

Suffering

God alone holds the keys to the mysteries of life, and your daily meeting with Him is instrumental in unlocking His hidden wisdom and intentions in your life.

One of the murkiest mysteries of this life involves a question that every heart asks: "Why is it necessary that I suffer?"

Many a time we will ask this type of question: "Why?" "Why me?" "Why this?" "Why now?" "Why this way?"

Suffering is a frequent topic in Scripture. It seems that God has a lot to say about this subject without attempting to satisfy every question or to fully solve the mystery. The writer of Hebrews says it well: "By faith we understand..." Without trusting Him, we are left to interpret life like a man lost at sea without a compass. He alone knows; and He alone is in charge of what happens to you. Knowing Him is your key.

This month we will examine the purposes of God in allowing us to suffer and the related topics that involve our temptations and our testings.

There is a reason that we feel safe in the presence of a person who has suffered intensely; and yet there is no smell of the smoke upon him. It is God's will to make all of us just such persons.

If you would understand, then study Father's words on this subject. Meditate upon them. Take His thoughts inside you and give them time and room. In this way, you will not waste your sorrows.

Lesson 1

Why does suffering strike us as being so wrong? There is something about pain, hurt, heartache, and sorrow that does not seem like this is the way things are supposed to be.

There is an innate sense that suffering was not supposed to be part of this creation. It feels like an intruder; and indeed, this is exactly what God says about it. In Genesis 1:31, He informs us that He originally made all things in such a way that they were declared by God to be the essence of good; yet we discover that through man's disobedience, deception, disease, and death were injected into our daily experience. Therefore, the suffering caused by broken relationships, rebellions, diseases, as well as the dying of those we love seem oddly out of kilter with all that seems right.

We are relieved to discover that heaven will have none of it! All will be restored. All will be well.

Scripture Study: Use your highlighter to mark Genesis 1:31. *(5 minutes)*

What do you think God's purpose was in stating each day that "it was good"?

What do you think God means for you to understand by this declaration?

Scripture Study: Examine the entrance of suffering in Genesis 3:16-24. *(10 minutes)*

State the various types of sufferings that are mentioned in this passage.

Scripture Study: Read joyfully Revelation 21:4-5. *(10 minutes)*

Journal: Express your gratitude to God for giving you this promise to look forward to.

Read Revelation 5:9-11. What would you say to God as a result of reading this?

Prayer Time: *(10 – 25 minutes)*

Can you bow before your Savior and worship Him in silent adoration?

Present your body as your offering to Him who purchased you, for this is deep worship!

Align your will with Him who loves you and is working to defeat evil.

Pray for Jesus to send you and your friends to those who do not know Him.

Lesson 2

The Savior is predicted to be “the Suffering Servant” who is “...a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” – Isaiah 53:3. It is for this reason that He is displayed as “the Lamb of God,” for God has troubled Himself to go “find” the Lamb of His choosing in order to deal with the cause of suffering.

Jesus had to enter into our pain, our tests, and our temptations in order to be qualified to identify with us; and I believe that He also identified with the suffering in Father’s heart over the effects of our sins upon Him.

When Jesus weeps, He reveals the Father’s heart. God weeps over cities, over death, and over our rejections of His love, for to love is to invite pain as well as joy! At least until all is restored.

Scripture Study: Read Isaiah 53:3-12. *(10 minutes)*

List the types of suffering which you see portrayed in the Messiah.

Scripture Study: Read and comment on the following verses: *(10 minutes)*

Hebrews 2:17-18 - Why did Jesus become a man?

Hebrews 4:15 - Why did Jesus become a man?

Hebrews 5:8-9 - Jesus was always perfect; but He did have to qualify to properly represent us and thus become the One who was perfectly fitted to be our sacrificial Lamb. So what did obedience have to do with His suffering?

Prayer Time: *(10 – 25 minutes)*

Kneel before your Savior and, by closing your eyes, “see” Him as doing all this so that He could enter into your sufferings.

Worship Him this morning in whatever way seems to flow from you.

Bring your suffering and your hurts to Him and surrender them into His hands.

Rejoice in His love for you! Receive His love into your soul.

Lesson 3

Jesus' sufferings must have included leaving the fellowship He enjoyed with His Father as well as leaving heaven for earth where "...the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" - 1 John 5:19. Being under the sentence of death as a mere infant, being pursued, being treated as an illegitimate child, being misunderstood just because He never sinned even as a child, experiencing the death of His natural father at an early age...these are but the beginnings of His sorrows.

Being pure from any and all sin must have also left Him uniquely vulnerable to feeling things when He saw the sins all around Him. If "righteous Lot" was "vexed" (tormented) day by day at what he saw, you can only imagine what The Pure and Holy One felt! (2 Peter 2:8-9)

The #1 thing on Jesus' "hit list" as He entered into His mission to rescue us was to obey God and thus strip Satan from his legitimate claim to authority over men; and this mission necessitated suffering.

Scripture Study: Carefully read Luke 4:1-8. (*10 minutes*)

Does the Holy Spirit ever lead you into situations in which you might face severe temptation?

Why do you think Jesus would tell you to also pray, "Lead us not into temptation?"

Even though Satan is a liar and cannot be trusted, what claim does he make that Jesus does not dispute?

What does obedience have to do with overcoming the devil?

Now, read Luke 4:14. What is the connection between being tested and refusing the temptation with moving in power?

Journal: As you meditate upon these things, do some pouring out of your thoughts to your Father. Share with Him your thoughts, struggles, questions, or sorrows. Maybe you simply want to experiment with "stream of consciousness" writing, which means that you just write quickly what you are feeling to Him. Just let it pour out. (*5 minutes*)

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Reread what you just wrote.

