as a means God uses to decrease self-rule in his covenant people.

Chapter 3 affirmed that one divine design for suffering is to increase God's rule by engendering spiritual maturity. The lamenting psalmists gained a variety of soul-maturing blessings as a result of their sufferings such as confession and repentance of sin, self-denial, seeking after God, a greater knowledge of God, obedience, praising him despite the suffering, and confident hope in him. Jesus learned the obedience required of him as Messiah through suffering (Heb 5:7-9). Satan's temptations in the wilderness were the Father's means to test and refine his obedience. Suffering in Gethsemane and on the cross further probed his willingness to obey his Father's will and, consequently, further developed his spiritual maturity. For Christ-followers, the six NT passages examined gave ample evidence that suffering engendered the spiritually maturing blessings of hope, conformity to Christ, spiritual strength, knowing Christ, righteousness, and spiritual wholeness. Suffering, then, both decreases self-rule through mortification and, simultaneously, increases God's rule as he engenders in his redeemed the blessings of spiritual maturity.

Chapter 4 verified that the concurrent decreasing self-rule and increasing God's rule both serve the ultimate purpose of God glorifying himself in the individual lives of his covenant people. This chapter began by showing one way God glorifies himself. Moses desired to see God's glory and God responded by declaring to him his self-glorifying name works (Exod 33:18-34:7). The lamenting psalmists glorified God through their suffering as they proclaimed and appealed to each one of God's self-glorifying works he revealed to Moses, namely his compassion, grace, slowness to anger,



steadfast love, faithfulness, forgiveness, and justice. The ultimate God-glorifying expression of suffering, as was next detailed, was Jesus on the cross. The three Johannine uses of ὑψόω (“to lift up”) clearly indicated that Jesus’ cross-sufferings glorified him as the giver of eternal life, the forgiver of sin, and the Savior of the world, all to the glory of the Father. Specific passages were examined that clearly show God is glorified through persecution-suffering, pruning-suffering, when his children are miraculously healed from suffering, in pruning-suffering, persecution-suffering, groan-suffering, which may occur independently or in some combination. This chapter also showed that God is glorified when suffering ends as evidenced by the thanksgiving psalms, when healing occurs, and in the eschaton where suffering for the redeemed will become a distant memory.

Chapter 5 defended the dissertation argument from specific disagreements raised by open theism. Neotheistic theological foundations rest on love as *the* defining attribute of God and the subsequent requirement that he create moral agents with libertarian freedom. Both of these openness claims were shown to be erroneous by Scripture, especially by highlighting the biblically contradictory conception of God these theological tenets produce. The dissertation argument was adequately defended against open theistic claims that God has no divine design for suffering and suffering is purposeless. The last section revealed the devastating effects openness theology has on sufferers’ confidence in God, Christ and the gospel, prayer, and eternal open. Belief in the God who is comprehensively sovereign was demonstrated to be the only true and reliable source of assurance and confidence for sufferers.

Chapter 6 argued that God graciously, kindly, and lovingly disrupts his covenant people’s peace with suffering in order to shape their hearts to Christlikeness by

choosing *his* wisdom, desires, and will over their own. The heart's cognitive, affective, and volitional responding aspects were briefly defined and discussed in order to show that the heart is complex, interwoven entity that both responds to and is affected by suffering. The next section focused on the heart's volitions. God designs suffering to decrease self-rule by mortifying the heart's unchristlike thoughts/beliefs of self-sovereignty and replace them with a Christlike embrace of God's sovereignty and knowing God. God is glorified by the volitions as the sufferer expresses faith and trust in him. The heart's affections were examined next. God designs suffering to mortify the heart's natural proclivity to indulging its own sinful desires while, simultaneously, instilling eternal hope and the desire to glorify God. The volitions were the topic of the next section. Suffering mortifies the heart's natural allure of self-will so that the heart's volitions will joyfully submit to God in obedience. God is glorified as the suffering child of God willingly chooses to remain loyal to God and Christ. The last part of the chapter was addressed to biblical counselors. Counselors need to understand the powerful pull the sufferer's heart has toward self-rule and rebuke them when it is expressed. Counselors should also continuously point sufferers to God, his Word, Christ and the gospel, worship, and eternal hope in order to be an instrument in the Holy Spirit's hand in the lives of sufferers.