Now, bow quietly before Him and listen. Be still a few moments. Give Him time and room.

Write down any impressions you have which are (or probably are) from the Lord.

Pray for your enemies this morning. Determine to bless those who curse you.

Lesson 5

Jesus interpreted His circumstances in the light of Scripture verses He had committed to memory. You will notice that He seemed to have a Scripture for every occasion. Fortunately, you probably already know more Scriptures than you think you do. Why not begin to actively use Scripture more aggressively so that you too are interpreting your battles by the words of God?

Satan is a liar, and his attack will always involve a temptation to interpret your situation in a way that contradicts God. When you refuse to do this, he has no leverage, no ability to inflict damage to your soul. This does not mean that you might not still suffer; but it does mean that you will have the joy of glorifying the Lord as well as having faith to receive great help in the midst of the trouble.

Never accept the idea that Satan tries to plant in you that says you cannot memorize and use God's Truth as a weapon against him. Oh no. Scripture is the key to power and, like any weapon, it must first be tested and then used in the face of an adversary. Combat is always intimidating.

Scripture Study: Reread Luke 4:4, and then trace it back to its source (which is where Jesus learned it) in Deuteronomy 8:2-3. *(10 minutes)*

Why does God want them (and you) to remember all the way He has led in the past?

Why would it be to your benefit to become more humble?

What is every test about?

Who is the test designed to benefit?

Why does God "let you be hungry"?

What does God want to deeply teach you?

Journaling: Express your thoughts and feelings to your heavenly Father as it touches your testings.

(5 minutes)

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Confess His words over your life this morning.

Now pray His will into situations that come to your mind.

It is important that you rejoice in the Lord and the power of His might!

Ask Father to lead you and use you today.

Lesson 6

All words carry life or death; and since you reap what you sow, it is extremely important that you speak life-giving words as you encounter things in your day which are not to your liking.

In order to do this, it is going to become increasingly important for you to have Scripture verses freshly on your mind and heart. Otherwise, some other words will come out of your mouth; and then that is what you will reap!

Be creative in devising new ways to refresh your mind with God's words, which, if used, would greatly alter the situations you are sure to face in the near future. Maybe your giants will be financial. Maybe loneliness. Maybe you are experiencing criticism. Maybe it's physical. Sooner or later, all of these giants will make your acquaintance. Is this not true? Be prepared to win.

Scripture Memory: Deuteronomy 8:2-3 is a little long, so it may take several days and some frequent review, but it's worth it. Remember, Jesus won a significant and strategic victory with the punch line to this two-verse salvo! Just keep saying it over and over to yourself as you work it into your memory bank. *(10 minutes)*

Scripture Application: Apply Deuteronomy 8:2-3 to your various situations. *(5 minutes)*

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Read Deuteronomy 8:2-3 before the Lord and then confess His words over your life.

Now begin to thank Him for being your Father and for sending Jesus to rescue you!

Enjoy Him this morning. Just delight yourself in the Lord this morning, and He will give you the desires of your heart.

Confess God's faithfulness over some of your friends who need God's help today.

Lesson 7

Jesus suffered a great deal in order to express the Father's nature to people who were trapped in very wrong ideas about God.

No sooner had He bound Satan through obedience to the Father than the full force of the rage of those who had known Him all His life was poured out upon Him! Family and friends tried to murder Him! (Luke 4:28-29)

Jesus told His brothers that the world hated Him; and He knew that all who followed Him would receive some of this same hatred. (John 7:7; Matthew 10:24-25)

“All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” - 2 Timothy 3:12.

Scripture Memory: Keep working on Deuteronomy 8:2-3. The more times you repeat it to yourself, the deeper it goes so that the Holy Spirit can pull it out at just the right moment! (5 minutes)

Scripture Study: Let your eyes take in these verses and respond accordingly. (10 minutes)

Luke 4:28-29 - Suppose Jesus had simply read the text from Isaiah but said nothing about the widows and lepers. How would things have gone differently for Him? How might you apply this to your own life?

John 7:5-8 - Jesus comments on both how you view time and how society treats you when you are representing the Father. Apply this to your life.

2 Timothy 3:12 - Why do you think the Holy Spirit spoke this through Paul?

Prayer Time: (15 – 30 minutes)

Ask your Savior to give you His courage to represent Him and take your stand by boldly speaking the truth in love.

All your righteousness comes from Him, and you actively receive this by using your faith in Him. Draw from Him what you need this morning.

Now delight yourself in God, your Father! Enjoy Him. Give Him your attention.

Confess His goodness and His faithfulness to you over the difficult things you are facing.

Lesson 8

By the time Jesus was giving His first teachings, He had already suffered enormously; so He was not just a dreamer, but an idealist who well knew what it costs to demonstrate God's character in a world which hates purity, truth and, most of all, God Himself!

The Sermon on the Mount summarizes some of His teachings about what is valued in His Kingdom; and it is almost a mirror image of our culture today. We honor pride, ability, money, personal beauty, power, influence, skill, achievement, cleverness, brilliance, etc. Jesus, however, treasures a very different set of values: humility, compassion, meekness, a craving for Father's character, His ability to show mercy, purity, His desire to bring men together, and then He speaks of something which shocks us: suffering! Yes, the thing that most radically distinguishes His Kingdom from ours is His value placed upon a willingness to be persecuted in order to express Father's character when it brings pain! In fact, Jesus goes so far as to say that this type of suffering is a crowning blessing that is visited upon your life! Wow! What a different viewpoint.

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 5:3-12 in this "new light" and allow Jesus to speak them right into your soul! (15 minutes)

Focus on Matthew 5:10-12. Read these verses again and use your marking pen to write or underline.

What is the cause of the persecution that Jesus describes?

What are some examples of this happening in your life recently? It is almost certainly happening, and yet you may not have fully recognized it as such.

What happens when you suffer in order to forgive, to show mercy, to remain pure, to humble yourself and ask for forgiveness, and you rejoice when you are wrongly treated?

What happens when you are wrongly treated and you do not treat this as a blessing, and you do not rejoice?

Prayer Time: (15 – 30 minutes)

Ask for and receive His forgiveness for not treating your suffering as a blessing.

Thank Father for your opportunities to express His character in your surroundings.

Give your God your Trust this morning. This is real worship.

Ask Him to let you express His mercy or His purity or His love toward someone today who does not deserve it.

Lesson 9

Lest all this strike you as “Bad News” (all this suffering stuff), let’s remember that we are living in a world which is “Fallen”: that is, functioning at some level under the influence of the devil; and it is not Father’s fault!

Jesus entered the “ring” rather like a gladiator in order to “fight” for us and conquer our ancient slave master. And still the fight continues until “all is accomplished.”

But this life is far from being about suffering. Jesus did suffer; but He was continually living in “the bosom of the Father” where He was loved and enjoyed and fed with the great joys of knowing God the Father! It was this constant experience of being loved, approved, accepted, fellowshiped, and treasured which fueled Jesus to face the difficult things as He fulfilled the desires of His Father!

Your life is about knowing God as your own Father and experiencing Him in every different aspect of daily life. Jesus came to show you the Father and win your heart so that you also would live in “the bosom of the Father” just as He did. This is why He came. The secret to your joy and confidence even when you experience some hurts and disappointments is your constantly receiving His love. He likes you, and He enjoys you. This is why He thought of the idea to send His Son. It was for you.

Scripture Study: Check out Matthew 3:17 and Luke 3:22, and you will see something which was the foundation of Jesus’ life and ministry. It was from this that He did all that He did. *(10 minutes)*

Examine John 5:19-20. Do you think that Jesus lived in His Father’s love? Why do you think this?

Reread John 15:9. When Jesus refers to His Father loving Him, try to describe what you imagine He meant.

Now, take your ideas about how the Father loved Jesus and Jesus’ daily experiences of it and apply this to yourself. Start this way: “This means that

Scripture Study: Look at John 15:1-9 and see how all this connects with 15:11. *(10 minutes)*

The “these things” of verse 11 means that Jesus well understands that you will not do well in this “Fallen” world without living with a constant source of love and comfort. He fully intends for you to live in His joy even when He allows you to represent Him in hard places.

Journal: Write what you are thinking to the Lord.

Prayer Time: *(10 – 25 minutes)*

Take your place by faith in Christ and abide in Him.

Let yourself enjoy His love and fellowship.

Soak up His total interest in you.

Listen to Him, and you will hear Him encourage you and strengthen you.

Lesson 10

The one who follows Jesus will suffer; but the surprising thing is that he will suffer the least in the long run. This is true even on this earth. Do you believe this? (Luke 18:29)

Jesus suffered, but He never suffered the effects of sin polluting His conscience, hardening His soul, flooding Him with guilt, tormenting Him with the cancers of vileness nor separating Him from the constant source of reassuring love from the Father! Not until He invited your sin into His being in order to take your punishments did He experience the costs of sin!

We are all vulnerable to temptation because of our fears (the manifestation of our unbelief). But do you understand that what is tempting you is also lying to you? The temptation always seems to offer less pain and more gratification; but it simply is not true. Only righteousness satisfies. Lust, by very definition, is that which cannot be satisfied.

Do you believe that your happiness lies in resisting temptations so that you may participate in the goodness of God?

Scripture Study: First read 1 Corinthians 10:13; then go back and quickly review the context which begins with 1 Corinthians 10:5. God is telling us that we can benefit powerfully by examining some of those who have gone before us, for ultimately human experience does not fundamentally change. *(10 minutes)*

List the promises that God makes to you in this one verse.

Describe the difference you think this verse makes in the life of the person who truly has this grid for interpreting the temptations to sin.

When you speak, think, or act in ways that differ from what God says, what do you think this reveals about one's belief about what causes suffering?

Scripture Memory: You may already be familiar with 1 Corinthians 10:13, but this is a good time to either memorize it or reinforce your memory with this guarantee which comes to you directly from God Almighty. *(5 minutes)*

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Review some of your recent temptations, and then place this Truth over the places you have been tested.

Ask God to forgive you where you have sinned.

Ask God to write His promises upon your soul.

Go free this morning in the assurance that you will always have the One who loves you watching over your soul with His jealous love!

Lesson 11

God never tempts us to sin. He does allow us to be tempted. He uses the difficult circumstances to reveal our true heart condition. He uses the fires of suffering, pressures, temptations, and testing; but He Himself never, ever tempts anyone to sin. He cannot sin; it's against His nature. Neither can He tempt anyone to sin.

Where does temptation come from, you ask? It comes from those whose nature is not like God's. It comes from the Tempter, the Accuser of the Brethren, the Liar who is the devil. And it also comes from our own flesh, which is that part of us not yet willingly yielded to God's rule.

Sin always injects us with an experience of death, and God uses our experience with this to cultivate in us a hatred for sin and a love for righteousness. He is teaching us to choose life when we are faced with temptations. No doubt you have already gained victories in some areas, which allows you a freedom and joy that comes from habits of righteousness.

Scripture Study: Read James 1:13-15 regarding how temptation works. *(10 minutes)*

When you are being tempted to sin, what is going on?

Why do you think God allows you to be tempted?

Reread 1 Corinthians 10:13. Why is this truth so critical to your understanding your daily experience in life?