Overall, this dissertation has attempted to make a new contribution to the literature on suffering. The literature on suffering is vast but, to date, a concentrated study on suffering has not been produced from someone associated with the biblical counseling movement. This study has sought to fill this gap from a union with Christ perspective and incorporating new developments within biblical counseling. This work on suffering is far

from comprehensive, probably an impossible task, and more contributions beneficial to biblical counseling could be made through further research.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

The following suggestions for further research are either directly related to suffering or flow from topics touched upon in this dissertation. First, biblical counseling would benefit from further research on the incarnational ministry model. Some general articles assessing this ministry model may be found but an in-depth, critical evaluation is wanting. What are the historical and/or theological roots undergirding this model? What historical precedence is there for the incorporation or rejection of this ministry model? What benefits and/or detriments are inherent in the model? What are the practical implications for both discipler and disciplee for adopting incarnational ministry? The same questions could be asked of the union with Christ model as the two are compared and contrasted. The general trajectory of biblical counseling appears to be moving in the direction of adopting incarnational suffering, so such a study could have a tremendous impact on the future of the movement.

Second, biblical counseling would benefit from further research on the use of eschatology in ministering to sufferers. Eschatological truths are used throughout Scripture to motivate sufferers to endure for the eternal hope awaiting them. Some pertinent questions are: Why and how does Scripture use eschatology to encourage sufferers? How has the church historically used eschatological truths to motivate Christlikeness during present trials? What difference does it make for counselors who hold differing eschatological ideas? For example, how would a counselor who embraces historical premillennialism differ in his or her counsel to sufferers than one who holds to

amillennialism? How may biblical counselors employ eschatological truths to minister to sufferers? Much is written defending eschatological positions and their implications on one's theological system but how these theological truths may practically impact counselors and counselees could be of great benefit to the biblical counseling field.

Third, biblical counseling would benefit from further research on self-denial. Self-denial is a *sine qua non* requirement of being a disciple of Christ and, at some level, inherently involves voluntary internal and/external suffering. Puritan authors wrote extensively on self-denial but, judging from the paucity of contemporary resources, denying self seems to have become a neglected truth.<sup>1</sup> The contemporary church, in general, and biblical counselors, in particular, could only benefit from a thorough, in-depth, practical biblical theology of what it means to deny self within a culture that celebrates self-absorption.

Fourth, biblical counseling would benefit from further research on the theoretical and practical theology of suffering offered by past authors. Contemporary authors have examined John Calvin's and John Flavel's works on suffering. Similar studies on the practical theology of, for example, Richard Baxter, Thomas Boston, Thomas Brooks, Thomas Manton, Richard Sibbes, C. H. Spurgeon, and Thomas Watson would be helpful.<sup>2</sup> A general Puritan theology of suffering, which would incorporate

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<sup>1</sup>Puritan works specifically dedicated to self-denial include Richard Baxter, *A Treatise of Self-Denial*, 2nd ed. (London: Robert White, 1675); Thomas Manton, "A Treatise of Self-Denial," in *The Works of Thomas Manton*, ed. Thomas Smith, vol. 15 (London: Nisbet & Company, 1873), 179–294; Thomas Watson, *The Duty of Self-Denial and Ten Other Sermons* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1997). Contemporary works include Walter J Chantry, *The Shadow of the Cross: Studies in Self-Denial* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1981), and Hayley DiMarco and Michael DiMarco, *Die Young: Burying Your Self in Christ* (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2012).