Scripture Memory: Begin memorizing or reviewing James 1:2, for this truth is another one of the keys to victory! Try saying it to yourself by emphasizing different words as you say it, and you will gain new appreciation for the depths of this truth. *(5 minutes)*

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Thank God this morning for giving you His Word to use in resisting temptation.

Praise Him for never allowing you to face a temptation that does not have one way to escape so that you will not have to sin.

Thank the Savior for taking upon Himself the suffering caused by your sins!

Ask God to free you from every evil that is plotted against you by your Enemy.

Lesson 12

When you are convinced that God is your very own Father, that He loves you, that He is firmly in control, that He fully intends to make you like His Son, Jesus, then you can join Him in His holy laughter when Satan attempts to destroy your life! This is the way to live!

You certainly do not see Jesus in worry or fear. And this is the life that God has for you also. You, too, are His precious child. He is teaching you to live in the freedom of truth that is also the life of faith.

Does He allow your faith to be tested? To be sure He does. Not only does the test reveal the purity of your faith, it also builds into you a confidence in God that remains even when you cannot see anything that you might call good. This is called endurance, and God values it highly. This is a quality that ranks high in His Kingdom. It is the gold of heaven.

Scripture Study: Read James 1:2-8, for this passage outlines for you the little-followed way to victory. Why not be one of those who champions this way to actually live? *(15 minutes)*

How different is James 1:2 from all that seems natural? _____

Is this the way you are currently living? _____

What will it take to make this your habit? _____

What is the value of endurance? _____

What is God's promise to you? _____

How much do you think you have grown in this process of believing God during times of difficulty? _____

What is God teaching you now in regard to His word here in James? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Look at what temptations you are now facing. Name them, and bring them to the feet of Jesus who was tempted in all things just as you, but was without sin.

Deliberately count, consider, and reckon it all joy to go through these difficulties for His sake! By faith in your Father, embrace the trials as His assignment for you.

Now ask Him for His wisdom for your life situation.

Worship your God for who He is! Know how safe you are in His hands, no matter what might be happening to you. Declare His faithfulness!

Lesson 13

God is happy! This is startling news, because so many think of Him as rather sad and frustrated. Nothing could be further from the truth! Jesus was a man of sorrows for one reason: He was entering into our mess that created so much suffering for everyone; but He was experiencing joy in His Father every day! People were not drawn to Him because He was sad, but the contrary: because He was so full of the joy of faith!

He lived without worry or fear even though He had many enemies and faced many forms of injustice. His “place” was not a house or town or title, but the one place all may find happiness: in His Father’s bosom.

He was carving out not only a place for you, but He was carving out a way for you to live without worry or fear also. Counting it all joy when you encounter various trials is very much a part of the way He lived. It is the attitude that speaks faith into adversity.

Scripture Study: Ah, the secrets of happiness begin with the words: “Blessed is...”. Study this secret, for it is surely not something widely known. Read James 1:12. (*10 minutes*)

If you believed this, how would it change the way you are currently handling your difficult situations?

Why do you think this verse equates persevering under trial with loving God?

When you have considered it joy and persevered under trial, have you come to Father to claim your “crown of life”? If not, why not?

Faith lays hold of God’s goodness. This is not presumption. Faith in the nature of your Father prompts you to come directly to Him for His blessing, for it is His joy to give you this crown.

Scripture Meditation: James 1:2. Read this verse slowly, allowing the words to enter into your soul. Just let God’s Words do their work, for they have their own power, being His Words. (*5 minutes*)

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

You are the Father’s child, and you are blessed. Climb into His blessings this morning. Own them as your own.

Wait upon Him this morning. Just be still in His presence and let Him do or say whatever He wishes.

Ask Him for His perspectives on the people in your life. See them through His eyes, for He loves them all. Speak blessings upon those who are causing you a problem.

Count it all joy today to represent God in your circumstances.

Lesson 14

Christians sometimes think that if they are in God's favor, they will not experience hard things. Although this is certainly not what the Bible teaches, it seems that many still believe that when all goes well, it proves that God is pleased with them and conversely when "all hell breaks loose" then God must be mad at them.

Of course, you cannot interpret Jesus' life through this grid. Nor Paul's.

"All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" - 2 Timothy 3:12. Or Jesus': "In the world you will have tribulation, but..." - John 16:33.

It is encouraging to see that it is natural to think that when something bad happens that God must not really be with us. We all start with this "theology," but now is the time to get God's theology. There is no temptation which comes to us, no hard thing but what is truly common to all humans. "Stuff happens," as they say.

Scripture Study: Examine the responses to Lazarus' death by Martha, Mary, and some of the other Jews. John 11:21 - Martha's very natural statement. Mary probably had much the same response in John 11:32. Still others reasoned much the same way. (John 11:37) (10 minutes)

Can you distinguish any differences between the responses of Martha and Mary with the other Jews?

—

Why do you think it is natural for us to reason this way?

What do you think Jesus' answer is to this response?

He intentionally waited until Lazarus died in order to arrive, so what is He wanting to teach them?

—

Scripture Memory Review: 1 Corinthians 10:13 and James 1:2. Refresh your mind by looking these verses up and saying them once to yourself. (5 minutes)

Prayer Time: (15 – 30 minutes)

Bow before the Lord this morning and submit your mind to the Lord.

Bring your problems to your Father and ask Him to give you His viewpoint.

Even if you did something wrong, He will not condemn you, so trust Him to bring the corrections that will only give you more freedom and peace.

By faith, enter into the Rest that Christ secured for you. Draw from Christ His wisdom, His righteousness, His sanctification, His redemption.

Lesson 15

It was probably a beautiful evening when Jesus suggested that they cross the Lake. Surely the disciples were like us in that they were not at all expecting that Jesus would take them right into a huge, dangerous storm! But He did.

Not only that, He seemed to sleep through it all.

Can you identify?

“Doesn’t God see?” “Doesn’t God care?” “Why me?” “Why now?” Actually we can get even worse in this downward spiral. “Nothing good ever happens to me.” Or, “I knew it. This was all too good to be true. See, it doesn’t work.”

And the truth is, we can go still further into this sinkhole; but we won’t go there. But we can at least identify with these men, so let’s allow Jesus to speak to us as well as them.

Scripture Study: Read Mark 4: 35- 41 carefully, looking for clues that will help you respond to life’s troubles in ways that bring better results than some you have tried in the past.

(10 minutes)

What are some of the things you have said in the past which need to change? _____

What do you think Jesus is saying to you now? _____

How do you think Jesus pulled this off? _____

There are a number of lessons here. What lessons do you see? _____

Scripture Study: Reread James 1:3. *(5 minutes)*

What do you think faith means here? _____

Why do you think faith is so important to God? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

If you have misinterpreted God in a recent difficult event, bow before Him in submission and receive His peace.

Tell the Lord that you trust Him with your life. Place yourself in His hands.

Now wait upon Him in stillness for a few minutes. Let Him be with you.

Pray for others you know who need His reassurance.

Lesson 16

God has very good reasons for allowing you to be tested. He is to be trusted at all times. His character is proven.

The questions are not really about God: they are about you. “Who are you, really?” “What do you really believe?” “Where will you stand when the pressure is on?” “Can you be bought?” “If so, what will be your price?”

Faith is not about you. It is about what you think of God; and that determines everything about you. Therefore, faith is directly related to character, whereas unbelief is connected to the loss of character.

Scripture Study: Reread the familiar portion in Matthew 16:13-26. People say all sorts of things about Jesus; yet even those who speak well of Him sometimes change their minds when they are tested. No doubt all have failed Him in some tests. But oh, to learn, to grow, to trust Him at all times! *(15 minutes)*

Jesus asks you The Question: “Who are you saying that I am?” _____

Think back to some recent tests, and answer this question yourself. Your attitudes, your words, and your actions certainly answered Jesus’ question. Who were you saying Jesus was to you in these recent situations? _____

Jesus builds His true Church when His people answer His question correctly during the times of temptation. Journal your thoughts about this. _____

Now reread Matthew 16:21-26. Explain why Jesus began speaking about His own suffering and how He foresees its role in the lives of those who are His. _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Ask for His forgiveness for complaining or otherwise discrediting Him during a recent test.

By faith, put on His righteousness, for this is His gift to you: i.e. the Gospel.

Gain the high ground by confessing His faithfulness over every situation where you are being tested. Rejoice in His goodness and faithfulness to you.

Pray for your friends who are being tested and need courage.

Lesson 17

David wrote about what he described as “the finding times.” These were the times of great testing which always means times of great temptation. These are the times in which we discover what is truly in us. The difficulties, the sufferings, the hurts, the injustices, all serve to reveal something about our character. These are the “times” which “find” us, for it is in experiencing these things that we learn about ourselves.

Choosing to side with God when our flesh cries out for a decision that promises an easier path, changes us. These are the choices that purify us and make us more like Christ.

These are the choices that glorify God.

Such choices also define what Jesus meant when He spoke about us bearing a cross.

Scripture Study: Read Psalm 32 and receive instruction from King David as he describes how he learned to not keep silent about his sins, but rather to openly disclose them. Notice in Psalm 32:6 where it says: “in a time when You might be found.” I recommend to you another translation: “Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You at a time of finding.” This is a literal translation. *(15 minutes)*

David begins this Psalm with his conclusion. What is his conclusion? _____

You will discover in Psalm 32:3-5 David’s experiences that led to his conclusion. What were his experiences? _____

In Psalm 32:6-7 you will see what changed David. What do you think these verses mean for your life? _____

Read Psalm 32:8-11 and write what you “hear” or “sense” the Lord saying to you.

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Pour out your heart to the Lord this morning like David might have done.

Be still now and listen. Do you sense Him quickening something to you?

If so, take His impressions as Him speaking to you; and if you are not hearing anything, just take your pleasure in Him, Himself. That is enough.

Go with a light heart today, because you are trusting in Him.

Lesson 18

Fear is both the cause and result of sin. It is your fundamental problem.

Think about this statement. Do you believe this? Is this true in your life?

Many of your decisions in life are dictated by your fears unless you have recognized them and invited Christ into what you are feeling.

For the most part, we are not in touch with our fears, so things in life intimidate us without us realizing it and without our knowing how to ask Jesus into what is happening inside us.

Scripture Study: Read Genesis 3:1-10. *(15 minutes)*

What fear do you think the serpent appealed to in order to tempt Eve? _____

What fear do you think Adam might have experienced that caused him to be passive in this situation? _____

Why did Adam say that he was hiding? _____

How do you think it affected all his descendents? _____

Answer this question: "What are my fears?" Try numbering them, realizing that this will be a work in progress. _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Bring the fears you recognize to the Lord.

Ask Him to forgive you for your unbelief.

Ask Him to come into your life at the point of your fears.

Read Psalm 34:4-9 before the Lord. Pour out your soul to Him who loves you and keeps you.

Lesson 19

Do not expect to live without experiencing fears. What you want to expect is to grow in your ability to recognize your fears and not be intimidated or controlled by them.

Our fears wear disguises. We tend to be aware of other emotions without realizing how they are connected to fear. Thus we may associate our worry with simply being responsible. Certainly we know those who do not seem to worry about such things, and they are irresponsible.