<sup>2</sup>For a work dedicated to Calvin's theology of suffering, see Joseph Hill, *Suffering: Understanding the Love of God* (Darlington, SC: Evangelical Press, 2005). Brian H. Cosby, *Suffering and*

several authors, would aid contemporary biblical counselors in their ministry to sufferers. Additionally, research on what past authors wrote concerning a particular area of counseling such as depression, loss of a spouse, or terminal illness, would be beneficial.<sup>3</sup>

Fifth, biblical counseling would benefit from further research on the insights other cultures have to offer on suffering. This dissertation was written from an American evangelical perspective to minister in this culture. Suffering, obviously, is a worldwide phenomenon and each culture has its own unique ways of applying biblical truth to their cultural setting. The theological truths presented in this dissertation are transcultural but culture does have an influence on the interpretation and application of the truth. What may a westernized biblical counselor learn, for example, from Christians in Africa, China, or Peru on suffering? The West, however, is not monolithic and additional insights could be garnered from other westernized cultures other than American.

Sixth, biblical counseling would benefit from further research on the gospel's positive effects on the heart. A wide range of materials are available which detail sin's effects on the cognitions (especially), affections and volitions, but a general lack seems to exist on how the gospel changes these functional/responding aspects of the heart and what restorations take place within each domain. A study in this area would aid biblical counselors in encouraging counselees when these changes are seen and give biblically-driven substance to prayer.

Seventh, biblical counseling would benefit from further research on God's

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*Sovereignty: John Flavel and the Puritans on Afflictive Providence* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), explores Flavel's theology of suffering.

<sup>3</sup>Mark Deckard, *Helpful Truth in Past Places: The Puritan Practice of Biblical Counseling* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2010), wrote a helpful book that takes extended Puritan writings and applies them to contemporary issues.

design for suffering in the unregenerate. This dissertation was limited to exploring the divine designs for suffering in the redeemed yet biblical counselors will also have contact with sufferers who are outside of Christ. Three commonalities exist between the unredeemed and the redeemed: (1) in the biblical metanarrative (creation, fall, redemption, consummation) all people have creation and fall in common; (2) suffering is universal because of the fall; and (3) pollsters consistently discover that approximately 96% of people believe in some god/God. Given these commonalities, perhaps the lament psalms could be used as an entry point in unregenerate lives, which would give opportunity to point them to the cross and Christ.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

I would like to end this dissertation with some brief summary thoughts. First, the cognitive, affective, volitional aspects of the heart are good for biblical counselors to understand, not only for the sake of the counselee but also as they assess their own counseling practices. Biblical counselors do not fit a mold but tend to approach suffering, and other issues, in certain ways. Cognition-focused counseling believes knowledge is the solution to dealing with suffering and will show strength in Scripture and theology. Affection-focused counselors are strong in forming emotional bonds with counsees and see emotional peace is the solution to suffering. Volition-focused counseling is strong in obedience to the Word and view conformity to God's commands as the solution. The wise counselor will know which tendencies he or she will have and, while not negating them, will make an effort to include the type(s) of counseling not natural in order to give the disciple/counselee full-orbed heart-counseling.

Second, the local church is vital to healthy biblical counseling. Thomas

Manton correctly observes that faith in Christ is not developed apart from his church: “As God would establish a dependence between himself and us, so he would establish a dependence between christians among themselves; therefore grace doth not only come from God, but we receive it in part through the means of the body.”<sup>4</sup> Biblical counselors should insist that sufferers not isolate themselves from the church body but, if physically able, to continue to regularly gather with the body of Christ. God has always made a distinction between those who are his people and those who are not. He created his covenant community from among all the nations and peoples for the express purpose of glorifying himself (Isa 43:7). The lamenting psalmists felt lonely and abandoned (Pss 25:16; 102:7) but they would not isolate themselves from the company of the godly (22:22, 25; 35:18; 40:9-10). The temptation for sufferers is to withdraw, thinking that isolation rather than interaction is more conducive to finding relief from suffering but the wise understand the folly and dangers of such thinking (Prov 18:1). The church is the contemporary great congregation and the place where God’s glory dwells (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; Eph 2:21). Biblical counseling then, needs to be under the auspices of and through the local church. William Goode expresses this point well:

Counseling must never be thought of as a weekly hour of magic, or an independent ministry conducted aside from the church. Preaching, teaching, evangelism, discipleship, and counseling are all integral parts that make up effective, biblical ministry. The local church is the instrument Christ ordained to help believers grow into His likeness. It is the only organization—or better, organism—He promised to build, sustain, and use. Counseling is an essential part of the local church’s ministry as it disciples and helps believers mature in Christ’s image.<sup>5</sup>

Sufferers should surround themselves with the company of the redeemed who love one

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<sup>4</sup>Manton, “A Treatise of Self-Denial,” 223.

<sup>5</sup>William W. Goode, “Biblical Counseling and the Local Church,” in *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 222–23.

another (Rom 12:10), care for one another (1 Cor 12:15), comfort one another (2 Cor 13:11), bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2), and encourage one another (1 Thess 4:18). Local church affiliation and attendance is something disciplers ought to monitor closely with all their suffering disciples.

Third, the mortification/maturation dynamic forms a seemingly paradoxical situation as expressed by Richard Sibbes, “As for crosses, he doth but cast us down, to raise us up, and empty us that he may fill us, and melt us that we may be ‘vessels of glory,’ Rom. ix. 23, loving us as well in the furnace, as when we are out, and standing by us all the while.”<sup>6</sup> Under the New Covenant and in light of the cross, redeemed sufferers cry out for the blessing of relief in order to have joy and, at the same time, the suffering is embraced with joy for the blessings it produces.

Fourth, the mortification/vivification/glorification dynamic presented in this dissertation is, admittedly, an idealized view of what suffering should accomplish.

Oftentimes, however, sufferers find themselves living Psalm 119:176—

I have gone astray (יָחַדְתִּי) like a lost sheep; seek your servant,  
for I do not forget your commandments.

The verb יָחַדְתִּי, in this context refers to a straying from God's ways into self-rule. Going astray “may be listless wandering from the known and the true, or it may be deliberate departure for the good for something other, such as idols. One strays when one leaves the good way.”<sup>7</sup> Redeemed sufferers know they not abandoned God's Word yet may also

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<sup>6</sup>Richard Sibbes, “The Soul's Conflict with Itself,” in *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes*, vol. 1 (1635; repr., Edinburgh: James Nicol, 1862), 122–23.

<sup>7</sup>*NIDOTTE*, s.v. “חָדַד,” by Elmer A. Martens. This verb was also used in Isa 53:6, which is a sweeping indictment all humanity who have the tendency to stray from God to indulge self-will: “All we like sheep have gone astray (יָחַדְתִּי); we have turned—every one—to his own way.”



recognize they have gone astray, that their reaction to the suffering is not Christlike. Thus the prayer, “seek your servant,” which acknowledges the inability of the sufferers to change his or her own heart.