Anger. Dig down beneath it, and you are most likely to discover a fear. Frustration, of course, is its more acceptable mask. Even irritation needs to be examined for an underlying fear.

Fear Based Living is something we inherited from Adam; and if you desire to live free from the powerful, hidden undercurrents of fear, then you will have to do some work.

Scripture Study: As you consider the topic of Fear and Worry, read Matthew 6:25-34. *(10 minutes)*

Why do you think Jesus was placing such an emphasis upon Worry in His most basic seminar about His Kingdom? _____

Why did Jesus assume that we were all included in His blanket reproof of, “You of little faith”? _____

What does Jesus tell you to do that will deliver you from Worry? _____

Thought Question: Look beneath some instances of your anger and ask yourself if perhaps there was some fear that was at the bottom of what you were feeling. Journal your thoughts. *(5 minutes)*

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Take the Matthew 6:30-34 passage and read it to the Lord.

Then do business with God.

Pray whatever you need to in order to transact business with Him so that you are progressively living without Worry and Fear dominating your decisions.

Pray for those in your Church to come into this very freedom.

Lesson 20

What are some of the common fears people have? Chances are you are not exempt.

Part of Jesus' basic training of those who would be His Disciples consisted of His teaching them to face many of these rather basic fears.

Scripture Study: Examine Matthew 10 and see that Jesus was preparing His Disciples to follow Him into their roles in bringing in the Kingdom of God. Particularly notice how He warned them about the certainty of facing their fears. *(10 minutes)*

Read Mathew 10:16. Shepherds normally protect sheep from ever being in the presence of wolves, so why is Jesus giving them this rather unusual picture? _____

What is it that a sheep would feel, surrounded by wolves? _____

How would you apply Jesus' orders to them to yourself? _____

In Matthew 10:17-20, how would you apply Jesus' warnings and counsel to yourself?

In Matthew 10:26, 28, and 31 Jesus commands us not to fear and gives us reasons. What are the reasons He commands us not to fear? _____

Journal: What are some of the common fears people face? *(5 minutes)*

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Accept Jesus' call upon your life to follow Him into bringing in the Kingdom of God as it relates to your life.

Pray through any area of fear that has surfaced as you have studied His words.

Draw near to the Lord this morning. Let Him draw near to you. He desires to be with you.
Now draw from your Savior the wisdom (shrewdness) and the righteousness (innocence)
that you need to move ahead.

Lesson 21

One of the reasons God allows everyone to take tests is to expose what is false.

While there is probably something false in all of us, this is not the same as being a false Disciple. Jesus told a story about the man who promised to go into the fields but did not, and He contrasted him with another who declared he would not go but changed his mind and went. His point: it takes more than words alone to establish what is genuine in a person; and time allows what is true to become evident. Apples grow on apple trees, even though in winter it may not be obvious; but eventually, what is there is revealed for all to see.

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 7:13-27. *(15 minutes)*

What is Jesus' topic? _____

Why do you think He was concluding His great Sermon on the Mount this way? _____

Have you ever known any false Christians? _____

What part of this passage tells how you recognized them as false? _____

Notice that Jesus did not say that He once knew them, but rather that He never did know them. What does this indicate to you? _____

What do you think is the fruit or the evidence that one is on the narrow path? _____

Jesus implies that the rains, floods, and winds will test every person's house. What is Jesus saying to you through this? _____

What is Jesus' promise to you that guarantees your success even through all the tests? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Jesus Himself is your one source of life, righteousness, and safety. Draw near to Him this morning.

He loves to impart His abilities and graces into your needs, so use your faith to draw upon Him who gave Himself up on your behalf.

Worship Him this morning as your true Savior!

Pray for Him to be glorified in everything you do today!

Lesson 22

We all want God to bless us with great success; and indeed this is His desire also. Do you believe this? Do you believe that God is only good and only does good to you?

But here is a problem: suppose God were to only do things in your life that you would interpret as a blessing. Then He would be blessing some of the thoughts, ideas, and decisions that are in direct opposition to Him.

This He cannot do. He is God and cannot change. You are not God; and you need to change. He is perfectly good, perfectly wise; and He never makes a mistake. You, on the other hand ... need we say more?

So, it is always His love for you and His wisdom as to timing that determines some of the things that you go through. Do you believe this? If so, then it will help you to trust in Him at all times; and this is a most powerful factor in living a happy and blessed life.

Scripture Study: Read Isaiah 55:8-13. *(15 minutes)*

Isaiah 55:8-9 describes our problem. Express our problem in your own words. "My problem is... _____."

What does God present as the solution? _____

Practically speaking, how will you use what He says is your solution? _____

What are His promises? _____

How does this passage relate to your times of suffering? _____

How would you counsel yourself this morning? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Read Romans 12:1-2 before the Lord this morning and then pray out of this passage.

Hold this passage in your hand and wait upon the Lord. He will lead you to pray in ways that you need.

Pray for His thoughts, His methods, and His ways of seeing people to constantly change

your life.

Ask Him for His grace to love someone today by seeing them His way.

Lesson 23

One of the great causes of suffering is experienced in our conflicts with other Christians.

Most of the epistles give multiple commands designed to remedy the sins that generate this particular form of pain: disagreements and hurts among brothers and sisters.

Every Christian must contend with Fear Based Living, for every person has unrecognized fears constantly working to influence both the interpretation of events as well as the responses. And here is where Christians encounter trouble with their relationships: the actions of one another are interpreted through various screens of Fear; and then come the reactions that harm one another.

We have Fears. We try to control the conditions that threaten our Fears, and we cannot. Thus we become angry. Then we feel justified in saying and doing things that we feel are within our rights. But in the process, we violate the Spirit of Christ; for His ways are spelled out in the many prohibitions concerning how Christians treat one another.

We must accept the reality that we cannot change anybody. Our responsibility is to trust God enough to obey His commands so that we take responsibility for our own actions.

Scripture Meditation: Read Romans 8:28-29 slowly, allowing the very Words of God to find room inside your soul. *(5 minutes)*

Scripture Meditation: Read Joshua 1:8-9 as though God were speaking this directly to you. Think through these commands, and you will see that if you do not meditate daily upon what God says, you will allow your Fears to dictate your actions, and you will fail. *(10 minutes)*

Journal your thoughts. *(5 minutes)*

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Have you sinned against a person, and do you have a need to be forgiven for violating one of the Scriptural commands?

Come into the light of God in the area of your relationships, and receive the forgiveness offered in the blood of Christ.

Determine in your heart before the Lord to obey His commands as you choose to treat others with kindness, courtesy, respect, patience, and humility.

Ask God to use you as a genuine Peace Maker in His Church.

Lesson 24

To follow Jesus Christ is to embrace a measure of suffering, for we are following Him who returned good for evil. Our so-called “rights” were surrendered when we were co-crucified with Him at the Cross! Someone has said that: “Our anger is somebody finding one of our unyielded rights”; and I have said that our anger usually has an unrecognized Fear lodged beneath it.

When we embrace the difficulties that God assigns us, we are taking up our Cross; and by this means God breaks the hardness in us and instills the tenderness of His Son in us. We call this, “brokenness”; and God highly values this quality in His children. We do well to prize it also, for it mirrors His nature. This is also maturity.

Scripture Study: Read James 3:13-18 as you look for evidences of a Christian who has submitted to the Cross and thus exhibits the nature of Christ in dealing with others.
(15 minutes)

How does James contrast “the gentleness or humility of wisdom” with other ways Christians may choose? _____

After reading what James says about so-called “wisdom,” how would you define this earthly wisdom? _____

The “wisdom from above” is _____

In James 3:17, the old KJV well translates “reasonable” (NASV) or “submissive” (NIV) as “easy to be entreated.” The word describes an evidence that the wisdom is from above when the person is willing to listen and easy to reason with. Does this describe you?

Why would you say that the Christian who is engaged in Fear Based Living could not live this way? _____

Prayer Time: (15 – 30 minutes)

If you are suffering in some situation, tell the Lord that you are accepting His assignment. Deliberately “count it all joy” as in James 1:2.

Draw near to the Lord and use your faith in Him to receive His comfort.

Pray blessings upon those who are hurting you.

Determine to take your responsibility to obey the Lord in these situations.

Lesson 25

Many Christians waste their sorrows. How do you waste your sorrows? By resisting the pain of the situation rather than your sinful reactions, you focus upon your hurts and what somebody is doing to you rather than upon your heavenly Father who is firmly in charge of your life. You are under His supervision, and He has determined to work all these things for your good if...if you choose to love Him and align yourself with His will.

It is so important that you meditate daily upon His commands and that you use your mouth to verbally agree with Him. Otherwise, your old nature will be triggered by some hidden Fear, and you will be reacting. This is how we can experience loss when God only intended for us to experience His good in some hard places.

Scripture Study: Read this rich passage in 2 Corinthians 1:3-11 and let these powerful words sink deep into your heart. *(15 minutes)*

How do you think God intends to comfort you? _____

How do you think that you sometimes miss the comfort He is intending for you to experience? _____

What do you think Paul means when he speaks of “the sufferings of Christ” which come into your life? _____

Read about the sufferings of Paul and their purpose, and then journal about what you think God is doing in your life. _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Read Matthew 5:4 before the Lord and receive His comfort.

Tell the Lord that you are willing to shine for Him in dark places.

Pray for His Kingdom to come through you in the places He has assigned you. Pray His will into places that need God.

Bow before Him this morning and reverence Him.

Lesson 26

Our mission is patterned after Jesus. His mission was to represent the nature of God and thus to make Him known; and ours is the same.

Our resources are like His also, for He was abiding in His Father so that it was the Father within Him who actually provided the wherewithal for the works. But we have to accept the mission or we'll inevitably miss the provision also. The two are linked: need and grace.

The Cross is the proper symbol for the Christian, for it displays the means by which we overcome the world, the devil, and our own destructive tendencies. Paul lived by the Cross, and yet his was a great joy and happiness experienced in all sorts of varying circumstances. We are on the same path.

Scripture Study: Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-18 and think about how this relates to your difficulties. *(15 minutes)*

What does Paul consider the treasure within you as an earthen vessel? _____

How does this relate to the power being of God instead of you? _____

If you had an extremely valuable thing inside a clay jar, what would you do in order to get at the treasure? _____

And how does this relate to your sufferings? _____

How is your inner man being renewed day by day? _____

How does Paul describe his afflictions? _____

Would you be willing to describe your sufferings in a similar way? If so finish this sentence: "Father I consider whatever I am suffering as _____

_____."

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7 before the Lord.

Thank your Father for using your life to reveal His nature where you live.

Praise Him this morning for His Greatness in your life!

Declare His goodness over every difficulty you are facing.

Lesson 27

If you cannot see your sufferings in a positive light, what will happen to you?

This is a thought provoker, isn't it? I always remember the scene in which Jesus spoke about them eating His flesh and drinking His blood, which led to many leaving Him. At this point, He asked Peter and gang if they also would leave Him; and Peter answered for me when he said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" - John 6:68.

When you face having to experience some pain, you will make a choice about how you will interpret it; and that choice will determine your life message. For this reason, it is a great privilege to have so many examples of people in Scripture who can teach us and share their perseverance with us.