And fifth, the divine designs for suffering presented in this dissertation are foreign to the natural inclinations of the heart. Self-rule cannot be mortified and spiritual maturity cannot be engendered by innate abilities but only through the ministrations the powerful, indwelling Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit circumcises unregenerate hearts (Rom 2:29; 2 Cor. 5:5) in order to wash, sanctify, and justify (1 Cor 6:11; 2 Thess 2:13; Titus 1:3; 1 Pet 1:2) the chosen of the Father. The Holy Spirit was given by the Father (Rom 5:5; 1 John 3:24) to dwell within the redeemed (Rom 8:9, 11; 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; Gal 4:6) so that through his power (Rom 15:13, 19; Eph. 3:16) and his illumination of the Word of God (1 Cor 2:6-12), children of God may live lives of holiness (Rom. 1:4) that no longer need to yield to the power of the indwelling sin nature (Rom 7:6; 8:2, 4). The Christ-follower is not to grieve (Eph 4:30) or quench (1 Thess 5:19) the ministry of the Holy Spirit but to be led by him (Rom 8:14; Gal. 5:18), taught by him (1 Cor 2:13), filled with him (Eph 5:18), walk by him (Gal 5:16, 25), and pray what is pleasing to him (Eph 6:18; Jude 20) in order to overcome weaknesses (Rom 8:26), and experience life, peace, and joy (Rom 8:6, 13; 14:17). Through the Spirit, God “has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3). The Holy Spirit helps the redeemed in Christ overcome their natural reluctance to obey God’s Word. The power of the gospel is manifested when those whom Christ rescued from the tyranny of sin live lives that reflect the righteousness of Christ in obedience to His Word. Many skirmishes will take place in the heart of the redeemed sufferer—some will be won, others lost—but through them all

the mighty Holy Spirit is leading, guiding, and prompting the beloved of the Father to Christlikeness.

Between the fall and the Parousia, God's people have experienced, and will continue to experience, a multitude of fears, hurts, troubles, and horrors associated with suffering. Suffering is a reminder of the fall, that the creation was subjected to sin and groans under its weight, that not all is right with the world. Suffering reminds the child of God of the cross as the Savior suffered to bring redemption to his chosen ones, thereby rescuing them from the eternal sufferings of hell. Suffering, too, makes the redeemed long for eternity and the day when God "will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev 21:4). Until this day arrives, however, the suffering redeemed hope, trust, and pray, "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:20).

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## ABSTRACT

### THE DIVINE DESIGN OF CHRISTIAN SUFFERING: MORTIFICATION, MATURATION, AND GLORIFICATION

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Chapter 1 introduces the dissertation's thesis and highlights its methodology.

This dissertation argues that the divine design for suffering in Christ-followers is to decrease self-rule through mortification, increase God's rule through engendering spiritual maturity, with both of these functions serving the ultimate purpose of God glorifying himself in the individual lives of his covenant people. This chapter also sets the argument within the contemporary context of biblical counseling.

Chapter 2 explores the first major element of the thesis, that God designs suffering to decrease self-rule in his covenant people through mortification. This theme is traced through the lamenting psalmists, the Suffering King's attack on self-rule via the cross, and Jesus' imperative to self-denial.

Chapter 3 argues the second major element of the thesis, that God designs suffering to increase his rule in his covenant people by engendering the blessings consistent with spiritual maturity. This thought is developed by examining the spiritual maturity suffering produced in the lamenting psalmists and Jesus. Six New Testament passages are examined which indicate suffering is instrumental in engendering spiritual

maturity in the Christ-follower.

Chapter 4 demonstrates the third major thesis element that suffering that the ultimate purpose of suffering in Christ-followers is to glorify God. This conclusion is reached by examining the lamenting psalmists glorification of God, Jesus glorifying the Father in his sufferings, Christ-followers' glorification of Christ through suffering, and how God glorifies himself when suffering ceases.

Chapter 5 defends the dissertation thesis against the challenges forwarded by open theism. The main arguments focus on open theism's contention that no divine design for suffering exists and suffering is purposeless. The last section critiques the implications open theistic beliefs has on trusting God, Christ and the gospel, prayer, and eternal hope.

Chapter 6 proposes that the cognitions, affections, and volitions of the heart are each mortified of their unchristlikenesses, conformed to Christlikeness, both for the glory of God through suffering. The last section is directed to biblical counselors to give indicators of self-rule in sufferers and to suggest how they may minister to all the suffering heart's functions.

Chapter 7 concludes the dissertation by giving a summary of its arguments, suggestions for further research, and some concluding thoughts.

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