Scripture Study: Read about how the love of Christ controls us as you begin reading in 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 and 6:1-10. *(15 minutes)*

The topic of the first passage is "the love of Christ" which means His love for us, whereas the topic for the second passage is "the grace of God."

When 2 Corinthians 5:14 says (in the NASV), "the love of Christ controls us," it means that Christ's love for us holds us together in its grip; and what follows describes how His love affects us.

Looking at 2 Corinthians 5:14-21, use your own words to state how Paul sees Christ's love affecting us. _____

Looking at 2 Corinthians 6:1-10, use your own words to explain how we do not receive the grace of God in vain. _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Surrender yourself to Christ's love this morning. In this, let Him take you into something that is on His heart.

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal even more of His love to you!

Wait upon God and let Him minister to you.

Loving you is His idea, so let Him do it. Love Him back, for this is true worship.

Lesson 28

God works according to the principle of resurrection; and though it sounds nice, we generally find it repulsive for one reason: it requires a death to something! Dying is not the fun part. We almost always resist the various types of death, whether it is the death of an important relationship, the death of our reputation, impending financial ruin, the loss of our health, the collapse of our career, etc. In all of these instances, there is some pain involved; and we usually resist these types of death with all our might.

I believe that Jesus allowed Lazarus to die in order to give us a living lesson to enable us to come to faith and receive from Him right in the middle of our grief and pain.

Scripture Study: Read John 11, but see it as a primer for teaching you how to experience Christ in His resurrection power even in the midst of your failure and helplessness.

(20 minutes)

Look at John 11:3: “Lord, behold, he whom you love is sick.” Put yourself in this verse by finishing this sentence: “Lord, I am _____, whom you love, and I am (describe your difficulty) _____.”

Check out John 11:15 so that you can see why I am seeing this as a training exercise.

Note that both sisters voice in John 11:21 and 32 just what we think when really serious trouble comes upon us. Rewrite what they are saying in your own words. “Lord, if You

_____.”

See how powerfully your suffering affects Jesus by reading John 11:33, 35. John 11:33 is better translated: “He was deeply groaning with anguish and hurt in His spirit, and He so allowed Himself to be affected that He trembled all over.” And this is how He feels about your suffering. He joins you. He weeps for you and with you.

But He also walks Martha into a much higher faith realm. Watch Him do this in John 11:21-27 and then finally in John 11:39-40. He seems most willing to take us where we are and walk us into a much higher level of trusting Him, right in the midst of our hurt.

Journal what you may be thinking or feeling. _____

Prayer Time: *(10 – 25 minutes)*

Bring whatever “death” you are experiencing to your Savior.

Pour out your soul to Him who is deeply moved by your pain.

Let Him walk you into confessing Him as your help now, in this situation!

“Do you believe this?” was His question. Answer Him. Confess with your mouth and believe with your heart, and so take His resurrection life for yourself. Today.

Lesson 29

One of the hardest things for us to accept is Jesus' statement: "Apart from Me you can do nothing." Oh how we find ourselves unconsciously resisting Jesus at this point without even realizing it!

Being stripped of all self-confidence is one of the results of our sufferings. Through extreme pressures, we learn again and again how limited we really are in our ability to be sufficient unto ourselves.

The ways of man (i.e. the ways of our culture) are built upon man depending upon himself, whereas the Kingdom is built upon incapable man solely trusting in the All-Sufficient God.

We are following the One who pioneered the way of the Cross; and it involves our living with the keen sense of: "Apart from You, Jesus, I can do nothing; but in You, I can do all that You ask, for You give me the ability."

Scripture Study: Read again the teaching of Jesus in which He describes how you are to live, and find His ability constantly flowing through you. Read John 15:1-11. *(15 minutes)*

Your fears will cause you to depend upon someone or something. Usually it takes many failures and hurts to convince us that we really cannot accomplish anything that will last without having to trust in Christ alone.

When you interpret your hard times as one of the opportunities to learn to abide in Jesus, you will be moving into Christ's Graduate School!

How would you teach someone else to abide in Christ? _____

Give yourself counsel about abiding in Christ. _____

Remember, your attitude toward your hurts and the circumstances that caused them will determine your future! What might your response be to this statement? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Agree with Jesus that, without Him, you can do nothing!

Use your faith to abide in Him. Believe that He is living in you.

Renounce your self-dependence, and choose to trust Jesus in every hard place.

Now worship the Lord! Sing His praises! Exalt Him.

Lesson 30

You will always face fears, and you will from time to time experience some suffering. When you are in heaven, you will see clearly how Father glorified Himself through you and how you grew in the knowledge of Him during the hard times. Therefore, your perspective is very important.

Paul learned some of these treasured secrets. He learned to be content inside during all sorts of changing seasons of life. He also learned to rejoice in his weaknesses. Imagine yourself coming to a place where you actually were totally content with the feelings of personal weakness. Well, this is exactly where the Lord is taking you. Happy are those who gladly follow Him into these life lessons.

Scripture Study: Paul was suffering and crying out to God when Jesus spoke this life-changing lesson to him. Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 and listen for the Teacher to instruct you in the way of the Resurrection.

Why would Jesus tell Paul (you too): “My grace is sufficient for you”? _____

What was Paul’s response? _____

What is your response? Is it like Paul’s? _____

In what five experiences is Paul now free to experience the grace of God? _____

What was Paul’s revelation that brought about this change in his whole approach to a situation that was not going to change? _____

How might you apply this teaching to yourself? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Confess before the Lord that His grace is sufficient for you.

Ask for forgiveness for complaining about your suffering rather than receiving His grace.

Worship the Lord right in the middle of going through something that is difficult for you.

“Acknowledge the Lord in all your ways, and He will direct your paths.”